

Practicing Blended Learning on a Collaborative Platform – A Pilot Study in FEHD

Description/Teaching Philosophy

Information Technology has greatly changed the way students communicate, acquire knowledge and obtain information. Blended Learning (BL), as a model of instruction that encompasses different forms of learning, is regarded as a mode that can thoughtfully combine the best elements of online and face-to-face education, and is considered as a predominant teaching model of the future.

A common phenomenon we have observed is that, on average, students in our undergraduate programmes are getting younger. As larger numbers of younger students enter higher education institutions, a drop of academic ability and motivation are anticipated. This has posed greater challenges for teachers in offering support to students in terms of study skills, communication and collaboration skills, time management, and engagement with their study. BL is identified as a useful instructional approach because it may encourage participation, communication between teachers and students, and cooperation among students. As one of the features of BL instruction is 'time on task' and 'teacher feedback', we believe the BL approach has great potential for enhancing student learning in terms of engagement, study skills, and other aspects of learning.

By engaging in this project, students and teachers may develop an enhanced approach towards learning and instruction to inform our understanding of effective and innovative pedagogical practices. BL will develop students' independent study skills and allow teachers to provide students with feedback to support their learning, both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers will develop BL strategies and teaching materials through the project on professional knowledge in BL and the use of technology in teaching.

Objectives:

- ✓ To identify if blended learning may engage students in acquiring strong motivation to study.
- ✓ To engage teachers in developing, implementing, and reflecting on the experience of trying out blended learning in course delivery.

Participants and Foci

- ✓ Interviews were conducted with **ten participants**.
- ✓ Interviews occurred at the **end of the second academic year** of the project.
- ✓ Interview **foci**: purposes, design, strategies, challenges, advantages and perceptions of influences on learning and teaching.

Technological tools in BL courses

Technological Tools	Purposes
iChoice	Online Q&A platform which students' answers can be instantly shown on mobile phones for class discussion
Google Slides	Give formative feedback to students on their video presentations
Moodle	Upload materials online (e.g. case studies, video), group discussion and intra-group communication, competition, peer review and comment, self-reflection on online readings/assignment for discussion
YouTube	Share videos for discussion or peer evaluation
Google+	Share photos, send messages, and stay in touch with the people
Blogs	Asking each group to create a blog to share ideas about each course topic, and let other groups to give comments and feedbacks
E-portfolio	Create student's own e-portfolio, videos, self-reflection on teaching, literature review and suggestions for improvement
Mahara	Create their e-portfolio by putting videos, notes, handouts and samples on it
E-surveys	Create electronic forms (eForm) for survey and data collection easily

Teachers reflection on student receptivity to BL (Advantages)

Themes	Teacher Reflection (extracts)
Perceived Advantages	U/G students are younger (nowadays), adaptive to online learning platforms
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ participation rate on Moodle was higher than last year. ✓ Willing to express ideas
P/G students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Liked the idea of online-discussion (time on campus was reduced) ✓ <u>online</u> discussion enables them to interact with their classmates without the constraint of time and place ✓ U/G part-time students took fewer courses than full-time students, e-channels becomes a means (<u>online</u> activities) of engaging them ✓ Can 'save' more time (can be good/no good)

Teachers reflection on student receptivity to BL (Disadvantages)

Themes	Teacher Reflection (extracts)
Perceived Disadvantages	Lack of interest in studying the course <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uploading the assignments online (remark: It doesn't mean that students really learned). • fulfill the minimum course requirements
	Increased workload <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the discussions took too much time and students may not find it essential/useful • Students were not interested in doing coursework outside class time, which were not part of the assessment. • They already met their classmates all day and did not feel the need for further discussion (<u>demotivated if too much</u>)
IT competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students would prefer face-to-face discussion than online discussion. • Possibly students who were weak at IT may encounter technical problems

Effectiveness and Lessons Learnt

Themes	Teacher Reflection (extracts)
Learning/meta-cognitive strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ students spent time in between the classes to finish tasks (online) ✓ the <u>online</u> discussion outcomes suggested that 'they think deeper' into issues ✓ willing to exchange ideas in online platform (after class engagement) ✓ did well in video presentation and ✓ willing/learn to participate in peer feedback, and learn from peer/teacher's comments
Collaboration & support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Benefit from ideas gathered from group discussions ✓ helpful to disengaged or relatively lower academic ability learners
Teacher-student relationship / communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ students liked to <u>keep contact</u> with teachers after class (via e-mail or discussion boards)
Facilitation of learning (effective)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ An example: students uploaded meaningful/useful videos; and they did well in video presentation and peer review of the others' work ✓ (Thus) video presentations (over e-platform) are even better than face-to-face presentation (because students can edit and redo some parts and ✓ students are more willing to make comments

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- Identifying when discussion boards are more effective and motivating than face-to-face conversation.
- Changing students' expectations and beliefs about learner-centred instructional methodologies.
- Accommodating BL in the syllabus, assessment and timetabling expectations.
- Balancing range and use of technologies during and outside of class time.