



SOME PARTICULARITIES OF THE USAGE OF BLENDED LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the design of a blended learning environment in a face-to-face transition and tries to determine whether the characteristics and background of the learner, together with the elements of blended learning design, are important factors for learning outcomes, such as intrinsic motivation, satisfaction and knowledge. the construction and performance of blended learning is learning.

The design of a blended learning environment in this study is one aspect of instructional design and has a lot to do with innovative pedagogy to improve teaching and learning using technology. It is noted especially by Schellens (2004) that the design of a learning environment is very important for stimulating and supporting student learning. The design of this study implies a transition from traditional face-to-face learning to blended learning with technology. The focus of this study is primarily the design of a supportive and motivational blended learning environment as an attempt to move from traditional paper-based course delivery methods to more advanced methods using technology. We are integrating an instructional design component into this study to examine this transition company. The transition is

designed to explore different alternatives that can foster exploration in learning through the use of modern information communication technologies. This means a re-invention of teaching and learning in university relevant for the 21st Century (Laurillard 2002). We note that individual differences play a big part in student learning and so this study considers student characteristics and background in terms of their demographics and social aspects. It also highlights what learning in blended environment can lead to in terms of outcomes when technology is applied in education through an intervention.

Literature review

This literature review examines individual student characteristics that play a role in student learning, particularly in a blended



learning environment. It also shows how students use a blended learning environment designed for their satisfaction and achieve learning outcomes. The variables examined were selected based on the study environment. In the researcher's experience, student characteristics were a problem in student learning. The level of support from supervisors and peers in the workplace and the extent to which their work provides the opportunity to learn can affect the success of blended learning. Emotional family support has been found to predict effects of online learning as noted by Chu and Ju (2010). Managing study activities in any learning environment is important and requires self-regulation skills from young and old. Qualities of technology quality, online and face-to-face interactions, as well as the use of a learning management system with its tools and resources. They are design features that are the means for the student to educate learning. These are anchored in the literature to show how students use them to achieve satisfaction, learning performance, motivation, and knowledge building as learning outcomes when designing blended learning.

Students' characteristics and background in a blended learning intervention

Self-regulation is a significant and critical aspect in learning (Barnard et al 2009). Students need to control the various resources available to them in learning such as learning time, the study environment as well as help available from peers and instructors (Pintrich 2000). The adoption of self-regulated learning strategies (Boekaerts and Corno 2005) leads learners in learning environments to efficiently

manage learning activities. The key to such learning outcomes as knowledge construction and intrinsic motivation lies so much in the ability of learners to regulate their own learning processes (Cleary and Zimmerman 2004).

Attitudes towards blended learning

There can be effective application of learning strategies where positive attitudes towards learning exist (Haddock and Maio 2009). Zhu, Au and Yates (2013) identified attitudes towards ICT usage, subject area, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and on-line learning as factors that influence students' attitudes towards online courses. Studies show that there has been satisfaction with blended learning thereby showing a positive attitude to such a learning environment (Yilmaz and Orhan 2010).

Family and social support Parental support for learner success in blended learning is vital (Black 2009; Russel 2004) and emotional family support predicts effects of e-learning (Chu 2010). The existence of family support especially in regard to IT applications is known to decrease anxiety related to IT usage (Bimber 2000), and in our situation, involving technology in learning is a challenge for many learners, which calls for tangible family support (Chu 2010). Social support as a theory discusses sources of positive or protective influences associated with individuals' social relationship and network (Berkman et al 2000). Online collaborative learners need to have feelings of connectedness and belonging promoted because they are considered as critical factors in online learning (Hara, Bonk and Angeli 2000).



Jacobson (1986) named informational, instructional and emotional supports as other types of social support necessary for success in learning environments. In the context of this study, some learners at the age of 24 are still supported by parents in university. We therefore examine the need for support emotionally, financially or otherwise for blended learning success in this intervention.

Holley and Oliver (2010) noted that assessment pressures at work and expectations for them to acquire independent study skills in a short time will always give a low chance of accessing academic time. Learner management of workload needs examination as a vital aspect for blended learning interventions.

Computer competences Students' knowledge and skill in computer applications can be a drive in the use of technology in learning while deficiency makes it difficult for them to learn (Lofstram and Nevgi 2007). Students' comfort with IT tools makes them interface better with given tools used in blended learning (Kvavik and Caruso 2005).

Gender and age Research shows that female learners do not comparatively do well in science and technology (Crombie and Abarbanel 2000) and in male dominated environments (Phan 2001). Boys' heavy use of computers and their positive attitudes resulted into outperforming girls in ICT literacy (Volman and Eck 2001). In some cases there are no significant differences in the academic achievement grades of male and female students though in the pre- and final test of traditional and blended learning environments respectively showed female

students' performance was higher (Yasar and Demirkol 2014). Hoskins and Hooff (2005) noted age as a predictor of achievement and older students do better than younger ones in online learning. There were however no differences in performance between the old and young learners in online environments (Colorado and Eberle 2010).

2.2 Blended learning design features

Interactions in blended learning

Student-student interaction for learners helps them to meet online in order to get a feeling of community belonging (Sorden 2011). Garrison (2009) indicated that social presence occurs as learners identify and communicate with a community and develop relationships. Meaningful and academically rich interactions between students are helpful for learning as well as being enablers of learning (Tu and Corry 2003). Student-faculty interaction ensures successful learner outcomes in blended learning and frequent contact brings student motivation as well as involvement. The value of student-faculty interaction is emphasized by Chen, Gonyea and Kuh (2008) in encouraging learner engagement, satisfaction and successful results of the learning process. The main responsibilities of staff in ensuring meaningful interactions with learners lie in clearly showing how learners will access the instructor and timely response to learners' concerns, (Graham et al 2001). The learning process is again significant when it involves learners being active, interactive as well as reflective in their learning (Payne 2007). The use of the discussion forum to exchange knowledge through participation in discussions can benefit learners by allowing



them to dialogue with peers and self-reflection which leads to knowledge construction, (Chen and Looi 2007).

Learners fondly make use of features such as accessing lecture notes and materials, uploading coursework as well as accessing grades while the use of the calendar, forums and personal messages were least used (Norris, Sporre & Svendsen 2013). The survey by Berg and Lu (2014) indicated that the student satisfaction with Moodle was mainly in the ease in searching for course information on the system as well as downloading and uploading assignments with ease and convenience on the system. Tools like the discussion forum are known to promote interaction and discussion as well as increase student engagement fostering critical analysis, reflection and the social construction of knowledge between learners in addition to giving assistance in building learning communities, (Garrison 1993). The use of the forum enhances active learning and developing learner thinking capacity and motivates learners to learn more, (McKeachie et al 1986). The chat and news forum are good in sharing information and announcements as well as seeking clarity on what is not understood.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed suggests that student characteristics and background are important factors worth considering when designing blended learning environments, as are blended learning design elements. The results here confirm the importance of these elements and also point to the significant factors that are predictors of the learning outcomes in blended learning between the elements. It should also be noted that gender and age are factors that do not affect student performance in blended learning. This study recommends that the blended learning design takes into account the diverse characteristics of the learner and examines the ability of learners to use and interact with learning management systems for successful blended learning enterprises. Further designs can be done to establish other student characteristics for blended learning and to identify other factors that predict learning outcomes for successful designs. Such factors may include teaching methods, learning styles, institutional readiness, and student abilities.

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