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Face-to-face Sessions Versus Online Activities In a Blended Learning Environment in the Term of Students' Perception

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Introduction

a. Overview:

Introduction Overview: The outstanding growth and changes being experienced today in science and technology affect, develop, and change education in every field. New models have appeared in learning and teaching processes as a result of these changes. One is blended learning, which is a learning environment that combines the pros offered by the web-based learning environment and the face-to-face learning approach (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). Face-to-face education environment provides more opportunities for social interaction, which students need to guide them through their learning while the web-based learning environment provides the time and place flexibility which is not possible in the classroom (Abate, 2004). Students are supported by the learning materials provided by the web-based instruction when they are out of the classroom and they can continue their face-to-face education in the blended learning environment within a certain timetable (Dabbagh & Ritland- Banan, 2005). This blended model was meant to increase learners' engagement by:

1. Replacing some face-to-face class sessions with online interactive learning activities to promote increased engagement with course material, continuous interaction with peers and faculty, and contextualized discussion based on daily experiences;
2. Replacing some face-to-face class sessions with online interactive learning activities to allow students greater flexibility in scheduling of responsibilities and increased opportunity for community engagement; and
3. Adding an online learning environment to allow participation by specialists and stakeholders beyond the official faculty (Scardamalia, Marlene & Carl Bereiter, 2006).

لمحة عامة :-

يؤثر التغير والنمو البارز في العلوم والتكنولوجيا اليوم على التعليم وعلى مدى تطوره. وقد ظهرت نماذج جديدة في التعلم وفي عمليات التدريس كنتيجة لهذه التغييرات. ويعتبر النموذج الأول ما يتعلق بالتعلم المختلط وهو عبارة عن بيئة تعليمية تجمع بين الايجابيات التي توفرها بيئة التعلم عبر الإنترنت ونهج التعلم المباشر (اسوتروب وجرهام ٢٠٠٣). وتوفر بيئة التعلم وجهاً لوجه مزيد من الفرص في التفاعل الاجتماعي والذي يحتاجه الطلاب في تقديم الارشادات اليهم ومن خلال تعلمهم ومن ناحية أخرى توفر بيئة التعلم عبر الانترنت المرونة في الوقت وفي المكان والتي من الاستحالة الحصول على مثل هذه المميزات في الفصول المدرسية (ابات، ٢٠٠٤).

ويتم دعم الطلاب بواسطة مواد التعلم التي تقدم من خلال التعلم عبر الانترنت بينما يكونوا بعيدا عن الفصول المدرسية ومن ثم يستطيعوا التعليم وجها لوجها من خلال بيئة التعلم المختلطة من خلال جدول زمني معين (داباغ وريتيلاند - بنان، ٢٠٠٥). ويعني نموذج التعلم المختلط زيادة في تداخلات المتعلمين بواسطة:

١- استبدال بعض الدورات التدريبية وجها لوجه مع أنشطة التعلم التداخلية عبر الانترنت لترويج زيادة التفاعل مع مواد البرنامج والتفاعل المستمر مع الزملاء والكلية والمناقشة بناء على الخبرات اليومية.

٢- استبدال أنشطة التعلم الفعالة عن طريق الانترنت للسماح للطلاب بمزيد من المرونة في جدولة المسؤوليات وزيادة الفرص في التفاعل مع المجتمعات و

٣- إضافة بيئة تعلم عبر الانترنت للسماح للمشاركة بواسطة الاختصاصيون والمساهمون بخلاف أعضاء هيئة التدريس (سكاردامليا، ماريلن وكارل بيريتز، ٢٠٠٦).

Statement of problems:

As educators in blended learning environments, we were interested in investigating the benefit of students from the two approaches which are included in this learning model, face-to-face meetings and online activities. Through our experience, we found that some students had difficulties with engagement to face-to-face meetings and managing their time in order to attend all their classes. They felt that they don't need to attend their classes physically with the online activities that fulfill their needs from the course. Another group of students were complaining that due to the lack of interaction in the online activities, they have lost the ability to interact with their classmates freely and express their ideas in all different ways, but what has affected them mainly is not getting the attention they need in the online environment as enough as when they meet their instructors and each other in school.

c. Goals and Significance:

The purpose of this study, which was conducted on students participating in blended learning programs in different schools and colleges, is to compare between face-to-face sessions and online activities in the term of students' preference and perception. We were looking to demonstrate which one of the two methods help students to learn better. We were aware of the importance of both of them; however, our goal from this study, which made it significant for our career, was to extract the advantages of each method and try to increase them at the expense of the disadvantages. We also planned to focus more on one of the two approaches in our classes based on the results of this study.

