EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY & COUNSELLING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Blended learning: Honouring students’ Psychological Contract

Roberta Fenech

Abstract: A psychological contract is an individual’s perceived expectation that remains in their mindset and thought process. The purpose of this study is to discover the psychological contract of the student in a blended learning setting by exploring his/her expectations of blended learning. Blended learning with its strategic and systematic approach to the integration of online and face-to-face teaching has stirred the interest of many with its promise of flexibility, personalized learning, ease of accessibility, and student engagement. The methodology adopted is a qualitative methodology using in-depth semi-structured interviews. A sample of 27 tertiary education students in the UAE were interviewed at the start of a 16-week blended learning course to uncover their expectations. The main finding is that the psychological contract of students in a blended learning setting consists of positive educational and relational expectations towards both the teacher and peers. Positive expectations of participation, communication and collaboration result from this study as students expect to learn from both their peers and their teachers through blended learning as well to learn autonomously through activities, problem-solving exercises and research.

Subjects: Educational Research; Higher Education; Educational Psychology

Keywords: blended learning; psychological contract; expectations; teaching methodology; qualitative study

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This is a transdisciplinary article that brings together the field of education and psychology, on the topic of psychological contracts that has mainly been studied in the world of work. The perceived expectations of students intrigue every educator who in the 21st century is using technology to transform the educational experience. This article reveals the expectations of the end user of the blended learning experience. The main finding that the psychological contract of students in a blended learning setting consists of positive educational and relational expectations towards both the teacher and peers, has the potential of influencing the teaching technology and style adopted by teachers. This article is also of interest to educators teaching 21st century skills. Positive expectations related to the utilization of the 21st century skills of participation, communication and collaboration result from this study, as students expect to learn autonomously through activities, problem solving exercises and research.
1. Introduction
A psychological contract is an individual’s perceived and subjective expectation that remains in their mindset and thought process. It is one-sided, intrapersonal and not legally enforceable (Conway & Briner, 2005; Knapp & Masterson, 2018; Rousseau, 1995). The purpose of this study is to discover the psychological contract of the student in a blended learning setting by exploring his/her expectations of blended learning.

Blended learning with its strategic and systematic approach to the integration of online and face-to-face teaching has stirred the interest of many (Boelens, Van Laer, De Wever and Elen, 2015; Boelens et al., 2018). It is praised for the creation of more flexible modes of education, personalized learning trajectories (Wanner & Palmer, 2015), accessibility to students (Graham et al., 2013), student engagement (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008), and individualized learning paths (Norberg et al., 2011; Wanner & Palmer, 2015).

This research explores what students expect of blended learning. Expectations shape student engagement (Orton-Johnson, 2009) and their willingness and ability to engage with non-traditional teaching methods (Bond et al., 2004). In support, Poon (2013) argues that the consideration of students’ expectations is important in the development and implementation of successful blended learning. Poon (2013) adds that it is important to manage such expectations and to encourage students to take more responsibility for their autonomous learning.

Student expectations of blended learning is not an extensively explored area since the research carried out on students’ expectations relates mainly to online learning (Dziuban et al., 2015; Ilgaz & Gulbahar, 2015). In addition, available research (Mitchell & Honore, 2007; So & Brush, 2008) mainly assesses the perceptions of blended learning at the end of a course as opposed to the current study whereby students are interviewed on their expectations at the very start of their blended learning course. The significance of this research is that exploring the psychological contract of students in a blended learning setting has practical implications for course design as well as teaching methodologies. Another aspect of this research that is significant is the application of the psychological contract theory to blended learning exploring student unwritten and unspoken expectations at the onset of a course.

