Blended learning: A transformation in education

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Abstract
During any crisis situation like a pandemic, war or natural disaster, online/blended learning could meet the academic needs of the learners in a bigger way. The use of information and communication technology (ICT)-based technologies has converted the entire teaching pedagogy to a learner centred pedagogy, following which the skills of using technology are to be seen as the most essential qualifications on the part of both the teachers/educators and learners. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to understand the prospects and challenges of providing online/blended learning in a country like India, particularly during and in post-Covid-19 situations.

Keywords: blended learning, education, information communication technology

Introduction
Covid-19 Pandemic leads too many disruptions and traditional teaching learning system is one that got disrupted. In this situation information communication technology is very helpful to craft student centred quality content using multimedia. Blended learning has encouraged the learner-centric approach in which teacher and learners interact with each other in flexible and conducive environment. Blended learning environment improves communication and interaction among teachers and learners.

Blended learning is almost perfect approach that covers both activities including class interaction with teacher and teaching aids such as virtual teacher, digital media etc. Blended learning is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some elements of student control over time, place, path, or pace. The creation of innovative learning environments in higher education has continued to gain importance in multiple disciplines (Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008). The incorporation of computers and other digital technologies into university classes has been shown to correlate with higher academic achievement on the part of students (Zucker, 2008). Using technology in education has shown positive effects on Student achievement, class engagement, Supporting Students. Learning environments, incorporated with information technology have been shown to have specific benefits for learning in terms of,

- Promoting cognitive development,
- Allowing for a wider range of student experiences,
- Supporting students’ self-management ability
- Supporting students’ development of conceptual understanding by facilitating data collection and collaboration.

Creating innovative learning environments has helped to ensure that learning and teaching can be carried out in accordance with defined goals. One of the emerging learning environments that have shown to be welcomed by students are blended learning (Lim & Morris, 2009).

Why Blended Learning (BL)?
In the past decade, teachers at higher and lower educational institutions have organically adopted blended learning as a meaningful learning tool in and out of the classroom. The success of blended learning is due to following main benefits:

- Classroom management and classroom environment.
- Creating a positive learning environment.
- Teachers’ attributes and qualities.
- Managing learning activities.
- Managing pupil misbehaviour; and
- School practices and support.
- Enabling blends (i.e., focus on addressing issues of access and convenience)
- Enhancing blends
- Transforming blends (i.e., blends that allow for a radical
transformation of the pedagogy).

BL is suitable for all educational levels, from preschool to post school levels. When it comes to changing the approach teachers have in the classroom, most of them have a question why? There is no doubt about it, the educator has to spend a lot of time in gaining the needed qualifications for proper use of technology. Not all online resources are safe to use in the classroom, in addition they need to drastically change the programme and adopt to a completely different method of teaching.

Historical background
BL found commonalities in defining that blended learning was "considered a combination of traditional (face to face) modes of instruction with online mode of learning, drawing on technology-mediated instruction, where all participants in the learning process are separated by distance some of the time.” This report also found that all of these evidence-based studies concluded that student’s achievement was higher in BL experiences when compared to either fully online or fully face to face learning experiences.

Modern blended learning is delivered online as the lessons are now stored in both online and offline storage media. Some examples of channels through which online blended learning can be delivered include webcasting (synchronous and asynchronous) and online video (live and recorded) Khan academy is the popular one used in classrooms to serve as platform for blended learning and other educational solutions.

Types of blended learning
1. The flipped classroom blended learning
Perhaps the most widely known version of blended learning “flipped classroom is the one where the students are introduced to content at home and practice working through it at school supported by a teacher and peers. In this way traditional roles for each one is flipped.

2. Enriched virtual blended learning
In enriched virtual blended learning, the students focus is on completing online course work while only meeting with the teacher intermittently as needed. In an enriched virtual blended learning model, student would not work with learning from a teacher on a daily basis face to face but would in a flipped setting.

Blended learning model
There is little consensus on the definition of BL. Some academic studies have suggested that it is unnecessary phrase. There are many components that can comprise a BL model, including instructor-delivered content, e learning, webinars, conference calls, live of online session with instructor and other media and event. For example, Facebook, email, blog, YouTube, skype and web board.
Models vary in the way,
- The teacher plays a role.
- The physical Environment in which the learning is taking place.
- How instruction and learning is being delivered.

- The flexibility of pace and place of learning.

However, there are distinct BL models suggested by some researchers and educational think-tanks. These models include,

Face-to-Face: Traditional instructor-led learning sessions supplemented with technology to allow learners to control their own learning pace. Benefits are role-play, mentoring, hands-on practice, and feedback.

Rotation: Students go from one learning activity to another learning activity, either in a structured learning session directed by a teacher, or online in a self-directed manner. Examples include learning stations, labs, and the flipped classroom where learners practice the lesson before attending the face-to-face training.

Flex: Flex learning is a term that can be used interchangeably with personalized learning. By accessing means of integration of learning in a Learning Management System (LMS), the students control their learning path, choosing what they to learn. The instructor is usually present in a mentoring capacity, to answer questions.

Gamification: One of the most effective ways to motivate learners is by letting them play! By using game play elements such as points or levels, learners feel a little competition and are more motivated to experience the material on their own time.

Online Lab: This blended learning model is entirely digital, with little or no instructor interaction, and takes place either before, during or after a training. Learners can access content on mobile phones (M-learning), laptops or tablets. This modality engages and solidifies learning.

Self-Blend: Self-blended learning is supplemental content—either in the form of webinars, white papers, industry blogs, or video tutorials—that help self-motivated learners delve deeper into a subject. A robust LMS can combine diverse content sources under one system to encourage curiosity and growth.

