Learning Quality in Blended Learning: A Study of Management Students' Perceptions and Experiences

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Abstract
This study investigates the perceptions of management students regarding blended learning in the Kerala district. A descriptive research design was employed to collect data from 180 students through a structured questionnaire. The data underwent analysis using exploratory factor analysis mean ranking. The results revealed that 'Faculty technology competence' obtained the top rank with the highest mean score, followed by Learner interaction and Learner engagement.
Keywords: Blended Learning, Faculty Technology Competence, Learner Engagement

Introduction

Higher education institutions have firmly established themselves in the contemporary highly competitive global market. The pressure on business organizations to satisfy their clients is immense, and similarly, higher education institutions bear a distinct responsibility to effectively compete for their students' enrolment and engagement. The prevailing market trends clearly suggest that universities are progressively embracing blended learning approaches. This is primarily because mixed learning is perceived as offering students an enhanced quality of learning environment, thereby fostering greater student success and satisfaction. India has seen a proliferation of private educational institutions, spurred by increased demand for excellent education and rising middle-class ambitions (Vijay Mallikraj et al.).

Numerous advancements are reshaping the landscape of teaching and learning, with technology playing a pivotal role in the rise of blended learning. Despite undergoing a gradual evolution, this innovative pedagogical method has swiftly gained acceptance. The inception of blended learning strategies, which combine traditional classroom instruction with online components, represents a key development. However, the successful implementation of such initiatives, particularly in developing nations, poses significant challenges in becoming a truly transformative practice in education.

The growing demand for blended learning programs presents the challenge of selecting the most suitable instructional design from a multitude of options that may be viable for a specific program. The decision-making process must carefully consider various qualitative factors, including meeting the learning needs of students, enhancing educational outcomes, ease of implementation, and overall financial implications (Smirlis and Ioakimidis).

Literature Review

Blended learning, an educational technique that mixes traditional face-to-face classroom methods with online learning activities, is becoming more common in higher education. The goal of this hybrid paradigm is to improve educational results by combining the benefits of both online and offline learning. This literature review investigates the quality of learning in blended learning environments, with an emphasis on management students' opinions and experiences.

Blended learning has evolved as a response to the growing need for flexible and accessible education. According to (Graham), blended learning is defined by the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences. This approach offers numerous benefits, including increased access to education, improved student engagement, and the potential for personalized learning (Garrison and Kanuka). Students' perceptions of learning quality are crucial in evaluating the effectiveness of blended learning environments. Research by (Owston et al.) suggests that students generally perceive blended learning positively, appreciating the flexibility and the opportunity for a more interactive learning experience. However, the perceived quality can vary depending on several factors, including course design, instructor effectiveness, and technological infrastructure (Means et al.).

Research has found that blended learning results in improvement in student success and satisfaction, (Dziuban and Moskal; Means et al.) as well as an improvement in students' sense of community (Rovai and Jordan) when compared with face-to-face courses. (Dziuban et al.) conclude that although combined learning preceded modern education technology, its evolution is inextricably linked to contemporary ICTs approximate some aspects of processes of human thinking. Management students often have distinct needs and expectations regarding their education, influenced by the practical and application-oriented nature of their field. According to a study by (Alavi and Leidner), management students value interactive and collaborative learning experiences that allow them to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. Blended learning environments that facilitate such experiences are perceived to be of higher quality.

Through their research (Kintu et al.) shown that mixed learning design features (technology quality, online tools and face-to-face support) and student characteristics (attitudes and self-regulation) predict student satisfaction as a result. The results indicate that some of the characteristics of the student and the context and design features are important predictors of blended learning for student learning outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the important factors explaining students' perception towards blended learning
2. To determine the most important factor explaining blended learning
3. To offer suitable suggestion for a better blended learning environment.

Design of the Study and Sample

In order to meet out the objectives a descriptive research design is adopted in the present study. To measure the students' perception towards blended learning a total of 200 questionnaires were distributed among post graduate management graduates in Kerala state out of which 180 valid responses were received. The students were approached through convenient sampling. Primary data was collected with the help of instrument developed by (Savara and Parahoo). All the items were measured on a five point likert scale. The dimensions used in the present study are (Technology infrastructure quality (6 items), Learner engagement (7 items), Faculty technology competence (5 items), Learner interaction (3 items), Quality of course design (3 items)). To examine the factor structure in the sample population an exploratory factor analysis was conducted.

Analysis

To identify the key dimensions explaining blended learning perception of management student 24items were subjected to principal component analysis out of which two items were removed due to poor loading. The values of Kaiser-Meyer-Ohlin (KMO) and Bartletts test gave satisfactory result. After varimax rotation a five-factor matrix structure evolved with 23 items with a loading of more than

.50. The five factors are Technology infrastructure quality, Learner engagement, Faculty technology competence, Learner interaction and Quality of course design.

Table 1 KMO and Bartlett's Test Results

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.833
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4293.358
	df	2531
	Sig.	.000

Table 2 Rotated Component Matrix Results

Rotated Component Matrix[a]					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
TIQ1	.687				
TIQ2	.810				
TIQ3	.768				
TIQ4	.814				
TIQ5	.824				
TIQ6	.750				
LE1		.696			
LE2		.726			
LE3		.772			
LE4		.790			
LE5		.801			
LE6		.626			
FTC1			.774		
FTC2			.766		
FTC3			.823		
FTC4			.686		
FTC5			.805		
LI1					.844
LI2					.745
LI3					.859
QD1				.890	
QD2				.756	
QD3				.852	
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.					

Mean Ranking of Factors Influencing Learning Quality

After the exploratory factor analysis the five factors were subjected to mean ranking test based on the mean scores of the respective constructs. Results show that the factor 'Faculty technology competence' secured the first rank with the highest mean score followed by Learner interaction and Learner engagement.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study on 'Learning Quality in Blended Learning: A Study of Management Students' Perceptions and Experiences' provides valuable insights into the evolving landscape of education. As traditional learning methods are increasingly supplemented with digital platforms, understanding student perceptions and experiences becomes crucial for enhancing educational quality and outcomes.

It can be inferred from the results that the blended learning approach is more beneficial for students who are skilled in using certain computer programs and applications. The results of this study are of interest to educators and managers of blended learning. The findings showed that achievement of learning quality was supported by five factors: technology infrastructure quality, learner engagement, faculty technology competence, learner interaction and quality of course design.

In conclusion, blended learning represents a promising approach to modern education, especially in the field of management studies. By leveraging the strengths of both traditional and digital learning methods, institutions can create a dynamic and flexible learning environment that meets the evolving needs of students. Continued research and innovation in this area will be essential to fully realize the potential of blended learning and ensure that it contributes to the overall enhancement of learning quality.

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