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Blended Learning: An Innovative Teaching-Learning Approach

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Abstract

The cutting-edge idea of blended learning combines the best elements of both conventional classroom instruction and ICT-supported learning, encompassing both online and offline learning. It offers opportunities for constructive learning, computer-assisted learning, and collaborative learning (CAI). For blended learning to be implemented successfully, it requires a lot of work, the correct mindset, a sizable budget, and highly motivated teachers and students. It is complicated to organize because it integrates many modalities, making it a challenging process. This article explores the idea of blended learning, outlining its key components and necessary conditions for putting it into practice. Also covered is the use of blended learning in the Indian educational system. Additionally, the current research attempts to clarify why blended learning is a necessary method.

Keywords : Blended Learning (BL), ICT Supported Teaching Learning Process, Traditional Teaching Learning Process, and Computer Assisted Learning, Online Learning

Introduction

The current state of the educational system is one of transformation. While it is attempting to adopt new technologies and explore new avenues to meet the challenges of expansion and meet the needs of individuals, it is not yet fully prepared to abandon the traditional modes of knowledge transfer due to a number of factors, including inadequate budgets, a lack of facilities, and the benefits of in-person interaction. Even the students are experiencing dual thinking. Students were split almost evenly between traditional classroom instruction and ICT-supported instruction when a set of teacher candidates were asked which method of instruction they would prefer.

Despite a few flaws, the conventional teaching method gives the teaching and learning process the much-needed personal touch. Students' developing personalities are directly influenced by the attitudes and actions of their professors. Along with cognitive and psychomotor goals, affective objectives are only met via face-to-face connection. Using a face-to-face, conventional method aids in the development of a solid value system. Traditional teaching methods facilitate the easier development of social skills like cooperation, sharing, expressing oneself, and respecting the opinions of others. In addition to books and teachers' lessons in the classroom, kids also pick up knowledge from their peers. Through peer group interactions, playground experiences, and casual conversations in lounges and canteens, for example, students pick up a lot of social skills. All of them are required for healthy personality development.

Although the traditional technique has its own advantages, as was previously noted, it is not without flaws. Its flaws are as follows:

- The main reason it isn't meeting each student's unique needs in the class is because of the incorrect student-teacher ratio.
- It is not changing to meet the challenge of instructing kids with physical disabilities.
- Teachers are not prepared for integrated classrooms.
- Since the evaluation system relies on the annual examination and attendance is mandatory, it is unsuitable to address the issues raised by irregular students. The entire year is wasted if a student doesn't pass the exam, and because of their intransigence, irregular students are effectively kept out of the mainstream of the educational system.
- The lack of competent counsellors, improper teaching practices, and inadequate follow-up programs in schools also prevents students who drop out of school for any reason from ever having the opportunity to re-enter the formal educational system.
- Since not every child can attend school, universal education remains an ideal that is out of reach.
- Children from underprivileged backgrounds, those living in remote locations, and those who are medically unfit cannot benefit from this official, traditional method of instruction.
- Students suffer from a lack of teachers at the same time, and their education is clouded by ineffective teachers.
- Our students are not adequately equipped to meet the needs of the modern market and professions since courses are not frequently rewritten, books are not updated, and teachers are not engaged in improving their knowledge and professional skills.

A solid choice is to use ICT to enhance the teaching and learning process in order to increase students' exposure to technology, eliminate teaching errors, improve quality, and make their knowledge more in line with current technological advancements and globalization. ICT-supported instruction gives the teaching and learning process a new dimension, exposes students to a vast body of knowledge, and presents them with many possibilities to learn, unlearn, and relearn. This style of instruction can help students of various backgrounds and abilities, including those who are physically challenged. It facilitates reaching every student.

The traditional teaching method and the ICT-supported teaching method are both flawed, and they cater to different needs, demands, and expectations from the educational system. Therefore, the solution is to provide and design a system that is based on an integrated approach, a system that combines the key components of both the traditional teaching method

and the ICT-supported teaching method. Today's learners require a blended learning strategy, which combines the best features of both teaching methods.

