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STRATEGY FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE BLENDED LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION INTO THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

The relevance of the research is explained by the current tendency of implementing foreign language blended learning into the educational process at European universities. The paper deals with the main goals of blended learning and strategies of its implementation, which should be taken into account in order to improve the foreign language teaching in Ukraine. The strategy of implementing foreign language blended learning into the educational process of any higher educational establishment should consist of the following stages: the definition of goals, the selection of a particular model, the implementation of technical, personnel, methodological and regulatory support. Blended learning should be used as a dominant instructional mode in higher education for foreign languages teaching. The study of the European educational experience can help apply the blended learning techniques efficiently, and promote research exchanges in the educational process of higher educational establishments in Ukraine. Blended learning is a powerful technology to be implemented into the modern foreign language learning model of Ukrainian education in order to approach to the level of European educational system.

Keywords: *blended learning, distance education, development, cooperation, implementation, university, pedagogical college, European universities, Ukrainian universities.*

Introduction

Blended learning seems to be the ideal technique as it appeals to all learning styles, circumstances, needs and demands. It combines the support of classroom learning with the flexibility of distance one. For students who would like to study at a university abroad but do not have an opportunity to leave their homes distance learning academic programs are a great option for getting a degree. The main advantage of this type of learning is that language courses can be taken from anywhere in the world, as long as the student has internet access. Besides, popular online study options offered in the United States or the UK, European universities present a generous distance-learning study offer, to meet the international learners' growing education demands in the English language.

Scientists all over the world have been paying special attention to the process of blended learning development (for example, B. Barret, C. Bonk, R. Garret, R. Gogos, H. Hanuka, M. Kuharenko, C. Maxwell and others). The issues of the implementation of foreign language blended learning in Europe are represented in the works of G. Keplinger, H. Kasparovsky, J. Reitingger, I. Wadsack-Köchl and others.

Foreign students looking for an online MBA or a philological (the English/German language or literature) program in international relations might want to consider University College London (UCL), Webster Vienna University or Private University of Education of the Diocese of Linz (also called as Private University College of Education; Private Pädagogische Hochschule der Diözese Linz) and many others. They can pursue a degree entirely online, or mix and match classroom and distance/online

courses according to their preferences. Courses have no fixed time, so students can carry out their assignments any time during business week.

The paper aims to analyze the benefits of blended learning in the educational process of foreign language teaching in Europe and define the main goals and strategies of blended learning implementation, which should be taken into account in order to improve the foreign language teaching in Ukraine.

Research methods

At the theoretical level, the following methods were employed: systematic analysis of education and scientific literature on the problems of blended learning; logical analysis – when studying theoretical background of the issue; theoretical modeling, aiming to develop instructions on teaching techniques, concerning blended foreign language learning; the empirical ones – diagnostic (surveys, questionnaires) to study readiness of teachers and students for using different forms of learning: classroom, distance and blended learning; praximetrics: study of the Private University College of Education and Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University curricula, norms, national standards and programs.

Discussion

Distance education is designed to give people options. It makes foreign language learning attainable for people of all lifestyles. Being a great alternative to traditional, campus-based classes, distance education and blended learning allow students to study on a more flexible basis.

No single reliable definition of blended learning exists, or even a universal agreement on the term itself.

Many use terms like *hybrid, mixed, or integrative learning* to describe the same trend, which is considered to be very popular nowadays. In 2000, an estimated 45.000 students took online courses, but almost a decade later more than 3 million took courses that way, many of them using computers themselves [6].

Blended learning is a term increasingly used to describe the way distance or e-learning is being combined with traditional classroom methods and independent study to create a new, **hybrid teaching** methodology. It represents a much greater change in basic technique than simply equipping classrooms with computers; it represents, in many cases, a fundamental change in the way teachers and students approach the learning experience. It has already produced an offshoot, the flipped classroom, which has quickly become a distinct approach of its own.

Though some experts emphasize the artificiality of the term ‘blended learning’, based on the view that the use of modern information and communication technologies in the educational process is not an innovation but a requirement of today.

Classroom, blended and e-learning are rarely found in their ‘purest’ forms. No teaching system is completely open, and few students ever study in complete isolation. Even fully online courses may encourage students to meet face-to-face for short periods, with or without an instructor, and most fully online courses supplement the online study with print readings such as textbooks. Thus, there are degrees of openness, ‘distance’, flexibility, and ‘virtuality’.

In any case classroom, blended and e-learning mean different things, and the one thing they all have in common is an attempt to provide alternative means of high quality education or training for those who either cannot take conventional, campus-based programs, or choose not to.

A blended approach implies that not only is the learner engaged more and driving his/her individual learn-

ing experience to some degree, but also since different learners have different learning styles, a blended approach is more likely to cater to those varying needs. There are also numerous benefits for the instructors – instant feedback, the ability to quickly assess learner’s performance and needs based on reporting, testing or quizzing.

