BLENDED LEARNING IN COLLEGES OF FURTHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

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Abstract. *For several decades, Further Education has played a pivotal status in enhancing national prosperity and has emerged as a distinctive sector of the education system. This study aims to provide an overview of the system of Further Education in England and discuss the issue of blended and traditional learning at colleges of Further Education.*
Keywords: *colleges; further education; blended learning; traditional learning; England*

Introduction. In England, Further Education (FE) broadly refers to all learning delivered after the age of 16, with the exception of Higher Education courses. Accordingly, FE encompasses a considerable range of learners who differ in terms of age, ability, subjects of study and purpose of study. Further Education continues to play a central role in the education and training of particular social groups; supports local communities and seeks relationships with employers/employment at sub-regional and regional levels. It is important to emphasize that the way students are educated is constantly changing. Teaching has become a more interactive and dynamic experience over the years and developments in education have escalated even more recently, with the rapid evolution of technology and the growth of the internet. Schools and universities are now moving away from traditional teaching methods to embrace blended learning, a methodology that redefines the roles of student and teacher and empowers students to take control of their own learning. Therefore, there is an urge to investigate the issue of blended learning in modern educational institutions, especially in first world countries such as England.

Analysis of recent research and publications. R. Robinson describes blended learning as an approach where a faculty member meets with their students face-to-face for regular scheduled classes, while students fulfil the course requirements by accessing learning materials online and participating in class discussions over the Internet within a secure website [8]. It is reasonable to suggest that the social networking element of this approach appeals to the engagement of "digital natives" [7], the student cohort who make up a high percentage of current and future university classes. A report published by the Department of Education and Early Childhood examined seven case studies that investigate the blended learning approach. The findings concluded that this method created a culture based on the acceptance of change and risk taking [2]. Students in these various educational contexts learned to independently and collaboratively overcome issues, problem-solve and challenge themselves. These examples of blended learning not

only proved to have beneficial learning outcomes, but ranked highly on satisfaction ratings with both students and educators.

Therefore, **the purpose** of this study is to investigate the issue of blended and traditional learning at colleges of Further Education in England and make a contribution to the development of this area of studies.

Results. Further education includes any study after secondary education that is not part of higher education [4]. FE in the United Kingdom is usually a means to attain an intermediate, advanced or follow-up qualification necessary to progress into higher education (HE), or to begin a specific career path. Courses range from basic English and maths to Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) [4].

Colleges are primarily covered by the Department for Education (DfE). All colleges and FE providers are subject to inspection by Ofsted which monitors the quality of provision in publicly funded institutions in England and Wales. Colleges in England are represented by the Association of Colleges. As of 2014, general FE and tertiary colleges catered for about one half of FE learners, of which 45% were over 25 years of age. Private training providers, which are the most numerous group, catered for 21% of learners with 59% of them being on an apprenticeship [6].

The different types of provider can be grouped into four main categories:

1. General FE and tertiary colleges.
2. Sixth Form colleges.
3. Private trainer providers.
4. Other public funded.

Not being able to comprise all colleges of FE in England, the author geographically narrowed down her research to County of Hertfordshire and its surroundings.

From the information provided at Hertfordshire County Council website [5], we found out that there are 7 colleges and University Technical Colleges (UTCs) in Hertfordshire and 26 more in the surrounding area.

University technical colleges are government-funded schools that offer 14-19 year olds a great deal more than traditional schools. They teach students technical and scientific subjects in a whole new way and are educating the inventors, engineers, scientists and technicians of tomorrow. UTCs specialise in subjects where there is a shortage of skills.

By working with a university and local employers, UTC students benefit from access to the latest research, industry experts and specialist facilities; employers who set projects that stretch their technical skills and creative thinking; teaching and mentoring from specialists who currently work in industry and higher education. The provider base in Hertfordshire and the surrounding area is diverse with a great range of qualifications to choose from. These include a wide range of post-16 professional and technical education and training including study programmes for 16- to 19-year-old learners, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships, provision for learners with high needs, higher education and commercial programmes. Four colleges, Hertford Regional College, North Hertfordshire College, Oaklands College, West Herts College, are part of the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium. This means they work in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire and all foundation degrees are validated and awarded by the University of Hertfordshire and their HNDs are awarded by Pearson (Edexcel).

