

Blended Learning

A Review of the Literature

By

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Introduction

“If I cannot learn the way you teach, will you teach me the way I can learn?”- Ignacio Estrada (Yusoff et al.,2017). As educators, we encounter a multitude of students and they learn in an array of ways, and we must meet students where they are to ensure their success. “Blends allow for a radical transformation of the pedagogy, a change from a model where learners are just receivers of information to a model where learners actively construct knowledge through dynamic interactions,” (McGee & Reis, 2012). Considering students learn at different paces and methods, educators should encourage the discovery of how these students learn. Yusof et al. (2017) state students should be independent, organized, possess practical knowledge of computers, be self-motivated, be critical, and have numerous other self-sufficient traits. What happens if our students lack these necessities? Educators can remedy this by creating a blended learning environment. Although schools and districts can access different resources depending on their socio-economic demographic, one must utilize what is readily available and outsource when necessary (Seage & Türegün, 2020). This literature review will be focused on supporting my research questions: how does blended learning impact students’ ability and motivation to engage in the required curriculum, and how are educators’ classroom environments affected by using blended learning?

Review of the Literature

What is blended learning?

Martin Oliver and Keith Trigwell (2005) argue that blended learning has become watered down and redundant. However, blended learning, its expectations, and its execution can be redeemed in classrooms once there is a commitment to engaging students. Blended learning can be interpreted differently and defined in many ways. One must understand the difference between blended learning and technology-rich instruction (Horn and Staker, 2015). Michael B. Horn and

Heather Staker (2015) define blended learning as creating a formal learning Literature Review: Blended Learning environment where work is completed through a student-controlled pace and path with the implementation of technology. Blended learning is not limited to strictly implementing technology; the student-controlled element should be the prime focal point. This method engages students in virtual spaces they can create for themselves, such as at home or libraries, not only the brick-and-mortar experience of a traditional classroom. There is a special importance on allowing students to go at their own pace; with the variation in the rate at which students learn, some may move faster or slower than their peers. While some students may require more remediation, others may be ready to move on and be challenged further. Since the spectrum of blended learning is so broad, educators must be intentional with the implementation of it in their classrooms. In a blended classroom, the role of the teacher shifts from instructor to facilitator; educators select appropriate collaboration tools and take time for technical preparation.

Types of blended learning

Rotation Model. With a rotation model, students will engage in numerous stations throughout the classroom. These stations may consist of teacher-led instruction, group projects, individual remediation or assignments, and a technology component (Ayob et al., 2020). A visible rotation schedule and timer can benefit both the student and educator to track how much time is available and where they should rotate next. Rotating stations encourage collaboration among students; educators can assign group assignments or allow students to assist others as they are engaging with their small group. Also, students can use individual assignments or technology to frontload themselves with the necessary information for their small group time with the instructor. All activities should be tailored to each student's needs and focus on where they need Literature Review: Blended Learning remediation or more challenging content. Station rotations facilitate students to analyze material individually before they engage in small or whole

group discussions, which creates a clearer understanding for the student (Nukamto et al., 2019).

Flipped Classroom. Flipped classrooms require students to undertake online lessons and lectures during independent time outside of their face-to-face timeframe with an instructor (Horn and Staker, 2015). A flipped classroom is beneficial to students by frontloading them with necessary information before instruction with a face-to-face instructor (Nurkamto et al., 2019). Students can identify their needs based on their understanding of the content before face-to-face instruction instead of being presented with raw content in real-time. This is crucial because time will be spent efficiently by focusing strictly on misconceptions, instead of presenting content initially in addition to having to work through all students' misconceptions (Horn and Staker, 2015).

Flex Model. The flex model is like flipped classrooms, but in contrast, a flex model classroom consists of a more online presence for students. Teachers serve as support on an as-needed basis throughout small groups and tutoring sessions on campus as students independently work through their courses (Horn and Staker, 2011). The flexibility allows students to always access needed materials, which are utilized to meet each student's individual needs while targeting their different skill gaps (Macaruso et al, 2020). Teachers can use their discretion and student knowledge to determine what level, ranging from minimal to maximum, of supplementary support they should provide to their students (Pardede, 2013).

Advantages of Using Blended Learning

Tayebinik and Puteh (2013) explain that with blended learning, they will acquire more time with students in small groups or individually when necessary. This time with students can be spent clearing misconceptions, correcting mistakes, or furthering students' knowledge of more rigorous content. They also discuss offering a variety of sources for students to learn from, the

active participation of students, and that blended learning produces an interactive setting for communication between educators and their students (Tayebnik & Puteh, 2013). With the digital platform, students will have constant access to a variety of resources made available to them, so they can continue learning any time that is deemed necessary. Blended learning will also require students to take responsibility for their learning while utilizing their choice, ownership, voice, and authenticity, known as COVA. Lastly, the communication between educators and students can always transpire; educators can create discussion posts or pages dedicated to communication. This can also provide a space for students to collaborate and ask and answer questions for each other, in addition to the educator.

Furthermore, Manjot Kaur explores a plethora of advantages of utilizing blended learning as well. Kaur (2013) explains that educators can tailor the content being relayed to students to fit their unique needs. So, it embraces individualization, personalization, and relevance to students' lives and their background knowledge (Kaur, 2013). Another important factor he mentioned was, that since students possess an array of learning styles, blended learning may be beneficial because they have access to materials that are in a variety of modes (Kaur, 2013). With the variety of sources, students can hand-pick which modes are best for their comprehension and learning.

