Gurvir Kaur
Teacher Trainee, Bhutta
College of Education, Bhutta,
Ludhiana, Punjab, India.

Blended learning: An effective approach in the learning process

Gurvir Kaur

Abstract
In the modern era, blended learning is an effective tool for improving the education system. This approach changes the education system and makes it more interesting than the traditional classroom system. Blended learning uses the effective ways such as presentations, audio-visual lectures, online projects, online discussions, blogging etc. to make the learning process more effective. In this paper, I will discuss about the models of blended learning, online collaborative activities, its dimensions, ingredients, need to implement and its benefits for the learners. This paper emphasizes the need and importance of blended learning for the learners in the today's education system and how by integrating the technologies with face to face classroom system able to improve learning, information, engagement, autonomy and enjoyment among the learners.

Keywords: blended learning, learners, online learning, face-to-face classroom, and instructor

Introduction
The integration of face-to-face learning and online learning help to enhance the classroom experience and extend learning through the innovative use of information and communication technology. Strategies used in blended learning enhance students' engagement and learning through online activities and improve effectiveness and efficiencies by reducing lecture time. Blended learning also offers flexible time frames that can be personalized to each person, offering them the ability to learn at their own pace. In general terms, blended learning combines online delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction.

Models of Blended Learning
Blended learning is gravitating towards six models:

Model 1: Face-to-Face Driver
All the programs that fit into the face-to-face-driver model retain face-to-face instructor to deliver most of their curricula. The physical instructor deploys online learning on a case-by-case basis to supplement or remediate, often in the back of the classroom or in a technology lab.

Model 2: Rotation
In the rotation model, within a given course, learners rotate on a fixed schedule between learning online in self-paced environment and sitting in a classroom with a traditional face-to-face instructor. It is the model in between the traditional face-to-face classroom and online learning because it involves a split between the two and in some cases, between remote and onsite. In this model, the face-to-face instructor usually oversees the online work.

Model 3: Flex
In a flex model, an online platform delivers most of the curricula. Instructors provide on-site support on a flexible and adaptive as-needed basis through in-person tutoring sessions and small group sessions.

Correspondence
Gurvir Kaur
Teacher Trainee, Bhutta
College of Education, Bhutta,
Ludhiana, Punjab, India.

Model 4: Online Lab
The online-lab model relies on an online platform to deliver the entire course but in a Rick-and-mortar lab environment. Usually these programs provide online instructors. Paraprofessionals supervise, but offer little content expertise. Students that participate in an online-lab program also take traditional courses and have typical block schedules.

Model 5: Self-Blend
In self-blend model, learners can take one or more courses online to supplement their traditional school's catalog. The online learning is always remote. All supplemental online schools that offer *a la carte* courses to individual learners facilitate self-blending.

Model 6: Online Driver
The online-driver model involves an online platform and instructor that deliver all curricula. Learners work remotely for the most part. Face-to-face check-ins are sometimes optional and other times required. Some of these programs offer brick-and-mortar components as well, such as extracurricular activities.

Online collaborative activities in blended learning
There are three kind of online collaborative learning activities in blended learning:

A. Online Discussion
- Discussion in web-based learning environments, like forums, is one of the most popular tools for improving learning performance collaboratively. It provides learners the ability of expressing their opinions about learning topic and also giving feedback to their colleagues. So it can enhance social and cognitive awareness of learners within a learning group and help them to communicate with each other effectively.

B. Wiki and Blog
- Through wikis, learners can collect and express their perceptions about main keys of the course (or assignment) and skills; which have been achieved via participating in collaborative learning activities in the course environment.

C. Online Communication
- Communication between learners for doing assignments and participating in activities like group's chat rooms and sending asynchronous messages to each other are part of collaborative activities in online environment.

Dimensions of the Blend
Blended learning program may combine one or more of the following dimensions

- ### Blending offline and online learning
In blended learning, offline and online forms of learning are combined where the online learning usually means "over the Internet or Intranet" and offline learning happens in a face-to-face traditional classroom. An example of this type of blending may include a learning program that provides study materials and research resources over the web, and providing instructor-led, classroom training sessions as the main medium of instruction.

- ### Blending Self-Paced and Live, Collaborative Learning
Self-paced learning implies learning at a pace that is managed or controlled by the learner. Collaborative learning, on the other hand, implies dynamic communication among many learners that brings about knowledge sharing. The blending of self-paced and collaborative learning includes review of important literature on a new product.

- ### Blending Structured and Unstructured Learning
Structured learning program organizes 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 look to actively capture conversations and documents from unstructured learning events into knowledge repositories available on-demand.

