

A Survey of Blended Learning Trends in Corporate Training Settings in Korea

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Blended learning has become one of the major trends in Korean corporate training. However, there has been scant research on blended learning in corporate training settings in Korea. The purpose of the present study was to explore current and future trends of blended learning in corporate and other training settings in Korea. 136 people from training related fields such as human resource development (HRD), training, and e-learning participated in this research. The findings revealed many interesting current trends and future expectations related to blended learning in training settings. In regards to the overall status of blended learning in Korean corporations, participants displayed strong interest in blended learning and were expecting that the importance of blended learning would grow in their organizations either modestly or significantly during the next few years. In addition, the perceptions of the respondents regarding the benefits of blended learning and the barriers to implementation in their respective organizations were analyzed.

Keywords : Blended learning, Training and Development, HRD

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Introduction

Globalization, new technology, and the increased value placed on knowledge influencing working and learning in organizations has led many organizations to focus on training (Noe, 2002). Particularly, with the emergence of Internet technologies, e-learning has been acknowledged as one of innovative methods for delivering training (Galagan, 2000; Rogenberg, 2001; Rossett, 2002). Although there are some positive results related to e-learning as a delivery method for training in corporate settings (Brown, 2001; Brown & Ford, 2002; Welsh, Wanberg, Brown, & Simmering, 2003), there are several critical limitations of e-learning. Such limitations include the lack of human interaction (Laurillard, 1993), the lack of diversity in the structure, the targeted groups, the quality of the content, and the delivery methods of e-learning (Lee, 2003).

In response to these limitations, interests in blended learning in corporate training as well as other educational sectors, have grown significantly (Boyle, Bradly, Chalk, Jones, & Pickard, 2003; Duhaney, 2004; Elliott, 2002; Thorne, 2003; Zenger & Uehlein, 2001). Blended learning is typically defined as a combination of various delivery methods; in particular, combining face-to-face and online instruction (Bonk & Graham, 2006), though there are many other definitions and viewpoints related to blended learning.

Recently, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) ranked blended learning as one of the top ten trends in the knowledge delivery industry (Rooney, 2003). Some scholars are expecting 80-90 percent of college and corporate training classes will use blended learning approach, and that more than one billion learners around the globe will be advancing their knowledge and their skills in this fashion (Kim, Bonk, & Zeng, 2005). As Rosenberg (2003) mentioned in his book, the question of blended learning is not about if we should blend or not, but about what the ingredients should be.

Along with this pervasive global trend of blended learning, the interests of blended

learning in diverse settings, such as higher education, government, and corporate settings in Korea also have increased tremendously (Kim & Choi, 2003; Lee & Im, 2006). According to a white paper by the Ministry of Education, and Korean Education and Research Information System (KERIS) (2003), about 63 percent in 2002 and 67 percent in 2003 of university courses in Korea used blended learning approaches (Lee & Im, 2006). In addition, more recently, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Energy of Korea announced that they would use blended learning as a training method for small and mid sized organizations (2006, March). With this governmental support for and interest in blended learning, a number of large Korean corporations, such as Samsung, Posco, and LG have tried to implement blended learning in their respective training programs (Kim & Choi, 2003).

Despite the strong interests related to blending learning both in corporate organizations (Kim & Choi, 2003) and higher education (Lee & Im, 2006) institutions in Korea, there is scant empirical research related to blended learning. In particular, the needs for research are most acute in corporate settings (Kim & Choi, 2003). In response to such needs, the purpose of this study was to explore the current and future trends of blended learning in Korean corporations. This study was part of an international study of the future of blended learning in corporate settings in five countries, which included USA, UK, China, Taiwan, and Korea, conducted between 2005 and 2006 (see Kim, Bonk, Teng, Son, Zeng, & Oh, 2006).

Even though interests in blended learning are dramatically increasing, relatively little is known about the actual trends and in-roads of blended learning in Korea. This study will contribute to a better understanding what the state of blended learning in Korea currently is as well as the possible future directions. Additionally, the extensive use of blended learning in Korea may stem from the prevalence of Internet access and its well-planned and well-supported infrastructure (Lee & Im, 2006). Korea is also one of the countries highly interested in technology-based training. Thus, it will provide a solid example for corporations in other countries who want to set up a national level infrastructure for technology-based training systems.

