Blended Learning: A New Hybrid Teaching Methodology

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Abstract

Blended Learning is an approach that provides innovative educational solutions through an effective mix of traditional classroom teaching with mobile learning and online activities for teachers, trainers and students. 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). According to Friesen and Norm (2012), Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through delivery of content and instruction via digital and online media with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Educational Technology, Teaching Methodology

Introduction

In the teaching/learning process, Educators are persistently striving to discover latest and innovative methods or approaches to their students. In this process Blended Learning is one of the newest concepts being adopted. Currently, the educational system, which is in a position to meet the challenges of expansion and for catering the needs of individuals, is trying to adopt new technologies and exploring new paths to reach the goal of quality educational opportunities for all. The term, Blended Learning is increasingly used to describe the way e-learning, combining with traditional classroom methods and independent study to create a new, hybrid teaching methodology.

Blended Learning is an approach that provides innovative educational solutions through an effective mix of traditional classroom teaching with mobile learning and online activities for teachers, trainers and students. It is the technology enabled learning to extend beyond the classroom walls and facilitates better access to learning resources. Actually Blended learning is

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not a new concept in the teaching learning process. 'Tele-classes' is one form of this type where students watch a lecture on closed-circuit television and the same can be said for self-paced learning.

Blended Learning

In 2003, the American Society for Training and Development identified 'blended learning' as one of the top ten trends to emerge in the knowledge delivery industry (cited by Rooney, 2003).

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)

Blended learning should be viewed as a pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness and socialisation opportunities of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment, rather than a ratio of delivery modalities- Dziuban, Hartman and Moskal (2004)

Blended learning designates the range of possibilities presented by combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical co‑presence of teacher and students- Norm Friesen (2012)

Blended learning methodologies accommodate the student's active life schedule while still providing the social connections that are necessary for clear communication to exist, ultimately supporting retention and success- (Hijazi et al., 2006)

According to the cited definitions, one should understand that blended learning involves the combination of two fields of concern- education and educational technology; it is such a combination of technologies, pedagogies and even job tasks with the use of web-based technology. It is also the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning.

Some teachers think that Blended Learning is meant what they have been doing successfully for years, using a range of resources and activities to provide individualized, student-centred learning experiences for their students. For other teachers, blended learning is a challenge. Really, it is the unmatched access to the internet with its rich sources of information and services and more importantly, the connectivity it offers students and teachers, particularly the ability to create online communities and support networks.

Forms/Models of Blended Learning

However, some researchers and educational think-tanks suggested distinct blended learning forms/models which are frequently used models given below:

- *The rotation model*, in which online engagement is combined or rather, embedded, within a range of face-to-face forms of instruction in a cyclical manner

- *The flex model*, in which multiple students are engaged primarily online, but under the supervision of a teacher who is physically present

- *The self-blending model*, in which students choose different courses to take independently, but do so in a setting where a supervising teacher and other students are co-present

- *The enriched-virtual model*, in which online, virtual experiences are seen as being enriched only periodically through arrangements of physical co-presence

<div align="right">(Norm Friesen, 2012)</div>

There two important common factors in the four models of blended learning. They let students process and learn material in a suitable way, and teachers are required to lay the foundation on which students learn. Teachers provide the topic and the critical thinking skills and the students apply these in ways that will help them retain the information. So, students are able to vary their pace of learning, drawing on as few or as many resources as necessary, choosing tasks/resources that best suited their learning styles and level of prior knowledge.

Advantages and Disadvantages

It is to understand that every strategy has its own Advantages and Disadvantages. In a corporate setup, professionals think whether the advantages/ benefits outweigh the disadvantages limitations.

Advantages/Merits

- Blended instruction and methods are high levels of student achievement and more effective than purely face-to-face or purely online classes

- Students can work on their own with new concepts free from teachers, using a combination of digital instruction and one-on-one face time

- Teachers can now streamline their instruction to help all students reach their full potential, as they were in a traditional classroom

- It provides a simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experience for college/university students

- Information and communication technologies have been used to develop students' learning attitudes

- It creates and improves communication between lecturers and students to better evaluate their understanding of course material with the use of computer-based qualitative and quantitative assessment modules

- It reduces educational expenses and training costs, by putting classrooms in the online space and it essentially replaces pricey textbooks with electronic devices

- It provides opportunity for data collection and customization of instruction and assessment as two major benefits of this approach

- It helps schools choose to reallocate resources to boost student achievement outcomes

- It facilitates students, who have special talents or interests outside of the available curricula, use educational technology to advance their skills or exceed grade restrictions

- It allows for personalized education, replacing the model where a teacher stands in front of the classroom and everyone is expected to stay at the same pace

- It lets students work at their own pace, making sure they fully understand new concepts before moving on

- It is the virtual learning environment that helps connect professors with students without physically being present, thus making this a 'virtual café'

Disadvantages/Demerits

- Blended Learning may have disadvantages in technical aspects, if it is not properly planned and executed, as it depends on the technical resources or equipment.

- IT literacy can serve as a significant barrier for students attempting to get access to the course materials, making the availability of high-quality technical support paramount

- It can be a challenge for group work because of difficulties with management in an online setting

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- The use of lecture recording technologies can result in students falling behind on the materials

- It is observed that providing effective feedback is more time-consuming and more expensive

- Access to network infrastructure is another serious issue

- Ineffective use of learning technology tools can waste resources

- Learners must have basic technology knowledge or a willingness to learn.

- High technology set up and maintenance costs.

- Lack of motivation

- Wastage of offered Resources

Blended Learning, A Formal Education Program

According to Friesen and Norm (2012), Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through delivery of content and instruction via digital and online media with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace.

Since the popular advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the late 1990s, Blended learning has been in use. It is to understand that blended learning is a combination of face-to-face and technology mediated instructional forms and practices. The major advantage that blended learning offers is scale, where one instructor can only teach many people.

Conclusion

Blended Learning is one of the newest concepts in the teaching/learning process. Currently, the educational system is trying to adopt new technologies and exploring new paths to reach the goal of quality educational opportunities for all. Blended Learning is increasingly used to describe the way e-learning, combining with traditional classroom methods and independent study to create a new, hybrid teaching methodology. Blended Learning is an approach that provides innovative educational solutions through an effective mix of traditional classroom teaching with mobile learning and online activities for teachers, trainers and students.

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