2. Background

2.1. Theoretical framework
The psychological contract theory is the theoretical framework to this study. A psychological contract is a subjective sense of expectations and obligations providing a rich theoretical framework to understanding student needs and expectations in higher education (Bordia et al., 2015). The three main concepts in the psychological contract are as follows: mutuality; psychological (as opposed to legal); and individual (Koh et al., 2004). The first concept on mutuality refers to the two parties in a psychological contract having a set of beliefs on what one is to provide based on perceived promises of a reciprocal exchange. The second concept (Koh et al., 2004) refers to the individual beliefs and perceptions of both unwritten and written terms. The third concept refers to the psychological contract being an individual level construct (Koh et al., 2004).

Bordia, Bordia, and Restubog (2015) place the responsibility on higher education institutions to fulfill student psychological contracts. The latter demands that such institutions know the content of the psychological contract in order to understand students’ goals. Bordia et al. (2015) add that the students’ satisfactory experience is likely to include the perception that the higher education institution understands their goals and supports their achievement.
Koskina (2011) suggests that students have a combination of transactional, relational and ideological elements in their psychological contracts. The following is the definition of the student psychological contract:

The student psychological contract refers to individual or group subjective understandings of the reciprocal exchanges between students, their teachers and their learning institution. It is made up of promissory (transactional) and non-promissory (relational and ideological) expectations that are not written in any formal agreement; yet, they may operate powerfully as determinants of attitude and behaviour, and potentially attrition and performance (Koskina, 2011, p. 1034).

Promissory expectations are obligatory and explicit expectations whilst non-promissory expectations are what students implicitly expect to experience from being students. The latter refer to the ‘implicit teacher’ and the implicit university’.

Bordia et al. (2015) highlight another three elements, namely educational, career development and socio-emotional. Authors add that there are short- and long-term expectations which can lead to short- and long-term outcomes. Psychological contracts are not static and are formed and evaluated throughout the educational journey. Expectations in the psychological contract are prioritized and the fulfilment/breach of such expectations have differing psychological and educational effects depending on the priority given to the expectations that is fulfilled or breached (Bordia et al., 2015).

2.2. Students’ expectations of blended learning

Holley and Oliver (2010) write that the expectations of students in relation to blended learning are shaped by their previous experiences. Students with previous positive experiences of blended learning have more positive expectations whilst students with no experience may experience a mismatch between their expectations of blended learning and their actual experience. Orton-Johnson (2009) highlights various negative expectations of inexperienced students with blended learning. An example of such as expectation is that traditional textual materials are more important and relevant for learning. Orton-Johnson (2009) interprets this expectation as reflecting a desire for students to remain in the comfort zone of the academically familiar and known. Another related expectation is that internet resources will not be perceived by lecturers as academic enough. Orton-Johnson (2009) concludes that such expectations combined with a student lack of confidence create a boundary of trust in traditional forms of learning that students are unwilling to cross.

The expectations of students with no previous experience of blended learning were also researched by Sivapalan (2017) in a study amongst engineering students and using mixed research methodology. Results indicated overall initial skeptical expectations. Students expressed both skepticism and apprehension of having to be part of a new learning environment. They were apprehensive about the support they would receive and about proper internet connections. However, as the semester progressed students found blended learning to be enriching and helpful.

On the other hand, results of a study by Poon (2013) amongst students with little previous experience of blended learning show ambiguity and uncertainty on the part of students. The students participating in this study were not sure about what a blended learning teaching method was. Poon (2013) adds that this result is very much in line with what the literature says about the importance of training to help shape expectations of blended learning.

3. Methodology

Qualitative research methodology was adopted as best suited to the research purpose of this study. The depth and richness of student expectations, that have so far been unspoken and unwritten, are best researched using qualitative research tools. This research was carried out
within the context of the United Arab Emirates tertiary education system in an institution that has over the past years invested heavily in training its faculty in the adoption of blended learning.

3.1. Participants
This study is set in a tertiary education institution offering traditional face-to-face tuition as the primary mode of instruction. However, the institution has over the past few years invested in training its faculty on the integration of online learning with traditional face-to-face learning and offers a few courses in blended learning mode. The participants in this study are a group of female third year business major students reading for degrees in either quality and strategic management, human resource management, innovation and entrepreneurship or, accountancy, in a tertiary education institution in the United Arab Emirates. The variation in participant specialization adds transferability to this research study.

