

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DISTANCE LEARNING AND BLENDED LEARNING IN SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING FLEXIBILITY

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Abstract: The development of information technology has driven changes in the education system, especially through the implementation of distance learning and blended learning. This research aims to understand the concepts of the two learning models and analyze their advantages and disadvantages. The method used is a literature study by examining various books, scientific journals, and relevant research reports. The results show that distance learning provides flexibility in the time and place of learning and has been widely applied, including in Open Universities. However, this model faces challenges such as limited interaction and internet network constraints. Meanwhile, blended learning combines online and face-to-face learning so that it can increase student engagement. Therefore, the integration of the two learning models can be a solution to improve the quality of education in the digital era.

Keywords: distance learning, blended learning, educational technology, online learning, higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology has brought significant changes to the education system, particularly in the way learning activities are designed, delivered, and accessed. In the digital era, learning is no longer limited by classroom space and fixed schedules because students can obtain learning materials through the internet, digital platforms, video conferences, online modules, and learning management systems. This transformation became more visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when more than 1.5 billion students worldwide were affected by school and campus closures, accelerating the use of distance learning in various education systems (UNESCO, 2021).

Distance learning is one of the learning models that emerged strongly from these technological developments. Moore and Kearsley (2012) define distance learning as an

educational process in which teachers and students are separated by time and/or place, so communication technology is required to facilitate interaction and learning activities. In practice, distance learning uses various media, such as video, audio, digital text, online discussion forums, quizzes, and e-learning platforms, to deliver learning materials. These characteristics make distance learning relevant for students who need flexibility in terms of time, place, and access to education.

In the context of higher education, distance learning provides opportunities for students from different geographical, social, and professional backgrounds to continue their studies without being physically present on campus. This model is especially relevant for institutions that serve students with diverse conditions, such as working students, students living in remote areas, or students who require more flexible study arrangements. However, distance learning also has challenges, including limited direct interaction between students and lecturers, dependence on internet connectivity, learning discipline, and student motivation.

Alongside distance learning, blended learning has also developed as an important model in modern education. Graham (2013) explains that blended learning combines face-to-face learning with technology-based learning to create a richer and more flexible learning experience. Through this model, students can study materials independently before or after class, while face-to-face meetings can be used for discussion, clarification, practice, and deeper interaction with lecturers and peers. This makes blended learning relevant because it combines the flexibility of online learning with the social and academic interaction of classroom learning.

Technological developments further strengthen the implementation of both learning models. Digital learning media, interactive modules, mobile applications, and Learning Management Systems such as Moodle and Canvas help educational institutions organize learning content, manage assignments, facilitate discussion, and monitor student progress. According to Pew Research Center (2021), access to digital devices has become increasingly important in supporting online learning, while Educause (2022) highlights the role of educational technology in improving the management and quality of learning experiences.

Previous studies also show that distance learning and blended learning have potential to support student learning outcomes when implemented with proper planning and adequate support. Bernard et al. (2014) found that distance learning can produce learning outcomes comparable to face-to-face learning when technological support and social interaction are adequately provided. Graham et al. (2019) also reported that blended learning can increase student motivation and engagement, particularly when students are given opportunities to choose learning strategies that suit their learning styles. In the Indonesian context, Rachmawati and Sari (2021) found that blended learning significantly improved students' academic achievement in secondary schools.

Based on this background, the effectiveness of distance learning and blended learning needs to be examined more deeply, particularly in terms of their concepts, advantages, and disadvantages. Distance learning emphasizes flexibility and accessibility, while blended learning offers a balance between online flexibility and face-to-face interaction. Therefore, understanding the strengths and limitations of these two learning models is important for educational institutions in designing learning systems that are more responsive to technological development and student needs in the digital era.

Problem Formulation

1. What is distance learning?
2. What is blended learning?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these two learning models?

Purpose of Writing

1. To know distance learning
2. To find out about blended learning
3. To analyze the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning and blended learning

Benefits of Writing

The benefits of this writing are:

1. Provide deeper insights into modern learning models, especially distance and blended learning.
2. This study is expected to serve as a reference for educational institutions in designing learning systems that are more responsive to technological developments and student needs in the digital era.

METHOD

This research used a literature review method by examining various relevant sources, including academic books, scientific journal articles, proceedings, and previous research reports related to distance learning and blended learning. The literature review was conducted to build a theoretical foundation, understand the development of both learning models, and analyze their advantages and disadvantages.

