

Chapter 16

Blended Learning in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Online and blended instruction offers learners a unique opportunity to learn ubiquitously without being limited to the constraints of time and distance. Additionally, these pedagogies have the potential to open the doors of the university to a wider audience, provide choices for non-traditional students, and extend services to populations that would otherwise not be able to attend the classes on campus. However, complementing traditional teaching with blended learning techniques in a traditional university course presents various challenges. This chapter identifies gaps in the factors affecting blended learning in the digital age. Based on the findings, the authors argue that instructors can rely on e-learning technologies to implement blended learning model by redesigning some lectures into new online learning activities, such as tutorials, self-testing exercises, and online group collaborations.

INTRODUCTION

The ubiquitous use of technologies in our daily lives has profoundly changed not only how humanity live but also how the overall construction, distribution and reconstruction of knowledge. Globally, technology is increasingly occupying central stage to the teaching-learning process in higher education. In Kenya, technology is accelerating access to education and training although traditional learning is still the most prominent mode of delivering courses on most college campuses in. As a result, fluency in information technology has become a central pillar of higher education: both implicitly in how information is shared and explicitly in preparing students for the global markets they will enter after graduation. According to Tham and Tham (2011), unlike the traditional face to face instruction, blended learning provides both

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lecturers and students with a more extensive and effective educational experiences. While blended learning provides numerous opportunities for lecturer-student interaction, added flexibility in the teaching-learning environment, increased student engagement in learning, and opportunities for continuous improvement (Chamberlain & Reynolds, 2007), several factors have posed challenge to the same.

Arguably, the use of blended learning in higher education is gaining recognition as one of the greatest trends in education and training in contemporary society. With the integration of both face-to-face and technological learning, the classroom has expanded in an exponential manner. According to Wu, Tennyson and Hsia (2010), complementing traditional teaching with blended learning techniques in a traditional university course presents a myriad of challenges. For example, ensuring that learners come to terms, technological hitches and technological malpractices were among other hurdles that the pilot programme witnessed. Despite all these, blended learning presents a unique opportunity to customize learner needs based on their individual differences and educational needs.

Kenya, like most sub Saharan nations, is among those countries which are already integrating the use of ICT in her higher education system. Some of the key areas where ICT is in use include: The design, development and delivery of ICT based learning materials in higher education teaching and learning settings including blended learning and e-learning, pedagogic innovation in using ICT towards making higher education accessible.

Changes in the higher education landscape in Kenya are prominent in the form of diversification of student populations with a wide range of learning styles and learning needs which are different from the traditional elitist student populations. For example, distance learning, holiday programme and online courses are on the increase in all universities in Kenya. Additionally, institutions of higher learning have to respond to the demands of globalisation coupled with the knowledge economy such as the need to prepare students with twenty first century skills and competencies for the labour markets. Therefore, changes in the pedagogy and teaching practices are becoming inevitable. Higher education institutions also have to increase their efficiency, be more transparent and accountable and perform better in research and teaching through technology. Choice University, where this study was conducted, is one of the three universities in Kenya where Kenya Education Network (KENET) is currently piloting blended learning between campuses.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

With rapid reforms, the educational arena is characterized with evolving technologies at an accelerating pace in the ever-increasingly-connected global community. Technology has presented endless possibilities for access to education as well as leaning. Through technology, new pedagogical approaches have developed thereby demystifying the traditional notion of classroom confinement. The result is a shift from the traditional delivery mode to a more blended approach to learning. According to Porter (2014), institutions of higher learning are increasingly using ICT to develop course materials, deliver and share course content, lectures and presentations, facilitate communication among lecturers and students, encourage pedagogical innovation, increase cooperation and collaboration, conduct research, enhance professional development as well as provide administrative and management services.

The advent of blended learning has ensured that blended teaching is rolled out as a teaching methodology for course delivery in several institutions of higher learning. However, with its implementation, blended teaching and learning has triggered many unanswered questions. For example, how receptive are

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