Pedagogical Perception of University Teachers towards Blended Learning

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Abstract

Blended Learning is a mix of pedagogical approaches that combines the effectiveness and the socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technological enhancements of online learning (Dziuban, Hartman, Juge, Moskal, & Sorg, 2006). The present study aims to examine the pedagogical perceptions of the University Teachers towards Blended Learning for enhancing the teaching learning experiences in Higher Education. The researcher also attempted to investigate the challenges faced by the University Teachers in providing Blended Learning to the students. The sample of respondents selected for study comprised of 120 University Teachers chosen from different departments of the University of Calcutta. The teachers were found to understand the significance and benefits of Blended Learning however some of them were found to face various challenges in providing Blended Learning to students. But with necessary measures a successful blended learning environment can be provided through which academic advancement of students can be made possible.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Pedagogy, Higher Education, University Teachers

Introduction

With the rapid development and popularisation of technologies Lectures are no longer the standard, and teaching involves more classroom interaction, case studies, student group work and presentation, simulations and other types of learning activities (Williams 2002).Adding creative and innovative uses of technology to improve teaching practices have generated new opportunities for learning (for example, Clark 2003). One of the most innovative technological and pedagogical approaches of learning is Blended Learning that attempts to create an optimal learning environment by blended a variety of learning approaches (lecture, tutorial, online, problem-based etc.) (Masie, 2002). Thorne (2003) claims Blended Learning "as a combination of face-to-face and online instruction, is seen as one of the most important recent advances in education could be one of the most important educational advances of this century", which Garrison and Kanuka (2004) believes can result in a transformative learning experience when the dynamic of fast-paced, spontaneous verbal communication characteristic of face-to-face learning is combined with the potential for thoughtful discussion and reflection online, thus the educational possibilities are multiplied. Hauck and Stickler (2006) views it as an answer to problems in higher education instruction.

Blended Learning is a mix of pedagogical approaches that combines the effectiveness and the socialization opportunities of the classroom with the technological enhancements of online learning (Dziuban, Hartman, Juge, Moskal, & Sorg, 2006). Graham (2006) describes Blended Learning as the convergence of face-to-face settings, which are characterized by synchronous and human interaction, with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based settings, which are asynchronous, text based, and involves humans operating independently. Mason and Rennie (2006) furthered the definition as "other combinations of technologies, locations or pedagogical approaches" (p. 12). This pedagogical model encourages students to learn in an interactive and collaborative environment, and at their own pace and in their own time (Graham, 2006; Saltzberg & Polyson, 1995).Littlejohn and Pegler (2007) views Blended Learning as a useful approach because it changes the focus of learning design by shifting the emphasis from simply considering the face-to-face and online environments to the design of issues, such as considering the process and synergy of blending between online and face-to-face environments. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) also defined Blended Learning as "the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences" (p. 5) and emphasized the need for reflection on traditional approaches and for redesigning learning and teaching in this new terrain. Williams, Bland, and Christie (2008) define Blended Learning as a combination of traditional face-to-face learning and distributed learning, the latter of which "is an instructional model that allows lecturers, students, and content to be in different locations" (p. 43).

Driscoll (2002) identifies four different concepts of Blended Learning, which Oliver and Trigwell (2005) summarize as follows (p. 18):

- combining or mixing web-based technology to accomplish an educational goal;
- combining pedagogical approaches (e.g., constructivism, behaviourism, cognitivism) to produce an optimal learning outcome with or without instructional technology;
- combining any form of instructional technology with face-to-face instructor-led training; and
- combining instructional technology with actual job tasks.

Valiathan (2002) described blends in terms of the focus for learning, or intended learning, which is:

- Skill-driven learning, which combines self-paced learning with instructor or facilitator support to develop specific knowledge and skills;

- Attitude-driven learning, which mixes various events and delivery media to develop specific behavior;

- Competency-driven learning, which blends performance support tool with knowledge management resources and mentoring to develop workplace competencies (Hartoyo, 2012: 103).

Blended Learning offers an effective platform for employing different pedagogical strategies and has the potential to maximise the advantages of both face-to-face and online learning (Wu, Tennyson, and Hsia 2010). The Tasmanian Department of Education e-School (2011) defined Blended Learning as "a range of learning opportunities, e.g. online, face-to-face, community and home to achieve curriculum diversity and promote student enthusiasm".Yen and Lee (2011) assert that "Blended Learning, thoughtfully combining the best elements of online and face-to-face education, is likely to emerge as the predominant teaching model of the future" (p. 138).