Education and training largely structured around qualifications, both academic and vocational, a wide range of levels and a broad range of sector specialisms. Qualifications are offered in a variety of settings and learning modes. "Core" areas of provision offered by most providers are preparation for life and work courses. Less commonly offered courses are retail and customer services, legal services, agriculture and animal care. The largest expansions in provision are computers and IT, sports and leisure, health and social care, administration, business and office.

Legally, FE colleges are incorporated through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and recognised as part of the FE sector. The powers of FE Corporations are set out in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. The principal powers are that a further education corporation may:
– Provide further and higher education,
– Provide secondary education to those aged fourteen years and above,
– Participate in the provision of secondary education at a school,
– Supply goods or services in connection with their provision of education.

Most colleges provide support to manage students' finances. Colleges run a number of schemes to help students on low incomes or those in receipt of benefits. Most financial support schemes are based on the age and financial circumstances of students.

Depending on the circumstances and the subject, students may qualify for:
– Discretionary Learner Support,
– Residential Support Scheme,
– Care to Learn,
– Dance and Drama Awards,
– Professional and Career Development Loans,
– 16 to 19 Bursary Fund,
– Advanced Learning Loan

Students who were born in the last twenty years in first world countries are known as "digital natives". Because of the integration of technology into their lives, digital natives are thought to be adept users of technology. With the use of ubiquitous mobile technologies like tablets and cell phones that allow digital natives to access information quickly, blended learning has been an integral part of digital natives' learning processes and habits. There are many components that can comprise a blended learning model, including "instructor-delivered content, e-learning, webinars, conference calls, live or online sessions with instructors, and other media and events, for example, Facebook, e-mail, chat rooms, blogs, podcasting, Twitter, YouTube, Skype and web boards" [3]. It has been proved that blended instruction is y more effective than purely face-to-face or purely online classes. Blended learning also has the potential to reduce educational expenses by putting classrooms in the online space and by replacing pricey textbooks with electronic devices.

However, blended learning could have disadvantages in technical aspects since it has a strong dependence on the technical resources. IT literacy may serve as a significant barrier for students attempting to get access to the course materials, academic staff may be hesitant to adopt blended learning due to the lack of technical skills and the increased workload required to develop resources for blended curricula. Nevertheless, more and more colleges of FE adopt blended learning to cater for the needs of the new generation of students. In order to understand what type of learning

they provide, we examined websites of colleges in Hertfordshire and the surrounding area. The findings are presented in Figures 1-2 below.
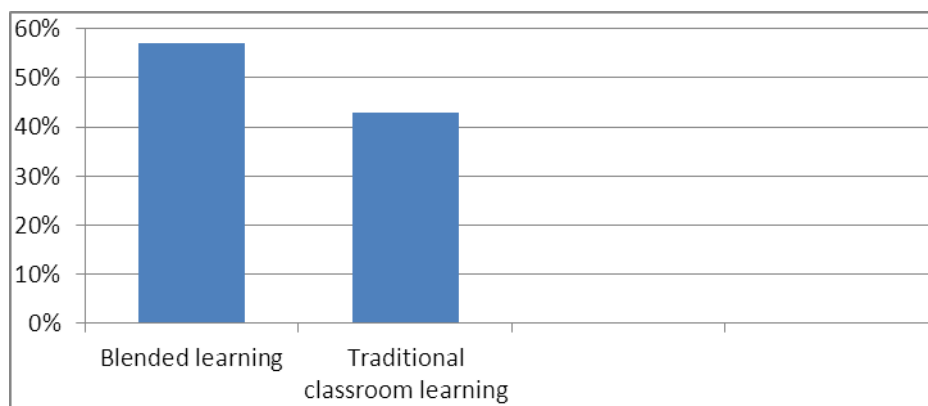

Figure 1. Correlation between Blended and Traditional Learning Provided at Colleges of Hertfordshire
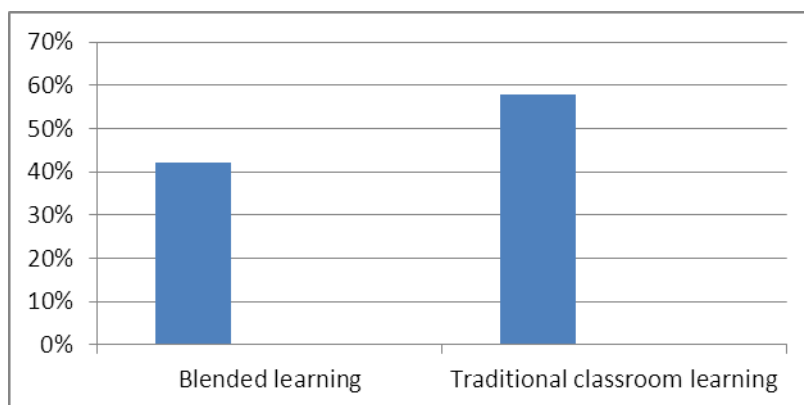