- ### 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 but 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.

- ### Blending Learning, Practice, and Performance Support
The finest form of blended learning is to supplement learning with practice. Cutting-edge productivity tools provide 'workspace' environments that package together the computer based work, collaboration, and performance support tools.

Ingredients of Blended Learning
In the past, the ingredients for blended learning were limited to physical classroom formats (lectures, labs, etc.), books or handouts. Today, organizations are used the following ingredients in blended learning approach:

1. Synchronous physical formats
- Instructor-led Classrooms & Lectures
- Hands-on Labs & Workshops
- Field Trips

2. Synchronous online formats (Live e-Learning)
- e-Meetings
- Virtual Classrooms
- Web Seminars and Broadcasts
- Coaching
- Instant Messaging

3. Self-paced, asynchronous formats:
- Documents & Web Pages
- Web/Computer-Based Training Modules
- Assessments/Tests & Surveys
- Simulations
- Job Aids & Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS)
- Recorded live events
- Online Learning Communities and Discussion Forums

Need to Implement Blended Learning
The face-to-face traditional methods of learning are not effective for different types of learners. So, there is a need to implement the blended learning to improve the learning process-

1. It promotes students' ownership of learning- Blended learning promotes student autonomy and ownership of learning by shifting some learning responsibilities away from the teacher. As blended learning uses online apps and programs to teach concepts so students can learn at their own pace. Slow learners can repeat and review exercises as many times as needed while fast learners can move ahead at a quicker pace.

2. Extending the reach- A face-to-face classroom training program limits access only to those learners who are present at the time of teaching, whereas a virtual classroom has an ability to playback a recorded live event and can extend the reach to those who could not attend at a specific time.

3. Optimizing Development Cost and time- A hundred percent online, self-paced, media-rich, Web-based training content may be too expensive to produce as it requires multiple resources and skills. But combining virtual collaborative learning forums and coaching sessions with simpler self-paced materials such as documents, case studies, recorded live e-Learning events, text assignments, and PowerPoint presentations requires lower skills.

4. Studies show students learn better- A recent study from the University of Iowa found evidence that blended learning was more effective than classroom lecture or online learning alone. Classroom lecture and online learning are unidirectional while blended learning offers bidirectional information flow i.e. fostering conversations not only between the instructor and students but among the students themselves.

5. It Prepares Students for a Tech-Centered World- By integrating technology, teachers can better prepare students for future careers. Today's businesses often want employees who know how to use online learning resources.

6. Blended learning increases collaboration- Students and teachers can collaborate better in groups with blended learning. With online projects, there is more transparency because the entire group can see the progress. It helps in decreasing the situations where one or two students do all the work while others watch.

7. Keeps students more interested and engaged- Blended learning can keep students more engaged by introducing technology into the learning process. It helps in presenting information in new and exciting ways. It can transform the subjects which students find boring into exciting areas by using interactive software and 3D animations.

8. Customized Content- In a traditional classroom setting, the individual needs of the learners are not taken into account as they are merged into a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum. Learners only work on what is relevant, important and specific to them with blended learning program.

9. No Fear Factor- Learners takes the anxiety in learning since they are able to ask their tutors any question directly. This not only spares embarrassment but gives the learner more focused learning and feedback. Learners can use their online program to practice vocabulary, expressions, and structures before meeting with their tutor, which can speed up the process of learning. With a blended learning, anxiety over tests or fear of failing are eliminated since the pass/fail of a traditional learning environment is irrelevant.

10. Motivation- The tracking and assessment control built into blended learning allows learners to receive instant feedback and track their own progress which enables them to remain more motivated in achieving their own desired goals and objectives.

Benefits of Blended Learning
1. Personalization: With the use of technology in an educational program learners can personalized log in and can select the specific activities they wish to focus on. For example, one learner select listening activities if this is his weakest skill, while the other learner focuses on vocabulary activities which is the weakest skill for him. This allows the learners to tailor their program to what they need, making it personal per learner.

2. Study at own pace: Having access to online programs and apps helps the learners to study at their own pace and allows the time they need in order to fully comprehend, complete and review tasks

3. Improved learning outcomes: In blended learning, learners have more control over the time, pace, path and place of the program which increases their motivation to learn. Learners have more time to complete the tasks in the best conditions suited to them which in turn, allows more focused learning therefore improved learning outcomes.

4. Increase student interest: When technology is integrated into learning material, then the learners are more likely to be interested in, focused on, and excited about the subjects that they are studying.

5. Keep students focused for longer: The engagement and interaction with the resources such as Internet keeps students focused for longer periods than they would be with books or paper resources, this engagement helps the learners to develop learning through exploration and research.

