Future Trends of Blended Learning in Workplace Learning Settings Across Different Cultures

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In this session, the presenters will report survey findings related to the current status and future trends of blended learning in corporate settings across different cultures. Surveyed in this study are 568 practitioners in corporate training or e-learning in various workplace settings from four countries – i.e., Korea, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Findings of this survey study reveal which technologies and instructional strategies are currently used for blended learning in these different countries as well as the emerging technologies and trends surrounding the field of blended learning in workplace settings. Also, the perceptions of the respondents regarding the benefits of blended learning and the barriers to deliver it in their organizations are analyzed.

With the emergence of Internet technologies, there has been an explosion of nontraditional learning opportunities during the past few years. This explosion is apparent in K-12 environments, higher education, and government and military training settings (Bonk & Graham, 2006; MacDonald & McAteer, 2003; Young, 2002). Such informal and nontraditional training approaches have also proliferated in corporate training (Cross, in press; Noe, 2003). However, various limitations of e-learning as a training method in corporate settings have led many to try mixing various delivery methods. Accordingly, the interests in blended learning, which is typically combine face-to-face training and online learning, is rapidly increasing (Boyle, Bradley, Chalk, Jones, & Pickard, 2003; Duhaney, 2004; Thomson NETg, 2003; Thorne, 2003). Millions of learners around the planet, in fact, are actually learning in this fashion each day (Bonk & Graham, 2006). Ironically, however, there is minimal known about the resulting learning differences among various blended learning models and the transfer of learning gains from one delivery mechanism (e.g., self-paced online learning to acquire content) and another (e.g., face-to-face classroom training to practice one’s new skills in front of others).

Despite the many unknowns, blended learning estimates continue to climb. By the end of the decade, it is conceivable that 80-90 percent of college and corporate training classes will be blended (Kim, Bonk, & Zeng, 2005) and that more than one billions learners around the globe will be advancing their skills in this fashion. Therefore, many practitioners in HRD and corporate training find themselves in a situation where they consider catching on this latest trend of workplace learning but also they have many questions unanswered when it comes to blended learning. In response, we ask the question; where is blended learning actually headed? The present study intends to provide a compass that can mark the direction and intensity of the blended learning approach in corporate training settings. Blended learning is becoming a dominant delivery method for workplace learning across organizations within various sectors and of varying sizes. A recent survey indicates that the use of blended learning in all of training in
the United States will jump to nearly 30 percent during the next year, or about double that of 2004 (Balance Learning, 2004). Some are embracing blended learning as a training method that links learning and performance (Rossett, 2006). There are also expectations that blended learning can create more engaging learning environments (van Dam & Andrade, 2005) and help improve business performances (Harris, 2005).

Although many organizations are recognizing the potential of blended learning to bring learning closer to employees, there are numerous issues to be addressed in delivering blended learning; in particular, in training sectors. First, there are a plethora of technologies and delivery methods that can be used for blended learning in training settings. Indeed, there are many different models and blended learning approaches for delivering training (Rossett, Douglis, & Frazee, 2003). Such a fact can lead to confusion for practitioners in deciding the optimal blended learning approaches for their organizations. Thus, practitioners need guidance on the effective and efficient methods for delivering blended learning. Second, although blended learning has been discussed in global perspectives in higher education settings (Bonk & Graham, 2006), such discussions have been lacking in training settings despite the fact that many researchers and practitioners have emphasized the importance and benefits of global collaboration in education and training. The present study addresses the first issue while exploring instructional strategies and emerging technologies related to the current status and future trends of blended learning in corporate training in five different countries.

Clearly, a study of the future of blended learning and its implications for the delivery of learning for global learners is warranted. In response to this need, a survey was conducted of training professionals (e.g., chief learning officers, training managers, trainers/instructors, and e-learning developers) from diverse cultures on the current status and future trends of blended learning in workplace learning settings.

**Review of Literature**

Blended learning has garnered a great deal of attention from both education and training settings around the world for several reasons. In education settings, particularly for higher education, blended learning has been recognized as an opportunity to improve the teaching and learning process by complementing the strengths and weakness of face-to-face and online learning settings. Blend traditional teaching approaches with learning technologies, thereby allowing for more interaction between instructor and students or among students than in face-to-face classroom instruction such as large class lectures (Chamberlain, Davis, & Kumar, 2005; Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004). Blended learning can also allow increased accessibility and flexibility for classroom teaching, as well as increasing its cost-effectiveness, by reducing seat time in classrooms (Chamberlain, et al., 2005; Dziuban, et al., 2004; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). Additionally, some blended learning approaches are adopted as a means to address the dissatisfaction of online students with the lack of sense of community in their online classes due, in large part, to the lack of face-to-face interactions (Lee & Im, 2006; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003).

