Chapter 15
Teachers Conceptions and Approaches to Blended Learning: A Literature Review

Vicki Caravias
Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critical review and synthesis of research literature in higher education exploring teachers' conceptions of blended learning and their approaches to both design and teaching. Definitions of blended learning and conceptual frameworks are considered first. Attention is given to Picciano's Blending with Purpose Multimodal framework. This paper builds upon previous research on blended learning and conceptual framework by Picciano by exploring how objectives from Picciano's framework affect teachers' approaches to both design and teaching in face-to-face and online settings. Research results suggest that teachers use multiple approaches including face-to-face methods and online technologies that address the learning needs of a variety of students from different generations, personality types and learning styles.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades the integration of Internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have enhanced knowledge and performance in many university courses (S. Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, & Pérez, 2008).

During this time universities have incorporated learning management systems, such as Blackboard and Moodle, into their teaching practices (R. A. Ellis, Goodyear, Prosser, & O'Hara, 2006; R. A. Ellis, Steed, & Applebee, 2006) to support teachers in delivering material to students. Learning Management Systems (LMS) provide the opportunity to deliver blended learning approaches that combine a mix

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of ICT with various learning resources and delivery methods. Coates et al. (2005) outline several key features of LMSs:

1. Asynchronous and synchronous communication between teacher-student and student-student (discussion boards, emails, live chats);
2. Content development and delivery (lecture notes, readings, practical activities);
3. Formative and summative assessment (submission of assignments, quizzes, collaborative work feedback, grades); and
4. Class and user management (enrolling students, displaying timetable) (p. 20-21).

Early adopters of blended learning argued that there are many possibilities offered by the technologies for Australian educators in higher education (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999). There are several reasons behind the drive to incorporate ICT into the educational process. First, pressure to utilise ICT at a university level comes from changes in the student demography. According to Concannon, Flynn and Campbell (Concannon, Flynn, & Campbell, 2005) the surge in "full time part time students is a phenomenon of recent years, where school leavers take part-time jobs whilst attending university" (p.502). For students who work full time, the flexible design accommodates their busy schedules. Without this flexibility, the students may not be able to pursue their degrees. Blended learning environments suit students who prefer face-to-face interaction in addition to students who prefer online learning.

Second, blended learning has the potential to promote lifelong learning in higher education (Dzakiria, Wahab, & Rahman, 2012). In their qualitative study, Dzakiria, Wahab and Rahman investigated the learning experiences of a student's undertaking studies at University Utara Malaysia. They found that blended learning's "flexibility nature can promote lifelong learning anywhere, and anytime" (p. 299). This is supported by research carried out by Masalela (Masalela, 2009) whose qualitative study examined factors that influenced fifteen faculty members' decision to use blended learning and found that learners become self-directed, develop critical thinking skills and become independent thinkers through blended courses. In addition, develop lifelong skills to use when they leave the university.

Third, changes in the market for delivery of education comes from innovation in new technologies. In the case of University of Central Florida (Dziuban & Moskal, 2001), a three hour classroom instruction was replaced with a two hour online instruction session. The university was able to operate multiple classes in one classroom using the technological infrastructure of the university. In addition, blended learning enables multi-university offerings (Jefferies, Grodzinsky, & Griffin, 2003) and facilitates elective courses (Verkroost, Meijerink, Lintsen, & Veen, 2008). Lastly, there is pressure from government for universities to increase participation and widen access to higher education (N. Jones & Lau, 2010).

In sum, the current environment of higher education requires a careful consideration of the role of blended learning in addressing a number issues related to teaching and learning such as generational differences, personality types and learning styles. The goal of this review is to present an investigation of the research currently available on teachers' conceptions of blended learning and their approaches to both design and teaching in higher education using Picciano's Blending with Purpose Multimodal framework. This proposes that teachers consider their objectives and understand how to apply the technologies and approaches that will work best for their students. This paper contributes to the field of blended learning by exploring how objectives from Picciano's framework affect teachers' approach to both design and teaching in face-to-face and online settings such as content, social/emotional contexts,