

Blended Learning – The New Normal

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Abstract

Blended learning which is after covid-19 becomes the part of our life is a formal educational program in which a learner learns at least in part through delivery of content and instruction via digital as well as online mode with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace. Blended learning opportunities include both types of learning face-to-face and online learning opportunities. The degree to which online learning takes place, and the way it is integrated into the curriculum, can vary across schools. Blending learning is a strategy which includes online learning with conventional learning which is often utilized to accommodate students' diverse learning styles and to enable them to work before or after school in ways that are not possible with fulltime formal traditional classroom instruction. Online learning has the potential to improve the productivity of students by enhancing the rate of learning, taking benefit of learning time after the school hours, reducing the cost of instructional materials, and better utilization of teacher time. These strategies are particularly useful in remote areas where blended or online learning can help teachers and learners in far-off places to overcome distance. The present paper is an attempt to highlight the role of blended learning in education.

KEYWORDS: Blended learning, Conventional learning

Introduction

The term blended learning is generally applied to the practice of using online as well as traditional or conventional learning experiences when teaching students. In a blended-learning course, for example, in blended mode students attend a formal class taught by a teacher in a conventional classroom setting, while also independently completing online/digital content of the course outside of the classroom. In this case, in-class time may be either replaced or supplemented by online learning experiences, and students got the benefit of learning the same topics online as they do in class i.e., the online and face to face learning experiences would parallel and complement each other.

Blended learning is also named as Hybrid learning and Mixed-mode learning. Blended-learning experiences are different in design and execution from school to school. For example, Blended learning may be provided in existing conditions by some schools or teachers or it may be the dominant learning-delivery model around which a school's academic program or curriculum is designed. Online learning may be a minor component. Classroom-based course, or video-recorded lectures, live video and text chats, and other digitally enabled learning activities may be a student's primary instructional interactions with a teacher. In few cases, students may work independently on online classes, projects, and assignments at home and after completion of assigned work periodical meetings with teachers is organized to review their learning progress, discuss about problems, their doubts, ask questions, or receive assistance with difficult concepts. In other cases, students may spend their entire day in a formal school setting but they will spend rest of their time in online learning and independently than they do receiving instruction from a teacher. Again, the potential variations are numerous

Rovai and Jordan (2004) claimed that blended learning is a combination of online learning and formal classroom learning that contain some of the benefits of online courses with the presence of face-to-face communication. Other researchers believed that the systems called blended learning integrates face-to-face instruction with online mode done (Graham, 2006; Stubbs, Martin & Ear, 2006; Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2006). Colin and Moonen's (2001) define blended learning as a hybrid of traditional/conventional/ face-to-face and online learning mode so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online and where the online component becomes the additional supplement of traditional classroom teaching- learning".

Harrington (2010) observed the combination of traditional classroom teaching with online teaching ones as 'hybrid classroom' and stressed that educators are increasingly engage in blended mode as they have become aware of the benefits. Moreover, she focussed that most EFL/ESL students enrol in hybrid learning too.

Usta, and Özdemir (2007) observed students' opinions about blended learning environment. In their findings they proved that students have generally positive opinions about blended learning environment. The results of the study also proved that high interaction between students and instructor exist in this type of environment. This result supported the findings of Akkoyunlu and Soylu (2006) which indicated high demands for face-to-face classroom teaching with on line learning.

According to Owston et al. (2006, as cited in Bdawi, 2009) there are three reasons for supporting blended learning: fulfilling the needs of the learners and encouraging critical thinking skills of students; the flexibility of blended mode. The learning occurs online as well as face-to-face and also affects its cost. Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal (2004) in a three-year study between the face- to-face, fully online, and blended teaching methods found that blended teaching always give better success rates than the other two methods. Dowling, Godfrey, & Gyles, (2003, as cited in Vignare et al., 2005) studied the relationship between students' outcome and hybrid delivery. The results of the following study observed a positive relationship between students' final scores and improved learning outcomes of the students. Moreover, Gómez and Duart (2011) studied a hybrid postgraduate program in a university in Colombia and summarized that it has a positive impact on learners.

