

Blended learning odyssey in physical education - A case study

● Ms Punithavathy Palanisamy, Learning Strategist, Centre for Innovation in Learning



Blended learning, hailed as a highly effective trend in higher education (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004), became a pervasive norm at the National Institute of Education (NIE). In our pursuit of insights into this transformative shift, we sought to capture the experiences of faculty members who embraced blended learning. Dr Zason Chian from Physical Education and Sports Science (PESS) shares his experiences and insights on implementing the blended learning approach in his classes.

1. How would you define blended learning in your own words?

I would say blended learning is an educational method that seamlessly integrates online and classroom components, encompassing learning materials, activities, and interactive engagements to create an enriched learning experience.

Blended Learning

2. Please share your implementation of blended learning approach

I employ a blended learning (BL) approach across all my courses, be it pre-service or higher degree programs. A key BL method I favour is Flipped Learning. Ahead of each session, I upload reading materials and short videos on Blackboard (NTU Learn), to engage my learners in preparatory reading. During our face-to-face classes, we delve deeper into the content through discussions guided by leading questions.

To cater to our active learner profile, I have introduced gamification using tools like Kahoot! for quizzes and polls during sessions. This often gets my learners excited and driven to compete to be featured in the leaderboard. Collaborative learning is another regular practice in my courses. I initiate discussions among students using online platforms to share their experiences of applying the techniques taught in the classroom. I believe this encourages diverse perspectives.

For in-service professionals with demanding schedules, I have embraced microlearning. I have developed a MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) course featuring bite-sized topics, allowing learners to conveniently absorb content at their own pace.

I incorporated interactive devices in the classroom for real-time application and feedback as a follow-up to the demonstration videos that the learners watch prior to the class. These devices tracked physiological aspects like EEG (Electroencephalogram), allowing me to provide feedback on the learners' relaxation state. Additionally, I utilised apps to test concentration levels, engaging students by demonstrating the practicality of these tools in daily life.

3. What motivated you to adopt a blended learning approach?

In my teaching career, I have seen a shift in how digitally literate learners have become. As educators, we must embrace these shifts and adjust our teaching methods to engage our learners actively. Blended learning provides us with the space and freedom to integrate technology seamlessly.

I am highly considerate of the time learners invest in commuting to attend classes. The lessons must be worth their time and effort. Zoom, which I discovered during the pandemic, proved that learning can thrive online beyond traditional classrooms. Post-COVID, my ongoing use of Zoom continues to be well-received by learners.



4. Can you elaborate on the planning phase of your blended learning activities?

In planning my blended learning activities, I examine the course content to identify opportunities for blending. Take, for instance, a topic on relaxation techniques that involves hands-on activities. Despite the need for in-person demonstrations, I leverage blended learning by providing demo videos and leading questions online. During face-to-face sessions, students showcase their understanding by demonstrating the techniques, and I offer feedback.

I recognise that online learning can be effective from my experience conducting online lessons during COVID-19, so I continue conducting Zoom lessons to cover conceptual content. However, I maintain a balanced approach, mindful of the preference for personal interaction in classroom settings. Classroom environments allow for direct engagement with the tutor and online settings provide flexibility and convenience, catering to those who appreciate the independent learning. I solicit feedback from learners to gather their preferences on the meeting mode and make adjustments along the way.

5. What was the most positive experience you had while implementing blended learning?

The most positive experience in implementing blended learning was the success of gamification using tools like Kahoot! and Mentimeter. This approach generated excitement among learners, encouraging them to assess their mastery of concepts actively.

Pre-lesson readings and videos were well-received by learners, with some attending class well-prepared with questions. While acknowledging diligent learners, I also addressed queries from those who had not prepared by starting with an overview of the readings. Emphasising the relevance of these materials to daily practice encouraged learners to engage more with the learning materials. We were able to delve deeper into the practical application as the conceptual understanding were acquired by the learners at earlier phase.

My learners appreciated the activities incorporating interactive devices in the classroom for real-time application and feedback as a follow-up because they were able to relate readings and videos to the actual context.



Use of actual device in class to give a real experience for the learners

6. What are your thoughts on the challenges of self-directed learning in blended learning courses?

Speaking from my experience with a MOOC course for in-service teachers, developing resources for self-paced learning has been a challenge for me. I developed learning videos to serve as valuable learning resources within the MOOC course. The complexities of the COVID-19, adding an extra layer of difficulty. Coordinating the crew for filming and production became a logistical challenge.

