BOOK REVIEW
RE-ENVISIONING AND RESTRUCTURING BLENDED LEARNING FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED COMMUNITIES

Edited by Chantelle BOSCH, Dorothy LAUBSCHER and Lydia KYEI-BLANKSON

Dr. Nur HIDAYAT
ORCID: 0000-0002-1023-4877
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta
Surakarta, INDONESIA

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INTRODUCTION

"Re-Envisioning and Restructuring Blended Learning for Underprivileged Communities" discusses how institutions in developing countries and less privileged societies have improved and transformed the implementation of blended learning to enhance teaching and learning for their constituents. This book aims to provide blended learning solutions that can be applied across various levels of institutions, programs, courses, and activities. Each chapter in this book will explore diverse learning environments, ranging from rural areas to developing countries, and delve into programs and courses designed to enhance student success and improve accessibility for students from diverse backgrounds. The book is highly relevant for teachers, administrators, educators, practitioners, stakeholders, researchers, academics, and students who are interested in blended learning opportunities within disadvantaged environments and often overlooked populations.
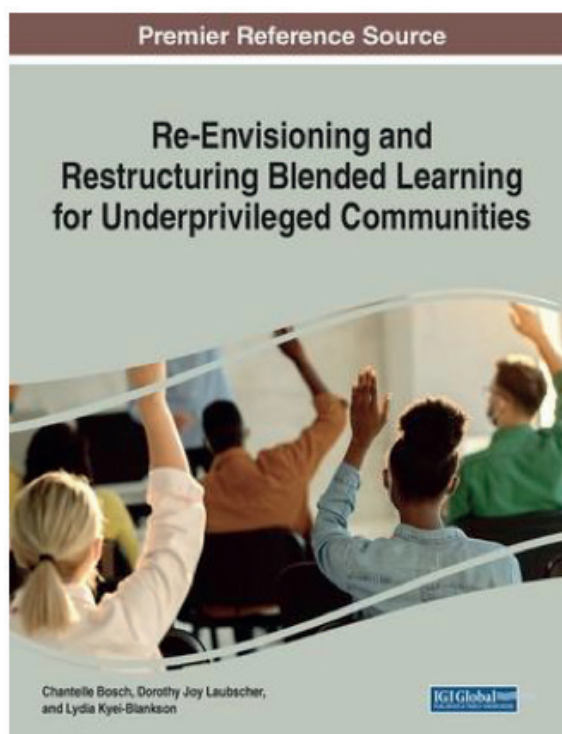
REVIEW OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1 provides the contextual foundation by offering a blended learning theoretical overview. In this section, different interpretations of blended learning are examined, and the advantages and difficulties of incorporating blended learning in different settings are explored. A broad range of blended learning models are outlined to establish a theoretical foundation for creating blended learning environments.

Chapter 2 focuses on the significance of ensuring high standards in blended learning within educational institutions, with a specific emphasis on underprivileged communities. The chapter highlights the importance of quality assurance measures in these contexts. In this chapter, the author emphasizes the need for policy implementation at the institutional level to ensure the quality of blended learning. The chapter sheds light

on the context of higher education institutions situated in both privileged and underprivileged communities, emphasizing the complexities associated with ensuring quality assurance. Additionally, the chapter showcases instances of effective quality assurance initiatives implemented in underprivileged communities.

Chapter 3 provides a depiction of research on the utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in primary schools. The authors report on the current usage of ICT and the ICT tools effectiveness. They also delve into the concept of "e-schooling" within underprivileged communities and identifies obstacles that impede the efficient utilization of information and communication technology (ICT) at the primary school level. Moreover, the research examines the potential for primary schools to incorporate ICT usage and instructional approaches from secondary schools and higher education institutions for the benefit of their students.

Chapter 4 presents empirical findings that conclude various types of technologies, such as laptops, interactive whiteboards, projectors, mobile phones, desktop computers, printers, and iPads, are effectively utilized as educational tools. In conclusion, the chapter establishes that incorporating ICT devices into classroom routines facilitates the clarification and comprehension of intricate concepts, while also adding depth and significance to the teaching and learning process.

Chapter 5 reports on an empirical study conducted where a mobile application is designed to help prospective mathematics teachers in presenting mathematical content. This chapter centers around the creation of an application rooted in the principles of Realistic Mathematics Education at the conceptual level. On the technical front, a variety of design frameworks were utilized to offer guidance to the design team. The experiences of users who utilized the application were recorded, and practical design principles for mobile application design are presented as a result.

Chapter 6 highlights the domain of science education with a particular focus on integrating blended learning to enhance multilingualism in science classrooms, specifically for students who are learning science in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The author explores various strategies such as incorporating multilingual instructional videos, presentation slides with narration in multiple languages, leveraging social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook for educational purposes, and utilizing Open Educational Resources (OER). The chapter also underscores the significance of embracing linguistic diversity in science classrooms.

Chapter 7 explores the significant role of content developers as key stakeholders in delivering high-quality curriculum content through digital platforms, particularly addressing the dearth of quality digital content in underprivileged communities. It specifically focuses on the challenges faced by teachers who instruct in Afrikaans, one of South Africa's official languages, spoken by approximately 13.5% of the population as their mother tongue. The chapter highlights the efforts of the Virtual Institute for Afrikaans (VivA) in providing valuable linguistic materials for Afrikaans language learning within the context of blended learning.