Barriers to Implementing Blended Learning

Mohamed Sayed and Faris Baker discuss many realistic barriers an educator may encounter while implementing blended learning in their classroom. Educators may feel apathy toward making this change for a number of reasons. This may happen because administration does not know the true benefits of this method, teachers may prefer to teach the traditional way we always have, or students may be unfamiliar with the role technology plays in their education (Sayed & Baker, 2014). One of the most important aspects of implementing any change is to

have all stakeholders involved and have them buy into what is happening, which is why it is imperative to relay the why, facts, benefits, and challenges of this change. Another barrier Sayed and Baker pose are difficulties in developing concepts and thinking skills. This article discusses that misconceptions and misunderstandings may happen because of the array of sources available to students, the method of instruction, difficulty of concepts, or poor quality in the materials presented to students (Sayed & Baker, 2014). Giving students the tools they need to be lifelong learners will be beneficial to help remedy this because students will possess the necessary tools to adapt to any information being presented to them. They also explain that educators must customize the learning experience to fit their students' needs and that students must take responsibility and develop learning strategies (Sayed & Baker, 2014).

Summary

The implementation of blended learning cannot happen overnight, and not even over the course of a few semesters. Innovation that creates true and powerful change requires investing time and experience over many years (Macaruso et al, 2020). Blended learning environments encourage independence, collaboration, and positive social interaction between peers and educators. Engaging in a blended learning environment enables more flexibility for student choice of learning and an instructor's ability to differentiate their instruction to meet these needs (Nurkamto et al., 2019). One of the crucial benefits of creating this atmosphere is that students work at their own pace. It makes the learning process more manageable because they facilitate their learning without needing to wait for a brick-and-mortar experience (Nurkamto et al., 2019). Since we are lifelong learners, this gives students the tools they should embody to learn any and everywhere, no matter the circumstances. In closing, students' motivation to learn and engagement in lessons are increased when involved in a blended learning environment. Yusoff et al. (2017) report once students become more confident in their learning, they "spend more time and effort and achieve higher levels of performance than those who are not confident and

motivated.” A blended learning classroom gives students space to identify what will make them successful and the teacher will also be able to assist students on their journey and help close academic gaps they are encountering.

This Review and the Field of Education

Dr. Feza Orhan’s (2008) article describes the results of incorporating blended learning in a college course, students reported they preferred the integration of blended learning in their course versus a complete face-to-face or strictly online course. Topping et al. (2021) conducted a study to analyze the effectiveness of intervention utilizing blended learning and identified that 87% of kindergarten and elementary students flourished more than with regular classroom instruction. Blended learning is not limited to availing oneself of strictly technology, students should be learning outside of the classroom as well. One study explains that their students’ general preference of digital, printed textbooks, or a combination of both varied; 5.26% of students preferred a digital textbook, 36.84% preferred a printed version, and 57.9% rather a combination of the two (Precel et al., 2009). Next, Dziuban et al. (2018) examined a study of student success rates within minority and nonminority students and course modality. They found that between each term, fall 2014 through fall 2015, nonminority and minority students both had a higher success rate in blended learning versus isolated online or face-to-face learning, and had lower withdrawal rates with blended learning in comparison to online or face-to-face learning (Dziuban et al., 2018). There were three key factors students credited to their success, their instructors’ effective communication skills, creating an effective learning environment, and establishing and progression of course objectives (Dziuban et al., 2018). This statement places the importance of planning on the educator’s part. Blended learning cannot simply be put together on a whim; the process is intricate and significant to the student’s success. Lastly, Schechter et al. (2015) investigated the prospective importance of resorting to blended learning on reading skills of low socioeconomic students in lower grades. They discovered students

using the technology-based program were flagged as requiring extra support with said skills and were redirected to targeted lessons that were intended to close these gaps (Schechter et al., 2015). This resulted in teachers having the opportunity to take advantage of their time and identify student needs through data collected virtually and provide teacher-led instruction in addition to the extra on-level lessons completed online (Schechter et al., 2015).

Strengths and Weaknesses of this Body of Literature

The strengths of this review are the explanation of blended learning and the benefits of implementing it. The explanation of blended learning is vital because as previously stated, sometimes blended learning and technology-enriched content can be misconstrued. Blended learning has many moving parts and educators need clear guides on how to properly implement this method, so they can take it and tailor it to their classroom environment. It was also imperative that the benefits of implementing blended learning were included because some educators are afraid to utilize technology inside and outside the classroom. So, this review gives them an opportunity to see that it is possible for anyone to implement this in their classroom and be successful.

A weakness of this review was the minimal information found on the impact blended learning will have on the educator's classroom environment. Part of my research question is to measure the impact the blended learning method could have on a teacher's environment, and I felt there could have been more research to support whether this would be beneficial from an educator's standpoint or not.

Focus of the Current Study

This review provided research that supported the opinions and findings I have developed throughout the ADL program. With this research, I have defined what blended learning is, how it

may impact student learning and its importance in the classroom. Blended learning provides an opportunity for students to take control of their learning and for educators to take a facilitator role instead of a lecturer. This method also increases student responsibility and gives them the opportunity to explore their learning style and how they process information. This research will help spearhead the innovative change being implemented in classrooms across the campus, and eventually the district. It helps guide the direction in which educators start their change and continue evolving in their classroom. The impact of blended learning can be powerful for students and educators when done with proper planning and fidelity.

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