Literature Review

We decided to review the literature that discussed terms like blended learning, e-learning, traditional learning and online learning to investigate their concepts, strengths, challenges, and advantages and disadvantages from students' perspective and experiences. This way we could collect more information about our research topic that focused on comparing between f2f sessions and online activities in a blended learning environment in the term of students' preference and perception.

Blended Learning :

• Concept and Existence:

The literature supports the concept of blended learning and emphasizes on the large existence of this learning model as a part of the learning process today. According to Allen and Seaman (2010), “thirty percent of all higher education participants are taking at least one course online” (p. 2). Advances in technology have many learning institutions offering online programs to accommodate the needs of students. Approximately 63% of academic leaders reported online learning is an important factor when looking at their long-term strategic goals of providing degree granting programs, to provide educational opportunities to students who cannot, or choose not, to attend classes on a college campus, and to provide training opportunities for economic development (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Yaman, 2009). Hybrid learning is also becoming popular as a blended learning environment. Allen and Seaman defined hybrid learning as “web facilities [traditional] format, where web-based technology is used to deliver 1% to 29% of the course contents such as syllabus and assignments” (p. 5).

• Advantages:

In her study which compared between e-learning and blended learning in accounting courses, N.S. Abdel Mageidd (2014) considered some advantages of the blended learning, such as:

- Greater flexibility of time, responsibility, and control to students for their learning.
- Increased flexibility of access to learning that reinforces the student’s autonomy, reflection, and powers of research.
- Ensure continued ease of access to curricular materials and instructional/learning processes.
- Blended courses help instructors to identify best practices to engage students and encourage them to be active participants in the course though developing online learning environments that provide opportunities for interactive and collaborative learning.

- It facilitates improved learning outcomes, effective use of resources, and student satisfaction. Thus, blended courses have higher success rates and lower withdrawal rates than their comparable face-to-face courses and fully online courses.
- It enables students to become more motivated and involved in the learning process by enhancing their commitment and perseverance.
- Creating a community of inquiry beyond the classroom allows learners to connect and collaborate with their peers and to create a learning environment that integrates social, cognitive, and teaching elements in a way that will precipitate and sustain critical reflection and discourse.
- Blended learning focuses on optimizing achievement of learning objectives by applying the right skills to the right person at the right time. (N.S. Abdel Mageidd, 2014)
- **Challenges:**

In their field report which outlines the goals of providing a blended learning model for an interdisciplinary training program for healthcare professionals who care for children with disabilities, G. R. Lotrecchiano, P. L. McDonald, L. Lyons, T. Long & M. Zajicek-Farber found that transitioning from a traditional f2f program to a blended model with graduate-level coursework certainly produced challenges. These challenges related primarily to faculty and learner time; level of effort; and familiarity, skill, and comfort-level with the online platform.

Trainees struggled with time management. Before the blended format, a major portion of their experience occurred in the classroom for didactic work (8 h in one designated day), which proved easier to secure. With the blended format, these busy professionals, who faced challenges balancing a variety of responsibilities, often found themselves challenged to organize their virtual and real-time agendas. (G. R. Lotrecchiano, P. L. McDonald, L. Lyons, T. Long & M. Zajicek-Farber, 2013).