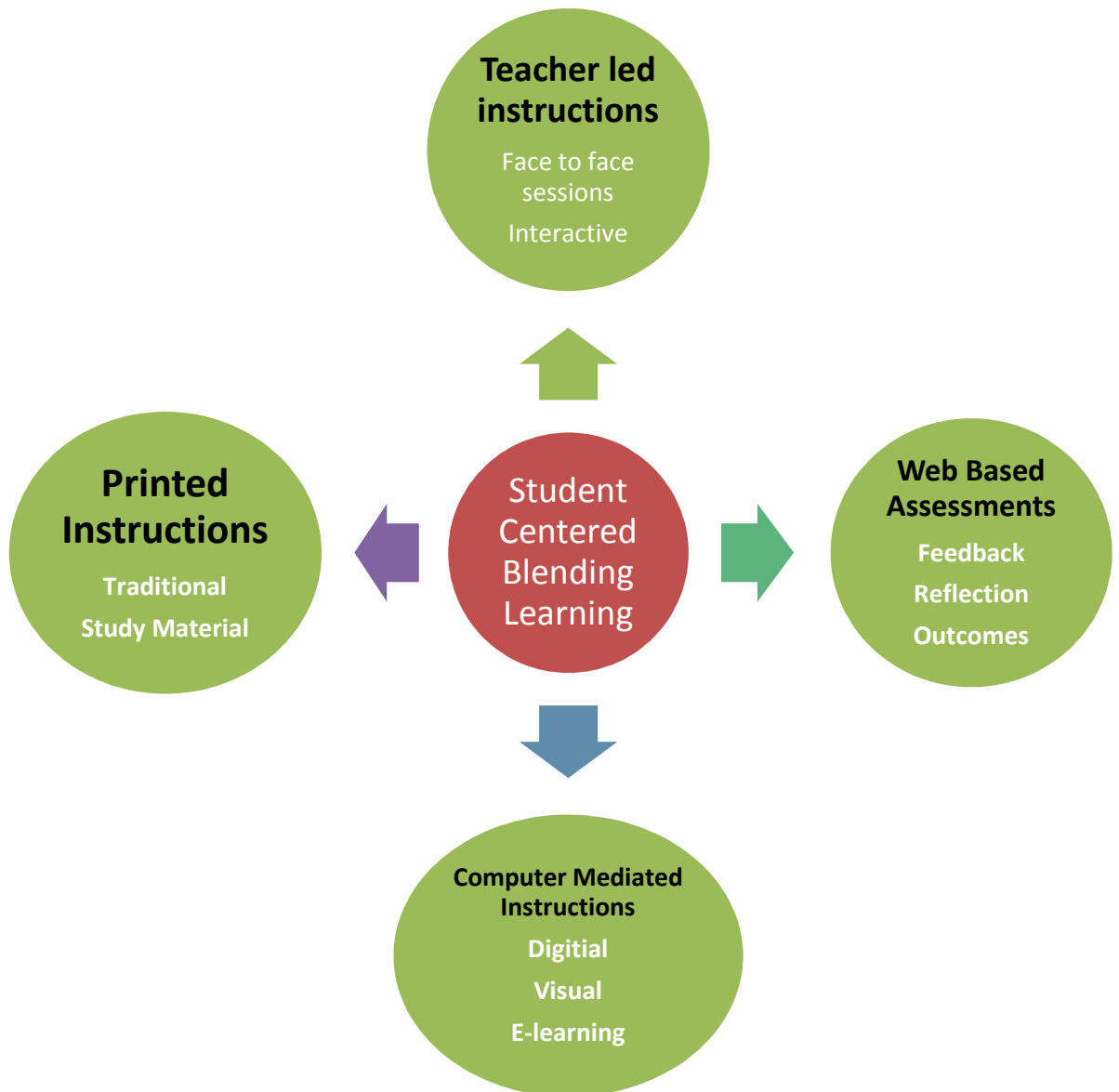
Parallel with the growing use of technology digitalization in the educational setting, blending learning approach can be a great contributing tool to complete face to face experiences (Ginns & Ellis, 2009). Besides, blended learning Instruction provides an active learning environment to students as well as flexibility in using resources for the learners and gives more time for faculty members to spend with its students in small groups or even individually (Oh & Park, 2009). In addition, blended learning has the potential which can change and improve students' experiences and outcomes through learning (Davis & Fill, 2007).

