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Investigation of the Results of Implementing the Block-Module Teaching System in Higher Education Institutions

Abstract

The higher education sector is one of the most competitive sectors in the economy. Due to rapid changes in society, universities are being asked to adapt to attract students. One of the things that some universities have done is to change the way they teach to make the learning process more accessible and to attract students who find it suitable. Based Methodology of Teaching (BMT), an innovative teaching method in higher education, has shown great potential to improve student performance. This study uses a case study approach and collects data from five institutions that have implemented BMT: the University of Salford, the University of Colorado, Heriot University, Victoria University, and Quest University. Thematic analysis of the data collected resulted in a scoring system with 14 positive and seven negative BMT outcomes organized into eight categories. Implications of the findings for research and practitioners are also reported here.

Keywords: *block model of teaching (BMT), intensive mode of delivery, accelerated teaching mode, impacts, outcomes, consequences*

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Ali təhsil müəssisələrində blok-modul tədris sisteminin tətbiqinin nəticələrinin araşdırılması

Xülasə

Ali təhsil sektoru iqtisadiyyatın ən rəqabətli sahələrindən biridir. Cəmiyyətdə sürətli dəyişikliklər səbəbindən universitetlər tələbələri cəlb etmək üçün uyğunlaşmağa məcbur olurlar. Bəzi universitetlərin etdiyi yeniliklərdən biri tədris prosesini daha əlçatan etmək və ona uyğun olan tələbələri cəlb etmək məqsədi ilə tədris üsullarını dəyişməkdir. Ali təhsildə innovativ yanaşma olan Blok Metodologiyası ilə Tədris (BMT) tələbə nəticələrinin yaxşılaşdırılması üçün böyük potensial göstərir. Bu tədqiqat hadisə təhlili (case study) yanaşmasından istifadə edir və BMT tətbiq edən beş ali təhsil müəssisəsindən məlumat toplayır: Salford Universiteti, Kolorado Universiteti, Heriot Universiteti, Viktoriya Universiteti və Quest Universiteti. Toplanan məlumatların tematik təhlili nəticəsində 14 pozitiv və 7 neqativ BMT nəticəsini əhatə edən səkkiz kateqoriyalı bal sistemi hazırlanmışdır. Tapıntıların tədqiqatçılar və praktiklər üçün nəticələri də burada təqdim edilir.

Açar sözlər: *blok tədris modeli (BMT), intensiv tədris modu, sürətləndirilmiş tədris modeli, təsirlər, nəticələr, yekunlar*

Introduction

The Block Model of Instruction (BMT) is defined by Cawelti (Braun, Clarke, 2006) as an instructional method that delivers the daily schedule or amount of schoolwork over larger blocks of time. According to Murray, Barkat, and Pearlman (Burton, Nesbit, 2008), BMT can offer several benefits to students, making it an attractive teaching method for universities. Cawelti (Braun, Clarke, 2006) states that this method has been widely used in colleges and secondary schools. This is because it provides secondary students with more flexibility, allowing them to receive sufficient instruction from teachers to support their learning. Although BMT is not a new concept for secondary school teachers, its use in higher education is still limited. Furthermore, the reasons why some universities have adopted this teaching model into their curricula are not fully understood. Research on the impact of implementing BMT in higher education is scarce. Research on the impact of implementing BMT in higher education is very limited. Some researchers report positive results. For example, Tatum (Cawelti, 1995) found that students who participated in BMT courses achieved better academic results. Caryanto and Yong (Crowe, Sharma, 2022) found that BMT allows students and teachers to build relationships and closely monitor students' academic progress.

On the other hand, some studies report negative effects. For example, Patel (Davies, 2006) found that implementing BMT does not allow teachers to achieve their goals. Harkin (Dodd, 2020) also noted that implementing Behavioral Modeling (BMT) not only makes it difficult to explain student and teacher behavior, but also to expect new demands and responsibilities from students and teachers. Given this research gap, this study examines the impact of BMT implementation on universities through a series of case studies. Various aspects are analyzed, including academic performance, satisfaction, faculty support, and staff challenges. The study also provides implications for universities considering the use of this teaching method and for students choosing a BMT-based degree program.