Some other challenges faced blended learning style were considered by N.S. Abdel Mageidd 2014 in her study which compared between e-learning and blended learning in accounting courses. They are:

- Students may have difficulties with more sophisticated technologies.
- Students may assume that fewer classes mean less work, and have inadequate time management skills.
- Students may experience a lack of motivation and accepting responsibility for personal learning.
- Students may feel isolated due to the reduce opportunities for social interaction in a face-to-face classroom environment.
- Lack of university support for course design. (N.S. Abdel Mageidd, 2014)

• **Online Versus Face-to-Face Instruction:**

Although there are many similarities between online and face-to-face learning experiences, there are unique challenges to online learning, especially with adult learners (Park & Choi, 2009). Often online programs are populated by nontraditional students, with multiple competing demands on their time, including families and other job responsibilities. This can result in higher attrition of students in online programs than those taught face to face (Herbert, 2006; Rovai, 2003; Walsh, Abi-Nader, Poutiatine, 2005). Despite this reality, limited learning outcome differences have been found between online and face-to-face instruction. Comparative research between online and face-to-face instruction has been conducted in a variety of universities with a variety of students and in a multitude of courses—many of which were not based on professional education and traditional education methods courses. Researchers examining learning differences between online and face-to-face college students found significant differences did not exist between delivery formats (Johnson, Sutton, & Poon, 2000; Lim, Kim, Chen, & Ryder, 2008; Warren & Holloman, 2005).

- **Students' Preference and Satisfaction:**

Gibson and Harris (2008) reported that students who preferred face-to-face education also preferred some more personal interaction between students and faculty and favored a more structured study program, while those who favored online education possessed a more independent learning style.

Warren and Holloman's (2005) study of online instruction outcome revealed no significant difference in students' satisfaction between online and face-to-face sections. A comparison of a face-to-face and online course analyzed by Ernst (2008) found 85% of student participants from an online instruction group, either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable in an online learning environment. Further, Reissetter et al.'s (2007) examination of student satisfaction and quality of learning in online and face-to-face learners, exposed equal measures of learning outcome and satisfaction despite the dissimilar learning experiences.

- **Role of teachers:**

Lee and Dashew (2009) cited the importance of teacher collaboration, pedagogy, and interactive learning when developing hybrid programs at Marist College. When teachers make the best use of traditional and non-traditional learning, student learning is enhanced.

The function of teachers in online and face-to-face learning experiences has been found to have limited differences as well. Diaz and Entonado's (2009) examination of instructor functions (e.g., the work or activities of teachers) in online and face-to-face learning settings focused on content area, student and teacher interaction and design. Overall, the results observed no relevant variance in the functions of teachers in online and face-to-face courses; if differences did exist, they were likely to be as a result of teacher involvement and institutional commitment (Diaz &Entonado,2009).

Methodology

This research was conducted by survey that contained mix methods qualitative and quantitative. Students who have blended classes participated in this research project.

Subjects:

There were 94 students participated in the research project. All of the students have blended classes. 40 students have blended classes at California State University – San Bernardino graduate and undergraduate students. 54 students also have blended classes at Loma Linda University.

Research design:

This research project aim to examine the college students' perceptions about blended classes. The question for our research was as follow: In a blinded learning environment, what do students prefer and benefit more from, face-to-face sessions or online activities? Why? We used a survey that contained twelve items to determine students' perceptions; we also used descriptive statistics to draw overall pictures of the students' perception. The participations responded a survey about their experience in the blended classes. All the items on the survey were about their preference in the blended classes. First of all, the items start with asking the students about their preference classes weather it is face-to-face classes or online classes or blended classes and their reasons for choose the answer. Second of all, items that contained list of choices for their reasons to prefer face-to-face and online classes. Third of all, items contained a scale about their opinion if the face-to-face or the online classes support their learning. Forth of all, scales also about their opinion if the communications and the interactions were easier in the face-to-face environment. Finally, items scales about their perceptions about the blended classes and the face-to-face classes, if they satisfied with their blended classes. Here is our survey link:

Date Collection:

We collected emails from both universities (California State University – San Bernardino and Loma Linda University) for students who have blended classes though students study there. We were able to collect 120 emails, and then we sent an email about our research. We got 100 respond from the students, they like to participate on our survey, so we sent the link for our survey witch was built on Google forms and contained twelve items. Luckily, 98 students answer the survey items. There were four duplicated answers that we removed from the results. The final numbers of the participations were ninety-four. We insured that all the items in the survey must be answered otherwise no one con submitted the survey.