The participants in the present convenience sample of 27 students were recruited in the first week of a course taught in blended learning format that is scheduled for 16 weeks. This was the fourth semester that this course was being offered in a blended learning format. Participants were aware of the blended learning format to be adopted in teaching the course at the start of their first week before the interviews were held. The aim of the research and its anonymity was explained to all students who were asked to voluntarily sign up for the research. Out of 44 students 27 voluntarily signed up for the interview.

3.2. Interviews
Face-to-face, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews were conducted by the author in English, with each interview lasting approximately 60 min. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participants and were transcribed verbatim. The interview procedure clarified the meaning of the words, expectations and blended learning. Participants were questioned about: (1) their general expectations of the blended learning classes (2) their expectations in relation to the teacher (3) expectations of their peers (4) expectations related to the actual learning (5) any previous experience of blended learning.

Probing questions were posed to encourage the elaboration of ideas and expectations. The three main psychological contract concepts, namely mutuality, psychological (as opposed to legal), and individual were addressed in the interview from the perspective of the individual student (individual). Students were asked about their beliefs on what the teacher is to provide in a blended learning setting (mutuality). The questions asked were also aimed at uncovering the students' unwritten and unspoken beliefs and perceptions of learning in a blended learning environment.

An audit trails was kept to increase dependability. Data from the interviews were organized and analyzed using thematic analysis. An inductive approach to the latter was adopted. Reading and re-reading of transcripts was the first stage aimed at immersing oneself in the content. This familiarization of data stage resulted in the identification of codes, themes and sub-themes, and finally patterns.

4. Results

4.1. Themes, subthemes and codes
Participants in this study were almost split equally between students with previous experience of blended learning (52%) and students with no previous experience of blended learning (48%). Three main themes emerged from interview analysis, these are learning expectations, participation expectations and communication expectations. The similarity amongst participant responses throughout the individual interviews served to corroborate the research instrument and the accuracy of responses (Stevenson & Mahmut, 2013). Further analysis of these themes resulted in the subtheme of technology related learning for learning expectations, peer expectations for participation expectations and teacher expectations for communication expectations.
Further thematic analysis of qualitative data resulted in the identification of 16 codes. The codes for the theme learning expectations are: instructor-led learning; learning outcome; active learning; personalized learning; challenge-led learning; innovative learning; using technology. The latter two codes are part of the sub-theme technology related learning. The codes for the theme participation expectations are: active participation; collaboration; peer participation; peer-to-peer learning. The latter three codes are part of the sub-theme peer expectations. The codes for the theme communication expectations are: peer communication; communication with teacher; communication of content; teacher availability; feedback. The latter three codes are part of the sub-theme teacher expectations. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage score of each of the 16 codes identified in this study. The theme with highest number of codes and overall frequency is learning expectations, followed by participation expectations for the sum of frequencies and finally communication expectations. Figure 1, 2 and 3 show that within the theme learning expectations the most frequent code is code 3 active learning, within the theme participation expectations the most frequent code is code 8 active participation and, within the theme communication expectations the most frequent code is code 12 peer communication.

### 4.2. Learning expectations

Participants were asked about both their overall expectations and specifically their learning expectations. In summary, participants had learning expectations of: instructor-led learning, such as the provision of learning materials that are easy organized and varied; learning outcomes, such as application of knowledge, better overall learning and improved knowledge, and successful assessment results; active learning, such as learning in a fun way through problem solving activities and research; personalized learning, such as individual attention; challenging learning, such as through the creation of competitive exercises; innovative learning, such as learning new ways of studying through the use of technology; the use of technology, such as learning the use of software and learning management systems in the classroom.

