

DIMENSION AND REALISM OF BLENDED LEARNING APPROACHES IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER LEVEL OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of this study is to explore the wide opportunities provided by blended learning in the field of higher education. The word blended learning signifies both online and offline mode of learning which continue simultaneously in same classroom. The word blended learning indicates that it is completely device oriented, students centric and activity based learning. The study had been conducted to know about practical value of blended learning. A descriptive qualitative method has been adopted for this study. The findings of the study signify that blended-learning method was more flexible, accessible, and feasible to all and teachers could easily track student's progress through Google form, online interview. According to learner's requirement, teachers could insert different learning software programme.

Keywords: Blended learning, collaborative learning, teacher, student

INTRODUCTION

In a blended learning approach, both virtual learning and usual classroom learning take place. Teacher can use both the method for teaching in the teaching-learning process. Blended learning, also known as hybrid learning, is a combination of digital learning and traditional learning. The advantage of blended learning is that it provides students multiple opportunities. In a traditional classroom, students often feel bored to listen long lectures from the teachers and it often brings monotony in the lives of the students. In this scenario, the use of technology or audio-visual aids in the classroom or the teaching-learning process becomes more effective. This kind of classroom offers students to explore their capabilities. Teacher as a facilitator in the classroom focuses on improving students' opportunities in the classroom and they also focus on assessing individual learner's need in the classroom. From this point of view, blended learning concept is much more beneficial for students rather than the traditional classroom.

We are now living in a digital world where education system is changing and upgrading itself continuously. Though in a country like India, implementing blended learning is really a challenge,

especially in remote villages, but it cannot be ignored by considering the present context. It can be said that the blended learning approach seeks to balance face-to-face learning and online learning within a course. It refers to technology-oriented activities which engage students in manifold ways instead of being only the classroom listeners. Blended learning approach enhances interactive session in classroom. So, it enhances students' communication skill, motor skill and various social skills.

As we all know web-based activities have greater impact in the field of education because the main aim of education is to generate skill based human being with complete knowledge of theoretical point of view. Blended learning approach truly will help us to accomplish the aim of education because some technology-oriented activities such as exploring information through internet, making power-point in specific topic, data calculation in excel sheet and traditional classroom related activities like participating debate, knowledge of essay writing, making chart model on specific topic, data representation in word format and many other activities could be done by using technology. In this mode students can join online classes if they are not able to present physically in the classroom and teacher might take online classes if they are able to arrive the institution in time. Sometimes, teachers also use audio-visual teaching aids and deliver instruction to the students. Even, students can also complete their task by using technology.

BLENDED LEARNING : A BRIEF CONCEPT NOTE

Graham (2006) defines blended learning as follows: "Blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction" (p. 5). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) define "blended learning as the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences". Allen and Seaman (2010) argue, "a blended learning course as follows : Course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings." According to Driscoll (2019, p. 1), blended learning signifies different things to different people. The meaning of the term "constantly evolves as it incorporates new concepts along with each new technology, thus illustrating blended learning's potential for growth. He further explains that blended learning may take the form of combining modes of web-based technology, pedagogical approaches, instructional technologies, and actual job tasks". Elsenheimer (2006, p. 26) also argued that "blended learning is an approach to instructional design that seeks to maximize learning potential by applying the most effective form of instruction for a given program element." This general description of blended learning is narrowed down by Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, which describes blended learning as a way of studying a subject that combines being taught in class with the use of different technologies, including learning over the internet." Graham (2013) provides a more straightforward definition of blended learning, which is the combination of both "online and face-to-face instruction."

We have already discussed several definitions of blended learning. These definitions describe blended learning as a mode of teaching-learning instruction which give equal importance to on-line and off-line classes. By adding few web-based activities and traditional classroom venture, it was never a successful method. The implication of blended learning approach mostly depends upon the need of school administration and demand of learners and it requires an Integrated approach and prearranged materials.

Watson (2008) described “blended learning as a major segment of a continuum between fully online and traditional face-to-face settings.” The blended learning continuum comprises the following categories :

- 1) It is fully online and distance learning-oriented course.
- 2) It has web-based curriculum with choice for teacher’s direction, but not essential,
- 3) It is completely online syllabus with stipulated days, necessary in smart classroom or computer room.
- 4) The learners can assemble in computer lab in every day and fulfil their needs.
- 5) Online learning is very much significant because it is not syllabus oriented learning nor it is confined in four walls.
- 7) In this approach, conventional teaching process is less important and it emphasize more on CAI.

