Chapter 49

Blended Learning Methods in Introduction to Teaching and Sociology of Education Courses at a University of Education

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the use of the Blended Learning (BL) methods has experienced worldwide uptake and is responsible for enormous changes, not only in developed country education, but in developing country education, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. Given the role that blended learning can play in educational development, educational institutions, students, employers, and governments are increasingly urged to examine the economic, demographic, and technological environments of the present so as to ensure comprehensive preparedness for the future. This study employs a questionnaire for data gathering and results are analysed quantitatively. The findings reveal a significant improvement in the use of blended learning methods to achieve effective academic performance in students. The impact of blended learning in the educational sector is thus evidenced in the changing instructional pedagogies that lead to more interactive learning processes.

INTRODUCTION

Educational systems around the world are effective to the extent that they make use of available resources to achieve stated aims and objectives. The main objective of an educational system, irrespective of the level of education, is to offer high quality education to learners. The resources needed to provide high quality education include financial as well as human and material resources (Carrim & Shalem, 1999; Ololube, 2009). The success of any educational system also undoubtedly depends on methodological competence in the use of blended learning (BL) methods (Ololube, 2011).

Given the dramatic increase in educational methods rendered possible by technological advances, a more open and flexible approach to teaching and learning, particularly in higher

education institutions where various forms of online/e-learning are taking shape, has been advocated across the globe (Fisher, 2003, Ifinedo, 2005; Ololube & Egbezor, 2009; Ebrahimi, 2012). The most frequently used blended learning format combines the face-to-face (f2f) and online delivery methods (Graham, 2006; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Jackson, 2005; Nel, 2005, Ololube, 2011), with the objective of providing a resourceful and effective instructional experience. More broadly, blended learning has been invoked to explain approaches that combine several different learning delivery methods. It is also used to describe learning that mixes event-based activities, such as face-to-face classroom learning, e-learning, and self-paced learning (Graham, 2006). Blended learning has resulted in more proactive and higher quality teaching methods. Its most recent manifestation, the incorporation of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in educational settings and curriculum has significantly altered the tools, content, dynamics and expectations of teaching and learning (Ololube, 2011).

The degree to which blended learning takes place, however, and the way it is integrated into the curriculum, can vary across institutions of higher learning. Blended learning in college and university based instruction is often employed to accommodate students' diverse learning styles and to enable them to participate fully in academic activities in ways not possible with traditional f2f classroom instruction. Blended learning has the potential to improve educational productivity by accelerating the rate of learning, taking advantage of learning time and hours more effectively, reducing the time cost-benefit scenario, and making better use of instructional materials (Heller, 2010; U.S Department of Education, 2012).

Blended learning is essential in enabling access to mainstream contemporary education. As such, it remains an important tool in Nigeria's educational development (Ololube, 2011). Nigeria must thus be diligent in integrating ICT into its education sectors, especially tertiary education,

as this level of education is at the forefront of national and regional development, charged with the production of equipped and adept human capital. Nigerian higher education institutions are preparing, albeit slowly, for these new challenges and have been sluggish in responding to calls for the expansion of blended learning services (Ifinedo, 2005; Iloanusi & Osuagwu, 2009). Globally, there is an increasing demand for more and better ICT competencies among students and faculty given rapid advances in technology and global education (UNESCO, 2008). The effectiveness or success of teachers today thus depends on how well they are prepared for their roles within a changing and challenging system (Hennessy, Harrison & Wamakote, 2010).

The teaching methods employed by educators guide and subsequently evaluate the progress of students (Ololube & Egbezor, 2009). This progress, then, depends on the instructional strategies employed. Faculty are expected to have specialized training and knowledge in the application of several different instructional delivery methods and that their methodological application is appropriate to day-to-day pedagogical encounters with students (Ololube, 2011). According to Husu (2006) and Haßler, Hennessy and Lubasi, (2011), teacher competence, specialized training and knowledge in the application of instructional delivery methods, goes beyond skills to include the attitudes and stamina needed to carry out actions in even the most difficult situations.

A number of barrier to blended learning use in Nigerian universities have been identified. These include inadequate funding, limited computer availability, intermittent Internet access, poor infrastructure, power supply shortages and often complete black outs, lack of trained faculty and personnel, and poverty, among others (Ifinedo & Ololube, 2007; Ololube, 2011). These factors make it difficult a total shift to blended learning assisted classrooms in public universities difficult at best (Mulford; 2003; Aladejana, 2008). Nonetheless, it is imperative that colleges and

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