Blended Master's course Design and Evaluation of Factors that Enhance the Blended Learning Experience of a diverse group of Health Professionals in an Anatomical context

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Technological advancement reshapes teaching and learning, however online teaching of anatomical sciences possesses various limitations. These include high cost, lack of time, skilled teachers, student support, motivation, engagement, social interaction, cadaver-based practical sessions, flexibility etc., which increases dropout rate for online courses. To overcome these, this study aims to reflect on design of a new blended anatomy course and evaluate factors that shape the blended learning experience of a diverse group of health professionals. Blended learning combines traditional face-to-face teaching methods with virtual learning approaches to enhance student-centred flexible learning in a structured way. John Briggs Constructive alignment (an outcomes-based approach) and Gilly Salmon's five stages (access and motivation, online socialization, information exchange, knowledge construction, practical knowledge development) E-tivities learning models were analysed and integrated to construct teaching and assessment activities which also kept the learners engaged, motivated and participating. To evaluate factors that enhanced the blended learning experience, student course evaluation questionnaires were analysed. Two new University of Aberdeen blended courses were developed in 2018 and were run in three semesters. Limitation factors were cross validated from the evaluation reports where students were highly satisfied with various factors: e.g., learning space, VLE resources, skilled teachers, cadaver-based videos, Collaborate video sessions, clinician-run sessions, online assessments, on-campus cadaver-based practical, ultrasound session, encouragement, and student support. However, the online Discussion Board and 3D Anatomy TV was less popular. Requests to develop additional anatomy modules, indicating successful student engagement. Pre-course versus post-course assessment scores were much higher, indicating increased student academic performance, and increased online self-learning time proven to be cost effective. This research provides a theoretical foundation for blended course design which enhances the blended learning experience in a diverse group of postgraduate students with a zero-dropout rate. This study proposes a validated framework for future blended anatomy course design at master's level.