



# BLENDING LEARNING – AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

The simplest definition of the term blended learning is the use of traditional classroom teaching methods together with the use of online learning for the same students studying the same content in the same course. It is a “thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). There are also blended programmes, in which students study some courses in face-to-face classrooms and other courses are delivered fully online. In other words, blended learning is a term applied to the practice of providing instruction and learning experiences through some combination of both face-to-face and technology-mediated learning. During the technology-mediated components of these learning experiences, students are not required to be physically together in one place but may be connected digitally through online communities. Classroom instruction time may be replaced or augmented by online learning experiences, and online learning can include varying degrees of interaction or just time alone in independent study and learning activities. However, in a quality blended learning experience, the content and activities of both in-person and online learning are integrated with one another and work toward the same learning outcomes with the same content. The various learning experiences are synthesised, complement each other, and are planned or orchestrated to run in parallel.

Blended learning is sometimes called hybrid or mixed-mode learning. These systems of instructional design use many types of teaching and learning experiences and vary in design and implementation across teachers, programmes and schools. The potential variations of mixed-mode learning are virtually endless.

**Keywords:** Blended learning, fusion, programmes, tutorials, opportunities.

## INTRODUCTION

**Blended learning** is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some elements of student control over time, place, path, or pace. While students still attend “brick-and-mortar” schools with a teacher present, face-to-face classroom practices are combined with computer-mediated activities regarding content and delivery. Blended learning is also used in professional development and training settings.

Blended learning is highly context-dependent therefore a universal conception of it is hard to come by. Some reports have claimed that a lack of consensus on a hard definition of blended learning had led to difficulties in research on its effectiveness. Blended learning is the concept that includes framing teaching learning process that incorporates both face to face teaching and teaching supported by ICT. Blended learning incorporates direct instruction, indirect instruction, collaborative teaching, individualized computer assisted learning.

Blended learning can be divided into three main models.

The first model, blended presentation and interaction, has classroom engagement as its primary component, with support from out-of-class, online exercises. The flipped classroom or flipped curriculum approach is a common example of this model, with students viewing podcasts or other online resources independently, followed by classroom-based tutorials or seminars for group learning based upon these resources.

The second is the blended block model (sometimes called a programme flow model), in which a sequence of activities, or “blocks,” is structured to incorporate both face-to-face learning and online study, usually with consideration for both pedagogical goals and practical constraints. For example, a course for geographically distributed learners or working professionals may have limited opportunities for classroom-based learning and therefore begin with a block of intensive face-to-face sessions, followed by blocks of online study and collaboration through online tutorials, possibly followed by a further block of face-to-face learning or group presentations.

The third model is fully online but may still be considered blended if it incorporates both synchronous learning (for example, online tutorials) and asynchronous activities (for example, discussion forums).

Blended Learning Uses:

As we saw above regarding the blended block model, there are often practical considerations leading us to choose blended learning. In addition, many policy makers and postsecondary leaders believe that replacing some components of a learning programme with online or distance education is a cost-effective way to deliver postsecondary education. While some efficiencies might be created through online delivery, there is increasing evidence about its effectiveness in delivering instruction. Two recent studies provide different views of whether online education will increase student learning and success. Nevertheless, over the past several years, perceptions of online learning have been shifting in its favour as more learners and educators see it as a viable alternative to some forms of face-to-face learning.

The opportunities for learning or the affordances blended learning offers are now well understood, and both educators and students find its flexibility, ease of access, and integration of sophisticated multimedia and technologies highly appealing.

Benefits of Blended Learning:

The advantages of blended learning for students include increased learning skills, greater access to information, improved satisfaction and learning outcomes, and opportunities both to learn with others and to teach others.

1. Opportunity for collaboration at a distance: Individual students work together virtually in an intellectual endeavour as a learning practice.
2. Increased flexibility: Technology-enabled learning allows for learning anytime and anywhere, letting students learn without the barriers of time and location but with the possible support of in-person engagement.
3. Increased interaction: Blended learning offers a platform to facilitate greater interactivity between students, as well as between students and teachers.
4. Enhanced learning: Additional types of learning activities improve engagement and can help students achieve higher and more meaningful levels of learning.
5. Learning to be virtual citizens: Learners practice the ability to project themselves socially and academically in an online community of inquiry. Digital learning skills are becoming essential to be a lifelong learner, and blended courses help learners master the skills for using a variety of technologies.

