A BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH TO TEACH PHARMACY LAW: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND CORRELATIONS WITH EXAMINATION PERFORMANCE

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Background
A hybrid environment of ‘blended learning’ (BL) combines the online resources of e-learning and traditional didactic learning environments.[1] This approach was used in line with Twigg's Replacement Model [2] for integrating e-learning to redevelop the delivery of Pharmacy Law material in Level 2 of the undergraduate Masters of Pharmacy programme.

Aim
The overall aim of this study is to investigate the feedback from learners in relation to their self-reported learning preference, their opinions and perceptions, and impact of the BL approach on performance at two summative examinations.

Method
A mixed methods study has been adopted. After the delivery of the Pharmacy Law material, the students (n=69) were administered the Kolb Learning Style Inventory (KSI) [3] to record students’ preferred learning style and the Community of Inquiry Survey (CoIS), which measures the Social, Teaching and Cognitive presence of online learning experiences.[4] Four focus groups (8 students in each) were undertaken to investigate student feedback further. Transcribed audio recordings were analysed using thematic analysis by two independent researchers. Findings were collated and where discrepancies occurred a third researcher provided further moderation. The student marks achieved at the summative law exam and the dispensing exam will be collected. Mean, median and interquartile ranges of these marks will be compared to marks achieved by two previous cohorts who had experienced didactic law lectures.

Results
Positive correlation was found between Theorist and Pragmatist (r = 0.621, p<0.001); and between Theorist and Reflector (r = 0.400, P =0.004) style preference. The average ranking was 3.6 ± 0.7; 3.6 ± 0.6 and 3.6 ± 0.7 for Teaching, Social and Cognitive presence. The items scoring the lowest average scores (3.4-3.5) were those that related to the online presence. The focus groups similarly demonstrated a mixture of feedback from students, with most expressing positive feedback for the flexibility and innovation offered by the BL approach but many also desiring the ‘security’ of formal didactic presentation of information.

Conclusions
The BL approach has been received with mixed response from the students. The focus groups provided important feedback from students that will inform the revising of some elements of the delivery. It will be interesting to observe the impact on student assessment once data has been collected and analysed.