

The Art of Promoting Blended Learning through Blended Pedagogies in Higher Education Classrooms

Serole Selina Ramapela ¹ 

¹ Department of Education Studies, University of Limpopo, Sovenga, South Africa.



ABSTRACT

The transformation of teaching and learning has increasingly become explicit and common in higher education institutions. The teaching and learning policies and principles for international and national educational systems dictate access to education for all. Instructors and students were subjected to the abrupt educational changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which required advanced and specialised skills, knowledge, competency and attitude from instructors to facilitate learning. The new normal situation required the exploration of innovative and alternative ways of teaching. Technology became the mode of instruction for convenience and effectiveness in curricula delivery. This study explored the art of promoting blended learning through active blended pedagogies for exceptional classroom contexts. These pedagogies and learning methods are characterised to be flexible and innovative to teach in non-traditional ways. The grounded and constructivist theories provided the premise of reference. The Life Orientation Level 3 pre-service student teachers were included in this inquiry to understand their learning contexts. Focus group interviews were conducted to obtain their experiences of these alternative teaching and learning approaches and contexts. The findings revealed that students benefited from the unconventional teaching and learning teaching models. This study concludes that higher education institutions can play a vital role in reinforcing the use of technology and e-learning systems to promote teaching and learning. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the higher education institutions completely implement the blended e-learning systems and technology to enhance students' learning experiences and for improved teacher efficiency.

Correspondence

Serole Selina Ramapela

Email:

selina.ramapela@ul.ac.za

Publication History

Received:

4th October, 2024.

Accepted:

10th January, 2025.

Published:

5th March, 2025

Keywords: *Blended Pedagogies, Blended Learning, Higher Education Classroom, Instructor, Non-Traditional.*

INTRODUCTION

Blended learning involves the extensive levels of intergration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online experiences to engage student in active learning activities and teacher efficeincy.¹ With the high enrolment in education systems, the conceivable delivery of successful teaching and learning experiences and students' content is immensely affected.

Learning is one of the most central actions within the educational setting that involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are embedded either directly or indirectly in the

¹ D. Randy Garrison and Heather Kanuka, "Blended Learning: Uncovering Its Transformative Potential in Higher Education," *The Internet and Higher Education* 7, no. 2 (2004): 95–105.

curriculum.² It directs varied experiences among individual students. The success of a teaching activity primarily includes activities that are suitable for the basics and nature of the learning process. Teaching and learning as combined refer to a transformative process from the teacher to the learners.³ The teacher formulates the learning objectives and develops teaching resources while implementing the preferred teaching and learning strategy. Hence, if students are expected to exhibit their active participation in the teaching and learning circumstances, they need to be provided with equal opportunities and experiences that discharge their learning capacities.

The literature confirms the anticipation of many challenges and issues related to remote learning and education against the traditional modes.⁴ The abrupt interference caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has exaggerated the persistent need for higher education institutions and school systems to instantaneously reconsider their pedagogical practices by exploring innovative and alternative ways while sustaining inclusive practice and relooking at the disparities of access to technology and its impact. The growing use of technology as educational interventions and the approaches to learning and teaching have evolved in a pervasive way to embrace perpetuate the need for blended learning programmes in academic institutions.⁵ Higher education institutions are adopting the new traditional teaching and learning models or becoming the new normality in the teaching-learning process.

This study explores the notion that the use of face-to-face and online environments are intended to optimise the learning experiences of students with the aid of blended online pedagogies. The student-teachers' reflective accounts to the blended learning environments taking into consideration the previous and current circumstances. The preceding literature confirms the lack of research evidence where student-teachers present their experiences of blended teaching models and learning and the growing use of these approaches.⁶ Through intensive focus groups among selected student-teachers, the general impression of online learning and education was examined to gather their qualitative anecdotes and learning experiences.

The various descriptions of blended learning and pedagogies are documented in this study. The characteristics and crucial elements of blended learning and pedagogies are addressed.

Blended learning refers to a form of education where students receive instruction through a combination of online and face-to-face support.⁷ It provides a comparable description of blended learning "as a formal education programme in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace; and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home."

The blended pedagogy promotes student-centred teaching and learning that support the development of subject knowledge and understanding, independent learning and digital fluency.⁸ The flipped classroom, hybrid learning, or mixed learning allows diverse teaching and learning activities and teaching styles and methods that are used interchangeably by lecturers and educators. Face-to-face teaching is facilitated in a practically and collaboratively but is clearly linked to learning activities outside the classroom. One of the elements of active learning is to encourage students to reflect and consider what, why, and how they are learning. This allows them to think critically and make connections of the learning material.⁹ Bonk et.al. are of the opinion that contemporary teachers will play a key role in becoming blended learning specialists in the future. They will need to possess the relevant knowledge and skills required for traditional classroom settings and virtual environments.¹⁰

² James E Mazur, *Learning and Behavior: Instructor's Review Copy* (Psychology Press, 2015).

³ Afzal Sayed Munna and Md Abul Kalam, "Teaching and Learning Process to Enhance Teaching Effectiveness: A Literature Review," *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)* 4, no. 1 (2021): 1–4.

⁴ Sebastian Vaida, "A Brief Analysis of the Pros and Cons of Online Adaptive Learning and Education," *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai-Psychologia-Paedagogia* 65, no. 1 (2020): 31–39.

