

Blended learning as an effective method for school and university teachers of Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author compares different definitions of the term blended learning given by foreign and local scientists and gives his interpretation. The article analyzes world scholars' works on blended learning, determining the advantages and disadvantages of this method. The online survey method was used to find out how far Kazakhstani teachers are familiar with the blended learning method, whether they use it or not, and understand if it is effective. The survey results showed that school and university teachers use blended learning in their lessons and will use it in the future. According to the questionnaire, the benefits of this method are that it encourages teachers to be creative, increases students' interest, and helps them to study independently. Significant shortcomings of blended learning are technical problems and poor Internet connection. Also, teachers need more time to prepare for their lessons. It is challenging for them. Although there are disadvantages to blended learning, the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. Therefore, today this method is effective.



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INTRODUCTION

What is blended learning? There are definitions of blended learning given by different researchers. Blended learning is an approach that is used adopted by many institutes due to its effectiveness in providing timely, continuous, and flexible learning (Prasad et al., 2018). Two definitions are popular among scholars. Graham (2006) and Garrison and Kanuka (2004) offered them. Graham (2006) gives the following definition: blended learning joins face-to-face education and computer-assisted education, while Garrison and Kanuka (2004) define blended learning as integration of face-to-face learning in the class with online learning. As we can see, face-to-face and online teaching are essential things in blended learning. The following definitions support this belief.

According to Porter et al. (2014), blended learning is realized through the combination of face-to-face and technology. Broadbent (2017) thinks this method connects only the advantages of face-to-face and online teaching. Akkoyunlu and Soylu (2008) believe blended learning is the most comfortable method for modern students and teachers that combines online and class teaching. From

the definitions earlier, blended learning is a way of teaching and learning that allows different groups of students to learn in an effective classroom and online environment.

Blended learning is a technique that has gained traction in educational communities in recent years and has shown promise in effectively doing what it set out to do: educate students in ways that fit their learning style (Turpin, 2018). According to Thorne (2003), the main ingredients of blended learning are face-to-face and online learning/teaching, where the usage delivers the knowledge of IT with a good level of classroom interaction. Allen and Seaman (2010) define blended learning as a course that combines online and face-to-face delivery where a significant portion of the content is delivered online through online discussions. In contrast, face-to-face meetings are usually reduced. Horn and Staker (2017) define blended learning as a form of online learning where students control elements such as time, place, path, or pace of learning.

Jusoff and Khodabandelou (2009) show that blended learning reduces network transaction distances and increases interaction between teachers and their students. Finn and Bucci (2004) provide a more detailed definition of blended learning as an effective integration of several teaching methods, technologies, and delivery modes to meet students' specific communication, knowledge, and information needs. Oliver and Trigwell (2005) concluded that blended learning requires two or more different objects, which can then be mixed.

Driscoll (2002) stated that blended learning had adopted several tools that combine web technology modes, pedagogical approaches, learning technologies, and specific work tasks. Considering the previously described definitions, researchers concluded that blended learning is a pedagogical approach that delivers the lesson's content in a traditional face-to-face and online manner where students manage their time, place, and pace.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of blended learning? Blended learning as a pedagogical approach has certain advantages. According to Horn and Staker (2011), blended learning is an evolutionary and justified change of e-learning. The importance of developing this approach is that it increases active knowledge and strategies aimed at students who need to be visible in e-learning (Horn & Staker, 2011). Thus, blended learning is a successful combination of face-to-face and e-learning aimed at satisfying students' individual needs. Graham (2006) supports this idea and points out that one of the advantages of blended learning is its technological nature and its ability to find the best ways to help students achieve their goals.

Other benefits of integrating blended learning into the classroom have been identified in many studies. This technology allows teachers to use more diverse and engaging methods than face-to-face teaching (Graham, 2006). The role of the teacher is essential because his task is to combine teaching and learning. According to Wu et al. (2010), blended learning is a platform for teachers to improve their skills using different pedagogical strategies. In addition, the role of the teacher becomes a "facilitator" or an "advisor" that shows students how to work better, helps them find methods and techniques, and leads them to success, rather than being a "simple teacher."

Many researchers also note blended learning is important in motivating students and improving their academic performance. In addition, using digital technology in the classroom leads to students' interactive learning and cognitive development (Arlinwibowo et al., 2021; Kassymova et al., 2019; G. K. Kassymova et al., 2021; Pratama et al., 2022). Raes et al. (2020) believes that the hybrid virtual classroom is promising regarding flexibility in education as it gives students a choice of where to attend the course.

