

Advantages and disadvantages of blended learning in higher education

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Annotation: The educational system at present is in a transition stage. To meet the challenges of expansion and for catering individuals need trying to adopt new technologies and exploring new paths to reach the goal of quality educational opportunities for all. At the same time due to various factors like deficient budgets, lack of facilities, advantages of face to face interaction, it is not completely ready to leave the traditional modes of knowledge transfer. The present paper tries to explain that how blended learning is an approach that needs to be adopted and it analyses the positive and negative sides of blended learning.

Key words: blended learning, technology, online learning, traditional learning, face-to-face driver approach, rotation approach, flex and self-blend approaches, teacher-led instruction, exploratory enrichment

What is blended learning?

There are many approaches, methods, and techniques (strategies) of teaching languages. One of the teaching strategies that has been a major growth point in the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry over the last ten years is blended learning. It combines face-to-face teaching with distance education, either computer-based or web-based. Blended learning, also known as hybrid learning, is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods. Instead of learning only from their teacher, and only interacting with their peers, students also engage with technology in order to meet learning goals. Given the advances of technology over the last 10 years, the majority of students already have experienced at least some form of blended learning. At the same time, it's important to note that simply the use of technology to type an essay or to submit a homework assignment — does not constitute blended learning. In addition to the production of knowledge, students engaging in blended learning also acquire and apply knowledge with a combination of online and in-person modalities.

Blended Learning (BL)

- BL is an education program that combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods.
- It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace.
- While students still attend “brick-and-mortar” schools with a teacher present, in-person classroom practices are combined with computer-mediated activities regarding content and delivery.
- Blended learning is also used in professional development and training settings.
- A lack of consensus on a definition of blended learning has led to difficulties in research on its effectiveness in the classroom.
- Blended learning is also highly context-dependent and therefore a universal conception of it is hard to come by.

Why is blended learning important?

Blended learning may be one of many approaches for providing a more flexible approach within higher education, however, it's become an extremely prominent approach. This method is important to the future of higher education as a whole, as it provides a range of ways for students

to engage. In a changing, increasingly technologically savvy world, blended learning is a valuable way to utilise technology for e-learning without reducing the importance and value of in-person teaching.

Blended learning is important in a number of ways:

- a. Takes the best attributes of online and in-person learning, in order to maximise the benefits of both
- b. Focus on individual rather than group work, allowing teachers to get a better grasp on the strengths and weaknesses of each student
- c. Can promote closer relationships and allow tutors to understand how to tailor their approach to each student
- d. More personalised instruction to suit the learning style of individual students
- e. Finally, blended learning is important when you take into account the events of the COVID-19 pandemic. This caused higher education organizations to reflect on how they can best adapt and change, both in emergency situations and for those with individual complications.

Both of these scenarios can interrupt and impact education. Blended learning being implemented as a long-term option allows students and staff to be able to adapt quickly rather than needing to shift entire working strategies at short notice.

Depending on the interest and skill of the teacher, as well as access to technology, there are several model types of blended learning. **The face-to-face driver approach** involves a majority of whole-class teacher-led instruction, with the teacher also in charge of delivering the online content and monitoring students. This online component is also done as a whole class, without students splitting off in groups or working individually. When it comes to blended learning, **a rotation approach**, students in groups move through a set of online learning activities in the classroom with the guidance of a teacher. In other words, teacher-led instruction is minimized, and the students engage in common tasks online. The teacher determines the learning activities and requires that every student complete them all, like a checklist. **The flex and the self-blend approaches** offer teachers and students more choice and flexibility. In flex, the online platform provides most of the curriculum and learning activities, while the teacher is available to support students individually or in small groups. In an online driver approach, the students do not or rarely come to a physical school, working remotely on online content. Teachers are available remotely for support. Students currently participating in distance or remote learning are learning with an online driver approach to blended learning.

Advantages of blended learning

There are many benefits of blended learning. The first is that the practice offers more flexibility in the learning process. Rather than assuming that all students need the same information and skill-building, at the same time and in the same way, blended learning allows for various learning activities, teaching approaches, pacing, and student groupings. The second major benefit is that students enjoy a combination of face-to-face and online learning, resulting in greater engagement. Some learning – like applying knowledge, solving complex problems, exploratory enrichment and working on a project together – is best done with other young people. Blended learning also provides students with time to work with faculty staff, as teachers are able to connect with them individually through technology. This provides a greater level of bonding between students and their teacher, and lets students who may be less confident in group environments to reach out. If students are struggling, they have the time and privacy to ask for extra support.

On the other hand, other learning – like targeted skill development, individual research, and exploratory enrichment – is best done alone, with the use of technology and the internet. Perhaps the most crucial benefit, though, is that blended learning provides easier and more effective ways for teachers to differentiate learning material for their students. A simple example is that some students with Individualized Education Programs learn better when they have access to audio versions of texts. In a traditional classroom, that accommodation would mean that a teacher or an aide would need to read the text to the student. A blended approach, on the other hand, supports the student in a more tailored and efficient way. BL also allows for personalized education, replacing the model where a teacher stands in front of the classroom and everyone is expected to

stay at the same pace. It allows students to work at their own pace, making sure they fully understand new concepts before moving on. A classroom environment that incorporates BL naturally requires learners to demonstrate more autonomy, self-regulation, and independence in order to succeed. Furthermore, because blended learning normalizes the frequent use of technology, students who may unfortunately experience stigma because of their learning differences more comfortably engage in the classroom experience with less anxiety. The level of freedom and trust in students to control their own learning, combined with the flexibility of time and location, can improve student retention overall. With students encouraged to stay on in education, this way of learning can help to prepare them for their working life, as they have more control over when and how they learn, managing their own time and workload to suit their lives. These are invaluable transferable skills for the future.