⁵ Samantha Adams Becker et al., "NMC Horizon Report: 2017 Higher Education Edition," *New Media Consortium*, 2017.

⁶ Liliana Cuesta Medina, "Blended Learning: Deficits and Prospects in Higher Education," *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* 34, no. 1 (2018).

⁷ Kevin Oliver and Dallas Stallings, "Preparing Teachers for Emerging Blended Learning Environments," *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education* 22, no. 1 (2014): 57–81.

⁸ Stefania Cassar et al., "Active Blended Learning in the Undergraduate Classroom: Effects on Student Learning and Student Engagement," in *INTED2020 Proceedings (IATED, 2020)*, 2734–42.

⁹ Isabelle Cherney, "Active Learning," in *Promoting Student Engagement*, vol. 1 (Society for the Teaching of Psychology, 2011), 150–56.

¹⁰ Curtis J Bonk and Charles R Graham, *The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs* (Wiley+ ORM, 2012).

This study portrays the reflective accounts of student-teachers in the blended learning environments taking into consideration the previous and current circumstances. The literature confirms that students' reflections on blended learning are limited and the rapid growth of using it has created a need to conduct further research to optimize its use.¹¹

LITERATURE REVIEW

Majority of South African higher education institutions and school systems have been experiencing a high rate of student enrollment from both rural and suburban areas. This required the institution of higher learning to be highly systematised and the education systems and curricula were improved in pursuit to optimise the ever-changing teaching and learning contexts. The excellent academic performance and positive attitude toward learning were anticipated outcomes resulting in the continuation of incorporating diverse and active teaching approaches. The evaluation and monitoring of high-quality classroom learning experiences to capacitate and empower students to be self-reliant were implemented. The pre-service student teachers indicated that their analytical and creative skills have improved and they have acquired self-regulatory skills to perform and achieve their academic goals.

The Role of Learning Models

Gibbs asserts that overly reliance on online learning material promotes surface learning in students; hence, they are expected to distinguish relevant material to use to complete learning tasks.¹² Gibbs strongly points out that the online and content material should be carefully integrated for meaningful and efficient learning. In concurrent studies, the Pedagogical and the Victorian Teaching and Learning Models assist principals, school leaders, teachers, students and parents or caretakers to work together while forming strong and effective learning communities that create and sustain better outcomes for students.¹³ In responding to the students' learning needs, the Pedagogical Model provides a flexible and efficient guideline for effective teachers to engage their students in various intellectual activities. The Model provides an overview of the learning cycle with five essential domains or phases of instruction that occur simultaneously; namely; engage, explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate.

For the purpose of this study, the instructor considered integrated models of blended teaching and learning with the intention of providing increased student choice and improved learning. As blended learning has been described as a mode of teaching that eliminates time, place, and situational barriers, the possibility of achieving an enabling high-quality interaction between the instructor and students was planned and anticipated.¹⁴ The strategies that promote getting student attention, maintaining engagement, and re-engaging both online and in the classroom are considered suitable for measuring blended learning practices in various contexts.¹⁵

The Valuation Outline of the Models of Blended Teaching and Learning

Pedagogies are changing and growing on a rapid scale to influence the practice in academia globally.¹⁶ This predicament calls for the urgent need to be innovative and meet the needs of students. By virtue of this view, it is important to be mindful that the pre-service students through the teacher's education and training are equipped and empowered to possess and demonstrate knowledge, skills and qualities that make them to be effective classroom instructors.¹⁷

¹¹ Michael Barbour, Leanna Archambault, and Meredith DiPietro, "K-12 Online Distance Education: Issues and Frameworks," *American Journal of Distance Education* (Taylor & Francis, 2013).

¹² Graham Gibbs, *Improving the Quality of Student Learning* (University of South Wales (United Kingdom), 2005).

¹³ "Victorian Teaching and Learning Model 2.0," February 13, 2025,

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/improve/Pages/Victorianteachingandlearningmodel.aspx>.

¹⁴ H. Kanuka, C Brooks, and N Saranchuck, "Flexible Learning and Cost Effective Mass Offerings," in *Improving University Teaching (IUT) Conference, Vancouver, BC, Canada*, 2009.

¹⁵ L.M. Jeffrey et al., "Strategies for Engaging Students: Help and Hindrances in a Blended Learning Environment" (Wellington, New Zealand: Ako Aotearoa, 2012).

¹⁶ Charles Dziuban et al., "Blended Learning: The New Normal and Emerging Technologies," *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 15 (2018): 1-16; Michael A Pizzi, "Blended Learning Pedagogy: The Time Is Now!," *Occupational Therapy in Health Care* 28, no. 3 (2014): 333-38.

¹⁷ Kim L Creasy, "Defining Professionalism in Teacher Education Programs.," *Online Submission* 2, no. 2 (2015): 23-25.

- Content knowledge allows them to provide learners with relevant and applicable information for real life;
- Skills refer to the pedagogy or art of teaching and managing effective classrooms.
- Dispositions address all the aspects relating to professionalism and learning contexts.