The great necessity for blended learning in Eastern Ukraine, for instance, emerged in 2014. After the evacuation of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University in 2014 from Luhansk to Starobilsk (the Faculty of Foreign Languages was displaced to Poltava) blended, or distance, learning was organized and LMS *Moodle Platform* was chosen under these conditions. The necessity of implementing such a system is explained by a large number of courses with very limited technical resources. In order to simplify administration and monitoring, it was decided to create one site for 11 institutes (faculties), 60 specialties, for three educational levels and two forms of study. Over a year, more than 14.000 distance courses and more than 16.000 logins were created. Later on, the decision was made to divide it into two sites: for the day department and correspondence forms of training, but with the only one leased server. Unfortunately, it has not provided the expected performance outcomes [7].

In 2014, when creating a new site for distance learning, *do.luguniv.edu.ua* (on an independent foreign hosting), the following categories structure was selected: ‘Institute (faculty) - specialty - course (year of study) – semester’, in which the online courses were created. According to the results of the first year of work, there was a big load on the site. Therefore, it was decided to create another one (*do1.luguniv.edu.ua*) for the corresponding form of training and transfer a part of online courses and users to it. The output data for the site *do.luguniv.edu.ua* for the Faculty of Foreign Languages only are given in the table through the example of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University.

Table 1.

Output Data for the Site *do.luguniv.edu.ua*
(The Faculty of Foreign Languages, 2016-2017 academic year)

Characteristics	Quantitative Indicator
Number of students	540
Number of lecturers	52
Total number of courses	207
Degree of Course Engagement (Current Structure)	4

Table 2.

Predicted Data with Combined Structure
(The Faculty of Foreign Languages, 2020)

Characteristics	Quantitative Indicator
Number of students	2000
Number of lecturers	200
Total number of courses	300
Degree of Course Engagement (Current Structure)	3

Some troubles with this approach are predicted: problems with access rights of tutors-coordinators from different institutes, faculties; the monitoring process is complicated by groups, institutes, faculties; it is necessary to change the approaches to the formation rules of short course name; there is need to change the way of identifying courses with the same name, but different teachers.

At the end of each academic year, some online courses were removed or made inaccessible, and new courses were created according to changes in the curriculum. All these facts led to a large load on the server. In addition, many identical courses were duplicated in different categories. Under these conditions, when performing on-site operations for creating categories, adding or copying courses, there was an increase in waiting time for the response from the server. For the second site, there was a quick filling of the cache folder, which required the administrator to clean the site cache permanently. This caused the necessity to find the ways to optimize the structure of the website for blended or distance learning without degrading the usability.

When discussing blended learning, one of the most important things is to mention its model. One of the elements of the course presented in the foreign language blended learning in European higher education is a face-to-face workshop (a group with a workshop tutor). The time of the element “face-to-face” is limited, so the initial online part of the course is designed to prepare students. This element is much more workshop based. The tutor acts as a facilitator and technical support specialist. As the students develop their technical skills, the tutor helps them to develop their own materials.

Another element of the course is self-study. It is based around the completion of two to three written assignments. It is the more academic part of the course. It gives students a chance to reflect on their learning and build up their background reading on the basis of their practical experience and understanding. The course is designed for future foreign language teachers. The students should have some knowledge in technology and materials design and want to learn more about the technologies beyond the classroom activity level. There is no limit as for the number of students for the online element of the course [1].

Active foreign language training tasks in the units are the basis of the core content of the online course. They engage students to work with materials, apply the acquired knowledge within the context of their work and share their opinions with their peers. The online reference materials are given in a non-prescriptive way. The range of references and recommended reading is presented at foreign language training websites, blogs and online resource sites, as well as online journals. Students are completely immersed in their work. Through directed reading they critically evaluate what they read and assess its relevance to their own context. This gives them an opportunity to share their reflections with their peers within discussion forums. A powerful argument in favour of this ap-

proach is that it allows more inclusively and at the same time critically study the literature published online. The specificity of a fast-moving field of foreign language training is determined by the fact that traditional paper-based reading sources are often out of date by the time they are published. So students should develop the kinds of digital literacy skills and digital study skills within the core online course tasks.

Thus, it is possible to emphasize a lot of advantages of the blended learning approach to the foreign language training. Some of the most valuable ones are as follows:

- the extension of the period of learning over a far greater timescale than would be possible with face-to-face teaching;
- teaching according to the pattern developed by a lecturer himself/herself, trying new learning methods with students;
- gaining first-hand experience on which one can reflect while approaching and understanding theory;
- making better use of the face-to-face time due to a good level of technical knowledge and sound experiences during the first online block of the course.

There is another form of foreign language blended learning in Europe as well: International teaching and research exchanges that play an important role. For example, starting from the third semester, the students of the Private University of Education, Diocese of Linz, Austria, can spend one or two semesters abroad. They will not lose a semester since all examinations taken abroad are fully recognized at this university.

