BLENDED LEARNING: AN EMERGING AND INNOVATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

Blended learning, as the name suggests, is a combination of two types of learning. One is the traditional, in-person form of class, and the other is the use of fast-developing technology. In modern classrooms, some parts of the syllabus and classroom activities are conducted traditionally while the rest is conducted online. Blended learning is an innovative concept. This is the resolution that exists between classroom and ICT supported learning leverages the benefits of traditional learning in both offline and online learning. This includes collaborative learning, creative learning and computer-assisted learning (CAI). Blended learning requires hard efforts, right approach, good budget and highly motivated teachers and students for its successful implementation. Since it involves diverse mediums so it is complex and a difficult task to organize. The present paper discusses the concept of blended learning, its main features and the feasibility of its implementation. The scope of blended learning in the Indian educational system is also discussed. The present paper also tries to explain that blended learning is an approach that needs to be adopted.

Keywords: learning, ICT, computer-assisted learning, online learning

Introduction

At present the Indian education system is in a constantly in changing state. There is a need to adopt new technologies to meet the challenges of expansion and to meet the needs of individuals and explore new avenues to reach the goal of quality educational opportunities for all, while taking into account various factors, such as: despite the budget scarcity, lack of good media, and the benefits of face-to-face communication, it is completely unwilling to abandon

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traditional methods of knowledge transfer. Even the students are in a state of double mind. When a group of teacher trainees were questioned about their method of teaching, they would give priority to traditional classroom teaching and use of ICT supported learning, students were found to be almost equally divided between these two options.

Despite some of its shortcomings, the traditional medium of instruction provides a much-needed human touch to the teaching-learning process. The personality and behavior of teachers directly affects the blossoming personality of students. Only face-to-face interaction serves cognitive and psychomotor as well as affective purposes. Confronting traditional viewpoints helps in developing a strong value system. Social skills such as cooperation, sharing, expression and respecting other ideas are more easily developed in traditional medium of teaching. Students learn not only from books, or from teachers teaching inside the classroom, but also from co-students, through their peer group interactions, they learn many skills in the playground and their small social interactions in the canteen, lounge etc. We also learn from conversations. All this is necessary for a proper personality development. As discussed above the traditional approach has its advantages but it is not free from shortcomings. It has the following drawbacks:

➢ It is basically failing to meet the individual needs of all the students in the class due to inappropriate student-teacher ratio.

➢ It is not physically adapting itself to meet the challenge of teaching students.

➢ Teachers are not trained for integrated classroom.

➢ It is not suitable to meet the challenges put forward by their regular students as attendance is compulsory and the evaluation system depends on the annual examination. If the students fail to appear in the examination, then their entire year goes waste, due to the rigor the irregular students are in a way thrown out of the mainstream of the school system.

➢ Similarly, absence of professional counsellors and lack of right attitude of teachers and follow up activities in schools; Children who stop attending school completely for any reason do not get the opportunity to enter the formal educational system.

➢ Schools are not able to reach every child and hence providing education to all is still a distant goal.

➢ Children from disadvantaged groups, from areas that are isolated and medically unfit students are not able to benefit from this formal traditional approach to teaching.

➢ The curriculum is not revised regularly, books are not updated, teachers are not interested in upgrading their knowledge and professional skills, the result is that our students are unable to meet the demands of the modern market and professions.

An ICT supported teaching-learning process is a good option to enhance the performance of students, to reduce teaching errors, to improve quality, to correlate their knowledge with current technological advancement and globalization. ICT enabled teaching provides a new dimension to the teaching-learning process, exposing students to a wider expanse of knowledge and opening up innumerable opportunities for learning to all types of learners; whether in-service, physically challenged, including those with disabilities, can benefited from it. This medium of teaching helps to reach all the students. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "If people cannot reach to schools, schools must reach to them".

