

Exploring Higher Education Learners' View on Positive Aspects of Block Mode of Teaching: A Secondary Data Analysis Approach

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Abstract

The Block Mode of Teaching (BMT) is a model of teaching where students study their subjects in shorter periods of time. BMT has been found to bring about several advantages to the education system. The present study explored the learners' perspective on advantages of studying in the BMT in the university setting. Secondary data analysis was used in this study as a research methodology. The data gathered were then analysed by using a thematic analysis technique. Finally, a big picture framework was developed for positive views of university learners on the BMT. The proposed big picture framework introduces 6 clusters, namely, Focused Learning, Workload Management, Skill Development, Flexibility, Interactive Learning, and Support Systems. The results of this study have several implications for the higher education practitioners as well as the research community.

Keywords: Block Mode of Teaching; Immersive Mode of Learning; Student Perceptions; Positive Aspects.

1. Introduction

The Block Mode of Teaching (BMT) provides an innovative shift in the higher education, that challenges the traditional semester-long teaching and learning models. In the BMT approach of teaching and learning, students intensely focus on a single subject at a time, usually for the period of three to four weeks, before starting the next subject. This format offers a concentrated immersive learning experience, that includes extended class sessions which combines the lectures, tutorials, and practical activities into a single day.

The adoption of Block Mode Teaching (BMT) in higher education is linked to several significant advantages for the student learning and the overall educational outcomes. Previous research indicates that this focused format can boost academic performance, can improve the student engagement, and contributes to the enhance retention rates. Former studies have highlighted that students who are enrolled in the block mode courses often achieve higher grades and they develop a more deep understanding of the course material in comparison with the traditional semester-long classes. Additionally, the shorter duration of the block courses seems to encourage a more concentrated and continuous learning format, that enables students to build momentum in their studies and keeps higher motivation levels throughout the course.

Research on Block Mode of Teaching (BMT) in the higher education has massively concentrated on its application, and the challenges it presents, as well as its overall success. A large number of studies have examined how this model of teaching and learning impacts the academic performance, the student satisfaction, and the instructional methods (Male et al., 2018; Dixon & O'Gorman, 2020). Despite this matter, there is a clear gap when it comes to a comprehensive analysis of learners' perspectives on the positive aspects of BMT across various educational settings and various academic disciplines. While

some studies in the literature have briefly looked into the student experiences, there is no comprehensive framework introduced to capture the diverse benefits of BMT from the learners' point of view. Using a secondary data analysis approach, this paper aims to fill this gap by presenting a comprehensive view of the higher education students' perspectives on the the positive outcomes of BMT.

Understading that how students perceive the benefits of the BMT is important for many reasons. Firstly, students' views have a significant impact on their engagement, motivation, and overall academic success (Helfaya, 2019). Secondly, as higher education continuously adapts to evolving student needs and their societal expectations, insights from learners can play a crucial role in shaping policy decisions and curriculum development (Çetin, 2021).

This reminder of the current article is organised as follows: After this introduction, a review of the relevant literature is provided. The research methodology is then discussed, followed by presentation of the findings that underpin the overarching framework of the paper. The article then concludes the article with final remarks.

2. Literature Review

The block-based teaching approach has gained recognition as an innovative educational strategy in the higher education. This model involves the focused and intensive way of study for a single subject within a shorter period of time, setting it apart from traditional semester-long course structure. The approach has been recognised for its capability to enhance student engagement, improve learning outcomes, as well as to provide flexibility to address a wide range of student needs.

This pedagogical approach is characterised by its intensive format,

wherein students concentrate their efforts on a single subject for a short period of time, which generally spanning 3 to 4 weeks. It is developed on the basis of key educational principles such as immersive learning, active involvement of students, and quick feedback cycles. Although the block scheduling has been a part of K-12 education for quite some time, its employment in the higher education has become more common, specifically in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact in accelerating the adoption of this model in the higher education, as universities worked to implement more adaptable teaching strategies.

The block model allows for an in-depth focus on a single subject, at a time, contrary to traditional semester system, where students focus on multiple subjects at once. The goal of this approach is to ease cognitive load of students and increase deeper understanding. Additionally, it offers more interactive and hands-on experiences of learning compared to the conventional lecture-based teaching and learning format. According to the block teaching model, such concentrated focus can lead to better retention rates and better understanding of complex concepts, as opposed to the conventional approach of spreading out learning over a longer period of time.

