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IMPLICATIONS OF IMPLEMENTING A HYBRID LEARNING APPROACH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GUYANA

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Abstract

Online learning and teaching is pervading higher education (HE) and many Universities are faced with the challenge of incorporating technology in education to meet the needs of students. The objective of this paper is to examine the *implications of introducing a hybrid learning approach at the University of Guyana*. A rationale has been established as to why this need is so germane. Literature has been reviewed and discussed, concerning face to face (F2F), online and blended instruction and the pertinence of these in current HE pedagogies. Special emphasis is paid to the transformative potential of blended learning to confront HE challenges and produce lasting learning experiences. A mandatory rethinking and restructuring of students' experiences has also been highlighted. Administrative and leadership issues are dealt with and an action plan outline to introduce and employ a blended learning approach is offered. Conclusions are drawn from the information presented, with a view to establishing that hybrid learning sustains the values of conventional HE establishments and, irrefutably, possesses the power to engender significant educational experiences.

Keywords: online learning, face to face (F2F) instruction; hybrid learning; blended learning; traditional approach, higher education.

Introduction

In the ambit of learning and teaching, there is a growing concern about the pedagogical methods used to maximise student learning. Educators agree that these must eliminate surface approaches - *when students use low cognitive skills to execute tasks* - in favour of deep approaches - *when students use the appropriate level cognitive skills for task completion* - to learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This state of affairs has arisen given that the traditional approach to learning and teaching is no longer adequate to effectively address and improve student learning outcomes.

Biggs and Tang (2011) reveal that "Since 2000 there have been dramatic changes in the nature of higher education. It is not just that participation rates are higher than ever [...], but that these and other factors have altered the main mission of higher education and modes of delivery" (p. 3). This means that newer pedagogical approaches are being sought, with a view to delivering high-quality education. The Bologna Process (2010) of 1999 has had a profound impact on the delivery of high-quality HE. Since then, there has been a clamour for teaching effectiveness, which has intensified over the years. HE learning and teaching must move away from teacher-centred strategies and embrace **student-centred approaches**, due to the increased number of students, entering tertiary institutions, who possess different learning abilities.

Online education is one significant way to

cater for diverse learning styles. Online learning and teaching has to do with the technologies and technological applications used to deliver course content. It is all about getting students to move away from the full F2F modality, in favour of a virtual environment where each and every one would be able to work at his own pace. Brown (2005) establishes that since the introduction of online learning and teaching, there has been a rapid improvement in student learning outcomes.

It would not be jejune to say that online learning is quickly becoming a household name in HE, urging educators to tackle current assumptions about pedagogy. In fact, HE administration sees itself challenged to ensure that students' mounting exigencies for high quality learning outcomes are met. Owing to existing evidence of the transformative power of information and communication technologies (ICT) across the world, the fact that it will be the major technological innovation for HE in this millennium and beyond is irrefutable.

The University of Guyana (UG) is not oblivious to these rapid technological changes around the world, regarding tertiary learning and teaching. Though the UG is cognisant of these imminent changes, implementation is extremely slow. F2F teaching is the only didactic method used. There is no visible innovation to curriculum and instruction. Teacher-centred strategies are still current. Online learning is not a reality. The delivery of quality education (QE) at the UG is still a very big issue, and this is impeding the promotion and enhancement of learning that matters.

This paper tackles the implications of technology in education at the University of Guyana, by introducing a hybrid/blended approach to learning and teaching. It will be established that since hybrid learning is achieving success across the world, at various Universities, it is high time that the University of Guyana move away from its traditional approach to learning and teaching, and embrace a more emancipatory approach by offering technology-based education to its students. Emancipatory, simply because it allows students to undertake and complete their studies in a time and place best suited to them, it gives them autonomy over their learning, and the materials are adapted to different learning styles. For this to happen, there are a number of issues that the University Administration will have to deal with, in order to make this a reality.

