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Blended learning: Trends in higher education

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Abstract

Blended learning method bridges the way between two considerably different approaches providing significant improvements to each element and participant in the educational process. Together with reductions in cost, time and space and improvement of the students' academic achievement, it also creates opportunities for advancement in the digital resources and solutions to construct as efficient learning platforms as possible.

Keywords: blended learning, interactive pedagogy, trends in education

Introduction

Over the past few years, education has seen the rise of a hybrid method of learning that combines traditional face-to-face approach with tech-powered e-learning. Both students and educators have agreed on the efficiency and benefits of blended learning method since it combines the best of both worlds allowing less costly, time-saving and more personalized ways of knowledge acquisition.

The shift the blended learning brought to higher education presents an ongoing process that is continually reshaping the learning process, as a result, several blended learning trends that define higher education of today.

1. Ease of Access: Firstly, a blended learning system provides several learning models such as flex, self-blend, rotation, and enriched-virtual that could easily meet the needs of any personal student requirement. Therefore, resources students can choose from various methods of digital and face-to-face delivery in order to incorporate quality education with their time and space resources.

As stated in the NMH Horizon Report 2015 higher education edition, this trend resulted from the understanding that students have grown accustomed to having each type of information accessible and delivered online, therefore, learning had to be approached in the same manner so as to be easily integrated into students' every-day behaviors, and also to encourage creativity and entrepreneurial thinking.

This trend has achieved its most important implication in the learning attitude of people living in remote parts of the countries as they are now provided with the opportunity to enroll in graduate or undergraduate programs of their choice. Additionally, the trend has brought about initiatives for the implementation of the blended learning approach in rural areas, and International locations

2. Interactive Pedagogy: Secondly, blended approach to learning managed to cause better student engagement which is more difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom. Fast development of Learning Management System platforms and features results in various means to encourage students to take a more active role and employ individual approach in the process of knowledge acquisition, thus creating opportunities for better student collaboration. With data-driven learning and assessment practices accessible via learning analytics, Both instructors and students are able to track students' progress and interaction with material, which provides opportunity for instructors to gain insight and provide timely help to students performing poorly.

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3. The Rise in the Development of Functional Learning Management System Features: The more cost effective alternatives to enterprise Learning Management System software, such as Word Press web development tools and availability of free resources for setting up an education website, it is becoming easier for local schools and individual tutors to build a great site with minimum investments. Combined with powerful Word Press themes designed specifically for such purposes, functional Learning Management System, pricing and membership management plunging, this opens new opportunities for teachers, tutors and school administrators. Skilled theme, for example, integrates all the necessary functionalities to allow for easy set up and management, which enables even those without many technical skills to develop fully functional school or tutoring website.

4. Cost Effectiveness: One of the most significant quality of this particular trend in blended learning is that it works both ways, meaning that both users and providers of the program can experience Cost savings. Students could benefit from reduced transport costs. As for universities, cost effectiveness is achieved through much faster and more effective access to global market as well as by reductions in the physical space requirements.

5. Improved Academic Achievement: Finally, with the benefits of blended learning method such as time/space flexibility and a variety of appropriate learning models which result in Better academic achievement, more interaction is being created constantly. Furthermore, this scenario provides tutors and teaching specialists with enough resources to work with smaller groups of students during in-person sessions thus utilizing the time much more efficiently, which, ultimately leads to considerably greater learning satisfaction, and consequently enhances students' overall performance.

The effectiveness of blended learning

A blended learning course combines online components with in-class or offline components so that students are supported in both platforms. The research about blended learning and its effects on students shows a range of opinions. While some experts believe blended learning offers better opportunities for students, others argue that the focus shifts to the delivery model rather than the content, and that some teachers are ill-equipped to manage both offline and online learning environments.

This hasn't stopped the teaching method from spreading. Originally an option for students in alternative schools, blended learning is quickly catching on in mainstream schools.

Potential benefits of the blended learning model

Blended or hybrid learning can allow instructors to personalize lesson plans for different learning styles. Students at Bunker Hill Community College in Massachusetts are exploring a pilot program launched at their college where online lectures from M.I.T are blended with in-class workshops and face-to-face communication. As of the time of the report, 18 of 19 students in the class had passed the midterm, and 16 of them received an A. One benefit of this approach -- and perhaps the one to which the Bunker Hill students' success can be attributed -- is the

ability for both students and instructors to customize learning.

How blended learning works

Blended learning tools may make it easier for teachers to get a quick assessment of student progress, and the technology may also help with students' sense of involvement. McIntosh highlights that the blended learning program offers teachers a chance to have a more holistic view of student performance, helping them to more easily discover where students are in their learning curve.

Some teachers seem to enjoy the oversight blended learning can offer in regards to student performance. Education Week featured a 2012 special report on the keys to success for blended learning and found that "the ability to pinpoint needs and the ability for teachers to use data at a very high level for individualized instruction" remain major advantages to this approach. Integrating data collected from online learning programs with in-class time is yet another key to blended learning programs, which some prefer to strictly online coursework.

A Northwestern University blog identifies other factors that can contribute to the success of a blended learning program, such as students who are comfortable with e-learning and technology, self-regulation, self-management, and spending time deciding which lessons are most effective online versus in-class. The Northwestern University blog also recommends a careful balance of in-class and online work.

Conclusion

Despite the potential for increased costs, blended learning may be a vital component of the future of education simply because it allows students to work at their own pace -- helping to make sure that students with unique needs or obstacles are not left behind. Hybrid learning can be suitable for students who feel uncomfortable in larger classrooms, who struggle in traditional learning environments, who work in rural areas or who have busy schedules. This approach can also benefit other settings. Whether it is a fleeting education fad or a move toward a more effective approach for student learning at all levels, blended learning is continuing to keep students engaged. This perhaps cannot be more vital than in the nation's most troubled schools, and may even help address achievement gap issues. Blended Learning demonstrate that: "Every single student, when given the chance, wants to learn -- they want to be successful."

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