| Theme                      | Subtheme               | Code                        | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Learning Expectations      | Code 1—Instructor-led learning | 14                          | 5%        |
|                            | Code 2—Learning outcome | 37                          | 13%       |
|                            | Code 3—Active learning  | 43                          | 15.00%    |
|                            | Code 4—Personalized learning | 9                          | 3.00%     |
|                            | Code 5—Challenge-led learning | 9                        | 3.00%     |
| Technology related learning| Code 6—Innovative learning | 3                          | 1.00%     |
|                            | Code 7—Using technology | 25                          | 9.00%     |
| Participation Expectations | Code 8—Active participation | 44                    | 16%       |
| Peer Expectations          | Code 9—Collaboration    | 6                           | 2.00%     |
|                            | Code 10—Peer Participation | 22                       | 8.00%     |
|                            | Code 11—Peer to peer learning | 3                      | 1.00%     |
| Communication Expectations | Code 12—Peer Communication | 38                     | 13.50%    |
|                            | Code 13—Communication with teacher | 15                   | 5.00%     |
| Teacher Expectations       | Code 14—Communication of content | 8                  | 3.00%     |
|                            | Code 15—Teacher Availability | 3                       | 1.00%     |
|                            | Code 16—Feedback        | 3                           | 1%        |
The majority of expectations related to the code active learning. Comments related to fun and entertaining learning activities, learning through research, problem solving activities, group work and collaborative activities, and online quizzes were made by participants. The following statements illustrate this expectation: this class will be more fun; I expect activities that help understanding and I expect research opportunities; I expect the teacher to create activities and I expect not to get bored in class.
On learning outcomes, which was the second most frequent code, participants said that they expect that blended learning will have the following outcomes: broader and new knowledge; information; real life applications; quicker, easier and better learning; better understanding; better memory retention; better scores on assessments. The following statements illustrate this perspective: 

broader knowledge and not just limited to course materials; I expect my attention span to improve in the blended learning setting; I expect to learn more and be better prepared for assessments.

On the subtheme of technology-related learning, participants mainly referred to the use of technology in learning (code 7). Participants primarily spoke about their expectations related to learning more about technology as a learning tool. Comments made were: I expect support in using software; the teacher will assist us in using technology; we will focus on how to use technology in the class room.

4.3. Participation expectations

Participants were asked about their general expectations and expectations of their peers. In summary, participants had participation expectations of: active participation, such as classroom involvement; collaboration, such as peers commenting on each other’s blogs and online communication threads, and collaborative activities; peer participation, such as peers giving feedback to each other and participating in activities; peer to peer learning such as sharing of information and knowledge.

Participants mainly shared expectations related to code 8 active participation. Comments related to own participation and opportunities to share one’s opinions were made. The following statements illustrate this expectation: I expect to participate more in this class; I expect to have the opportunity to share my opinion during online teaching; I can participate a lot and learn more.

On the subtheme of peer expectations, participants mainly referred to peer participation (code 10). Comments related to students participating in chats, blogs and discussion fora were made. The following statements illustrate this perspective: this course will motivate student participation; students will participate more because of the use of technology; I expect my friends to participate and comment on the threads in the discussions fora.
4.4. Communication Expectations
Participants were asked about expectations related to their teacher and peers in class. In summary, participants had communication expectations of: peer communication, such as online communication with peers through blackboard collaborate, discussion boards, communication of ideas and opinions, and respect in peer communication; communication with the teacher, such as to be listened to; communication of content; teacher availability, such as online availability; feedback, such as peer and teacher feedback.

Participants mainly shared expectations related to code 12 peer communication. Students expect peers to communicate in a respectful manner both face-to-face and online, as well as in a less impulsive manner. Students expect peers to use the backboard collaborate chat and blackboard tools such as the discussion board to communicate. Participants expect there to be greater communication in blended learning classes as opposed to traditional classes. The following statements illustrate this expectation: classmates will share information that they are usually shy to say to the whole class; I expect to be less impulsive when communicating with my peers because I can think more before writing on a chat, blog or discussion board; I expect greater freedom of communication of thought; I expect my classmates will respect each other’s opinions.