Rationale

The University of Guyana is the only HE institution in Guyana. The University was established by an Act of Parliament in April, 1963. Its aim is "To provide a place of education, learning and research of a standard required and expected of a University of the highest standard, and to secure the advancement of knowledge and the diffusion and extension of arts, sciences and learning throughout Guyana" (The University of Guyana Act, 1963).

One of the four goals in the UG Strategic Plan (2009-2012) is "To achieve higher quality learning and teaching aligned with expanded national needs, especially in science and technology". Regrettably, the UG is not fulfilling its mandate. The curriculum has not been modified in more than 30 years. The only existing pedagogical method is the traditional F2F interaction, where the teacher is the sage of the stage, and where students are expected to take in the 'sagely knowledge' like sponges. In other words, all learning is teacher-centred. There are no innovative technologies being used to promote diversified learning and teaching.

In light of the above, the University of Guyana student population is dwindling rapidly. The National Development Strategy [NDS] (2001-2010) establishes that many students opt to pursue undergraduate studies at foreign universities, due to the inability of UG's courses and programmes to sufficiently improve their learning outcomes. Those that remain exhibit their frustrations, demanding a different and better approach to course delivery, as the present mode is quite obsolete.

This is the present state of affairs that plagues this institution of higher learning. There is a dire need for modernisation through quality enhancement. Curricula need to be restructured to embrace creativity, application and life-long learning. In a world where technology is taking centre-stage, where the majority of students are computer literate and technology savvy, the University is left with no other option, if it intends to remain credible and authentic, but to integrate online learning and teaching, with a view to delivering high-quality 21st century higher education.

Literature Review and Discussion

The benefits of F2F instruction, online and blended learning are examined below, while discussing the transformative potential of blended learning, establishing that hybrid learning is a promising de-

velopment and that it shows excellent future potential for helping the students to determine what is available, combining the most relevant options for their needs.

Face to Face Instruction

This style refers to two criteria: the *temporal simultaneity* of the processes of teaching communication and *physical presence* of instructors and students in the communication process. This means that for the "face to face" modality, most of the teaching-learning processes coincide in space and time. The teacher and students share the physical space where the teaching communication processes are carried out simultaneously in time.

No one doubts that "face to face" teaching is very lively, warm, human and personal. "We could assume that the best possible training is undoubtedly the face-to-face training. Perhaps, it is because the face-to-face interaction between a student and teacher is considered one of the key factors in any process of formation" (Estaire 2005, p. 28).

Face to face teaching is accompanied by a complex context that reinforces the informal manner in the interest of the learning activities that unfold (peer discussions, group revision, extra-curricular activities, contact with the teacher, and the like). In general, it allows for the implementation of interaction and interpersonal communication between all members of the learning community, the best stimulus for motivation. It fosters group work and increases the motivation of the student. In other words, there is active participation of all the students.

By using this 'face to face' teaching model, a distributed learning is created, i.e. the terms for knowledge are structured so that cognitive skills obtains optimal development. Both the productive and receptive skills can therefore be improved by taking a form that can help reinforce each of them in a more balanced manner. It also promotes closer contact between teacher and students which is vital in the learning and teaching process.

Online Learning

A number of terms have been used to categorise what online learning is, a fact that makes a generic definition difficult to conceive. Ally (2004) postulates that "Terms that are commonly used include e-learning, Internet learning, distributed learning, networked learning, tele-learning, virtual learning, computer-assisted learning, Web-based learning, and distance learning" (p. 4). Without a doubt, the implication of the afore-mentioned terms suggests that the learner and facilitator are not necessarily in the same location, and that they use some kind of technological apparatus to communicate and to execute learning and teaching.

Current literature on the online learning and teaching phenomenon presents a plethora of definitions for the term 'online learning'. Martyn (2003) offers that it is "An innovative approach used to deliver instruction to a remote audience, using the Web as the medium" (p. 38). It would not be unfair to say that online learning is far more than simply using the Web to deliver materials. Given that Ally (2004) affirms that the focus must be on the learner and the learning process, he defines online learning as "The use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience" (p. 5).

