

Reflection on the Use of Blended Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine students' satisfaction and learning outcomes in smart and blended learning environments. This paper reflects on the experience of the delivery of a program at H University in Seoul, Korea using smart and blended learning. The goal was to apply the findings to current blended learning models in order to explore possible modifications that may enhance learning environments for Korean university students. The participants were 19 students enrolled in an English Language major course, Speaking 2: Presentation, which aimed to teach students to deliver oral presentations in English. Data was collected from questionnaires, reflection journal, and face-to-face interviews. The analysis of the data indicated that the overall student perception of smart and blended learning environments is positive. In addition, students' perception of the course content influenced their interest in smart and blended learning environments. One of the primary findings was the importance of clear and transparent communication and organization of a smart and blended learning environment.

Keywords

Blended learning, smart learning, e-moderating, English 360

Introduction

Online learning, while it has many advantages, has its disadvantages as well. One primary disadvantage is the lack of social interaction, which occurs in conventional learning environments. This creates a special need to motivate students who are less independent (Salmon, 2002). The need for a compromise between conventional learning environments, or face-to-face sessions, and online learning directs us to a new approach and model for learning hybrid or blended learning (Rogers, 2001).

The United Kingdom Department of Education and Training (DET) provides a definition of blended learning: "learning which combines online

and face to face approaches" (DET, 2003). As defined above, there overlaps between conventional learning, which utilizes some type of online learning activities, and e-learning, which utilizes some conventional learning environmental activities, or traditional classroom interface. As stated by Proctor (2003), "blended learning is the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning." According to Kim & Lee (2010), blending learning and blended learning models give education programs effective and low-risk strategies with which to manage the ever increasing number of forthcoming technological advances and developments. Kim and Lee (2005) asserted that forms of communication and our abilities to manage information challenge our cognitive abilities and the traditional classroom paradigm. Institutions of higher education, namely universities, need to discover their transformative potential (Kim & Lee, 2010).

As universities begin to adopt new models of learning in order to adapt to shifting paradigms, it is ever important role to measure student satisfaction. The degree of student satisfaction with courses plays an important role in evaluating the efficacy of program (Allen, Bourhis, Burrell, & Mabry, 2002). Also, variation in student perception of their learning context has been found to be closely associated to the quality of the learning outcomes (P. Ginns & R. Ellis, 2007). As blended learning models make their way into Korean university education systems, there is a need to more closely examine potential factors of dissatisfaction within the blended learning environments, in a Korean context.

1 Research Method

1.1 Participants

The participants were predominantly in their early 20's and majoring in English Language and Literature at H University in Seoul. Table 1 below shows the description of the participants. All

students were enrolled in a content-based instruction course, Presentation, which taught students to deliver oral English language presentations. These students were mostly English language majors, therefore possessing a more advanced English language skill set, as well as generally superior English language communication abilities. It could then be extrapolated that they could more freely communicate their perceptions of blended learning and perceived learning in a blended learning environment. It could also be deducted that because the students were focused less on learning English, and more on learning a skill, such as giving oral presentations, they could more easily distinguish blended learning methods from traditional teaching and learning methods, as the language was not perceived as a barrier.

Table 1: Student Sample Data

Total number of participants	Male	6
	Female	13
Year in university	Sophomore	8
	Junior	6
	Senior	5
Major course of study	English Language and Literature	14
	Other	5
Had previous blended learning experience	Yes	15
	No	4

1.2 Procedure

The duration of the course was 16 weeks, which was one semester. Students met twice a week, for 90 minutes each session. With three hours of class instruction a week, for 16 weeks, the total number of face-to-face hours was 48. Each class consisted of 19 students and 1 instructor. There were a multitude of ways in which the dimensions of the blend applied to blended learning affect the teaching and learning strategies (Singh & Reed, 2001). The course designed for this study blended self-paced and live, collaborative learning on-line and off-line content, and custom content with off-the-shelf content. These blends were proven to simply link classroom activities with e-learning activities, offered a rich set of learning strategies, and has over-lapping attributes (Singh, 2001).