Analysis of both traditional method of teaching-learning process and ICT supported teaching-learning process shows that both have some merits and demerits, both are fulfilling different needs, demands and expectations from the educational system. Hence the solution is to provide and design a system that is based on an integrated approach, a system that incorporates the main features of both traditional approaches and ICT supported teaching. The demand today is for a method which blends the benefits of both the methods for student learning i.e. blended learning.

Blended learning

Blended learning is the concept that involves teaching-learning process, in which both teaching and learning are facilitated by ICT. Blended learning includes direct and indirect instruction, cooperative learning, personal computer-assisted learning. These include:

Face-to-Face Teaching: Blended learning provides full scope to the traditional classroom teaching, where students get enough time to interact with their teachers and thus get influenced by their personality, behavior and value system. Face-to-face interaction helps in synchronous communication. Both teachers and students are able to receive immediate feedback which is conducive to the teaching learning process. Face-to-face interaction is very motivating for both teachers and students and it gives a human touch to the process.

Student interaction with the course material: Provides time to the student to directly interact with their course material through the traditional medium of teaching and school campus printing material and ICT mediated learning provides them with their course material in a versatile and diverse interesting manner. Provides indirect interaction with. Videos provide the

necessary realism to the content and sharing on blogs and visiting e-books provides a fresh and up-to-date perspective on the content.

Peer Group Interaction: Students learn through formal methods within the school campus and they learn informally by interacting with their peer group. Many essential life skills and social values are practiced in non-formal interactions with their peer groups. The school campus provides many opportunities for this on playgrounds, social exchanges during free time. Group discussion and exchange of ideas during classroom teaching not only provides students interaction with teachers, but well-crafted strategies allow students to undergo discussions and exchange ideas with their classmates on various aspects of the curriculum. It helps students develop self-confidence, overcome their hesitations and develop skills to communicate effectively and develop good listening skills.

Accessing e-library: This is a part of ICT supported teaching-learning method. In the traditional mode, students get access to the school library which is limited but the digital library provides them access to various books related to their subject and in diverse areas. It broadens their perspective and enriches their knowledge; it helps in fulfilling cognitive objectives.

Virtual Classroom: It provides students with the option to learn anywhere, anytime and from anyone. Students can be a part of virtual class meeting with their co-students and teacher in cyberspace irrespective of geographical boundaries. The school can also provide provisions for this so that the system gets flexibility and students who cannot go to school regularly can take advantage of this medium. Also, a student can connect with other experts and increase their knowledge. With the world today turning into a global village, through this mode students will be integrated with their counterparts in any other part of the world and will also get multicultural experience.

Online Assessment: Immediate feedback is an important factor in learning as it motivates the learner and is based on the principles of readiness. Online assessment helps in making the assessment system more formal, transparent and faster. It becomes more reliable and objective.

E-Tuition: Students have different needs. Some of the students do not benefit from classroom teaching as they require constant personal guidance and complete attention. Such students can opt for e-tuition that meets a personal tutor and receives personalized guidance in cyberspace through video conferencing.

Accessing and maintaining educational blogs: Students get less opportunity to nurture their creativity in traditional classes because of the rigid time table and a lot of pressure of class work, assignments and exam stress but educational blogs allow students to Provide a platform

to showcase your creativity and also get feedback. Additionally, educational blogs are a good platform to discuss topics of importance that are not part of the curriculum such as social problems, political issues and issues relevant to youth such as drug addiction, crime, population education, etc.

Webinar: Webinar is also a feature of blended learning which is an ICT enabled format. This means that students attend seminars on various subjects relevant to them through an Internet connection. All the participants are available through various software like Skype, Google Talk etc. and then present their paper and participate in the discussion through video conferencing.

Watching lectures of experts via YouTube: The blended system provides the student to get the benefit of experts on the course material they are studying. Because they can easily watch various lectures by renowned experts in different fields available on your tube. Additionally, the college can also upload videos of lectures by its own teachers so that students can avail this medium if they are unable to attend the college.

