



BLENDED LEARNING: THE QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE IN 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Blended Learning connotes an amalgamation of traditional in-campus learning and online learning in a suitable way to make both teacher and students benefited in the teaching learning process. It helps in the improvement of learning practices and this mixed learning approach makes students able to complete their given activities in more independent and flexible way. The experience of inside and outside the classroom should be planned very carefully as well as systematically. The importance of a teacher cannot be altered anyway by the usage of Technology. It can only enhance the process of learning as it maximizes the learning opportunities in order to meet students' needs. Students also learn joyfully in the blended learning environment with the proper support and guidance of efficient teachers. From different point of view Blended Learning is considered as a significant learning approach in the education system of 21st century. Present paper is an attempt to put light on the overall concept of blended learning approach in this globalized era.

Keywords- *Blended Learning, Online Learning, Teachers, Globalized Era, Education, 21st Century.*

Introduction

Blended Learning can be treated as a paradigm shift in education of present century. Both students and teachers are able to overcome some limitations or deficiencies faced in the conventional classroom setting. It is an innovative as well as essential pedagogical support for students to make their learning experience more enriched and excelled. Teacher can teach and also learners can learn in more flexible and comfortable way in compare to the previous methods of teaching-learning. By utilization of actual Blended Learning setting students' access to quality education can be ensured regardless of their location or circumstances (Dey & Bandyopadhyay, 2019). Blended environment surely can increase students' choice in their learning so that their learning can be improved. In this new normal approach, students can avail some of the extra benefits which are not available in the normal or non blended educational classroom. Not only teachers' interest but also their competencies are equally important to make the Blended Learning environment successful. The entire program must be well planned as well as well organised for both of the teachers and students. Education has become more accessible and in depth also with the rapid increase of technology. This speedy adoption of technological support in educational setting can give priority to individuality in order to make learning outcomes more effective. Arranging Blended Learning environment is not possible without the use of internet. Dependency on internet usage is increasing day by day and presently this internet is esteemed for a colossal number of assistance that it caters to the global world of this century (Gorain et al., 2018; Gorain et al., 2021; Gorain et al., 2022;

Khan et al., 2023; Mohanta et al., 2023). To make the Blended Learning setting successful, the necessary factors are positive attitude, rigorous efforts, good infrastructure, adequate budget and highly motivated students and teachers (Lalima & Dangwal, 2017).

Objectives of the Study

In the present paper the author has tried to discuss an overview about Blended Learning in the education of 21st century. The main objectives of the study are to give a concept of Blended Learning approach and teachers' contributions in this changing teaching-learning environment. The paper also focuses on the Present Status of Education in the 21st Century.

Blended Learning Approach

Blended Learning is more personalised educational approach where teachers are the facilitators and students are active learners. Hence, it completely shifts the roles of students and teachers in teaching learning process. Students are not passive receivers and teachers do not perform the duty of knowledge transmitter in just a mechanical way. Students do not depend on paper pencil method in their learning; they feel benefited by the use of several digital tools and technology that are relevant with their learning. Students have the opportunity to choose the most important learning activities with the access of online contents whenever and wherever they are. It uses a variety of digital media which enhance media-driven learning of students. It is notable that our world has become a global village where no country is isolated from the effect of Technology. Blended Learning offers students the element of self-direction in their learning and it is ideally suited to all kind of learners (Sharma, 2019).

Using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a strong means to enhance the quality of educational programs especially in education of 21st century (Bishnu & Roy, 2018; Roy and Saha, 2021). Blended Learning is an attempt in educational setting to produce quality students with lots of attributes like self efficacy, self reliance, self confidence, capability etc. Blended Learning provides students the facility like the fulfilment of educational dreams of Swami Vivekananda i.e., if people cannot reach school, schools should reach them so that everyone can access education (Sarkar, 2023). This Blended Learning can be considered as one of the best methods to modernize the traditional classroom in search of a harmonious and well balanced relationship between online and offline teaching-learning. The big advantage of Blended Learning is to provide an effective solution to the issue of unequal access of education. A large number of students can avail educational opportunities and thus, the range of education has become more expanded. Education is one of the most powerful tools to build a knowledge based society and Blended Learning is an authentic and helpful medium in making that knowledge based society.