It is undeniable that many tertiary institutions are heading in the direction of incorporating technology in on and off campus education delivery. And there must be reasons for this move. For learners, online learning is not time, location or distance-bound. Students are continuously involved in synchronous and asynchronous communication with colleagues and the course tutor. They can access course materials anytime. In addition, learners can take online courses while working, therefore contextualising learning. For teachers, instruction can be done from anywhere. They can update and modify materials, with learners seeing changes immediately. They can readily give synchronous or asynchronous support to students who may be having difficulties with course material, assuring the students of a smooth learning journey.

Hybrid or Blended Learning

"Quite recently, one of the major questions concerning distance education was whether it delivered comparable outcomes to traditional classroom instruction" (Ali & Elfessi 2004, p. 9). Currently, the question that is now pervading research in online learning is "Why not have the best of both worlds?" With the view of addressing this issue, a new instructional approach – the hybrid or blended model (Graham, 2005) - developed, which combined the best aspects of traditional pedagogy and online instruction.

"Blended learning combines the benefits of traditional instructor led training with the advantages of additional self-paced and innovative instructor-

led Internet-based courses, instructional software" (Bershin 2004, p. 6). In other words, it can be described as carefully and thoughtfully incorporating F2F educational experiences with online educational experiences. There is substantial perceptive appeal of combining the strengths of synchronous (F2F) and asynchronous pedagogical activities. According to Garrison and Kanuka (2004), the hybrid F2F interaction and computer-mediated communication have different conceptions. These are 'web-enhanced', 'hybrid' and 'fully online'. Figure 1 below represents the various forms of E-learning.

In agreement with Garrison and Kanuka (2004) are Mitchell and Honore (2007) who clarify that (1) web-enhanced courses are F2F interaction-based, only allowing for course outlines and announcements to be uploaded, to which students have access; (2) blended courses have considerable synchronous and asynchronous e-learning activities, coupled with some traditional F2F sessions, and (3) fully online courses usually embody Internet-based distance education. A very interesting classification of web-based learning environments is made by the Sloan Consortium (Allen & Seaman, 2006), in reference to the quantity of content and activities delivered online: web-facilitated courses are 1-29% online, hybrid-based courses are 30-79% online, and fully online courses are 80% and above online. This is an interesting categorisation because it clearly establishes a distinction between these three forms of E-learning.

Vernadakis, Antoniou, Giannousi, Zetou and Kioumourtzoglou (2010) posit that more studies obviate that the majority of online learners favour some amount of face to face interaction with their facilita-

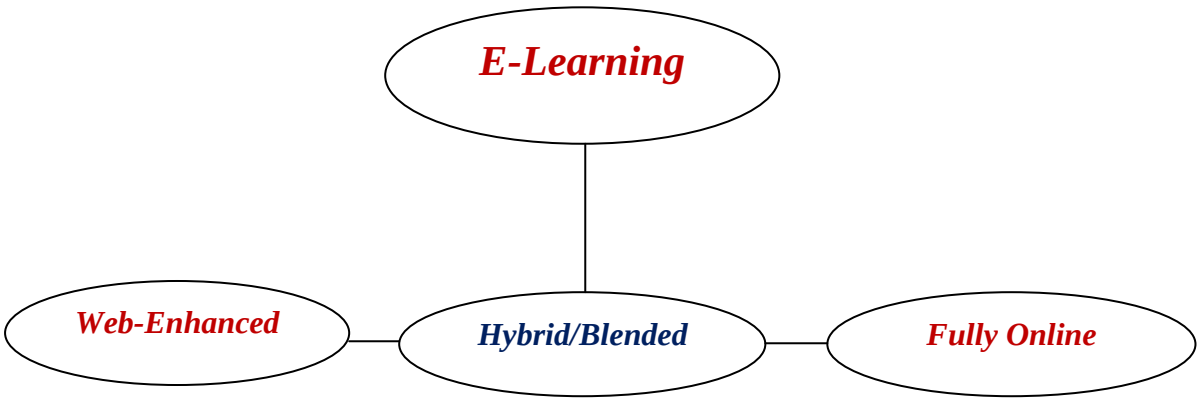

Figure 1
Various forms of E-learning

tors. This tends to be more successful, endorsing the hybrid model. Initial research carried out by these authors show that student performance in blended courses was equal to or a little greater than F2F courses, and that hybrid courses had a lower withdrawal rate than their fully online counterparts. This empirical evidence is very encouraging, as it validates and authenticates the effectiveness of the hybrid or blended modality.