Blended teaching models have proven to provide varied learning benefits and accommodate the learning preferences of students. Some of these benefits include flexibility, personalisation, increased access to learning resources, improved collaboration, enhanced engagement and better insights. Students are able to engage in face-to-face and online environments. Students' levels of motivation and commitment to learning are optimised. In addition to these benefits, blended teaching and learning increases interactivity among students and furthermore develops student skills and expertise as learners.¹⁸

Blended learning models on the other hand provide integrated learning experiences and also broaden understanding of certain learning material presented in diverse classrooms.¹⁹ The model has transformed the higher education sector even for the next generation.²⁰ It incorporates the instructional modalities, methods and online with face-to-face instructions.²¹ Blended learning is currently regarded to be among the newly introduced instructional techniques and has transformed the teaching and learning milieu.²²

Blended classrooms and online teaching and learning are pronounced to offer a varied range of learning methods to develop the student's skills and expertise as learners.²³ Students are able to study independently and structure their learning experiences to meet their individual needs.

Blended learning significantly enhances student-learning outcomes and caters to various types of learners. For the purpose of this paper, a careful choice of application of effective teaching models and their blended teaching learning roles are explained.²⁴

- The flipped classroom model has been commended to allow teachers to focus on providing individualised support and guidance while allowing students to move at their own pace. It also helps to engage students in the learning process and to be able to apply their knowledge more meaningfully.
- The station rotation model plays a vital role in combining traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning activities. It also allows students to work in their comfort spaces and in the way that best suits their learning styles by creating an engaging and dynamic learning environment tailored to each student's needs.
- The flex model is considered to provide students with the choice to learn materials from various sources. It also encourages them to be more independent and take more responsibility for their learning.
- Individual rotation model focuses on a different learning modality for the students to concentrate on the subject matter that optimise their interest in the learning process.
- The A la carte model provides students with continuous guidance and support as they progress through the learning material. They interact with the teacher in real-time and in real life situations. Classes are offered by the educational institution and are performed as usual, while students can select from the provided set of times and courses.
- The online driver model allows the instructor to guide and support the students as they progress through the material. The instructor uses discussion boards and video conferencing to facilitate student collaboration and provide additional resources to enhance learning.

¹⁸ M. Cleveland-Innes, "Facilitation and Teaching Presence: Using the Community of Inquiry in Blended and Online Learning Environments," *Invited Presentation. KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Faculty Development Course, Stockholm, Sweden*, 2018.

¹⁹ Guorui Fan, "Changes in Educational Institutions in China: 1978–2020: Analysis of Education Policies and Legal Texts from a National Perspective," *Handbook of Education Policy Studies: Values, Governance, Globalization, and Methodology, Volume 1*, 2020, 111–29.

²⁰ Cher Ping Lim, Tianchong Wang, and Charles Graham, "Driving, Sustaining and Scaling up Blended Learning Practices in Higher Education Institutions: A Proposed Framework," *Innovation and Education* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

²¹ J Hannon and C Macken, "Blended and Online Curriculum Design Toolkit. La Trobe University," 2014.

²² V. Rao, "Blended Learning: A New Hybrid Teaching Methodology.," *Online Submission* 3, no. 13 (2019).

²³ Cleveland-Innes, "Facilitation and Teaching Presence: Using the Community of Inquiry in Blended and Online Learning Environments."

²⁴ Heather Staker and Michael B Horn, "Classifying K-12 Blended Learning.," *Innosight Institute*, 2012.

- Project-based learning engages students with the learning material and offers a deeper understanding of the topics to be learned. It gives students the ability to focus on topics they need to master and allows them to move forward when they feel ready.
- The adaptive model creates personalised learning experiences for each student. It also provides students with immediate real-time feedback to adjust their learning plan rapidly and stay on the learning track.
- The hybrid learning model combines digital and in-person learning. It also allows for a more personalised learning experience with virtual education.
- The virtual game-based model combines both virtual and physical components. It also makes learning more interactive and engaging for students to participate actively in the learning process.
- Problem-based learning focuses on active, student-centred and experiential learning. It also allows students to explore real-world problems and create solutions by applying the knowledge and skills acquired in their real lives.
- Mastery-based learning model provides students with opportunities to progress through the material at their own pace, focusing on the topics they must master before moving on to others. It also allows students to become more active participants in their learning process and to take ownership of their education.

For the purpose of this paper, the instructor was very reliant on the online but integrated face-to-face pedagogies to maintain a fair determination of the impact of both on the pre-service student teachers' learning experiences. The instructor ensured that the pre-service student teachers were motivated and well-prepared for engagements. Their learning experiences were prioritised and through systematic observations, the pre-service student teachers were able to share their perspectives at liberty.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Blended learning is combining multiple learning components and learning events to create a meaningful learning experience. The new developments in learning science and technology provide opportunities to develop learning environments that suit students' needs and interests by offering them the choice of increased flexibility. Therefore, a mix of traditional and new learning approaches and technology could be appropriately utilised for flexible learning through synchronous and asynchronous formats. Blended learning allows the combination of various pedagogical approaches such as constructivism, behaviourism (objectivism) and cognitivism to produce an optimal learning outcome with or without instructional technology.²⁵

Behaviourism/objectivism and constructivism have been reported to be specifically inclined to both face-to-face and online learning, though the use of technology in online courses has gradually marked a significant theoretical balance from behaviorism to constructivism because of the improved use of educational technologies.²⁶ Instructors would still choose to utilize a combination of these approaches to best meet the learning styles of students. The selection of a specific medium of instruction is dependent on context and blended learning model and would therefore concentrate on instruction rather than only the contact environment.²⁷ The combination of blended learning approaches has become popular in the educational higher education realm by instructors who are positive about their efficacy though Woods et. al. discovered limited literature on academic practice in a blended environment but the current practice could be improved through better understanding when preparing to make changes to the practice.²⁸

²⁵ Johannes Cronje, "Towards a New Definition of Blended Learning," *Electronic Journal of E-Learning* 18, no. 2 (2020): 114-121.