Online Driver: This blended learning model is entirely self-directed and takes place in a digital environment. Learners can engage with an instructor through chat, email or message board. It provides a flexible schedule and personalized learning, but lacks the face-to-face interaction of other types of blended learning. An LMS is the best way to encourage users to direct their own learning while still monitoring their process as they enjoy media and eventually, engage in classroom discussion. You can choose from existing learning management systems or opt to have an LMS developed specifically for your purposes.

Blended learning in the context of teacher education
When BL is used within the scope of teacher education courses, students enjoyed taking part in the learning environment (Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2006). Teacher education research articles have focused on the use of BL within the context of teacher education focused on educational technology (Demirer & Sahin, 2013) and general preservice teaching skills.
Blended learning at the time of Covid-19 pandemic
During the Covid-19 lockdown, with a view to reconsidering the idea of pedagogy from traditional chalk-and-talk method to online/blended learning, the Indian Government launched the initiative called “Bharat Padhe Online” to encourage the teachers to create digital educational contents, share ideas and innovations in public platforms by creating educational blogs, wikis and creating more and more OERs. To provide the continuous learning support services to the learners at all levels, various task forces had been formed to monitor the online learning environment across the nation – from nation to state and then from state to district levels. But, as observed by Garg (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic had affected higher education like never before. Initially, everyone from political leadership to academic administrators was confused as to what course of action to be taken. After considerable discussions and debates, it was decided that teaching-learning be shifted to e-mode so as to save human lives as well as to compensate the loss of academic semester. Therefore, the change was abrupt, drastic, posing unique challenges to both teachers and students. Teachers had to undergo digital transformation overnight, overcome technology phobia and work so hard for the sake of their students. When the educational institutions in India switched over to online education overnight, the teachers shifted from blackboard to computer screen, as opined by Meena (2020). But strictly speaking, online education, in its strict sense, was not actually practised.

Blended learning models as the alternative in post-Covid-19 situation in India
From the study, it has been found that majority of the respondents preferred the blended form of learning as the most suitable model of learning in the coming days in the Indian context. India being a large economy, there are some variations in terms of accessing modern sophisticated tools for educational transactions by the teachers and learners alike. Besides, it has also been found that due to the low level of internet connectivity for educational purposes, it is not possible to access fully online or synchronous teaching learning facilities by all in equitable way. Therefore, the asynchronous ways in education can provide the optimum learning opportunity to all in a more flexible and convenient way. So, the blended form of learning, which is generally learner-centric and cost-effective, is going to influence the entire Indian educational scenario in the days to come.

Advantages of Blended Learning
In a classroom there are students with varied learning style. So, the teacher should cater to the need of all types of students. In the modern technological era, the teacher can use many modern techniques along with the traditional methods to make the teaching learning process more innovative and interesting. It is important to note that even BL model can be blended together and many implementations use some, many, or even all of these as dimensions of large BL learning strategy. In the light of above discussion there are following advantages,

Students learn with freedom and greater flexibility
Classroom teaching is two-way process, there is an interaction with the teacher in the classroom. The students are no longer placed in a mould they are not expected to sit quietly for a 40 minutes lecture. By the end of such a traditional lecture they will forget all questions they had on mind while they were actively listening during the first 10 minutes. Unfortunately, that how long their focus can last before wondering away.

Students Explore on line resources
The ‘web’ is source of endless knowledge as a teacher we have an opportunity to teach them how to find the best online sources and make sure they are reading up to date reliable information you help them to gain skills they will definitely use in life. Show them how to check the fact and how to recognize authoritative sources of information.

Students get more time for reflection
Let’s say we are teaching history lesson to high school students. We ask them to research as much as possible about the World War II and they all present facts in the classroom. We compare those fact with the course work material and take the time to reflect. Since, we are not wasting time on the standard lecturing...
Students get more feedback

When we save time for more discussion in the classroom, it means that we will be listening to what students say that’s a great way to evaluate their understanding of the course work concept. We shall give them feedback though our responses. We will have a chance to give such feedback every single day, by encouraging them to keep up with the good work or inspiring them to get deeper into the research process. There is no need to wait for test when we evaluate their knowledge on a daily basis.

Anxious students can relax

Some students do not like discussion they are the one who usually stay quite throughout a heated argumentation, although we know that they have lot to say, it seems like they are too afraid to speak up. The traditional classroom teaching method does not give these students a chance to overcome this anxiety. Try to involve these students in discussion, instead of waiting for them to take part, ask what they think. We shall notice that they are getting anxious, their voice may start getting trembling and we shall notice the confusion on their faces. Try to get their answers through a conversation and involve them fairly in all class discussion. In a way we will be forcing them to face their fear of speaking up and only way to overcome a fear is facing it.

- The teaching staff used face-to-face (in-class) and online (internet) environments effectively.
- I think I learned better.
- Face-to-face (in-class) and online content were suitable for the chosen environment.
- There was integrity in the content taught in both environments.
- Blended learning overcame special times, special places, and special instructors and provided students learning outside-of-the classroom as well as time in class for active learning.

Conclusions

In a country like India, with specific challenges to meet at the current situations, the “one-size-fits-all” concept may not work. Therefore, before putting certain online/blended activities into practice, one must take into consideration the many variables, including the target learners, their social, cultural and economic backgrounds, their age range, their access to technological infrastructure, the technology readiness on the part of the educational institutions and so on.

Though many of us don’t have technology rich classroom, the rapidly evolving education background increasingly require as to incorporate technology to customize student learning. Blended learning with its mix of technology and traditional face to face instruction is a great approach. Blended learning is an approach to education that combines online education material and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods. Blended learning combines classroom learning with online learning, in which students can impart, control the time, pace, and place of their learning. In a teacher design blended learning model, teachers determine the combination of teaching strategy, which can change teacher approach and students’ perspective about learning.

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