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Blended learning- A progressive approach in education

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Abstract

Blended learning refers to an education program that combines teaching methods of the traditional classroom and online learning. Traditional face-to-face learning is combined with methods of eLearning so that learners can reach their full potential. Every learner has different needs and learning styles so, with this education program, they have greater flexibility of learning at their own pace. It is not uncommon to see students spending more than 20 years in the education system and saddled with unattractive job prospects. The solution lies in 'blended learning'; this concept is gaining pace in the education system along with many myths. It's an approach which has a wide scope and many benefits for generation z, which is largely dependent on digital world for learning. Thus, keeping in view the above points, this paper discuss about the progressive approach of blended learning in education.

Keywords: Blended learning, education

Introduction

Learning requirements and preferences of each learner tend to be different. Educational institutions must use a blend of learning approaches in their strategies to get the right content in the right format to the right learner at the right time. Blended learning combines multiple delivery media that are designed to complement each other and promote learning and application-learned behavior. Blended learning programs may include several forms of learning tools, such as real-time virtual/ collaboration software, self-paced Web-based courses, etc. The concept of blended learning is rooted in the idea that learning is not just a one-time event-learning is a continuous process. Blending provides various benefits over using any single learning delivery medium alone (Singh, 2003) ^[16].

Blended Learning-Future of Education

The debate around the quality of higher education in India has been gaining momentum since the Union Budget 2017, which laid emphasis on skill development, employability and digitization of the education process. The government announced a slew of measures, including 'Swayam', an online learning portal; revamp of the National Education Policy (NEP); the Higher Education Empowerment Regulation Agency (HEERA) as a single higher education regulator; and the University Grants Commission (UGC) mandate to educational institutions to develop massive open online courses (MOOCs). While India is making headway in digitizing the learning process, world over, universities are disrupting and innovating teaching and learning. The country has a long tradition of face-to-face learning; the teacher or *guru* cannot be replaced overnight with an unseen, technological entity. However, it is pertinent to note that the gap between what students are taught in classrooms and what the industry is demanding of its prospective employees is growing every day. The rate of change in technology has, and will continue to, outpace the change in university curriculum, the fastest of which takes place once a year. It is not uncommon to see students spending more than 20 years in the education system and saddled with unattractive job prospects. The solution lies in 'blended learning', a concept that is fast gaining pace in the Indian context (Khan, 2017) ^[6]. In simple terms, blended learning is combination of traditional class room set up and digital mediums of learning. It strives to create a balance between conventional method of learning and technology oriented learning.

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It is important to note here that blended learning is not equivalent to technology-rich teaching; the core of blended Learning is giving the student greater autonomy over his or her education growth path, using technology only as an enabler (Khan, 2017) ^[6].

Blended learning is setting a positive trend in generation of netizens, benefiting both teachers and students. It focuses on learner centered approach, preparing the next generation for handling the complexities of fast changing world. Blended learning provides ample opportunity, catering the needs of all kinds of learners and giving them wide choice to satisfy their specific interest. Students have the advantage of gaining knowledge without restricting themselves into four walls of classroom, where they can learn at their own pace – both in terms of speed and complexity of information. It is only fair that the education process be flipped to become increasingly learner-driven than prescriptive in nature.

Since, blended learning does not support prescriptive kind of learning, which leads to reducing the burden of teachers from overloaded information; instead, focusing on balancing the face to face learning with technology. The teachers will act as facilitators rather dictators, relieving them from the pressure of conventional education. This trend means educators can focus on student understanding, rather than the delivery method itself, offering them more flexible delivery options, depending on the content, subject, and capabilities of the students.

Scope of Blended Learning

The original use of the phrase “blended learning” was often associated with simply linking traditional classroom training to e-learning activities, such as asynchronous work (typically accessed by learners outside the class at their own time and pace). However, the term has evolved to encompass a much richer set of learning strategies or “dimensions.” Today a blended learning program may combine one or more of the following dimensions, although many of these have over-lapping attributes (Singh, 2003) ^[16].