²⁶ Mary Anne Weegar and Dina Pacis, "A Comparison of Two Theories of Learning--Behaviorism and Constructivism as Applied to Face-to-Face and Online Learning," in *Proceedings E-Leader Conference, Manila*, vol. 6, 2012.

²⁷ Richard Clark, Paul A Kirschner, and John Sweller, "Putting Students on the Path to Learning: The Case for Fully Guided Instruction," *American Educator* 36, no. 1 (2012): 5-11.

²⁸ I Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, "Conflicted: Faculty and Online Education, 2012.," *Babson Survey Research Group*, 2012; Robert Woods, Jason D Baker, and Dave Hopper, "Hybrid Structures: Faculty Use and Perception of Web-Based Courseware as a Supplement to Face-to-Face Instruction," *The Internet and Higher Education* 7, no. 4 (2004): 281-97.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The qualitative research approach was specifically chosen to understand the individual's thoughts, feelings, opinions, and reasons behind their emotions.²⁹ The instructor (the lecturer) was able to gather in-depth and rich insights from the participants who are pre-service student teachers on the topic of enquiry.³⁰ A rich and nuanced understanding of their perspectives, emotions, beliefs, and motivations in relation to specific issues, situations, or phenomena was certainly managed.

Research design

The research design forms part of making choices and articulating a rationale for the choices that researchers use to plan the study.³¹ This enquiry considered the basic interpretive studies research design to provide descriptive accounts that are aimed at understanding a phenomenon through various ways.³² The process enabled the instructor to understand the world experience of the pre-service student teachers on their understanding and perceptions of how the blended pedagogies improved their experiences of blended learning. Their authentic descriptions of the phenomenon were acceptable and valuable for the instructor to create logical meaning for the study.

Sampling

To gain information and to explain perceptions of an event and ideas or experiences from their perspective, the representation of a total sample of 12 Life Orientation third-year level students who were registered for the year 2023 were purposefully selected from a class of 120 pre-service student teachers for the study. The participants were selected because of their common characteristics of all of them majoring in Life Orientation. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the well-organised schedule and a guide for the six sessions in each focus group. The schedule and the guide were shared and discussed with each focus group prior to conducting the interviews and that allowed the process to be more flexible and conceivable.

Data collection

The elements of the interview schedule and guide for observations as elucidated by:³³

- Greeting and creation of rapport
- Description of time or duration of the interviews
- Explanation of the objective of the study
- Description of the focus group participants' roles and responsibilities
- Description and clarification of the focus of the interview questions
- Description of their general conduct during the focus group discussions

These elements of the interview schedule and guide were incorporated to allow the instructor to consider during the envisaged interviews. The instructor applied these elements as a means to structure the interviews and to ensure that research participants who are the pre-service student teachers could interchange with common understanding and to offer more complete picture regarding their experiences of alternative teaching and learning approaches for their contexts.

The two sets of interviews were created during the three-month period during the normal classroom periods, particularly for each focus group to participate on behalf of the entire class. The focus groups presented their authentic reflections while observed by the instructor and their reflections of experiences of the instructor's use of active blended teaching and learning opportunities were noted and

²⁹ Denzin K. Norman and Yvonna S Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Chicago: SAGE Publications, 2017).

³⁰ Irene Korstjens and Albine Moser, "Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and Publishing," *European Journal of General Practice* 24, no. 1 (2018): 120–24.

³¹ Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (Routledge, 2013).

³² D. Ary, L. C Jacobs, and C. Sorenson, "Introduction to Research in Education Australia: Wadsworth," 2010.

³³ Carolyn Boyce and Palena Neale, *Conducting In-Depth Interviews: A Guide for Designing and Conducting in-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input*, vol. 2 (Pathfinder international Watertown, MA, 2006).

recorded to be thematically analysed.³⁴ The structured and systematic observation of the focus groups was conducted using specific variables and according to a pre-defined and pre-determined schedule.³⁵ Narrative and explicit data provided a well-organised structured summary arranged in text format through readable and understandable patterns of themes and sub-themes.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis of data as a qualitative research method of analysis made it possible for the instructor to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets from the selected focus groups.³⁶ The relevant narratives of their experiences were captured through identified themes. The instructor adopted a rigorous thematic analysis approach to produce insightful and reliable findings.³⁷ This flexible theoretical process increased the possibilities to identify, describe, and interpret patterns of themes and sub-themes within a data set in detail.³⁸ The themes were deductively extracted following the instructor's theoretical interest in the issues to be examined and that was complemented by the literature review data.

