Chapter 17
The Possibilities of Blended Learning to Resolve the Education Crisis:
Best Practices for K–12

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ABSTRACT

This chapter has argued that the blended learning model can be a panacea for addressing the serious challenges facing education authorities universally. Whilst it offers many pedagogical insights and tremendous pedagogical value based on several studies, it fails to provide equal opportunity and economic freedoms, thus leaving the majority of vulnerable children in the world marginalized. The chapter has made a case for a blended schooling system instead of a traditional model which is extremely expensive. The trends of the practices of blended learning were analyzed, and it was found that most of the studies defined blended learning from the point of view of its online and traditional elements without considering pedagogy. These studies suggested using new methods of learning and teaching in online technologies to implement blended learning to K-12 students. The authors also proposed a conceptual inclusive blended learning model to reduce digital inequality and which is one of the ways most children in the world can gain access to the mainstream economy and social life.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of a blended learning model as a replacement for traditional or fully online learning is a particularly useful topic and an excellent point of departure for this chapter within the context of the

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pandemic. As this chapter illustrates there are many valuable pedagogic insights that can be obtained from blended learning, however, the pandemic has revealed that there are major inequalities in the education system of the world. Both in rich and developing countries many poor communities are reproduced and American has witnessed a vicious response from black communities that have been reproduced for over a hundred years. Therefore, a major factor that this chapter contends with is the notion of inclusion of the vulnerable communities so that they can be mainstreamed into economic and social life. This chapter ushers in Rawl's principle of social justice which includes the following as cited by Sen (2009, p.59):

1. Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all.
2. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions, first they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least disadvantaged members of society.

Does blended learning offer conditions of equal opportunity? The chapter argues that it can offer much to the learning-teaching situation, but does it make a difference to the serious challenges faced by the majority of learners in the education system universally?

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic has forced education authorities to look at alternatives to traditional teaching in schools across the world. Accompanying this search for alternatives has also left everyone with a serious dilemma which is the digital divide. The crucial question is how to reduce digital divide? What is blended learning? Can blended learning reach most learners in the world? And which effective practice can be used to implement it? This chapter has attempted to respond to these questions regarding the implementation of blended learning for K-12.

As one has learned, the interaction between humans and computers has greatly increased as we embark in the twenty-first century. The ability to access computers and the internet has become increasingly important to completely immerse oneself in the economic, political, and social aspects of not just the so-called first world, but of the world in general. However, not everyone has access to this technology. The idea of the "digital divide" refers to the growing gap between the underprivileged members of society, especially the poor, rural, elderly, and handicapped portion of the population who do not have access to computers or the internet; and the wealthy, middle-class, and young people living in urban and suburban areas who have access.

In both the developed and developing world there has been a realization that for vulnerable learners who make up a substantial part of the world's schooling population, the greatest challenge remains the reduction of the inequalities so that one can create the conditions for a more equitable and just society. Chipping away at inequalities means reducing the digital divide. Studies in the United States conducted by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in 1997 as cited by Stanford University (n.d.), sheds more light on the digital divide:

Widening levels of education seem to magnify the digital divide; households with higher levels of education are increasingly more likely to use computers and the Internet. It has been observed that those with college degrees or higher are 10 times more likely to have internet access at work than those with only a high school education. A study conducted by the NTIA from 1997 to 1998 determined that the gap in computer usage and Internet access widened by 7.8% and 25% respectively, between those with the most and the least education.

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