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People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

Collaborative pathways: Empowering blended learning and advancing future-focused education

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This extended abstract delineates a collaborative endeavor between the School of Communication & Design and the Learning Design team at RMIT Vietnam. The project's core objective was to uplift and reimagine blended learning approaches across selected courses.

In line with the growing body of research endorsing the role of academic-designer partnerships in fostering technology-enhanced learning (Ellis et al., 2016; Nihuka & Voogt, 2012; Huber & Jacka, 2022; McDonald & Mayes, 2005), this initiative thrived on the close collaboration between academics and learning designers.

What sets our approach apart is the non-homogenized implementation of blended learning changes. Instead of uniformly transitioning courses from face-to-face to a blended format, changes were specifically tailored based on the needs and learning outcomes of each course. This bespoke approach, combined with our multifaceted support framework and adaptive project management strategies, ensured that the course design was both effective and reflective of individual course characteristics.

The multifaceted support framework leveraged initial design workshops to establish core principles and a shared vision, codesign of initial proof of concept course modules, design templates, a central site providing blended learning exemplars and pedagogical resources and ongoing consultations. Embedded throughout these were foundational frameworks for online and blended learning including Backward Design and Community of Inquiry (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, Garrison et al., 2001). New tools to support active, social, asynchronous learning were also integrated into the LMS. Adaptive project management strategies addressed challenges as they arose.

The transformed courses showcase innovative blended learning approaches personalized to disciplinary contexts, leading to positive measurable impacts. Academics reported feeling empowered by new skills gained through the collaboration and this positive reception extended the reach of the program, providing a catalyst for academics not directly involved to implement the approaches and tools used in the program in their own course design.

Despite its success, the initiative was not devoid of challenges. Different priorities necessitated compromise, and academics required additional support to adapt to new the new technologies and pedagogical strategies. The project's collaborative nature proved instrumental in surmounting these hurdles, enabling learning designers to progressively build academic involvement whilst addressing issues central to blended learning implementation in a Vietnamese context such as lack of familiarity and experience with blended learning (Le et al., 2021).

The outcomes of this collaboration underscore the value of leveraging complementary expertise of academics and designers. Beyond elevating technology-enhanced learning, the project fostered mutual understanding, leading to wider impacts than initially anticipated. Insights gained can inform effective collaboration strategies and highlight organizational enablers to nurture such relationships and promote the move to blended learning and uplifting of courses on a larger scale.

This tailored approach not only represents a best practice example in the TEL context but also signifies a progressive step in the broader landscape of higher education, which is rapidly evolving towards online and blended modalities. While our experience is grounded in the Vietnamese context, the inherent flexibility and adaptability of our methods make it a model that can be replicated and customised for diverse tertiary educational settings globally.

As higher education continues its evolutionary trajectory, academic-designer collaborations such as this one, rooted in blended learning enhancement, will grow in significance. The insights and methods presented here offer valuable pointers for those aiming to advance pedagogical innovation.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Collaboration, Technology-enhanced learning, Vietnam

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