MAIN FEATURES OF BLENDED LEARNING

The main characteristics of blended learning are –

- **Better Options** - In blended learning, students can choose between receiving their education through ICT support or through traditional classroom instruction, where they can interact directly with teachers and peers. This is mostly dependent on the kind of content and goals being pursued. The mode that is best suited for a given topic is sometimes chosen by the course designer or the teachers themselves.
- **Well versed Teachers** - The fact that teachers are highly adaptable, tech-savvy, and well-versed in how to operate effectively in both traditional classroom settings and environments with ICT support is a crucial aspect of blended learning. They will be proficient in both conventional techniques and additional contemporary technologies.
- **Face to face interactions** - Students have plenty of opportunity to socialize with others in the same course. They can communicate with them both virtually and on college campuses. As a result, the group grows quite large and diverse, which broadens the students' knowledge and fosters a sense of love, understanding, and peace with kids from different nations and cultures.
- **Modern Technology** - This century is known as the ICT century. These days, being illiterate includes not just not being able to read and write, but also not being familiar with current technology. Because ICT proficiency is now a need for all vocations, blended learning helps students have rich ICT experiences. Blended learning gives students the chance to fully utilize the technologies that are available to them.
- **Proper Training** - The abilities required to have a successful, contented, and tranquil life are known as life skills. Empathy, decision-making ability, love, patience, communication, self-management, and critical thinking are among the most important life skills. The pupils can practice these skills thanks to integrated learning. In the classroom, teachers and peers introduce students to some skills like love, empathy, and patience. Online activities introduce them to other abilities like communication, critical thinking, self-management, and decision-making.
- **Personality Development** - Students who participate in blended learning have the ability to fully develop their personalities on all fronts. Through blended learning, all three dimensions of personality—cognitive, physical, and emotional—are developed. This is not possible with a traditional or ICT-based method when used in isolation. Conventional classroom instruction helps students' memory and comprehension, which aids in the development of the cognitive domain. At the same time, the behavior of the teacher, the playground, and the social groups with classmates help students' affective and physical domains. Online experiences aid in the development of the reflective level of learning, which helps students' higher faculties of mind.

Social networking sites and other online social interactions also aid in the development of the right kind of values.

- **Physical Development** - The accusation that online learning and ICT promote the teaching-learning process at the expense of students' physical development is common. This restriction is overcome with blended learning. Since it integrated the educational experience, students were able to play, work out, and practice yoga on the college campus.
- **Wide Exposure & New Perspective** - Students' exposure to a wide range of experiences enriches their topic knowledge, allowing them to see new facets of the subject and develop information that is both practical and helpful.
- **Human Touch** - Students receive the human touch through the conventional method of teaching because of the teacher's physical presence, which is essential for a balanced emotional quotient and necessary for secondary education.
- **Multicultural & Multi dimension Approach** - The possibility for students to interact and exchange opinions with peers worldwide is afforded by the blended learning method, which also introduces an interdisciplinary and multidimensional element to the teaching and learning process.
- **Child Centred Learning** - The purpose of blended learning is to help students achieve their full potential and, in turn, realize the vision of child-centred education.
- **Diversified Teaching** - In blended learning, teachers perform a distinct function from the typical position of a teacher in the classroom. They act as an organizer, resource, motivator, and developer when they create information that will be made available through ICT. They also serve as a guide on the side. As a result, teachers are liberated from the routine of traditional responsibilities and are able to explore a variety of areas that will benefit their professional development.
- **Constructivism** - Constructivism is also included in blended learning. Instead of relying on others to create their teaching-learning methods, students create their own knowledge.

PREREQUISITE OF BLENDED LEARNING

Blended learning implementation is a challenging endeavour. All the components of the teaching and learning process—teacher, student, content designer, and infrastructure—need to have certain basic preparations made. The following are prerequisites that must be met in order to successfully deploy blended learning:

- **Well-trained educators** are a key component of blended learning, even if they are primarily focused on the student. Instructors must be well-versed in the idea of blended learning and possess the necessary training and expertise to combine traditional and technological methods. To enable students to access the content online, they ought to receive training on creating digital content. They must be well-versed in internet etiquette and browsing, and they ought to know every website that might help students with their online education. A teacher should be able to use social networking sites, blogs, YouTube, video conferencing apps like Skype and Google Talk, and others for instructional purposes.

