

India Needs a Flexible Approach to Education: Blended Learning

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Abstract

This article focuses blended learning as indispensable to meet the demands of the students in the present pandemic situation. Blended learning is a hybrid learning as it twins both traditional, face-to-face learning, and online learning. It is easily accessible to the students as they work with the teacher, peer group and at the same time independently. It accelerates learning, and fun opportunities to practice what they learn. It enables students to explore new subjects and deepen their understanding of difficult concepts. As they practice on their own, they assimilate the concepts and transfer their learning to suit the real-life situations. The article illustrates different models of blended learning. The hybrid learning, embedded with technology, provides students with avenues to information. The article concludes interpreting that NEP 2020 emphasises blended learning as a suitable approach to learning in the present pandemic situation.

Key words: blended learning, face-to-face learning, online learning, learning management system, technology

1. Introduction

In recent years, the war against the Pandemic Covid -19 and how technology influences our lives have been arduous. Despite this, every person has been driven by the need to keep learning and teaching. Many intellectuals believe that India needs a more flexible educational approach to look into the future through continuous teaching and learning; consequently, blended learning is the way forward.

Blended Learning, a novel teaching approach based on web-based training and designed to meet students' ever-changing needs and goals, is now being adopted by many educational institutions. It is an excellent alternative for students who want to learn at their own pace and in a modern environment, and it provides them more freedom to do so. It has taken a long time, but Covid-19 has played an essential role in developing and advancing blended learning.

2. Blended Learning

Blended learning, which allows for a mix of online and in-person components, is the way education in the future. Learning styles, schedules, and family environments can all play a role in determining which method is best for a particular student. To elucidate, blended learning a hybrid learning system is a contemporary and new approach to education. It combines online educational materials and opportunities for online interaction with traditional place-based classroom methods. This technology-enhanced instruction can connect students with educators from all over the world and in any institution. It requires administrators and educators to constantly audit, examine, and evaluate ways to maximize teacher-student interactions and online learning tools to increase student growth and guarantee excellent education. As a result, blended learning is expected to significantly impact the education sector, resulting in a significant shift in the education industry.

The following figure explains how substantial blended learning is with a combination of face-to-face learning and e-learning. The students learn better in a structured environment that includes face-to-face interaction with an instructor, and independent types who learn better with semi-autonomous, computer-based training.



Figure showing blended learning, Source: iStock

The Indian School of Hospitality's Technology (ISH's Technology) experimented with blended learning allowing students and professors to exchange online materials, and it worked. However, rewriting numerous course materials for online distribution necessitated ISH to maintain the rigour of the subject matter. In a Lesson Management System, a hybrid course or a new subject can be taught in various ways. So the teachers pre-shared their classroom presentations on the Lesson Management System and found that it facilitated higher student engagement.

Students of all backgrounds and learning styles can participate to their fullest potential with E-learning. Students have a wide range of options for how they want to get their information, including the facility to pick and choose when and where it is delivered. According to one instructor, the LMS has all the study materials and videotaped lessons. In addition, the library allows students the choice to study when, when, and how they want to do so. Students' interest is piqued due to the shift from "lecture to debate," and its continuity is assured.

Whether we like it or not, we are already using the mixed learning paradigm. Perhaps more than we think, parents and teachers would have been familiar with blended learning during the Pandemic. Blended learning, a traditional classroom setting, and an online learning environment is becoming an accepted method to reach out to students. For example, Instructor-Led Training and Open Courseware videos are used to teach students

arithmetic. Prior to the spread of Covid, educators would instruct their pupils and provide learning resources to help them progress further in their studies. Although learning is the norm of the day, it is becoming necessary for us to have a laptop or PC set up for Zoom or similar virtual meetings at any given time. Here are a few possibilities.

3. Technology in Blended Learning

Achieving attention without applying technology is like making "fetch" happen. In other words, you can't make Gretchen Ronnevik say, "I'm sorry." (Gretchen Ronnevik is a biographer who helps spiritually depleted people find new life and meaning via her work).

There are several ways that technology and modern blended learning can be integrated. We need to discover a way to integrate different elements to create the best possible blended learning environment. We must first determine what works best for students.