Several studies have been conducted to explore the claimed effectiveness of blended classes with that of face-to-face or online classes. Results of several research studies of students in higher education settings suggest that student satisfaction and learning outcomes can be superior in blended learning settings to those in online settings (Boyle, Bradley, Chalk, Jones, & Pickard, 2003; Lee & Im, 2006; Lim, Morris, & Kupritz, 2006). Dziuban and his colleagues (Dziuban, Hartman, Juge, Moskal, & Sorg, 2006) also report that the learning effectiveness of students enrolled in blended learning courses (i.e., students’ academic achievements and their withdrawal rates) are equal or superior to that of students in face-to-face or online courses. Furthermore, some studies suggest that faculty shows a high level of satisfaction with blended learning courses, due largely to increased flexibility and enhanced interactions in web-enhanced environments (Dziuban et al., 2004; Wingard, 2004). Additionally, a meta-analysis of the past studies on the effectiveness of web-based instruction compared to classroom instruction by Sitzmann and his colleagues (Sitzmann, Kraiger, Stewart, & Wisher, 2006) provides preliminary evidence of the effectiveness of blended learning programs by harnessing the effectiveness of the two different modes of instruction; i.e., online and face-to-face instruction.

In addition to the benefits of blended learning reported in higher education settings, HRD and training professionals have touted the potential of blended learning for transferring learning in the workplace setting (Rosenberg, 2006; Rossett & Frazee, 2006; Shaw & Igener, 2006). A study by Thomson NETg (2003) of learners in both education and training settings indicates that learner satisfaction and learning outcomes - i.e., level 1 and 2 evaluations in Kirkpatrick’s (1994) model for evaluating training programs – were higher in blended learning courses than in e-
learning courses. Another key benefit of blended learning in corporate training settings is an increase in the cost-
effectiveness of course delivery by reducing the time and costs for employees to travel to participate in a classroom
training (Bonk & Graham, 2006). A recent survey of learning professionals in the UK and the US also shows that a
majority of learning professionals think that blended learning is the most efficient training method (Balance
Learning, 2004). Some best practices and successful blended learning models in corporate training settings have
been reported in the literature (Bersin, 2004; Bonk & Graham, 2006). It should be recognized, however, that
empirical studies on blended learning in workplace learning settings are still scant. In effect, Shaw and Igneri (2006)
contend that more research studies are needed to enhance our understanding of how blended learning can truly
improve learning, performance, and retention.

Methodology

This survey was conducted of 568 employees from four different countries (i.e., Korea, Taiwan, Untied Kingdom,
and the United States; additional data is still coming in from China). The figure below represents the breakdown of
the total respondents by their location of employment (see Figure 1). The participants in this survey study belonged
to various types of organizations, including government, business, and not-for-profit organizations. About 40
percent of the respondents were female and 60 percent were male. This survey took place between November 2005
and July 2006 using SurveyShare, a Web-based survey tool. This survey is a part of a longitudinal study of the
future of e-learning in corporate training and higher education settings in 2003 and 2004 (Kim & Bonk, in press;
Kim, Bonk, & Zeng, 2005).

![Figure 1. Respondents’ location of employment](178)

The survey instrument for this study consisted of 31 items related to respondent demographics, current status of
blended learning in the respondent organizations, and future predictions for blended learning in their organizations.
Seven investigators, including three from Korea, two from mainland China, one from Taiwan, and one American,
participated in developing the survey instrument. To address these international participants, the survey was created
in four different languages (i.e., traditional and simplified Chinese, English, and Korean). The survey instrument
was developed in English first, and then was translated into other languages by investigators who were speakers of
the native language. The translation was then cross-checked by other investigators on our research team or by
external colleagues to check for the accuracy of the translation and also for the validity of the instrument. The
survey was distributed to several online forums and listservs for training and human resource professionals in the
aforementioned countries. Some descriptive analyses (e.g., frequencies) were conducted of the data using a
statistical analysis tool provided in the survey system used for this survey.
Findings

The results of the present study indicate that blended learning has become a popular delivery mode in workplace learning settings. 65 percent of those surveyed responded that their organizations were already using blended learning approaches for training their employees and another 20 percent of them indicated that their organizations were considering using it at the time this survey was being conducted. This trend was similar across different countries surveyed in this study, while blended learning approaches were being used the least in Taiwan among the four participating countries. About 45 percent of the respondents from Taiwan reported their organizations were using blended learning approaches. Still, 30 percent of the Taiwanese respondents indicated they were considering using blended learning approaches, which is a higher percentage than that of any other countries being studied. In terms of the future state of blended learning, 68 percent of those surveyed predicted that their organizations’ budget spending on blended learning would increase during the next few years. Korean respondents were the most optimistic about their future training budgets on blended learning, with 84 percent of them saying their budget spending in blended learning is expected to increase in the new few years.