Data Analysis:

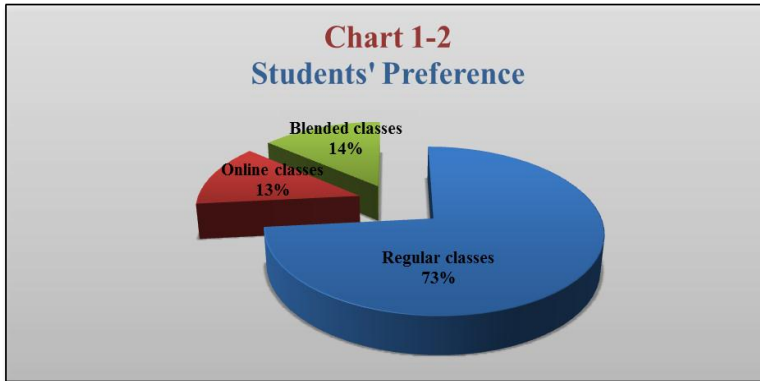
Statistical analysis was performed with Excel for these questions: 5- Face-to-face sessions support my learning. 6- online activities support my learning. 7- Communication is easy in the online environment. 8- Interaction is easy in the face-to-face environment. 9- I prefer blended classes rather than online classes or face-to-face classes. 10- I learn more on the face-to-face discussion rather than the online discussion. 11- it would be easier to ask questions through the face-to-face class rather than the online class. 12- I am satisfied with my blended class. We have used mean, median, and mode to compared the data (see chart 1-1). For these questions: 1- what do you prefer? 3- I would prefer to have face-to-face class because. 4- I would prefer to have online class because. We have analyzed the data by using frequently and frequently distribution (see charts 1-2, 1-3, and 1-4). Also, for the qualitative question which was why you chose the answer above (face-to-face or online or blended classes)? We used the frequently and frequently distribution to analyses the data (see chart 1-5).

Results:

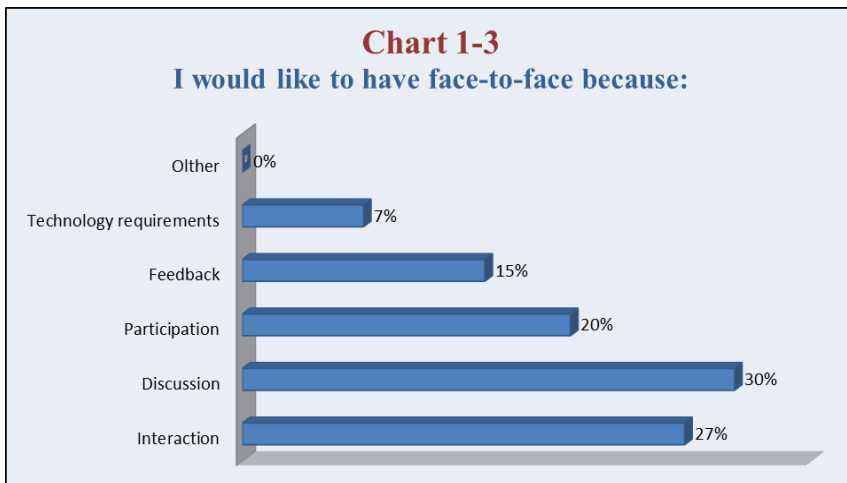
In this research project 94 students participated to answer the survey questions. The average of the students' opinion about weather the face-to-face classes support their learning or not was 4.29. On the contrary, their average for the questions about the online classes support their learning was only 2.72. Another question was about the communication on the online environment, the average was just 2.48. Conversely, students' opinion about the interactions in the face-to-face classes was 4.18, and for the discussion were 3.86. Most of the students do not prefer blended classes whereas their average for this question was 2.56. Also, a questions about their satisfaction about blended classes the average was 2.81, and the median was 3 as well as mode (see chart 1-1).

