

Understanding Student Engagement in Blended Learning Environments at the Secondary Level: An Action Research Study

Neena Sahani

Junior Project Fellow, Psyforu Research International

Email: [neenasahaniict\[at\]psyforu.com](mailto:neenasahaniict[at]psyforu.com)

Abstract: *This paper examines reflective action research as a practical and evidence-informed approach for improving learner motivation in blended secondary classrooms. It argues that motivation should be understood not merely as an internal learner trait but as a classroom outcome shaped by pedagogy, teacher feedback, digital design, peer interaction, emotional safety, cultural relevance, inclusion, and learner agency. Drawing on reflective practice, action research, technological pedagogical content knowledge, teacher professional development, differentiated instruction, inclusive education, student well-being, and Indian Knowledge System-based contextual pedagogy, the paper proposes a reflective action research model for diagnosing motivational barriers, designing blended interventions, collecting evidence, and revising classroom practice. The paper is situated within the policy vision of NEP 2020, NCF 2005, NCFTE 2009, NPST 2023, MANODARPAN, and NCERT well-being resources. It concludes that reflective action research can help teachers transform blended classrooms into motivationally supportive, inclusive, participatory, and culturally meaningful learning environments.*

Keywords: learner motivation, reflective action research, blended learning, secondary education, student engagement, teacher reflection, digital pedagogy, Indian Knowledge System

1. Introduction

Motivation is one of the most important determinants of student engagement and learning. A motivated learner is more likely to attend class, complete tasks, ask questions, persist through difficulty, collaborate with peers, reflect on learning, and take responsibility for academic progress. In secondary education, motivation becomes especially significant because learners face increasing curricular demands, examination pressure, peer comparison, digital distraction, emotional changes, and career-related uncertainty. When motivation weakens, students may become passive, irregular, dependent on teacher explanation, reluctant to participate, or disengaged from both classroom and digital learning.

Blended classrooms offer new possibilities for improving motivation. They combine face-to-face teaching with digital learning resources, online assignments, multimedia content, discussion platforms, formative quizzes, recorded lessons, and flexible learning opportunities. In principle, blended learning can increase motivation by making learning more interactive, personalized, visual, accessible, and self-paced. However, in practice, blended learning often fails to motivate students when digital tools are used only for content delivery, repetitive assignments, or mechanical assessment. Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, and Bond (2020) caution that emergency remote teaching should not be confused with planned online learning. This distinction is equally relevant for blended classrooms, where technology must be pedagogically designed rather than casually added.

Learner motivation in blended classrooms depends heavily on teacher reflection. Teachers must observe how students respond to digital and face-to-face activities, identify why some students remain unmotivated, design interventions,

collect evidence, and revise teaching strategies. Schön's (1983) idea of the reflective practitioner explains that professionals improve practice through reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. In classroom contexts, this means that teachers must think while teaching and after teaching, using learner responses as evidence for improvement. Singh (2014a) similarly presents action research as a systematic method for educators to investigate classroom problems and improve teaching-learning processes. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes holistic development, learner-centred pedagogy, experiential learning, digital integration, critical thinking, and teacher empowerment (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). The National Curriculum Framework 2005 argues that learning should be connected with the child's life and should move away from rote memorization (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2005). The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education 2009 emphasizes the preparation of professional and humane teachers (National Council for Teacher Education, 2009), while NPST 2023 highlights professional standards related to learner engagement, reflective practice, and teacher development (National Council for Teacher Education, 2023). These policy directions show that improving learner motivation is not an isolated classroom concern; it is central to educational quality. This paper examines reflective action research as a tool for improving learner motivation in blended secondary classrooms. It argues that motivation can be strengthened when teachers use evidence-informed reflection to redesign digital resources, classroom interaction, feedback, differentiated tasks, inclusive participation, well-being support, and culturally rooted learning experiences.

2. Learner Motivation in Blended Classrooms

Learner motivation refers to the internal and external conditions that influence a student's willingness to participate, persist, and invest effort in learning. In blended classrooms, motivation is shaped by several factors. These include the relevance of content, clarity of tasks, quality of teacher feedback, peer interaction, digital accessibility, emotional climate, learner confidence, perceived success, autonomy, and cultural connection.

Mishra and Koehler's (2006) technological pedagogical content knowledge framework is useful for understanding motivation in blended classrooms. Technology motivates learners only when it is meaningfully connected with pedagogy and content. A video, quiz, simulation, or discussion forum can increase motivation if it supports understanding, participation, feedback, and autonomy. However, the same tool can reduce motivation if it is poorly explained, excessively used, unrelated to classroom discussion, or experienced as additional burden. Shulman's (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge also remains important. Teachers must transform subject matter into forms that students find understandable and meaningful. Motivation increases when students experience success, relevance, curiosity, challenge, and support. Therefore, teacher knowledge is central to motivational design.