Ware and Warschauer (2005) conducted a study and found that blended learning is very useful in "bringing the outside world to class". This means that students have the opportunity to work with teachers around the world to access a variety of materials. When students realize they are getting a unique experience, they are more motivated and want to learn new things. Despite the apparent advantages of using blended learning, practice shows some disadvantages and risks associated with its implementation.

DeLacey and Leonard (2002) are among those who have studied the negative effects of blended learning. For example, this method is more expensive than the traditional one. At the initial stage of implementation, this method requires funds to purchase computers, access to the internet for teachers, schoolchildren, and home students, payment for certain internet resources, and others. At

the same time, blended learning does not promote the development and formation of communication and discussion skills among students as it is focused on individual work.

According to *Rasheed et al. (2020)*, teachers' challenges are mainly in using technology for teaching. Challenges in providing suitable instructional technology; and effective training support to teachers are the main challenges faced by educational institutions. Technical issues related to the poor Internet connection, lack of materials related to the subject they teach, and time-consuming lesson preparation can be obstacles to BL (*Zenchuk, 2019*).

Hofmann (2011) discusses the challenges of blended learning in the classroom and their causes. For example: (1) The teacher must be good use of technology. Due to the technological nature of blended learning, teachers and students must be familiar with computer operating systems, be able to work on the internet, and solve minor technical problems that may arise during the course. Unfortunately, many teachers, especially in rural areas, are still struggling with ICT literacy, and this approach can be challenging for them;

(2) One of the biggest mistakes in introducing this method is that teachers continue comparing this method with traditional teaching methods. The professional knowledge of educators should inspire the use of new methods but should not be an obstacle; (3) Management and control of participants' progress. Teachers often say this because the available literature needs to provide a clear answer on monitoring and assessing students' achievement when using blended learning. It is difficult for teachers to get evidence that students have completed assignments on their own, so there are questions about how to record progress.

(4) Minimization of teacher participation in the learning process. The key here is to understand the role of the educator in teaching. Introducing a computer into the classroom does not mean avoiding human involvement or minimizing its position. The teacher still plays an important role in educating students by guiding and supporting them and providing valuable feedback at every stage of the learning process.

The literature generally states that blended learning is a complex method that uses many methods and is unique before it is implemented. This study aims to determine: (1) If Kazakhstani teachers are familiar with blended learning; (2) If Kazakhstani school and university teachers use blended learning methods in their lessons; and (3) If using blended learning is effective in Kazakhstan.

RESEARCH METHOD

These days an online survey is widely and successfully used in research practices in Kazakhstan and abroad. This method allows quick processing and analysis of large amounts of information, saving time. The authors used an online survey to determine if Kazakhstani teachers and educators are familiar with blended learning and if they use it in their lessons. Also, it helped to understand if using blended learning is effective. The survey was conducted remotely, without direct contact with the respondent, in March-April, 2021. The survey questions were compiled and distributed on the Google Forms platform.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Twenty-eight school teachers and university teachers took part in the survey. Eight of them were men, and 20 were women. 88% work in educational institutions and most participants are school teachers (*Figure 1*). The respondents are 21 and over 40, and one-third are 31-35. A quarter of teachers are 36-40 and over 40. That is, the age of the participants is above average. Most have much experience, 7 to 15 years (*Figure 2*). School and university teachers gave different answers to the question 'What is blended learning?'. However, about half of them showed that they were familiar with this teaching method. It also turned out that some confuse this method with other forms of education (*Figure 3*).