Research

Literature review. Davis (Green, Thorogood, 2018) defines BMT (Brain-Based Learning) as a course that is taught for a short period of time, but frequently and over a longer period of time. Although BMT is being implemented in many universities, its exact benefits are still a matter of debate. Tatum (Cawelti, 1995) reports that students who take BMT courses achieve better academic results. However, these results have limitations such as student retention, long-term outcomes, and student dropout rates. Because BMT courses are often short, universities have difficulty collecting sufficient data to compare them with traditional teaching methods. However, Burton and Nesbitt (Harkin, 2021) suggest that students who choose BMT or learn over time perform better than students who enroll in traditional courses. Tatum (Cawelti, 1995) reports that students who choose BMT or learn over time perform better than students who enroll in traditional courses. Although the data on the implementation of BMT in universities is very limited, it is important to review the existing research literature to better understand the projects and their impact at different levels of education. Research on the impact of BMT implementation is still very limited.

In particular, Karyanto and Yong (Crowe, Sharma, 2022) investigated the advantages and disadvantages of brain-based learning (BBT) in teaching engineering mathematics modules to students at the University of Nottingham Malaysia campus. Although BBT provides opportunities for students and teachers to strengthen their relationships and closely monitor students' learning progress, they found that this transition was difficult for some students. Lu and Wu (Harvey, Power, Wilson, 2017) investigated an integrated approach to teaching and assessment. The researchers compared traditional teaching methods with a new approach that combined learning activities and BMT learning activities, which increased opportunities for interaction with learning activities and teachers. The results showed that students were able to retain knowledge more using the latter approach because the learning process was structured around open discussions, interaction with teachers, and multiple practical exercises in the classroom. Other researchers have collected data on the implementation of the UNT at the Victoria University (VU) (Karjanto, Yong, 2018). Data

analysis showed that the implementation of the UNT had a positive impact on student learning outcomes.

These effects included, among other things, improved grades and higher levels of student engagement. After investigating the first year of the implementation of the UNT at the VU (Karjanto, Yong, 2018), Semerawickrama and Cleary (Loton, Solomonides, Trish, 2019) continued the study in a second year to assess the impact of the project. The study found significant increases in achievement, particularly among students from non-English speaking countries and those of lower socioeconomic status, (Lostroh, 2007) examined the impact of the implementation of the UNT on science subjects in higher education. The results of the study suggest that universities should only implement the UNT in some subjects, as the block model is not suitable for all subjects. Patel (Davies, 2006) conducted a study at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) in which teachers were asked to share their views on the impact of the project after the implementation of the UNT. Research suggests that block-based learning (BBL) does not enable teachers to achieve their educational goals. Harkin, a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at MMU, examined the impact of an online block-based learning (BBL) model using Lefebvre's spatial practice methods. While block-based learning (BBL) offers safe operational methods for universities, understanding student and faculty behavior and anticipating their new concerns can be challenging. Lostro (Lostroh, 2007) provided additional information on the implementation of BBL at Colorado College. The study found that, despite concerns that block courses (typically 3.5 weeks) do not provide enough content, both strategies can have a positive impact on student learning. These strategies include focusing on a specific area or taking off-campus trips to deepen conceptual content and gain practical experience, and student interaction is essential to increasing the effectiveness of BBL. Table 1 summarizes what past studies have found on the topic of BMT consequences.

Table 1. Overview of the relevant research studies

Author (Name, Year)	Key Findings
Karjanto & Yong (2018) [4]	Provided the pros and cons of block teaching model for delivering mathematics modules to engineering students.
Lu & Wu (2018) [9]	Compared the traditional teaching mode and the new teaching approach where there is a combination of teaching and learning activities in BMT
McCluskey Weldon & Smallridge (2019) [10]	BMT implementation at Victoria University in the first-year college.
Semerawickrema & Cleary (2021) [11]	BMT implementation at Victoria University in the second-year.
Harvey, Power & Wilson (2017) [12]	The impacts of BMT implementation were studied on science subjects in tertiary level.
Patel (2021) [5]	A post-implementation study of BMT at Manchester Metropolitan University.
Harkin (2021) [6]	Investigated the impacts of online block teaching model by using Lefebvre's Trialectic of Space.
Lostroh (2007) [13]	Studied BMT implementation at Colorado Collage.

This study employs a multidisciplinary research method, suitable for gaining a deep, contextual understanding of complex real-world issues. Case studies enable the examination of significant meanings and implications by focusing on one or more cases to compare various aspects of the research question (McCluskey, Weldon, Smallridge, 2019). Different studies have defined case studies in different ways. For example, Stake (Merriam, Tisdell, 2015) considers that "case studies are both the process of learning about a case and the results of our learning" (p. 237). Miles and Huberman (Miles, Huberman, 1994) describe it as "a type of phenomenon that occurs in a limited context" (p. 25), while Green and Thorogood (Moogan, n.d.) define it as "the in-depth study of a specific 'case', which may be a field, an individual, or a policy" (p. 284). However, the main concept is an in-depth investigation of an event or phenomenon and its impact on the environment. Table 2 summarizes the final data collection results and the cases studied.