The course was instructed in a 70:30 blend; 70 percent of the hours taught were face-to-face, and 30 percent of instruction was e-learning. The students were required to complete additional assignments, with an average value to 20 total hours. This number was estimated, based on self-paced learning models for e-learning education modules (Allison Rossett, Felicia Douglass, & Rebecca V. Frazee, 2003). The face-to-face sessions consisted

of materials available on the blended learning Internet platform. The instructor used computers, projectors and smart whiteboards to access the information on the learning modules. Students were allowed to access their own personal devices, if they brought them to class. If printed materials were required for the class, students, prior to class, accessed folders located on the blended learning Internet platform, and printed the materials.

The platform program allowed and permitted access to videos, articles, multiple choice activities, matching activities, fill-in-the-blank activities, voice and sound clips, and short answer or essay fields. The materials were customized by the instructor, as well as materials provided by the host of the platform program, Cambridge University Press. The materials were available to students for the duration of the semester. They were allowed unlimited access to the contents of each lesson. Lessons were divided into folders, and each folder was labeled with the date on which the lesson was given. Inside each folder was typically upwards of three hours of activities. Homework was assigned based on the contents covered in class. Homework was recorded as “completed on time,” or “not completed on time.” Each student was given an unlimited number of attempts to mark the answers correctly. The platform program identified incorrect answers, and allowed students to clear only the incorrect answers, while saving the correct answer to the student profile. The student could then attempt to mark the correct answer again, until he or she was satisfied with the score, and / or learning outcome. This particular platform program and course blend ration allowed for the use of collaborative peer-to-peer activities, mentor-to-peer activities, structured group assignments, provided the presentation of e-learning module objectives, necessary knowledge associated with the objectives and learning tasks to facilitate the skills associated with the objectives. These core components combined to form an instructional model for blended learning (Jared M Carmen, 2002 & Fernando Alonso, Genoveva Lopez, Daniel Manrique, Jose M. Vines, 2005).

1.3 Data Collection and Analysis

1.3.1. Questionnaire

A semi-structured questionnaire was employed to investigate students’ satisfaction and perceived learning outcomes regarding their participation in the blended learning course. While some of the questions were structured, requiring a “yes” or “no” answer from the participant, other questions were open-ended, allowing the participant to give his or her opinion, or clarify his or her answer. While the

questionnaire required the participant to identify gender, age, university major and year of study, it did not require the participant to give his or her name. This was to encourage full disclosure of any negative opinions, without the fear of judgment or retaliation.

In order to establish a baseline for evaluating the questionnaire, participant first report whether or not they have previously participated in a blended learning course. To gather sufficient information about why participants did or did not like blended learning, the questionnaire covered inquiry regarding the benefits and drawbacks of blended learning, the benefits and drawbacks of traditional learning, the best method of learning to deliver oral presentations in English, the best method for learning English, the best method for learning English grammar, the best method for learning English speaking skills, the best method for learning TOEIC testing skills, determining future in blended learning, and additional student comments and observations. Each student enrolled in the course was required to complete the questionnaire prior to departure, on the final day of the course. The questionnaire was written in English, and students were asked to answer in English. They were instructed that if they had a comment or observation that they could not communicate adequately in English, they could use Korean, and it would be translated later. The students were allowed up to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected by the instructor upon completion, and evaluated and analyzed.

The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions, and included a combination of closed and open-ended questions. Students were offered space to fill in an answer if their opinion was not accurately reflected in an option provided. The definitions for smart learning and blended learning were provided and basic personal information was required.

1.3.2. Instructor Reflection Journal

The blended learning course instructor maintained a reflection journal for the duration of the course, which lasted one, 16-week semester. The aim of the journal was to record observations, successes, failures, and to note the instructor's perceptions of students' frustrations, likes, dislikes, and general comments, as well and comment generally on the development of the course, where blended learning was concerned.

1.3.3. Student Interviews

Semi-structured interviewing was employed to further investigate students' satisfaction of blended learning. After collection of the questionnaires, the

authors of this research used selective interviewing to fill-in schemata holes, where students' responses had created additional questions. The interviewing was semi-structures, and therefore unrestricted by a list of standardized questions, preselected by the interviewer. Semi-structured interviewing also allows for further prompts, investigations, probes, and clarifications, as well as follow-up questions to engage the interviewee and acquire further information, clarify a response or deepen the understanding of a response. Interviews were conducted in-person, on a one-to-one basis, with only one interview present for each interview. This allows each respondent to answer the questions, free from the potential influence of other interviewees.