Teachers in the Changing Educational Setting:

We, presently, are going through the age of globalization which is the witness of rapid development of science and technology (Mahato et al., 2022). Education is treated as the basic cornerstone in the growth and development of a nation. The form of education has been changed according to the needs and time of this globalized period. Present period is the quest for excellence in both of teacher qualities as well as teaching learning process in order to secure the human welfare and development of the entire society. It was the strong need to go beyond the traditional paradigm of teacher preparation. Teacher is a balanced intellect who randomly works for the enrichment or enlightenment of students' stock house of knowledge. Complete development of body, mind and soul is never possible without the proper support and guidance of teachers. Teachers act like Pathfinder for the students since the earlier period of education. Teacher has the responsibility to promote the ability of choosing right and wrong way among learners and also to bring out the potentialities of learners. There are lots of differences in the education system between present and the earlier. Globalization puts its effect in the entire education system of a

country. As a result there is a change in the duties and qualities of a sensible teacher to expose the students to the new world of knowledge in this globalized era.

There are so many digital and wireless devices available and accessible by which learning can be undertaken anytime from any place. Blended Learning allows students to take a major role in managing their own education. There is no complete dependency over teachers in case of student learning. Google knows everything and learners can easily acquire necessary information instantly with the help of the internet. Not only students but also teachers are being gradually enriched as technology provides a vast knowledge to them. It should be remembered that technology cannot replace the value and necessity of teachers in teaching learning process. Though technology provides crucial information about the contents, deep learning occurs with the development of deep understanding about the subject matter which is only possible from a teacher's adequate knowledge and skills. Teachers should be careful about their teaching skills in blended setting. Teachers are lifelong learners, so they must have willingness to learn by accessing and analysing specific data from different sources. They should be prepared enough to accept the new teaching strategies in a Blended Learning environment. Teacher is more a mentor than the knowledge provider to the students. They must have the courage and consciousness so that they can encourage the learners and also celebrate student's success. The aims and objectives, curriculum, teaching methods, strategies, teaching learning materials, evaluation methods- all these should be figured out in advance. Strong rapport should be built between teachers and students so that both teaching and learning process become more progressive and flexible. Students in blended setting are not deprived from the facility of face to face teaching learning. They have enough opportunity to make interaction with teachers and make all the doubts clear positively in the educational environment.

The interaction can be possible in both classroom setting as well as in virtual space. Individual learning opportunity makes students more expertise on their subjects. Teachers should develop a healthy environment where students can learn with joy with having the facility of peer collaboration. According to the nature of contents and objectives, students will decide to select the mode of teaching learning process. In this technology developed era, use of only in-person instruction is not fruitful for the students' learning. Careful attempts should be made by teachers for Blended Learning to be successfully implemented. ICT expertise is being an increasing necessity not only in education but also in all fields of life. Teachers make student learn in blended setting how to sincerely use available technology in their learning process. The scope of using electronic library or digital library has become widely accessible. It fulfils students' cognitive objectives by enhancing their knowledge in a broad way. The main objective of true education is all round development of students but the conventional classroom does not meet the aim of their holistic development. The Blended Learning approach offers students a multicultural as well as multidimensional experience that enables students to express their thoughts and emotions accordingly. Fundamentally, the teaching of only 3RS viz. Reading, writing and arithmetic are no more adequate enough in this 21st century. The fundamental aspects of education are becoming so challenging day by day in the process of developing successful citizens of this country. Teacher should update and upgrade their knowledge and adapt new teaching learning strategies with their traditional methods of teaching. In the age of knowledge explosion, development of several skills like problem solving skill, cognitive skill, communication skill, critical thinking etc., are much more important than acquisition of material knowledge. So there is a strong need of incredible change in teaching learning in search of quality education. Learners of present generation do not prefer to go to the library and spend quality time with quality books. Today's learning is basically screen-based learning with the support of technology in each and every aspect of education. Teacher should adjust with the changes and expectations of this digital era (Bartal, 2019). Teachers take a huge responsibility in Blended Learning platform, the success of blended setting mostly depends on good communication between students and teachers. Teacher should be a good communicator in creation of a positive and healthy relationship with and between the students. Teachers should also be an active listener so that they will be able to keep patience throughout the teaching learning session and positively respond to students' queries. Being a lifelong Learner, teachers must

eagerly participate in students' learning activities so that they can become co-learner in the entire program. They should be overall a good manager with having deep management skills. In the most suitable way teachers have to manage all the resources (both material and non-material resources) to ensure optimum level of development and also to make teaching learning more achievable. Teacher should make serious attempts to brush students' skills and abilities according to the necessities to boost students learning at adequate level. Overall teachers' role has become more expanded and challenging also in Blended Learning environment as they have to handle their teaching task in both online and in-campus teaching learning process.

