

Blended Learning: The Pathway to Higher Education in Post-Pandemic Era

Dr. Jayshree Anandrao Bhagat

Assistant Professor, P.G.T.D. of Education

R. T. M. Nagpur University, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, teaching-learning process is no longer focused on students putting pen to paper and memorising facts. Instead, it is centred on using technology enabled tools and platforms to assist traditional pedagogical practices. In this new teaching environment, teaching and learning practices are continually changing to fit the expectations, learning styles and interests of students. Technology has been at the core of the most recent innovations, altering the traditional classroom. This has resulted in the emergence of blended learning, where students and teachers are no longer solely constrained to interact face-to-face; instead, they now have a plenty of tools and technologies readily available at their fingertips.

COVID-19 Pandemic has caused many unexpected and profound changes in the Education Sector around the world. Due to the closures of educational institutions, India has also witnessed a large number of students suffering from huge learning gaps. Educational institutions worldwide positively responded to the pandemic by **going online**. With the current priority of reopening the schools and colleges and bringing the students back to the classrooms in a safe manner, blended learning is seen as a fundamental part of the future of education. Blended learning is a way of learning combining traditional and modern learning models, with the help of digital learning platforms and tools. The power of blended learning methods lies in their ability to improve the learning experience for both the teachers and the students. Blended learning combines the flexibility and accessibility of technology with the in-person interaction and support of a teacher.

II. WHAT IS BLENDED LEARNING?

Blended learning, also known as technology-mediated instruction, web-enhanced instruction, or mixed-mode instruction, is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with physical place-based classroom methods. It is an instructional model that combines both online and offline instruction and uses online components to supplement face-to-face learning. It combines in-person classroom instruction with online and virtual components to get the benefits of both. The result is an enhancement of in-person teaching with the ease, flexibility and accessibility of technology. It also allows students to simultaneously master their coursework alongside the technology they are using to learn it, preparing them for a digital future. Blended learning lets students progress at their own pace. Students can refer to course concepts and material as needed and can advance when they feel ready.

III. INTEGRATION OF BLENDED LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Blended Learning can be integrated in Higher Education by following ways-

1. Create Harmony between Online and Face-to-Face Instruction

For blended learning to be successful, online learning and face-to-face learning need to be differentiated and harmonised. The online portion of blended courses should serve to enhance the effectiveness of classroom learning. For example, recorded lectures can serve as the basis of online learning. This helps lay the groundwork for in-person learning, which could then be used for seminars, tutorials, and different learning activities.

Reversing this type of blended learning is another option. Depending on the subject taught, it may be beneficial to use digitally enabled learning opportunities such as discussion forums or video conferencing to add a more collaborative element to in-person lectures. In this type of blended learning, educators can follow up on topics of interest that come up in the online element, giving students space to ask clarifying questions and further explore issues.



2. Provide Flexible Learning Options

A blended model means that learning is no longer constrained by the timing and location of a traditional lecture. Instead, **coupling face-to-face learning with online instruction can provide students and educators with more flexibility than the traditional classroom can.** In this environment, students have access to supplementary course material such as readings or recorded lectures. This means students can choose when and where they study as well as how often they access material to fully understand a concept.

Blended learning also gives instructors additional flexibility. This learning environment helps expand the range of pedagogies allowing educators to share additional resources such as videos or supplementary information compared to traditional face-to-face teaching. Additionally, instructors have flexibility in providing their students with feedback. In blended learning, this is no longer limited to writing a letter grade on a test or exam and giving it back to students the following week. Instead, educators can provide feedback instantaneously or through different mediums such as video and audio.

3. Integration of Digital Tools

Integration of digital tools such as videoconferencing software helps faculty to create, run and record class sessions simultaneously with in-person classes. This not only helps online learners collaborate with those participating in face-to-face instruction but also provides in-person learners with additional resources to use.

4. MOOC for Higher Education

MOOC stands for Massive Open Online Courses. They have been around for a decade but witnessed a massive surge in the users during the pandemic especially. It allows the learner to get access to the best educational content from prestigious universities or institutions. India's journey with various MOOC platforms like SWAYAM, has been a success story in the mission of providing quality education, support lifelong learning, and increase enrolments in the higher education of the country. Platforms like Coursera, Udemy are providing opportunities for Indian students to enhance their skills to the best of their knowledge around the world. These platforms widen opportunities for the learners when pandemic restricted their physical movement to go out and learn the skills. MOOC courses can be integrated with face to face learning and can be proved substantial to recover from the learning and the job loss.

5. Flipped Classroom

With this, students first interact with new material and concepts through homework. Teachers then use in-person class time to put these new ideas into practice. This differs from the traditional model where students first learn in the classroom.

6. Adapt Traditional Assessments to fit Blended Learning Expectations

The assessment strategy in a blended course should include both online and in-person assessments. In a blended class, this may consist of using different digital tools such as online quizzes or self-assessments that students can complete on their own time. These types of **formative assessments** can be used to provide students with immediate feedback and to gauge learner retention. On the other hand, face-to-face instruction can help facilitate **summative assessments**. In this learning environment, students can complete tests or exams to demonstrate what they have learned or show mastery of specific benchmarks or standards.

IV. BENEFITS OF BLENDED LEARNING

Following are the benefits of integrating Blended Learning in Higher Education-

1. Blended learning combines the best aspects of online and in-person learning. It gives students an element of control, improves communication and is incredibly flexible.
2. Blended learning lets students progress at their own pace. Students can refer to course concepts and material as needed and can advance when they feel ready.
3. With Blended learning, an environment of autonomy empowers students to learn, study and troubleshoot questions on their own, while guidance is always a click away. This can help students build discipline, independence and problem-solving skills as they learn the material.

4. Technology-infused learning in blended learning helps in enhancing communication for teachers, parents and students both synchronously and asynchronously. Students can use discussion forums to ask questions, discuss course content and assignments, and work together in assigned groups and sections.
5. The integration of technological tools not only ensures that students can use material any time, from anywhere—it also improves accessibility for all students regardless of their learning needs. Some technology tools that can enhance learning experiences in blended environments include features that make content more accessible to students who use assistive devices, as well as features that allow content to be accessed on demand.
6. In blended learning, students have unrestricted access to course material and content such as videos, presentations, and readings. This not only helps students refer to the material after an in-person class but also functions as a substitute for in-person learning.
7. It can also create equitable learning experiences for students by supporting online, offline and mobile functionalities, ensuring that all students can learn anytime, anywhere.

V. CONCLUSION

During Covid-19, Educational institutions worldwide positively responded to the pandemic by **going online**. With the current priority of reopening the schools and colleges and bringing the students back to the classrooms in a safe manner, Blended Learning is seen as a fundamental part of the future of education. Blended learning is a way of learning combining traditional and modern learning models, with the help of digital learning platforms and tools. Now in the post-pandemic era, with the integration of Blended Learning, Higher education institutions can rethink about educational delivery to provide more flexibility without compromising the quality of learning. This can optimise the delivery of impactful education while supporting equitable experiences for all students. Higher education institutions can expand the reach and enhance the quality of their instruction, through current disruptions and beyond, while educators can push the pedagogical and technological envelope to drive learner success. Lastly and most importantly, students can be empowered by Blended Learning environments to take greater control over how, where and when they learn.

REFERENCES

- [1]. National Education Policy, 2022
- [2]. Blended Mode of teaching and learning: Concept Note, University Grants commission, New Delhi
- [3]. https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Innovative_Education_Technologies_for_21