- **Teachers with a scientific mindset:** It is crucial that educators possess a scientific mindset. They should be able to see things well, be upbeat, and be able to solve problems. A scientific mindset will assist educators in handling setbacks while working on this novel idea and in conducting an unbiased analysis of the circumstances. Teachers who possess this proper scientific temperament will naturally influence pupils in the same way.
- **Teachers with a broader perspective and a positive attitude toward change** are essential for the success of any novel idea or technique, and blended learning processes also require teachers with these qualities. They must be adaptable, ready to welcome change, highly creative, and energetic.
- **Complete amenities, such as a stocked computer lab, internet access, and video conferencing capabilities,** are essential components of blended learning. Infrastructure plays a major role in blended learning. In addition to having well-equipped classrooms, schools should also have internet access, internet-connected compute laboratories that can accommodate all of the students in a single session, and, if at all possible, a campus with wireless internet access.
- **Learners can access the internet on their personal computers.** Besides the school's fully ICT-friendly campus, students should also have access to basic hardware so they can study both online and offline at home. This necessitates the government having an optimistic outlook and offering sound investment plans.
- **Flexibility in the system:** For blended learning to be implemented, the system, the timetable, and the examination system must all be flexible.
- **Completely conscious and concurred Parents:** In order for them to support their children's blended learning and be prepared for it, parents need to be fully informed about this cutting-edge method of instruction. They should also be able to acknowledge that their children will benefit from this departure from traditional instruction.
- **Formative assessment and ongoing internal assessment:** Since blended learning does not enable summative assessment, school administrators and higher education institutions should be prepared to fully implement CAI and other formative assessment technologies. To increase the system's flexibility, an online examination feature should be included.

Role of Teachers in BL Environment

With BL, a teacher's job description changes from knowledge provider to mentor and coach. This change does not imply that teachers' roles in students' education are becoming less significant or inactive. On the contrary, teachers can have an even greater impact on students' learning through BL. With BL, classroom education is now more student-driven, bottom-up, individualized, and differentiation-focused. Previously, it was mostly teacher-directed, top-down, and one-size-fits-all, with a dash of differentiation thrown in. A significant portion of this new learning dynamic can be attributed to technology's increased use in training. BL strikes a suitable balance between teacher-led instruction, which adds the human elements of support, empathy, and caring guidance that only teachers can provide, and online instruction, which offers the interactive, tech-based learning, personalized pacing, and privacy that keep students continuously engaged and motivated.

Both teachers and students gain from this unique learning dynamic. Allowing and allowing students to become directly informed, active learners give them a sense of agency over their

education and fosters independence. As more students work independently, teachers have more time to support more students in-person and give them tailored teaching more frequently, which improves differentiation. Teachers may see a complete and more accurate picture of each student's performance because of BL. With more frequent and one-on-one interactions between teachers and students, BL gives educators the chance to fortify and improve their bonds with their students. Close relationships foster trust, which enables teachers to get insight into students' personal needs and issues. With this knowledge, teachers are better equipped to support and mentor students as they overcome hurdles that often stand in the way of learning. To sum up, blended learning (BL) seamlessly blends the greatest elements of direct instruction and online learning, enabling teachers to effortlessly fulfil more demands from students without adding significantly to their already heavy burden.

Role of a Learner in the BL Environment

- **Boost student interest:-** Students are more likely to be engaged, focused, and enthusiastic about the subjects they are studying when technology is included into classroom instruction.
- **Maintain students' attention for longer:-** When combined with the ability to conduct research using resources like the internet, computers are an invaluable tool for finding information and data. In addition to helping students learn through investigation and research, this interaction and engagement with the resources allows them to stay focused for longer periods of time than they would with books or paper resources.
- **Grants independence to students: -** By using eLearning resources, students can improve their capacity to set realistic objectives and manage their own education, developing transferable skills that they can use in any topic.
- **Establish a mind-set of self-advocacy: -** Learners grow more independent and accountable as they keep track of their own accomplishments. This helps them learn how to locate resources or receive assistance when they need it and how to advocate for themselves in order to accomplish their objectives.
- **Encourage student initiative:-** BL instils a sense of 'student ownership over learning' which can be a powerful force propelling the learning, it's this feeling of responsibility that helps the feeling of ownership.
- **Allow instant diagnostic information and student feedback:-** Fast analysis, review, and feedback on student work allows the teacher to improve time efficiency while customizing his teaching strategies and feedback for each student.
- **Allows learners to study at their own speed:-** Students can learn at their own pace thanks to BL's flexibility and the internet's resources; if needed, a teacher can assist in accelerating the learning process or provide more advanced materials.

Prepares students for the future:

BL offers a multitude of real-world skills that directly translate into life skills, from:

- Research skills
- Self-learning
- Self-engagement
- Helps to develop a 'self-driving force'

- Better decision making
- Offers a larger sense of responsibility
- Computer literacy

RELEVANCE OF BLENDED LEARNING IN INDIA

The Indian education system faces a number of challenges, including the inability to expand in order to provide free and compulsory education to all children, the inability to maintain quality while increasing quantity, curriculum gaps that prevent it from meeting international standards and even from preserving and propagating Indian values, a lack of full-time teacher dedication, and ineffective teachers who negatively impact students' learning. To overcome the obstacles, some drastic measures and significant internal revolutions are desperately needed. To some extent, blended learning will assist in resolving these issues with the Indian educational system.

