STUDENT TEACHERS’ PERCEPTION ON BLENDED LEARNING IN AN IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME: A CASE STUDY AT TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE BATU LINTANG CAMPUS

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to reveal how blended learning was perceived by a group of student teachers enrolled in an in-service teacher training course. A survey using google forms was used to collect data for the study. The research instrument, included nine components of blended learning. A total of 179 student teachers, who were pursuing their Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PDPP), took part in the study. The findings of the study revealed that among the nine components of blended learning, the role of the teacher/lecturer and face to face lessons were the two most important components perceived by student teachers. The third component was role of students in participating in online discussions. Student teachers also revealed they needed to interact with other students, both online and face to face. Any LMS could be accepted in blended learning programmes but ease of use features were perceived to be important to enable them to participate in online discussions and to receive feedback. However, their participation online must be considered as part of their overall course assessment. Attractiveness of the online materials and online sharing of unrelated course materials were perceived as insignificant. Based on the findings, implications and recommendations for future research were also included in the report.

Keywords: Blended Learning; Student Teachers; Teacher Training; In-Service teacher training

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, blended learning, also known as hybrid learning or mixed-mode instruction, has become a popular teaching and learning strategies [1] in the world of education today. With the advancement of ICT in the 21st century and widespread integration of those technologies into the learning communities, blended learning, which incorporates online digital resources with traditional classroom teaching, is becoming more relevant. In blended learning, the student attends the course using face to face interaction mode, self-learning using
electronic, online or other learning management systems (LMS) at own pace and time [2].

Based on literature review, it has been reported that blended learning provided lots of benefits to students. For instance, as most students have multiple learning styles, this strategy is more likely to cater to the individual needs of the learner than the traditional classroom teaching experience. Additionally, the new generation of students today is quite comfortable and enthusiastic to use new technologies such as mobile devices which are readily available and affordable. Hence, the integration of technologies in blended learning, makes learning more meaningful, satisfying and motivating [3]. Numerous other benefits of blended learning have also been reported in past studies such as offering effective learning experiences, facilitating learners’ access to the resources and supplementing the course by giving feedback [4, 5].

Although it has been widely researched and concluded that blended learning has a great deal of positive impact on learning, not many examined the importance of the various components in blended learning [1]. For instance, is the role of teachers in blended learning perceived as important? What about the role of students? Is attractiveness of the LMS used essentially important too? Which component in blended learning is deemed most or least important to students? According to Lu et al. [1], blended learning comprised nine components: (a) role of teachers/lecturers; (b) face to face lessons; (c) role of students; (d) features of online course materials; (e) online sharing; (f) student to student interaction; (g) LMS; (h) assessment and (i) design of activities.

This study aimed to investigate the perception of student teachers towards all the nine components of blended learning incorporated into one of the in-service teacher training programmes they are currently enrolled in. Specifically, the study aimed to address the following questions:

1. What is the perception of student teachers towards the various components in the blended learning programme?
2. Which component(s) of blended learning are perceived as more pertinent?

By addressing the above concerns, the findings of this study would provide important feedback to course designers when designing blended learning programmes as well as for future researchers to expand the body of knowledge related to blended learning.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research methodology to address the predetermined research objectives of the study. Among the quantitative
methodologies, an online survey method using google forms was used to obtain responses from student teachers who participated in the study.

**Population**

The population was taken from a group of student teachers enrolled in a holiday in-service teacher education programme known as Postgraduate Diploma in Education Programme or PDPP (Program Diploma Pascasiswazah Pendidikan) in Teacher Education Institute Batu Lintang Campus. They comprised of 9 groups who enrolled with the institute in November 2018 to undertake primary teacher education programme majoring in English Language, Mathematics, Science, Moral Education, History, Design and Technology, Visual Arts, Geography and Early Childhood Education. At the time of the study, they have been engaged in the PDPP for 6 months using the blended learning mode. A total of 179 student teachers took part in the study. All of them gave their consent to participate prior to the administration of the research instrument.

**Instrument**

Survey questionnaire was used to collect the data of the study. The research instrument was adapted from Cirak Kurt and Yıldırım [6] which consisted of 18 statements for the nine components of blended learning, with two statements to measure each component. Each statement is scored on a 10-point Likert scale with a score of 1 indicating completely disagreement with the statement and a score of 10 indicating completely agreement with the statement. To determine the internal reliability of the items used as well as to determine the suitability of the research instrument for use in the Malaysian education settings, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of reliability were derived and the results indicated acceptable reliability with values ranging from .81 to .85. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of reliability for the overall 18-item was .83 indicating the instrument used was reliable.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Due to the inaccessibility of the student teachers at the point of study, the survey was conducted online using the WhatsApp Social Media and google form as a platform to collect data. Before the research instrument was administered, the student teachers were briefed on the purpose of the study and permission to participate in the study was sought using WhatsApp. Upon agreement of the participants to participate in the study, the google form link was sent to the student teachers. The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. There were 179 respondents involved in the survey.
Data Analysis

The data was analysed using SPSS software. Statistical analyses such as, descriptive statistics, were used to analyse the data. Among the descriptive statistics used were frequency distribution, measures of central tendency and measures of variability. Mean scores were calculated and standard deviation was used to measure variability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study aimed to gather the perception of student teachers on the nine components of blended learning in an in-service teacher training programme. The nine components of blended learning were role of teachers, role of students, design of activities, LMS used, face to face lessons, online course materials, interaction between students, and online sharing.

