

Thesis title: The Perfect Blend: Blended learning methods applied to wine education

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Abstract

Where winemakers might blend certain grape varieties to enhance the quality of the final wine, wine educators might also consider blending their classroom teaching methods with online tools to enhance the quality of wine education.

This thesis explores how blended learning methods can enhance wine education, specifically focusing on the WSET Level 3 course. The core question addressed is how educators can facilitate effective learning outside the classroom using online tools, shifting from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach.

A detailed problem analysis identifies significant challenges faced by WSET Level 3 students, particularly with the theory component of the exam. The key findings from a survey of 97 recent students and interviews with seven participants reveal:

Success Rates: The first-attempt pass rate for the WSET Level 3 exam is 57.7%. The theory part is notably challenging, with 94 out of 97 participants finding the short written answer questions the most difficult.

Obstacles: Common obstacles include insufficient study time, difficulty summarizing the book, overwhelming content, and memory issues. Stress and negative emotions associated with the exam further hinder performance.

Study Habits: Many students engage in ineffective study techniques like marking and summarizing. Those who studied consistently throughout the course period showed higher success rates, emphasizing the need for early and regular study practices.

The learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the WSET Level 3 course are analysed using Bloom's Taxonomy. This framework categorizes cognitive skills from basic knowledge recall to higher-order skills like application and analysis. The study finds that:

Students must not only recall a large body of facts but also understand and apply concepts to answer higher-level exam questions.

Effective teaching should focus on developing these higher-order cognitive skills to improve student performance on the exam.

Blended learning, defined as a mix of face-to-face and online learning experiences, offers several advantages:

Flexibility and Accessibility: Blended learning provides a more flexible and accessible education, catering to different learning preferences and schedules.

Enhanced Performance: Research shows that students perform better in blended courses than in traditional face-to-face courses.

Student Preference: The survey indicates a strong preference for online tools, with 74.2% of participants agreeing that such tools would aid their study efforts.

The thesis outlines ten principles for designing effective blended learning experiences:

Flipped Classroom: Maximizing classroom time for higher-order learning activities.

Active Learning: Encouraging interactive and engaging study methods.

Contextual Learning: Providing realistic scenarios to enhance understanding.

Repetitive and Spaced Learning: Implementing spaced repetition for better retention.

Collaborative Learning: Promoting group discussions and peer teaching.

Gamification: Using game elements to increase motivation and engagement.

Time-on-Task: Maximizing effective study time through blended activities.

Rich Learning Environment: Utilizing diverse modalities to stimulate multiple senses.

Nudging and Chunking: Offering timely reminders and breaking content into manageable chunks.

Formative Assessment: Providing continuous feedback through mock exams and quizzes. Where winemakers might blend certain grape varieties to enhance the quality of the final wine, wine educators might also consider blending their classroom teaching methods with online tools to enhance the quality of wine education

Various ICT tools can support blended learning, including podcasts, blogs, vlogs, formative assessment tools, learning management systems, and artificial intelligence. These tools can offer interactive, engaging, and multi-sensory learning experiences, helping students to retain and apply knowledge effectively.

The thesis concludes by stating that blended learning significantly enhances the WSET Level 3 learning experience by addressing study obstacles and promoting effective study habits. This student-centred approach supports the feeling of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, leading to improved student performance and satisfaction.

Recommendations for Educators:

Implement Flipped classroom techniques, promote active learning, utilize contextual learning, facilitate collaborative learning, integrate gamification, create rich learning environments, use nudging and chunking strategies, promote early and consistent study habits, employ formative assessments, ensure adequate time-on-task.

Recommendations for Students:

Engage in pre-class preparations and in consistent and early study practices, adopt active learning techniques, such as flashcards, peer discussions and mock exams. Practice repetitive and spaced learning, join study groups, combining tasting and theory. Maximize your study time and utilize diverse learning resources.

A detailed design of a blended learning journey for the WSET Level 3 course, with both online and classroom learning activities, is provided.

By implementing these recommendations, educators can improve student outcomes, contribute to the professional development of wine experts, and enhance the overall quality of wine education.