Chart 1-1			
Questions	Mean	Median	Mode
5- Face-to-face sessions support my learning.	4.29	5	5
6- Online activities support my learning.	2.72	3	3
7- Communication is easy in the online environment.	2.48	2	2
8- Interaction is easy in the face-to-face environment.	4.18	4	5
9- I prefer blended classes rather than online classes or face-to-face classes.	2.56	3	3
10- I learn more on the face-to-face discussion rather than the online discussion.	3.86	4	5
11- It would be easier to ask questions through the face-to-face class rather than the online class.	3.74	4	5
12- I am satisfied with my blended class.	2.81	3	3

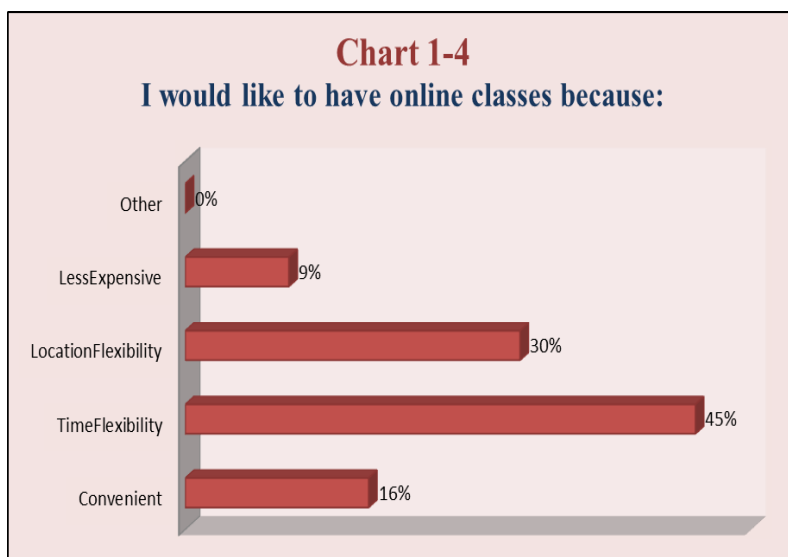
Moreover the results showed that 73% of the students prefer regular classes rather than online classes or blended classes (see chart 1-2).



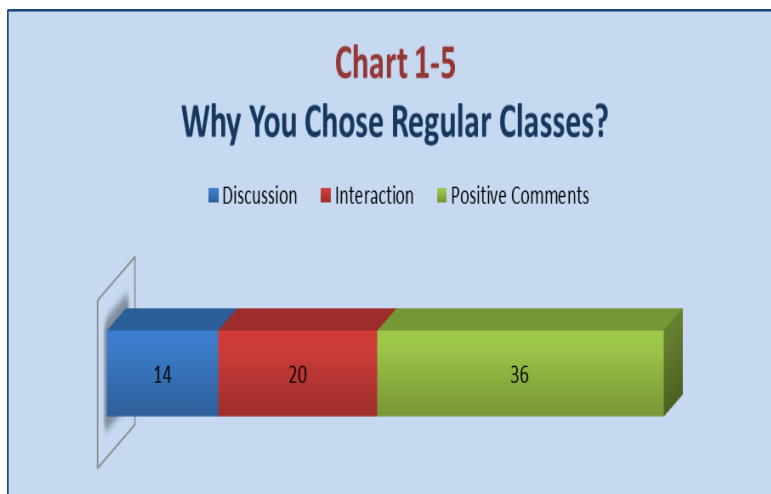
More than 30% of the students who have blended classes see that the discussion the most important module to have this kind of classes, and 27% for the interaction and became participation, feedback, and technology requirements (see chart 1-3).

