

Strategies to Achieve Students' Centric Approach in Blended Learning

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ABSTRACT

Learning environment for students can be completely traditional like face to face or full online. Recently it is been witnessed that academies encourage more on hybrid style of learning environment in different disciplines yet achieving the learning outcomes of the respective module has always been a challenge. All education systems encourage the teaching pedagogy to be learner's centric.

Many times, teachers perceive that it is not required to talk about student centric learning as teacher's voice still plays an overly leading role in teaching. This methodology sometimes prevents deep learning process. In one way students' centric approach can achieve deep learning and help in meeting all learning outcomes.

The objective of student-centric teaching is to give learners the prospect to develop their cognitive skills in a well-functioning learning environment, until they become sincere, self directed for their ambitions in order to act as their own educator and take control of their own learning. A premeditated effort is required to raise students to this level. Teachers, school principals, peer group and parents all have to contribute and take on new roles. For the teacher, this new role is to ensure all students play a part actively in the learning environment and to supervise the students' cognitive development.

This research paper attempts to develop strategies in the blended learning environment to achieve learning outcomes of the course from the students' perspective. For two semesters Quality Matters eight general standards are used in blended learning course E-Commerce to inculcate students' centric approach. Results of the learners show the effectiveness of using students' learning approach in their assessments, submitting activities, general understanding of the course and in class participation.

Keywords— Students' Centric, Blended Learning, Deep Learning, Quality Matters, general standards and E-Commerce

I. INTRODUCTION

Blended learning is a term gradually more used to depict the technique e-learning is being combined with conventional or traditional classroom methods and self-determining study to create a new, hybrid

teaching pedagogy. It represents a much greater transformation in basic technique than simply adding computers to classrooms. It corresponds to, in many cases, a fundamental change in the way teachers and students approach the learning experience.

The traditional scenery of a classroom is all about the educator and the teacher's needs. All the tools are the educator's to use, for the best release of lessons. In this situation students are merely passive receivers of information. But this does not mean that blended learning reduces the need of a teacher rather it enhance the role of teacher. Blended learning environment is more demanding than the traditional one. Teachers need to identify the individual learning needs of students, making sure they all use the class time engaged with the learning process. And this can be harder than the traditional teaching model.

The blended learning classroom gives more freedom to teachers to decide upon how much time to spend with each student. Struggling students, great performer, reserved Learners, and extroverted ones can get the attention each of them needs.

The blended classroom inspires teachers to offer a adaptable and engaging system to allocate learning content, while putting more control into students' hands regarding their own learning processes and make learning quality as students' centric.

To achieve the aim of making blended learning as students' centric, Quality Matters 8 general standards are used to design the module E-Commerce in King Khalid University. Quality Matters general standards are coherent strategies that facilitate teachers to design the blended course to meet learning outcomes of the respective course and realize students' centric approach.

Quality Matters is a leader in quality assurance for online education and has received national recognition for its scalable, peer-based approach and continuous improvement in online education and student learning. [1]

The QM rubrics are research-based tools. The Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric (5th Edtn) consists of 8 general standards and 43 specific criteria that describe best practices in online and blended course design. The QM process is designed to be continuous, collegial, and collaborative. The rubric and associated annotations

are based on best practices that promote student learning and instructional design principles that are part of good design. The rubric is supported by a thorough review of the literature and is updated every three years to reflect new techniques and technologies that have become available. [1]

Quality Matters' 8 general standards that were used on designing blended learning module E-Commerce to make it student's centric are Course Overview and Introduction, Learning Objectives and competencies, Assessment and Measurement, Instructional Material, Course Activities and Learners Interaction, Course Technology, Learners Support and Accessibility and Usability. [1]

II. BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, digital- and online-learning options have become more popular and more extensively used in academies owned and run by the government, although many colleges have been slow or unenthusiastic to approve new technologies for number of multifaceted reasons, ranging from insufficient financial support, technologies, and computing networks to general organizational defiance and resistance to change.

