

BLENDED LEARNING IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Recent changes in the higher education pattern aimed at reducing the number of practical classes in favor of individual work increase a basic concern about the quality of higher education. Both university teachers and students have to adapt to the new learning conditions and find some effective ways of developing students' academic achievement. The experience of using blended learning as a promising instrument for solving the existing educational challenge is focused in the paper.

The general idea of e-learning is targeted at widening the opportunities for learners who have a restricted number of practical classes for a variety of reasons, or working adults having a desire to continue their education. Moreover, it is commonly believed by many experts that the use of IT technology in education will definitely lead to the academic quality improvement and will result in saving costs at the same time. So, distance education is strenuously promoted by the university authorities around Ukraine. However, their initiative is often blocked up by both students and teaching staff that, on one hand, used to teaching and learning in the traditional environment, and on the other hand, do not possess necessary computer skills and experience needed for creating and completing online courses. The evidence of this fact can be proved by the results of the students' survey conducted in SHEI “National Mining University” where 91% of the respondents underlined the positive impact of extra practical classes and teacher's supervision on foreign language skills improvement with only 36% of students supporting e-learning as an efficient learning instrument. Furthermore, 51% of students suppose that e-learning cannot increase academic achievement and 13% consider its influence as a negative one.

In these conditions blending learning, which combines both modern technology and traditional environment, becomes a promising tool. Appeared in 2000, it first

simply supplemented traditional classroom learning with self-study e-learning activities, but more recently it has evolved into a much wider set of learning practices.

The experiment started in NMU in 2016 was a great impulse for creating special conditions to promote the development and integration of distance learning into the educational pattern. According to the experiment requirements, first 3 weeks of the winter semester had been arranged as a complete distant education process forcing all university staff to develop and provide various online courses for their students. The experience of many European and American universities and organizations, which have been successfully developing online education in recent years, was of great help as they provided a good example of well-functioning online courses. The first steps of the implementation stage appeared to be really successful and demonstrated the following benefits:

- availability of the single platform where all students can easily get access to extra material, home assignments, lectures, etc. that greatly support the individual work arrangement and assessment;
- possibility of making practical classes and lectures more efficient and interactive due to pre-class preparation by means of distance courses;
- extra opportunity for cooperation, communication;
- developing IT skills as a key competence of the 21st century;
- more individualized and personalized teaching approach stimulating interest and motivation.

Although a number of various fears and difficulties make e-learning integration into the higher education process slow and troublesome, the results of blended learning use demonstrate positive effect which can result in improving the quality of university education.

References:

1. Marsh, Debra (2012) Blended Learning: Creating Learning Opportunities for Language Learners. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. – 30 p.