Now we have already known that Blended learning is a unique approach and it is effectively used in the education process. With the help of E-learning software and guidance of teacher, student can complete his/her project.

Several definitions of blended learning approaches have been proved that it satisfies learners’ need because only in this method students enjoys flexible schedule time, self-paced online materials and face to face interaction with teacher.

The significant trademark of Blended learning is as follows :

- Motivated students’ participation in learning.
- Improved teacher- student interdependence.
- Increased maturity for learning.
- Time scheduling and mobility.
- Upgraded student learning outcome.
- Strengthen school organization prestige.
- More liberal and reliable teaching learning atmosphere.
- More manageable for self and permanent learning.
- Better scope for activity-based learning.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted to attain the following objectives:

- 1) To investigate the dimension and realism of blended learning approaches among the learners of higher education.
- 2) To study the level of interest of learners in relation to the blended learning approaches in the field of higher level of education.
- 3) To find out the pragmatic values of learners on blended learning approaches in the field of higher level of education.

DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH

Blended learning could be an effective option when students are willing for personalized learning without increasing their expenses. With this approach face to face interaction takes place in the classroom, while through online materials and some additional activities are delivered. In some other cases, infrequent meetings happen for problem solving and community building. There are many reasons why schools are switching to blended learning. Teachers are switching to the blended learning mode on the basis of its suitability to the subject and their curricular needs. Blended learning can be chosen based on the requirement from the following six models.

- 1) **Face-to-Face Driver Model** : This model is the nearest to the typical school structure. This model allows students who are willing to progress above their grade level. In this model a significant amount of classroom teaching time has been replaced by online activities. In introduction, online instruction is allowed to only certain students in a given class on case-to-case basis. They can use these online activities as a supplement to the face-to-face instruction.
- 2) **Rotation Model** : In this model of learning students rotate into various models, such as station rotation, lab rotation and individual rotation. Out of these sub models some are better suited in school level and others work well in college level.
- 3) **Flex Model** : In this model students choose how they want to take instructions - online or face to face. Learning is self-guided and students can learn new things in digital environment, however materials are primarily delivered through online and teachers in the classroom have to provide on-site support as needed.
- 4) **Self-Blend Model** : In the self-blended model of learning, students opt online courses in addition to their traditional face-to-face learning. In this model students get little support from their teachers in this model of learning, student themselves make the progress and monitor their learning.
- 5) **Online Driver Model** : This model is the opposite to the face-to-face model. Here students can take their course remotely and material is primarily delivered via an online platform. If

they have any question, they can chat personally with the teachers. In this model, face to face meeting is not mandatory.

- 6) **Online Lab Model** : In this model students can complete their course through online, including those which are not part of school site. Schools are adopting this model as resources getting limited day by day. Though students are learning online but travel to a dedicated computer lab to complete their coursework. In those labs trained professionals supervise their work.

Now a day, students are technology oriented and understand the potentials and opportunities of blended learning. Traditional teachers often don't use this learning model but due to the financial stress. Now a day, online education is the most viable and effective solution.

Learner-centric Approach : Mix-method or blended learning system becomes more popular among college or university level students because of its flexibility of learning experience. According to Smart and Cappel, the principle of effective learning should be activity based and enquiry based. In this regard blended learning approach should be more emphasized on student's engagement on completion of project or involving creative activities like making working model on specific theme. Effective blending of online learning and face-to-face learning creates conditions that are highly encouraging to students' self-learning. Blended or hybrid method - a combination of person to person and E-learning instruction has been proved that enhancing relationship between student-teacher and it has increased students' active participation in learning process. Tallent-Runnel's studies proved that students like to learn at their own style. In this respect, Blended learning always motivated students' self-study habit. Teachers' advice or notes are very significant instrument for every educator but it should not be the only tool to communicate students. According to Wurdinger and Carlson, lecture method only help to increase the comprehension level of students and they can understand theories but the blended approach help to increase students' creative thinking along with deep knowledge of theories.