- **Blending Offline and Online Learning:** At the simplest level, a blended learning experience combines offline and online forms of learning where the online learning usually means “over the Internet or Intranet” and offline learning happens in a more traditional classroom setting. We assume that even the offline learning offerings are managed through an online learning system. An example of this type of blending may include a learning program that provides study materials and research resources over the Web, while providing instructor-led, classroom training sessions as the main medium of instruction.
- **Blending Self-Paced and Live, Collaborative Learning:** Self-paced learning implies solitary, on-demand learning at a pace that is managed or controlled by the learner. Collaborative learning, on the other hand, implies a more dynamic communication among many learners that brings about knowledge sharing. The blending of self-paced and collaborative learning may include review of important literature on a regulatory change or new product followed by a moderated, live, online, peer-to-peer discussion of the material’s application to the learner’s job and customers.
- **Blending Structured and Unstructured Learning:** Not all forms of learning imply a premeditated,

structured, or formal learning program with organized content in specific sequence like chapters in a textbook. In fact, most learning in the workplace occurs in an unstructured form via meetings, hallway conversations, or e-mail. A blended program design may look to actively capture conversations and documents from unstructured learning events into knowledge repositories available on demand, supporting the way knowledge-workers collaborate and work.

- **Blending Custom Content with Off-the-Shelf Content:** Off-the-shelf content is by definition generic—unaware of an organization’s unique context and requirements. However, generic content is much less expensive to buy and frequently has higher production values than custom content. Generic self-paced content can be customized today with a blend of live experiences (classroom or online) or with content customization. Industry standards such as SCORM (Shareable Content Object Reference Model) open the door to increasingly flexible blending of off-the-shelf and custom content, improving the user experience while minimizing cost.
- **Blending Learning, Practice, and Performance Support:** Perhaps the finest form of blended learning is to supplement learning (organized prior to beginning a new job-task) with practice (using job-task or business process simulation models) and just-in-time performance support tools that facilitate the appropriate execution of job-tasks. Cutting-edge productivity tools provide ‘workspace’ environments that package together the computer based work, collaboration, and performance support tools.

As we can see, modern world is digital now, it’s equally important that students learn how to be digital creators. Here comes the need of revising the traditional system of education with technology, maximizing the educational impact for students by combining in-class and out-of-class learning. This paradigm shift through blended learning adds to many benefits.

The Benefits of Combining Traditional Teaching and Technology

Blended learning is a recent development in education, combining face to face classes with e-learning modules (Voos, 2003) ^[18], which makes it possible to enjoy the advantages of both teaching methods (Graham, 2006; Harding ^[5]. Other advantage obtained include its greater flexibility (Graham, 2006; Macedo-Rouet, Ney, Charles and Lallich-Boidin, 2009) ^[5] and reduces costs in comparison with traditional classes (Woltering, Herrler, Spinzer and Spreckelsen, 2009) ^[20], especially when a large no. of students are to be taught. This type of learning presents a series of advantages over the exclusive use of technology based learning. Previous studies have reported that the quality and results of learning are affected when students utilize only such methods, possibly due to: a) lack of interaction with the teachers and other students (Laurillard, 1993) ^[7]; b) procrastination in asynchronous learning; and c) the reduced motivation to read learning material online (Lim and Kim, 2003) ^[9]. Blended may be capable of improving, expanding and even transforming face to face learning (Alexander, 1999; Donnelly, 2010) ^[1, 4]. Blended learning involves a paradigm change in which the emphasis

shifts from teaching to learning. According to prior studies, complementing traditional classes with online materials: a) has positive effect on student performance (Boyle, Bradley, Chalk, Jones and Pickard, 2003; Lim and Morris, 2009; O'Toole and Absalom, 2003) [3, 10, 12]; b) enables the promotion of a flexible learning environment that reinforces the students autonomy, reflection and the powers of research (Chamber,1999; Lebow,1993; Radford,1997; Tam, 2000) [3, 8, 14, 17]; c) facilitates the review and control of learning (Osguthorpe and Graham, 2003) [13]. In a nutshell, the goal of blended learning is to provide the most efficient and effective instruction experience by combing delivery modalities (Sen, 2011) [15].