Literature Review

Blended Learning in Corporate Settings

The evidence that blended learning is becoming a dominant delivery method for adult learners can be found in studies of both higher education as well as corporate settings (Bonk & Graham 2006; Duhaney, 2004). For example, a recent survey indicates that the use of blended learning in all of the training in the United States will jump to nearly 30 percent by 2006, or about double that of 2004 (Balance Learning, 2004). In addition, another higher education survey (Kim, Bonk, & Zeng, 2005) shows that 93 percent of respondents were already using blended learning in their teaching.

Given the strong interests in blended learning in various education and training settings, many researchers provided definitions of blended learning (Bielawski & Metcalf, 2003; Bonk & Graham 2006; Driscoll, 2002; Rooney, 2003; Thorne, 2003). Recently, Graham (2006) classified the most common definitions of blended learning into following three themes; (1) combining instructional modalities, (2) combining instructional methods, and (3) combining online and face-to face instruction. According to him, the third definition of blended learning, which is “a combination of online and face-to-face interaction,” (p.5) fits the historical background of the emergence of blended learning system more precisely than the other two.

Several researchers have argued for benefits of blended learning such as engaging learning environments (van Dam & Andrade, 2005), higher levels of interaction (Dziuban, Hartman, Juge, Moskal & Sorg, 2006), convenience for learners, reduced travel costs, and improving business performance (Harris, 2005). More specifically, Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) accumulated the results of various case studies of blended learning and identified the benefits of blended learning environments as follows; (1) pedagogical richness, (2) access to knowledge, (3) social interaction, (4) personal agency, (5) cost-effectiveness, and (6) ease of revision. Also, research by

Dziuban and his colleagues (Dziuban, et al., 2006) at the University of Central Florida showed that blended learning is more effective based on students' grade, withdrawal rate of students, and overall students' satisfaction. Many additional benefits of blended learning in corporate, military and other training settings are outlined in the recent *Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs*, by Bonk and Graham (2006).

Although there is an agreement related to the potential of blended learning, there are still some critical issues that need to be addressed to deliver blended learning successfully (Bonk & Graham, 2006; Graham, Allen, and Ure, 2005). First of all, a clear guidance of the effective and efficient methods for delivering blended learning should be given to practitioners in training and education organizations. Since there are so many different delivery methods that can be used for blended learning in training settings (Bonk & Graham, 2006; Rossett, Douglass, & Frazee, 2003; Valiathan, 2002), it is very hard for people to choose a best combination of delivery methods for their own organizational settings. Another significant issue related to blended learning is to provide global perspectives within corporate settings. While there have been some discussion of blended learning on global perspectives in higher education (Bonk & Graham, 2006), little attention has been garnered on the benefits of global collaboration in corporate settings. Consequently, more attention on global benefits of blended learning in corporate setting is required.

Corporate Training in Korea

Due to the dissemination of high-speed Internet services, the technological infrastructure in Korea is ranked the highest among the advanced countries (Lee, 2003). E-learning in Korea started in the 1980s at the national level when the government planned to establish computer networks for all governmental agencies. Since the government has retained firm control over the public educational and training systems, several Korean Ministries have played critical roles in promoting e-

learning.

In addition to such interests in e-learning from the Korean government, e-learning in corporate training has been rapidly increasing during the past decade in Korea. In 1998, the Ministry of Labor (MOL) initiated a pilot-test project to help the legal system support web-based trainings. After the pilot-test project, the Ministry started Web-Based Training (WBT) as one of the delivery formats for vocational training under the Vocational Training Promotion Act (Lee, 2002). Then, the Ministry began to give financial support to corporations that offered mandatory web-based training courses for their employees (up to 80% and 90% of training costs, for large corporations and small-and med-size corporations, respectively). With such governmental support, it is not too surprising that the number of corporations utilizing WBT has dramatically increased since 1999. In addition, in 2001, the Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC) established the ‘Law for Developing Online Digital Contents Industry,’ which emphasized digital content for education and an urgent need for IT experts. In order to provide a nationwide communication infrastructure for high-speed Internet, MOIC continues to supply more convenient Internet service. Due to such strong support from the Korean government on e-learning, Korea rapidly developed an e-learning infrastructure.