Downing, et al., (2014) in their paper have discussed the potential of Blended learning in the context of Student's engagement. This study proved that students are more attentive when they are learning through blended approach rather than face to face learning because in this hybrid learning approach individually they are engaged to accomplish their own task without a teacher's support. Therefore, it automatically increases their interest level, their attention level, their motivation level. One important reason for supporting the blended learning approach is that it helps them to complete their assignment or task without mentor's interference. According to UGC guideline (2021), blended learning approach has several possibilities. These are:

- 1) It expends interest level of the learners because this approach focuses on web-based learning.
- 2) Blended learning approach is followed by discovery method. It supports the idea of exploring the new theme so that the students are actively involved in finding new concepts for a long time.

- 3) Blended learning approach supports self-directional learning.
- 4) Self-improvement (students) is one of the main principles of blended learning medium of instruction.
- 5) Blended learning approach generates the feeling of self-responsibility aptitude of students.

PRCTICAL VALUE OF BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The study by Alseweed (2013), Dogan (2016), Chilkoti (2016), Kaur (2017) have revealed that Blended learning system enhances the level of self-learning of students in the field of higher education. Blended learning connects teacher activities, student's effort, learning design, study pattern through technology. So, we cannot avoid the ideas of blended learning from our education system. According to Dziuban, et. al, (2004), instruction through blended learning mode improves the literacy level of information which is very much beneficial for teachers and students in their academic area and their future professional arena also.

There are a few reasons for adopting the blended learning approach in the educational institute. Few significant points have been discussed below :

- In comparison between traditional formal learning and on-line learning, blended learning is specifically very powerful learning approach in our technology-oriented education system.
- Blended learning is much better than face-to-face learning because it is associated with students' higher level of achievement.
- If we consider economic value of blended learning approach, it is less expensive than the face to face mode of learning.

The next few points also discussed the practical utility of blended learning approach in the field of higher education:

Face-to face and online pedagogy mode of teaching instruction: Students in blended learning environment are not passive listeners. They are involved in many activities and learners are getting opportunities to fulfill their project very innovatively with the help of online resources. The role of teachers in blended learning approach is not only delivered through their lecture. The instructors also are busy in providing their lecture in a very creative way.

Support all round development of learners: The Blended approach of learning helps the students to generate new skill, new learning procedure, technology-oriented ideas and creative proposal for the improvement of student's practical knowledge. In this platform students can share their ideas, their innovative activities and significant documents which will help to increase their cognitive skills, psychomotor skills and affective skills. In short, we can say that blended learning approach is very much useful to produce expert human being in their professional area.

Cope-up with real world: Students are facing realistic problems when they reach in field of higher education level. The blended learning environment try to encourage the students to meet realistic situation and learners also learn the route to overcome the problem with their own capabilities. Instead of explaining the theories, learners should be given the opportunities to visit the actual field and acquiring relevant information which will help them to solve the real life problems.

Projecting topic in an innovative way: In blended learning approach, students from different fields like—science, language or humanities can produce their concept through cartoon strips or documentary film with the help of digital source. Story creation tool, info graphic representation, podcasts provide them to present any subject oriented issues in several creative styles. Blended learning design will intensify student expression skill and help them to introduce their ideas creatively.

Generating the ideas of knowledge mapping: Online learning features like inserting data, installing new educational app, uploading images, adding slide etc. make learning more interesting and purposeful. With the help of online learning tools learner can present diagrammatic representation of any topic and they can also comprehend the topic from another perspective. Students will find out co-relation between their own subjects with other subjects through the mind mapping.

We have already discussed the utilitarian and practical values of blended learning approach in our modern education system, but it has few shortcomings too. These are followings :

- This approach of learning often becomes a major cause of distractions to the students.
- Although blended learning is increasing student's effectiveness, it also tends to weaken the learning habits of learners.
- Diligent and sincere students will make the best of this method of unconventional learning. However, there are a few of those students who would take advantage of this. But the too much use of social media during study might spoil the whole purpose of this method.

CONCLUSION

In this study, it is found that blended learning approach is highly effective for the learners who are enrolled in colleges or universities. In learner-centric curriculum, blended approach is really energy-saving and it consistently emphasis on students' activities along with teacher instruction. Very few methods/approaches provide students self-learning space but blended learning approach is very popular in this field. Blended learning approach also provide students a collaborative space through online platform which helps the students to solve various classroom related problems. After pandemic, blended learning approach has become most popular approach of learning due to its feasibility.

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