On the subtheme of teacher expectations, participants mainly referred to code 14 communication of content. Comments related to expectations of clearer and easier content in the blended learning setting as well as the use of real-life experiences in communicating content. The following statements illustrate this perspective: I expect clear and specific communication of materials; I expect communication of real life examples in course materials.

4.5. Previous experience
Participants were asked whether or not they had previously attended blended learning classes. Participants with previous experience (students with previous experience—52%; students with no previous experience—48%) expressed more learning expectations than students with no previous experience. The total frequency of learning expectations for students with previous experience is 76 whilst the total frequency for students with no previous experience is 61. On participation expectations, the total frequency for students with no previous experience is 30 and the total frequency for students with previous experience is 45. Findings once again show that participants with previous experience express more expectations also regarding participation and not just learning. Differently, participants with previous experience expressed less communication expectations than students with no previous experience. On communication expectations, the total frequency for students with no previous experience is 36 and the total frequency for students with previous experience is 31.

4.6. Negative expectations
Negative expectations were mentioned by two of the twenty-seven students participating in this study. Both students did not have any previous experience of blended learning. Apprehension was expressed around not understanding well the lecture, feeling lost and not being able to communicate and interact with the rest of the class. Examples of negative expectations shared in the first week are: It will be harder to learn; I expect it to be difficult to communicate as students may be shy and find it difficult to write in a chat.

However in both interviews these negative expectations were restricted to the first segment of the interview and as the interview progressed more positive expectations emerged. Once the initial apprehension was expressed the students explored more positive expectations like active learning (code 3), using technology (code 7), and teacher availability (code 15).

4.7. Interrelating themes
Findings also reflect the interrelationships between themes. For example, the main themes of participation expectations and communication expectations are interrelated. The codes of
collaboration (code 9), peer participation (code 10) and peer-to-peer learning (code 11) for the main theme of peer participation interrelate with peer communication (code 12) and feedback (code 16) for the main theme of communication expectations. Participants refer to peer communication and feedback when mentioning collaboration, peer participation and peer-to-peer learning. The following are examples of statements reflecting the above interrelationship: I expect peers to give feedback and to comment on each other’s threads and posts (code 10, 12 and 16); peers may answer my question online and I may answer theirs (code 9, code 11 and 12); students will cooperate by sharing ideas (code 9, 10, 11 and 12); I expect that we will participate in activities together, exchanging ideas, exchanging opinions and helping each other to understand the materials (code 9, 10, 11, 12 and 16).

In addition, the main theme of learning expectations interrelates with both the themes of participation expectations and communication expectations. An example is how instructor-led learning (code 1), active learning (code 3), personalized learning (code 4) and challenge led learning (code 5) from the theme of learning expectations interrelate with communication with teacher (code 13) in the theme communication expectations. This is due to the fact that communication with one’s teacher is key in the learning experience. The following statements show this interrelationship: I expect the teacher will give us a lot of information and exercises (code 1 and 13); I expect the teacher to create activities (code 3 and 13); I expect to get individual attention (code 4 and 13); I expect to be challenged and for the teacher to create a competitive environment (code 5 and 13).

Another example is the interrelationship between active learning (code 3) in the theme of learning expectations and active participation (code 8) and collaboration (code 9) in the theme of participation expectations. The following statements show this interrelationship: I expect experiential learning through activities (code 3 and 8); good quality learning in a fun way and I expect my teacher will add more activities and more group work (code 3 and 9).

5. Discussion
The main finding in this study is that the psychological contract of students in the initial stage of their blended learning course combines educational and relational elements associated with expectations of peers and teachers. The expectations are positive in nature, notwithstanding the split between inexperienced and experienced students. The intertwining of educational and relational expectations are in line with the findings by Buckley, Novicevic, Buckley et al. (2004) who describe course contracts as relational contracts. A distinction is draws between traditional courses which are more transactional by nature and dynamic courses, such as course taught in blended learning mode, which are relational by nature.