Although some positive results have been shown in terms of the cost effectiveness of e-learning in higher education settings (Lee, 2002), some problems are mentioned regarding e-learning in corporate training. Lee (2003) pointed out that the absence of an extensive network of human, material, and information resources as well as the lack of diversity in the structure, the target group, the content, and the method of e-Learning are key problems of e-learning. Due to such limitations of e-learning for corporate training, there has been an increase in demands to adopt blended learning to maximize training outcome and learning transfer. For instance, a recent research study by Kim and Choi (2003) investigated the effectiveness of blended learning within a leadership training program. Their study focused on developing blended leadership training programs based on adult learning theories and strategies as well as

evaluating the effectiveness of the blended approach. The findings of their study indicated that the trainees' perception of blended learning, their satisfaction with their learning comprehension, and their learning competencies were dramatically improved as a result of the programs used blended learning approach. Even though their study was conducted with a small sample size (26 trainees), it demonstrated the potential of blended learning in corporate training.

The Study Methodology

A survey study of professionals in Korean workplaces was conducted to identify the current status and the future trend of blended learning in Korea. The present survey instrument consisted of 31 items related to respondent demographics and the current status and future directions of blended learning in their respective organizations. 30 questions in this questionnaire were closed-ended types, such as multiple-choice and Likert-scale items, and one question was open-ended type.

A research group composed of five investigators, including three Koreans, one Chinese, and American nationals, developed the instrument. The survey instrument was developed in English first, and then was translated into Korean by Korean investigators for this survey of Korean HRD professionals. The translation was then cross-checked by three members of the research team as well as by external colleagues to check the accuracy of the translation and validity of the instrument.

The participants of this survey study belonged to various types of organizations, including government, business, and not-for-profit organizations in Korea. In total, there were 136 respondents in this survey who worked in training related fields such as HRD or e-learning in their organizations. The survey took place between November 2005 and March 2006 using SurveyShare (<http://surveyshare.com>), a Web-based survey tool that also was used in our previous studies of the future of e-learning in corporate training and higher education settings in 2003 and 2004.

To access sufficient training and human resources professionals in Korea that were needed for this study, the survey was distributed to several online forums, communities, and listservs. The survey sponsor, SurveyShare, provided the expenses necessary for the access to different human resource professional databases and email services. The respondents to the survey submitted responses anonymously and were stored on the database hosted by the survey site. The data were retrieved from the database and were analyzed using some descriptive statistics such as frequencies.

Findings

The findings from the present study are discussed primarily in three sections: (1) demographics, (2) the current status of blended learning, and (3) the future trends of blended learning in Korean corporations.

Respondent Demographics

6 out of 31 questions addressed participant demographics, such as the location where they work, gender, the major industry of their organizations, the number of the employees in their organizations, their job duties, and their primary roles related to blended learning in their organizations. In terms of work location, 133 out of 136 Korean participants currently worked in Korea (97.8%). Regarding the gender, 96 among the 136 respondents were male (70.6%). The primary industries of their organizations included education, industrial or manufacturing, and information technology. The sizes of organizations that participants worked for also varied from companies having 1-100 employees (37%) to companies having more than 10,000 (14%) employees.

The job titles or roles of the participants were numerous, such as instructional designer or content developer (23%), consultant or learning technology advisor

(18.5%), human resources manager (13.3%), training manager or director (11.1%), and salesperson, marketing manager, or communications personnel (7.4%). Regarding blended learning, more than 35% of the respondents had planning roles. In addition, more than 15% had designing roles while another 10% had delivering roles.

The current status of blended learning in Korea

Across the survey, 15 out of 31 questions related to identifying the current status of blended learning in Korean corporations. With regard to the implementation status of blended learning in Korean corporations, 63.2% of the respondents answered that their organizations were using blended learning either recently or for more than past two years. In addition, roughly 28% of them noted that they were considering using it in the near future. For those who delivered blended learning, the five most frequent delivery approaches were instructor-led training, custom e-learning content, canned/off-the-shelf content, online coaching and mentoring, and workplace-related assignments. Blended learning is used to enhance employee's competency in numerous areas. Above all, job-related skills, leadership, new hire orientation, basic skills (e.g., reading and writing English as a second language), and business skills were the more popular ones for blended learning programs.

