Review of Blended Learning Definitions

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the definitions of blended learning, presents a relatively comprehensive understanding of blended learning definitions, and provides a reference of blended learning for future research.

Keywords: *Blended Learning, Definition, Review*

1. INTRODUCTION

As online learning has been more and more popularized, the integration of traditional face-to-face learning with online learning seems to be inevitable. Therefore, blended learning is fast developing and becoming the main learning mode in recent years. However, the question that might first come to our mind is: What is blended learning? This section will give an answer to this question according to the literature available.

The terms "blended learning", "hybrid learning", "technology-mediated instruction", "web-enhanced instruction", and "mixed-mode instruction" are often used interchangeably in research literature (Margie, 2003). Whereas, there is no doubt that the most commonly used term of them all is blended learning. According to Catalano (2014), the notion of blended learning is based on constructivist theories about learning that are represented by Jean Piaget (1896-1980), John Dewey (1859-1952), L. S. Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Heinze (2008). The formal terminology to describe blended learning occurred in the late 1990s. Just as Friesen (2012) stated that "Blended learning" appears to have been in use since the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the late 1990s. The terminology was founded first in 1999 according to the literature available; Phipps & Merisotis (1999) described that blended learning has been referred to as the "third generation" of distance education systems. Cooney et. al. (2000) carried out one of the first studies that used the term "blended learning", aiming to combine elements of play and work in a pre-kindergarten school in order to acquire blended activities.

Starting from the 21st century, blended learning began to develop into a fast model, including the definition of the term. Blended learning, a combination of face-to-face and online instruction, is seen as one of the most important advancements of this century and a natural evolution of the learning agenda (Thorne, 2003). Although Güzer and Caner (2014) have identified 2003-2006 as the "definition period" of blended learning, the author of this dissertation believes that the "definition period" actually starts from 2001.

2. LIST OF BLENDED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

The author listed the academic definitions of blended learning in the 21st century in table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of blended learning in the 21st Century

Author	Year	Definition
Colis & Moonen	2001	Blended learning is a hybrid of traditional face-to-face and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online, and here the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning.
Singh & Reed	2001	Blended learning can be described as "a learning program where more than one delivery mode is being used with the objective of optimizing the learning outcome and cost of program delivery".
Valiathan	2002	Blended learning is used to describe learning that combines various event-based

		activities, including face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning, and self-paced learning.
Osguthorpe & Graham	2003	Blended learning should include the combination of online and face-to-face learning environments.
Procter	2003	Blended learning is the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning.
Clark	2003	Blended learning is the use of two or more distinct methods of training.
Garrison & Kanuka	2004	Blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences.
He Kekang	2004	Blended learning is a combination of the advantages of traditional way of learning and E-learning.
Garrison & Kanuka	2004	Blended learning is a student-centered approach to creating a learning experience whereby the learner interacts with other students, with the instructor, and with content through thoughtful integration of online and face-to-face environments.
Joy-Matthews, Megginson, & Surtees	2004	Blended learning is a learning process that makes use of a variety of media and methods and includes some form of electronically mediated learning.
Graham	2005	Blended learning is a learning combination between face-to-face and self-paced online learning.
McSporran & King	2005	Blended learning means to personalize and individualize the teaching and learning activity in order to suit different learning needs of a diverse public from diverse professional areas.
Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal	2005	Blended learning is a global method of instruction that combines efficiency and opportunities of socializing in the classroom together with the possibilities of active learning in an online medium.
Oliver & Trigwell	2005	Blended learning is the combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment", or "the combination of a number of pedagogic approaches.
Klink	2006	Blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experience with online learning experiences.
Graham	2006	Blended learning is the combination of the instruction from two historically separate models of teaching and learning: traditional face-to-face learning systems and distributed learning systems.
Bonk & Graham	2006	"Blended learning systems" are learning systems that "combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction".
Allen et al	2007	Blended learning refers to blended education as a course that blends face-to-face and on-line delivery where 30–79% of content is delivered on-line.
Li	2007	Blended learning is the optimization selection and combination of all the teaching elements which aim to achieve the teaching aims.
Garrison & Vaughan	2008	Blended learning is the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies.
Maciuc	2009	Blended learning represents a learning/teaching system that combines and interprets multiple aspects and study specific approaches.
Köse	2010	Blended learning can be defined as an educational approach that combines different models of face to face and distance education and makes use of all technology types belonging to educational studies.
Chew et al.	2010	Blended learning describes a variety of teaching which integrates both face to face and online delivery methods.
Malcevschi, Maestri, Marmiroli	2011	Blended learning is the combination of multiple approaches to learning. These methods may also include a mixture of face-to-face classrooms, self-paced learning and online classrooms.
Friesen	2012	Blended learning designates the range of possibilities presented by combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical copresence of teacher and students.
Safranj	2013	Blended learning refers to a mixing of different learning environments.

Yigit et al	2014	Blended learning is the coherent integration of e-learning and traditional learning to address our educational goals.
Georgsen & Lovstad	2014	Blended learning is a combination of instruction, both methods and delivery media from two archetypical learning environments, the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning environment and an ICT-mediated or e-learning environment.

3. SUMMARY OF BLENDED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

Besides these definitions, there were also some researches summarizing the definitions. Graham et al. (2003) summarized the definitions into three common themes: combining instructional modalities (or delivery media), combining instructional methods and combining online and face-to-face instruction. Whitelock and Jelfs (2003) opened a journal special issue on this topic with three definitions: 1. the integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches (drawing on the work of Harrison); 2. the combination of media and the tools employed in an e-learning environment; and 3. the combination of a number of pedagogical approaches, irrespective of learning technology use (drawing on the work of Driscoll). From an organizational perspective, Driscoll (2002) identifies four different ways in which blended learning can be defined. Blended learning can be seen as:

• A mix of modes of web-based technology;

• A mix of various pedagogical approaches (e.g., constructivism, behaviorism, cognitivism);

• A combination of any form of instructional technology with face-to-face instructor-led training;

• A combination of instructional technology with actual job tasks (in order to create an effective mix of learning and working).

Horn and Staker (2014) explained that the definition of blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns:

1. At least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace;

2. At least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home;

3. And the modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.

One thing that might be noticed is that although there are many definitions of blended learning, only one definition has a concrete proportion of blending. The Sloan Consortium (see Allen et al., 2007) refers to blended education as a course that blends face-to-face and on-line delivery where 30–79% of the content is delivered on-line.

Lastly, what can be emphasized is that some of them (Boddy et al., 2013; Finn & Bucceri, 2004; Dziuban et al., 2004; Procter, 2003; Driscoll, 2002) integrated the "effective" in the definition, which shows that the purpose of blended learning is to achieve the expected effectiveness even when it's defined. This learning model aims to provide more effective educational experiences by combining features and functions of well-known learning and teaching techniques (Harriman, 2004; Williams, 2003). Just as Wang et al. (2009) mentioned that educators used blended learning to maximize the advantages of traditional face-to-face learning and online learning. The term blended learning (BL) is perhaps the most prominent delivery mechanism in higher education (Curtis et al., 2005).

4. CONCLUSION

This paper provides a relatively comprehensive introduction of blended learning definitions. The reason why there are so many blended learning definitions is that blended learning is a hot trend and will be definitely the main teaching approach in future. According to the research available, I suggest to make some more specific and detailed definitions to be more practical in the future. One of the limitations is that it is not possible to include all the definitions of blended learning in the academic world. For the future research, it is also suggested that the application of these definitions could be explored. It is hoped that this paper can be taken as a reference for other research concerning blended learning in future.

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