Sheridan (2009) emphasises that blended learning is distinctive and effective in its capacity to foster a *community of learners*. This permits the stabilising, consistent influence that steadies public communication and unlimited access to Internet-based information. Conditions are created for open dialogic processes, critical discussions, negotiation and agreement during task completion. Consequently, hybrid learning adds a key reflective element with numerous communication forms to address specific learning requirements. Blended properly, online and F2F instruction mutually reinforce each other, providing students with a great degree of autonomy, crucial for fostering critical thinking and constructing meaning.

Not More of the Same

Considering the discussions thus far on the effectiveness of the hybrid or blended model, it is wise to suggest that hybrid learning does not constitute more of the same. It is not just a question of discovering the correct blend of technologies or augmenting access to learning. Blended learning is primarily about reorganising the learning-teaching interaction. They are inseparable. Lunenburg and Irby (2006) affirm that "Teaching and learning are appreciably connected" (p. 86). In other words, effective learning will result from effective teaching.

Tertiary teachers need to really sit down and reflect seriously on the design and delivery of HE curriculum. With the very limited HE results in aiding critical and reflective thinking (Hattie, 2009a), and the necessity for these aptitudes to be developed and sustained in this ICT age, it is becoming increasingly clear that all energies must be channelled into nurturing complex, creative and critical cognitive skills in students. A hybrid approach offers infinite options to produce dynamic learning spaces that can create these skills effectively. It unequivocally is a new challenge for HE teachers to offer the required didactic presence in such an environment.

The transformative potential of blended learning to produce significant educational experiences

A sea of documented literature exists, regarding the potential of ICT to support significant educational experiences. Low (2007) mentions that it has been widely proven that both synchronous and asynchro- nous computer-mediated instruction (CMI) support flexibility, motivation, reflection, independent and collaborative learning and skills development, all resulting in a deeper, meaningful experience in the learning community. Due to the advantages of hybrid learning, El-Deghaidy and Nouby (2008) reveal that many institutions have moved from fully online to blended learning programmes, since it is indicative of promoting learner-centred, active and constructive learning.

Livingstone (2011, p. 73) documents a research done, using a blended approach, in the area of Spanish as a Foreign Language (FL):

> In a research done, Morales & Ferreira (2008) conducted an empirical study based on blended learning in which they provide effective guidelines for researchers who develop computer platforms for foreign language learning. The main objective was to visualize how language teaching methodological principles could be applied effectively in the design of activities to develop language skills in blended environments. To this end, an experimental study was conducted to gather empirical evidence about the effectiveness of learning English as a foreign language (FL), in the F2F and blended modalities, using an experimental and control group. The results showed that the increase in learning English as a FL was higher in the experimental group, which used a blended format, than the control group who worked with the face to face modality.

Vernadakis, Antoniou, Giannousi, Zetou and Kioumourtzoglou (2010) conducted a study in hybrid learning, to determine its effectiveness to improve student learning outcomes. This blended model was used to teach the course – *New Technology in Physical Education* – at the Democritus University of Thrace, Greece, facilitated by the Open E-class course management system (CMS). At the end of the process, they noted that the students improved significantly in their learning experiences, as compared to the same course earlier taught via the F2F method. This is very encouraging and underscores the potency of hybrid learning.

Many more studies have been conducted, before and after this period, (Twigg, 2003; Atan, Rah-man & Idrus, 2004; Riffel & Sibley, 2005; Zubas, Heiss & Pedersen, 2006; Delialioglu & Yildirim, 2008; Raturi, Hogan & Thaman, 2011) validating the efficacy of this mode of instructional delivery.