Blended Learning should not be seen as an add-on to regular classroom instruction, nor as an effort to find simply the right mix of technologies (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Richards, 2003). Instead Blended Learning requires "rethinking and redesigning the teaching and learning relationship" (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004: p. 99). In higher education, where Blended Learning is becoming increasingly prevalent, Ausburn (2004) and Danchak & Huguet (2004) argue in unrelated studies that Blended Learning courses must be designed around principles of adult learning that favour multiple learning activities from which the learner can choose, personalization rather than a one-size-fits-all design, a variety of learning pathways and resources, and a community with whom participants can interact including the instructor.

Several research studies have demonstrated that courses using Blended Learning as a delivery method contribute to improved learning outcomes for students (Boyle, Bradley, Chalk, Jones, & Pickard, 2003; Dziuban et al., 2006; Garnham & Kaleta, 2002; Lim & Morris, 2009; O'Toole & Absalom, 2003; Twigg, 2003a). Blended Learning is also beneficial due to increased flexibility of access to learning that reinforces the student's autonomy, reflection, and powers of research (Chambers, 1999; Lebow, 1993; Radford, 1997; Sharpe et al., 2006; Tam, 2000), and facilitates the review and control of learning (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). Through Blended Learning, students are able to catch up on a course if and when they can. (Garnham & Kaleta, 2002; Owston, Wideman, Murphy, & Lupshenyuk,

2008; Smyth, Houghton, Cooney, & Casey, 2012). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) explored some of the benefits of using Blended Learning in higher education institutions by explaining how Blended Learning has transformative potential, offering institutions the opportunity to embrace technology, encourage a community of inquiry, and support active and meaningful learning. Owston et al. (2008) focussed on professional development in schools of education and described how Blended Learning has the ability to foster a professional learning community and yet still allow for the development of social cohesion due to the inclusion of a face-to-face component. Cost and resource effectiveness is also considered an advantage of Blended Learning (Graham, 2006; Twigg, 2003b; Vaughan, 2007). Blended Learning enables the students to become more motivated and more involved in the learning process, thereby enhancing their commitment and perseverance (Donnelly, 2010; Sharpe et al., 2006; Wang, Shen, Novak, & Pan, 2009; Woltering, Herrler, Spitzer, & Spreckelsen, 2009).

In the 21st century the role of instructor has transformed from teacher to facilitator, as they take charge of learning the new technology, adapting the technology to pedagogy or even forging new pedagogical principles based on innovations in technology, as discussed in Charles and Anthony (2007). On the other hand, there is evidence of staff reluctance in adopting technology to support/replace face-to- face teaching (Ooms et al. 2008). Academic staff encounters the challenge of how to effectively integrate technology in their teaching practices (Arbaugh 2008). Blended Learning developments take time, and the amount of work involved, even when given support by e-developers, can be underestimated by those staff who are new to Blended Learning (Ooms et al. 2008). Research indicates that the insufficient time due to contextual factors such as the structure of timetables and workload, and a lack of proper training can cause delays and ineffective use of technology in education (Cuban, Kirkpatrick, and Peck 2001; Pajo 2001). A combination of technological and pedagogic training is desirable (Hannon 2008; Oliver et al. 2004; Higher Education Funding Council for England. 2005), and academic staff development becomes most successful when supported by a range of strategies (Bates 2000). Faculty scepticism and misunderstandings about what Blended Learning includes are not uncommon and are factors that could hinder Blended Learning developments (Ooms et al. 2008).

Objectives: The present study aims to examine the pedagogical perceptions of the University Teachers towards Blended Learning for enhancing the teaching learning experiences in Higher Education. The researcher also attempted to investigate the challenges faced by the University Teachers in providing Blended Learning to the students.

Research Questions

i What are the pedagogical perceptions of the University Teachers towards Blended Learning?

ii What are the challenges faced by the University Teachers in providing Blended Learning to the students?

Methodology: The researcher conducted a survey research for the present study.

Sample: The sample of respondents selected for study comprised of 120 University Teachers chosen from different departments of the University of Calcutta.