Table 2. Cases studied in this study

Case Name	Country	The Highlight of the Case
Victoria University	Australia	VU has completely restructured its teaching style to BMT and the students need to complete subjects in 'blocks' of 4 weeks for undergraduate and 8 weeks for postgraduate. The undergraduate model involves studying one unit at a time, where the postgraduate involves studying 2 units at a time.
Salford University	UK	The school offers block teaching and learning by six weeks intensive programme which focuses on one subject only. There are also exceptions.
Colorado College	US	Students on the Block Plan take their subjects in three and a half weeks blocks, followed by a 4-day block break.
Heriot-Watt University	UK	They offer block teaching which is spread over a period of 6 weeks or less.
Quest University	Canada	They offer blocks of one month for each subject and it usually begins on a Monday and ends on the Wednesday of the fourth week, each class is of three hours duration.

VU, completely changed its curriculum and switched all its academic departments to BMT. Undergraduate and first-year students are required to study courses in four-week "blocks," while postgraduate students are required to study courses in eight-week "blocks." Results showed that the block model has served the university very well. VU reported an overall improvement in academic performance since implementing BMT. Lawton (Murray, Barkat, Pearlman, Robinson, 2020) argues that it has significant impacts on various groups of students, such as non-native English speakers, Indigenous students, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The University of Salford has used BMT in a modular structure for a number of programs, including business and nursing. Each module represents a self-contained unit of study and is divided into different levels: Level 3 (introductory level), Level 4 (certificate level), Level 5 (diploma level), Level 6 (degree level), and Level 7 (postgraduate level). In each block, students study one subject at a time during a rigorous six-week program. Their knowledge was assessed with two assignments: one after the third week and one after the sixth week. Under the block model at Colorado College, students take courses in blocks of more than three weeks with four days off. The University of Colorado currently offers 11 blocks. In the BMT model adopted at Heriot-Watt University, classes are delivered over six weeks or less. The course structure was designed to provide students with 150 hours of instruction per subject. The Heriot-Watt model incorporates problem-based learning (PBL) into each subject and provides students with opportunities to reflect on their learning. At Quest University in Canada, students enroll in one monthly block for each course. These blocks begin on Thursdays of the fourth day of the week and end on Wednesdays, lasting three hours each. Unlike traditional colleges, at Quest University, students focus on one subject at a time. This unique approach allows students to regularly collaborate and engage in independent projects across curricula and interdisciplinary blocks.

Data analysis. This study used thematic analysis to analyze the data. Brown and Clarke (O'Shea, May, Stone, Delahunty, 2024) defined thematic analysis as the process of identifying, analyzing, and representing patterns in collected data to extract relevant information. Different studies used different stages of thematic analysis. As in previous studies (O'Shea, May, Stone, Delahunty, 2024; Patel, 2021, and (O'Shea, May, Stone, Delahunty, 2024), this study used four main stages to analyze the data, as described below: Step 1: In the first step, students repeatedly read the collected data to familiarize themselves with the dataset. The more familiar the researchers become with the data, the better they can understand bone marrow transplantation (BMT) and fully grasp the data. Step 2: In the second step, the data are coded or classified according to their characteristics or

information. Step 3: In the third step, the collected data are reviewed using the generated codes. Researchers should take the time to repeatedly check the data codes and determine whether any codes contain information relevant to a specific aspect of the project or fall into the same category. This specific aspect can be referred to as a theme or pattern in the data. Step 4: In the fourth step, the themes are reviewed and listed. A theme is a pattern that reflects an important aspect of the data or the research question.

This section presents the full results of this study. Figure 1 shows the classification developed based on thematic analysis of the data. This classification shows 21 impacts (14 positive and 7 negative) of BMT implementation, grouped into eight categories. In Figure 1, the effect shown in yellow is negative, while the effect shown in white is positive. Each category and its main effects are explained after Figure 1.

