BENEFITS OF BLENDED LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT : Blended learning is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some elements of student control over time and place. Technology is driving factor in the present generation in which digital automation, artificial intelligence, mobile supercomputing, intelligent robots are at its momentum. The present education system demands high innovative and competent environment at International level. One such approach is Blended Learning. The objective of the present paper is to analyze the concept of blended learning, tools used in blended learning, advantages of blended learning.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Definition, Benefits of Blended Learning, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Blended learning is a combination of offline and online education which enables students to interact with the instructor, study material, and other students both through physical classroom and online platforms. The idea of blended education makes learning easy and more productive which is why this interpretation of digital learning is promising in the long run and will become the new normal. Blended learning , or the integration of face-to-face and online instruction Graham (2013), is widely adopted across higher education with some scholars referring to it as the "new traditional model" The progression in digital methods for education was imminent even before the unpredictable onset of COVID-19. However, this pandemic consequently redesigned the scenario of education rapidly and made us realize the importance and need for technology in education. As Covid-19 forced the requirement for social distancing, this outcome hit every sector significantly, which includes education. Students and teachers faced diverse challenges in these difficult

times of Covid, giving rise to methods that can help avoid social interaction and at the same time, ensure the continuation of quality education. Students and educational institutions were forced to adopt distance learning methods like e-learning, virtual classrooms, online repositories, etc.

It is justified to deduce that the integration of information technology in education has been accelerated by the pandemic. This crisis opened gates for opportunities in the education sector for the incorporation of digital methods. Covid-19 has also proven that integrated learning is very convenient and flexible for both the learners and tutors, which makes it safe to assume that online education will eventually become an integral component of the education system.

The National Education Policy has given a rare glimpse in what can be achieved through the transformation of education. The new NEP clearly states that it is time to take on a policy that is undoubtedly student centric, or what can be safely put down as Education .The time has indeed come to recognize the fact that the student is the main stakeholder and that efforts must be taken to make the system respond to their dreams and aspirations. In this line of thinking the new policy gives the acceptability of many modes of learning including that of face to face learning.

With emergence of digital technologies and the emerging importance of technology for teaching-learning at all levels from school to higher education, the NEP 2020 recommends for use of blended models of learning. The NEP-2020 states that while promoting digital learning and education, the importance of face-to-face in-person learning is fully recognized. Accordingly, different effective models of blended learning will be identified for appropriate replication for different subjects.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) are continuously working towards bringing revolutionary changes in the higher education sphere and, collectively, believe that the rapidly changing global perspectives demand a radical change in our teaching pedagogy as well. UGC has recommended blended learning under which up to 40 per cent of a course can be taught online and the rest 60 per cent through traditional, offline methods, at all higher educational institutions..

The following are some of the tools used in blended-learning by educators. These tools are effectively used in teaching and learning objectives of students in higher education.

Learning Management Systems

A learning management system, or LMS, is often the technological cornerstone of a blended learning environment. An LMS is an integrated software application to deliver content and resources online, to provide interaction or collaborative work spaces, and to manage complete student, course and programmer administrative functions, including registration, assessment and analytics.

Web Conferencing

Web conferencing is used in blended learning as an online counterpart to classroom-based tutorials, seminars or any synchronous (real-time) learning activity, such as collaborative, project- based work. Web conferencing tools are usually highly multi modal, with simultaneous video, voice, text chat, whiteboard annotations and screen sharing, making them rich and dynamic — but also complex — learning environments the more powerful web conferencing tools, such as Adobe.

Digital Textbooks

Digital textbooks, or e-texts, potentially offer significant advantages over printed texts, lower initial and updating costs; improved accessibility, flexibility and customization (including localized material); and richer learning experiences through multimedia content, embedded assessments, and interactivity. They are often considered key components of educational reform, and several jurisdictions have begun mandating the widespread adoption of digital texts.

Blogs and Wikis

Blogs and wikis are online writing tools and can receive feed back from their peers. In blended learning blogs are primarily used for individual, reflective writing, while wikis can be very effective for collaborative research and writing activities. Wikis can also be effectively used for collaborative class planning or syllabi, as often found in connectivity MOOCs (cMOOCs).

E-portfolios

Electronic portfolios, or e-portfolios, are collections of writing, documents and other artifacts maintained individually by students to demonstrate their learning over a course or programme.. In this way, an e-portfolio becomes more than a mechanical assessment exercise; it encourages learners to take a broader, holistic view of their learning, to understand their own learning progress over time and to find meaning in the work they have done.

Some of the advantages of blended learning are as follows:

- Blended learning methods enable students to explore information or guidance online, which can be accessed any time they need and classroom learning helps to build better relations between the learner and the teacher.
- Education is not just about academics but also learning time management, discipline, and blending learning helps both students and teachers to learn according to their own pace and schedule.

- Extra-curricular and various other hands-on activities help students to build their social-personality effectively and online learning offers a wider selection of content and information they need for the overall physical and psychological development of their personality.

- Blended learning makes it easy for learners to communicate about their assignments, announcements, test results or anything else they might need to know from their teachers and makes assessment and evaluation more personalized and effective.

- Education becomes less expensive and more accessible to a wide range of learners.

- Blending learning helps students to explore technology and use different tools or techniques for learning, for example, PowerPoint, Virtual classrooms, Video lectures, etc.

- Blended learning improves the quality of education and information assimilation while making teaching more efficient and productive.

- The use of eLearning materials increases a student's ability to set appropriate learning goals and take charge of his or her own learning, which develops an ability that will be translatable across all subjects

CONCLUSION

Blended learning is emerging as one of the most popular pedagogical concepts and with the advancement of technology and learning analytics the boom is going to be experienced. There should be more studies guiding teachers or administrators on how to create a successful blend.

Blended learning environment increases student interest: When technology is integrated into college lessons, learners are more likely to be interested in, focused on, and excited about the subjects they are studying. The tools used in the classroom such as PowerPoint, interactive whiteboards and audience response systems, virtual communication tools such as audio files, discussion boards, e-lists, discussion groups, chat or conferencing, email, news groups, polling, questionnaires, web forms and videoconferencing; social-networking software such as instant messaging and phone calls, podcasts, social-networking sites, video clips, virtual worlds, weblogs and wikis; e-learning systems such as VLEs, conferencing systems, group collaboration software and group sites and mobile learning using mobile phones, laptops and tablet PCs.

. This engagement and interaction with the resources keeps students focused for longer periods then they would be with books or paper resources, this engagement also helps develop learning through exploration and research.

Its time to integrate constructivist and collaborative models into blended learning environments and aim to educate students in more creative and innovative way.

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