

## **Abstract**

While blended learning seems to be quite suitable for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), current uptake of this learning method is low. For this thesis an explorative study on blended learning in SMEs examines the requirements for successful blended learning in SMEs. The research is based on an on-line three-round ranking-type Delphi study and a case study. This method takes into account that the area and the term “blended learning” are discussed in very different, partially contradicting connotations. For this reason, first the background of the initial research question is provided and a description of the research design. Then the results of the Delphi study and the case study are presented. Participants were selected for the online-Delphi study and the semi-structured interviews following a list of panel criteria and were grouped into sub-panels of SME learners, trainers and providers of e-learning as well as learners from large companies as a control group for the SME learners. Data analysis methods include Kendall’s coefficient of concordance, concept maps and radar chart analysis.

The results indicate how to improve the uptake of blended learning by SME learners. Recommendations for a guidebook for facilitators and a checklist with “Top 10” aspects from the different sub-panels provide a tool set for a sustainable approach to a responsive learning environment. A main result of the case study is the role of the tutor or trainer. All interviewees pointed out the importance of a personal touch for a successful blended learning scenario.

Future research could involve validating the results in a quantitative study with a larger sample. Further areas that could be explored are the impact of initial training to improve the digital literacy within the SME learner group. The learning theories which can support the SME learners’ preferences best and what kind of learning system could support these requirements are two further directions for future research.

**Keywords:** Blended learning, SME, Delphi study, concept maps, radar chart analysis, case study, guidebooks