Blended Learning vs other forms of Learning

Goal	Classroom Learning	Blended Learning	E-Learning
Communication between teacher and students	Full group lessons	Full group lessons	Digital course materials
	Small group lessons or tutorials	Small group lessons or tutorials	Online discussions
	Individual conferences	Individual conferences	E-mail

	Marked assignments and rubrics	Marked assignments and rubrics	Instant messages
		Digital course materials	News announcements
		Online discussions	Online calendar
		E-mail	Drop boxes
		Instant messages	Online grade tool
		News announcements	Rubrics
		Online calendar	Web conferences
		Drop boxes	
		Online grade tool	
		Rubrics	
Collaboration among students	Learning centres' or other room arrangements	Learning centres or other room arrangements	Online group work
	Class discussions	Class discussions	Online discussions
	Face-to-face group work	Face-to-face group work	Chat sessions
		Online group work	E-mail
		Online discussions	Instant messages
		E-mail	Blogs
		Instant messages	Electronic portfolios
		Blogs	Web conferences
Demonstration of learning	Paper-and-pencil tests and assignments submitted in person	Paper-and-pencil tests and assignments submitted in person	Blogs
	Live presentations, labs, performances, or exhibits of skill	Live presentations, labs, performances, or exhibits of skill	Electronic portfolios
	Models, works of art, posters, and other physical artifacts submitted in person	Models, works of art, posters, and other physical artifacts submitted in person	Online discussions
		Blogs	Online surveys and quizzes

		Electronic portfolios	Assignments, such as essays, worksheets, slide shows, photographs, and videos submitted to electronic drop boxes
		Online discussions	Web conferences
		Online surveys and quizzes	
		Assignments, such as essays, worksheets, slide shows, photographs, and videos submitted to electronic drop boxes	



Different forms of Blended Learning in Classroom

Traditional classroom teaching methods are no longer effective to achieve current learning standards. Technological approaches alone can't provide students with in depth and meaningful learning experience. It is a formal educational program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace. The methodology behind blended learning is the combination of classroom learning with digital or online learning. It also has different names like mixed learning, hybrid learning, blended e-learning, etc. In this article, we cover different ways of using blended learning which can be incorporated successfully into the classroom.

Six forms of Blended Learning

1. Face-to-face Driver
2. Rotation
3. Flex
4. Online Lab
5. Self-Blend
6. Online Driver

Face-to-face Driver

Face-to-face driver is a blended learning model in which teachers deliver lecture face to face in their traditional classroom setting. Teachers take the formal class in a usual lecture method following an established protocol taking precedence and technology being a secondary thought. However, they also provided with online resources to supplement or revise curriculum which students can study at home, in the classroom or in a technology lab according to their pace and requirement.

Rotation

In the Rotation model of blended learning: within a given course, a student rotates on a fixed schedule between learning online/digital in a one-to-one and after that in self-paced environment and learning in a classroom with a traditional face-to-face teacher interaction.

Flex

Flex model of blended learning features which is mainly an online platform that delivers most of the curricula. It's the model where most of the learning is done online. The face-to-face traditional model exists to provide on-site support for a flexible and adaptive learning instruction. Conventional learning occurs on the basis of requirement through in-person tutoring sessions and small group sessions.

Online Lab

Online lab is a model of blended learning which mainly involves programs that rely on an online platform to deliver the entire course but in a brick-and-mortar lab environment. The entire course and teaching are done in online or digital mode. Teachers interact with their learners through pre-different ways like recorded videos, audio and video conferences or discussion forums and email etc.

Self-Blend

The next type of blended learning is Self – Blend. This model is a fully individualized approach that allows students to choose to take one or more courses online and after that supplement their traditional school's catalogue. Maximum part of the learning is done online, but for doubts and improvements student will still attend face-to-face classes.

Online Driver

Online Driver model involves online platform as well as face to face teachers' interaction to deliver the curricula. Students work from remote locations most of the time and when required come to school for optional or required face-to-face classes. Have a look at the info graphic below to know what blended learning is, what its different forms are, why it's spreading, and how it works in real and virtual classrooms.