What are key drivers for this increasing popularity of blended learning? A majority of respondents reported that improving the quality of the learning experience, an increase in the availability and accessibility of learning, and cost reductions were the major key drivers for adopting blended learning in their organizations. Additionally, nearly 30 percent of those surveyed responded that an increase in the focus related to on-demand learning would promote blended learning the most in the new few years, followed by the blurring lines between work and learning (19%), an increase in the use of real world cases, stories, and examples in training (15%), and increasingly individualized or personalized learning (15%).

In spite of the clear indications of the increasing importance of blended learning in the future of workplace learning, the results of this study also found that there were obstacles in adopting blended learning – mainly limited time and budgets. Interestingly, only 8 percent of the respondents recognized “lack of management support” as a problem of developing blended learning, which was usually viewed as a major challenge of delivering training. Our survey respondents also indicated that their lack of understanding of blended learning is the most important issue that needed to be addressed to implement blended learning successfully. This finding is important because 68 percent of respondents also indicated that blended learning was either important or very important for the strategic planning for training and development in their organizations for the coming years. Ironically, however, only less than a half of those surveyed (49 percent) answered that their strategic plans were addressing blended learning. This trend in the lack of strategic planning on blended learning was almost identical across the four different countries being studied.

One of the most often asked questions that arises when delivering blended learning is what the optimal blends are (Rossett & Frazee, 2006). Figure 2 illustrates the results of this survey regarding instructional strategies that would be widely used in blended learning in the future. Our respondents predicted that instructional strategies that link learning and performance by providing learners with collaborative learning environments and authentic tasks will be used more often in the future. In contrast, didactic, lecture-based learning approaches and Socratic questioning were among the least favored. Clearly, Figure 2 reveals an emphasis on learner-centered, problem-based, and team-based approaches over instructor-centered ones.
In another question, we listed 13 technologies and asked the respondents to pick a technology that was expected to be used most widely for blended learning in the future (see Figure 3). Our survey respondents predicted that technologies that enable learners for just-in-time training or performance support, such as knowledge management tools and digital libraries or content repositories would be widely used in the future. The respondents also predicted that wireless and mobile technologies would be used widely for delivering blended learning. Interestingly, only a small number of respondents predicted that some collaborative learning tools, such as massive multiplayer online gaming, blogs, and wikis, would be used often in the future. This is a highly interesting finding given the exploding interest in such technologies in the media and in training related conferences and publications. This phenomenon is conceivably associated with corporate security restrictions which are extremely critical in workplace learning (Ardichvili, 2002).
Another important question for delivering quality blended learning is how it will be evaluated. Survey respondents predicted that the quality of blended learning would be measured most often in relation to its benefits to their organizations such as employment performance, return on investment, or cost-benefit analysis (see Figure 4). It is notable that there is a trend toward evaluating blended learning at a higher level. The results show only 16 percent of the respondents’ organizations are evaluating blended learning at Level 3, improvement of behavior. However, 31 percent of them projected that employee performance on the job will be the most effective criteria to measure the quality of blended learning in the future. Also, some respondents predicted that the effectiveness of blended learning would be best measured by comparing learner achievement in blended learning and classroom settings. Furthermore, only about 30 percent of respondents answered that their organizations were evaluating the quality of blended learning. Considering that 65 percent of those surveyed answered that their organizations were using blended learning approaches, less than a half of the organizations that were using blended learning approaches were actually evaluating them.

![Figure 4. Respondents’ predictions on evaluation methods for blended learning in the coming decade.](image)

**Conclusions and Implications**

In parallel with other survey studies (Balance Learning, 2004; eLearning Guild, 2003), the findings of the present study indicate that blended learning will become a popular delivery method in the future of workplace learning not only in western countries such as the United States and the UK but also in Asian countries such as Korea and Taiwan. Additionally, the results of this study shed light on where blended learning is headed in terms of the instructional strategies and emerging technologies that are expected to significantly impact the delivery of blended learning in the coming years. Despite the strong agreement among the respondents of this survey study regarding the increasing importance of blended learning for the future of workplace learning, they also indicated that they were facing several barriers to implementing blended learning in their organizations. One of the most noticeable barriers or issues that our survey respondents reported was their lack of understanding of the term blended learning.

Apparently, there is a pressing need to provide training and HRD professionals with guidance on how to implement blended learning in their organizations. Consequently, the results of this study should help practitioners to become better informed of how blended learning will be designed, delivered, and evaluated for workplace learning in the future. Moreover, the findings of the present study on the current state of blended learning will provide some
direction for future researchers to address the issues that the training practitioners and managers are facing around the planet. Lastly, since there is scant research on blended learning that compares countries or regions of the world, the results of this study will provide meaningful data and ideas for serious decision making by both training practitioners and researchers related to blended learning around the globe.

References

