

Chapter 17

Students' Perceptions, Interaction and Satisfaction in the Interactive Blended Courses: A Case Study

Bünyamin Atici
Firat University, Turkey

Yalın Kılıç Türel
Firat University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Blended courses that offer several possibilities to students and teachers such as becoming more interactive and more active have become increasingly widespread for both K12 and higher education settings. With the rising of the cutting edge technologies, institutions and instructors have embarked on creating new learning environments with a variety of new delivery methods. At the same time, designing visually impressive and attractive blended settings for students has been easier with extensive learning and content management systems (LMS, CMS, LCMS) such as Blackboard, WebCT, Moodle and virtual classroom environments (VLE) such as Adobe Connect, Dimdim, and WiZiQ. In this study, the authors aimed to investigate students' perspectives and satisfactions towards designed interactive blended learning settings and to find out the students' views on both synchronous and asynchronous interactive blended learning environment (IBLE).

INTRODUCTION

There is a new generation youth growing with technology and having different habits, behaviors, and expectations than previous generations. This phenomenon requires both designing ideal instruc-

tional settings for learners by taking necessities of this new generation into account and providing institutions become more competitive more challenging and more adaptive (Dziuban, Moskal, & Hartman, 2005). Under recent circumstances, it is inevitable for official and commercial institutions to make use of e-learning applications with instructional activities. On designing learning

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environments, Internet enables us to use different tools, to access from anywhere at any time, and to save all kinds of records regarding instruction. As well as widespread usage of Internet, it mainly affects characteristics of learners such as learning, studying, and communicating. Therefore, it is crucial to employ Internet as a supportive element for learning. On the other hand, when the instruction is merely based on Internet, it may suffer from the several disadvantages of online distance learning and it is required to eliminate those problems by combining traditional face-to-face events (Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2008). BL concept is the reflection of this requirement (Rovai & Jordan, 2004). In order to be able to make mention of BL, it is important to highlight that blended learning is a standalone concept and it is also neither enhanced face-to-face classroom strategy nor fully online learning method (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

“Blended (Hybrid) Learning” (BL) can be defined simply as a well-balanced combination of online and face-to-face instruction. This concept can be stated to use different structure in an instructional setting. However, the most important thing makes blended learning special and distinguish is its flexible structure which is designed according to existed possibilities, necessities and conditions of the context that will be applied. In this manner, created blended learning system will be definitely unique. Meanwhile synthesizing the strength parts of both face-to-face and online learning has been proved as the most effective approach in several studies (Olapiriyakul & Scher, 2006:222).

Elearnspace (2005) defined blended learning as “*blended learning takes the best of both worlds and creates an improved learning experience for the student*” (n.p.) because BL has diverse benefits such as growing interaction, compatibility, better learning, low costs and low session time, and better retention (Young, 2002).

Success of BL is associated with the level of how interactive it was designed. Interaction gives learners an opportunity to meet their needs and

competences, to shape their learning experiences, and to be motivated. Students who can control their learning pace find time to process and reflect information as well. Interaction in a learning process emerges as an important mechanism required obtaining information, both cognitive and physical development (Lim, Lee, & Richards, 2006). Blended learners do not learn by only one channel, one method, or only one way. Interaction opens up different ways and channels to learn. Consequently, in both face-to-face and online sections of the BL settings, using interaction properly and well-balanced will be more efficient and effective.

Institutions need to change their policies and practices by redesigning their campus structure relying on the learning management tools (Olapiriyakul & Scher, 2006). Therefore, on giving online support to users, Learning Management Systems (LMS) as a ground platform is also critically important. LMSs can be either commercial or open source and they are utilized for organizing all processes of students, teachers, and courses as well as content delivering and communication between users such as teacher-students and students-students. In addition to LMS platform, a VLE (virtual learning environment) or virtual classroom software should be used for synchronous meetings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF BLENDED LEARNING

With becoming the state of the art technologies widespread, researchers have started to consider on their utilization in education more effectively. These technologies are basically performed in three ways: Integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) to *traditional* classroom *settings* as supportive tools, *fully online* or in another word e-learning settings and combining these both approaches together, *blended learning settings* (Gülbahar, 2009; Dziuban, Moskal & Hartman, 2005).

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