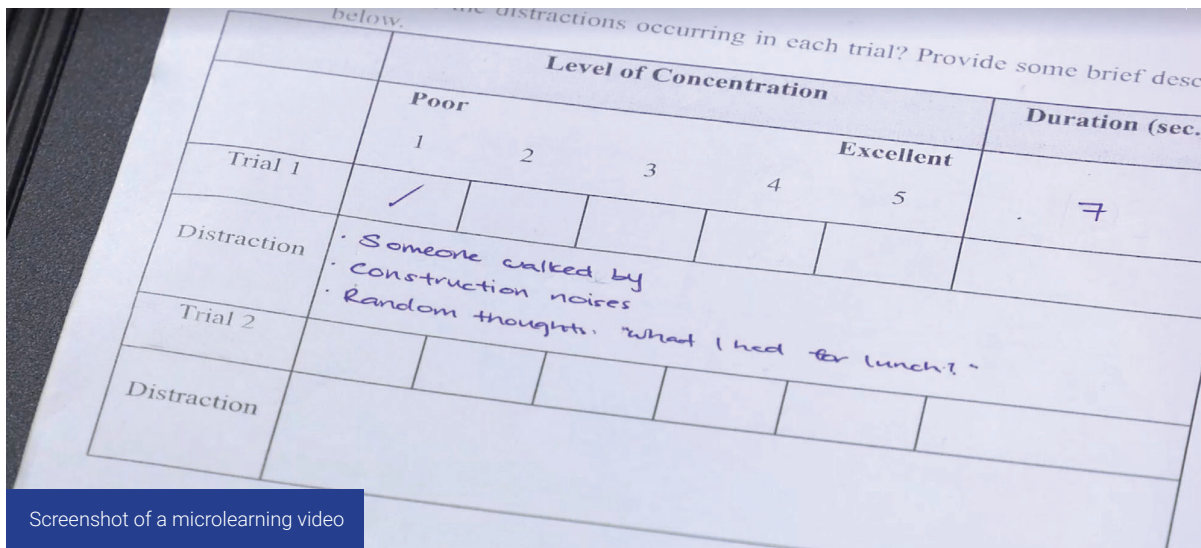
The fully online nature of the course presented complexities in gauging learners' progress and attitudes toward the content and teaching methods. Unlike face-to-face interactions, the online setting lacked the space for personal coaching with immediate feedback, especially evident in practical skills like applying relaxation techniques. Despite providing video demonstrations for clarity, the challenge remained in assessing the techniques' accuracy.

During asynchronous periods, minimal to no interaction was observed. I am still figuring out how to effectively engage learners online, acknowledging the importance of fostering a sense of connectivity and support. Using check-in tools and initiating personal conversations with individual learners might aid in engaging the silent learners.

Blended Learning

7. How has adopting the BL approach helped you professionally in technology-enabled pedagogy?

Adopting a blended learning approach has broadened my perspective on the potential of technology in enhancing the learning experience. Witnessing the rapid evolution of technology and its impact on learners' attitudes towards learning has been eye-opening. Although I do not consider myself a tech expert, I am continuously on the lookout for latest technological advancements and how they can be relevant and beneficial in educational settings. I engage with my colleagues and participate in technology-related webinars to stay updated on the latest trends. One example is Gen AI tools. I am now currently exploring Gen AI tools that can facilitate the learning resource development and help my learners with self-paced learning.



8. What is your message to your peers in NIE about adopting blended learning in their teaching and learning approach?

To my peers at NIE considering adopting blended learning in their teaching and learning approach, I acknowledge that designing a blended course can be challenging, and some may question the need for change when traditional classroom teaching has been a norm. My encouragement is for faculty to adopt an open-minded approach, taking small steps to address students' needs.

It is essential to question whether learners still prefer full courses in traditional classrooms. The experience of the COVID-19 era demonstrated that virtual teaching and learning can be as effective, if not more so, and learners appreciate the flexibility it offers. Changing the learning environment can create a fresh and engaging learning experience for students. I understand that redesigning courses might not be within the comfort zone for educators, but the process does not have to be undertaken alone. Involving learners by communicating about the blended approach can help you decide on how to combine online and classroom activities. Sharing expectations and gathering the learners' feedback can provide valuable insights into what works and what does not. It is important to be reflective and persevere in our efforts to create a meaningful learning experience for our learners.

Conclusion

We hope that Dr Chian's insights offer a compelling perspective on the impact of blended learning on the learner experience. By integrating this approach into your courses, not only can you create a more engaging and meaningful learning experience for your students, but you can also foster professional growth in technology-enabled pedagogy.

References:

Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 7(2), 95-105.