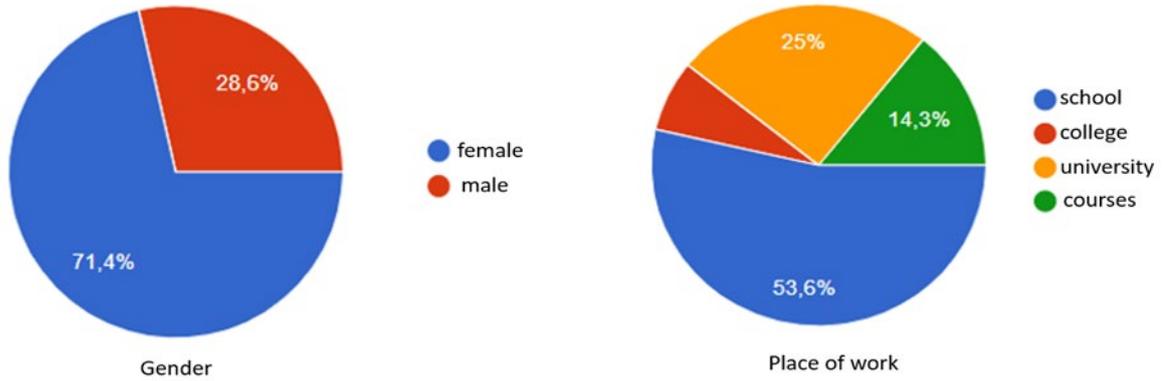


Figure 1. Gender and Respondents' Place of Work

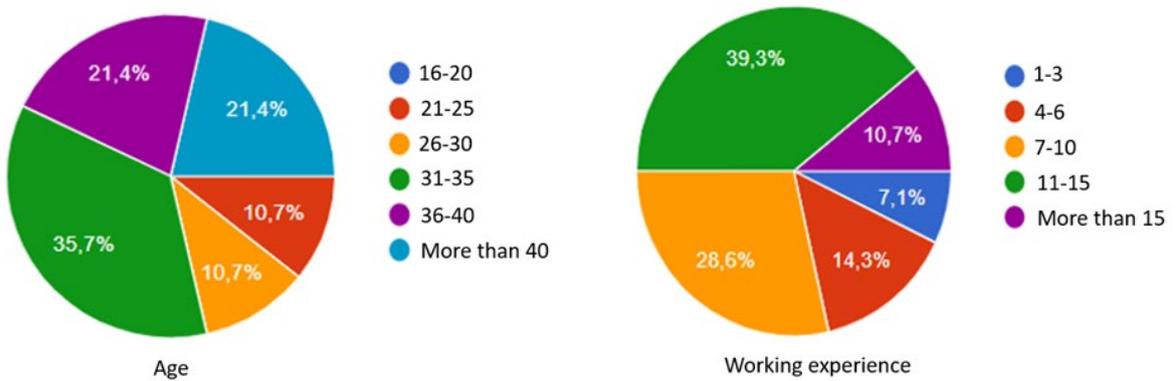


Figure 2. Age and Working Experience of Survey Participants

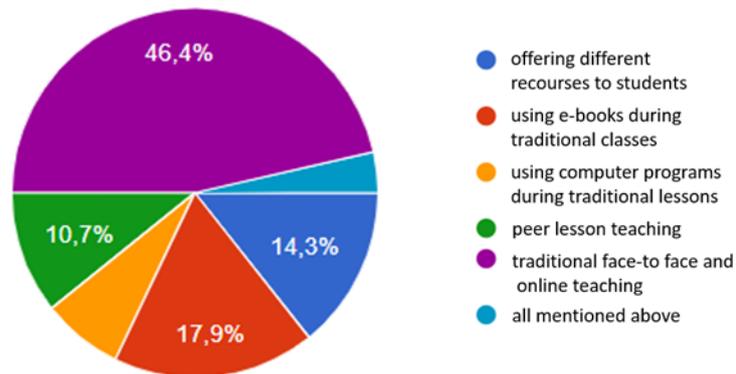


Figure 3. What is Blended Learning?

Most respondents use this method in their lessons, but a third say they do not use it, but 86 percent of educators will use this form of education in the future (Figure 4). School and university educators have shown that the most effective aspect of this method is that it encourages teachers to be creative. They also noted that it would improve students' interest, increase their participation and accountability for their own learning, and develop communication and collaboration skills. It also aims to make teaching and learning relevant and personalized (Figure 5).

