

# BLENDLED LEARNING – A SPECIFIC APPROACH OF TEACHING STRATEGIES IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Marinela, Lăzărică<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract:

*Fast developments in information and communications technologies have significantly affected the behaviour of today's students. These students, grown up in the digital age and exposed to digital technologies since they were born, have inherited a social and technological culture which makes them think and process information differently from the past generations. Therefore, they are fully dependent on tech equipment and their learning is constructed as a much more social process. In this context it is important to design and implement specific strategies in teaching learning process.*

*Blended Learning is a strategy which integrates the teaching learning process with different learning environments like face-to-face, online, social networking etc. Its rapid growth has been facilitated by the Internet and other emerging technologies like cloud computing, social networking etc.*

*This paper provides a view about blended learning model and mainly, the technology-based tools involved in blended learning.*

**Keywords:** *blended learning, blended learning model, online learning*

**JEL classification:** A20, C81, D83

## 1. Introduction

The technology is an integral part in the lives of young people who are direct beneficiaries of the educational process. This was often made argument for the need to develop learning methods that use modern technology in the formative and educational. These e-learning methods have involved fundamental changes in learning paradigms. E-learning has not only changed the presentation way of information from traditional to the digital one, but it has catalyzed the development of a new philosophy of learning. By such methods students are responsible for their own learning, on which they themselves have control and manages it according to their interests and needs. The specialists' researches reveal that the methods which combine the traditional education with the modern technologies (*blended learning*) have increased the effectiveness.

## 2. Blended learning – a few considerations

Blended learning is a concept older than 10 years. This term first appeared around 2000 and was at that time often associated with simply supplementing traditional classroom learning with self-study e-learning activities.

Like many advances in educational practice, blended learning is defined and implemented in multiple ways. This concept is defined in wikipedia as "a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path or pace" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blended\\_learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blended_learning)).

As more and more organisations implemented this model, many different meanings have evolved. iNACOL, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, defines blended learning as "combining online delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction and live instruction to personalize learning, allow thoughtful reflection, and differentiate instruction from student-to-student across a diverse group of learners." (Watson, John, 2008).

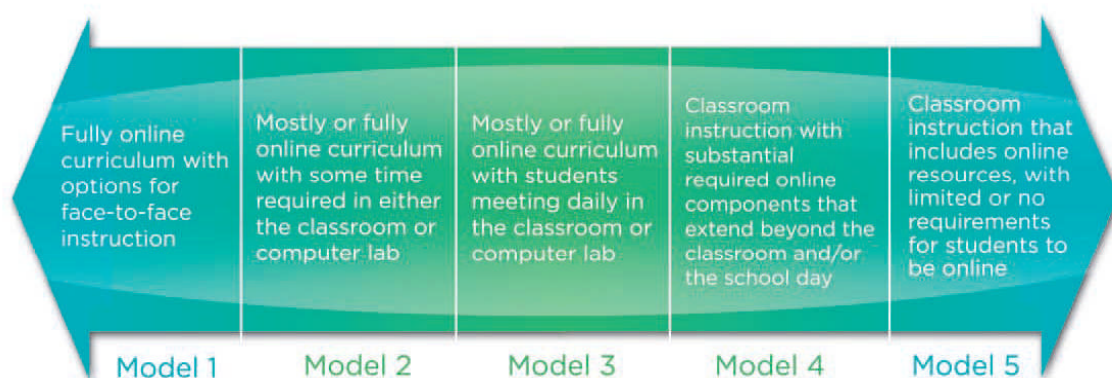
---

<sup>1</sup> PhD Lecturer, „Constantin Brâncoveanu” University of Pitesti, Faculty of Management Marketing in Economic Affairs - Brăila, [mlazarica@yahoo.com](mailto:mlazarica@yahoo.com)

Essentially, all definitions broadly highlight blended learning as an instructional practice that combines the teaching methods from both face-to-face instruction and online learning.