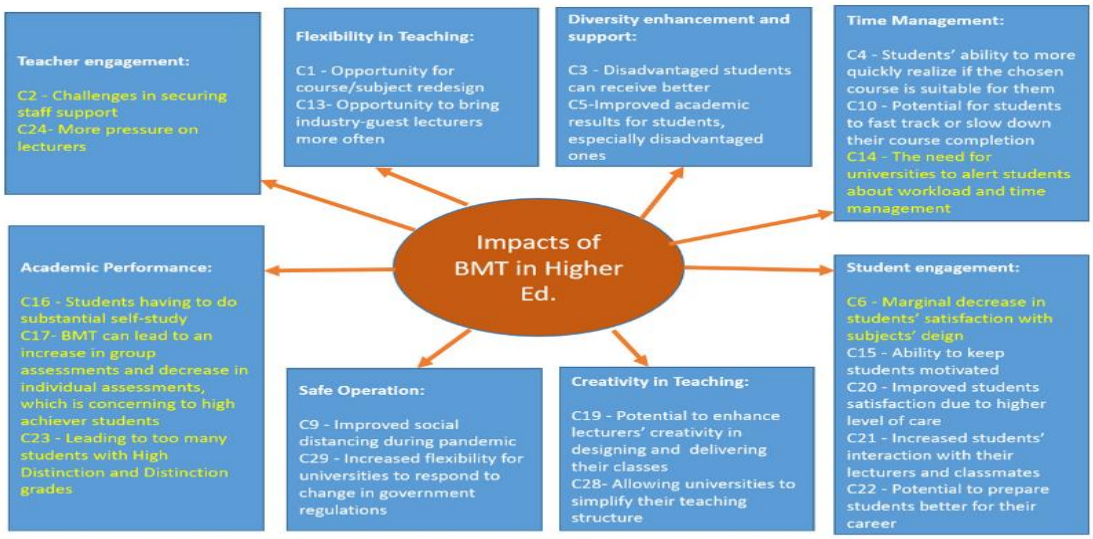

Fig. 1. Taxonomy of findings

Flexibility in teaching. The category "Flexibility in Learning" covers all factors that increase or decrease the flexibility of universities in designing curricula. This category includes two main positive effects of the block model:

C1 – Opportunity to redesign courses/subjects. The BMT offers universities the opportunity to adapt courses and subjects to suit students' needs, thus increasing student retention. According to Ross (2018), universities are increasingly interested in changing their teaching methods to better match students' preferred learning styles. As students have varying levels of prior knowledge and may need additional support or prefer shorter courses according to their professional commitments, adapting courses to their needs seems to be a strategy for universities to attract more students.

C13 – Opportunity to invite guest speakers from the business world more frequently. BMT implementation projects enable universities to more frequently invite guest lecturers, including alumni, who can share their professional experience and knowledge with students. According to (Ross, 2018), Salford Business School has introduced a program called the "MBA Guest Leadership Speaker Series", which is offered as modules within block courses. This module allows students to connect with guest speakers who are also Salford Business School alumni. These speakers can share their knowledge and professional experience.

Faculty engagement. This class describes the impact of the block learning model on university staff. Two negative effects are associated with this category:

C2 – Difficulty gaining faculty support. The block learning model has made it difficult for universities to gain faculty support, as it is challenging to convince them of the acceptability and application of new learning methods. (Semerawickrema, 2021) emphasized in an interview entitled "Block Learning Model Ready for Simulation" that convincing faculty to adopt and test the new

learning model after its introduction is a challenge. So, despite the transition to the block learning model, universities continue to struggle to gain support.

C24 – Increased pressure on coaches. Block teaching can increase stress for instructors, as they must complete all assessments and final results in a short period of time. In the discussion of Dodd's article "Block Teaching Comes of Age at Victoria University" (Stake, 1995), the instructor workload for block teaching projects was perceived as huge. This is because they are not only forced to restructure their courses, but also to deliver longer courses and administer all assessments in less time than traditional teaching methods. Significantly increased workloads force many instructors to simplify course content and assessment systems, resulting in a significant drop in student performance.

Supporting and encouraging diversity. This category refers to the impact of the Block Learning Model (BLM) on students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The BLM has two positive outcomes.

C3 – Students from disadvantaged backgrounds receive better support. BLM can help students with learning difficulties, low-achieving students, or students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as their questions are more likely to be answered in class. The implementation of BLM in universities has had a number of positive effects on students, particularly those who are the first in their families to attend higher education. O'Shea et al. (Tatum, 2010) describe these students as the first in their families to attend higher education. In the article by Ross (Semerawickrema, 2021), Professor Dawkins argues that the implementation of BLM projects has had a number of positive effects on these students, and they represent a large group at Victorian universities. Since these students often face linguistic, economic, or physical difficulties, BMT allows the university to tailor courses to their needs, provide them with more opportunities to answer questions in the classroom, and provide additional support and time to better understand the course content.

C5 – Improved academic performance, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. BMT generally improves the academic performance of students experiencing economic or educational difficulties. According to (Ross, 2018), students with a background in economics benefit more from projects, while students in the humanities and education fields benefit less. The reasons for this are unknown, but may be related to the specifics of their courses or the teaching staff. Nevertheless, overall satisfaction for this group of students increases.