Student expectations shape student engagement (Orton-Johnson, 2009). The student expectations of active learning, use of technology, active participation and peer communication are promising expectations influencing the students’ engagement with both the traditional and online components of blended learning. Students in this study believe in the value of blended learning as a teaching modality that leads to: broader and new knowledge; information; real-life applications; quicker, easier and better learning; better understanding; better memory retention; better scores on assessments. These positive expectations of blended learning are also reflected in previous studies. Blended learning has been praised for the creation of more flexible modes of education, personalized learning trajectories (Wanner & Palmer, 2015), accessibility to students (Graham et al., 2013), student engagement (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, and individualized learning paths (Norberg et al., 2011; Wanner & Palmer, 2015). This reputation that blended learning is building and the fact that the research study was carried out in an institution that is investing heavily in the shift from traditional to blended learning may have consciously and unconsciously shaped the expectations of students who see blended learning as fun, entertaining, good quality learning, challenging, collaborative learning that leads to desirable learning outcomes.
Another interpretation of these positive expectations may be the context within which the students in this study learn. The context is the UAE context which actively promotes the integration of technology in many aspects of one's life including education (Fenech, Boguant, Ivanov, 2019). The fact that the slight majority of participants had already experienced blended learning may have also served to diffuse a positive attitude in the group of students that although were interviewed individually had most probably already heard from their peers about the nature of blended learning.

Previous studies resulting in more negative expectations of students were carried out amongst homogenous groups of either experienced or inexperienced students. The heterogeneous nature of the group of participants in this study may be an underlying reason behind the positive reactions of inexperienced students which in other research studies were noted as, negative (Orton-Johnson, 2009), skeptical (Sivapalan, 2017) and ambiguous (Poon, 2013). This finding demands further research on expectations carried out amongst students with mixed experiences of blended learning.

Student expectations shape the willingness and ability of students to engage in non-traditional teaching methods (Bond et al., 2004). The students’ expectations in this study of innovative learning, active learning, active participation, collaboration, peer communication and feedback also shapes the openness and confidence of students in new forms of learning that go beyond the traditional forms and that include a strong element of a sense of community.

In line with the latter sense of community, students in a blended learning environment also place considerable responsibility on their peers. The blended learning environment generates in students expectations that peers are more participative, active, respectful, collaborative, good at communicating and giving feedback. Blended learning is therefore perceived as the effort of a community and not an individualized activity and such community is essential for the success of learning. This result may also be interpreted within the context of the UAE where the society is more of a collective that an individual one (Gaweesh & Al Haid, 2018), therefore influencing one’s openness to collaboration and communication. A recommendation is to foster collaborative learning in blended learning such as through web conferencing, discussion boards, social media and group activities.

The role of the teacher in this study is not only viewed as the provider of content however also as that of a facilitator who facilitates activities, the use of technology, collaboration and communication. The teacher is perceived as accessible, available, able to communicate and challenge learners, as well as foster self-directed learning. Blended learning is not only changing the way students perceive teaching and learning however also the role of the teacher is changing. The teacher in a blended learning environment is both that of a facilitator, moderator and supporter (Salmon, 2002). A practical recommendation is that teachers’ explore and take into account the expectations of their students in terms of their role as educators. The role of the teacher in blended learning includes the facilitator of participation, communication, collaboration and independent learning. This recommendation is in line with Bordia’s et al. (2015) recommendation that places responsibility on higher education institutions on fulfilling students’ psychological contracts. Furthermore, this will lead to student satisfaction which is contingent upon their perception that higher education institutions understand their goals and support them in achieving such goals (Bordia et al., 2015). Gani and van der Berg (Gani & Geesje, 2019) in a study on the use of learning management systems by teachers write that teachers still use learning management systems mainly for administration missing out on opportunities to create communities of inquiry.

