

Chapter 75

Blended Learning in Higher Education: A Developing Country Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to explore Pakistani students' perspective on an appropriate mix of online and-face-to-face activities in different courses offered at various UK universities. Identifying aspects that students evaluate as supportive, challenging and efficient in their learning is important for the design of an appropriate mix in blended learning courses. A questionnaire was provided to the respondents consisting of both open-ended and closed questions. Applying both statistical and content analysis, this chapter provides a deeper understanding of students' responses and concludes that blended learning is an approach that supports a range of learning styles and life styles.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are cognizant of the fact that introducing new learning approaches that meet the learning needs of today's knowledge society is need of the hour. Higher education institutions must strategically reposition themselves to remain competitive. Higher education institutions can't just develop new technologies and learning models. They must assist the learners to take advantage of these approaches to optimize their learning (Hwang, Hsu, Tretiakov, Chou & Lee, 2009; Coffrin, Corrin, de Barba, & Kennedy, 2014; Clark & Mayer, 2016). The review of available literature shows there exist between learners' requirements and what the learning online environments offers. Many issues, such as sense of isolation, lack of motivation, ineffective communication, avoidance of online communication, and ineffective guidance provided by the educators, have affected the learning of the learners in online environments (Hanisch, Carroll, Combes & Millington, 2011; Coffrin, Corrin, de Barba, & Kennedy, 2014). The available literature raises some insightful questions about providing the right blend of traditional and online teaching models. This chapter seeks to explore these questions by asking Pakistani

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5472-1.ch075

students about their experience of blended learning in different courses of study offered by various UK universities. In these programs, all students have equal access to all online tools and materials, as well as the option of attending face-to-face activities. Students can mix the activities and tools to suit their needs. After introduction, section 2 provides a literature review followed by discussion of research design in section 3. Section 4 provides discussion of findings. Section 5 provides concluding remarks and future research directions are provided in section 6.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There exist gaps in students' experience of blended learning. This study uses the definition of blended learning provided by Garrison and Vaughan (2008) and Tselios, Daskalakis and Papadopoulou (2011). According to them, blended learning refers to integrating valuable aspects of both conventional and non-conventional methods of learning where the interaction between teachers and students can take place with or without the use of technology. Blended learning can combine different methods of learning (such as face-to-face and online methods) to create different ways of learning (Wu, Tennyson & Hsia, 2010; Lim, Morris, & Kupritz, 2014). Blended learning can 'blend' different forms of instructional technology and classroom teaching. Tselios et al. (2011) develops the claim that blended learning can integrate advantages of online and traditional learning. The findings of De George-Walker & Keeffe (2010), Vaughan and Garrison (2005), and Daouk, Bahous, Bacha, and Blessinger (2016) lend support to the claim of Tselios et al. (2011). According to them, blended learning goes beyond the simple integration of conventional and non-conventional methods of learning. Vaughan and Garrison (2005) argues that effective blended learning leverages strengths of both conventional and non-conventional methods of learning to facilitate achieving greatest learning outcomes for students (Waha & Davis, 2014).

El Mansur and Mupinga (2007) argue that students enjoy certain aspects of blended learning including schedule flexibility, interactivity, and availability of teachers. Garrison and Vaughan, (2008) extends this argument by saying that blended learning increases the quality and quantity of interaction among students and teachers. The findings of Pinto de Moura (2010) and Akhter (2015) lend further support for this argument. They found that 24-hour online availability of teacher combined with physical presence of teacher in the classroom provides new level of interaction that students found beneficial.

According to Li-Ling (2011), blended learning can bridge the gap among teachers and students and among students. Qiuyun (2008) extends support to this argument by saying that blended learning results in development of an effective learning community that not only increase interaction between students and teachers but also enhances the learning experience of the students. The findings of Qiuyun are in line with the findings of Garrison and Kanuka (2004). They found that blended learning provides a learning community with academic standards no less than the standards of conventional learning communities. Blended learning can also produce positive impacts on student performance as well by improving performance in individual courses and decreasing dropout rates (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez & Rodriguez-Ariza, 2011). Besides advantage, there are disadvantages of blended learning as well. El Mansour and Mupinga (2007), Eshet-Alkalai (2004), and Alammary, Sheard, and Carbone (2014) claim that students may find themselves lost in blended learning environment and that can negatively impact their learning experience. The students may feel isolated from their peers and teachers and find them unable to develop relationships with their peers and teachers. Verkroost, Meijerink, Lintsen and Veen (2008) claimed that

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