Blended Learning and Generation Z

The blended classroom of future generation z can influence the power of digital world and utilize classroom time for interaction, collaboration and discussion, testing and problem-solving, redefining how education is administered, while at the same retaining the ethos of India's traditional classroom system. It offers a window to a global world for students who might otherwise struggle to access traditional professional education programs and supplements the wider work of universities, colleges and learning providers. Generation z will be largely dependent on digital world for their learning. Efforts are being made for formalizing the online education space, ensuring regulatory recognition for online courses and encouraging universities to develop their own online curricula. Learning being a continuous process even outside the formal system of education encouraged the use of flipped classroom model of blended learning. This model gives students multiple channels to access material at home, and unlocks more practice time and individualized help from their teacher while in the classroom. With increasing demand of new modes of learning for netizens, blended learning can be used in unique combinations like blended collaborative learning, blended cooperative learning etc. Living in isolation in the digital world can be a big factor to be considered. Through blended learning sense of community can be established since it supports face to face learning with technology. In nutshell we can say blended learning and generation z are complimentary to each other and have long way to go in future unfolding various aspects of learning which in return will bring fruitful results to the education system.

Of course, any new approach is always associated with misconceptions. There are enough studies to reveal insightful trends and expose some of the most common myths surrounding blended learning stated by White & Waite (2019) are as follows:

Myth 1- Blended Learning is an Exclusive Approach. Make you're Choice Now!

Fact: Blended learning is an engine that can power and accelerate many instructional approaches:

Blended learning doesn't come at the expense of other innovative approaches. The seven blended-learning models can complement everything from competency-based education to project-based learning. That's because blended learning affords the kind of structural flexibilities that benefit other innovative approaches, such as enabling students to work at their own pace, or freeing up teacher time to focus on advising student-driven projects.

Myth 2- I'm Doing Personalized Learning, Not Blended Learning.

Fact: Chances are that if you're personalizing student learning using some form(s) of technology; you're probably practicing blended learning, too:

Personalized learning doesn't require technology—after all, if every student had an individual tutor, learning would be highly personalized! But blended learning is a critical driver for personalization at scale. It allows students to take a degree of control over their own learning path, pace, time, and even place, and takes pressure off teachers to differentiate “by hand” for each student all the time. Plus, as our emerging framework for teacher impact shows, teaching with technology using a blended-learning model can unlock teacher time for other non-technological aspects of personalized learning, such as building strong personal relationships with students.

Myth 3- Blended Learning Looks Like Kids in Headphones in Front of Screens all Day.

Fact: Blended learning complements a range of teaching and learning approaches, including highly collaborative project-based and experiential learning:

Blended learning offers flexibilities that allow students to make choices about how they learn best. Sometimes that means working individually with a computer, but often not. Many schools are using blended learning to free up time and space so that students can learn in more collaborative and hands-on ways. The “kids in headphones” visualization results from the design choices a school makes in its blended-learning implementation, rather than the blended-learning models themselves.

Myth 4- If I'm using technology in my school, I'm doing blended learning and disrupting the old system!

Fact: Blended learning isn't the same as tech-rich learning—and it's not always disruptive: Rotation, Flipped Classroom, and Lab Rotation are all hybrid models, and they are important drivers that can enable more student-centered learning without overhauling the whole system. However, these hybrid models are what we call sustaining innovations—they improve the existing system along the original measures of performance—rather than disruptive ones that are positioned to transform the classroom model and become engines of change over the longer term.

Myth 5- Flex is the Pinnacle of Blended.

Fact: The Flex model has many virtues...but the unique circumstances of your classroom and students' needs will drive which blended model is the right fit:

Flex may or may not be the classroom of tomorrow, but addressing students' needs now will help determine the best learning process for them today. By definition, the Flex model lets students move on fluid schedules among learning activities according to their needs. Teachers provide support and instruction on a flexible, as-needed basis while students work through course curriculum and content, giving students a high degree of control over their learning. Who wouldn't want that for their students?

So we can say, getting familiar with what blended learning is and isn't, and what it

Supports and enables, will make us a more convincing advocate and change agent for blended learning.

Conclusion

The blended classroom of the future can leverage the power of online courses and free up classroom time for interactive collaboration and discussion, testing and problem-solving, while at the same retaining the ethos of traditional classroom system. It breaks the 'one-size-fits-all' model by taking education beyond the physical classroom and allowing students to learn anytime, anywhere. Many educators have adopted this unique form of learning, one hope that in a decade's time, blended learning becomes the norm rather than the exception.

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