SOME QUESTIONS ON BLENDED LEARNING

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Abstract

The term 'blended learning' is widely used in the present era. Blended learning is being acknowledged as an elucidation to the perceived weaknesses in both conventional learning and e-learning. Blended learning commonly describes learning that combines conventional teaching and learning approaches with various information and communication technologies. This paper entitled as "Some Questions on Blended Learning" discusses about the concept of blended learning and gives a satisfactory justification about why people use the blended approach in teaching learning activities. This paper also talks and provides the solution about the some major questions like: what is blended learning? how to manage instructional complexity?, how to design blended learning?, how to manage the roles and responsibilities?, how to create a seamless learning experience?, how to meet expectations? and how to control costs?

Keywords: Blended Learning, Teaching, ICT, Online, Instruction.

Introduction

Now a days, learning have been limited to physical classroom formats (lectures, labs, etc.), books or handouts. There are a lot of opportunities of learning approaches which represent a real opportunity to create learning experiences that can provide the right learning at the right time, in the right place and at the right level, for each and every individual, not just at workplace, but also in schools and universities. These approaches of learning are truly universal, crossing global boundaries and bringing groups of learners together through different cultures, region, religion and time zones. In this context, blended learning could become one of the most significant developments and transmitting curriculum to students at every level of students of the 21st century during the teaching learning process.

The idea of blended learning, in which multiple learning environments and activities are combined, has existed for quite some time. Long before the advent of computers and social networks, teachers created blended learning experiences using simple technologies like paper and pencil. The precise origin of the term "blended learning" is uncertain. "Blended learning" appears to have been in use since the popular advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the late 1990s.

What is Blended Learning?

In the 21st century, the term 'blended learning' is very popular in recent years as a description of particular forms of teaching with technology, it remains ill defined. Blended learning is a student-centered approach to creating a learning experience whereby the learner interacts with other students, with the instructor, and with content through thoughtful integration of online and face-to-face environments.

Collis and Moonen (2001) [1] define the blended learning as "a hybrid of traditional face-to-face and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online, and where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning. Blended learning is thus a flexible approach to course design that supports the blending of different times and places for learning, offering some of the conveniences of fully online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact." This is the most usable definition nowadays. Furthermore, Whitelock & Jelfs (2003) [5] opened a Journal of Educational Media Special issue on blended learning with three definitions:

1. The integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches
2. The combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment
3. The combination of a number of pedagogic approaches, irrespective of learning technology use.

The above definition explains firstly, blended learning is perhaps the most common and combination of conventional learning and online learning; the secondly, it is widespread in global perspective and the lastly, it is concerned with many pedagogical approaches that combine various delivery modes rather than privileging e-learning. According to Purnima Valiathan "The term blended learning is used to describe a solution that combines several different delivery methods, such as collaboration software, Web-based courses, electronic performance support systems (EPSS), and knowledge management practices. Blended learning also is used to describe learning that mixes various event-based activities, including face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning and self-paced instruction."

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Therefore, it can be concluded that 'blended learning' is multi-facetted, different authors may use different interpretations, making cross study comparison difficult. Such clarification is needed if an appropriate blend is going to be found for different circumstances (e.g. subject domain, pedagogy, age of child, diversity of group).

Why use Blended Learning?

After analyzing the above mentioned definition, it may be included that the determination of the ingredients of the blend learning are the media, the context (place and time), the pedagogies, the learning objectives and the teaching practices. Focusing on the incidence where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning. Blended learning is thus a flexible approach to course design that supports the blending of different times and places for learning, offering some of the conveniences of fully online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact. As well as maximizing the benefits of traditional and e-learning methods, blended learning can be used to accommodate different learning styles and preferences. Therefore, organizations must use a blend of learning approaches to provide the right content, in the right format, to the right people at the right time.

Thomson (2003) [4] concluded in his study that speedier performance was detected on real world tasks by those who learned through blended strategies as opposed to those that learned via e-learning along. In another study DeLacey and Leonard, Harvard Business School, (2002) [2] founded that "students not only learned more when online sessions were added to traditional courses, but student interaction and satisfaction improved as well." Judith Smith also established in his research that "adults don't just "learn" in one way. Likewise, associations should not make the mistake of providing just one way for adult learners to receive their educational content."

The above mentioned reviews show the need and importance of blended learning in the teaching learning process in the classroom. Thus, we can provide individual learning experiences to the learner by using a mixture of media, strategies, and methods.

Five Major Questions on Blended Learning

Blended learning is well known approach in smart classroom nowadays. Options for blended learning go beyond the classroom. A blended learning is an integrated strategy for delivering on promises about learning and performance. There are five major problems arise during the use of blended learning which are given below:

1. How to manage instructional complexity?
2. How to design blended learning?
3. How to manage the roles and responsibilities?
4. How to create a seamless learning experience?
5. How to control costs?

Herewith all the above mentioned questions which are related to "how to create blended learning?" will be discussed one by one.

1. How to manage instructional complexity?

In blended learning the instructors have a wide range of choices of delivery of instructional mediums. So, instructors and designers face greater complexity and pressure during teaching. This is due to the variety of combinations of technology and possibly the lack of patterns to follow for that particular mix. In blended learning it is easier to finish an online module and start another online module. The knowledge of variety of information communication technologies (ICTs), time management, guidelines, and even brief demos might need to be provided for the instructors, designer and learner.

2. How to design blended learning?

To design blended training, the instructional designers start by analyzing the training or course objectives and braking them down into the smallest possible pedagogically (for children) or and ragogically (for adults) appropriate chunk (learning object). After the course or training has been chunked, the best approach to deliver each segment of instruction (learning object) is identified. In some cases the best approach might be using online learning but in others it might be live instruction. The course is then aggregated by grouping the instruction logically while taking into account the medium of delivery. In this way, one may require a few lessons online and some others live.

3. How to manage the roles and responsibilities?

Unlike traditional classroom learning in which there usually is a single instructor, in blended learning you might have multiple individuals, each taking a modality or role in the blend. Up front clarification of instructor and assistant roles is essential for success and the reduction of potential conflict and learner confusion.

Instructors can use e-learning tools and technology in a classroom setting. Learners and instructors interact live and on-line over the Web– no physical classroom involved. Self-paced learning is another option that makes content accessible on a 7X24 basis. We've found that e-learning is most effective when it uses a blend of all these delivery options.

4. How to create a seamless learning experience?

Careful designing of blended learning with good communications among instructors is another important element in the success of blended learning. Make sure that instructors and assistants communicate with one another throughout the instruction, not just before the course. Make sure that as different segments of the blend are designed, all prerequisites are met by the previous learning objects. Arrange learning objects or alter meeting times to insure each segment reinforces the previously acquired knowledge or skill and introduces new concepts seamlessly in spite of the different modality of delivery.

5. How to control costs?

Blended learning offers great flexibility and great effectiveness as it can choose the best medium for every objective. Cost influences decisions about blending, too. However, the challenge is to make the blend not only effective but also efficient. In cases where multiple instructors are used it is natural for each to perceive their part of the blend with disproportionate importance. From the design stage put in place cost controls that work hand in hand with quality assurance and learning effectiveness measures.

Conclusion

It is anticipated that blended learning will enhance the student learning experience. A typical example of this would be blending online activities with face-to-face sessions. Thus, Blended learning is transforming education in every corner of the world. Blended learning can be generally understood as the way teachers and learners combine or 'blend' multiple teaching methods and learning styles together.

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Website Link

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