Online Learning through Videos and Audios: Various recordings, animated videos are available which explain various concepts very easily and in an interesting manner. They are based on the principle of realism and connection with life. So that students can get real life experience while studying and it makes difficult concepts and events concrete for students.

Virtual Laboratories: This can be used in professional courses where laboratory work is very important and sometimes the cost of setting up a well-equipped laboratory is not feasible and, in some cases, students can access virtual laboratories and One can learn the skills required by working in a virtual laboratory. When all these features are combined in one frame it is called blended learning.

Main features of blended learning.

In blended learning students can choose either the traditional method of classroom teaching. Where they can have personal interaction with the teacher and their classmates or they can choose ICT supported teaching-learning. This largely depends on the nature of the content and objectives being targeted. Sometimes the curriculum designer or the teacher himself decides on the topic to be dealt with.

Teachers are proficient in both the mediums-

It is an important feature of blended learning that teachers are very dynamic, tech-savvy and fully trained to work efficiently in both the traditional classroom format and ICT supported format. They will be well equipped to use traditional methods and other modern technologies.

In addition to face-to-face interaction, students also interact in the virtual space.

Students get ample time to interact with other students pursuing the same course. They can interact with them inside the college campus and also in virtual space. Thus their group becomes very large and has great diversity thereby broadening the student's knowledge and developing a sense of understanding, love and harmony with students from other cultures and countries.

Students get full experience in using new technology.

The present century is the century of ICT. Today illiterate is not only one who cannot read and write but a person who is not well versed with modern technologies is also illiterate. Expertise in ICT is in demand in all professions today, so blended learning helps in enriching the student's ICT experience. Students gain the ability to use blended learning to exploit available technologies to their advantage.

Students get training in various life skills

Life skills are those skills which are necessary to live a happy peaceful and successful life. Key life skills include empathy, decision making, love, patience, communication, self-management, critical thinking. Blended learning helps students practice these skills. Students get acquainted with their teachers, classmates and some skills like self-management, decision making, critical thinking, communication through online experiences in the classroom with love, empathy, patience.

All-round development of personality is targeted.

Blended learning provides full opportunity to students for all-round development of personality. All aspects of personality, such as cognitive, physical and emotionality are developed through blended learning which is difficult to achieve in traditional mode or ICT approach. Aids in memory level and understanding level of traditional classroom teaching and hence helps in development of cognitive domain as well as teacher's behaviour, playground experience and social group with classmates in affective and physical domain at the same time. Let's develop. This leads to the development of higher faculties of social networking sites and other social interactions, although the Internet helps in the right kind of value development.

Physical development is possible in school.

Online learning and ICT teaching, supporting the teaching process, are often targeted with the drawback that it neglects the physical development of students. Blended learning overcomes this limitation. Since it also includes school experience the student gets time for play, physical labour, yoga inside the college campus.

Students get broad exposure to course material and new perspectives:

Due to the variety of experiences, students get broader exposure and their content knowledge is enriched, they gain different new dimensions of the content and practical knowledge.

It has a human touch.

Through physical presence students with traditional approach get that human touch to the teacher which is very essential for the emotional quotient of a balanced student and is very essential till the secondary level. It is multicultural and multi-dimensional.

Approach to teaching-learning

Blended learning approach provides the student with the opportunity to communicate and share his/her thoughts and feelings with students from all over the world and thus makes the teaching learning process multicultural and brings with it a variety of experiences that are interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. Also brings factor.

Child-centred blended learning makes the teaching-learning process designed to provide maximum benefit to students and thus reach the goal of child-centred education.

diverse role of teacher

In blended learning the teacher is playing a different role from the traditional role of a teacher in the classroom, he as a motivator, as a resource person, as an organizer, as a developer, when he develops the content. IS- is provided through ICT, as a guide on the side. Thus the teacher gets freedom from monotonous traditional roles and can try his hand in different fields. Which is also good for his/her professional development. The student creates knowledge instead of merely consuming it. Constructivism is also included in blended learning. Students built on their own knowledge based on others to design teaching-learning strategies for them.

