

APPLYING MIXED EDUCATION (TRADITIONAL AND ELECTRONIC) IN THE WORK WITH EDUCATION MAJORS

(Preliminary communication)

Nikolay Tsankov and Daniela Tomova
*South-West University Neofit Rilski, Blagoevgrad,
Faculty of education, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria*

Abstract

The growing requirements to the qualification of education determine the necessity for continuous quality improvement in higher education impose a demand for the application of more efficient educational technologies and practices. The development of information and communication technologies facilitates their successful integration in higher education within all of its levels. Employing the electronic education platforms, makes it possible for students to determine their own pace of learning, as well as their study and study time. The study includes 40 subjects, students majoring in the field of Pedagogy of the education. The goal of the research is to explore mixed education in view of the expectations of students and faculty members. To realize the research goal, we asked the students to complete a questionnaire and interviewed their lecturers. The paper offers an interpretation of the concept of mixed education in universities (as a unity of traditional and electronic approaches) through a conceptual grounding of the issue, on the one hand, and by validating the former through a survey of students' opinions who are to be subjects of this type of education. Thus, we demonstrate that mixed education does not and cannot change the essence of the educational process but offers opportunities for improving some of its important aspects.

Keywords: *questionnaire method, interview method, quality training, motivation for training, interest in training, educational technology, information technology, social networks*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades education has turned into a strategic goal for postindustrial society and its successful achievement is crucial not only for the development of modern man but also for the humanity as a whole, for the spiritual, social, and economic improvement of our current state. The XXI century is a period of changes in all spheres of human life, which poses new demands to the individual, to the competences we have as a mode of establishing new cultural values and a path toward successful realization in the changing social environment. This requires the design of set of personal goal setting strategies in education which is being defined as continuous and open for all people; a major factor for the overcoming of long-term ethnic, religious, and social controversies.

This lasting importance of education demand a search for alternatives to turn it into a conscious, active, motivated, creative and personality-oriented activity. Its orientation towards leisure time, toward a creative initiative, self-reliance, competitiveness and mobility, requires a change in the educational paradigm. A process

is under way which development is the object of voluminous research work as a part which form the theoretical bearing of the present paper. (Tsankov & Genkova, 2009).

The vision of the necessity for active participation of the students in the cognitive activity is not novel but contemporary conditions impose its transformation into a basic life philosophy and a path to personal development that lives up to the requirements of constant change and innovation characterizing social development in the XXI century. These changes affect the modern man being and stipulate a change of personality development and education as a whole related to the formation of a new type of consciousness and value orientation. This search toward new approaches for the improvement of university education and the utilization of information and communication technologies in education is directly related to students' interest and motivation in the process of education. The development of their creative potential is contingent on the employment of various technologies, forms, and methods. The implementation of electronic education in the cognitive activities of edu-

education majors is topical and crucial for the contemporary didactics of higher education as well as for university teaching practices. The significance of the problem areas discussed above, their conceptual basis and methodological grounding form the following research tendencies:

- **in social terms** – settling the controversies between objective social requirements to education and their realization through the employment of traditional and electronic (hereafter mixed) education;
- **in theoretical terms** – theoretical analysis of the necessity for electronic education and its integration in traditional university education;
- **in utilitarian terms** – improvement of the practice of education and its orientation towards the formation and development of lifelong study skills as a personality property.

The growing requirements to the qualification of education majors the necessity for continuous improvement of the quality of higher education imposes as a demand for the application of more effective technologies and practices. The development of information and communication technologies allows their integration in universities at different levels of the educational process. The employment of educational platforms the students can choose their own rate, time, and place of studying according to their needs and the specific character of the study subject. Electronic education platforms are exceptionally flexible and make it possible for large groups to be educated while at the same time their results are individually rated. The spontaneous communication between the students and their instructor through the electronic portal gives valuable feedback for the adequacy of the educational process and its usability level and offers bearings for its perfection. The student can get fast and easy access to the educational content, the evaluation inventory and can contact the other participants or the instructor. Modern electronic education platforms present the educational content in especially attractive way, so it can be adapted to students' needs and thus increasing their interest and motivation.

Based on the advance of information and communication technologies, contemporary systems for course management or electronic education system for

course management or systems for electronic education (Course Management Systems) offer a variety of opportunities for the design of the educational environment and the structuring of educational content, which inevitably entails a change in the processes of the teaching and learning (Zhecheva, Nikolov & Orozova, 2011). Their entrenchment on the contemporary concept of edutainment (education in the form of entertainment) related to the establishment of cognitive situations in which the dynamic condition rooted in the content of the activity and its results (Boneva-Damyantov, Tsankov & Damyanov, 2012) undoubtedly increases the motivation and the subjective interest.

The major components of the design of the empirical study are determined with respect to their sequencing and structural make-up. The object of the study is the exploration of the realization of mixed (traditional and electronic) education. The specific orientation of the research is the attitude of students and faculty members to mixed education with an emphasis on the factors of the environment, the expected results, and the resources available for mixed education.

METHODS

The study includes 40 subjects, students majoring in the field of *Pedagogy of the education*. The goal of the research is to explore mixed education in view of the expectations of students and faculty members.

