

BLENDDED LEARNING – A BOON OR BANE FOR TEACHER-LEARNER



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Abstract:

The concept of liberalization, privatization and globalization in our country has opened up the boundaries to become a part of global village. Our country should bring out some changes in our traditional education system to provide the right content, in the right format, to the right people at the right time for quality and timely education. This can be achieved only when we transform our conventional education system as per the needs of society and economic status in the world. New innovations like the use of information and communication techniques (ICT) have made it imperative to adopt a new approach and Blended learning can be a key to success to meet global standards. It has been observed that at Lingaya's University, the use of this approach in the classrooms that require the physical co-presence of teacher and students has produced good results. The author tries to explore the possibilities of its use in our educational institutions discussing its pros as a boon and cons as a bane, justifying the title while adaptation into current conceptions, helps in engage students to attain academic success, combining online learning and face-to-face instruction effectively and ultimately throwing light on the uses of blended learning in the beginning and suggesting its expansion to ensure quality and accountability and socialization. Blended learning has become a buzzword and is in demand in corporate as well as academic fields and it is likely to emerge as the predominant model for the students in future.

Words: *liberalization, privatization and globalization, innovations, blended, buzzword*

Historical Background:

The concept of blended learning is not a new concept but is in existence in USA and other countries for a long time, but it has been flourishing day by day in the last few years. The term probably came to light when it was noticed in a press release in 1999, when an Atlanta-based education business, announced its change of name from Interactive Learning Centers (ILC) to EPIC learning and in an article it was stated that “The Company currently operates 220 on-line courses, but will begin offering its Internet courseware using the company's Blended Learning methodology.”¹ This concept has also been explored immensely all around the world by many academic institutions and the term is so dynamic in nature that it keeps on changing with time. The blended learning covered array of teaching and learning methods, when the first *Handbook of Blended Learning* by Bonk and Graham was published in 2006 that challenged and enhanced the extent and vagueness of the term's definition, and defined ‘blended learning systems’ as learning systems that “combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction.”²

Blended Learning:

The terms ‘blended,’ ‘hybrid,’ ‘technology-mediated instruction,’ ‘web-enhanced instruction,’ and ‘mixed-mode instruction’ are often used interchangeably in current research literature.³

In the past decade online learning has become an increasingly important component of our education system. The growth of online education has been driven primarily by state-led online programs and the teachers in physical schools have increased their use of Internet-based content and resources in their classrooms. At Lingaya's University, this concept has been driven by tech-savvy teachers and technology experts seeking new ways to provide enriching content and to extend learning to an independent mode. The internet with high bandwidth, WI-Fi facilities and availability of LCDs in most of the classrooms at campus have significantly increased the quality of classroom learning resources that blend online learning and face-to-face instruction. Besides the traditional options today like coaching, classes, and mentoring, the students have many electronic options like e-learning classes, on-line help systems, templates, decision support tools, and knowledge bases.

People have different perceptions about blended learning and it refers to as both blended and hybrid learning, with little or no difference in the meaning of the terms among most educators. It blends online delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction and live instruction to personalize learning, allow thoughtful reflection, and differentiate instruction from student to student across a diverse group of students.

We shall throw light on some definitions given by the great masters of this approach. E-learning gurus Elliot Maisie and Brandon Hall recognize the many options and encourage combined systems, which they call ‘brick and click,’ or ‘blended’ learning (Rossett & Sheldon, 2001, p.281). Many definitions follow the concept - a blended solution between e-learning (on-line or click) and classroom learning (face-to-face or brick): Blended Learning can combine the positive aspects of the two learning environments, classroom based learning and e-Learning (Bonk & Graham, 2006).

But some gurus have a broad vision that blended learning goes beyond e-learning and classrooms: Blended learning is a mix of delivery methods that have been selected and fashioned to accommodate the various learning needs of a diverse audience in a variety of subjects. This method can include any combination of any of the above delivery methods (McSporran& King 2002).

The integration of face-to-face and online learning to help enhance the classroom experience and extend learning through the innovative use of information and communications technology. Blended strategies enhance student engagement and learning through online activities to the course curriculum, and improve effectiveness and efficiencies by reducing lecture time.⁴

Elements of Blended Learning:

The elements of blended learning are not confined by any race, caste, group or religion but the one that delivers the best in a particular situation and time is considered as the best. A Professor of educational technology Mr Allison Rossett, supports the situational instructional design model for this approach. "Learning theories aren't like religion," says Rossett. "You don't have to pick Catholic or Baptist or Muslim, and shun the others. The goal is to have the right theory for the right situation." (cited in Zemke 2002). According to Zemke the situation is dependent upon "the people you serve, the nature of the skills they must master and the context in which they are to perform." Such a "situational" instructional design model fits well with the concept of blended learning. By applying learning theories of Keller, Gagné, Bloom, Merrill, Clark and Gery, there are five key ingredients – live events, online contents, collaboration, assessment and reference material emerge as important elements of a blended learning.