Disadvantages of blended learning for learners and educators

Unless successfully planned and executed, BL could have disadvantages in technical aspects since it has a strong dependence on the technical resources or tools with which the BL experience is delivered. These tools need to be reliable, easy to use, and up to date, for them to have a meaningful impact on the learning experience. A blended learning model often requires students to utilise technology outside of the classroom. Not every learner will have equal access to the resources, which can make online learning difficult or even impossible. IT literacy can serve as a significant barrier for students attempting to get access to the course materials, making the availability of high-quality technical support paramount. Other aspects of BL that can be challenging is group work because of difficulties with management in an online setting. Using e-learning platforms can be more time consuming than traditional methods and can also come with new costs as e-learning platforms. Another critical issue is access to network infrastructure. Although the digital divide is narrowing as the Internet becomes more pervasive, many students do not have access to the Internet, even in their classrooms. Any attempt to incorporate BL strategies into an organization's pedagogical strategy needs to account for this. This is why learning centers are built with good Wi-Fi connections to make sure this issue is addressed.

Challenges in blended learning

The challenges of blended learning in higher education are numerous and their emergence is encouraged permanently based upon the innovative technological developments and interaction through traditional learning environments, which emphasises blended learning transformational force. For higher education courses blended learning has become the reality characterized by continuous investigation and debates of the benefits, potential and effectiveness to transform and improve the learning process. New, highly interactive, meaningful and student centred blended learning environments have been developed fostered by the current and advanced technologies. The convergence of traditional face-to-face and distributed learning environment that were sharply separated in the past has been in progress by developing blended learning environment. Different media/method combinations and the needs of different audiences have enabled the approach of face-to-face practiced in a lecturer centred environment and person-to-person classroom activities, and distance learning system based on self-paced learning.

Problem: The negative effect of the blended learning for students is mainly in the cognitive load, learning styles, and working conditions. One misunderstanding teachers often make in the implementation of blended learning is that teachers pay much attention on the network platform and they design a lot of activities to allow students to learn more. But the result of doing so makes the students' cognitive load increased blended learning counterproductive. In addition, the different backgrounds of the students have their own learning styles, some students are accustomed to reading a textbook, they like outlined and annotated in the textbooks. If we give students a lot of learning content and ask them for digital learning, it will influence the learning effect. Once again, Because function of the network platform is not good cause the negative effects of the navigation lost, not easy operation. Finally, in the process of blended learning implementation, because the high expenses increase the cost of getting resources, it will also affect students' learning effect.

Solution: Motivation can link the goal of blended learning and learner's expectation, and then spread blended learning to students. So when teacher design a blended learning course, it's necessary to analyze student by questionnaires to have a better understanding about students' learning style and the convenience of Internet. On this basis, we should determine what learning resources to provide the network of digital resources, which learning resources to provide the paper. The support platform of online teaching should obey the design of the content of network while supporting the rich network of interactive teaching principles.

Problem: Assessment about blended learning is diversified. It contains classroom performance, examinations, and practical in traditional classroom teaching, and online learning, online discussion, online quizzes, and online assessment in online learning. This make students' learning effectiveness evaluation becomes difficult to grasp in blended learning, such as electronic job plagiarism problem and the proportion of evaluation. Online learning provide students a wealth of learning resources, convenient interaction and sharing of resources, at the same time online learning give birth to the "network research" family, "network copy" family, and "passive" family.

Solution: To avoid the negative effect. The first, we should strengthen the education of integrity and awareness of intellectual property rights, we should let them to realize that plagiarism is an offense. The second, when a teacher designs homework to students, they try to designs the homework which can't directly search it's answer by Internet. This will avoid plagiarism to some extent. For example, when teaching image processing technology, the teacher can require students to use their own digital photos as a material, learning acquisition and processing technology of sound material, require students to record their own voice and then use it. The third, to students plagiarism, we can use some technical means, such as anti-plagiarism detection to prevent copying. Such as online jobs which based on Moodle network, we can use the platform to provide "anti-copying plug-ins" to stop plagiarism.

Conclusion: Great success often comes from great collaborations, so it is exciting to see how educational technology (EduTech) is giving both students and teachers more opportunities to network through the use of collaborative tools such as Google Docs, online calendars, and virtual workrooms. Plus, Skype, email, and even texting allow us to stay in touch with each other and meet colleagues from around the world. Blended instruction is more effective than purely face-to-face or purely online classes. BL methods can also result in high levels of student achievement more effective than face-to-face learning. By using a combination of digital instruction and one-on-one face time, students can work on their own with new concepts which frees teachers up to circulate and support individual students who may need individualized attention. Rather than playing to the lowest common denominator – as they would in a traditional classroom – teachers can now streamline their instruction to help all students reach their full potential. BL facilitates a simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experience for university students. The use of information and communication technologies has been found to improve student attitudes towards learning.

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