



Blended learning: The impact of vocational and distance learning initiatives on students' school experiences

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Introduction

Secondary schools are increasingly providing students with a blended form of learning, involving distance and vocational forms of learning alongside more traditional formats. This project explores the experiences of students in the OtagoNet videoconference cluster of schools, both within the 'classes' and outside of them, their learning outcomes, their needs and the impact this new form of learning is having on them, their teachers, schools, and communities. Approximately 700 students and 50 teachers and school leaders from 11 of the OtagoNet schools are involved in this study.

Aims

This research aims to build on research previously conducted with the OtagoNet groups of schools, which showed that using videoconference to deliver classes was an effective form of learning and teaching. Students are now often involved in combinations of classes that involve face to face classes, videoconference and text-based distance courses, as well as workplace learning. This research explores students' experiences of this blended form of learning, in particular, the nature of this blended learning, the outcomes for students, and the factors that impact on this.

We are interested in finding out:

- what non-classroom forms of learning are occurring and how common they are;
- what support systems are in place for students;
- about students' experiences of this blended learning;
- whether blended learning impacts on students' achievement or progression in terms of learning and study skills; and
- whether effects on learning and study skills differ between different groups (for example, those from different schools, of different gender or of students, and whether only certain groups of students are taking blended learning courses).

Why is this research important?

While previous research has shown that distance education can be effective for secondary students, little is known about the effects on students of taking subjects through a combination of classroom, distance and workplace learning approaches, or of working with multiple providers. The need for schools to offer increasingly wide variety of learning opportunities to meet the call for personalised learning means this research is timely.

What we plan to do

Data

Students are completing the Learning and Study Skills Inventory (LASSI) at the beginning and the end of the year. They are also completing a survey designed for this research, that asks about their experiences of blended learning.

A small group of these students are also participating in interviews at the beginning, middle and end of the year. We are also interviewing teachers, and employers where appropriate, of this group of students, at the beginning and end of the year. NCEA data of participating students is also being collected.

Information regarding the opportunities for students to take part in blended learning, and the types of support being provided for students involved in this kind of learning will also be collected.

Analysis

Quantitative data is being analysed using chi-square, t-tests and ANOVAs, as appropriate, to answer the research questions. In particular we wish to identify whether students taking blended learning differ in their LASSI scores at the beginning of the year, and whether a difference exists at the end of the year. WE will also compare the performance of different groups of students (for example, those from different schools, of different gender or ethnicity, or doing different combinations of learning mode). Interview data will be analysed thematically.

Our partners:

In conducting this research we are working with staff and students across the OtagoNet schools. In particular, we are working with the following schools and staff: Blue Mountain College (Kevin McSweeney), Cromwell College (Anne Sinclair), East Otago HS (Tony Jenkins), Lawrence Area School (Bill Lovell-Smith), Maniototo Area School (Alec Campbell), Mt Aspiring College (Heather Watt), South Otago High School (John Douglas), Tokomairiro High School (Mike Wright), and Tuatapere Community College (Wayne Edgerton).

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