Given the fact that the internet and most digital learning technologies are still relatively new, instructional alternatives such as blended learning could be seen as de facto reform strategies by incorporating blended learning, schools and teachers are forced to change the ways in which they have previously instructed, interacted and interrelated with students. For example, if students begin learning both in-person and online, it might lead schools to reexamine their traditional school schedule and rethink how the typical school day is structured. In many cases, blended learning is one component of a larger improvement program in a school or region. [1]

Quality Matters generally explains the potential advantages and disadvantages of blended learning that will largely depend on the quality of the design and execution of a given blended-learning model. It advocates may argue that blended learning gives students the benefits of both online learning and in-person instruction. For example, students can work independently and at their own pace online, but still have access to the personal attention of a teacher and all the assistance, knowledge, and resources such an educator provides. At the same time, teachers can structure courses and deliver instruction more flexibly or creatively than in a traditional classroom setting. Blended learning may also argue that online learning, on its own, is insufficient without in-person or one-on-one interactions with a teacher. [1]

Critics of blended-learning practices may also query if the practice can offer students with enough personal awareness, guidance, leadership, direction, supervision and assistance from teachers, especially for students who may not be self-directed, self-disciplined, or organized enough to learn effectively without regular supervision from teachers and adults. Reviewer also

question whether teachers have received or will receive adequate training in how to instruct students effectively in a blended-learning context, given that the practice requires teachers to use new technologies and, possibly, more sophisticated instructional practices. Some educators also express concern that blended learning is merely a way for states or schools to reduce effort expenditure by replacing technology for people, which could result in teacher layoffs, higher student-teacher ratios, unexpected educational discrepancy, and other potential negative outcomes. Still other critics may simply dismiss blended learning as a passing educational fashion. Another complicating factor is the rapid explosion of for-profit enterprises that are selling digital-learning packages and online-learning systems to schools, a trend that has raised significant concerns about the potential for profiteering and poor quality educational services and products.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research paper on developing strategies to achieve students' centric approach in blended learning is a descriptive study based on application of Quality Matters standards in designing E-Commerce course. Blended learning is conducted on Blackboard in Learning Management Services (LMS) of E-Learning, King Khalid University.

For designing blended learning course E-Commerce as students' centric, I took each standard of Quality Matters and applied in the course in the following way.

1. Strategy General Standard: Course Overview and Introduction
 - 1.1 Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various courses
 - 1.2 Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.
 - 1.3 The self-introduction by the instructor is appropriate and is available online.
2. Strategy General Standard: Learning Objectives and competencies
 - 2.1 All learning objectives or competencies are stated clearly and written from the learner's perspective.
 - 2.2 The relationship between learning objectives or competencies and course activities is clearly stated.
3. Strategy General Standard: Assessment and Measurement
 - 3.1 The assessments measure the stated learning objectives or competencies.
 - 3.2 The course grading policy is stated clearly.
 - 3.3 Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners' work and are tied to the course grading policy.
4. Strategy General Standard: Instructional Material
 - 4.1 All instructional materials used in the course are appropriately cited.
 - 4.2 A variety of instructional materials is used in the course.

4.3 The distinction between required and optional materials is clearly explained.

5. Strategy General Standard: Course Activities and Learners Interaction

5.1 The instructor's plan for classroom response time and feedback on assignments is clearly stated.

6. Strategy General Standard: Course Technology

6.1 Course tools promote learner engagement and active learning.

7. Strategy General Standard: Learners Support

7.1 The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to obtain it.

8. Strategy General Standard: Accessibility and Usability

8.1 Course navigation facilitates ease of use.

8.2 Information is provided about the accessibility of all technologies required in the course.

8.4 The course design facilitates readability.

IV. DISCUSSION

The term blended learning is generally applied to the practice of using both online and in-person learning experiences when teaching students. In a blended-learning course, for example, students might attend a class taught by a teacher in a traditional classroom setting, while also independently completing online components of the course outside of the classroom. In this case, in-class time may be either replaced or supplemented by online learning experiences, and students would learn about the same topics online as they do in class—i.e., the online and in-person learning experiences would parallel and complement one another. Therefore blended learning is also called as hybrid learning and mixed-mode learning. Blended-learning experiences may vary widely in design and execution from school to school.

Blended learning may also allow teachers to spend less time giving whole-class lessons, and more time meeting with students individually or in small groups to help them with specific concepts, skills, questions, or learning problems—the basic educational rationale behind “flipped classrooms” or “flipped instruction,” a form of blended learning. Blended learning may also allow schools to teach more students more efficiently at a lower cost to the school and in the case of higher education the student. And because students are required to use digital and online technologies in blended-learning situations, they naturally acquire more technological literacy and greater confidence using new technologies. Some supporters may also argue that the blended-learning approach more closely resembles modern workplaces, in which employees may work largely on their own to meet specific objectives, only periodically checking in with their supervisors to give them updates or seek assistance. In this case, students would also be learning skills such as self-discipline, self-motivation, and organizational habits they will need in adult life.