Table I display the perception of student teachers on the nine components of blended learning. The student teachers perceived the role of the teacher/lecturer as the most pertinent in blended learning programme (M=8.07), followed by face to face lesson (M=7.61), role of students (M=7.54) and student to student interaction (M=7.43). The next four components that fell one scale lower were LMS used (M=6.89), assessment (M=6.79), design of activities (M=6.70) and features of online course material (M=6.61). The least of important was online sharing of unrelated material (M=5.56).

TABLE I. MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF STUDENT TEACHERS PERCEPTION ON THE COMPONENTS OF BLENDED LEARNING

| Components of Blended Learning | Sample Statements                                                                 | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|
| Role of Teachers/Lecturers    | Careful planning by the lecturer is important to arouse my interest in blended learning courses. | 8.07 | 1.58               |
| Face to Face Lessons          | Face to face lessons in blended learning play an important role in my learning experience. | 7.61 | 1.86               |
| Role of Students              | I don’t need to participate actively in online discussions.                       | 7.54 | 1.72               |
| Student to Student Interaction| I am motivated by the fact that I can interact with my friends both online and face-to-face in the learning process. | 7.43 | 1.71               |
| LMS                           | I am comfortable with any LMS (Schoology, Moodle, Edmodo, etc) used for blended learning as long as effective learning takes place. | 6.89 | 2.16               |
| Assessment                    | I am motivated that my performance online is taken as part of my year end assessment. | 6.79 | 2.04               |
| Design of Activities          | The assignment, discussion and feedback provided through blended learning increase my motivation to learn. | 6.70 | 2.02               |
| Features of Online Course Materials | The features (colours, font size, attractiveness) of online materials do not affect my interest in the course. | 6.61 | 1.62               |
| Online Sharing                | Sharing photographs, texts and videos not related to the course can increase my motivation in the course. | 5.56 | 1.34               |
The study concluded that student teachers were mostly concerned with the role of the lecturer and the face to face lessons in the blended learning programme. The role of the lecturer was perceived as the most important component in blended learning. The lecturer needs to have good planning skills in order to arouse the interest of the student teachers in the blended learning course. This was consistent to the reports on previous studies which indicated the importance of the role of teachers in blended learning [7, 8, 9]. The teacher in blended learning needs to guide and monitor progress, give feedback, boost confidence and maintain motivation of the students. However, their roles have been extended to develop learning activities, teaching and learning materials, programme and curriculum for online learning [8].

Equally pertinent was face to face lessons as reported in the study conducted by Kocaman-Karoglu [10]. Although blended learning which combines online learning with face to face learning, the student teachers reported that face to face lessons play an important role in their learning experience. In face to face lessons, student teachers are able to communicate directly with the lecturer and receive immediate feedback, which are part and parcel of an effective learning process.

The third most important component perceived by student teachers was the role of students, which is also consistent with previous studies that concluded the importance of student role in blended learning courses [7, 11]. Student teachers perceived that they needed to play an active role in participating online discussions and related activities to achieve learning.

The component on student to student interaction takes the fourth place. Student teachers perceived that they needed to interact with their friends both online and during face to face session. Interaction with other students was found motivate the students as they were able to learn from each other in the learning process. The finding was found to be similar to the study by Wang [12] where interaction between students was among the effective components of blended learning.

Of lesser importance as perceived by student teachers were LMS used, process based assessment, design of activities, features of online materials and online sharing. Student teachers revealed that there were comfortable with any LMS used in the blended learning course. The features of the LMS, though was perceived to be important, must also be user friendly to allow effective learning to take place. Student teachers also perceived the inclusion of process based assessment as important too where their participation in online activities could be taken into consideration for their overall performance in blended learning programmes. With respect to design of specific activities, student teachers revealed that the discussion and feedback provided in blended learning were important to increase their motivation to learn. On the contrary, the features of the online materials such as colours, font size or even attractiveness of online materials did not influence their desire or interest to study in blended courses. Similarly, sharing of videos, pictures or texts online that are unrelated to the course was found not important got the respondents.
CONCLUSIONS

This study has investigated nine pertinent components of blended learning. These results indicated the importance of the role of course lecturer in organizing the entire blended learning course and that face to face lessons were important aspects in the learning process. The lecturers need to monitor students engage actively in the online discussions and related activities to achieve their learning. Students must be given ample opportunities to interact with each other, either via online or face to face. For blending learning courses to be successful, course designers may enhance user friendly features imbedded in LMS for participation to involve actively in discussions and receive feedback. The study concluded that student teachers were mostly concerned with the role of the lecturer and the face to face lessons in the blended learning programme. The role of the lecturer was perceived to be the most important component in blended learning. The lecturers need to have good planning skills in order to arouse the interest of the student teachers in the blended learning course. The teacher in blended learning still needs to guide and monitor progress, give feedback, boost confidence and maintain motivation of the students. However, their roles have been extended to develop learning activities, teaching and learning materials, programme and curriculum for online learning.

Blended learning can be considered as part of their overall assessment. Attractiveness of the online materials and sharing of unrelated course materials online were perceived as not important.

Additional study to further validate this finding needs to be conducted as this study was conducted on one group of student teachers enrolled in an in-service teacher training programme in one of the institutes in Sarawak. The same study could be replicated in different teaching institutes in other parts of Sarawak or Malaysia to shed more light on the results of this study and to give more comprehensive account on the importance of the nine components of blended learning.

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