Several previous studies were used as the basis for the analysis. Bernard et al. (2014) found that distance learning can produce learning outcomes comparable to face-to-face learning when supported by adequate technology and social interaction. Graham et al. (2019) showed that blended learning can increase student motivation and engagement, especially when students are given flexibility in choosing learning methods that suit their learning styles. In the Indonesian context, Rachmawati and Sari (2021) found that blended learning can improve students' academic achievement, particularly when online and face-to-face learning are integrated effectively.

The data in this study were collected by identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing credible literature relevant to the research focus. According to Sugiyono (2019), literature review is a data collection technique carried out through the examination of documents, notes, and written references related to the research problem. Creswell (2014) also explains that literature review helps researchers build a conceptual framework and position their study within previous research. Therefore, this method was used to obtain a deeper understanding of distance learning and blended learning, as well as to support the discussion and conclusion of this research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Distance Learning

The results of the literature review show that distance learning is a learning model that has developed rapidly along with advances in information technology. In this model, students and lecturers do not need to be in the same physical location because the learning process is supported by digital technology, such as the internet, video conferences, and online learning platforms.

According to Moore and Kearsley (2012), distance learning is an educational system that uses communication technology to bridge the separation between teachers and students. In Indonesia, this model has been widely implemented by the Open University through electronic modules, online tutorials, discussion forums, and computer-based examinations. This system provides flexibility for students to access learning materials anytime and anywhere.

Distance learning offers several advantages, especially flexibility in time and place, wider access to higher education, and opportunities for students from various regions to continue their studies. However, this model also faces several challenges, including limited direct interaction, internet connection problems, and the need for strong self-discipline and learning motivation.

Blended Learning

Blended learning is a learning model that combines online learning with face-to-face instruction. This approach allows students to benefit from the flexibility of digital learning while still receiving direct guidance and interaction from lecturers.

Graham (2013) explains that blended learning integrates face-to-face learning with technology-based learning to improve the effectiveness of the learning process. One common model is the flipped classroom, where students study learning materials online before attending face-to-face sessions for discussion, problem-solving, and deeper understanding.

The literature review indicates that blended learning can increase student engagement because students have the opportunity to prepare before class. As a result, classroom activities become more interactive and focused on discussion. This model also helps lecturers use learning time more effectively.

Advantages and Challenges of Both Learning Models

Distance learning and blended learning each have advantages and challenges. Distance learning emphasizes flexibility and accessibility, making it suitable for students who work, live far from campus, or have limited time. However, its effectiveness can be affected by limited interaction, low learning motivation, and technical problems.

Meanwhile, blended learning provides a balance between online flexibility and face-to-face interaction. This model allows lecturers to apply more varied learning strategies, such as discussions, presentations, and classroom practice. However, blended learning requires careful planning, adequate technological infrastructure, and the ability of lecturers to integrate online and offline activities effectively.

Effectiveness of Distance Learning and Blended Learning

Based on the analysis, both learning models can support the quality of education when implemented properly. Distance learning is effective in expanding access to education, while blended learning is more effective in strengthening interaction, engagement, and active participation.

In the context of higher education, especially at the Open University, distance learning remains an important model because it provides broad access for students from various regions. However, the integration of blended learning elements can improve learning quality by combining digital flexibility with direct academic interaction. Therefore, the use of online learning technology supported by interactive learning strategies can be an effective solution for improving education in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review, it can be concluded that distance learning and blended learning are two learning models that play an important role in supporting student learning flexibility in the digital era. Distance learning provides flexibility in terms of time and place, allowing students to access learning materials without being physically present in the classroom. This model is particularly useful for students who live in different geographical areas, have work responsibilities, or need a more flexible learning schedule.

However, distance learning also has several challenges, such as limited direct interaction between lecturers and students, internet connection problems, and the need for strong self-discipline and learning motivation. These challenges show that distance learning requires adequate technological support and effective learning management to achieve optimal results.

Blended learning, on the other hand, offers a more balanced approach by combining online learning with face-to-face instruction. This model allows students to enjoy the flexibility of

digital learning while still receiving direct academic interaction and guidance from lecturers. The findings show that blended learning can increase student engagement, encourage active participation, and make classroom activities more effective through discussion, problem-solving, and deeper exploration of learning materials.

Overall, both distance learning and blended learning have their own strengths and limitations. Distance learning is effective in expanding access to education, while blended learning is effective in improving interaction and student engagement. Therefore, the integration of online learning technology with interactive face-to-face learning strategies can be an appropriate solution to improve the quality of higher education in the digital era.

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