The principal reason behind this transformative potential of hybrid learning is the slackening of the dominance of the traditional scenario, in favour of more participatory and significant learning activities. Ferreira and Kotz (2010) conducted and reviewed a number of studies to prove that learning that can be transformative. For one study, the traditional classroom session was replaced with one to two weekly lectures and with a mixture of synchronous discussion boards, replications, hypermedia lessons, quizzes and other digital content. The results were astounding, since the course facilitator had more time to give to each student, as compared to the traditional teacher, boosting the quality of the online lessons through continuous innovative instructional practices.

It is without question, therefore, that the blended learning approach is more successful compared to F2F and fully online courses. The reason behind this is that blended-teaching organisation can attend to didactic issues and achieve pedagogical outcomes that neither a traditional or fully online course could do alone.

The University of Guyana's role in embracing a blended learning approach for learning and teaching

Taking into consideration the discussions above on the efficacy of the hybrid approach for learning and teaching, the UG has to play a key role in ensuring its introduction and implementation. This is where **administrative and developmental issues** (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012) will take centre stage. These issues concern *policy, planning, resources, scheduling and support*. In addition, **organisational and leadership issues** (Lingam, 2012) are also vital for such an approach to be embraced. These two pivotal issues are discussed below.

Administrative and Developmental Issues

Policy

The UG currently does not offer any form of technology-mediated education to its population of students. The approach that is still being used, in all of its 50years of existence, is the traditional approach. The traditional approach is no longer apt (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006) to successfully nurture deep learning, hence the need to do things differently.

The UG currently caters for approximately 5,000 students, most of whom are undergraduates. Very few postgraduate programmes are offered. To this end, there needs to be administrative policy put in place to deal with introducing a blended learning module. Such a policy would serve as a guiding principle for selecting the best course of action in favour of hybrid learning. From the literature review above, a major attribute of a blended approach is its capacity to offer a highly interactive and collaborative educational experience to thousands of students– high registrations and a greater course demand - at a reduced cost. Owing to this, there will have to be a formal approach to policy and operations development to facilitate hybrid learning approaches.

Planning

Planning is very closely aligned to policy (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). At the UG, two crucial stages of planning are considered necessary to introduce and sustain a hybrid approach: *strategic* and *operational* planning. Why strategic plans? These include the specification of requirements, objectives and aims, available resources and possible costs. Potential costs is the most complicated and important of these, as these must account for technology, delivery format and schedule, staffing - technical assistance, administrative support, course designers and facilitators - and infrastructure like Internet access, office space, hardware/software, and the like.

Why operational plans? Because the aims and goals in the plan need to be executed. In reference to hybrid learning, this kind of planning attends to the non-instructional components such as promotional and marketing strategies, establishing and maintaining associations for joint resources, monitoring technology and creating an efficient evaluation process of the approach.

Resources

Carefully assessing the requisite resources to implement and maintain hybrid learning environments cannot be treated lightly. The three main kinds of resources needed are *financial, human*, and *technical* (Lunenburg & Irby, 2006).

With reference to *financial resources*, it is important to highlight that no organisation can function

without money. And, to this end, it will be needed to initiate and support the blended learning proposal. Continual incentives for Internet-ready computers and instructional design and development support are key areas for consideration. At UG, this cost can be affordable and can be found in existing budgets, once there is a priorities' reassessment. To this end, commitment from senior administration has to be ratified.

Concerning *human resources*, it would not be jejune to say that the development and delivery of a blended learning approach at UG is heavily dependent on people. Individuals who possess skills in instructional design, technology and curriculum development will be needed to assist with teaching faculty new to this pedagogical method. Apart from these, there will be a need for individuals who can provide motivational strategies and personal attention for teaching faculty who may not be convinced of the value of the hybrid learning approach.

In relation to *technical resources*, the UG will need to obtain the kind that is dependable and transparent in order to ensure that the specific technology can enhance the learning-teaching process, rather than impede it. This requires having learning management tools in place that are up to date, reliable and easy to use, possessing the capacity to meet the learners' needs.

