BLENDED LEARNING – IN INNOVATIVE APPROACH FOR EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM TRANSACTION

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Abstract

Traditional classroom teaching methods are no longer effective to attain current learning parameters. Technology based approaches alone can't provide students with meaningful learning experiences. But the combination of both can help an educational institution achieve its goals easily. Blended learning is an innovative approach that embraces the advantages of both traditional teaching in the classroom and ICT supported learning including both offline learning and online learning. It has scope for Co-operative learning, Constructive learning and Computer assisted learning (CAI). Blended learning needs rigorous efforts, right attitude and highly motivated teachers and students for its successful implementation. Blended learning approach ensures that the learner is directing his or her individual learning experiences. This approach also helps cater the individual needs of the learners. Most students have unique learning styles and a blended approach is more likely to cater to those needs than a traditional classroom teaching approach. The present paper discusses the concept of Blended learning, its main features, models of Blended learning, types of Blended learning and strategies of Blended learning.

Keywords Blended Learning, ICT Supported Teaching Learning Process, Traditional Teaching Learning Process, and Computer Assisted Learning, Online Learning

Blended Learning is a mixture of learning methods that incorporate multiple teaching models, most frequently e-learning and traditional learning. Blended learning is a natural development to the growing accessibility of e-learning, online resources and the continued need for a human component in the learning experience. A Blended learning approach ensures that the learner is engaged in his or her individual learning experience. This approach also helps cater to the individual requirements of students.

Even though the term Blended learning is frequently used, there is ambiguity about what is actually meant (Oliver and Trigwell 2005). In a critical review, Oliver and Trigwell concluded that the term Blended learning simply requires two or more different kinds of things that can then be mixed. Driscoll (2002) opined that Blended learning has taken on several means, such as combining modes of web-based technology, pedagogical approaches, instructional technologies and actual job tasks.

Graham (2006) defines Blended learning as follows: "Blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction". Garrison and Kanuka (2004) define Blended learning as "the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences".

The use of the term Blended learning is comparatively new. Before the term became popular, the term Hybrid learning was used. Now a days the terms Blended learning and Hybrid learning are used interchangeably (Graham 2009; Watson 2008). Similarly to the reviewed blended learning definitions, a hybrid learning environment has been described as combining face-to-face education with access to online learning tools.

Blended learning is less expensive, more affordable, and saves time. It offers flexibility in terms of availability. In other words, Blended learning enables the student to access the materials from anywhere at any time while enjoying the benefits of face-to-face interaction and support. Blended learning provides access to global resources and materials that meet the students' level of knowledge and interest. Self-pacing for slow and quick learners reduces stress, increases satisfaction, and information retention. E-learning allows more effective interactions between the learners and their instructors through the use of emails, discussion boards and chat room. Students have the opportunity to track their progress systematically.

BLENDED LEARNING MODELS

 Many different Blended learning models have been suggested by educationists. Blended learning models have commonly focused on physical or surface-level characteristics rather than pedagogical or psychological characteristics (Graham et al. 2014). Although not developed specifically for blended learning, one of the most influential blended learning models is the community of inquiry framework. It has been argued that the generic nature of the framework, and that it resonance well with both face-to-face and online learning, make it useful for understanding and designing blended learning (Garrison and Vaughan 2008). A community of inquiry is described as "the ideal and heart of higher education" and "shaped by purposeful, open, and disciplined discourse and reflection".

Staker and Horn (2012) presented four models of blended learning that they argued categorize most blended learning programs across the K-12 sector. These are: 1) The rotation model where students rotate between learning modalities, one of which is online learning. Other modalities include full-class instruction, group projects and individual tutoring. 2) The flex model where content is delivered primarily online and students move on an individually customized schedule. The teacher or other adults provide face-to-face support as needed through activities such as small-group instruction, group projects and individual training. 3) The self-blend model where students take one or more online courses to supplement traditional courses. 4) The enriched-virtual model where students divide their time between attending a campus and learning remotely in an online setting.

Forms of Blended Learning:

1. Face-to-face Driver
2. Rotation
3. Flex
4. Online Lab
5. Self-Blend
6. Online Driver
7. Flipped classroom Blended Learning
8. Remote Blended Learning

Face-to-face Driver

Face-to-face driver is a Blended learning model in which teachers deliver most of the study material. Teachers lead the class through a lecture following an established protocol taking precedence and technology being a secondary thought. However teachers also provide online learning resources to supplement or revise course materials which students can learn at their home, in the classroom or in a computer lab.

Rotation

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

Flex

Flex model of Blended learning features an online platform that delivers most of the curricula. It's the model where most of the learning is carried over online and the face-to-face model exists to provide on-site support for a flexible and adaptive environment. In this model ample opportunity is available for the teacher to support the student in off line mode.

Online Lab

Online lab is a model of Blended learning that characterizes programmes that rely on an online platform to deliver the entire course in a systematic way. The entire course and teaching are done online. Teachers interact with students through pre-recorded videos, audio and video conferences or discussions and email.

Self - blend

The Self - Blend model is a fully individualized approach that allows students to choose to take one or more courses online to supplement their traditional school's programmes. Maximum portion of the learning is done online, but the student will still attend face-to-face classes.