Time management. This aspect concerns the ability of staff to effectively manage their time within BMT. There are three main findings in this category: two positive and one negative. C4 – Students can quickly decide whether their chosen course is right for them. The modular model (BMT) allows students to quickly decide whether their chosen field of study is right for them, compared to the traditional model. This allows them to switch to another course without significant time or financial investment. The implementation of the BMT system at universities helps students quickly determine whether their chosen course is right for them, as they spend a significant amount of time in the classroom studying and practicing (Semerawickrema, 2021). As a result, students can save time and money by switching to the right course promptly.

C10 – Students have the option to accelerate or defer their studies. BMT students are allowed to independently determine their own pace of study and work-life balance. According to (Ross, 2018), students using the BMT model can complete their studies faster or slower depending on their lives and personal circumstances. While full-time students typically study two subjects per block, part-time students can study one subject and simultaneously work. In some cases, students can skip a class and return to the next one when personal circumstances require full attendance.

C14 – Universities must inform students about their study load and time management. When implementing the BMT model, universities are required to inform students of the workload required to meet exam deadlines. According to James Cook University in Australia [20], universities implementing the BMT model are required to inform students of the workload and ensure that exam deadlines are met.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT. This category describes the impact of BMT implementation on student engagement. It comprises five main effects: four positive and one negative.

C6 – Slight decrease in satisfaction with course design. Although BMT training may improve students' overall academic performance, satisfaction with course design may decrease slightly, while satisfaction with instructors may increase slightly. According to (Burton, Nesbit, 2008), the impact of projects on academic performance is unclear across different disciplines, but it is assumed that students are somewhat more satisfied with their instructors. However, since they provide little positive feedback on the design of these modules, their perceptions of learning module design vary.

C15 – Maintaining student motivation. BMT can help maintain students' motivation and interest in learning. According to Roseman University (Lostroh, 2007), students are more motivated to learn through BMT because they can focus on one module at a time and fully understand the content before moving on to higher levels of knowledge. In addition, all students are expected to actively participate in course discussions. Therefore, their interest increases significantly, and their knowledge expands.

C20 – Improved student satisfaction with supervision. BMT can lead to greater satisfaction among certain student groups because they receive intensive supervision and support. According to Curtin University (Lostroh, 2007), the implementation of BMT has helped the university focus on a diverse student body. Curtin University operates the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS), a program for students from indigenous communities. Through the implementation of BMT projects, the CAS has been able to offer additional support by adapting courses to the needs and schedules of the students.

C21 – Increased students' interaction with their lecturers and classmates. As a result of the BMT implementation, the size of classes has been reduced, allowing students to have more opportunities to interact with their lecturers and classmates. According to (Cawelti, 1995), BMT requires universities to reduce their class size as classes will be held more regularly, for longer hours, but within a shorter period. As students spend more time with each other and with their teachers, they have more opportunities to interact and discuss, which can help them build long-term relationships. This benefits students when they enter the workforce, as they already have connections in the field.

C22 – Potential to prepare students better for their careers. According to (Lu, Wu, 2018), BMT is believed to better prepare students for the job market as the length of the learning course is reduced.

Discussion and research contribution. This study aims to identify the positive and negative effects of applying BMT in higher education. Educational researchers can benefit from the findings of this study. They can expand their knowledge about the impact of BMT application on universities. Further studies can consider our results, compare them with their own research, and conduct further investigations to explore different sides of BMT implementation. Table 3 shows the contribution of this study by showing results that confirm the results of previous studies and are new to our knowledge.

Table 3. Research contribution

Impact Number	Newly Found (NF) OR Confirming Existing Literature
1	NF
2	NF
3	[36], [37], [38]
4	NF
5	NF
6	NF
9	NF
10	[39]
13	NF
14	NF
15	[40], [37, 41]
16	NF
17	NF
19	NF
20	[37]
21	NF
22	NF
23	[37]
24	NF
28	NF
29	NF

Conclusion

Block teaching is a condensed teaching approach that allows universities to optimize the learning process and appeal to students who prefer this learning style. Block teaching has demonstrated significant potential for improving academic performance. This study used a case study methodology to examine five higher education institutions from four different countries that have implemented block teaching: Salford University, Colorado College, Heriot-Watt University, Victoria University, and Quest University. The thematic analysis of the collected data led to the development of a taxonomy with 14 positive and seven negative effects of implementing block teaching, categorized into eight groups. The findings are valuable for various stakeholders, particularly universities, as they support the adoption of block teaching.

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