Perspectives of Pre-Service Teachers About Blended Learning in Technology Integration Courses

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study explores pre-service teachers’ perspectives towards using blended learning in technology integration courses. Data were collected through surveys and interviews with pre-service teachers enrolled in technology integration courses in a large Midwestern university. Findings from the study showed that pre-service teachers had favorable perspectives towards using a blended learning approach to teach technology integration courses. The majority of pre-service teachers preferred that the technology-integration course adopt a blended format instead of a traditional face-to-face format; however, it is uncertain if students will be more motivated to study in a blended technology integration course than in a traditional face-to-face one. The study has implications for higher education faculty, instructional designers and technology specialists.

KEYWORDS

Blended Learning, Mixed Methods, Pre-Service Teachers, Technology Integration

INTRODUCTION

In recent years blended learning has gained more and more popularity in colleges and universities around the world. It has been associated with pedagogical innovation and a student-centered approach. Garrison & Kanuka (2004) define blended learning as “a thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (p. 96). Many benefits are associated with blended learning, including its potential to strengthen higher order thinking skills (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) and its emphasis on reorganization and reconceptualization of teaching and learning, causing educators to reflect on course design and delivery (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) discussed key elements for successful blended learning, mentioning integration of face-to-face and online learning environments, restructuring and replacing traditional class contact hours and a careful rethinking of the course design to optimize student engagement. Gerbic (2003) argues for more research “to further investigate the relationships between beliefs about blended learning and practices” (p. 230). Little research has been conducted on the use of a blended learning approach in technology integration courses required in teacher preparation programs. In order to better prepare pre-service teachers for their future careers, it would be beneficial for students in technology integration courses to experience blended learning first hand as well as receive meaningful learning experiences combining two modalities: face-to-face and online. This study aims to explore pre-service teachers’ perspectives about using blended learning to teach technology integration courses. The following research questions guide the study:

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1. Quantitative:
   a. What are pre-service teachers’ perspectives about use of blended learning to teach technology integration courses?
   b. How do pre-service teachers’ previous learning experiences influence their perspectives on using blended learning to teach technology-integration courses?
2. Qualitative:
   a. How do pre-service teachers describe their perspectives towards blended learning in technology integration courses?
3. Mixed Methods:
   a. To what extent do the quantitative and qualitative data converge? How and Why?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous literature states that an intersection of two pedagogies online and face-to-face as found in blended classrooms raises much interest because of its ability to combine strengths of online and face-to-face environments and compensate for weaknesses of both (Gerbic, 2011; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). Whereas research has been conducted that looked into blended learning practices in general, limited research can be found pertaining to blended learning in teacher preparation technology integration classes. Recent studies discussed effective blended learning approaches that were used at university classrooms. For example, Schumann and Skopek (2009) implemented a blended learning approach to improve learning relationships between on campus and off campus students. Holley and Dobson (2008) used a blended approach to address students’ learning issues and encourage non-traditional student engagement. One thousand students participated in a project that combined traditional lectures and online tasks aimed to lessen the impact of uncertainties associated with the start of the year for new students. The study offered insights into how students use time in a blended environment and described students’ perceptions and experiences with a blended environment. The study found that online activities enhanced discussions and participation whereas in-person collaborative learning activities reduced possible isolating effects of the online environment. Ausburn (2004) used a blended approach to personalize student learning and provide students with a variety of self-directed opportunities. A total of 67 education majors who were adult learners enrolled in blended courses at a large state university in the United States. They completed a questionnaire and a self-test that classified students into groups based on their preferred learning strategies. Blended courses combined class meetings with self-directed study and collaborative work. The study concluded that having learning options and a variety of activities that allowed for self-directed learning were important for adult learners taking blended courses. In addition, the study revealed that adult learners valued two-way communication with both course instructors and classmates and benefitted from reminders and announcements.

Alonso, Manrique, Martinez and Vines (2011) evaluated a blended learning approach in an undergraduate engineering course. Students chose to either enroll in a distance learning or a blended learning course. The study showed the effectiveness of a blended approach. Similarly, Wong and Tatnall (2009) studied online versus face-to-face instruction in an introductory accounting course through the use of interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and document analysis. The study suggested that a level of interaction between students and an instructor had a significant influence on students’ learning and satisfaction and that interaction in the classroom contributed to students’ overall learning experiences. Al-Qahtani and Higgins (2013) studied effects of face-to-face, blended and online delivery on students’ achievement by conducting an experimental study. All three groups were similar when it came to curriculum, course materials and their majors. In addition, participants were matched in terms of technology skills and experiences. Blended learning was found to provide a clear advantage in terms of student achievement. Taylor, Atas, and Ghani (2017) studied the experiences of students and instructors in a graduate education course using a qualitative study. Analyzed interview data,
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