- Blended learning will be an excellent alternative since it will make the area of educational opportunities bigger and education able to reach more students. In our country, due to its enormous population, the traditional school system is not able to provide equal educational chances to everybody.
- In order for students to be prepared for the rapidly evolving market, the educational system must constantly adapt to the scientific and technical advancements. Since the scientific and technological fields are the most dynamic and rapidly evolving, incorporating new innovations, the content that is taught to students must also change rapidly. However, in India, courses are typically not updated and revised as frequently, so if blended learning is implemented, both teachers and students will be able to easily update their knowledge and skills.
- Another significant problem is the lack of qualified teachers. Even though there are fewer teachers than there should be, a lot of elementary schools still have an inappropriate teacher-to-pupil ratio. This issue affects both government and private institutions equally. Blended learning is a fantastic alternative since online learning can take the place of teachers because there is another big issue: teachers are not very dedicated to their work.
- The main reason why there are issues with indiscipline, irregular attendance, dropout rates, and other related issues is that our old method of instruction cannot meet the unique needs of each student and cannot engage them in the material being taught. Additionally, because the courses lack concentration and the students lack confidence in their future, there is unease and worry, which contributes to the problem of indiscipline. However, blended learning offers a combination of solutions to address all of these issues. As was previously mentioned, blended learning gives students a range of experiences, makes them more engaged, and keeps them at the centre of the teaching and learning process since it encourages them to take ownership of their education and become more disciplined. Additionally, when blended learning provides students with a more modern, high-quality education from dynamic resources, learning becomes more intentional.
- Education remains a significant challenge for everyone. The Constitution guarantees all children up to the age of 14 free and compulsory education, yet our system is unable to do this as well. However, regardless of location, our educational institutions can simply expand enrolment if they adopt blended learning.
- As previously mentioned, blended learning will assist students in mastering all contemporary techniques and life skills that will help them lead successful lives.

Educated students, however, are also inefficient and skilled to meet the needs of the global market and suffer from unemployment.

- The education of special children presents challenges as well, but blended learning, with its diversity, can easily meet those challenges. For example, gifted students can easily satisfy their curiosity through blended learning, and blind students can easily learn through blended learning since the ICT-supported teaching and learning process will support their learning technically. Similarly, physically challenged students can also participate in mainstream education and enrol in reputable institutions without worrying about distance because blended learning allows them to study from home and online.
- Another major problem is the quality of education, particularly in higher education. Since none of our universities rank among the best in the world, implementing blended learning will be a wise choice to stay competitive and improve quality. Students' understanding will expand when they get exposure to both kinds of modalities. By connecting with internet specialists and content providers, our students will acquire cutting-edge skills that will position them as excellent candidates for desirable employment. These exposures will undoubtedly surpass the limitations in the methods or syllabus design.
- As our educational system embraces modern technologies, it is also failing to instil in students the proper value system and a love of Indian culture and tradition. However, blended learning places equal emphasis on traditional methods and classroom instruction, providing students with an understanding of the core values of Indian culture.

Conclusion

The administration of educational institutions and educational authorities must devote all of their resources to the implementation of blended learning. A well-thought-out design that incorporates people at every level of the educational hierarchy is required. We will need to raise educational budgets in order to prepare educational institutions for blended learning. We may accomplish this by working with the corporate and industrial sectors as well as NGOs. These industries can be persuaded to contribute financially to the implementation of blended learning since they stand to gain the most from more effectively preparing these educational institutions' graduates for the global marketplace. The development of appropriate attitudes toward this revolutionary idea in all those involved in the educational system is another crucial issue that must be taken into account. It is necessary to organize awareness campaigns, seminars, and discussion forums in order to influence the views of parents, the community, instructors, and students. These can be used to educate individuals about the advantages of blended learning in order to set the proper mindset for its application. It is certainly possible to use the mass media for this. To prepare instructors for the blended learning approach, teacher training programs, both pre-service and in-service, need to be reoriented. As blended learning will address multiple issues at once and make better use of resources, the funds and labour invested in numerous projects aimed at achieving universal education should be reallocated to preparing our elementary schools for this model.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that blended learning offers a partial solution to the issues facing our educational system. It has the potential to shape our educational system going forward if it is put into practice in an orderly, well-planned manner with the appropriate mindset. It is to our own advantage that we move quickly to implement blended learning.

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