

## Blended Learning vs Traditional Classroom Settings

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### Abstract

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In the field of education the trend of e-learning is increasing day by day. Besides other method of e-learning one of the tools to implement this concept is through Blended Learning. This paper gives the overview of the concept of Blended Learning from different perspectives and how does it occur. In blended learning, the purpose is to establish a balance between online learning and face-to-face learning. It also describes the various blended learning strategies. This paper also describes the areas where this technique is beneficial, along with the challenges faced by this technique such as technical Challenges, organizational challenges and instructional design challenges. Thus the Blended Learning process is described in terms of its various advantages and the factors that promote successful blended learning Approach.

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**Keywords:** e-learning, Blended Learning, teaching strategies, virtual classrooms, traditional classroom settings

### 1. Introduction

Blended Learning is a blending of different learning methods, techniques and resources and applying them in an interactively meaningful learning environment. Learners should have easy access to different learning resources in order to apply the knowledge and skills they learn under the supervision and support of the teacher inside and outside the classroom. Learners can select the best activities to suit their own pace, learning style and level, as well as time and place. Learners can be more independent and self-reliant in their own learning. They can also be more able to take decisions, think creatively and critically, investigate and explore as well as solve problems they face in learning and real life. Meanwhile, teachers can be facilitators, supervisors, assessors, organizers and managers of learning activities, and so should be creative and able to support learners and provide various learning materials in different formats. In order to decide whether a course should be proposed as a face-to-face interaction, an online course or a blended course depends on the analysis of the competences at stake, the nature and location of the students, and the resources available. Depending on the cross-analysis of these 3 parameters, the course designer will opt for one of the 3 options. In his course scenario he/she will then have to decide which parts are online, which parts are offline? A basic example of this is a course of English as a second language where the instructor reaches the conclusion that all audio-based activities (listening comprehension, oral expression) will take place in the classroom where all text-based activities will take place online (reading comprehension, essays writing). Education given via tools such as letters, videos, cassettes and television is called "distance education". In other words, distant education is defined as a type of education in which the distance between the learner and the instructor is emphasized and in which technology is intensely used (Kaya, 2002).

### 2. Literature Review

In recent years, the spread of computer use, developing internet technologies and faster internet connections have all allowed a great deal of distance education to be given in educational settings via the internet.

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Therefore, while naming such educational settings, instead of the concept of distant education that rather defines a larger area, the concept of “e-learning” that defines distant learning environments in which Internet and network technologies are used for the presenting and receiving the content . (Horton, 2002). The development and spread of Internet technologies accelerated the process in education, and in recent years, with the increasing number of schools and institutions giving education via the Internet, the concept of e-learning has entered in our lives (Çallı, Torkul and Taşbaş, 2003). Despite all these rapid developments, face-to-face instruction has never lost its popularity. In addition, distant education and e-learning methods have never taken the place of face-to-face instruction. One of the reasons for this the student-teacher interaction achieved in face-to-face instruction cannot be achieved in distant education or in e-learning applications. Such an interaction seems to be a must for permanent learning and for the teacher’s control over this activity (Şimşek, 2009). On the other hand, in face-to-face instruction, individualization has stayed in the background (Bonk and Graham, 2004). Moreover similar to traditional face-to-face learning environments, there are several limitations of e-learning environments. This fact led to the idea of the blended learning approach, which brings two teaching approaches together correcting their deficiencies: one has been used for ages and the other has a history of quarter century long (Balcı, 2008). The third definition, which draws researchers’ attention to blended learning, brings two such different learning models together as online learning or e- learning and face-to-face learning (Graham 2006). One of the widely-accepted definitions of blended learning was proved by Singh and Reed (2001). According to their definition, blended learning is the transfer of “right” skills to the “right” person at the “right” time by matching the “right” learning technologies with the “right” learning style for the purpose of achieving the learning objectives. According to another definition, blended learning means combining the strong and advantageous aspects of web-based learning with those of face-to-face learning (Horton, 2002; Osguthorpe and Graham, 2003).