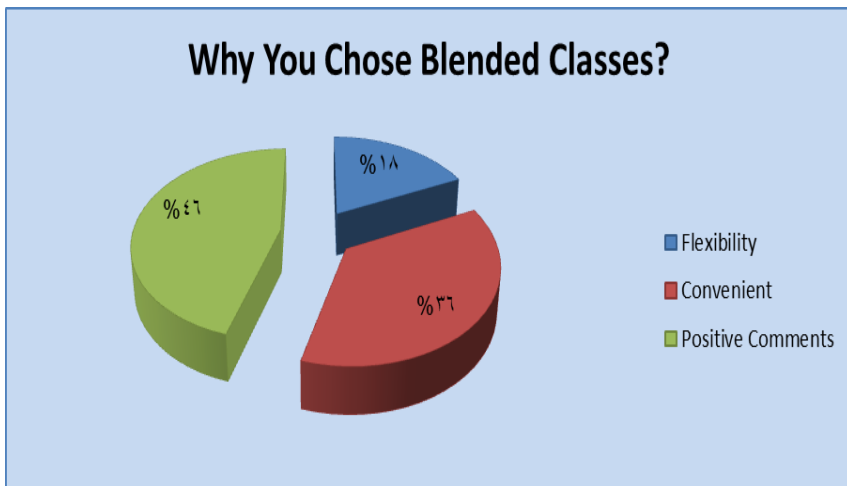
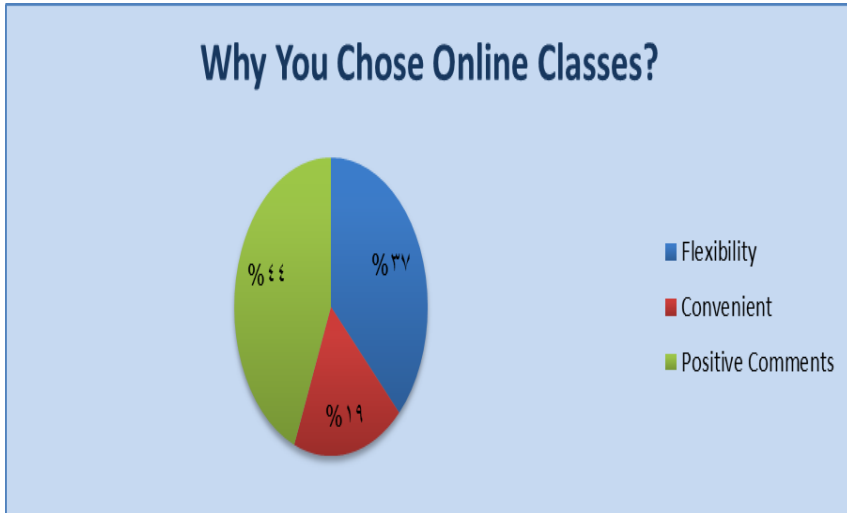


For online classes 42 students which is 45% preferred online classes due to the time flexibility, and 30% for the location, and the for its convenient and because it is less expensive (see chart 1-4).



A qualitative question about students' reasons for chose face-to-face or online or blended classes findings showed that students who have chosen face-to-face classes preferred this class because discussion, and interaction and another benefits, and for the online classes most answers were for their flexibility, convenient, and another benefits as well as blended classes (see chart 1-4).





Discussion:

With the advancement in technology, a lot of universities have now started online programs using eLearning techniques to facilitate their students. Though eLearning provides great benefit to the students who cannot attend universities during daytime, still it, alone, cannot provide the quality of learning that is found in face-to-face classes. Face to face classes enables student to interact directly with the instructor and ask as many questions as they want to. A teacher also gets better teaching

experience while teaching in face to face sessions. The online platforms, on the other hand, have got some advantages as well. Students can access learning material at any time of the day. Students get easy access to all learning resources with a single click. Everything is at single place; assignments, lectures, quizzes, etc. The online learning platforms create ease for teachers by automating the opening and closing time for assignments and quizzes so that the students can attempt an assignment or quiz only within the assigned time. Merging eLearning platforms with face-to-face classrooms creates blended learning which is very effective. We have surveyed 94 students, and the results turned out to be majority supporting the blended learning.

Research Limitations:

There is an item that we could have removed it because it was already in our survey, which is the qualitative question why you chose the answer above because the questions number 3 and 4 in the survey have already answered these questions. The answers in this question was similar to the questions we provided in questions 3 and 4 which we spent a lot of times to analysis it. It would be much better if we have removed this question.

Conclusion:

The survey results conclude with the fact that blended learning is more effective as compared to face-to-face learning alone. Face to face classrooms allows students to have a better interaction with instructors. But along with face-to-face classrooms, implementing eLearning is a very effective strategy which provides 24/7 access of learning resources to students. Students can access learning resources on a single click; assignments, quizzes, lectures, etc. Also, students can clear their confusions using resources on eLearning that they had in classrooms while attending the classroom lectures. The eLearning platforms also have discussion forums where can students can post their queries, and other students can share their responses. Also, the students can directly interact with teachers on the online platforms.

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