Features of Blended Learning:

Blended learning helps enhance the classroom experience and extend learning through the innovative use of information and communications technology (ICT). There is flexibility while framing the course curriculum that improves effectiveness and efficiencies by reducing lecture time. There should be a virtual learning environment to incorporate online contents, course information, value added studies at campus and accessing Internet resources. It provides the best features of classroom interaction and live instruction to personalize learning, allow thoughtful reflection, and differentiate instruction as per the students learning styles, learning proficiency and their learning ability that provide teachers adequate ammunition to cater to the needs of the diverse students to have an effective learning. Lingaya's university provides e-learning facilities to its students that enable not only the teachers to improve their teaching skills but also to the students to submit their PPTs and assignments by email. This further encourages individualized learning. This has also freed learning from the shackles of time and place made learning a reality as per the discretion of the learners.

Status of Blended learning in India:

Our country has passed through a very fast pace of transformation since 1991 not only in business sector but also in the field of education. Opening of new schools, flexibility in the education policies and a growing number of online schools and programs are combining online teaching and face-to-face instruction in either way. This may be at any level - course level combining both online and non-online instruction within one subject, at institutional level, enrolling their students on a regular, scheduled basis, with the teacher physically present or remaining at a distance. This provides students options whether taking one or more fully online courses and attending a traditional classroom for one or more face-to-face courses. Doordharshan, the Indian State run Television Channel and University Grants Commission have been jointly playing a commendable role in taking education to the masses in rural India. The students are now free to opt for any course at any time and at any place availing any options like traditional face-to-face setting with few or no online resources, fully online curriculum with all learning done online and at a distance and no face-to-face interaction, fully online curriculum with options for face-to-face instruction, fully online curriculum with limited days required in classroom or computer lab, fully online curriculum in computer lab or classroom where students meet every day, classroom instruction with vital online contents that broaden learning beyond the classroom, classroom instruction integrating online resources, but limited or no requirements for students to be online. It is a comprehensive instructional approach for providing socialized constructive and sustainable learning experiences through the combination of face-to-face interactions and e-learning techniques. But it has not yet reached its landmark but progressing consistently.

Pros and cons of Blended Learning:

It has been observed at Lingaya's University that the adoption of this concept has brought perceptible changes not only in the students but in teachers as well because it "facilitates a simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experience".⁵ The wide use of ICT in classrooms and labs enable the students to have an easy, instant and required contents access on the projects and course material that not only develops interest, motivation, group dynamics, leadership qualities but also facilitate easy learning to the absentees. "Computer-based qualitative and quantitative assessment modules"⁶ in a study by Alexander and McKenzie (1998) and online quiz, assignments, submission of presentations and projects provide opportunities to the students to evaluate their performance. The lack of IT skills among the students, internet and technical problems often pose problems in learning that make the availability of high quality technical support paramount.⁷ It also enables the teachers update their knowledge and improve their existing teaching techniques.

Future of Blended Learning:

The global village is facing abrupt and enormous changes every day and every organization believes that the one that adapt first will survive more. The corporate sector needs versatile people with all round development that compels the educational institutions to frame curriculum content, self-study modules, assignments, evaluation contents, learning activities

fulfilling the requirements. The students must be equipped with not only the theoretical aspects but their applications in the live situations. This should alter to learners varied in terms of learning styles, learning proficiency, as well as learning ability. The diversity among the learners to a larger extent can be balance by the use of Blended Learning. It facilitates teachers to adopt various strategies for individualized – self paced and self-regulated learning of the students. It enables the students to learn as per their convenience of time and place. The students lacking because of their absence in classroom, can complete their work on time. This concept adopts both the traditional-classroom teaching and the online - the use ICT techniques. It provides freedom to the teachers to introduce the contents which are difficult to understand and this enhanced the knowledge of the learners to handle the challenges constructively. This has been shown in the study that student interaction and satisfaction improved, along with students learning more, in courses that incorporated blended learning⁸. (DE Lacey and Leonard, 2002). IGNOU, Doordharshan and UGC and Ministry of Education have considered this as a useful tool in taking education to the learners in rural India. The blended learning has been adopted worldwide organizations of vary areas and it has been today well understood that the consistent progress can be attained only when we adopt this concept in training and development of the future learners.

Conclusion-

The fast pace of change in technology and business environment has produced many threats and challenges not only for the corporate but for the educational institutions as well. This can be a boon for teachers today if they equip themselves with adequate teaching-learning techniques/pedagogies that can face these abrupt changes failing will be a bane jeopardise their existence with their obsolete techniques. Blended Learning will certainly keep the learners curious, eager, motivated, socialised and interested. The teachers have to strive hard to frame the syllabi contents as per the existing requirements of the area concerned globally and should appear more persuasive, interesting and appealing to their students. Therefore, Blended Learning is certainly a boon and is one of the sources to bring sustainable transformation in learners, culture, society and corporate sectors that can fulfil our dreams in the new Millennium to be called superpower and again as “Sone Ki Chidiya”.

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