Blended learning comes in a wide range of implementation models. The continuum of models implemented in educational institutions gives educators a working picture of the many ways in which online learning blends with and supports traditional instruction (fig. no. 1). This figure shows the wide range of models, from fully online curriculum (model 1) to few online resources (model 5).

**Fig. no. 1. Blended learning continuum**



(<http://www.kineo.com/elearning-reports/blended-learning-current-use-challenges-and-best-practice.html>)

Recent studies reveal that many organisations gained significant benefits from blended solutions. The most common identified benefit (54% of respondents) was improvements in business performance. Also, another benefit nominated was more effective learning do to blend of methods. Finally, others important benefits are: a cost-effective accessibility to all participants, a good speed of implementation and costs savings in providing learning (Oxford Group, 2013).

According to the research in this field, the blended solutions will increasingly be common in the future. There are many key challenges that organisations face in developing / implementing blended solutions. Particularly timeline to design and develop, complexity of designing a blend, lack of internal expertise to commission and cost are critical.

Past studies have found for the US universities that blended courses have the potential to increase student learning outcomes (97% vs 94% for face-to-face and 92% for fully online) while lowering attrition rates in comparison with equivalent fully online courses (Charles D. Dziuban, Joel L. Hartman, Patsy D. Moskal, 2004).

Blended learning helps instructors evolve as designers of active learning environments, thus becoming much more facilitative in their teaching. This phenomenon is consistent with what Carl Rogers called the “facilitative teacher”, where instructional environments take precedence over information transmittal (Carl Rogers, 1983).

### **3. Research regarding the opportunity of implementing of a blended learning system in "Constantin Brâncoveanu" University**

Romania is familiar with the blended learning method because there has been noticed an increase in the use of blended learning. However, the use of blended learning has still not reached a high level and there are now many institutions where it can be adopted.

A recent international report (Barbour et al, 2012) shows as main reasons that inhibit the spread of online education in Romania:

- the educational system is very centralized,
- as far as blended education is concerned, the regular use of e-learning software does not allow teachers to attain the learning objectives, partially due to the limited time and the overloaded compulsory curriculum, and partially due to the uncertainty of teachers in using such new tools, conducting such time-consuming, computer-assisted teaching activities,
- lack of funding for professional development and teacher training (resulting in shortages of qualified instructors trained to teach online),

Despite higher costs, blended learning systems can provide important benefits of educational institutions that adopt them.

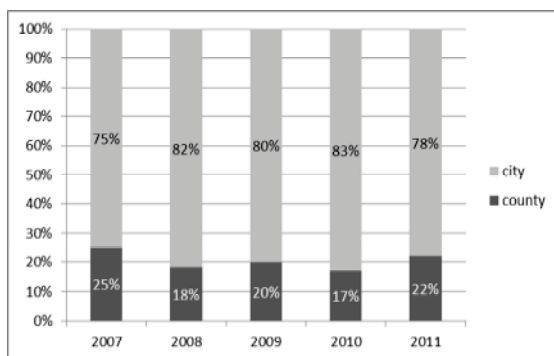
Because blended learning is combining online learning with traditional learning, such a training system will combine the advantages of both types of training: quality / flexibility and memorability. By online learning students can have unlimited access (from any computer, iPhone, iPad, at any time) to reference sources and learn at their own pace, and by traditional learning (group meetings) may discuss the new learned concepts.

The private universities in Romania often show significant differences compared to the structure of the student population, unlike the public universities. Overall, the average age of students in private education is significantly higher than the public sector. This phenomenon is due to the fact that most candidates already have a job and choose a private education. In addition, most private institutions of higher education in Romania offers training programs for low frequency (RF) or distance learning. All these factors create specific premises for implementation of e-learning or blended learning systems.

