

# Researcher study effectiveness of traditional and blended learning environments

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In today's online era, the concept of a classroom extends beyond a walled room with desks and chairs and into the realm of cyber space. Computer screens are replacing the blackboard and keypads are replacing chalk. To provide learners with the best experience, many educators are opting for a blended approach: a traditional classroom with face-to-face interaction supplemented by online resources. One University of Missouri researcher has found that while this approach is currently not necessarily more effective, there is hope for developing an effective hybrid approach to learning.

"I couldn't find any research on the subject of blended learning when I was trying to decide for my own class whether blended learning was effective," said Shawna Strickland, director of the Respiratory Therapy Program at the MU School of Health Professions. "In theory, it sounds great, but there was really no hard evidence that it works. In addition, it is important to ask the question: 'do the students even like it?'"

In her latest study, "The Effectiveness of Blended Learning Environments for the Delivery of Respiratory Care Education," Strickland compared the course delivery methods in two respiratory therapy courses taught by the same teacher. One group of students completed the course in a traditional environment, while the other group completed the course in a blended environment. The method of course delivery, the final examination grade and the course grade were recorded for each student. Strickland studied the students' satisfaction with the course through the information provided by each student on a

standardized student evaluation of the course.

Strickland discovered that there were few statistical differences between the effectiveness of a traditional course delivery method and a hybrid one. The student satisfaction evaluation also revealed that students in the hybrid classrooms are more frequently confused regarding course requirements. It also was noted that the students who completed the course in a traditional setting were more pleased with the course outcomes than the students who completed the blended course.

Strickland discovered that there were few statistical differences between the effectiveness of a traditional course delivery method and a hybrid one. The final examination and course grades were almost identical.

"While there was slightly more confusion regarding hybrid classrooms, the results favor the continuing practice of blended learning environments as a viable option for course delivery in health care education," Strickland said. "Overall, the basic results say it's at least as good as a traditional classroom. As professors become more technologically savvy and more used to supplementing their courses with online material, the blended course will become more favorable,"

In her study, Strickland lists the many benefits to blended classrooms: increased classroom size, accessibility of material and flexibility, but noted that motivation and technological ability are major factors in the success of a student in a blended environment. The study was published in the *Journal of Allied Health*, which is sponsored by the Schools of Allied Health.

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia

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