Need for blended learning

Implementing blended learning is not an easy task. It requires some basic preparations in all elements of the teaching-learning process – teachers, students, material designing, and infrastructure. The following are the basic requirements for implementing a successful blended learning.

Well-trained teachers– Although child centric, teachers are an important pole of blended learning. Teachers should be well acquainted with the concept of blended learning and fully trained and skilled to blend both approaches – traditions and technology. They should be trained to develop content in digital form so that it can be available online to students. They should be well versed with internet browsing and internet terminology, should be aware of all the websites that can be useful to students while learning online. The teacher should know how to use blogs,

YouTube media, software like Skype, Google Talk and other video conferencing and social networking sites for educational purposes.

Teachers with scientific approach – It is very important that teachers have a scientific approach. They should have good observation skills, they should be optimistic, should have problem solving skills. The scientific approach will help teachers deal positively with the failures they encounter while working on this innovative concept and help them analyze situations objectively. This right kind of scientific temperament will automatically be passed on from teachers to students.

Well-equipped computer labs, internet connections, full facilities like provision for video chatting – these are essential factors of blended learning. Blended learning largely depends on infrastructure, the school should not only have good classrooms but also a well-equipped computerized laboratories with facilities for all the students of a class and internet access, Wi-Fi in the campus if possible. If yes, then there should be sufficient number of computers.

Students have access to the Internet on their personal computers – Apart from the school being a completely ICT friendly campus, students should also have basic hardware support for online and offline learning at their residence. This requires a positive attitude and good investment plans from the government.

Flexibility in the system- The system should be flexible, flexibility, time table, examination system all this is very important to implement blended learning. Fully aware and agreeable parents- Parents should be well informed about this innovative approach to teaching so that they are ready for it and support their wards for blended learning and can accept that traditional teaching This deviation from is beneficial for their children.

Formative assessment and continuous internal assessment– School authorities and higher education bodies must be prepared to fully implement Continuous Internal Assessment (CAI) and other tools of blended assessment, as formative assessment is not supported in blended learning. To make the system more flexible, provision should be made for online examination. These are some of the essential and basic requirements without which blended learning cannot be executed successfully.

Benefits of blended learning

1. As part of the learning takes place through online or offline mode, ICT, teachers and students can get more time in the classroom for creative and cooperative practice.

2. Students get the benefits of online learning and CAI without losing the social learning element and human touch of traditional teaching.

3. It provides greater scope for communication.

4. The communication cycle is completed in blended learning which is not possible if only the traditional approach is followed.

5. Students become more tech savvy and they increase digital fluency.

6. Students have further strengthened professionalism as they develop qualities like self-motivation, self-responsibility, discipline.

7. It updates the established course material and hence gives new life.

Relevance of blended learning adopted in India

The Indian education system suffers from various problems such as failure to expand the system to provide provision of free and compulsory education to all children, non-adherence to maintaining quality along with increasing quantity, failure of the education curriculum to meet the demands of the international market. Not capable of fulfilling and even capable of preserving and propagating the Indian value system, teachers are not fully dedicated to their profession and the inefficiency of teachers is adversely affecting students' learning. There is an urgent need for some radical steps and major revolutions to overcome these challenges. To some extent, blended learning will help in solving these problems of the Indian education system. Due to the large population in our country, the system of formal schools is not able to provide equal educational opportunities to all, Therefore blended learning would be a good option as it would broaden the field of educational opportunities and education would be able to reach more children.

Technological and scientific developments demand a constant matching of the education system to their pace and correlation with them so as to enable students to cope with the rapidly changing market. Technology and scientific fields are the most dynamic and changing at a great pace incorporating new innovations, Therefore the material transmitted to students should be modified accordingly, but in India, curriculum is generally not modified nor updated; This should be done so that blended learning can be adapted to students and teachers so that they can easily update their knowledge and skills.

