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Blended learning: benefits and disadvantages

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Annotation: The current article aims at providing general information about blended learning, in comparison with both traditional and e-learning, and the dimensions that must be considered in order to create the best blend. The review shows that blended learning is not a new concept, but that it exists in many different forms and is prevalent in most classroom practices. The article also discusses benefits and disadvantages of blended learning.

Key Words: blended learning, education program, personalized learning, hybrid learning, face-to-face classroom, digital media, approach;

As it is known to everybody online education as well as blended learning is becoming more and more popular in most countries of the world after the pandemic period. Everything has its own good and bad sides. A lot of people suffered from this dangerous disease “Covid 19” and lost their lives during this pandemic period. On the other hand online education developed rapidly and spread even distant points of the globe at this difficult time. Most teachers have improved their computer- based online teaching skills and begun to teach students using blended learning effectively for the last years. And what is blended learning?

Blended learning is an education program (formal or non-formal) 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, face-to- face classroom practices are combined with computer-mediatedactivities regarding content and delivery. Blended learning is also used inprofessional 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.

"Blended learning" is sometimes used in the same breath as "personalized learning" and differentiated instruction.

The terms "blended learning", "hybrid learning", "technology- mediated instruction", "web-enhanced instruction", and "mixed-mode instruction" are often used interchangeably in research literature. Although the concepts behind blended learning first developedin the 1960s, the formal terminology to describe it did not take its current form until the late 1990s. One of the earliest uses of the term appears in a1999 press release, in which the Interactive Learning Centers, an Atlanta-based education business, announced a change of name to EPIC Learning. The release mentions that "The Company currently operates 220 on-line courses, but will begin offering its Internet courseware using the company's Blended Learning methodology." The term "blended learning" was initially vague, encompassing a wide variety of technologies and pedagogical methods in varying combinations (some making no use of technology whatsoever). [1]

In 2006, the term became more concrete with the publication of the first *Handbook of Blended Learning* by Bonk and Graham. Graham challenged the breadth andambiguity of the term's definition, and defined "blended learning systems" as learning systems that "combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction". In a report titled "Defining Blended Learning", researcher Norm Friesen suggests that, in its current form, blended learning "designates the range of possibilities presented by combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical co-presence of teacher and students". Blended learning is being recognised as a solution to the perceived weaknesses in both traditional learning and e-learning.[2]

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The 'ingredients' of the blends arecompared, leading to a discussion of the factors that must be considered by educational institutions when selecting appropriate and effective teaching practices. All students no matter their age learn differently and teaching methods should reflect this, by designing teaching programmes in a way that reaches visual, auditory and kinetic learners alike. With the heavy integration of technologies we'll be able to improve teaching, information retention, engagement, responsibility and enjoyment. Students never outgrow their learning styles, meaning blended learning is more important than ever, no matter what the industry is, from schools to corporations, in all walks of life. Technology-based training emerged as an alternative to instructor-led training in the 1960s on mainframes and mini-computers. The major advantage that blended learning offers is scale, whereas one instructor can only teach so many people.

There is little consensus on the definition of blended learning. Some academic studies have suggested it is a redundant term. However, there are distinct blended learning models suggested by some researchers and educational think-tanks. These models include:

- Face-to-face driver – where the teacher drives the instruction and augments with digital tools.
- Rotation – students cycle through a schedule of independentonline study and face-to-face classroom time.
- Flex – most of the curriculum is delivered via a digital platform and teachers are available for face-to-face consultation andsupport.
- Labs – all of the curriculum is delivered via a digital platform but in a consistent physical location. Students usually taketraditional classes in this model as well.
- Self-blend – students choose to augment their traditionallearning with online course work.
- Online driver – Students complete an entire course through an online platform with possible teacher check-ins. All curriculum and teaching is delivered via a digital platform and face-to-face meetings arescheduled or made available if necessary.

It is important to note that even blended learning models can be blended together and many implementations use some, many, or even allof these as dimensions of larger blended learning strategy. These models,for the most part, are not mutually exclusive.