The effects of BMT in higher education have been largely explored in the recent years. In 2020, Dixon and O'Gorman examined how the lecturers perceive intensive instruction in undergraduate education. Their finding shows that, although lecturers valued the increased student engagement and the possibility to offer more deep learning experiences, there were some complexities in the effectively delivering the content. Similarly, Male et al. (2018) performed an in-depth analysis on how intensive mode of teaching was implemented across Australian universities, and the study indicates that block mode courses often led to higher levels of student satisfaction as well as improved academic outcomes.

Further research by Helfaya (2019) studied the integration of the computer-based assessment and feedback in a block teaching framework, particularly in the context of digital accounting education. This study showed that the combination of BMT with innovative techniques of assessment significantly increased the students' engagement and their performance in subjects that were technical. Study by Çetin (2021) provided insights from a Turkish university, that block teaching was associated with a higher rates of student success and positive attitudes toward this method of teaching and learning. Additionally, Burton and Nesbit (2008) provided a comparative perspective, that indicates students in block mode courses generally outperformed those students studying in traditional semester-long courses, with higher satisfaction levels, particularly noted in their engagement with course material and their peer interactions.

Despite these individual studies addressing various aspects of BMT, there remains a gap in the literature. Specifically, there is a lack of comprehensive framework that fully encompasses the multifaceted benefits of the BMT from the perspective of the learners. This paper aims to fill this gap by offering a broad overview of higher education learners' views on the positive aspects of block mode teaching, by employing a secondary data analysis approach.

3. Methodology

This study has employed secondary data analysis as the research method (Johnson, 2014). The reason why the secondary data analysis method has been used herein is that this method allows collecting data from a wide variety of free data sources that are easily accessible; it mostly does not require ethical clearance as the data is already available to the public; and it allows the researcher to generate new understandings from existing data.

Secondary data is defined by Vartanian (2011, p. 3) as “data collected by others, not specifically for the research question at hand”. Secondary data is typically collected for purposes other than the current research study. Examples include government reports, organizational records, data from previous research, data from magazines and news papers, forum and podcasts. Secondary data for the purpose of this study has been collected from the Australian University Reviews portal on a page related to Victoria University.

The collected data were then analyzed using a thematic analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the analysis process, the recurring themes were

identified across the data. The themes were then categorized to form the big picture proposed in this study.

4. Findings

Figure 1 shows the big picture this study has developed for university learners’ positive views on Block Mode of Teaching. This big picture has 6 clusters, namely, Focused Learning, Workload Management, Skill Development, Flexibility, Interactive Learning, and Support Systems. In what follows each cluster is explained and supported by quotes from students.

