

Chapter 10

Framework for Evaluating Blended Learning in a University Public–Speaking Course in Singapore

Linda Fang

Temasek Polytechnic, Singapore

Siew Hoong Chow

SIM University, Singapore

Wai Man Soo

Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore

ABSTRACT

SIM University (UniSIM), Singapore's first privately-funded university, caters to working adults in Singapore. It currently offers over 40 undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes through its four schools. The university is committed to helping busy working adult learners manage their studies by providing a flexible learning environment. Blended learning is one such initiative. While courses are designed for adult learners to meet the standards set by the curriculum developers and the university, it is imperative that there are ways to indicate that learning has taken place. This paper proposes an evaluation framework to help identify, capture and reflect learning for Speaking With Confidence (COR 157), a blended learning level one core course for undergraduates. This framework would be of interest to adult learners, faculty and administrators.

INTRODUCTION

SIM University (UniSIM), Singapore's first privately-funded university established in 2005, caters to working adults in Singapore. It currently offers over 40 academic undergraduate and post-

graduate degree programs through its four schools, namely, the School of Arts and Social Sciences, the School of Science and Technology, the School of Business, and the School of Human Development and Social Services. It has an enrolment of approximately 10,000 adult learners (SIM University, 2009).

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UniSIM's vision is to provide educational excellence for adult learners through flexible learning. This is achieved through the offering of blended learning courses developed in-house by subject specialists working closely with UniSIM's Educational Technology and Production Department. These follow the UniSIM blended learning model comprising 50% online learning and 50% face-to-face classroom learning. The first eight blended learning courses were offered in July 2008. The number of such courses increased to 30 in 2009/2010. Currently, approximately 10% of the courses offered by UniSIM have an online component (SIM University, 2010).

As the UniSIM blended learning model requires self-directed and online collaborative learning, it is hoped that this approach is effective for the UniSIM adult learners who comprise Singapore citizens, permanent residents and other nationalities residing in Singapore. While it is assumed that the UniSIM adult learners, whose average age is 30 years (SIM University, 2009), are technically savvy, the concern is the quality of learning given the rapid introduction and increased use of blended learning. The adult learners are expected to achieve learning objectives specified in the syllabi and meet the standards set by the university. Grades supported by tutor comments and end-of-course surveys are insufficient to identify, capture and reflect various aspects of learning. It is important to provide a comprehensive view of the effectiveness of a course in terms of learner response, whether there is learning and the manner in which it takes place, the outcomes of the learning, and the sustained effect of the course (Kirkpatrick, 1994).

For the evaluation of a course to be useful and meaningful, it needs to address the concerns of the stakeholders. In this paper, these only include the adult learners, faculty and administrators. It is assumed that adult learners would primarily be concerned with how the course design and delivery influence their learning. They need to be convinced that the assessments are an effective

channel of feedback for learning. Faculty would be concerned that they would need to provide their adult learners with fulfilling blended learning experiences. They would need to know how to better engage and motivate adult learners, as well as facilitate and guide adult learners in a blended learning environment. The administrators would be concerned with the quality assurance of the course. This is because the design and development of blended courses is relatively new to UniSIM, and hence they need to seek ways to continuously improve the design of future courses.

The course, *Speaking With Confidence*, also known as COR 157, is a blended learning university core course for undergraduate programmes at UniSIM. It was first offered in July 2008. Since then, over 650 adult learners have successfully completed the course over four semesters. Developed within four months using the UniSIM Design model (Chow & Fang, 2010) it was rated one of the most-well-designed courses by the adult learners. The purpose of this paper is to propose a framework to identify, capture and reflect learning for COR 157. This framework provides a means to evaluate the suitability of blended learning for university adult learners in Singapore. It also addresses the concerns of important stakeholders, namely adult learners, faculty and administrators.

BACKGROUND

At its broadest definition, blended learning involves the use of different training "media", namely technologies, activities, and types of events to provide an optimum training program for specific groups of learners. The blend can range from e-learning self-study with other blended media or events, instructor-led program blended with self-study e-learning, live e-learning centred with other added media, online job training, simulation and lab learning (Bersin, 2004). For this paper, blended learning refers to the combination of classroom-based learning with

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