
Blended Learning- A Shifting Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

Recent innovations in the application of technology in education of technology in education have enabled learning to take place beyond the four walls of the classroom. Blended learning means those programs that provide some combination of both online and face to face learning. Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in parts through delivery of content and instruction via digital and on-line media with some element of student control over time, place and pace. Blended learning supports all the benefits of e-learning including cost, reduction time and efficiency and location convenience for the learner as well as the essential one to one personal understanding and motivation that face instruction present. Blended learning provides more flexibility and support to students. These courses are associated with improved student learning outcomes. There are many benefits of blended learning like make teaching more interesting, students can access unlimited up-to-date resources available via web, increasing quality of learning etc. but there are some challenges of blending learning like technological problems, lack of trained teacher, more time consuming etc. Blended learning programme should be developed to provide opportunities for faculty to learn how to redesign their courses, teach well online and effectively use technology.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Online learning, Face to Face learning

Introduction

There are two fundamental equalizers in life –the internet and education.

John Chambers CEO of Cisco Systems (1997)

As a nation we are so backward in education that we can not hope, to fulfill our obligation to the nation in this respect in a given time during the generation, if the program is to depend on money. I have therefore to suggest that education should be self supporting.

-Mahatma Gandhi

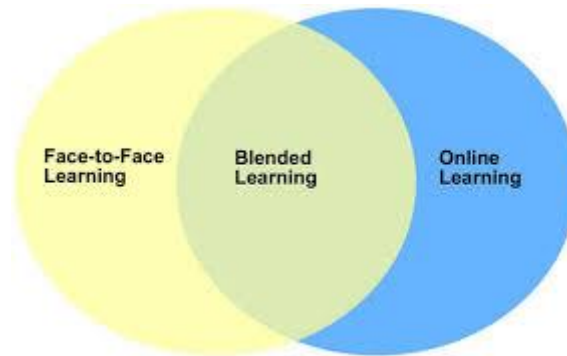
It is indeed a fact that the process of globalization and modernization is occurring at a faster pace. The world is getting narrow to become a global village. On the other hand the information accession and processing in microseconds with availability of highly sophisticated electronic media have modified the learning strategy. Arrival of computer and internet in the field of education has changed the procedure and pattern of education. Now education knocks at the doors of students or learners. Today anyone can get education anywhere, anytime. NPE (1986) has laid stress on the special use of computer for improving the quality of education. Use of technology in education is rewarding for both students and academics (William, 2002)

In this changing era of globalization, today students have particular learning needs and require a number of skills and capabilities to achieve success. With the growing demands of diverse student population, on line learning has become popular as it provides the students with more flexible access to course content and instruction at any time and from anywhere with unlimited educational discourse.

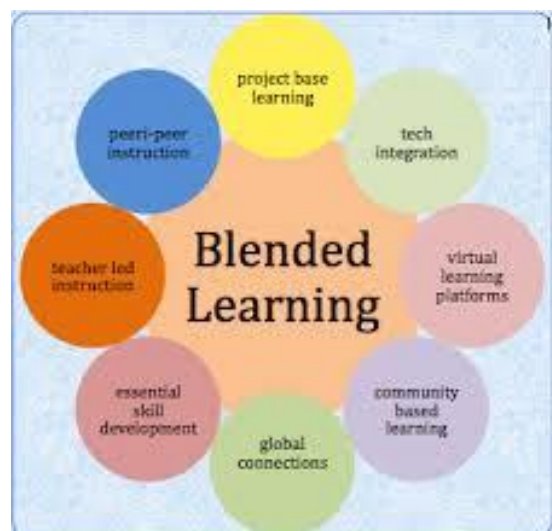
Recent innovations in the application of technology in education have enabled learning to take place beyond the four walls of a classroom. E-learning is one such method as it allows education for seven days and twenty four hours. E-learning is a technology based distance learning program conducted online where students can communicate with peers and instructors. Teachers at one place can teach multiple students at different locations and the students can receive constant feedback.

It is a kind of learning which occurs through internet. But e-learning environment has some disadvantages as hindrance of socialization process of individual, lack of face to face interaction between teacher and the learner and barrier to learner without computer and ICT skills. This disadvantages evoked a search for new environment which combines the advantages of both e-learning and traditional learning and this new environment is known as blended learning.

Blended learning has the advantages of both online and traditional instructions. So it becomes increasingly more important. Commonly blended learning means those programs that provide some combination of both online and face to face learning. Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns atleast in parts through delivery of content and instruction via digital and on-line media with some element of student control over time, place and/or pace. Colis and Moonen (2001) defined blended learning is a hybrid of traditional face to face and on-line learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and on-line and where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom teaching.



Blended learning supports all the benefits of e-learning including cost, reduction time efficiency and location convenience for the learner as well as the essential one to one personal understanding and motivation that face to face instruction presents. It is a data driven instructional approach that offers personalized learning in a flexible, adaptive model that draws from multiple resources and an integration of technology. It is integration of synchronous (offline) and a synchronous (online) method.