Advantages of Blended Learning

Hameed, Badii, and Cullen (2008) in their study observed that the efficiency of e-learning increased when mixed with traditional learning. They concluded that blended learning approach provides the most flexible method of e-learning in the present scenario. The other advantage of blended learning is its potential to offer many sources for teachers and learners both. Azizan (2010) observed that utilization of technology in formal classrooms offer extra resources for the students and this is expected to increase the confidence and competence of learners as well as enhances the quality of learning. Chen and Jones (2007) outlined some other advantages of blended learning such as in depth understanding of topics by utilizing web-based resources as well as active participation of students in classroom. Furthermore, online learning

engagement provides an interactive setting for active communication in classroom among teachers and students and may facilitate many cooperative activities even beyond the classrooms (Yuen, 2010). From the above discussion we identified the major benefit of applying blended instruction i.e. to overcome the shortcomings of online instruction and exploit various instructional process and delivery strategies in order to increase learners' satisfaction and efficiency as well as boosting the learning outcomes of learners.

1. Provides personalized training experiences

Blended Learning provides the learners with face-to-face instruction and use of technology hand in hand offers students a customized training experience with personalized immediate feedback. If a learner struggles with a particular training topic, they can easily access supplemental resources online or get the guidance they need from their instructor. They are also able to utilize specific multimedia activities that cater to achieve their performance goals. For example, if they would like to develop their learning skills after utilizing benefits of both the modes helps them to achieve their targets. If they need to learn more about a particular topic and its features, they are able to access the details of the topic and tutorial instantly. Instead of spending time through an hour-long training course with the instructor to get the information they require, they can just pick-and-choose which elements will improve their performance and skill and continue their work.

2. Offers 24/7 access to training resources

Blended learning training removes time and location limitations. If the student is at home and would like to clear its doubts, they can do it according to their need corporate learners no longer have to wait for a scheduled training to address their concerns and questions, as the online training resources are always there to help. If you create an online forum, they can also benefit from the experience of their co-workers and get answers to questions when the instructor is not available.

3. Track employee performance and skill development

Blended learning also makes data tracking faster and more convenient to use. Instead of grading exams, use an online assessment with a build-in grading rubric, which also offers the benefits of immediate feedback to students. Virtually every training exercise and activity can be tracked to track the progress of employee and helps in skill development, from the choices they make in a branching scenario to their level of participation in an online discussion. Organizations also gain the opportunity to find out which activities are effective, beneficial and which need to be modified in order to find out the performance goals and objectives.

4. Reduction in training costs

The benefit of blended learning that brings many organizations to this strategy is the cost savings. This is due to the fact that blended learning can make the training process more efficient, but does not require as much time or money as traditional training. No instructors need to be present, in some cases, and there is no training space to rent is required. In addition, the training courses can be updated and expanded in a small time period, as there is no need to worry about printed material.

Disadvantages of Blended Learning

1. Improper use of technology tools leads to waste of resources

If training instructors and teachers are unaware of how to use the learning technology provided we are not able to get the desired benefits. Also, if learner utilize learning technology tools that are not reliable or do not have the necessary features, then it may end up wasting resources like time and energy instead of improving ROI. This is why

it's crucial to find the right tools before you implement your blended learning program in the workplace. Find out which devices and software are able to meet your requirements as well as which fit into your overall training budget.

2. Basic Knowledge of technology or a willingness to learn is must for learners

In virtual mode all blended learning environments you will encounter at least one learner who is hesitant about change. There are also some learners who may not be familiar with technology and have a steep learning curve ahead of them. To create the interest of learners there should be support on hand to teach new learners and motivate those who may be more reluctant. It's also important to cultivate a blended learning community that stresses the value of technology in training, as well as the real world benefits it can offer. Organize such workshops that employees can attend in order to learn as much as possible about the new training program and be introduced to the features of the devices they'll be using on a regular basis.

3. Blended learning demands high technology set up and maintenance costs

Purchasing of the software for learning and other technology for your blended learning program, such as devices and infrastructure setup is a costly affair. This is also true that if there is a larger workforce or several departments. However, bear in mind that these are short term expenses for that time and that these helps in saving money in the long run. Even if you have to pay a nominal monthly maintenance fee you are able to receive the numerous benefits that a blended learning strategy has to offer.