1.3.4. Blended Learning Internet Platform

The presentation course's e-learning component was created with the use of Cambridge University Press's English 360. English 360 is an internet-based platform, which enables students to access course materials from any device with Internet access. The platform provides instructors with the choice of using Cambridge University Press materials, uploading custom content or using content from other English 360 courses. The platform program records data for each student enrolled in the course. The total number of hours spent on-line, individual homework and applicable test scores are recorded and available for the instructor. The authors of this research make use of the data provided by English 360, as a part of normal platform program operation. In addition to this data, all student-to-instructor and instructor-to-student correspondence is recorded automatically. This is used for analysis and review of student questions, concerns and driving needs to contact the other party.

1.4 Limitations of This Research

The intention of this research is to investigate individual student perception of blended learning, in a university setting, in Korea. It is not, however, intended to generalize the Korea perception of blended learning. Because of the data scale limitations, and relative small number of participants, this research focuses on blended learning in English, rather than blended learning in a more holistic interpretation. Their perceptions are then a highly limited, but potentially significant, representation of the use and perception of blended learning for content-based English education in a university setting, in Korea. Whether or not the student was a transfer student or a directly admitted student, the socio-economic standing of the student or the student's family, significant time spent

abroad and previous experience with the topic of presentations were not considered as parameters in sampling, they could potentially influence the final analysis of the data. The sample size may limit the generalizations of research result.

2 Results

2.1 Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire were as follows (Table 2).

Table 2: Students Questionnaire Results

Item	Question	No(%)
1	Have you ever completed a smart learning based course before enrolling this course? • Yes • No	15(79) 4(21)
2	Have you ever completed a blended learning course before enrolling in this course? • Yes: • No	15(79) 4(21)
3	What are the benefits of smart/blended learning? Please circle all that apply. • The information is always available on the Internet. • I can't lose my book. • I can assess it while I commute to work/school from a SMART wireless device. • Materials and information cost less on the Internet. • I can communicate with the class from my computer. • I can communicate with the professor from my computer. • I can review my work after submitting it, without waiting for the professor to grade it. • I can use the tools and functions on the learning platform (dictionary, learner needs, etc.). • It is interactive. • It is fun. • It doesn't feel like I am actually doing work or homework. • I am an independent learner and I like working alone at home.	16(84) 13(68) 8(42) 6(23) 4(21) 11(58) 11(58) 5(26) 8(42) 5(26) 2(11) 5(26)
4	What are the drawbacks of smart / blended learning? Please circle all that apply • I don't have a laptop / tablet to bring to class. • I prefer using a traditional book. • The professor might struggle with	3(16) 4(21) 3(16)
	the technology involved with smart / blended learning. • I dislike using a computer. • I can lose my work if I lose my Internet connection. • Access to leaning platforms is expensive. • I think SMART/BLENDED classes rely too much on the internet. • I think SMART/BLENDED classes rely too much on gadgets. • Devices, such as a notebook or tablet PC, are expensive. Students can abuse the privilege of having a computer in class (IM friends, surf the internet, etc.). I learn best in a traditional classroom environment. Other : Froze and crashed / computer crashed Other : Can't concentrate well on a computer	2(11) 10(53) 3(16) 6(32) 3(16) 2(11) 8(42) 4(21) 1(5) 1(5)
5	What is the best method for learning to give presentations? • Listening to a traditional lecture • A workshop-style class • Hands-on learning (Learn by doing it) • Watching great presentations on the Internet • Reading a book about presentations	3(16) 8(42) 12(63) 9(47) 5(26)
6	What are the benefits to traditional (non-smart/ non-blended) learning? • I like to use a traditional book to study with. • I can take notes in my book or notebook in class. • I do not have access to the Internet at home. • The teacher is in total control of what we learn. • It does not require access to the Internet. • I do not like to use a computer. • My teacher cannot use SMART technology. • I learn from my classmates during class time. I like it when my teacher tells me what I should know. Other : I learn best when I do something with paper.	3(16) 11(58) 1(5) 4(21) 6(32) 2(11) 1(5) 7(37) 9(47) 1(5)
7	What are the drawbacks to traditional (non-smart/non-blended) learning? • I can lose my book. • I cannot interact with my class. once class time is finished. • We are limited to the contents of one book.	7(37) 7(37) 8(42)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books are expensive. • I need to be active in class to remember what I learned. • I do not like traditional teacher-centered lectures (teacher at the front of the room, speaking to students). • I am an independent learner Other : No video clips/activities	6(32) 4(21) 5(26) 3(16) 1(5)
8	Which type of course, traditional or smart/blended, do you think is better for learning to English? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional • Blended 	4(21) 15(79)
9	Which type of course, traditional or smart/blended, do you think is better for learning to give presentations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional • Blended 	6(31) 14(74)
10	Which type of course, traditional or smart/blended, do you think is better for learning grammar? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional • Blended 	12(63) 7(37)
11	Which type of course, traditional or smart/blended, do you think is better for learning speaking skills? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional • Blended 	4(21) 14(74)
12	Which type of course, traditional or smart/blended, do you think is better for improving TOEIC skills? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional • Blended 	14(74) 4(21)
13	Would you be interested in taking a smart/blended learning course again? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No 	19(100) 0(0)