In general, skepticism of digital and online learning (and its many variants) is widespread, at least in part because many technology-enabled educational practices are still largely untested, and their educational utility and value remain in question. For example, one common argument made against online learning is that it lends itself to rote, formulaic tasks that do not promote the kind of higher-order thinking skills that lead to deeper and more meaningful learning for students (although such outcomes will depend largely on the quality of the specific program or model in question).

In order to make familiar to the blended learning environment and the introduce to all the active role players of hybrid learning I designed the Home Page of the course E-Commerce depicting the following QM general standard.



Fig 1. Home Page of Blended Learning Module E-Commerce

For learners I plan the introductory message for the course that briefly describe the course and explains in general about the components. Introductory Message for the Learners'-Electronic Commerce or E -Commerce is the use of electronic systems such as Internet and Web to transact. Electronic Commerce has brought fundamental changes to traditional commerce but this is just the beginning. Technologies are growing at an exponential rate and advancements in ICT technologies such as WDM, WiMAX, wireless 4G, cloud computing, smart phones, tablets, social networks, location based technologies and big data have fueled the development of a mobile digital platform that enables increasingly faster anytime anywhere communications. Coupled with explosive growth of social networking, this mobile platform is rapidly becoming backbone of the digital society we live in today; this platform that holds the future of E -Commerce. Also this course gives an introduction to E -Commerce in particular it considers different principles of handling E-Commerce sites and different infra- structure requirements. The emphasis of the course will be based on the understanding of how the various elements that underlies the development and management of E -Commerce sites which will remain in line for a better Electronic Commerce application.

On the Blackboard of LMS I created a tool Start here and tried to organize all the contents to facilitate learners for navigation, accessing and using for learning purposes.

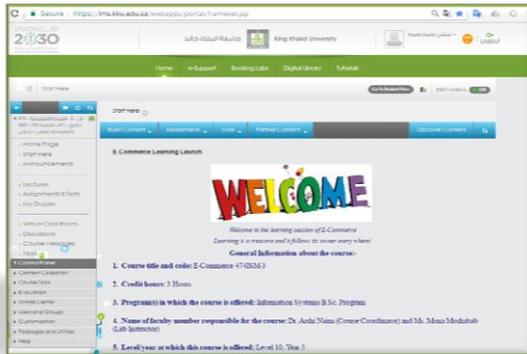


Fig 2. Start here Page of Blended Learning Module E-Commerce

In this tool I gave clear information to the learners about the course, such as course titles, course code, credit hour, program in which this course is offered, Name of the faculty members responsible to teach the course with their brief profile, level or year in which this course is taught, pre – requisites and co – requisites of the course, physical location where this course will be taught in face to face session, mode of instructions (50% Online and 50% face to face) and main purpose of the course. Within the start here tool I gave a navigation tool so that learner can know where and how to find the particular learning material and how to use it too. Also through navigation tool learners can know the contents of respective tool. Like Navigation Tool Home Page: - Page will give latest announcements, Start Here:- Tool that provides all information related to 474ISM-3 E-Commerce. It contains content named E-Commerce Learning Launch containing following contents:-

E-Commerce Introduction

1. Instructor's Introduction
2. Learner's Introduction on Discussion Forum
3. Course Prologue
4. Minimum Technology Requirement
5. Minimum Technological Skills Requirement

Course Tour

1. Course Syllabus
2. Course Specification
3. Course Structure
4. Course Plan

Readings References: Name of Essential book and other references are given

Assessment and Grading Policy: Rubrics and List of all Activities pertaining to 474ISM-3 E-Commerce is given in this tool.

Assignment tools gives the list of all Activities and learning outcomes of these activities pertaining to 474ISM-3 E-Commerce is given in this tool.

Course Learning Policies and Regulations

1. Communication Policy
2. Netiquettes

Other Tools as per Blackboard

1. Announcement: This tool will provide all notifications needed to be informed to the students pertaining to the 474 ISM E-Commerce Module.

2. Lectures: This tool contains all 474 ISM E-Commerce Learning Material. There are two content folders in this tool.

a) *Essential Learning Materials* where learners have to go through and all assessments will be based on these learning materials.

b) *Optional Learning Materials* are just to enhance deep learning process but no assessment will from these learning materials.

3. Assignments and Tests: This tool is used for grading assessments such as Assignments and Quizzes. Students have to refer to Essential Learning Materials to solve these assessments and grading will be available on My Grades tool.

4. My Grades: This tool is for students to check their grades and monitor their progress for all assessments pertaining to the 474 ISM E-Commerce Module.

5. Virtual Class Room: This tool is for creating learning environment virtually where learner can take essential as well as option learning through online lecture from course instructor.

