Looking Back and Looking Forward:
A Glimpse of Blended Learning in Higher Education From 2007-2017

Maurice Taylor, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education, Ottawa, Canada

Norman Vaughan, Mount Royal University, Department of Education, Calgary, Canada

Shehzad K. Ghani, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education, Ottawa, Canada

Sait Atas, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education, Ottawa, Canada

Michael Fairbrother, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education, Ottawa, Canada

ABSTRACT

Using an engagement in research approach this article explores the landscape of blended learning in higher education over the last decade by comparing the results of a critical literature review by Vaughan to an instrumental case study that identified key factors that led to the implementation of a blended learning initiative in one medium sized Canadian university. Findings indicate that although students still prefers the time flexibility of blended learning, there are major differences between undergraduate and graduate students and their motivation for choosing this pedagogy. Professors also find increased teacher-student interactions using a blended learning format but acknowledge more support for course redesign and better professional development and training. From an administrator's viewpoint, one of the main challenges occurred at the individual faculty level in trying to communicate the definition of blended learning to professors. As a way of looking forward, interviews with experts from various Ontario universities and a survey of university personnel from across the country provided some initial insights. A discussion situates the findings using the theoretical lens of andragogy, self-directed learning, the community of inquiry framework, and points to a possible range of additional research questions for blended learning.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

As Veletsianos (2016) so aptly puts it there is an increasing awareness that higher education is in a period of transformation due to emerging technologies and the contextual issues surrounding digital learning. Due to this realization, universities have been thrust into debates about the future of education and concerns related to the complexity of the teaching and learning transactions especially given that a new demographic of student is demanding more than the traditional lecture method in classrooms. Blended learning is an important feature in these deliberations. Hybrid or blended learning is often defined as the combination of face-to-face and online learning (Sharpe, Benfield, Roberts, & Francis, 2006). Bleed (2001) argues that this is not a sufficient definition for blended learning as it simply implies "bolting" technology onto a traditional course, using technology as an add-on to teach a difficult concept, or adding supplemental information. He suggests that blended learning should be

viewed as an opportunity to redesign how courses are developed, scheduled, and delivered through a combination of physical and virtual instruction: "bricks and clicks." Joining the best features of in-class teaching with the best features of online learning that promote active, self-directed learning opportunities with added flexibility should be the goal of this redesigned approach (Littlejohn & Pegler, 2007). Garrison and Vaughan (2008, p.148) echo this sentiment when they state that "blended learning is the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies." Furthermore, according to Owston (2013) it now seems clear that blended learning has the potential to transform the sector of higher education as the reliance on the transmission model is seriously being questioned by students, professors and administrators. Nevertheless, as Taylor, Atas, and Ghani (2017) have indicated there are both enablers and constraints in blended learning that are faced by each of these three key stakeholder groups. These seem to be related to individual faculties, size of institution and type of university-wide blended learning initiative.

Over a decade ago, Vaughan (2007) critiqued the literature in blended learning in higher education from the perspective of students, faculty, and administration that had direct experience with this form of course delivery. Drawing on over 35 empirical studies and reports in higher education from 2001-2006, several findings were observed. One of the important conclusions was that there was a marked difference as to the benefits and challenges of blended learning from each of these major constituent groups. More than a decade later, it is still uncertain as to whether these expressed benefits and challenges of blended learning have actually changed or have been addressed (Casey, 2013). Therefore, the scope of this investigation was to explore the similarities and differences that have occurred in blended learning since Vaughan's critical review in 2007 using a comparative thematic analysis of a case-based study by Taylor, Ghani, Atas and Fairbrother (2018). This instrumental case study, which used interviews with students, professors and administrators, identified the key factors that led to the adoption and implementation of a blended learning initiative in one medium sized Canadian university. In addition, an attempt to portray a way forward on blended learning in higher education was explored. For the purposes of this investigation, the research questions were stated as: (1) From the viewpoints of students, professors, and administrators, what aspects of blended learning in higher education have changed and what aspects have remained the same over the last 10 years? (2) What are the directions needed to enhance the development of blended learning in higher education?

METHODOLOGY

The study was situated in a critical and contemporary approach to social research as espoused by Reid, Greaves and Kirby (2017). The particular approach is referred to as engagement in research (pp.38-39). As the authors maintain engagement refers to how groups affected by the research question or implementers of the research results get an opportunity to engage in the research process. In using the case based study by Taylor et al. (2018) students, professors and administrators were all included in generating the research project design, the research questions and deciding on the methods of data collection. Participants also gave suggestions on how to apply the results at the individual faculty level as well as recommendations to the university-wide community. By using this approach, the voices and roles of all three constituent groups were respected ensuring that the research was done with their collaboration and permission.

Thirty-one students who engaged in the case based research were both from the undergraduate and graduate programs across five different faculties. These students had taken at least one blended learning course in their program during the time of the interviews. The 27 professors interviewed were also from five different faculties in this medium sized Canadian university. They had been teaching in their particular faculty for more than 6 years and involved in instructing in a blended learning format for an average of 2.3 years. The 15 administrators interviewed held senior positions of Dean, Vice Dean or Director and had served in an administrative capacity for more than 13 years.

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/article/looking-back-and-looking-forward/198364

Related Content

Valuing Indigenous Research Paradigms in the Context of Language Acquisition
Jennifer Adele Morrison (2020). *International Journal of Adult Education and Technology (pp. 12-20).*
www.irma-international.org/article/valuing-indigenous-research-paradigms-in-the-context-of-language-acquisition/264172

Assessment Processes for Online Professional Development
Lesley S. J. Farmer (2014). *Adult and Continuing Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 257-277).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/assessment-processes-for-online-professional-development/105247

Karl Marx and the Paris Commune of 1871: Tracing Traditions of Critical Pedagogy
Robert McGray (2014). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 1-14).*
www.irma-international.org/article/karl-marx-and-the-paris-commune-of-1871/112051

Managing the Utilization of Technologies in Adult Education, Training, and Administration: The Case Study of Turkish MoNE
Mehmet Durnali (2021). *Research Anthology on Adult Education and the Development of Lifelong Learners (pp. 778-796).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/managing-the-utilization-of-technologies-in-adult-education-training-and-administration/279758

Challenges and Solutions to Assisting Older Adults in Completing the GED: A Study of What the Experts Say
Karen E. Brinkley-Etzkorn (2016). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 16-34).*
www.irma-international.org/article/challenges-and-solutions-to-assisting-older-adults-in-completing-the-ged/171103