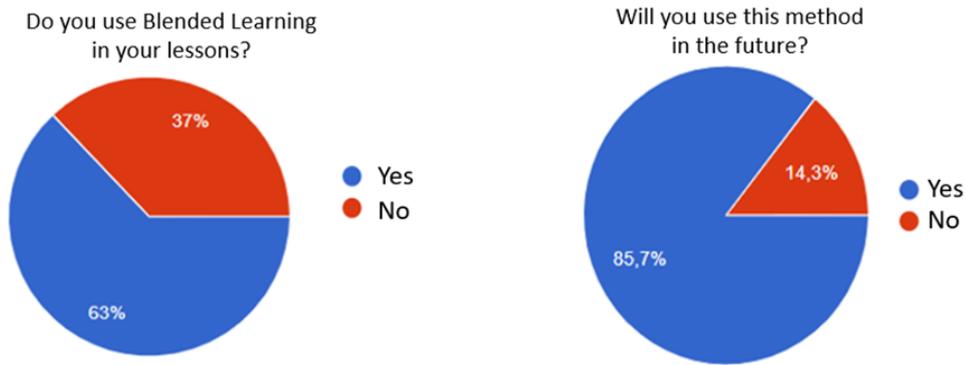


Figure 4. Educators' Response to the Use of Blended Learning in the Future

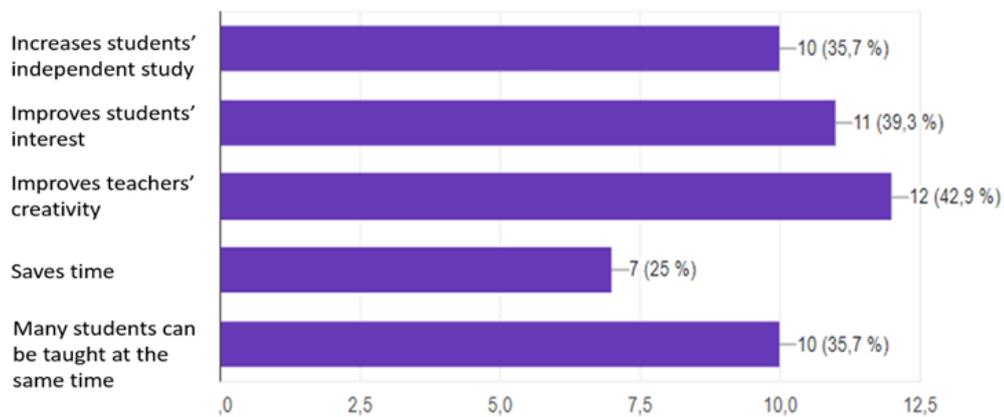


Figure 5. Advantages of Blended Learning

Most respondents answered that online work, technical problems, and problems with the Internet are shortcomings of "blended learning." Another problem is that teachers need more time to prepare for their lessons. Some teachers think this method is unsuitable for their subject due to certain features, and few say that blended learning as a whole did not improve their practice and could not improve students' progress. So, these disadvantages can make teachers avoid using this method in the future (Figure 6). About 80% of teachers answered "Yes" about this method's effectiveness. It means that despite the shortcomings of this method, many school and university teachers recognize its usefulness (Figure 7).

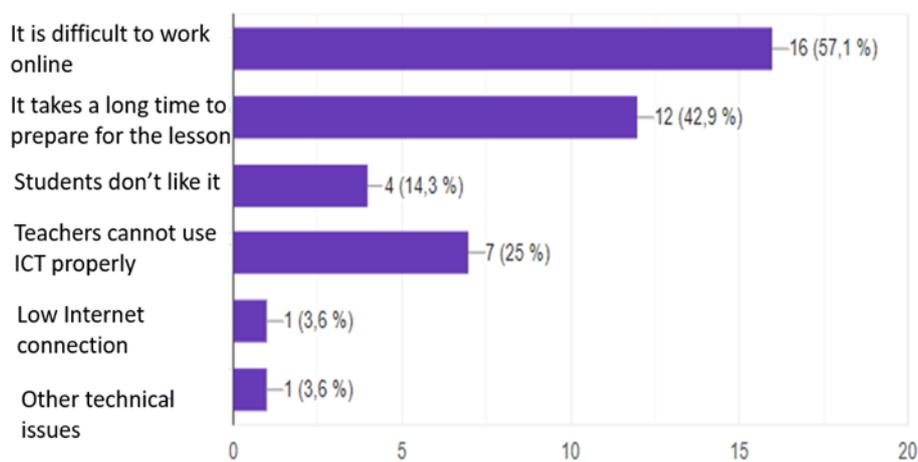


Figure 6. Challenges of Blended Learning

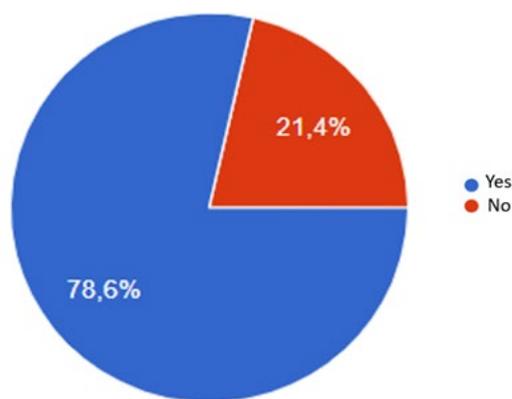


Figure 7. Blended Learning Effectiveness Level

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, blended learning is a pedagogical approach that combines elements such as delivering lesson content online and in a traditional face-to-face manner and managing students' time, place of study, and path. Blended learning can increase students' participation and responsibility for their learning and develop communication and collaboration skills. According to the survey results, the blended learning method is used in educational institutions in Kazakhstan. School and university teachers have shown that they use this method in their lessons and will continue to do so in the future. Although there are disadvantages to blended learning, the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. Therefore, today this method is effective. In the future, another research will be conducted to find out in which subjects the use of blended learning is more effective and what exercises and tasks should be given to students to make this method more productive. This is because Kazakhstani scientists need clear answers to these questions.

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