Spending a semester or two abroad and getting acquainted with new people and cultures is a unique experience. On average, 70 students per year get the chance to improve their language skills, expand their knowledge and competences. They spend several semesters in their partner universities in Europe, Asia and Africa. Conversely, they welcome visiting students to their institution, primarily from Asia and Europe, based on *Moodle Platform* [3].

Of all the blended learning models (Face-to-Face Driver Model, Rotation Model, Flex Model, Online Lab Model, Self-Blend Model, Online Driver Model), face-to-face driver is the closest to a typical European university structure. With this approach, the introduction of online course is carried out on a case-by-case basis, meaning only certain students in the class will participate in any form of blended learning. The face-to-face driver approach allows every student to progress at his/her own pace using technologies in the classroom [4].

The implementation of any model of foreign language blended learning requires the participants to perform systematic and purposeful work. In our opinion, the implementation strategy should include several stages:

1. Defining the purpose. Blended learning implies the change of the algorithm of teacher’s and students’ work. This is a large-scale change in the educational process, and it should not be a tribute to the fashion, but a solution to a specific task, for example, increasing overall

success or digital literacy; improvement of the teaching methodology of certain educational disciplines, development of students' communicative skills, etc. So, before starting to develop a strategy for blended learning implementation, one has to answer a few questions: What for does a higher education establishment need blended learning? What are the benefits of its implementation? What should be changed in a higher educational institution for the implementation of this project? What steps should be taken for its successful implementation? [2].

2. Choosing the blended learning model. In this aspect, it should be remembered that the model of blended learning also has to solve specific tasks set by the educational establishment. It should be understood that not every model is suitable for the relevant discipline, although it should not begin with a large-scale reform, sometimes - a pilot project of several disciplines should be conducted, which can then be extended to others.

3. Considering the issue of technical support and teaching staff. The process of blended learning implementation should not be blocked by such negative factors as lack of Wi-Fi, computers, or software. Expenditure on software and training materials can be significantly reduced by using free content and open source software.

4. Providing methodological and regulatory support. It is necessary to develop methodological recommendations and regulatory requirements for the organization of

the educational process, for the model of foreign language blended learning. This refers to the development of instructional materials for teachers and students, recommendations on the use of information and communication technologies for teaching certain disciplines and methods of active training in the classroom. The teachers' load should be fixed, the distribution of functional responsibilities between the educational units concerned.

Conclusions

Thus, the strategy of foreign language blended learning implementation into the educational process should consist of the following blocks (elements, stages): defining goals, selecting a particular model, providing technical, personnel, methodological and regulatory support. By understanding foreign language blended learning as an instructional delivery model that helps students control their learning and by leveraging the opportunity of personalization, Ukrainian educators can start to address challenges and opportunities in universities that will enable them to move the practice of foreign language blended learning forward, using the European experience.

The perspective directions of further scientific research studies are planned to cover organizational and methodical directions of the implementation of European open distance/online courses in the educational activity of higher educational institutions in Ukraine.

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СТРАТЕГІЯ ІМПЛЕМЕНТАЦІЇ ЗМІШАНОГО НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В ОСВІТНІЙ ПРОЦЕС

Насправді ми не знаємо, до яких професій готуємо наших студентів. Освітній простір останніми роками збагатився електронною та дистанційною формами навчання, відкритим та змішаним навчанням, застосуванням хмарних технологій тощо. Актуальність представленого в статті матеріалу обумовлена важливістю впровадження змішаного навчання іноземної мови не тільки в університетах Європи, а також в українських вищих навчальних закладах. Сьогодні серед учених не існує єдиного підходу щодо змісту цього феномену. Мета статті – проаналізувати переваги змішаного навчання в освітньому процесі при вивченні іноземної мови в Європі та визначити основні цілі та стратегії змішаного навчання, які слід враховувати з метою покращення викладання іноземної мови в Україні. На підставі аналізу наукової літератури та практичних розробок педагогічного співтовариства автор висвітлює зміст та особливості концепції «змішаного навчання», описує переваги, стратегії та моделі змішаного навчання. Наголошено, що стратегія впровадження змішаного навчання іноземної мови в діяльність будь-якого освітнього закладу повинна складатися з таких етапів: визначення цілей, обрання певної моделі, здійснення технічного, кадрового, методичного та нормативного забезпечення. Доведено, що вивчення європейського педагогічного досвіду може допомогти у впровадженні міжнародного викладання, обміну науковим досвідом та змішаного навчання іноземної мови в освітній процес вищих навчальних закладів України. Змішане навчання – це потужна технологія, яка повинна бути впроваджена в сучасну модель вивчення іноземної мови в українській освіті. Перспективними напрямками подальших наукових пошуків вбачаємо організаційно-методичні напрями впровадження європейських відкритих онлайн курсів в освітню діяльність вищих навчальних закладів України.

Ключові слова: змішане навчання, дистанційна освіта, розвиток, співпраця, впровадження, вищий навчальний заклад, Європа.

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