

research snapshot

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Blended learning: how do students feel about it?

What is this research about?

In a blended learning course, online learning is offered for a portion of the class in place of face-to-face time. Previous research has shown that students are more satisfied in blended learning environments. They experience more flexibility, independence and easier access to learning resources. Blended learning also offers students the chance to fit multiple commitments in their schedule while feeling engaged in a course. But how do students perceive their experiences in blended learning courses? And how is this linked with their academic achievement?

What did the researchers do?

York University sought to increase students' engagement with learning, especially as a large body of commuter students attend York. A series of working groups, academic plans, and literature reviews were conducted. Afterwards, the university decided to distinguish themselves from other schools by expanding their delivery of blended learning.

Questionnaires were developed and given out to students at the end of 11 blended learning courses offered across 3 faculties: Fine Arts; Health; and Liberal Arts and Professional Studies. There were a total of 577 respondents to the questionnaire, which included: 25 Likert-style scale questions (responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree); and 6 multiple choice questions. These questions asked students about

What you need to know:

High achieving students are very satisfied with courses that use blended learning (both face-to-face and online activities). They are most satisfied with the flexibility and convenience of blended courses, while feeling engaged and learning concepts better. Courses need to accommodate or offer different class formats to low achieving students, who did not feel satisfied with blended learning.

their experiences and preferences regarding blended learning courses.

The university also provided students' final grades and cumulative grade point averages (CGPA), ranging on a 10 point scale (with 9 being equal to a grade of A+ and 0 equal to an F). The data was analyzed to see if there was a relationship between students' perceptions of blended learning and their final grades, and if this could help predict CGPA.

What did the researchers find?

The findings from the questionnaires answered 4 research questions that were investigated.

1. How do perceptions and satisfaction with blended courses relate to achievement?

Students who achieved higher success in blended courses were more satisfied, preferred

blended learning more, and expressed a desire to take courses with similar formats once again. However, lower achievers were the least satisfied with blended learning. They were less likely to take similar courses again, and preferred face-to-face instruction. Thus, the researchers questioned whether blended learning serves low achieving students well. They also questioned whether the blended format is suitable for subject areas that students traditionally find difficult.

2. How do perceptions of convenience offered by blended learning relate to achievement?

High achieving students believed that blended courses offered more convenience and reduced their travel time and expenses. Low achieving students did not feel the same. The findings may suggest that low achieving students may see time flexibility from blended courses as “free time”, rather than an opportunity to be efficient.

3. How do perceptions of engagement in blended courses relate to achievement?

There was a strong relationship between students feeling engaged and their grades in blended courses. High achieving students felt they were more engaged than in other courses, unlike low achieving students. This dynamic also showed a medium effect on factors related to the quality of interaction and high achieving students’ preference for blended courses. They participated more with online activities, unlike low achievers who felt bored or overwhelmed by the demands of blended learning.

4. How do perceptions of learning in blended courses relate to achievement?

Student responses demonstrated a significant relationship between: how well students believed they learned in a blended course compared to other classes; and their grades. There was also a significant link between students’ motivation to succeed and their grades, although the effect was smaller. More research is needed to compare students’ perceptions across different courses, as well as measure how effective

blended learning can be for low achieving students.

How can you use this research?

These findings may be useful to educators and policymakers, especially in the area of higher education. It offers insight on the benefits and reception of blended learning by students. This may help inform funding priorities and academic endeavours to broaden course delivery at post-secondary institutions. It also may direct future research to explore strategies to accommodate low achieving students for success in blended courses.

About the Researchers

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Blended learning, student perceptions, e-learning implementation, achievement, educational policy.

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