In blended learning, the purpose is to establish a balance between online learning and face-to-face learning. The balance between face-to-face learning and online learning may change from one course to another. Due to the basic features of some courses, face-to-face learning is used more, while in other courses online learning is used more. Still in another course, both learning methods are equally used (Osguthorpe and Graham, 2003). There should be a clear relationship between the methods used in blended learning. The course should not seem like different activities forced together. Different methods used should complement one another without ruining the whole. For instance, theoretical parts of a course could be presented on face-to-face basis, while visual elements could be presented on online basis (Silwerwood, 2007; Precel, Alakalai and Alberton, 2009). Presenting the course content via the Internet could be effective in terms of the transfer of information, yet this cannot assure that students will participate in the course and learn in this way. Therefore, importance should be given more to interaction than to the transfer of information in online environment. By assigning simple academic tasks (summary, analysis) to be carried out by students and by creating discussion forums via which they can discuss with each other and with their teachers, interaction can be achieved in online environment (Sands, 2002). Researchers stated that blended learning has certain advantages such as flexibility and comfort in the learning environment, increase in the level of learning, increase in permanence in learning, increase in interest in learning, good-quality interaction and low cost (Graham and Kaleta, 2002; Young, 2002; Collins, 2003). The importance of blended learning has increased in recent years due to its advantages. The American Society for Education and Development defined blended learning as one of the top ten trends in the knowledge delivery industry (Rooney, 2003; cited by Graham, 2006). Young (2002) stated that the blended learning model has been the best and unique trend so far in higher education and that in near future, the number of blended courses executed in higher education will increase in a way to cover 80-90% of all the courses.

Ability of computers to present information visually is especially important for science courses. Well-developed pictures, three-dimensional models, animations and interactive environments allow easily understanding the learning objectives (Çömlekçioğlu and Bayraktaroğlu, 2001). The importance of using the Internet and computers is gradually increasing in terms of the science courses. Activities carried out during the usual course hour are not sufficiently effective because of time constraints. With the blended learning model, students are able to carry out multimedia applications – which cannot be sufficiently taught during lessons - via the Internet. In addition, ability to see the course content before coming to the class enables students to learn the research subjects and thus to come to the class as prepared for the lesson.

Students can discuss important subjects in the Internet environment (in forums) and establish communication both with their teachers and with other students. While teaching the blended lessons a balance should be maintained between the face to face and online strategies based on the lesson objectives. For example before coming to the classroom the students should prepare themselves for the lesson by examining the summary of the subject, the visual presentation (in video format), the videos and animations related to the subject, the glossary and the other related links via the Internet. In addition, for each subject, the students should be given an assignment (homework) that they are supposed to search for before coming to the classroom. The students could be asked to bring the research assignments to the classroom. The practice of blending different learning approaches, strategies, and opportunities is not new. The most effective teaching and learning have always involved the use of different methods, approaches, and strategies to maximize knowledge acquisition and skills development. Good teachers will always use more than one method or approach in their teaching, and good learners will always combine different strategies in their learning. Good programs of study combine lectures, seminars, group projects, placements, and so on to offer students a variety of different learning opportunities. "Traditional" distance learning courses have long provided blended learning through a combination of self-access content (print/video/TV/radio and face-to-face/telephone support).

### **3. Conclusion**

The practice of blending learning is, therefore, not a new way of teaching, nor is it a single method of learning. The term blended learning first appeared around 2000 and was at that time often associated with simply supplementing traditional classroom learning with self-study e-learning activities. More recently, the pedagogic value of providing blended learning opportunities has received significant attention, and the term has evolved to encompass a much richer set of learning approaches and environments. Today blended learning can refer to any combination of different methods of learning, different learning environments, different learning styles. To conclude we can say that the Blended learning provides flexibility in learning for both students and teachers. Integration of the virtual and physical landscapes enables both instructors and students to become learners, but this is most effective when there is institutional support through the provision of professional learning and the opportunity for redesigning courses for the most appropriate blend (Bliuc, 2007). I would finally conclude with the Heinze and Procter definition of blended learning as follows: "Blended learning is learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, and is based on transparent communication amongst all parties involved with a course "(Heinze, & Procter 2004).

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