

Chapter 2

Blended Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Emerging technologies and the digital transformation in society have changed the way teaching and learning take place. Therefore, techno-pedagogical content knowledge has become an integral approach in modern teaching and learning. This chapter explores issues related to blended teaching and learning in higher education and highlights the challenges and opportunities it possesses. This chapter also outlines how to overcome challenges to provide effective teaching and learning by exploring literature. Moreover, it categorizes challenges for discussion to identify possible solutions and outlines recommendations. In support of evidence, a case study approach was used along with a review of the literature to draw evidence for a wide range of best practices. According to the findings, the blended teaching and learning model allows students to learn freely, demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways, and develop crucial knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help them become lifelong learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As technologies advance, trends and patterns are changing the way new generations act in their everyday lives. The blended approach of teaching and learning is considered a student-centered, conformist and pragmatic way to provide education (Verpoorten et al., 2021) in the current technological era. In higher education, the advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) has created a new era by providing educators and learners with an advanced teaching and learning environment. In this new environment, educators are able to use technological tools and aids to stimulate and boost the learning experience of the learners. Moreover, it expands the horizon of the learning spaces so that people from various geographical locations can utilise the learning opportunities avoiding physical mobility (Caner, 2012; López-Pérez, Pérez-López, & Rodríguez-Ariza, 2011).

The use of ICT in teaching and learning is a matter of great interest for many educators in higher education worldwide. This interest is evident in the adoption, adaptation and implementation of ICT solutions for flexible teaching and learning approaches inside and outside the classrooms in many universities (Azizan, 2010). In this process, the use of the Learning Management System (LMS) in higher educational institutions is contributing as the foundation for the rapid growth of ICT incorporation (Bonk, Kim, & Zeng, 2005). On the one hand, the integration of ICT brings several positive aspects into the experience of educators and learners such as skills development on ICT tools that are relevant for academic and professional needs, access to vast amounts of knowledge instantaneously, and flexibility to balance academic and personal work. On the other hand, educators are aware of the issue of quality of education in higher educational institutions as they face several challenges by incorporating ICT in teaching and learning (Ginns & Ellis, 2007).

As the challenges emerge from overall development and changes in the globalized world, higher education students are moving towards more flexible education opportunities that address time and space for participation in learning. At present, for higher educational institutions, both face-to-face classroom teaching and learning and pure e-learning have strengths and limitations. In this context, many researchers suggest the blended teaching and learning (BTL) approach as an effective and flexible opportunity for higher educational institutions, educators and students. Though the implementation of BTL varies across contexts (Li et al., 2020), it is a pragmatic idea that links many fields including educational technology, pedagogy, online and distance teaching and learning, educational evaluation, and educational psychology (Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019).

An extensive review of literature on comparative studies has found that there is no noteworthy distinction between face-to-face and online teaching and learning in regard to the efficacy of achieving learning outcomes (Caner, 2012). Moreover, the studies show the benefit of BTL for creating a better learning environment and achieving learning outcomes of higher education students compared to only face-to-face or online teaching and learning approaches (Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019). Currently, many higher educational institutions provide students with flexible opportunities to participate in BTL, harmonizing the strengths and limitations of face-to-face and online teaching and learning (Bower et al., 2015; Caner, 2012). Furthermore, Bonk et al. (2005) find the possibilities of web-based tools in the coming years endless for students' collaboration, teamwork, critical thinking, engagement, and creative idea generation and expression. For this reason, stakeholders and practitioners of higher education need to take positive steps to adapt BTL approaches as it seems likely to be the trend in the post-COVID-19 era (Lockee, 2021).

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