Tools Used: The researcher administered two questionnaires to collect information from the University Teachers selected for the study.

Data analysis: The data collected were analysed using percentages.

Results and Discussion of the Study

i **Research question:** What are the pedagogical perceptions of the University Teachers towards Blended Learning?

Table I

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neither Agree or Disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
i	I have knowledge and experience of using Blended Learning	34	61	1	2	1
ii	I have training and guidance in the use of Blended Learning	26	32	8	15	17
iii	I prefer to use Blended Learning methods more than traditional methods of learning.	39	60	1	1	0
iv	I believe quality of teaching learning experiences can be enhanced through Blended Learning methods	38	41	0	11	10
v	I believe Blended Learning provides greater flexibility for teachers in administering the course and delivering learning materials	33	57	0	8	2
vi	I believe Autonomy, Reflection and Research skills can be improved through Blended Learning	27	36	7	19	11

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neither Agree or Disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
vi	I firmly believe that using Blended Learning can foster better professional and cooperative learning environment	36	39	4	13	7
vii	I believe Blended Learning is more economical and cost and resource effective if used with proper planning	43	42	7	5	3
ix	I believe Blended Learning has better learning outcomes when used with subjects that require hands on experiences	47	26	5	11	13
x	I believe students' prompt feedback and practical knowledge can be enhanced through Blended Learning	62	33	2	2	1

The results of the Table I indicated the evidence of perception of Blended Learning of the University Teachers. The teachers were found to understand the significance and the benefits of Blended Learning with 61% of teachers agreeing to have knowledge and experience of Blended Learning and 62% of them strongly agreeing the importance of Blended Learning in enhancing prompt feedback and practical knowledge of learners. 60% teachers preferred to use Blended Learning than traditional methods whereas 57% of them agreed Blended Learning provide greater flexibility for teachers and 43% University Teachers strongly agreed that Blended Learning is cost and resource effective. The study is consistent with other researches (Chambers, 1999;Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Graham, 2006; Lebow, 1993; Owston et al., 2008; Radford, 1997; Sharpe et al., 2006; Tam, 2000;Twigg, 2003b; and Vaughan, 2007).

ii **Research question:** What are the challenges faced by the University Teachers in providing Blended Learning to the students?

Table II

Sl. No.	Statements	N	Number of Responses	%

i	Negative outlook towards technology-assisted learning in the form of online classes, or partially online classes	120	42	35
ii	Poorly designed courses	120	48	40
iii	Difficultly to access Internet connection	120	37	30.83
iv	Poor infrastructural facilities	120	59	49.17
v	Computer anxiety	120	41	34.17
vi	Many lack expertise required in Blended Learning for careful planning to deliver a quality learning experience	120	32	26.67
vii	Many still prefer only lecture method at University level	120	45	37.5

The results of the Table II suggested that some of the University Teachers face various challenges in providing Blended Learning to students with 26.67% University Teachers reporting they lack expertise in Blended Learning whereas 30.83% teachers find difficulty in accessing internet connection which is very essential for Blended Learning, moreover 35% of them have a negative outlook towards online learning whereas 40% teachers find the courses designed for Blended Learning are poor. These findings are consistent with other studies (Learning Technology Center, 2009; Yudinigroho, 2013).

Conclusion: The researcher thus concluded that with the advancement of science and technology and its incorporation in the field of education innovative pedagogies are already in practice. Blended Learning being an effective pedagogical approach is found in this study to successfully gain its place in higher education as University Teachers are found to be more open to this new approach and perceives the need and importance of Blended Learning as it overcomes many existing problems of purely online instruction like limited hardware, software, time, money as well as pedagogical problems as claimed by Delialioglu and Yildirim (2007). Since Blended Learning combines the benefits of face-to-face courses with the benefits of online courses it facilitates improved academic performance of students through their adequate feedback, active and interactive participation, collaborative tasks and practical methods of teaching and learning. However some of the University Teachers are faced with some challenges in providing Blended Learning, but majority of them feel that with careful designing of courses proper blending of face to face and online instruction,

stable and adequate internet connection, proper infrastructural facilities, investment of time and resources by the Universities and Government for developing and maintaining a successful blended learning environment through which academic advancement of students can be made possible.

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