Scheduling

The fact is unquestionable that blended learning approaches need considerable thought to course scheduling. And the same will apply to the UG. Specifically, teaching faculty and administration will need to rethink the way courses are offered: will blended learning courses and programmes be offered via the traditional format (4 days a week for 1 hour)? Or will there be a more emancipatory format, where flexible scheduling can be implemented, to allow learners and facilitators to work at a time best suited to them? This may very well be a big issue and an enormous challenge at UG, since such changes may need approval from senior administration.

Support

As it relates to the introduction and implementation of a blended learning approach at the UG, a critical component of this model is to provide training and support for both students and teaching faculty (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). At a minimum, the provision of effective blended learning support necessitates an understanding of the course management environment in which facilitators and learners will be, in addition to situational, institutional, informational and dispositional obstacles.

More specifically, a dedicated student service support centre needs to be established to assist students with technology access not only to get computers with the correct software and Internet connectivity, but also to train them with the necessary skills to be successful in such an environment.

Just like students, the teaching faculty will also need the requisite training and support, especially those who have never used a computer before and those who have misgivings about this new method. They will need assistance in matters related to course development, time management, and technical assistance. The most effectual support system that a teacher can have is a course development team to assist in the design and development of the blended learning courses and programmes. Such a team usually consists of an instructor as content expert, an instructional designer assisting with course design, and a media specialist who assists with the creation of course materials.

Organisational and Leadership Issues

The fact is irrefutable that HE institutions, oftentimes, are notoriously resistant to change (Lingam, 2012). In light of the continual changing scenes in HE, and the desire to effect quality education, many universities are rethinking their strategic plan, drafting policy to guide technological innovation and developing models to preserve HE traditional values, all with a view to dramatically improving the students' educative experience. Blended learning has been favoured to preserve and enhance those traditional values, hence its early success and interest. It allows for the enhancement of the campus experience, the extension of thinking, learning and teaching through the innovative use of ICT.

The present challenge for all stakeholders of the UG - administrators, policymakers and teaching faculty - is to recognise and admit that there have been considerable and unalterable changes in societal demands, funding deficits, competition, student demographics and technological innovations. Owing

to this, a critical need exists for them to creatively and assertively move to tackle and adjust to these changes. In order to respond to these changes, there must be change in mind-set, a consciousness-raising, a paradigm shift, a change of conception to reposition HE institutions in reference to learning and teaching. In other words, therefore, it requires a shift in thinking, concerning how the educational orgsanisation is run. This is a pivotal issue that needs urgent attention.

In light of the above, a successful introduction and implementation of a blended learning approach at the UG will necessitate the following:

- Establishing a clear institutional direction and policy.
- Increasing awareness and commitment.
- Creating a point of support, quality assurance and enhancement and project management.
- Creating a fund specifically for financial support and incentives, through the University, to commence the blended learning course transformation process.
- Investing in a reliable and accessible technology infrastructure.
- Selecting models strategically that prove to be exceptionally successful exemplars to effective learning and teaching.
- Developing a formal pedagogical design support via the blended learning format
- Evaluating systematically the satisfaction and success of learning and teaching, technology and new course administration.
- Instituting a task team to address issues, challenges and opportunities and to communicate and suggest new directions to the University community.

Fulfilling the demands of the above pre-requisites present a notable challenge to the leaders and academic faculty of the UG. The literature reviewed has clearly established the vital role of learning technologies in education. Then, what is the UG doing to respond to the rapid changes which are certain to dislocate its traditional framework and operational dynamic? The answer to this question lies in whether UG's educational leaders have the courage and vision to transform it into a 21st century institution. To ignore would be to disregard the core purpose of HE: scholarly inquiry by students and teachers. And as Mahatma Gandhi says, "We ignore, at our own risk".