Interactive Tools :

The following are the types of learning that may be used:

Live e-learning:

- Virtual Classrooms
- Distance education courses
- On line coaching
- On line feedback
- On line evaluation
- Chat rooms

Live Face to Face

- Workshops
- Classrooms

- Coaching / Mentoring
- Role modeling

Self paced e-learning

- E-mail
- CD / DVD's
- Interactive learning modules
- Simulation
- Web training modules

Models of Blended Learning :

The majority of blended-learning programs resemble one of four models: Rotation, Flex, A La Carte, and Enriched Virtual. The Rotation model includes four sub-models: Station Rotation, Lab Rotation, Flipped Classroom, and Individual Rotation.

1. Rotation model — a course or subject in which students rotate on a fixed schedule or at the teacher's discretion between learning modalities, at least one of which is online learning. Other modalities might include activities such as small-group or full-class instruction, group projects, individual tutoring, and pencil-and-paper assignments. The students learn mostly on the brick-and-mortar campus, except for any homework assignments.

a. Station Rotation — a course or subject in which students experience the Rotation model within a contained classroom or group of classrooms. The Station Rotation model differs from the Individual Rotation model because students rotate through all of the stations, not only those on their custom schedules.

b. Lab Rotation – a course or subject in which students rotate to a computer lab for the online-learning station.

c. Flipped Classroom – a course or subject in which students participate in online learning off-site in place of traditional homework and then attend the brick-and-mortar school for face-to-face, teacher-guided practice or projects. The primary delivery of content and instruction is online, which differentiates a Flipped Classroom from students who are merely doing homework practice online at night.

d. Individual Rotation – a course or subject in which each student has an individualized playlist and does not necessarily rotate to each available station or modality. An algorithm or teacher(s) sets individual student schedules.

2. Flex model — a course or subject in which online learning is the backbone of student learning, even if it directs students to offline activities at times. Students move on an individually customized, fluid schedule among learning modalities. The teacher of record is on-site, and students learn mostly on the brick-and-mortar campus, except for any homework assignments. The teacher of record or other adults provide face-to-face support on a flexible and adaptive as-needed basis through activities such as small-group instruction, group projects, and individual tutoring. Some implementations have substantial face-to-face support, whereas others have minimal support. For example, some Flex models may have face-to-face certified teachers who

supplement the online learning on a daily basis, whereas others may provide little face-to-face enrichment. Still others may have different staffing combinations. These variations are useful modifiers to describe a particular Flex model.

3. A La Carte model — a course that a student takes entirely online to accompany other experiences that the student is having at a brick-and-mortar school or learning center. The teacher of record for the A La Carte course is the online teacher. Students may take the A La Carte course either on the brick-and-mortar campus or off-site. This differs from full-time online learning because it is not a whole-school experience. Students take some courses A La Carte and others face-to-face at a brick-and-mortar campus.

4. Enriched Virtual model — a course or subject in which students have required face-to-face learning sessions with their teacher of record and then are free to complete their remaining coursework remote from the face-to-face teacher. Online learning is the backbone of student learning when the students are located remotely. The same person generally serves as both the online and face-to-face teacher. Many Enriched Virtual programs began as full-time online schools and then developed blended programs to provide students with brick-and-mortar school experiences. The Enriched Virtual model differs from the Flipped Classroom because in Enriched Virtual programs, students seldom meet face-to-face with their teachers every weekday. It differs from a fully online course because face-to-face learning sessions are more than optional office hours or social events; they are required.

Benefits of Blended Learning :

- Make teaching more rewarding and interesting for academics.
- Students can access unlimited up-to-date resources available via web.
- Teachers can use a variety of online and inclass teaching strategies to achieve goals and objectives more effectively.
- Increase the quality of learning and success rate of students.
- Make the learning flexible and learner centered.
- Learners get opportunities to experience a range of delivery modes.
- Teacher's role become more facilitative and learner centered.
- Creating and supporting new research opportunities.
- Caters for a range of learning styles.
- Students can learn according to their own speed and interest.
- Students interact with content more frequently when content is presented in a web based environment.

Challenges of Blended Learning:

Teaching in the blended course can be challenging, since it requires different teaching skills i.e .managing the course content both online and in class and preparing students to work in hybrid form. Following are some of the challenges of blended learning.

- ❖ Students faces technology related problems in blended learning.

- ❖ Availability of financial and human resources for shifting from traditional method to blended learning.
- ❖ Adaptability with the dynamic and changing environment.
- ❖ Technically trained persons who can orient the teacher educators to implement the blended learning.
- ❖ More time is required to design and implement a range of delivery modes and methods in a blended learning environment.
- ❖ Adaptability with the dynamic and changing environment.
- ❖ Preparation of e-learning packages.
- ❖ All learners cannot cope with blended learning as they find it difficult to follow between different delivery modes.
- ❖ Work better with mature and self-motivated learners than with young ones.
- ❖ Enriching training programmes with current information.

Conclusion:

Blended learning provides more flexibility and support to students. These courses are associated with improved student learning outcomes. There are many benefits of blended learning but there do occur some challenges. The programme should be developed to provide opportunities for faculty to learn how to redesign their courses, teach well online and effectively use technology.

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