For the purpose of this paper, the enquiry obtained supplementary and concrete evidence from the secondary data from literature sources with more focus on the pros and cons of using active blended teaching and learning in diverse classroom contexts and that provided a rigorous analysis, synthesis, or qualification of the primary sources.³⁹

Ethical Considerations

The basic ethical principles of research were adhered to by ensuring that the participant student teachers provide written informed consent and received detailed information regarding the purpose and potential risks of the study.⁴⁰ The maintenance of confidentiality and security of their identity and data was prioritised. The University protocols to conduct the study were duly followed.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The following two guiding engagement and exploration statements and a question were put forward in the interview guide to the focus group participants during the interviews:

- Provide your own understanding of blended teaching and learning.
- What were your experiences of blended teaching and learning during their classroom sessions?

These guiding statements provided a structure for the discussion of the findings of the study. To answer them, objectives were formulated to inform the design and the method of the study.

- To examine the students-teachers' understanding of blended teaching and learning.
- To understand and determine their experiences of blended teaching learning during their classroom sessions and discussions.

The focus groups were allowed to freely express their views and experiences of the strategies employed by the instructor (lecturer) during and after the blended learning sessions. Common dimensions of categories of themes were deduced for the pre and post interviews. They were required to provide more explicit accounts and feedback on the benefits and limitations of blended learning pedagogies from their own perspectives.

Table 1: The participants' or pre-service student teachers' views and experiences of blended pedagogies to achieve blended learning

³⁴ D. E. Gray, *Doing Research in the Real World* (Sage, 2016); David L. Morgan, "Focus Groups," *Annual Review of Sociology* 22, no. 1 (August 1996): 129–52, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.22.1.129>; Korstjens and Moser, "Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and Publishing."

³⁵ Gray, *Doing Research in the Real World*.

³⁶ S. Dawadi, "Thematic Analysis Approach: A Step by Step for ELT Research Practitioners," *Journal of Nelta* 25, no. 1–2 (2020): 63–71.

³⁷ Lorelli S Nowell et al., "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017): 1609406917733847.

³⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

³⁹ R. Streefkerk, "Primary vs. Secondary Sources/Difference & Examples. Scribbr," 2023.

⁴⁰ Lennart Kaplan, Jana Kuhnt, and Janina I Steinert, "Do No Harm? Field Research in the Global South: Ethical Challenges Faced by Research Staff," *World Development* 127 (2020): 104810.

Focus Group 1		Focus Group 2	
Session 1	Participant 1	Session 1	Participant 1
The methods are practical and thought-provoking. The method boosts our confidence in learning.		The methods improved our critical thinking skills. The method improved our academic performance.	
Session 2	Participant 2	Session 2	Participant 2
The methods encouraged interaction and engagement among the students. The method improved communication skills and the ability to critique one another.		The methods required adequate time to achieve the learning goals. The method provided opportunities to prepare for all the classes.	
Session 3	Participant 3	Session 3	Participant 3
The methods allow flexibility and convenience for assessments. The methods need quality and sufficient time of execution.		The methods provide computer literacy skills. The methods develop social and intrapersonal skills and also confidence in communication.	
Session 4	Participant 4	Session 4	Participant 4
The methods are exciting and interesting to use as future teachers because learners need motivation. The method allows flexible learning at anytime and anywhere.		The methods reduce some administration load of content to be learned. The method helps me to be able to communicate well with other students.	
Session 5	Participant 5	Session 5	Participant 5
The methods made me uncomfortable as I had to interact in the presence of my classmates. The method does not accommodate my way of learning.		The methods create fear for me to engage during classroom discussions. The method does not allow the freedom of communication with other classmates because those who are fluent enjoy discussions.	
Session 6	Participant 6	Session 6	Participant 6
The methods is very good for a smaller class sizes. The method challenges my ability to think critically.		The methods create open learning though active discussions. The method develops the ability to plan my classroom tasks well through the use of technology.	

DISCUSSION

The literature revealed that blended teaching is one of the most important pedagogical formats that can improve student learning, optimise the use of active learning strategies, and potentially improve student-learning outcomes.⁴¹ The pre-service students teachers' views and experiences as outlined in **Table 1**, provided clear evidence that the blending the face-to-face learning together with online learning modality and activities facilitated productive interactions between the instructor and the pre-service student teachers.

Figure 1: Categories of themes and sub-themes

The following categories of themes and sub-themes were interestingly expressed passionately by the focus groups during the rigorous interview sessions:

Category 1 Theme: Learning Skills

⁴¹ Pizzi, "Blended Learning Pedagogy: The Time Is Now!"

Sub-themes:

- *Improve critical skills*
- *Encourage interaction*
- *Communication skills*
- *Computer literacy skills*
- *Learning styles*
- *Boost ways of learning and creativity*
- *Encourage engagement*
- *Allow active classroom discussions*
- *Improve academic performance*
- *Ability to plan and prepare for lesson*

Category 2 Theme: Personal Skills

Sub-themes:

- *Social and interpersonal skills*
- *Boost confidence*
- *Exciting and interesting*
- *Fluent in the language*

Category 3 Theme: Pros and Cons

Sub-themes:

Pros:

- *The methods provide opportunities to prepare for all the classes*
- *The methods allow flexibility and convenience for assessments*
- *The methods allow flexible learning at anytime and anywhere*
- *The methods reduce the administrative load of content to be learned*
- *The methods did good for small class sizes*
- *The methods develop the ability to plan classroom tasks through the use of technology.*

Cons:

- *The methods require adequate time to achieve the learning goal*
 - *The methods need quality time of execution*
 - *The method makes it uncomfortable to interact in the presence of classmates*
 - *The methods created fear to engage*
 - *The methods did not allow the freedom to communicate*
 - *The method does not accommodate ways of learning*
-

The themes and sub-themes in **Figure 1.** were deduced from the pre-service student teachers' views and experiences of the blended pedagogies and learning.