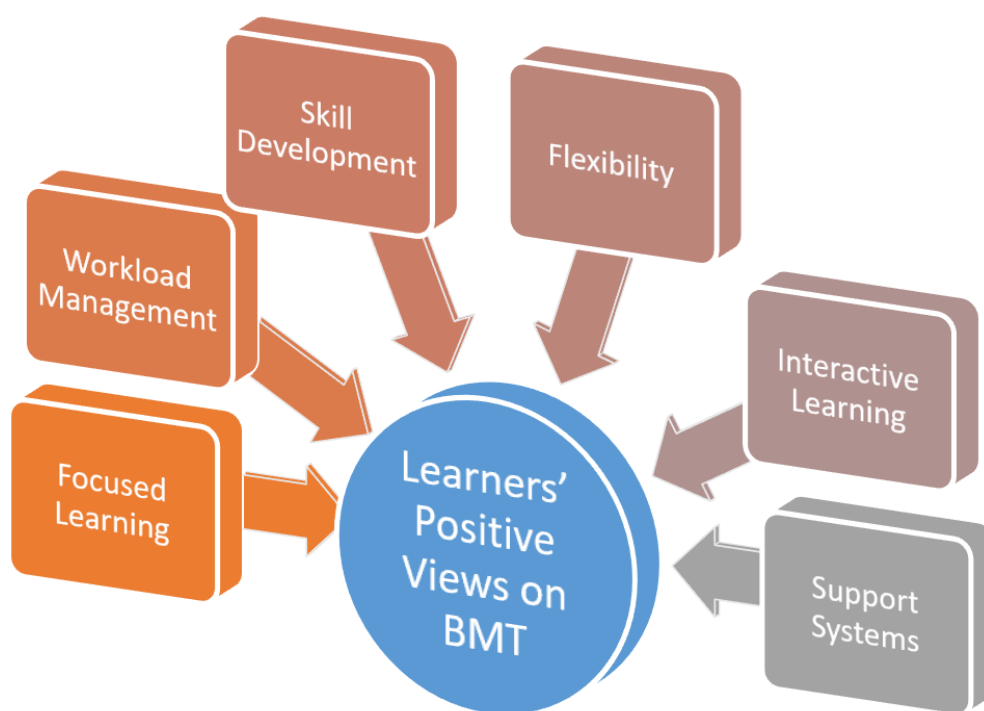


Figure 1. A big picture of learners’ positive views on Block Mode of Teaching

4.1. Focused Learning

A number of student participants mentioned the “Intense Subject

Immersion” as an advantage of the BMT. The following student quotes support this, “The block method is a great way to immerse yourself in a subject”. Some other students mentioned the “Potential for Better Grades” as a major benefit of

the BMT which is a result of increased focus on the subject. On this token, one student says, "[The block method is] a chance to get a high distinction [achievement] because of the heightened focus on the subject matter."

4.2. Workload Management

Some of the students who participated in this study indicated that a strength of the BMT is the enhanced workload management. As an example of the quotes by students here, one student said, "Block model is great for new students and for managing workloads". Some other students refer to "Clear Instructions" as an advantage of the BMT which has helped them get better understanding of the assignments and thus become more efficient. For example, one student said, "They clearly explained the criteria and answered questions about it, before they assigned assignments."

4.3. Skill Development

Some of the students who were engaged in this study indicated the "Improved Academic Writing" as a positive aspect of the BMT. As an example of the quotes by students here, one student said, "I can write considerably better academically so that is one thing they taught me." Some others referred to the "Enhanced Critical Thinking" as a benefit of studying in the BMT. On this token a students said, "Yes, getting a low mark on work you think is amazing stings but you'll look back and realise they are right, your writing was terrible 6 months ago."

4.4. Flexibility

A group of the students engaged in this study indicated the "Adaptable Learning Pace" as a positive aspect of the BMT. As an example of the quotes by students here, one students said, "Block mode does show some merit". Some other students referred to the "Understanding Culture" as a key benefit of studying in the BMT. On this token, a student said, "I

also appreciated that they were rather flexible and did understand that being a student can be difficult when trying to balance your obligations with real life."

4.5. Interactive Learning

A number of the students who participated indicated the "Engaging Learning Environment" as an advantage of studying in the BMT. For example, one student said, "Their teaching methods were just, chill, modern, engaging, encouraging and effective."

Some other participants referred to the "Opportunity for Practical Application" as a positive aspect fo studying in the BMT. On this token, a student said, "For example, once, we made a play about education strategies."

4.6. Support Systems

A group of participants mentioned the "Accessible Help" as a key advantage of studying in the BMT. For example, one student said, "They clearly explained the criteria and answered questions about it, before they assigned assignments. They were willing to help with assignments via email." A number of other participants indicated the "Provided Resources" as a merit for the BMT. Here is a quote by one of the students about this, "They provided helpful resources for our assignments". Finally, "Accommodation for Special Needs" was found as another positive aspect of studying in the BMT. On this token, a student said, "They provided enlarged colour-coded timetables for those with special needs, which are very easy to follow."

5. Conclusions

The current paper explored the benefits studying in the Block Mode of Teaching bring for university students. The study used the secondary data analysis as a research method and thematic analysis as an analysis technique. A big picture framework was developed for university learners' positive views on Block Mode of Teaching. This framework summarises

the positive aspects of studying in the block mode of teaching in the following categories, Focused Learning, Workload Management, Skill Development, Flexibility, Interactive Learning, and Support Systems. The findings of this paper have significant implications for executives and top managers in higher

education sector, academics and educators, curriculum designers, students about to choose a university to study, and so on.

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