There are many components that can comprise a blended learning model, including "instructor-delivered content, e-learning, webinars, conference calls, live or online sessions with instructors, and other media and events, for example, Facebook, e-mail, chat rooms, blogs, podcasting, Twitter, YouTube, Skype and web boards". [3]

Blended instruction is reportedly more effective than purely face- to-face or purely online classes. Blended learning 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." Proponents of blended learning argue that incorporating the "asynchronous Internet communication technology" into higher education courses serves to "facilitate a simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experience". This incorporation is a major contributor to student satisfaction and success in such courses.The use of information and communication technologies have been found to improve student attitudes towards learning. By incorporating information technology into class projects, communication between lecturers and part-time students has improved, and students were able to better evaluate their understanding of course material via the use of "computer-based qualitative and quantitative assessment modules".

It is challenging to find a widely accepted definition of blendedlearning, and even more difficult to find a core set of literature on blended learning methodologies. In general, training approaches can belocated on a continuum that runs from traditional, face-to-face class meetings to totally online courses that have no direct interpersonal contact. Blended learning is generally acknowledged as fallingsomewhere between these two extremes, incorporating elements of each. Blended learning also has the potential to reduce educational expenses, although some dispute

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that blended learning is inherently less expensive than traditional classroom learning. Blended learning canlower costs by putting classrooms in the online space and it essentially replaces pricey textbooks with electronic devices that students often bring themselves to class. E-textbooks, which can be accessed digitally, may also help to drive down textbook budgets. Proponents of blended learning cite the opportunity for data collection and customization of instruction and assessment as two major benefits of this approach. Blended learning often includes software that automatically collects student data and measures academic progress, providingteachers, students and parents detailed students' data. Our children, and their following generations are already and will continue to grow up in a world that's a stark reminder of how rapidly the human civilization has changed, a society and world where smartphones and tablets are widespread, affordable, and replacing most computers and laptops. The rapidly changing landscapes should be a marker to show that teaching methods need to evolve to keep up with the times and incorporate integrated technologies into the learning modal, these technologies aren'tgoing to go away, they'll continue to be integrated into our society and it's time to embrace them for the advantages they bring. We've provided a definition of blended learning above. [3]

Blended Learning is a mixture of learning methods that incorporate multiple teaching modals: most frequently e-Learning and traditional face-to-face learning. Often, tests are automatically scored, providing instantaneous feedback. Studentlogins and work times are also measured to ensure accountability. Schools with blended learning programs may also chooseto reallocate resources to boost student achievement outcomes. Students with special talents or interests outside of the available curricula use educational technology to advance their skills or exceed grade restrictions. Blended learning 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. "Blended learning allows students to work at their own pace, making sure they fully understand new concepts before moving on." A classroom environment that incorporates blended learning naturally requires learners to demonstrate more autonomy, self-regulation, and independence in order to succeed. If teachers offer a form of initial program orientation before introducing blended learning strategies, it can better prepare students to feel confident navigating the different components and developing a stronger sense of independence.

Those who use blended approaches base their pedagogy on the assumption that there are inherent benefits in face-to-face interaction (both among learners and instructor) as well as the understanding that there are some inherent advantages to using online methods in their teaching. Thus the aim of those using blended learning approaches is to find a harmonious balance between online access to knowledge and face-to-face human interaction. [3]

Education is no longer just about putting pen to paper and memorizing facts. Today, innovative educators in both higher education and corporate learning & development are improving learning through technology, as evidenced by the rapid adoption of technology-assisted teaching methods and blended learning models.

Blended learning (also known as hybrid learning) is a method of teaching that integrates technology and digital media with traditional instructor-led classroom activities, giving students more flexibility to customize their learning experiences.

Although there are 4 basic models of blended learning, the possibilities are endless when it comes to the ways in which instructionaltechnologies can be blended into a teacher's pedagogical approach. The flipped classroom, for example, is one type of blended learning model in which students view lecture material prior to class, then spend class time engaging in exercises under the supervision of the teacher.