We also asked about their organization's overall vision or planning for blended learning. For instance, more than 85% of the respondents answered that their organizations have a strategic plan for training and development. Among these respondents, about 67% of them indicated that their organizations share it with employees internally and about 42% of them share it with public. In addition, more than 72% of participants believed that their strategic planning is working effectively. While more than 55% of those organizational plans address online learning, only slightly more than 35% address blended learning. Among the organizations whose plan addresses blended learning, 35% of them describe or lay out a specific blended

learning model or framework for their organizations. Moreover, more than 40% of those respondents believe that their particular organizations needed strategic planning advice regarding blended learning and more than 50% of them indicated that their organization needed other types of advice related to blended learning, such as that related to design, development, implementation, and evaluation.

In terms of the quality of the blended learning courses, it is important to point out that over 60% of the organizations conduct evaluations of the quality of their blended learning courses. Such evaluations are produced by training department personnel (37%), human resource personnel (22%), internal consultants (18.1%), external consultants (3.2%) and others (19.7%). Even though these professionals and their organizations indicated high interest in blended learning, more than 80% of the respondents answered that blended learning was implemented in less than 30% of their training initiatives. Also, approximately 65% noted that less than one-fourth of their training expenditures in both 2004 and 2005 were actually spent on blended learning.

In another question about benefits and obstacles/problems of blended learning, respondents viewed the greatest benefits of blended learning as learning appropriateness (29.6%), familiarity (15.6%), acceptability (11.9%), richer instructional content (11.1%), and scalability (11.1%), etc. (see Figure 1).

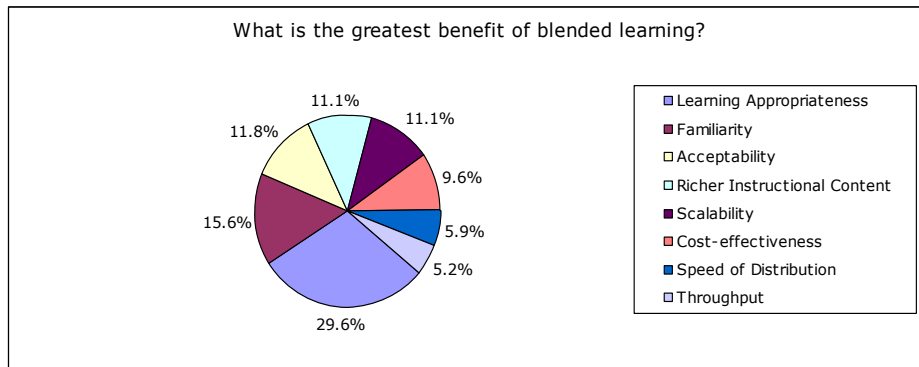


Figure 1. Benefits of blended learning

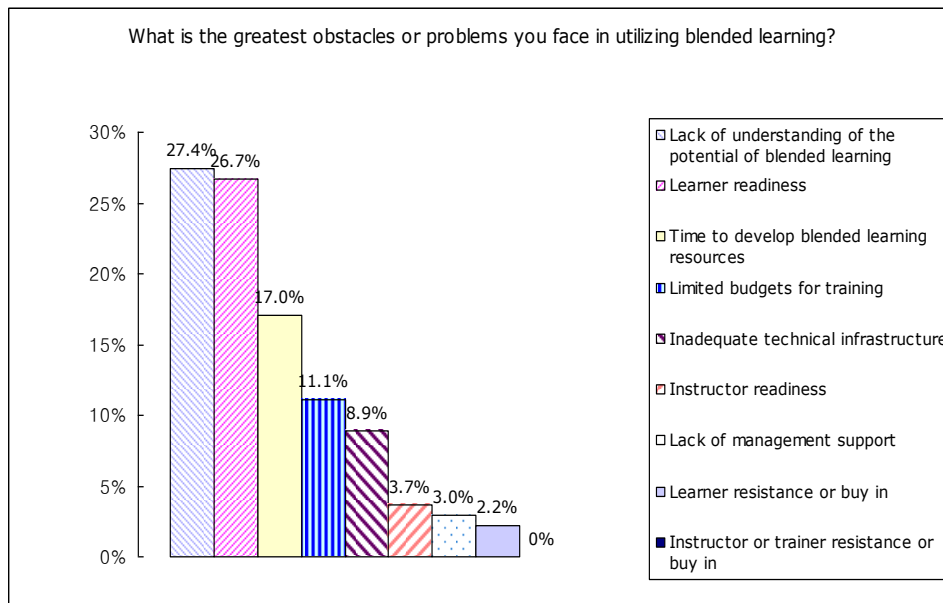


Figure 2. Greatest obstacles or problems related to blended learning

Regarding the greatest obstacles/problems of blended learning, respondents mentioned a lack of understanding of the potential of blended learning (27.4%), learner readiness (26.7%), time to develop blended learning resources (17.0%), limited budgets for training (11.1%), and inadequate technical infrastructure (8.9%) (see Figure 2).