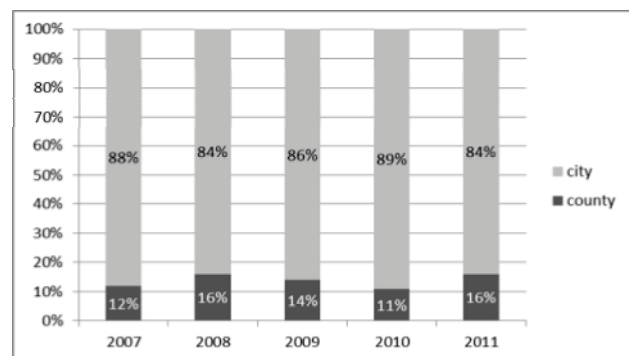
In the last years, I have been concerned by analysis of the main items regarding the opportunity to implement a blended learning system in the faculties of "Constantin Brâncoveanu" Pitesti, Braila Center. A large part of the data comes from a study aimed on analyzing the new students enrolled for the period 2007-2011 at first and second degree from the Faculties of Braila Center. The correlation and the synthesis of these data allowed the student population segmentation analysis according to several criteria.

For this paper research, the data were selected from the mentioned study and it highlights the structure of the students enrollment in 2007-2011 by three criteria: type of education (full frequency FF /RF), address type (city / county) and employee/unemployee.

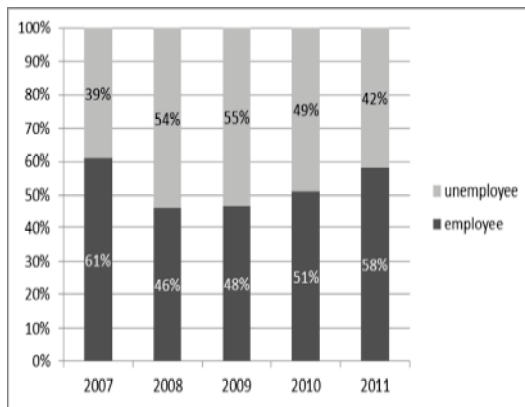
**Chart no. 1. Address type / first degree**



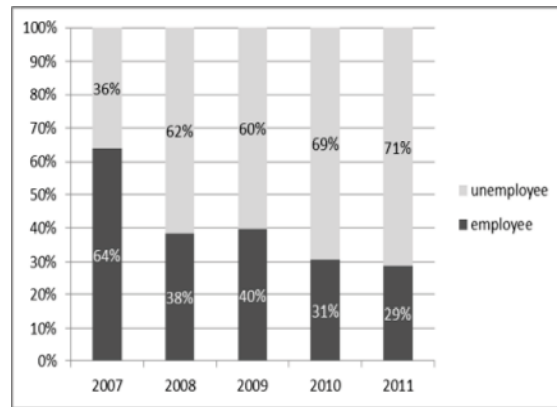
**Chart no. 2. Address type / second degree**



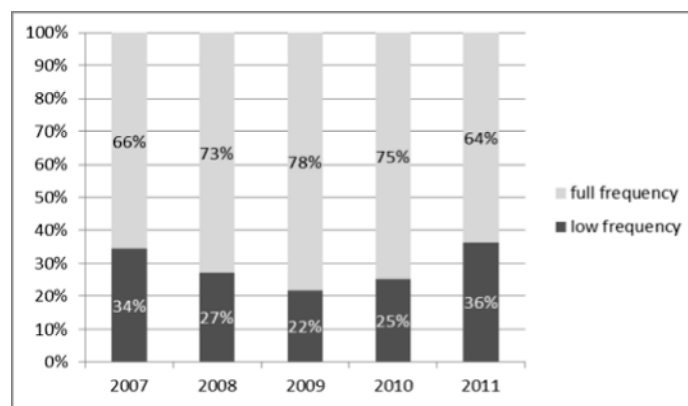
**Chart no. 3. Have job or no / first degree**



**Chart no. 4. Have job or no / second degree**



**Chart no. 5. Frequency type / first degree**



The graphs above show a significant percentage of students residing outside the city (chart no. 1 and 2). The specificity of this criterion determines additional agreement by this category of a blended learning system.