Challenges of Blended Learning

Blended learning is very crucial for the modern educational institutions but this strategy has many challenges. Some of the challenges are discussed below:

Imposes New Burdens on Educators

A true blended model, where some students are in the conventional mode and others are learning in online mode remotely at the same time, can sometimes require more of educators than what traditional classroom teaching requires. With blended learning there is more flexibility for “live “and while teaching instructors must interact with both in-person and remote students. Educators find their attention divided more than they would require in face to face or classroom instruction alone.

Requires Greater Comfort with Technology

Teaching well in a blended learning setting requires more friendly with technology use than is usually needed for in-person teaching. Some teachers are more comfortable with technology usage and easily make these adjustments, but the technology-averse will need training and on-going support.

Remains Difficult Without Proper Technology Solutions

One more challenge of using blended learning is that using this strategy requires the right combination of digital tools and services from a technology partner that understands the unique needs of learners in higher education. This again demands more efforts from teacher educators as well as from policy makers.

Impact of blended learning on the students and teachers

The role of blended learning is very crucial in present time as it breaks down the traditional lecture method of teaching. With the help of technology, it helps in customisation of resources and provides the learning experience to student's need according to their pace. Since blended learning also provides the students with high flexibility and personalisation as well as benefit to students have the flexibility to learn at their own pace. Thus, through blended learning mode learners can enjoy learning according to their own pace that suits their study routine, and teachers can

interact with their learners by monitoring their growth and giving immediate feedback to their students. This new model of teaching or method of tutoring by using additional resources beyond the classroom can have a positive effect on the students' achievement and learning experience.

Blended learning helps in improving various factors in the classroom for teachers as well students like resulting in more engagement of students, real-time and authentic feedback on teaching strategies, new methods of teaching, cooperative learning and better time management among others. Thus, through blended learning mode, schools and teachers are mainly focussed on inculcating methods to understand and manage the social and emotional well-being of students. While the pandemic has created great opportunities for a combination of online and offline mode. Digital transformation has provided many the opportunities to Learners to explore new ways of understanding the difficult concepts. The future of present education will be in blended mode of education. These models would help to provide a new solution to enhance, access and quality of education in India.

Blended Learning in the Time of Covid-19 Pandemic

According to UNESCO, COVID-19 has a great impact on Global education. It has affected approximately 1.38 billion students from pre-primary to higher education. At the time of pandemic schools and universities were closed for the whole of the year and transitioning to distance learning, the effectiveness of online learning methods and systems are put into test. An article from World Economic Forum (Li & Lalani, 2020) finds that teaching-learning digitally can be more impactful in a number of ways than formal classroom learning but only for those who have access to the latest technology. UNESCO (2020) provides a comprehensive list of distance learning solutions for schools and school administrators, teachers, students, and parents or caregivers, which include learning solutions with strong offline capability for those who have limited online access.

The real fact is that COVID-19 can reshape the present educational system for better and for worse (Li & Lalani, 2020). While the sudden transformation to distance learning has caught academic institutions, teachers, and learners off guard, it also provides a preview of long-term transition in the education system (Tam & El-Azar, 2020). But with only about 60% of the world's population have online/digital access (Kemp, 2020), the digitization of education is arguably be only beneficial to those to have quality access to online learning tools, which can be costly for the less affluent population. The present situation is however gives an opportunity to work on combining the digital divided by improving online connectivity, easy access of device and developing strategies for effective offline teaching- learning process.

Conclusion

Blended learning has great advantages in teaching-learning process. One of its main benefits is the flexibility in administering the course. On one hand teachers may improve the quality of its teaching learning process by motivating his students to do some learning activity outside the classroom such as finding additional resources and references on the internet and taking online, test, quizzes and assignment etc. Beside the flexibility which is provided by blended learning, blended learning itself has potent disadvantages. Blended learning needs technology set up and internet connection in its administration. If we want to apply in school or regions where there is less adequate internet connection, the blended learning will lose its essence i.e. to improve the quality of overall teaching- learning process and eventually decrease the

effectiveness of language learning. The recommendations deal with the implementation of blended learning is that the teacher or institution should prepare the infrastructure first. In terms of blended learning it requires the stable and adequate facility of internet connection. In case if the school or the institution cannot be able to provide proper internet connection, they should consider reducing the numbers of internet connection in teaching learning process. But in last we don't run away from its necessity in present modern and globalized world because this is New Normal for all of us.

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