Regarding the key drivers of blended learning in their organizations, the respondents believed that blended learning could improve the quality of the learning experience (54.5%), increase the availability and accessibility of learning (45.5%), and reduce the cost of training (22.4%). Additionally, they felt that new strategic directions or visions within their respective organizations promote the implementation of blended learning. Respondents were asked to identify the most important issues involved in launching a blended learning program: The key issues that they identified included the integration of blended learning with business processes and employee performance plans and incentives (39.4%), designing a launch program (21.2%), rapid feedback and technical support to fix problems that

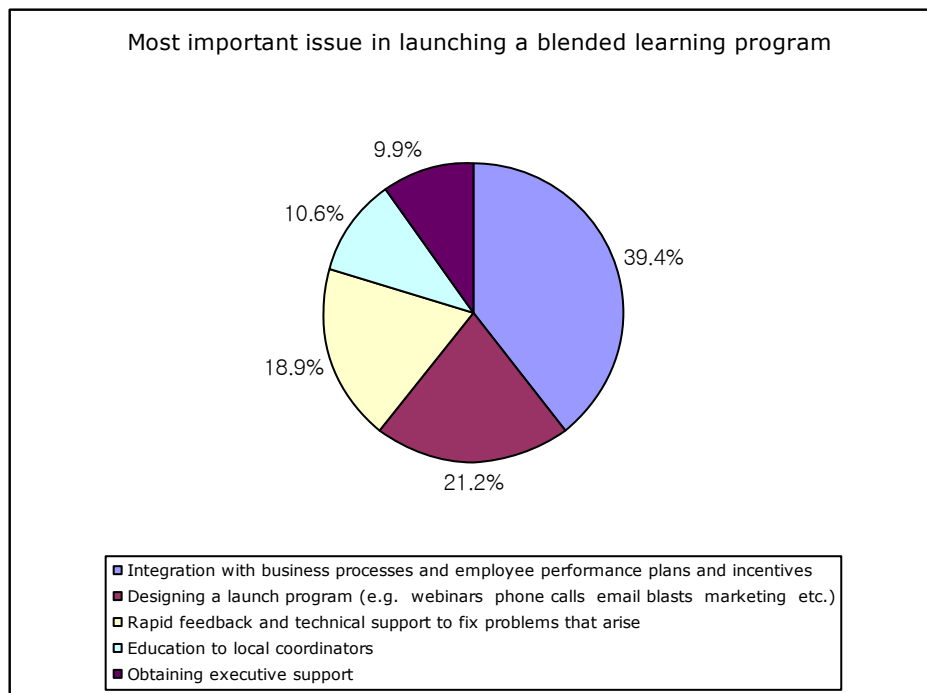


Figure 3. Most important issues in launching a blended learning program

arise (18.9%), education to local coordinators (10.6%), and obtaining executive support (9.9%) (see Figure 3).

Future trends of blended learning in Korean corporations

An overwhelming majority of those surveyed predicted that blended learning in their organizations would increase either a little bit or significantly during the next few years (83.6%). These respondents argued that the five most significant issues or problems with blended learning that must be addressed during the next few years are followings: (1) learners lacking self-regulated learning skills (23.9%), (2) boring and low quality content (13.4%), (3) lack of understanding of what blended learning really is (12.7%), (4) lack of standards (11.2%), and (5) fast changing technology (9.7%).