2.2 Instructor Reflection Journal

The aim of the journal was to record observations, successes and failures, comment generally on the development of the course, where blended learning was concerned, and to note the instructor's perceptions of students' frustrations, likes, dislikes, and general comments. Some of the perceptions of the instructor were like followings. First, in terms of communication,

"I feel my students are more willing to communicate with me through the messaging system on English 360 than they are through e-mail or office visits."

"I received several e-mails regarding desired

clarification of assignments today. I think that having the shared messaging system and homework platform makes it easier for students to quickly ask questions. Eliminating steps required for communication appears to increase the likelihood of communication."

Second, regarding technology and anxiety,

"Some students appeared anxious at the mention of blended learning. I assured them that we are all learning together, and no one would be punished for not understanding the system on the first day. I also mentioned that they should "play with the system, and become familiar with the interface. Students seemed to relax when I told them that it was also new for me, and we were learning together.

"As time passes, I am no longer feeling anxious about using blended learning. It automatically makes light work of HW, some aspects of grading, communication and adding materials and assignments. Creating new class folders and adding contents are easier than I had previously thought."

Third, in terms of exams and scores,

"My students are using the forums and threads section to group study and share/exchange knowledge and information on English 360. They are answering questions for one another that I would normally answer. Based on the HW scores, they are using the 'clear wrong answers' option to re-submit assignments and master the tasks."

"Amazing scores for the final exam! Students collaborated on-line and created a Facebook Group for the class, and studied for the exam in a blended/smart environment. They have all seemingly benefited from the group learning, and have taken extra steps to create their own learning community. After the exam, they invited me to join the group and look at their efforts and study materials. I am truly impressed."

2.3 Student Interview

Student interviews were conducted in –person, on a one-to-one basis. It was semi-structured and unrestricted by a list of standardized questions.

2.4 Blended Learning Internet Platform

Data were collected from the blended learning

Internet platform, English 360. The total number of messages received by the instructor on the platform was 36. The total number of messages sent by the instructor on the platform was 155.

3 Conclusion

The goal for the study was to apply the findings to current smart and blended learning models in order to explore possible modifications that may enhance learning environments for Korean university students. The analysis of the data indicated that the overall student perception of smart and blended learning environments is positive. In addition, students' perception of the course content influenced their interest in smart and blended learning environments. One of the primary findings was the importance of clear and transparent communication and organization of a smart and blended learning environment. The specific conclusions were like followings.

- Students are highly concerned with access to information. They showed strong preference for blended learning because of the access to class materials.
- They strongly prefer to have immediate feedback about assignments and homework.
- Students are more concerned with accessing information and not losing books than they are with losing e-learning assignments, due to computer/internet problems.
- Students showed moderate concern over the ability of an instructor to manage SMART devices and classroom technology.
- Students rated communication and the ability to communicate with class members and the class instructor, as very important.
- Students showed slight preference for being told what to study, and in that respect, prefer traditional learning environments (compared to 100% e-learning).
- Students strongly prefer a traditional method of note taking in class.
- Students strongly prefer to learn English in blended environments for listening, presentation skills, and general English learning.
- Students strongly prefer traditional environments for TOEIC and Grammar.
- The instructor and students communicated frequently with one another.
- 100% of students would enroll in another blended learning course, if it were offered.

4. References

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