

CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF INTEGRATING BLENDED LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES INTO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Key words: blended learning, distance learning components, flexible learning, digital literacy.

Blended learning, also known as hybrid learning, is defined as an innovative educational approach combining traditional face-to-face instruction with digital learning modalities, offering students greater flexibility in their learning journey. Particularly significant in times of quarantine or pandemic, blended learning requires educators to adapt and creatively meet the educational needs of students. A number of papers by domestic scholars is devoted to theoretical and methodological foundations of blended learning such as V. Kukharenko, O. Rafalska, N. Rashevskya, and others, as well as foreign academics like C. Bonk, C. Greikham, and S. Laster.

The concept gained popularity after the publication of “Handbook of Blended Learning” by Bonk and Graham [1], which outlined three categories of educational blended learning: basic, increased, and modified blending. These categories involve integrating distance learning components into traditional education, accessing online lectures and materials, and promoting independent problem-solving among learners.

Considering the importance of modernizing education in alignment with technological advancements, scientists [2] emphasize the important role of blended learning in developing students' abilities to learn, manage information, and adapt to the labor market. Traditional teaching methods often lead to passive learning, hindering students' ability to acquire and apply knowledge effectively. Blended learning, however, offers a multifaceted approach, allowing educators to take on innovative roles and leverage digital technologies to enhance the learning experience.

It should be noted that blended learning is characterized by electronic material submission, online assessment with detailed feedback, group collaboration opportunities, and interactive face-to-face sessions. Its advantages include fostering teamwork, offering flexible learning schedules, enhancing independent study skills, and promoting digital literacy among students and teachers [3].

Despite its benefits, challenges such as teacher reluctance, inadequate IT skills, and dependency on technology and the internet persist. A low level of digital skills among teachers and students is a significant obstacle to the widespread adoption of blended learning. The best way to tackle this problem is the organization of additional training, workshops, webinars, and advanced courses focusing on innovative programs used in blended learning. Technical support and the creation of various video materials, curricula, and test modules are also necessary for successful implementation.

Blended learning combines classroom instruction with independent online learning, offering expanded educational opportunities and fostering student motivation and independence. It transforms teaching styles, encourages personalized learning, and integrates digital resources into the educational process. Blended learning technologies optimize teaching time and enhance the overall efficiency of education.

Integration of asynchronous internet communication technology facilitates independent and collaborative learning experiences. Innovative technologies improve knowledge acquisition and communication quality between students and teachers [2]. Digital modules for assessing knowledge aid in evaluating student understanding and competency formation.

Blended learning is particularly effective in teaching humanities subjects such as foreign languages, where live communication and interactive learning experiences are crucial. It fosters students' organizational, analytical, and decision-making skills, preparing them for success in today's digital age.

Blended learning encompasses both online and offline learning activities, combining independent study with classroom instruction. Synchronous learning involves real-time interaction

via webinars, video conferences, virtual classrooms, and online training. Asynchronous learning allows students to work at their own pace through various digital resources, such as massive open online courses (MOOCs), online literature, blogs, forums, chats, and e-mail [1].

Ensuring the successful implementation of blended learning requires clear communication of course materials, instructions, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria. The integrated use of blended learning technologies teaches students to be responsible and independent while providing opportunities for them to assist in utilizing modern technologies.

In conclusion, blended learning serves as a catalyst for modernizing education by integrating traditional and digital teaching methodologies. While it presents both advantages and challenges, its implementation signifies a shift towards a more student-centered and technologically proficient educational landscape.

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