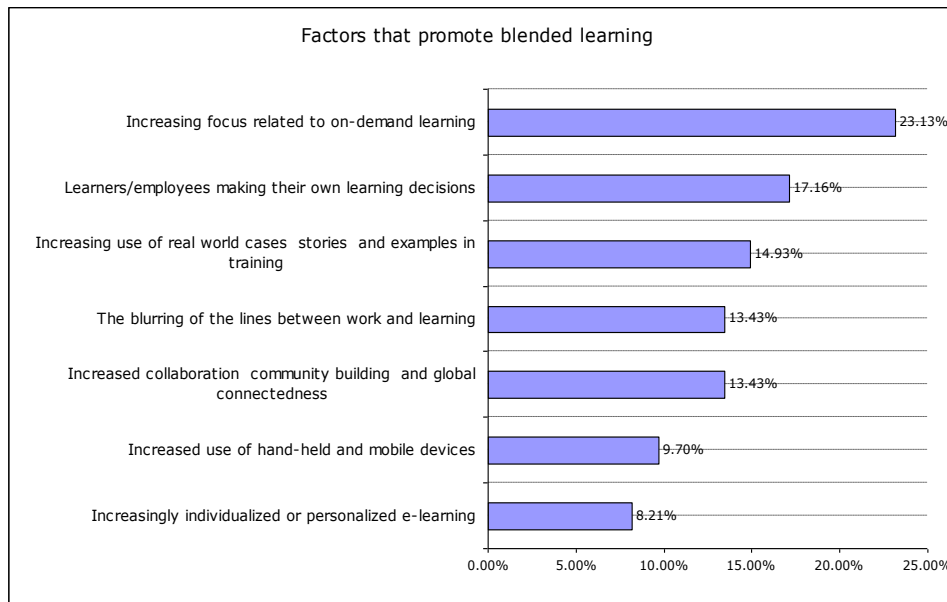


Figure 4. Factors that promote blended learning

Our survey respondents also predicted the factors that will promote blended learning the most during the next few years. Increasing focus related to on-demand learning (23.1%), learners/employees making their own learning decisions (17.2%), increasing use of real world cases stories and examples in training (14.93%), increased collaboration, community building, and global connectedness (13.4%), the blurring of the lines between work and learning (13.4%), increased use of hand-held and mobile devices (9.7%), Interestingly, individualized or personalized e-learning (8.2%) were ranked the highest (see Figure 4).

In terms of instructional approaches or strategies that will become more widely used in blended learning during the coming decade, coaching and mentoring, authentic cases and scenario learning, and problem-based learning were mentioned the most frequently (see Table 1). In effect, such approaches place more emphasis on learner control and relevant problems, rather than traditional instructor-centered approaches such as modeling and lecturing.

Table 1. Instructional approaches or strategies to be widely used in blended learning

Rank	Instructional approaches/strategies	Response Ratio (%)
1	Coaching and mentoring	59.7
2	Authentic cases and scenario learning	56.0
3	Problem-based learning	44.8
4	Modeling of the solution process	41.0
5	Simulations or gaming	35.8
6	Self-paced learning	34.3
7	Virtual team collaboration and problem solving	29.9
8	Discussion	17.2
9	Guided learning	14.9
10	Debates and role play	12.7
11	Lecturing and instructor-directed activities	11.9
12	Exploration and discovery	11.2
13	Socratic questioning	3.0

Figure 5 shows which emerging technologies will most significantly impact the delivery of blended learning during the coming decade. Among the thirteen response items, knowledge management tools (36.1%), online simulations (12.0%), cell phones/mobile technologies and handheld technologies (8.3%), intelligent agents (8.3%), and webcasting or video streaming (8.3%) are the most frequently mentioned. Knowledge management tools stood out as the important emerging tool for blended learning in the coming years according to our survey respondents.

More than 67% of respondents' viewed blended learning as important to the strategic planning within training and development in their organizations during the next few years. Also, 55.5% of respondents who have the strategic planning noted that they included the blended learning as their strategic planning within training and development in their organizations.

Regarding the evaluation of the quality of blended learning, they believed that they