Blended learning continues to grow in meeting learner needs. The teachers feel comfortable as they expand their use of digital tools for teaching and learning. The use of technology in blended learning makes the teacher himself a learner to expand their teaching tool kit for instructional practices. Students too get opportunities to add to the teaching kit as blended learning involves self-learning.

E-learning -tube approach: Students may administer online courses, training modules, and catalogues and distribute learning content across the entire enterprise with this model. In addition, it keeps tabs on progress and output to demonstrate the benefits of informal learning as a return on investment.

Instructor-led training: ILT manages virtual classroom performance, attendance tracking, and course assignment. Indeed, microlearning with an iPhone app and a little tape listening will give the users a modern experience.

Social learning: Students in SL need a place to interact with professionals, ask questions, and get responses from them. An excellent social learning platform collaborates best practices and knowledge curation. In addition, students have the chance to complement their peers.

Experiential learning: Effective solutions or experiential learning allows learners and professionals to contribute user-generated content. It allows for exceptional information sharing to be peer-reviewed and shared across teams while rewarding outstanding performance. For example, consider a more regulated and productive YouTube.

Mobility: There will soon be no escaping the need for a smartphone, tablet, or laptop. Furthermore, as everyone knows, it is as essential to us as breathing.

Cloud-based platforms: Delivering to mobile devices is now a need, and cloud-based platforms (CBPs) can handle it all. Learners will have more options for getting to and interacting on the e-learning platform.

Managed learning: Instruction and assessment is managed online through a systematic online platform like google classroom, and blackboard course sites. These facilitate teachers to communicate and collect assignments, give feedback, and also meet diverse learners' needs.

Orchestrated learning: Students are directed by teachers. Students follow the instructions of teachers and participate in directed instruction and practice. Some well-known activities are working on digital worksheets, posting reading responses on discussion boards, taking notes from video tutorials, or participating in whole class reviews using Kahoot or Ed puzzle.

Collaborative learning: Teachers and students do work together to personalize learning. These individual and group activities can promote collaboration and critical thinking. Use networking portals like LinkedIn and Twitter to connect with expertise.

Authentic learning: Engage learning based on an authentic audience beyond the classroom to give a context for how curriculum applies to real-world situations. Students can authenticate their learning by using sites like wikis, Schoology, and Google Hangouts.

To be successful, a teacher requires updated skills, and assessment tools to diagnose learner needs, and then crafts targeted instruction with the available resources. It is only then that blended learning can be transformational.

4. Models of Blended Learning

The following models explain how the learning schedules are planned in blended learning.

Rotation model

This model is based on the physical presence of the students. However, students within their specific class revolve between online learning and other learning procedures which are either scheduled or planned by the teacher. Most of the learning, in this model, is based on physical presence of the students and teacher. The Flipped Classroom is a typical example of the Rotation Model.

Flipped model

In the flipped classroom, students receive their course materials and presentations ahead of time. Then, a learning management system (LMS), email, or other training delivery technique can be used to distribute the content.

Driver-to-driver communication model

The layout resembles that of a typical classroom. However, instead of going to a physical classroom, students connect to a webinar or meeting session like a Zoom Meeting to get their learning done virtually. The classes are conducted online, and assignments are given as a follow-up. As a result, an LMS is a viable option for implementing this comprehensive educational approach. In addition, the model can be used to deliver a training session and distribute tasks to students before or after the event.

Virtually enhanced model

The Virtually Enhanced Model (VEM) is an alternative to full-time online training. The VEM allows students to complete most of their courses online while participating in live webinars with an instructor. The learners' attendance is ad hoc and at their discretion, allowing them to learn at their speed.

Flex model

In this model, students shift at intervals between learning modalities that are tailored and that are scheduled online. Similar to the Rotation Model, learners basically learn on-campus. However, Flex Model every class is given both online and offline programmes and schedules.

5. Creating a Blended Learning Curriculum

Blended Learning integrates both classroom teaching and technology, whichever model is used. It fuses face-to-face instruction with online learning experiences. Hence, it is crucial to start with a target; the purpose of the training and its goals. It helps students and the instructor develop a more targeted program that gives them the skills and knowledge.