The focus groups initially expressed discomfort as a result of a lack of confidence to engage with their classmates. Through literal observations during the classroom sessions, some participants were able to improve their communicative skills through the focus group interviews.⁴² Diverse practical learning activities were employed by the instructor or lecturer to produce increased class attendance and rewarding educational experiences among students.⁴³

Blended teaching and learning emerged to be useful for pre-service student teachers' self-examination as it provided multiple components of information to support pre-teacher reflection while

⁴² Gray, *Doing Research in the Real World*.

⁴³ Scott Freeman et al., "Active Learning Increases Student Performance in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 23 (2014): 8410–15.

satisfying them during blended learning practice.⁴⁴ The social presence of peers is regarded to be extremely important for students to feel a sense of immediacy and intimacy within blended learning environments.⁴⁵ This was dependent on how the instructor communicated with the students. For those pre-service student teachers who were at risk of dropping out because found it hard to get a sense of the instructor, the online platform was offered as an informational alternative tone.

The focus groups demonstrated dedication and commitment to complete the sessions. They were provided with opportunities to engage freely and by sharing their authentic experience of alternative teaching and learning opportunities. **Table 1.** Depict the participants' experiences of blended teaching and learning. Both of the focus groups were provided with clear guidelines for the discussions following the interview guide.

The various frameworks of teaching which were incorporated were evident to have contributed to being instrumental in becoming a well-developed professional.⁴⁶ Literature provides the various domains for effective pre-service student-teacher development that the instructor strengthened during the focus group activities.⁴⁷ Among those are:

- reflecting on teaching by articulating their real-life experiences
- an understanding of lesson goals and objectives
- stating the strengths and weaknesses of lessons based on data analyses on students
- participation in terms of content comprehension encourages participation from diverse student populations writes
- reflections about lessons and refines subsequent instruction
- accepts feedback and implements recommendations develops written plans for improvement

Literature links the transformation of technologies, pedagogical framework and practice with improved blended learning.⁴⁸ The increased use of technology and innovation in educational environments imposed the given context. Cleveland-Innes, and Emes concur that the success of blended teaching and learning could be assessed through student-centred teaching.⁴⁹ They highlighted and discussed the following principles to promote effective learning as adopted by Weimer.⁵⁰

Lerner-centred teaching is characterised as:

- providing the student with the power to learning
- developing critical thinking and knowledge
- allowing the teacher to be viewed as the facilitator and contributor
- placing the responsibility for learning to students
- using effective assessment to promote learning

Various studies emphasised and identified the attitude and computer skills to make it possible to promote blended teaching while facilitating meaningful learning.⁵¹ Cheung et.al. strongly assert that the transitioning from pure, face-to-face to blended learning can be a challenging process as it involves extended time to design the learning material but encourage students' participation.⁵²

⁴⁴ Charles R. Graham, "Emerging Practice and Research in Blended Learning," in *Handbook of Distance Education* (Routledge, 2013), 351–68.

⁴⁵ Alvin Y. Wang and Michael H. Newlin, "Predictors of Performance in the Virtual Classroom: Identifying and Helping at-Risk Cyber-Students," *The Journal* 29, no. 10 (2002): 21–28.

⁴⁶ Charlotte Danielson, *The Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument*, 2013.

⁴⁷ Ben de Souza, *Teaching Practice: A Handbook for Student Teachers*, 2017.

⁴⁸ Muhammad Azeem Ashraf et al., "Pedagogical Applications, Prospects, and Challenges of Blended Learning in Chinese Higher Education: A Systematic Review," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2022): 772322.

⁴⁹ Martha Cleveland-Innes and Claudia Emes, "Principles of Learner-Centered Curriculum: Responding to the Call for Change in Higher Education," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 35, no. 4 (2005): 85–110.

⁵⁰ Maryellen Weimer, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

⁵¹ A. García-Valcárcel and F.J. Tejedor, "Training Demands of the Lecturers Related to the Use of ICT," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2009): 178–83, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2009.01.033>.

⁵² K S Cheung et al., "Instructional Design Practices for Blended Learning," in *2010 International Conference on Computational Intelligence and Software Engineering* (IEEE, 2010), 1–4.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that teacher education institutions must be mindful of various blended learning experiences that can offer them more flexibility, autonomy, and creativity in designing and delivering their curricula. They could use blended pedagogies to create, engage and personalise learning experiences for their students, as well as access a variety of resources and data to support their instruction. Blended learning can also help them to save time and reduce their workload. More research could be conducted to establish the emerging technologies to improve blended learning systems and to overcome resistance for change management.