Making Blended Learning Work:

Technology integration in itself is not necessarily blended learning. If online learning is only a minor component of a classroom-based course, without offering students the independence, convenience and interaction opportunities of being online, it may not really be a blended learning system but simply a case of technology integration.

Creating an effective blended learning environment means making appropriate choices and overcoming the challenges that come with the use of technology. The following challenges and recommendations were identified in recent research.

1. **Technology access:** A critical first step is to know which resources are available to your students. Is there limited bandwidth, unreliable Internet connectivity, or lack of devices such as laptops or smartphones? Once you are clear about access, you can choose learning activities with the technology in ways that allow all to participate.
2. **Design:** Creating the appropriate in-person and online activities means designing courses with the pedagogic principles of both and integrating technology in a way that supports meaningful learning.
3. **Safety and security:** Create awareness of cyber-malice and ensure security interventions against unethical learning practices, academic dishonesty, identity theft and bullying are in place.
4. **Skill development, support and training:** Both students and instructors must have technological literacy and competence with technology applications.
5. **Motivation:** Students need adequate motivation when engaging in a wide range of often shifting learning modalities, some of which may require significant skill development.

#### Seven Blended Learning Structures in Education:

Many factors must be considered when choosing how to blend in-person and online teaching and learning activities. In some cases, most interactions between students and the teacher, as well as the direct delivery of instruction, take place in person in the classroom, while materials and possibly some additional activities are delivered online. In other cases, most of the class activities occur online, with infrequent meetings in person to solve problems and support community building. In some blended arrangements, students may choose which activities to complete online and which to complete in a classroom.

Ideally, blends are personalised so individual students have the blend that best fits their age, life circumstances and learning needs. These are called à la carte models. Students choose what to take fully online, what to take fully in person and, when the design is available, blended courses where they choose when to go to in-person classes and when to watch videos, download readings and complete assignments online.

Teachers are valuable coaches for helping students manage in any learning situation; it is up to teachers and learning designers to offer blended activities that best suit the subject, the learners' needs and the curriculum requirements.

Below are seven sample configurations of blended learning activities, offered by O'Connell (2016) for you to consider for your teaching situation.

- **Blended face-to-face class:** Also sometimes called the "face-to-face driver model," the blended face-to-face class model is based in the classroom, although a significant amount of classroom time has been replaced by online activities. Seat time is required for this model, while online activities are used to supplement the in-person classes; readings, quizzes or other assessments are done online at home. This model allows students and faculty to share more high-value instructional time because class time is used for higher-order learning activities such as discussions and group projects.
- **Blended online class:** Sometimes referred to as the "online driver model," this class is the inverse of the blended face-to-face class. The class is mostly conducted online, but there are some required in-person activities such as lectures or labs.
- **The flipped classroom:** The flipped classroom reverses the traditional class structure of listening to a lecture in class and completing homework activities at home. Students in flipped classes watch a short lecture video online and come into the classroom to complete activities such as group work, projects or other exercises. The flipped classroom model can be seen as a sub-model of the blended face-to-face or blended online class.
- **The rotation model:** In this model, students in a course rotate between various modalities, one of which is online learning. There are various sub-models: station rotation, lab rotation and individual rotation.
- **The self-blend model:** While many of the blended learning models on this list are at the course level, self-blending is a programme-level model and is familiar to many college students. Learners using this model are enrolled in a school but take online courses in addition to their traditional face-to-face courses. They are not directed by a faculty member and choose which courses they will take online and which they will take in person.

- The blended MOOC: The blended MOOC is a form of flipped classroom using in-person class meetings to supplement a massive open online course. Students access MOOC materials — perhaps from another institution or instructor if the course is openly accessible — outside of class and then come to a class meeting for discussions or in-class activities.
- Flexible-mode courses: Flexible-mode courses offer all instruction in multiple modes — in person and online — and students choose how to take their course.

#### CONCLUSION:

To conclude it can be said that blended learning is to some extent is the solution to problems prevailing in our educational system. If implemented in a well-planned, organised way with right type of attitudes it can become the future of our educational system. It is in our own benefit that steps for adapting blended learning are soon initiated.

Blended learning as an important and rapidly developing form of education, with an emphasis on the benefits it offers to both educators and students, including greater flexibility and convenience, as well as potential increases in learner creativity and independence.

One key concept is that blended learning is not merely the addition of some technological element to an existing course but rather is an integrated plan utilising the best of what both face-to-face and online learning have to offer. The blended presentation and interaction model, the blended block model and the fully online model provide initial frameworks for the deliberate structuring of blended learning to improve learning outcomes.

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