To realize the research goal, we asked the students to complete a questionnaire and interviewed their lecturers. The design of the questionnaire (survey) incorporates several thematic areas: mixed education as a link between the traditional and electronic education; typological characteristics of mixed education; expected results of the application of mixed education; conditions, means, factors and resources for the adequate realization of mixed education; mixed education as a type of educational technique, as a concept, and as an educational event. The interview draws the attention to the opportunities offered by mixed education for an efficient development and realization of the curricular and extra-curricular student activities in the conditions of mixed education. The present paper discusses certain important

For you the relation between classical (traditional) and electronic education is preeminently in

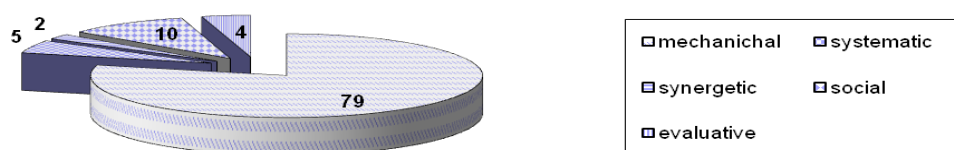


Figure 1.

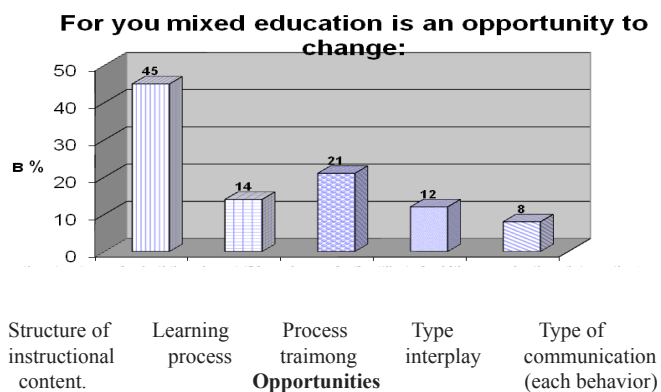


Figure 2.

issues the empirical study uncovers, but does not cover the whole range of questions it raises.

Students' opinions concerning the idea of mixed education as a link between the traditional and electronic education is of special interest (Fig. 1.). 79% of the subjects define it as a mechanical link, 10% of them as a social one and 4% consider it as significant in evaluative terms. "Mixed education is a mechanical link of relatively low social and scientific order", represent a result that deserves special attention in the design and planning of this type of education.

This is also the context of the expected change on part of the students in the process of realization of mixed education (Figure 2.). Nearly half of the students who participated in the survey (45%) view this change in relation with the opportunities for the structuring and the design of educational content. The lowest relative share (8%) opted for a change in the type of interrelations (communication). *Therefore, mixed education is oriented towards a change of the structure of the educational content, which is a component of the technology of education, but does not imply an overall reformation of the education and the social interaction between the educators and educated.*

RESULTS

Interestingly, even when educational matters are concerned, the students prefer using the popular social networks (Facebook, Twitter, App.net, LinkedIn) rather than the platforms especially created for electronic and distance education. 82 % of the students participating in the survey would rather communicate with their professors and fellow students via the social networks, despite the fact that a relatively large percent of them (67%) are aware of the advantages of the latter. The exploration of this dependency through the co-relation quotient demonstrates that there is no direct relation between students' knowledge of the advantages of educational platforms and students' willingness to use these in their education. This conclusion implies a necessity to stimulate students' motivation to work in the conditions of mixed education before it actually starts. Additionally, new means should be established for the design of the

educational environment and the structuring of the educational content in such a way as to simulate the inter-face of social networks.

Despite the controversial opinions of both students and professors, the following accents are to be distinguished in the evaluation of the advantages of mixed education, which in turn form the basis of it efficient design and realization.

Advantages of mixed education according to students:

- Facilitation and efficiency of communication with professors;
- Easy access to information concerning extra-curricular activities;
- Timely access to the requirements of interim evaluation and exam procedures;
- Opportunity to compose an electronic portfolio to guarantee better exam preparation.
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Advantages of mixed education according to professors:

- Higher degree of conceptualization and structuring of educational content (key words, models, functional relations);
- Fast and timely updating of educational content and opportunity for continual re-structuring in accordance with the logic of the course and with students' abilities;
- Efficient design and organization of students' extra-curricular activities;
- Higher degree of visualization within students' class activities;
- Easy encoding of educational information in a different mode (dynamic modeling);

• The analysis of the results of the study will help to build up an awareness of the opportunities for realization of mixed education (integration of traditional and electronic) at the Faculty of Education, by means of:

- Designing a conceptual model of mixed education. Creation of conceptual model for the integral education (integration of traditional and electronic);

- Design of educational means;
- Design of course elements in electronic form through a specific educational platform;
- Co-operation in the university libraries;
- Design of a personal student portfolio;
- Configuration of incoming and outgoing electronic educational service covering time, resources, mediators and consumers;
- Improvement of the quality of education in the Faculty of Education;
- Establishment of conditions for a successful inclusion of other professors in the initiative for conducting mixed education employing electronic education platforms.

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Correspondence:

Nikolay Tsankov

South-West University “Neofit Rilski”

Faculty of Education

St. Ivan Michailov 66, 2700 Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

E-mail: ntzankov@swu.bg