6. Provides student autonomy: With the use of e-Learning materials, learner's ability to set appropriate learning goals and to take charge of his or her own learning increases.

7. Prepares learners for the future: Blended learning helps to develop the following skills in the learners which prepare them for the future life. These are:
- Research skills
- Self-learning
- Self-engagement
- Helps to develop a 'self-driving force'
- Better decision making
- Offers a larger sense of responsibility
- Computer literacy

8. Better communication- With blended learning, instructors can easily update the learners on new announcements, assignments, test results, and anything else regarding their course. This is beneficial to learners because good and effective communication is crucial for a seamless workflow and overall organizational success.

9. Improved collaboration- Collaboration is one of the key factors necessary for effective learning. Blended learning enables the course participants to work together, engage in discussions, and provide useful feedback to one another, which undoubtedly leads to improvement and higher engagement.

10. Keeping track of learners' progress- Tracking the progress of learners is important but the traditional methods of learning make it difficult to see how the learners are performing before actually assessing them. Blended learning enables the instructors to keep track of learners' progress at any given time so that they can better understand their strengths and weaknesses without fail.

11. Enhancing teaching efforts- Because the needs of every learner are different and each learner follows a unique learning style, so it is important to meet everyone's needs to make the course more effective. Learners will benefit more from reading text accompanied with presentations, and they will understand the topics better after watching relevant videos. With blended learning, incorporating different learning styles i.e. PowerPoint, images, audio files, video files, etc. become possible.

12. Learner is more engaged using a variety of content types- To achieve engagement, the blended approach in learning uses a plethora of different material types such as video, audio and visually enhanced presentations etc. Blended learning course helps to keep learners engaged and also to make sure that all material is easily understood which is not always in the case of fast-paced environment of a face-to-face classroom.

13. Reduces cost- Blended learning saves educators' money in several ways such as:
- Repurposing content decreasing and money spent for course preparation.
- Virtual tutoring can help to eliminate employee and venue costs.
- So, by implementing blended learning strategically, an institution could reduce costs by nearly 50%.

14. Enhanced retention- The English department at Long Island University (LIU) Brooklyn is currently testing blended learning as a way to improve retention for their students. Other studies indicate that learning online can increase retention rates between 25-60% as compared to only 8-10% for face-to-face learning.

15. Increased satisfaction and effectiveness- Today learners prefer to have a variety of ways to learn. Blended learning encourages self-learning as students are forced to look for information online independently, rather than just and relying on a lecturer. In the book Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education, the authors argue that blended learning is effective because

with this approach learner's focus on more active and meaningful activities which can lead to improved effectiveness.

Conclusion
Thus from the above discussion, it may be concluded that blended learning breaks down the traditional walls of teaching-learning process, that don't work for all students. Now with access to present day technologies and resources we can enhance the learning experience for each student. Blended learning is a collaboration of online learning and classroom learning. It allows organizations to gradually move learners from traditional classrooms to e-learning in small steps making change easier to accept. In this way, it benefits both the learners and the organizations. So, it allows to continuously adapting to learners' needs and preferences, embracing the needs of 21st century learner.

References
1. Driscoll M. (n.d). Blended Learning: Let's Get Beyond the Hype by in IBM Global Services
2. Ghassemi S. Taghiyareh F, Orooji F. (n.d.). Developing a Learner-Centered Criteria to Assessing Group Activities in Blended Learning Environments
3. Michael B Horn, Heather S. The Rise of K–12 Blended learning, 2011.
4. Singh H. Building Effective Blended Learning Programs by Issue of Educational Technology, Volume. 2003; 43(6)51-54.
5. Singh H, Reed C. A White Paper: Achieving Success with Blended Learning ASTD State of the Industry Report, American Society for Training & Development, 2001.
6. Tudor E. Blended learning; What is it and why do we need it, 2017.
7. Watson J. (n.d.). Blending Learning: The Convergence of Online and Face-to-Face Education Promising practices in online learning. 45-48.
8. Retrieved from https://www.emergingedtech.com/2019/01/6-reasons-teachers-need-to implement-blended-learning/
9. Retrieved from https://global-lt.com/blended-learning-vs-traditional-learning-five-key differences/
10. Retrieved from https://www.teachthought.com/technology/the-benefits-of-blended-learning/ Retrieved from https://www.pulselearning.com/blog/6-reasons-blended-learning-becoming trend/
11. Retrieved from https://www.talentlms.com/blog/5-reasons-why-blended-learning-works/ Retrieved from https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/blog/17-05-18-what-are-the-benefits-of blended-learning