Lack of good teachers is also a major issue. Teachers are less in number, still many primary schools do not have a suitable teacher-pupil ratio, this problem is not only present in the government sector but private institutions are also in the same situation. Another serious issue is that working teachers are also not very dedicated towards the profession, so blended learning is a good option as online teaching can be a substitute for teacher.

Generally, the problem of indiscipline, irregular attendance and dropouts etc. exists because our traditional mode is not able to meet the individual demands of every student and is not making the delivery of this material interesting for the students. Moreover, the curriculum is not focused, students are not confident and secure about their future, hence this unrest and stress leads to the problem of indiscipline, but blended learning will be a combo solution to all these problems. As discussed above learning provides a variety of experiences to students, makes them active and they focus on the teaching-learning process due to increased participation and enable students to take responsibility for their own learning. Makes more disciplined. And as the blended teacher is providing more advanced and quality education to the students which is from the dynamic resource, hence learning thus becomes more purposeful.

Still, education remains a big challenge for all. Our constitution provides provision of free and compulsory education to all children of all ages, but our system is not able to meet even this goal. But if our educational institutions implement blended learning then they can easily increase enrolments despite geographical limitations.

Educated students are also not skilled enough to meet the demands of the global market hence facing unemployment but as discussed above blended, blended learning helps the students to master all the modern technologies and life skills. Which will help them to live a successful life.

There are also problems in the education of special children, but blended education with its diversity can easily meet the needs of special children, those who are gifted can satisfy the emphasis of their knowledge in blended education, blind students Can be easily educated in blended learning Because ICT enabled teaching-learning process will provide technological support in their learning, similarly the physically challenged can also become a part of mainstream education and take admission in good institutions without worrying about distance because of blended learning. Will help them to study online and from home.

The quality of education is largely higher education and also a serious issue. None of our higher education institutions are among the top institutions in the world, hence adopting blended learning to cater to this and enhance the quality is a Would be a good option. When students get experience of both types of medium, their knowledge will be enriched. Our students will gain advanced skills by accessing experts and content available online that will make them strong candidates for good jobs. These exposures will definitely cross the limits in syllabus designing or methodology.

Similarly, another problem in our education system is that it fails to develop the right value system and display love towards Indian culture and tradition in the students. As it is adopting itself in modern technologies but blended learning gives equal importance to the traditional mode and classroom teaching and thus can give the essence of Indian value system to the students.

Implementation of blended learning in Indian education system

Blended learning requires complete dedication on the part of the management and administration of educational institutions. It requires a well-organized design that involves all individuals from the top to the bottom of the educational hierarchy. To prepare educational institutions for hybrid we will need to increase educational budget, this can be done with the help of NGOs and also coordination with industrial and corporate sector. These sectors can be motivated to give their financial inputs towards blended learning execution as these sectors will benefit the most if, the output of these educational institutions is geared more efficiently to the global market.

The second very important issue to be considered is the right kind of development that all people having to do with the educational system have towards this ground-breaking concept. For change awareness programs of parents, community, teachers and students, seminars, discussion forums should be organized. These can be used to create awareness among the people. These can be used to make people aware of the benefits of blended learning so as to create the right mindset for its implementation. Mass media can be used for this purpose.

Teacher training programmes, both in-service and pre-service, have to be revamped to prepare teachers for the blended learning approach. The finances and efforts that go into various projects to cater to education for all should be redirected into preparing our primary schools for blended learning Because it will solve many problems simultaneously and there is a more productive use of both finance and efforts. There would be no exaggeration if it is said that this blended learning is to some extent the solution to the problems prevailing in our educational system. If implemented in a well-planned, organized manner with the right kind of approach, it can create the future of our educational system.

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