**Research Design Project**

**Tami Echard and Twila Masaschi**

**Research Methods in Instructional Technology**

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**Dr. Lloyd Reiber**

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**General Background**

In the state of Georgia, Senate Bill 289 (SB 289) is currently under review by the Georgia House.  This bill encourages an online learning experience for all Georgia high school students.  This experience could consist of a teacher-led online course or a variety of blended/hybrid implementations.  The Georgia Virtual School is currently piloting a program for blended learning in several Georgia school districts.  While there is not an abundance of current research on the high school level, there is research available in high education.  The perceptions of students in those instances have been analyzed and can be used as we focus on high school blended learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to address student perceptions of blended learning at the high school and undergraduate level.

**Research Question**

What are student perceptions of blended learning as implemented at their local school?

**Significance of the Study**

If SB 289 passes, students will be encouraged, and possibly mandated at a later date, to complete an online learning experience.  If this is determined to be a blended online experience, favorable student perceptions will be necessary for the success of the course. (As of 03/27/12, SB 289 has passed the house and will go back to the Senate for final vote. It is anticipated that it will be signed into law with a modification that courses are not mandated but encouraged)

**Literature Review**

This literature review will address current research on student perceptions in a variety of blended environments.   This review is limited to high school and undergraduate higher education students.

Horn and Staker (2011) offer a comprehensive definition of blended learning stating that blended learning occurs anytime a student learns under supervision by a teacher in a brick and mortar classroom and through an online delivery model where the student can work at their own pace.  De George-Walker and Keeffe (2010) simplify their definition by pointing out it is the integration of a face-to-face class with online instruction.

Blended learners had several areas identified as strengths.  Smart (2006) identified simulations, extensive content, and immediate thorough explanations as strengths of their blended learning course.  De George-Walker and Keeffe (2010) found that the open access to content allowed them to work ahead as well as revisit material for review or makeup.   These students also indicated the availability of content within any twenty-four hour period was beneficial as it allows flexibility in their everyday schedule.  Holley and Dobson (2008) indicated that students enjoyed the layout of the online component.  It was more colorful and engaging than a traditional text.

Learners also had issues with the structure.  Palmer and Holt (2010) indicated that students in their study ranked feedback as highly important however had the lowest satisfaction with regards to their online feedback from the instructor.  Smart’s (2006) study also indicated assignments took more time to complete in their online portion of class and they had issues with lost work and files.

Finally Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez and Rodriguez-Ariza summed it up well when his study found that student satisfaction while participating in a blended learning environment led to a positive attitude toward learning.  They also found that this favorable experience decreased the overall drop out rate.

**Research Design**

The research will incorporate a student survey as well as interview follow up for clarification.  The Georgia Virtual School is currently conducting a pilot of blended learning implementation in twelve districts across the state of Georgia.  There are currently 500-1000 students participating in their pilot.  The sample will be a stratified random sampling from each of the districts participating.  It will include approximately 50 total students – four to five students per district.

The survey will be Likert scale survey consisting of 10 to 15 questions addressing satisfaction with the blended learning environment, technical difficulties that resulted, as well as any recognized benefits of their blended learning experience.  This survey will also allow them to offer open-ended responses to each area of questions.  After reviewing survey results, students may be asked additional follow-up questions in an interview style survey.  This will be necessary to clarify any comments or contradictions in scale ratings and comments.

The results of this study will be compiled and presented to the Georgia Virtual School Blended Pilot Committee.  They will then assess any changes or enhancements that need to be included for further blended implementation.

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