Present Status of Education in 21st Century

Teacher education is the way to enlighten teachers by enchanting their skills and competencies. Since the beginning, there are many attempts made for the development of education. Modern education is not based on knowledge formation only; rather it puts emphasis on making the sense of dignity and self reliance among students, manifestation of innovative powers, cultivating several values among children and enhancement of learning capacity through the random use of science and technology. Blended Learning is proved as a new and innovative way to facilitate the entire teaching learning process. In Blended Learning setting, there are lots of changes in teaching strategies in compare with the traditional classroom teaching. Both the abilities and efforts are important for teachers as well as students to make the education successful in a Blended Learning platform. It ensures the improvement of content knowledge in both qualitative and quantitative way. Although Blended Learning is not a completely new approach, it has become increasingly popular as well as relevant in the education of 21st century because of the rapid development of technology and changing needs of both time and learners.

This approach works as a significant tool that helps learners in developing relevant skills in this 21st century such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration etc. A teacher can use different mode as per their choice in content delivery, taking feedback, evaluation of students that are relevant with the teaching-learning. It also increases students' active participation throughout the process and makes education more accessible to the students as per their needs or necessities. Learners of all stages are highly attracted with technological gadgets; today's new students can be considered as Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001). It also provides students more freedom and flexibility; they have own choice in their learning. Teachers in Blended Learning setting act like facilitators who enhance students' learning in accordance with their own convenience and it increases the level of students' satisfaction in their learning.

We all are going through the age of globalization where we partially or entirely depend on internet usage in different aspects of our life. The world people are connected to each other through the random use of internet and our knowledge is becoming extended gradually with this help of technology in educational context. Blended Learning platform can stimulate the students in increasing social interaction with both of the teachers and students. It enables students in making technology more effective and relevant for learning in this 21st century education. This dynamic platform of education leads students towards education according to their own pace. However it is considered as more student centric approach in compare to the traditional classroom teaching. The main principle of psychology is individual difference which is given more importance in this educational setting and students can learn in more comfortable way with their personal needs and interests. There is a strong need of individualisation in education mostly in higher level. The uniform traditional classroom can no longer meet the educational needs of individuals. Hence, the demand of Blended Learning setting is increasing day by day to focus the individual needs of students. It is an effective way of teaching learning which increases students' motivation and achievements (Muxtorjonovna, 2020). It should always be kept in mind that individual difference is the most important concern of educational psychology and each student has different strengths and weaknesses. Teacher should carefully handle all these matters in educational setting. Blended Learning is not only fruitful in new normal era but also helpful in developing 21st century skills

among students including information literacy, problem solving, critical thinking and so on (Thahir et al., 2023). It allows educational institutions to develop more personalised strategies to make students benefited according to their desirable learning goals.

Conclusion

Recently we have got recovery from the evil effect of pandemic situation caused by Covid-19 and a gradual return occurred from online classes to face-to-face teaching learning again. The pandemic has changed not only education system but also the whole context of human life. It was not that technology was not used in teaching learning previously, but during pandemic it was globally introduced as the only media of connecting students with teachers and also in continuation of teaching learning process when the educational institutions were instructed for temporary closure. The formal education system has taken its own place by face-to-face interaction among students and teachers; still there is a need of taking technological support in each and every aspect of education. In that case, Blended Learning is an innovative approach that ensures quality education by blending the platform of online and offline education together in teaching learning scenario. It is that kind of teaching learning platform that blends traditional classroom technology with computer mediated learning activities to deliver adequate knowledge to the students. Blended Learning purposefully integrates the best of synchronous and asynchronous learning approaches to fulfil the specific educational goals (Levin et al., 2013). In order to provide the best learning environment, attempts are made to combine face to face and online activities with different types of synchronous and asynchronous tools. Furthermore, Blended Learning can be considered worldwide as a future delivery system of education (Rani, Gandhi & Patil, 2020). It is an ideal strategy for both of teachers and students to make clear concept about the topics with the use of technology with having the facility of spending quality face to face time in educational setting and also maximizing the effectiveness of educational program.

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