Figure 2. Correlation between Blended and Traditional Learning Provided at Colleges in the Surrounding Area

As Figure 1 indicates, 57% of colleges and UTCs are engaged in blended learning providing teaching and learning both in classrooms and in virtual, educational settings. For one, College **of Animal Welfare** designed Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to support the lecturer's classroom teaching as well as provide courses that are completely based online from enrolment through to assessment and certification. 43% of colleges in Hertfordshire provide traditional classroom learning.

According to Figure 2, blended learning is adopted by 42% of colleges in the area surrounding Hertfordshire. 58 % of colleges prefer traditional curriculum delivery.

To answer the main research question, we designed a short questionnaire consisting of the following questions:

1.What type of learning do you provide at your institution: traditional or blended?

2.How do students and academic staff of your institution benefit from blended learning?

3.Do your students have an access to modern technology at your institution, which ones?

The questionnaire was emailed at official addresses of 33 colleges of Hertfordshire and the surrounding area. Having analysed the given responses, we found out that most colleges utilize interactive whiteboards, tablets, laptops, computers, iPads, and media players as a technological support on many courses. Notably, all the respondents got stuck with the question about benefits from blended learning which means this area should be undergone to further and deeper investigation.

Discussion. The purpose of this study was to provide an overview of some important characteristics of Further Education in England with a deeper insight into the issue of blended learning in colleges of Hertfordshire and the surrounding area. The figures presented in the study were based on on the data obtained from the questionnaire and colleges' websites.

Thus, the findings of our research allow us to conclude that many FE colleges have adapted to the challenges of a new technological era, however, some institutions in Hertfordshire and the surrounding area still see inflexibility in the way that they are run and deliver courses.

The length of this study means that there were trade-offs in terms of the depth with which this topic should be examined. We tried to strike an appropriate balance but inevitably there are issues that would merit further investigation and analysis.

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ЗМІШАНЕ НАВЧАННЯ В КОЛЕДЖАХ ПОДАЛЬШОЇ ОСВІТИ В АНГЛІЇ

С. Цимбал

Анотація. Протягом кількох десятиліть подальша освіта відіграє дедалі все більшу роль у покращенні національного добробуту Англії, підвищуючи якість надання освітніх послуг, збільшуючи можливості фінансування й перетворюючись на важливий сектор системи освіти.

Дане дослідження має на меті охарактеризувати систему подальшої освіти в Англії та обговорити питання змішаного та традиційного навчання в коледжах подальшої освіти.

Ключові слова: коледжі; подальша освіта; змішане навчання; традиційне навчання; Англія

СМЕШАННОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ В КОЛЛЕДЖАХ ДАЛЬНЕЙШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В АНГЛИИ

С. Цымбал

Аннотация. В течение нескольких десятилетий дальнейшее образование играет все большую роль в улучшении национального благосостояния Англии, повышая качество предоставления образовательных услуг, увеличивая возможности финансирования и превращаясь в важный сектор системы образования.

Данное исследование имеет целью охарактеризовать систему дальнейшего образования в Англии и обсудить вопрос смешанного и традиционного обучения в колледжах дальнейшего образования.

Ключевые слова: колледжи; дальнейшее образование; смешанное обучение; традиционное обучение; Англия

СОЦІАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ АСПЕКТИ ОСВІТНЬОЇ МІГРАЦІЇ СТУДЕНТІВ

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Анотація. Статтю присвячено дослідженню феномена освітньої міграції студентів. Цей феномен автори аналізують у соціально-психологічному аспекті. Представлено аналіз психологічних аспектів адаптації особистості, готовності молоді до міжкультурної комунікації у нових умовах. Описано психологічні умови акультурації студентів-мігрантів. Описані соціально-психологічні характеристики та внутрішні ресурси