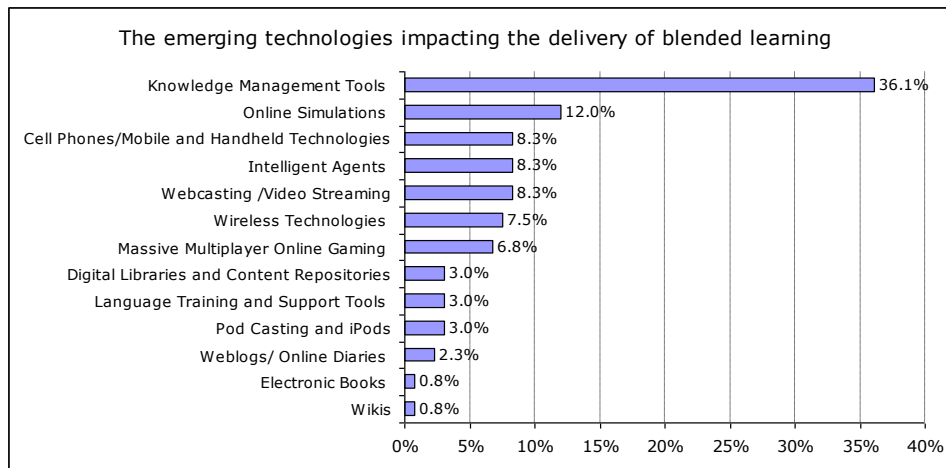


Figure 5. The emerging technologies impacting the delivery of blended learning

should measure employee performance on the job (25.6 %) as well as employee performance on simulated tasks of real-world activities (20.3%). Additionally, they noted the importance of the comparison of learner achievement in blended courses with those in live of face-to-face classroom settings (16.5%). Other important evaluation measures included ROI calculations (6.2%) and cost benefit analyses (6.8%). These results also indicate that actual job performance with blended learning training is more vital to these respondents and will have greater impact on the company than learner satisfaction (6.0%) or course evaluations (4.5%).

Conclusions and Implication for HRD

The purpose of this study was to explore the current and future trends of blended learning in Korean corporations. In this study, 136 people who worked in the training related fields such as HRD, training, and e-learning in their respective organizations participated. The findings reveal many interesting current and future trends of blended learning in Korea. First, in regards to the overall status of blended learning in

Korean corporations, participants displayed strong interests for blended learning within corporate training and were expecting that the importance of blended learning would grow in their organizations either modestly or significantly during the next few years.

The respondents' positive expectations for blended learning were based on their beliefs that blended learning could improve the quality of the learning experience and could also increase the availability and accessibility of learning. Additionally, it can be expected that their strong benefits of blended learning such as learning appropriateness, familiarity, and acceptability would lead to further implementation of blended learning in their organizations. These findings confirm the claims by theorists and practitioners that blended learning has potentials to improve access and pedagogy for workplace learning (Bonk and Graham, 2006; Brennan, 2004; Graham, Allen, and Ure, 2005).

The increased popularity of blended learning in Korea corporate settings is consistent with the international trends that have been reported from other survey studies (eLearning Guild, 2003, Kim, et al., 2006). Even more than merely keeping up with the international trends in blended learning, the findings from the present study indicate that Korea is a leader in blended learning. The support from the Korean government on blended learning is strong compared to other countries studied by Kim, et al. (2006). Additionally, more Koreans reported that their organizations have a strategic plan in place on blended learning than any other Asian countries surveyed in the study by Kim et al, (2006). Due, in part, such strong support from the government and organizations, Korean respondents were more optimistic than any other participants in this international study about the increase in their training spending on blended learning in the coming years (Kim, et al., 2006), suggesting their organizations will continue to implement blended learning in the future.

Despite many substantial benefits of blended learning, some limitations were also noted, including a lack of understanding of the potential of blended learning, learner readiness for blended learning, and time to develop blended learning resources.

Consequently, it is vital for the organization to provide strong support and develop clear strategic plans for blended learning to address such issues. Clearly, additional studies on strategic planning for blended learning are strongly needed. Also, as previous researchers mentioned (Bonk & Graham, 2006), studies about the effective and efficient methods for designing and delivering blended learning need to be presented to practitioners in training and education organizations. Given the extensive confusion surrounding the term blended learning, there is a pressing need for extensive training and professional development in this area.

Even though the interests in blended learning are dramatically increasing, relatively little is known about actual trends of blended learning in Korea. Thus, this study offers meaningful empirical data for future researchers and practitioners to develop effective blended learning in Korea. In addition, since many companies in Korea are trying to apply blended learning in their training, the results of this study should help HRD practitioners to become better informed regarding how blended learning will be designed, delivered, and evaluated for workplace learning in the future. Moreover, the findings of the present study on the current state of blended learning will provide some direction for future researchers to address the issues that twenty-first century training practitioners and managers are facing. Lastly, since there is scant research on blended learning among Asian countries, the present study of blended learning in Korea, which has exhibited a national level of technology support, would be highly important. In effect, it provides meaningful data and ideas for HRD practitioners and researchers in other Asia countries who seek direction for blended learning content development, planning, and evaluation, though within their own idiosyncratic contexts.

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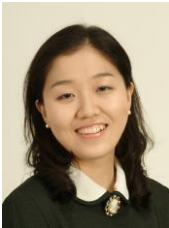


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