There is no universal method which could be applied to all situations of learning or learners. Any curriculum is need based. The same dictum applies to blended learning. Certain specified approach, method and techniques that may be viable to the target group have to be followed.

The curriculum and material have to be made interactive. Blended learning sessions provide for a wide range of activities. The session assigns assignments prior to a live webinar training session to gauge how much learning can be done online versus self-paced. During the webinar, participants can discuss the problem and possible remedies.

Assessments are fundamental to any learning process. Learners' progress will be assessed at the end of the program. For example, if there are any knowledge gaps, it will indicate that the training was not practical. Creating tests and evaluations in an LMS is not a simple task. Accordingly, the curriculum should specify both tests and evaluation to be conducted.

6. Corporate Training and Blended Learning

There are numerous situations in which blended learning might be beneficial. For example, corporations may or may not benefit from what universities have shown to be effective. Nevertheless, there are many benefits of incorporating blended learning in a company's training initiatives.

Return on investment (ROI)

Training materials and lodging costs can be reduced by using blended learning. In addition, blended learning can train people throughout the world quickly and effectively!

Flexibility

The non-training burden of employees might be taken into account when training the trainees in a corporate setting. Using online training and assignments, blended learning models provide trainee-learners more control over their learning and advancement.

Engagement

Webinars, for example, can be used to record corporate training sessions. It is also possible to boost learner engagement by using an LMS, gamification, and certification.

LMS for blended learning

While a LMS is not required for blended learning, it makes administration, delivery, and tracking easier. In addition, it provides high-impact training that improves corporate performance. So now the question remains, how possible it is to use a blended learning management system (LMS). First, we need to consider some features that an LMS should have to facilitate blended learning.

7. Blended Learning and LMS Selection

As discussed earlier, blended learning combines and consolidates both traditional class room method led by the teacher and online learning. This facilitates learners to have more control over their training.

Systemization of LMS and blended learning simplifies and streamlines the tasks of training managers. Concurrently, they can deliver a flexible training program to the target group of trainees. It helps them to adapt the training programme to suit to the needs of different learners because of its flexibility. Direct interaction with other employees can be easily arranged through video conferences when face-to-face isn't possible with all trainees.

Blended learning has always been an advantageous and beneficial learning strategy for companies that wish to train their employees effectively. The fusion of LMS and blended learning has been very useful for sales training, manufacturing and healthcare.

Course management

However, not all LMSs have the same capabilities. A well-designed LMS makes course creation simple by allowing users to drag and drop content into place. PDFs, presentations, movies, and audio files can all be used. As a result, course/s can be quickly created and consumed in a mixed learning environment.

Tools for social learning

We can use the LMS's social learning features to spice up blended learning courses. They allow students to share their training experiences and knowledge through these technologies. It also aids in the exchange of information between instructors and learners. As a result, learners can assist and learn from each other in an LMS community. It also gives learners the ability to look for additional training materials. In addition, it is a fantastic method to foster a company-wide learning culture.

Reporting

One of the most essential LMS features is reporting. Without LMS, it is not possible to monitor the success of the blended training. It should demonstrate how learners are progressing and how they respond to the survey. A helpful feature is exporting or scheduling reports and sending them directly to the email inbox. Additionally, any blended learning program results can disclose what the learners want to learn and how well such programs are doing.

Fusion of webinars

Blended learning cannot function without webinars. Therefore, courses that involve webinars should be as frictionless as possible, which is easier to do with centralized data access. LMS can set up and administer webinars using platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting, or Webex. An excellent LMS should also contain accessible integration features such as auto and self-enrollment, real-time polling, virtual breakout rooms, and attention monitoring instruments. On-demand videos and training films can be created from webinars. Each session should be recorded for future reference.

Using webinars as part of a blended learning strategy, then connecting them to the LMS offers a great advantage. The option is to:

- Schedule sessions in LMS to display on the webinar tool. There will not be any scheduling issues. In addition, setting it up takes a single session.
- Create registration forms that may be accessed by people with disabilities and that immediately transfer information to the webinar platform. For example, attendance data is promptly transferred back to the LMS to assist users in saving time updating it.