The UG's senior academic leaders can no longer micro-manage or manage from a distance. They must commit resources to implementing a blended learning model, through ICT development, whose academic returns can be extremely enormous. What is desperately needed is a will to act and a focus on meaningful change, change that would see a major improvement in student learning outcomes. Is this not what is desired? It must be immediately affirmed that hybrid learning is not a technological whim. In fact, as established, it is an approach that seeks to convert UG in a manner congruent with its highest ideals: the fulfillment of its vision and mission.

And this brings us to the next point: how the UG reacts to technological change will be a good indicator as to its inner drive for greatness or mediocrity. In this ICT age, where a great many universities are in concordance, the survival of many HE institutions is at risk. The justification behind this is that there is intense competition for the best students and faculty. Tuitions are on the increase and UG students are demanding value for their money. Not only are they petitioning for a quality learning experience, they also clamour for service and convenience. El-Deghaidy and Nouby (2008) postulate there is increasing evidence that sitting in a lecture hall throughout the week is not intellectually stimulating or is simply not worth the travel to campus.

It therefore follows that educational leaders must adopt and implement these values. They must be made evident in learning, teaching and research. Where is the true spirit of experimentation and adventure in pedagogy? Where is the exploration to move UG from a 19th century to a 21st century HE institution? Is UG really committed to ensuring that learners construct knowledge? It would not be unfair to say that at UG, very little attention is given to classroom experiences, growing expectations of quality HE and the potential of a hybrid approach for educational sustainability. Even though it may not be known what the future has in store, one thing is certain: it is high time for administration and leadership to engage students and teachers in exploring new and promising possibilities.

Conclusions

The discussion above has centred its attention on the implications of introducing a hybrid learning approach at the University of Guyana. The UG is the only tertiary education institution in Guyana which, to date, still embraces a traditional approach to learning and teaching, where all of the classes are face to face. Research has shown that such a method, even though it may engage students, is still teacher-directed and does not allow an emancipatory, student-

centred approach to learning (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006). In fact, students are a part of a system which has frank apathy towards their true interests: improving the quality of learning through quality teaching.

A hybrid learning approach has the potential to transform the current situation at the UG, combining the benefits of a traditional teacher-led session with the advantages of self-paced and innovative instructional tools. It encourages flexibility of learning, eliminates distance barriers, and adapts learning materials to the different styles of learning. Blended learning is a promising development and shows excellent future potential for assisting the students in determining what is available and combining the most relevant options for their needs.

It is imminent that campus-based higher education will embrace the blended learning model in meaningful ways. For this to happen, and for the transition to be quick, there must be a clear policy and strong leadership. In a very short space of time, the UG can be converted into a HE institution consistent with its vision, mission, values and goals, while alleviating the pedagogical and fiscal challenges and deficiencies currently facing the quality of classroom experiences. The academic evidence, benefit and competitive advantages are crystal clear. What is needed, are the commitment and the will to invoke and sustain change. It is without doubt that blended learning has the potential to initiate the urgent process of rethinking and reshaping the UG to becoming a learner-centred institution which seeks to facilitate a higher learning experience.

To this end, a pilot study can be conducted to assess the effectiveness of this model. Such a study can shed valuable information on the degree of achievement of the learning outcomes, student satisfaction, retention and achievement, programme satisfaction, and so on. For this study to be done a learning management system (LMS) will have to be chosen which will ultimately lead to the assessment of the learning process, the effects of blended learning on this process, as it relates to higher order thinking – critical and reflective skills - while promoting high interaction, high collaboration and high motivation. A good suggestion would be to use *Moodle,* a *free* learning management system (LMS) being used by a number of universities around the world. This is validated by Raturi, Hogan and Thaman (2011).

In light of the above, it behooves the UG's leadership, and all other stakeholders, to explore the impact of hybrid learning in achieving more significant educational experiences. They must first realise that rapid inevitable changes are upon them and that they must now do everything in their power to present students with significant learning options. The emphasis should be on giving learners quality options. After all, what will it profit the UG to regress, when it is in an age of progression? What will it profit the students? This is the impetus that must propel the UG to move forward and upward towards becoming a University that embodies learning and teaching excellence.

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