CONCLUSION

The abrupt interference caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has exaggerated the persistent need for higher education institutions and school systems to instantaneously reconsider their pedagogical practices by exploring innovative and alternative ways while sustaining inclusive practice and relooking at the disparities of access to technology and its impact. This study provided a clearer picture of the level of interference caused by COVID-19 pandemic on the teaching and learning processes for various education institutions. There is a lack of comprehensive studies to provide guidance on the effective remote learning strategies across the countries. There is also sufficient evidence on the disparities that exposed the limited access to technology and the ability use the online resources by students and teachers.

This study provides reliable experiences from the student-teachers' reflective accounts of the blended learning environments, taking into consideration the previous and current circumstances. The literature indicates the lack of research evidence where student-teachers had opportunities to express their experiences of blended teaching methods and learning and growing use of these approaches. The intensive focus groups among selected student-teachers provide their general impression of online learning and education. The well-planned and implemented blended learning models and frameworks are acclaimed to provide concrete and realistic opportunities to reflect, revise and improve the curriculum and instructional designs. The focus groups expressed the same views during the reflection process.

The study examined the benefits of blended learning and pedagogies in enhancing students' learning outcomes. The blended and online environments are considered to be offering experiences that are not available in non-blended environments and that the nature of these different experiences could promote efficient learning. The blended learning is determined to provide better social, cognitive, teaching and emotional presence.

The study therefore concludes that facilitating and promoting blended pedagogies and learning is an art that requires the development of students and teachers' emotional intelligence. It is a transformational practice that further develops the pre-service student-teachers to master the teaching and learning skills. They are able to develop characteristics of being prepared, positive, hold high learning expectations, creative, respect for other and compassionate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams Becker, Samantha, Michele Cummins, Annie Davis, Alex Freeman, Courtney Hall Giesinger, and Vidya Ananthanarayanan. "NMC Horizon Report: 2017 Higher Education Edition." *New Media Consortium*, 2017.
- Allen, I Elaine, and Jeff Seaman. "Conflicted: Faculty and Online Education, 2012." *Babson Survey Research Group*, 2012.
- Ary, D, L C Jacobs, and C Sorenson. "Introduction to Research in Education Australia: Wadsworth," 2010.
- Ashraf, Muhammad Azeem, Shorif Mollah, Shahnaz Perveen, Nadia Shabnam, and Lizoon Nahar. "Pedagogical Applications, Prospects, and Challenges of Blended Learning in Chinese Higher Education: A Systematic Review." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2022): 772322.
- Barbour, Michael, Leanna Archambault, and Meredith DiPietro. "K-12 Online Distance Education: Issues and Frameworks." *American Journal of Distance Education*. Taylor & Francis, 2013.

- Bonk, Curtis J, and Charles R Graham. *The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs*. Wiley+ ORM, 2012.
- Boyce, Carolyn, and Palena Neale. *Conducting In-Depth Interviews: A Guide for Designing and Conducting in-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input*. Vol. 2. Pathfinder international Watertown, MA, 2006.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.
- Cassar, Stefania, C Paine Schofield, Alan Hertz, and Georgio Georgiades. "Active Blended Learning in the Undergraduate Classroom: Effects on Student Learning and Student Engagement." In *INTED2020 Proceedings*, 2734–42. IATED, 2020.
- Cherney, Isabelle. "Active Learning." In *Promoting Student Engagement*, 1:150–56. Society for the Teaching of Psychology, 2011.
- Cheung, K S, J Lam, N Lau, and C Shim. "Instructional Design Practices for Blended Learning." In *2010 International Conference on Computational Intelligence and Software Engineering*, 1–4. IEEE, 2010.
- Clark, Richard, Paul A Kirschner, and John Sweller. "Putting Students on the Path to Learning: The Case for Fully Guided Instruction." *American Educator* 36, no. 1 (2012): 5–11.
- Cleveland-Innes, M. "Facilitation and Teaching Presence: Using the Community of Inquiry in Blended and Online Learning Environments." *Invited Presentation. KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Faculty Development Course, Stockholm, Sweden*, 2018.
- Cleveland-Innes, Martha, and Claudia Emes. "Principles of Learner-Centered Curriculum: Responding to the Call for Change in Higher Education." *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 35, no. 4 (2005): 85–110.
- Creasy, Kim L. "Defining Professionalism in Teacher Education Programs." *Online Submission* 2, no. 2 (2015): 23–25.
- Cronje, Johannes. "Towards a New Definition of Blended Learning." *Electronic Journal of E-Learning* 18, no. 2 (2020): pp114-121.
- Danielson, Charlotte. *The Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument.*, 2013.
- Dawadi, S. "Thematic Analysis Approach: A Step by Step for ELT Research Practitioners." *Journal of Nelta* 25, no. 1–2 (2020): 63–71.
- Dziuban, Charles, Charles R Graham, Patsy D Moskal, Anders Norberg, and Nicole Sicilia. "Blended Learning: The New Normal and Emerging Technologies." *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 15 (2018): 1–16.
- Fan, Guorui. "Changes in Educational Institutions in China: 1978–2020: Analysis of Education Policies and Legal Texts from a National Perspective." *Handbook of Education Policy Studies: Values, Governance, Globalization, and Methodology, Volume 1*, 2020, 111–29.
- Freeman, Scott, Sarah L Eddy, Miles McDonough, Michelle K Smith, Nnadozie Okoroafor, Hannah Jordt, and Mary Pat Wenderoth. "Active Learning Increases Student Performance in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 23 (2014): 8410–15.
- García-Valcárcel, A., and F.J. Tejedor. "Training Demands of the Lecturers Related to the Use of ICT." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2009): 178–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2009.01.033>.
- Garrison, D Randy, and Heather Kanuka. "Blended Learning: Uncovering Its Transformative Potential in Higher Education." *The Internet and Higher Education* 7, no. 2 (2004): 95–105.
- Gibbs, Graham. *Improving the Quality of Student Learning*. University of South Wales (United Kingdom), 2005.
- Graham, Charles R. "Emerging Practice and Research in Blended Learning." In *Handbook of Distance Education*, 351–68. Routledge, 2013.
- Gray, D. E. *Doing Research in the Real World*. Sage, 2016.
- Hannon, J, and C Macken. "Blended and Online Curriculum Design Toolkit. La Trobe University," 2014.
- Jeffrey, L M, J Milne, G Suddaby, and A Higgins. "Strategies for Engaging Students: Help and