Another recommendation for education institutions is to add the analysis of student expectations to their already existing systems of student evaluation and feedback. A further recommendation that is in line with students expectations is that made by Evangelou et al. (2007) on the need for learning management system to support the contemporary communication and
collaboration needs of students. They add that learning management systems need to include collaboration tools that can promote learning and encourage creative, parallel, and lateral thinking during collaboration.

The consideration of students’ expectations is important in the development and implementation of successful blended learning (Poon, 2013). Considering the expectations of students in this study is crucial in the development of recommendations in line with students’ expectations. A general recommendation is the implementation of blended learning in one’s teaching. More specific recommendations are orientation sessions for students on the use of technology as students expect to be exposed to new forms of learning and to integrate technology in their learning. Another recommendation is for personalized learning which is one of the advantages of online learning. Students expect their teacher to make use of the blended learning teaching to provide personalized learning. Another recommendation is to build on collaborative teaching by fostering peer communication and participation which in this study transpired to be key elements of students’ expectations.

6. Conclusion
In conclusion, this study explored the psychological contract of students in a blended learning setting uncovering students’ learning expectations and relational expectations towards both the teacher and peers. It has uncovered positive expectations of challenge, participation, communication and collaboration. Students expect to learn from both their peers and their teachers through blended learning as well to learn autonomously through activities, problem-solving exercises and research. Students expect to learn both course content as well the use of technology utilized in online learning. They expect to become innovative learners as they expose themselves to innovative teaching. Learning Management systems and courses are designed keeping in mind the expectations of the end users. Students are asking for learning management systems and course designs that meet their expectations of collaboration, peer and teacher communication, participation, training on the best practice in using technology, challenge such as that associated with gamification and simulations, and learning by doing.

The limitation of this study in that in exploring the psychological contract of the student, the expectations of students following the 16-week blended learning course were not revisited to discover met and unmet expectations and the impact of such experience. It is recommended that in a follow up research study students are interviewed to explore the outcome of their expectations.

A further limitation of this study may be considered to be the non-random sample as this study used the convenience sample of volunteers. A recommendation for further research is to utilize random sampling in assessing the expectations of students. Another recommendation is the exploration of teachers’ expectations in completing the picture of a psychological contract that, like all contracts, is held between different parties; however, unlike other contracts remains unspoken and unwritten.

In future research, it is recommendable to use triangulation by applying various methods to gather data on students’ expectations. This will result in greater confirmability of the qualitative research. An example may be including methods such as observation and analysis of students’ journals in addition to interviews. Another method may also be to involve several investigators to interpret the data and consider the ideas and explanations given by the additional researchers.

On the generalizability of findings, the potential of generalization in this research study is not of a statistical or theoretical nature, however may be of an exemplary one. Exemplary generalizations, as described by Knottnerus et al. (2020), implies that generalizations may be made to other subjects with similar profiles and in similar contexts. Developing on this idea of exemplary generalizations, one may argue that similar findings may be reported of business undergraduates in institutions that
traditionally teach face-to-face and in which blended learning is just past its initial stages. Further research may be carried out to support or reject this premise on exemplary generalizations.

The concluding recommendation this research study conveys regarding course design is that this needs to be student led and the integration of technology enables such student orientation. Students are asking for the integration of technology in course design to satisfy their needs to connect and collaborate with others and to learn in a more active, autonomous and innovative way. This may be achieved by designing courses that blend face-to-face and online teaching allowing both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration, personalized learning paths, gamification, and different communication fora, such as blogs and discussion boards.

This study also has implications for curriculum management. In deciding the content and structure of programmes and their assessments the expectations of students and teachers offer insights into the organization and pedagogy to be adopted. Blended learning, when incorporated in curriculum management, promises to meet the expectations of students related to active learning, collaboration, flexibility and personalized learning, and community building.

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