Chapter 8 comprises two sections. The first section examines the context of COVID-19 and explores the potential application of blended learning in complex and unforeseen social situations. The second section emphasizes the utilization of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a guiding framework to support teachers and school communities in addressing social justice issues associated with blended learning initiatives. The author draws upon two sources of data: personal phenomenological experiences as a graduate instructor and discussions observed in educational media during the COVID-19 crisis. The chapter discusses the concept of ensuring equitable and inclusive access to blended learning instruction through the lens of UDL. These findings underscore the necessity for proactive measures within the K-12 education sector to ensure equal opportunities and inclusivity for all learners in the implementation of blended learning.

Chapter 9 discusses practical solutions offered by blended learning in addressing challenges that arise due to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly regarding formal paper-based portfolio assessments that are difficult for teacher-students to complete in their assignments. The study adopts a participatory learning and action research (PLAR) methodology to examine and document the lecturers and in-service teachers' collaboration. Their collective effort involves designing a novel plan aimed at assisting elementary-level students in rural areas who encounter obstacles in their learning process. This plan integrates content knowledge with technology-based teaching and learning approaches to provide comprehensive support. Challenges related to teacher-student assessment are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 10 presents the research findings conducted with distance education students. Blended learning, as applied in various parts of the world, both in the northern and southern regions, becomes the focus of discussion, along with the importance of self-directed learning. The author presents findings from a case study conducted in Ghana involving adult learners. In this study, a blended learning approach is implemented, with a particular emphasis on utilizing a learning management system (LMS) as the central tool for delivering instruction. The author argues that the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT), such as mobile phones, is crucial for adult learners in reducing the sense of isolation in their learning process. Moreover, the author draws attention to the obstacles encountered in the Ghanaian context that impede the advancement of self-directed learning and the effective implementation of blended learning. The chapter concludes by offering potential solutions and recommendations to tackle the challenges faced in higher education within Ghana. The author posits that adult learners in developing nations, including Ghana, possess untapped potential that can be nurtured through appropriate practices in blended learning and self-directed learning. Furthermore, the author advocates for the implementation of pertinent policies by governments in developing countries, such as Ghana, to support adult education initiatives.

Chapter 11 investigates the role of a learning management system (LMS) in facilitating self-directed learning among adult learners. The authors present the outcomes of an empirical case study conducted in Eswatini, focusing on adult learners who are enrolled in higher education institutions. This chapter describes the flexibility and autonomy that can be provided by LMS in facilitating self-directed learning. Through a qualitative approach, the study investigates the mastery and perceptions of adult learners towards the LMS in enhancing their autonomy in learning. In conclusion, the chapter offers a compilation of actionable suggestions for instructors, content developers, and instructional designers to improve student independence and self-directed learning within the LMS platform. These recommendations provide practical guidance for enhancing the student experience in utilizing the LMS.

Chapter 12 reflects on the transition from a hybrid delivery mode to a fully online mode in a higher education institution. The chapter discusses the planning process for the online mode, including virtual training for tutors. It also addresses key aspects such as launching online courses and providing counseling support for students. The chapter highlights the value of the learning management system (LMS) in monitoring teaching and learning activities through the collection and analysis of learning analytics data. It concludes by suggesting the exploration of additional tools to enhance online delivery and monitoring, ultimately improving the quality of online learning experiences.

Chapter 13 applies Knowles' theory of adult learning to evaluates the preparedness of both staff and students at Great Zimbabwe University in transitioning from traditional face-to-face learning to blended learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines their ability to adapt and adjust to the new mode of instruction, which combines online and in-person elements. It explores blended learning, its didactics, and pedagogy, and concludes that financial limitations and a lack of technological competence present challenges to implementing blended learning effectively in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 14 introduces principles and guidelines for forming Communities of Inquiry (CoI) in blended learning environments. Using the CoI framework, the chapter evaluates the online learning quality and emphasizes the importance of engaging students through CoI principles. This theoretical study utilizes exploratory desktop research to analyze published information and address research questions. The chapter concludes by providing guidelines, principles, and practical recommendations for fostering social and cognitive presence, with a focus on the instructor's role in the virtual learning environment.

CONCLUSION

Education has been confronted with significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread impact worldwide. Educators, including teachers, academics, researchers, and managers, have had to adapt, innovate, and improvise in the face of an uncertain situation. The most affected group within society is those who are less privileged, struggling to adjust to the "new normal" brought about by the pandemic. Therefore, primary attention is focused on blended learning implemented in various contexts for these less privileged communities. This publication centers its focus on this matter, transforming and restructuring blended learning for such communities. The topic is explored across various levels of education, ranging from early

childhood to adult education. The book combines theory and empirical research with contributions from authors representing diverse fields and educational contexts. The importance of developing and enhancing sustainable blended learning for less privileged communities is emphasized in this publication. This book will serve as a source of inspiration for your educational journey while providing support and assistance to learners at all levels in achieving greater success.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHOR

Dr. Nur HIDAYAT is a lecturer at Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Dr. Nur Hidayat gained his Ph.D. in Language and Literature Education at Universitas Negeri Surabaya. His academic interest areas are computer assisted language learning (CALL), English language teaching (ELT), applied linguistics and Education. He has over than 18 book reviews published in reputable international journal. He also serves as the Vice President of I-Read (Indonesian Researchers in English Language and Education). His publication can be found at https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1023-4877

Nur HIDAYAT
English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Address: Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, 57169, Surakarta, Indonesia
Phone: +62 271-717417
E-mail: saujiruseta@gmail.com

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