The second criterion, by percentages exceeded in some years even the value of 50% (chart no. 3 and 4), brings a strong argument in favor of the opportunity of implementing such a system.

The attractiveness of such a system of learning is enhanced for the students from RF, which have a significant share (~ 25-35%) overall - chart no. 5.

The training of students in the group over 30 years has specific aspects compare to the group under the age of 30. The older students' category exhibit strong and formed value systems, it has misconceptions, a different level of education and culture and lower availability to change. Consequently, the methods proposed by blended learning can be particularly effective, addressing to the specific needs mentioned and considering the characteristics of learning, types of smart thinking and different learning styles.

Actual data show that at the Braila Center, the percentage of students older than 30 years is raised, arguing the opportunity of implementing a blended learning system.

In the past two years, I made a brief empirical research of the 1st and 2nd year college students regarding their willingness to access a blended learning system. Over 85% of them answered affirmatively that the introduction of such a modern system would have a good feedback from almost all of the students.

"Constantin Brâncoveanu" University operates in three cities: Pitesti, Braila and Rm. Vâlcea. In this context, the implementation of a blended learning system would bring a range of special benefits for the university, enabling more effective collaboration and interaction between teachers and students from these three locations.

#### 4. Conclusions

Blended learning – an instructional practice that combines teaching methods from both face-to-face instruction and online learning, gives to educational institutions new approaches and strategies for addressing the challenges they face and for taking advantage of the exciting new learning opportunities that are now available.

Blended learning does not exclude the traditional learning methods, but adds new and modern methods as: IT tools (email, web, chat, online conferences, e-learning platforms), workshops, individual project groups, practical demonstrations, etc..

The statistic data about the segmentation of students population from Braila Center, "Constantin Brâncoveanu" University, as well as the empirical research convincingly argues in favor of implementing of a blended learning system in the entire university.

#### References:

1. Barbour Michael, et al, (2012), *Online and Blended Learning: A Survey of Policy and Practice of K-12 Schools Around the World*, available at [http://www.inacol.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/iNACOL\\_IntnlReport2011.pdf](http://www.inacol.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/iNACOL_IntnlReport2011.pdf)
2. Dziuban D. Charles, Hartman L. Joel, Moskal D. Patsy, (2004), *Blended Learning*, research bulletin Educase Center for Applied Research, volume 4, issue 7
3. The Oxford Group (2013), *Blended Learning—Current Use, Challenges and Best Practices*, report 2013, available at <http://www.kineo.com/m/0/blended-learning-report-202013.pdf> (accessed july 2013)
4. Rogers Carl (1983), *The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning*, London: Routledge
5. Sheridan, Rick *Hybrid and Blended Learning Approaches for Internet-Based Online Education*, available at [http://www.academia.edu/4112227/Hybrid\\_and\\_Blended\\_Learning\\_Approaches\\_for\\_Internet-Based\\_Online\\_Education](http://www.academia.edu/4112227/Hybrid_and_Blended_Learning_Approaches_for_Internet-Based_Online_Education) (accessed september 2013)
6. Staker Heather, Horn B. Michael (2012), *Classifying K–12 Blended Learning*, available at <http://www.innosightinstitute.org/innosight/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Classifying-K-12-blended-learning2.pdf> (accessed august 2013)
7. Watson, John, (2008), *Evergreen Consulting Associates: Blended Learning: The Convergence of Online and Face-to-Face Education*, iNACOL Promising Practices in Online Learning
8. \*\*\**Blended Learning: Where Online and Face-to-Face Instruction Intersect for 21st Century Teaching and Learning*, available at <http://www.kineo.com/elearning-reports/blended-learning-current-use-challenges-and-best-practice.html> (accessed august 2013)
9. \*\*\* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blended\\_learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blended_learning)
10. \*\*\* <http://www.kineo.com/elearning-reports/blended-learning-current-use-challenges-and-best-practice.html>