In general, blended learning refers to the following:

1. Some learning happens online in a format where the student hascontrol over the path and pace at which they engage with content.
2. Some learning happens in an instructor-led classroom.
3. Online and in-person learning is complementary, creating a trulyintegrated learning environment.

We can identify a range of tools and technologies that can be used in constructing effective

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learning environments for blended learning, namely: (a) technologies in the classroom that are commonly used in face-to-face learning situations, such as Power Point, interactive whiteboards and audience response systems; (b) virtual communication tools that enable users to engage in discussions and activities over the internet, including audio files, discussion boards, e-lists, discussion groups, chat or conferencing, email, news groups, polling, questionnaires, web forms and videoconferencing; (c) social-networking software, now extensively used by students and staff in their personallife, and becoming more prevalent in the context of learning and teaching, such as instant messaging and phone calls, podcasts, social- networking sites, video clips, virtual worlds, weblogs and wikis; (d) e- learning systems, that is, online environments that bring together a range of tools to support e-learning, such as VLEs, conferencing systems,group collaboration software and group sites; (e) mobile learning using mobile phones, laptops and tablet PCs. [4]

Nowadays, most teachers and students use blended learning methodologies. However, many are unaware that they are using them. In our opinion, the starting point for devising any efficient teaching technique or methodology must be by considering learners' perspectives.Students often express the desire for more direct contact with academic staff, and this may not always easily be fulfilled by electronic means. Here are five reasons why we choose blended learning.

1. Different people learn different things in different ways.
2. Using multiple modalities dramatically reinforces engagement, learning and retention.
3. Learners can control the pace of their learning.
4. Blended learning saves money.
5. Blended learning is modular and scalable.

The advantages of blended learning are dependent on the quality of the programs being implemented. Some indicators of excellent blended learning programmes are "facilitating student learning, communicating ideas effectively, demonstrating an interest in learning, organizing effectively, showing respect for students, and assessing progress fairly". [5]

Of course, as with many methods of teaching and learning, there is the potential for downsides when it comes to blended learning. Below, we've picked out some of the drawbacks for both learners and educators. Unless successfully planned and executed, blended learning could have disadvantages in technical aspects since it has a strong dependence on the technical resources or tools with which the blended learning 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. 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 blended learning that can be challenging is group work because of difficulties with management in an online setting. Reportedly the use of lecture recording technologies can result in students falling behind on the materials. In a study performed across four different universities, it was found that only half of the students watched the lecture videos on a regular basis, and nearly 40% of students watched several weeks' worth of videos in one sitting. This has further implications for the educator and in how much online resources need to be revealed to the student but also ensure it is at the right level for the intended student.

From an educator's perspective, most recently, it has been noted that providing effective feedback is more time-consuming (and therefore more expensive) when electronic media are used, in comparison to traditional (e.g. paper-based) assessments. Using e-learning platforms can be more time consuming than traditional methods and can also come with new costs as e-learning platforms and service providers may charge user fees to educators.

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 pervasive and ubiquitous access to the Internet - even in their classrooms. Any attempt to incorporate blended learning 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.

In conclusion it is important to mention that the use of blended learning clearly relates to changes in higher education from tutor-centred approaches to a focus on learners. Typical examples of tutor-centred learning and teaching activities include didactic lectures and also traditional

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computer-aided learning packages. There are a range of reasons why academics develop programmes incorporating blended learning, but a crucial one is to encourage interactivity and the active participation of learners.

However, the online learning blended learning face-to-face learning 100% e-learning minimal use of technology 5 points of blended learning is not to replace the seminar, but to provide other forms of interaction that can work alongside and enhance work done in the classroom. This is perhaps particularly important at a time when higher tuition fees are changing the way in which we see student education. Blended learning also offers an opportunity to address questions from students and parents about key issues such as group sizes and contact time, while allowing us to reflect on and develop our own practice as academic teachers.

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