6. Discussion: This forum is for creating thread on discussion topics. This tool is also graded and learners have to discuss topics given on this tool.

7. Course Message: This tool is for personal communication between learner and instructor. This tool is only for the purpose of communication not for submitting any assessment given for the course.

8. Tools: Other important tools needed to enhance learning environment is given in this area.

There is no simple answer to justify for the reason for developing blended learning as students' centric and no single definition of student-centric teaching. However, most people agree that student-centric teaching is connected with teaching practice that accommodates the needs of each individual student. This includes teaching principles such as differentiated, individualized and personalized teaching. While these principles vary, they all share a common trait which is focus on learning.

A student-centered approach to teaching shifts focus from the teacher's needs to the student's.

When students watch or listen to lectures at home, and then solve problems and apply the new knowledge in the classroom, they get less frustration with their homework. When they don't understand a new concept, they can ask questions and get immediate targeted answers. The time spent in the classroom becomes not enough for all the conversations and collaboration that inevitably spur from exploring subjects in a deeper manner. Last but not least, students who are absent due to illness, too long a commute, or any other reason, can catch up with their peers faster and easier with the flipped classroom model than with the standard one.

The question is: How can we organize our teaching and assessment in order to help your students become independent and capable of developing their cognitive skills? There is, of course, no ‘miracle cure’. The list of student-centric teaching strategies is endless. So in this research we outlines eight general standards of Quality Matters that are relatively easy to implement and can lead to successful student-centric teaching in a number of teaching scenario.

Development of online and offline course content:

- Facilitation of communication with and among students, including the pedagogy of communicating content online without the contextual clues students would get in person.
- Guiding the learning experience of individual students, and customizing material wherever possible to strengthen the learning experience.
- Assessment and grading, not unlike the expectations for teachers within the traditional framework.

By putting an emphasis on learning through supervised activities, blended learning has proven to be very adaptable to what some corporations are calling blended training. Trainers can shift their focus from the delivery of knowledge to its application, and companies spend less flying trainers around to oversee all instruction in person.

The focus moved from the mere accumulation of knowledge to skills acquisition by students. The result is a shift from a content-based approach to a learning-centered approach, a change from teaching objectives to students’ learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are becoming fundamental for structuring the standards and guidelines of quality assessment in higher education and continuing education institutions in Europe and worldwide. In this context, the assessment of learning outcomes becomes a crucial process in the education system.

Table 1: Sample Course Learning Outcomes corresponding to Assessment Methods

Course Learning Outcomes Alignment with Assessment Methods and Teaching Strategy			
	Learning Domains And Course Learning Outcomes	Course Teaching Strategies	Course Assessment Methods
Upon successful completion of the course, students must be able to:			
1.0	Knowledge		
1.1	Define business model and business plan	Lectures Group Discussion	Exams Lab Report Quiz
1.2	List and describe the E -Commerce security challenges and payment systems	Lab Demonstration	
1.3	Outline the key		

technology concepts behind the internet		
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A course created in a blended learning model uses the classroom time for activities that benefit the most from direct interaction. Traditional education (especially at the college level) tends to place an emphasis on delivering material by way of a lecture, while in a blended learning model lectures can be videotaped ahead of time so the student can watch on their own time. The classroom time is more likely to be for structured exercises that emphasize the application of the curriculum to solve problems or work through tasks.

An individual semester of blended learning may emphasize classroom time at the beginning, then gradually increase the amount of work that students do online or during independent study. Many argue that class discussion boards, for example, are far more useful if the participants have met face-to-face first.

The hybrid classroom or blended learning environment, a more recent change, refers to classes that are structured almost exclusively around a reversal of expectations for lectures and homework. Students are expected to watch lectures online at home, and do homework while they are in class.

Blended learning redefining teaching roles:

In some situations, the move to blended learning has inspired educators to redefine traditional roles. The word “facilitator” has emerged as an alternative to “teacher,” bringing with it a slightly different focus. The facilitator places an emphasis on empowering students with the skills and knowledge required to make the most of the online material and independent study time, guiding students toward the most meaningful experience possible.

V. CONCLUSION

Online learning may be a minor component part of a classroom-based course, or video-recorded lectures, live video and text chats, and other digitally enabled learning activities may be a student’s primary instructional interactions with a teacher. In some cases, students may work independently on online lessons, projects, and assignments at home or elsewhere, only periodically meeting with teachers to review their learning progress, discuss their work, ask questions, or receive assistance with difficult concepts. In other cases, students may spend their entire day in a traditional school building, but they will spend more time working online and independently than they do receiving instruction from a teacher.

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