



Benefits and Challenges of Blended Learning

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Benefits of Blended Learning

Incorporating online learning modules in your courses can help you overcome some of the issues described in the previous unit; however, they are not the complete solution. Given the complex and dynamic nature of education, all solutions must be designed to fit the specific needs of your students and be regularly revised based on metrics of success.

Improve Access

Use of new technology and online resources not only can make learning materials more widely available to more students, but also can make those materials available to students in their local languages (UNESCO, 2014). Additionally, online learning modules can provide accessible education to students with physical or other disabilities.

Student-driven

Online learning can provide students with more options regarding subject matter and mode of instruction to cater to their individual backgrounds, needs, and interests. Students have convenient, on-demand access to course materials and lectures, which allows them to progress through the course at their own pace. Additionally, the more autonomous nature of blended learning nudges students to improve their metacognitive awareness, which has been shown to be an important element of student success (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). In other words, when educators use blended learning models, they can encourage students to reflect and think about how they learn and change their study habits to match their needs.

21st Century Skills Oriented

It is generally accepted that the global economy is driven by knowledge (OECD, 2008; UNESCO, 2005; World Bank, 2002); yet, according to a study conducted by CISCO (2008), school systems around the world are failing to equip learners with the 21st century skills they will need to be competitive in the job market. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills organizes these skills into seven (7) categories: creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, information literacy, media literacy, ICT Literacy, and life and career.

If you are interested in exploring each of these categories further you should visit the [p21.org website](http://p21.org).

Matches Broader Trends

Even though, currently, many countries have limited access to the internet, once people gain access to the internet they quickly integrate it into their lives (Pew Research Center, 2014). Additionally, when students' engage with online learning modules they enhance their technological literacy, which is quickly becoming a necessary skill for the 21st century (Pearson & Thomas, 2002). In fact, as students and faculty become more adept at using technology, there are greater expectations that technology will be used for teaching and learning purposes (Dahlstrom, Walker, & Dziuban, 2013).

Additional Opportunities to Collaborate and Interact

In an online environment, students from around the globe can easily share, discuss, explain, and comment on learning materials. It is also easier for students to connect their lived experiences with technology to classroom materials when discussions can be integrated with social networking tools. By using current, technological tools in classroom experiences, educators can make discussions more interactive, help create a borderless community of learners, and empower both educators and peers to give more immediate feedback to each other (Kassop, 2003).

It Matches How the Brain Works

Ratey (2002) found that brain cells only grow when people are actively engaged. Additionally, the connections in our brains disappear if they are not repeated and reinforced.

Bransford et. al (2001) explains that humans do not passively record events in their brains, but rather their brains actively process, recall, categorize and store information in a variety of different regions of the brain. They also highlight that the functional organization of students' brains depend on and benefit from robust, engaging educational experiences.

Prepares Students to Become Lifelong Learners

The skills listed above are very dynamic. There is no end point for creativity and innovation, students will likely work with many different people from many different cultures throughout their careers, media's primary form of distribution has changed from paper to smartphones and will likely continue to develop, and many future job descriptions have not been written. Students will need to improve these skills throughout their lives, and for the majority of that time, their primary teachers will be themselves.

Challenges of Blended Learning

It is important to remember that designing an effective blended learning environment is difficult. Students and instructors often are required to acquire new skills and spend more time preparing for class. Listed below are some of the specific challenges that have been highlighted by research:

- Deciding which elements of a blended learning model requires in-person interaction and which ones are best mediated by technology is a complex decision (Aldrich, 2006).
- Dahlstrom, Walker, and Dziuban (2013) found that while students expect technology to be used in the classroom, they still want the instructor to provide some guidance for its use. Therefore, it is important for instructors to use technology purposefully in their courses and make it clear how it is benefiting their students.
- As technology becomes more integrated with students' academic and personal lives, students become more wary of their privacy (Dahlstrom, Walker, & Dziuban, 2013).
- Some institutions and regions are resistant to changes in pedagogy that include the use of ICT (Hamuy & Galaz, 2010; Mouyabi, J. Seke Mboundou, 2011).
- Many faculty members have little training and experience using online tools in the classroom, and feel that they will not be able to use them effectively to meet students needs (Hunt et al., 2014).

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