Online Driver

Online Driver involves online platform as well as off line to deliver the topic under study. Students work from remote areas most of the time and come to school for optional or required face-to-face classes only.

Flipped Classroom blended Learning

A Flipped Classroom is one where students are introduced to content at home, and practice working through it at school supported by a teacher or peers.

Remote Blended Learning

In Remote Blended Learning, learners focus is on completing online coursework while only meeting their teacher when needed. In a Remote Blended learning model, students wouldn't see learning from a teacher on a daily basis but would in a in a flipped setting.

Advantages of Blended Learning for Students

Increase student interest: when technology is integrated into school subjects, students are more likely to be interested in, focused on the subjects they are studying. Subjects that might be monotonous for some – like Mathematics could also be presented in an interesting way.

Keep students focused for longer: The use of computer combined with access to resources such as the internet is a boon for students in the process of construction of knowledge. This engagement and interaction with the resources keeps students focused for longer periods then they would be with books or paper. This kind of engagement also helps develop learning through exploration and research.

Provides student autonomy: The use of e-learning materials increases student's ability to set appropriate learning goals and take charge of his or her own learning, which develops an ability that will be transformable across all subject areas.

Instill a disposition of self-advocacy: Students become self-driven and responsible, tracking their individual achievements**,** which helps develop the ability to find the resources or get the help they need by which they can achieve their goals.

Promotes student ownership: Blended learning insists a sense of 'student ownership over learning' which can be a powerful force encouraging student's learning. It is this responsibility that helps in promoting the feeling of ownership.

Allows instant diagnosis and student feedback: The ability to rapidly analyze, review and give feedback to student work, gives the teacher the ability to finalize methods of teaching and feedback for each student while improving time efficiency.

Enables students to learn at their own pace: Due to the flexibility of Blended learning and the ability to access internet resources that allows students to learn at their own pace, that means a teacher can help speed up the learning process or give more advanced resources if necessary.

Prepares students for the future: Blended learning offers a multitude of real-world skills that directly translate into life skills from self-learning, self-engagement and better decision making.

 Blended learning strategies

   Reflection

Reflection develops metacognitive skills in students. Encouraging learners to reflect on their learning is an activity that promotes effective learning. This could be carried out in a period of time by assigning the students to prepare a journal or portfolio. Further, reflective activities can be used in one session of class by encouraging the students to share their understanding of the content, discuss with peer group members and then write a short paragraph that summarizes what they have understood. Students can also present their reflection summary using graphic organizers/presentations which sum up their understanding of the previously covered online materials and at the end, teacher can ask students to share their thoughts with the class.

   Case Study

Teacher can share a case study and ask students to express their opinions in groups, then share with the class as a virtual presentation. Teacher can ask them to share their opinions by pasting cards on the wall

and presenting them to the whole class. Teacher can also ask students to design a model of something depending on the case study assigned.

Story Mapping

Teacher has to ask students to prepare a visual depiction of an interesting story related to the concepts covered online. They should work in groups to create the setting, characters and ending that best relates to real life situations. Story mapping is an interesting strategy for lower classes.

Compare and Contrast

Based on the concepts presented online, teacher can create tasks for the students to compare and contrast those concepts in the class with their peer group. Using graphic organizers for illustration can be more engaging and interesting.

Concept Map/ Mind Map

Based on what the content highlights, teacher can ask students to create a concept or mind map in the class and then share it with others. In case, the number of students is large and the teacher don't have enough time to share all their maps, he /she can ask students to upload the rest on LMS (Learning Management System).

Peer Evaluation

Students feel a sense of ownership towards their learning when they play the role of the instructor as an evaluator. Research studies shows that peer evaluation allows the students to learn from each other's successes and failures. To make it work well, it is important that teacher provide clear guidelines. Teacher can also give a checklist which makes it easier for students to evaluate each other's work. Teacher can ask individual students to assess each other.

Role-play or Interview

Role-plays provide opportunity for students to simulate real life situations in　　　their learning. Teacher can task students to act out their role-plays or interviews　　　after practicing with their peer group. Filming and recording them, then uploading them on teacher's LMS gives them a sense of ownership to their own efforts.

Game

Teacher can play basic games and relate them to the content selected for study. Games are fun for the learners, which can have a significant impact on their learning.

Problem Solving

Defining a problem and asking the students to solve it within a specific period of time can be a good activity in the class. Teacher can either pose the problems prior to the face-to-face session or introduce them in class abruptly.

Debates

By selecting relevant sections of the online content in class and providing them for open or closed discussion learners will get a chance to share their ideas with each other.

Conclusion

All students no matter their age learn differently and teaching methods should reflect this, by designing teaching programs in a way that reaches visual, auditory, and kinetic learners alike. With the integration of technologies, teachers will be able to improve teaching, information retention, engagement, responsibility, and enjoyment. Blended learning provides more flexible, interactive, efficient and varied learning experiences for students. Blended learning can enhance student's learning outcomes, improve motivation and it is an effective way for achieving learning objectives. Blended learning can be used as an alternative learning for the teacher. With the rich integration of technology teachers will be able to improve their teaching skills.

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