Because it incorporates the best of both worlds, a blended learning strategy will provide the students with a richer, more engaging educational experience. Create blended courses using the Learn Upon LMS that features online and face-to-face instruction. Synthesia's "Using Video to Power Your Blended Learning Strategy" course on Learn Upon shows users how to do just that.

8. Benefits of Blended Learning

E-learning has various benefits, such as flexibility and broader reach. Nevertheless, technology cannot replace classroom learning because classroom learning is crucial for students' overall growth. So, blended learning is a suitable and useful way to combine e-learning and offline learning for students. Every pupil learns differently. So, blended learning is a great tool to customize learning approaches to meet student needs. As blended learning allows students to learn at their pace and with a teacher's aid, it helps slow learners.

Blended learning may seem like a daunting task putting a lot of time and effort into it. But, there are many advantages of blended learning for learners or employees or organizations. It offers a more secured and esteemed platform for learning. The following are some of the advantages of blended learning:

- Processes of education is both interactive and collaborative
- Learner enjoys autonomy
- Supports a higher level of learner involvement
- Enhances learner's comprehension as the concepts are notified earlier
- Promotes extensive research
- Encourages to take a closer look at each aspect
- Learners appreciate flexible time and favourable situation
- Learning is pleseant and captivating

If there is anything that 2020 taught us, it has reduced the amount of time students spend together offline while yet allowing for a live connection.

9. Limitations of Blended Learning

The following are the limitations of blended learning:

- In order to implement blended learning effectively, teachers must have a high level of digital competencies, such as building online courses, distribute them to students, and tracking their progress. Not many teachers are willing to put in the effort to learn new technology because of the steep learning curve of some eLearning programs.
- Teachers who are new to digital technology may give students too much material to study, assuming students do not have classroom time constraints. Additionally, because students are at home, they have more spare time. There is a risk of information load for the learners as a result of this.
- Plagiarism is more likely to occur when one develops more eLearning content. Instructors may do this by inadvertently, for example, if they find an image that illustrates their point and include it in their online course despite the image's copyright protection. If this happens, the corporation or university may face legal action.
- Organisations or learners must pay for eLearning software if they utilise it.
- Not everyone can use blended learning. As the digital divide persists, Infrastructure is a major issue. Further, technology dependency may lead to stress in students.
- It might be a hassle for teachers. Hence, teachers may not focus on all students. This may weaken the student-teacher bond.
- Not all internet content is genuine or original. Therefore, getting students to use only legitimate sources is challenging.

These drawbacks, however, will not be an issue if you follow the guidelines. One need to plan and select simple eLearning tools so that may be in reach. The teachers may be given proper training with regard to new digital skills. Determining the educational needs, planning the budget, and resources that address both challenges helps a lot in implementing blended learning.

10. Conclusion

Offline and online learning come together in a complementary way in blended learning. For students, blended learning is an excellent method to benefit from e-learning and traditional classroom instruction. Instead of just blending the two modes of learning, blended learning is a well-planned combination of useful activities in both formats. However, the systems in place should ensure that everyone has access to the choice. Achieving this balance is a win-win situation for everyone involved. For example, a student may begin education in a traditional classroom before moving on to online multimedia training. Since only one lesson per week was needed, students could work at their own pace and without worrying about scheduling issues.

When students who can share and work with other students directly in a collaborative setting get more out of their learning. Group activities that use information from online resources or lessons can improve collaboration between students. In addition, students who complete the online coursework before participating in face-to-face class activities are believed to have a more enriching educational experience than those who only participate in online courses. LMSs and mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones are some tools and platforms that enhance blended learning. Thus, blended learning has become the new normal for students in the 21 Century. NEP 2020 is a learner-centered paradigm that emphasizes the student as the primary stakeholder and holds educators accountable for creating an ecosystem that responds to the learners' hopes and desires. In this connection it envisages blended learning as an important approach to learning environment.

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