- Hindrances in a Blended Learning Environment.” Wellington, New Zealand: Ako Aotearoa, 2012.
- Kanuka, H, C Brooks, and N Saranchuck. “Flexible Learning and Cost Effective Mass Offerings.” In *Improving University Teaching (IUT) Conference, Vancouver, BC, Canada*, 2009.
- Kaplan, Lennart, Jana Kuhnt, and Janina I Steinert. “Do No Harm? Field Research in the Global South: Ethical Challenges Faced by Research Staff.” *World Development* 127 (2020): 104810.
- Korstjens, Irene, and Albine Moser. “Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and Publishing.” *European Journal of General Practice* 24, no. 1 (2018): 120–24.
- Lim, Cher Ping, Tianchong Wang, and Charles Graham. “Driving, Sustaining and Scaling up Blended Learning Practices in Higher Education Institutions: A Proposed Framework.” *Innovation and Education* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.
- Mazur, James E. *Learning and Behavior: Instructor’s Review Copy*. Psychology Press, 2015.
- Medina, Liliana Cuesta. “Blended Learning: Deficits and Prospects in Higher Education.” *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* 34, no. 1 (2018).
- Morgan, David L. “Focus Groups.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 22, no. 1 (August 1996): 129–52. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.22.1.129>.
- Munna, Afzal Sayed, and Md Abul Kalam. “Teaching and Learning Process to Enhance Teaching Effectiveness: A Literature Review.” *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)* 4, no. 1 (2021): 1–4.
- Norman, Denzin K., and Yvonna S Lincoln. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Chicago: SAGE Publications, 2017.
- Nowell, Lorelli S, Jill M Norris, Deborah E White, and Nancy J Moules. “Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017): 1609406917733847.
- Oliver, Kevin, and Dallas Stallings. “Preparing Teachers for Emerging Blended Learning Environments.” *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education* 22, no. 1 (2014): 57–81.
- Pizzi, Michael A. “Blended Learning Pedagogy: The Time Is Now!” *Occupational Therapy in Health Care* 28, no. 3 (2014): 333–38.
- Rao, V. “Blended Learning: A New Hybrid Teaching Methodology.” *Online Submission* 3, no. 13 (2019).
- Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine, and Dvora Yanow. *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. Routledge, 2013.
- Souza, Ben de. *Teaching Practice: A Handbook for Student Teachers*, 2017.
- Staker, Heather, and Michael B Horn. “Classifying K-12 Blended Learning.” *Innosight Institute*, 2012.
- Streefkerk, R. “Primary vs. Secondary Sources/Difference & Examples. Scribbr,” 2023.
- Vaida, Sebastian. “A Brief Analysis of the Pros and Cons of Online Adaptive Learning and Education.” *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai-Psychologia-Paedagogia* 65, no. 1 (2020): 31–39.
- “Victorian Teaching and Learning Model 2.0,” February 13, 2025. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/improve/Pages/Victorian-teaching-and-learning-model.aspx>.
- Wang, Alvin Y, and Michael H Newlin. “Predictors of Performance in the Virtual Classroom: Identifying and Helping at-Risk Cyber-Students.” *The Journal* 29, no. 10 (2002): 21–28.
- Weegar, Mary Anne, and Dina Pacis. “A Comparison of Two Theories of Learning--Behaviorism and Constructivism as Applied to Face-to-Face and Online Learning.” In *Proceedings E-Leader Conference, Manila*, Vol. 6, 2012.
- Weimer, Maryellen. *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013.
- Woods, Robert, Jason D Baker, and Dave Hopper. “Hybrid Structures: Faculty Use and Perception of Web-Based Courseware as a Supplement to Face-to-Face Instruction.” *The Internet and Higher Education* 7, no. 4 (2004): 281–97.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Selina Serole Ramapela has a PhD in Education and is a Senior Lecturer in the Education Studies Department at University of Limpopo, South Africa. She is a passionate teacher and academic

instructor. Her research focuses on career guidance and development, language enhancement, inclusive education, positive psychology, teacher development, research and community engagement projects. She has a vast experience of teaching in higher education. She is also active in supervision and external examining for postgraduate students. She is a trained and registered assessor, moderator, psychometrist and career development practitioner. She develops the learning materials and assessment tools for her modules. She served as a Council member for a progressive TVET college and served on some of this college committees. She would like to become a very established and active in the research publication domain.