3. Reflective Action Research and Motivation

Reflective action research provides a practical method for improving learner motivation because it allows teachers to study motivational problems in their own classrooms. Rather than assuming that students are lazy, careless, or distracted, the teacher investigates the conditions that affect motivation. Singh (2014a) emphasizes that action research helps educators address immediate classroom problems through systematic inquiry. In blended learning, such inquiry is essential because motivational barriers may be visible in both digital and face-to-face modes. The first stage of reflective action research is identifying the motivational problem. A teacher may notice that students do not watch pre-class videos, do not complete online quizzes, show low participation in group discussion, avoid reflective writing, or appear uninterested in classroom tasks. The teacher must define the problem specifically. For example, "students are unmotivated" is too broad, whereas "only 30 percent of students complete online preparatory tasks before classroom discussion" is more researchable. The second stage is diagnosing causes. Low motivation may result from unclear instructions, lack of feedback, weak relevance, digital fatigue, fear of failure, limited access, monotonous teaching, excessive workload, or low confidence. Diagnosis may involve student feedback, observation, digital platform data, informal interviews, classroom notes, and analysis of student work. The third stage is planning an intervention. The teacher designs a strategy to address the motivational barrier. If students do not complete pre-class tasks, the teacher may reduce the length of digital content, add guiding questions, connect the task with classroom discussion, and provide recognition for completion. If students lack confidence, the teacher may use scaffolded tasks and peer support. If students feel disconnected from content, the

teacher may use local examples, Indian Knowledge System-based contexts, or real-life applications. The fourth stage is implementation. The teacher applies the intervention in the blended classroom. During implementation, the teacher continues to reflect-in-action, modifying support as needed. Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-in-action is important here because classroom situations are dynamic. The fifth stage is evidence collection. Evidence may include task completion rates, participation records, student reflections, quiz attempts, quality of responses, attendance, observation notes, feedback forms, and assessment performance. Guskey (2002) argues that teacher change is strengthened when teachers see evidence of improvement in student outcomes. Therefore, motivation-focused action research must collect evidence of change. The sixth stage is reflection and revision. The teacher analyses whether motivation improved, which students benefited, which barriers remained, and what modifications are required. This creates a continuous improvement cycle.

4. Motivational Barriers in Blended Secondary Classrooms

Several motivational barriers commonly appear in blended secondary classrooms. One major barrier is low perceived relevance. Students may not feel motivated when they do not see the connection between the lesson and real life. NCF 2005 emphasizes the importance of connecting school knowledge with life outside school (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2005). Teachers can improve motivation by using examples from students' environment, local community, current issues, and cultural context. A second barrier is digital overload. When teachers assign too many videos, quizzes, worksheets, or online tasks without integration, students may experience fatigue. Hodges et al. (2020) remind educators that effective online learning requires planning, not mere transfer of classroom content to digital platforms. Blended learning should reduce unnecessary burden and improve meaningful learning. A third barrier is lack of autonomy. Students are more motivated when they have some choice in learning. Teachers can provide choice in topics, formats, project outputs, peer roles, or reflection modes. For example, students may choose between writing a short response, preparing a concept map, recording an audio explanation, or creating a digital poster. A fourth barrier is fear of failure. Many secondary students avoid participation because they fear being judged by peers or teachers. Reflective teachers create emotionally safe classrooms where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities. MANODARPAN emphasizes psychosocial support for student mental health and well-being (Ministry of Education, Government of India, n.d.), and NCERT's mental health and well-being resources highlight the importance of supportive school environments (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2022). A fifth barrier is lack of feedback. Motivation decreases when students submit work but receive no meaningful response. Feedback should be timely, specific, encouraging, and improvement-oriented. It should help students understand what they did well and what they can improve. A sixth barrier is unequal access. A seventh barrier is lack of differentiation. Singh (2014c, 2014d) argues that learners differ in styles, readiness, and needs. If all students

receive the same task in the same format, some may feel bored while others feel overwhelmed. Differentiated instruction can improve motivation by matching tasks with learner readiness and interest.

5. Reflective Strategies for Improving Motivation

Teachers can use several reflective strategies to improve motivation in blended classrooms. The first strategy is motivational diagnosis through student voice. Teachers can use short surveys, reflection slips, digital polls, or informal discussions to understand what motivates or discourages students. Student voice helps teachers move beyond assumptions. The second strategy is purposeful digital task design. Digital tasks should be short, clear, meaningful, and connected with classroom learning. Instead of asking students to watch a long video passively, the teacher can provide a short video with guiding questions and use student responses in the next class. This connection increases accountability and relevance. The third strategy is formative feedback. Online quizzes, classroom questions, peer review, and teacher comments can motivate learners when used constructively. Feedback should not merely judge performance; it should guide improvement. Guskey (2002) highlights the importance of student outcomes in teacher change, and formative feedback provides evidence for both students and teachers. The fourth strategy is differentiated blended instruction. Teachers can provide varied resources and tasks according to learner needs. Some students may need basic explanations, while others may need enrichment. Some may prefer visual resources, while others may need textual summaries or teacher-guided practice. Singh's work on differentiated instruction supports such responsive pedagogy (Singh, 2014c, 2014d). The fifth strategy is peer-supported motivation. Group work, peer explanation, collaborative projects, and discussion roles can increase motivation by creating shared responsibility. However, group work must be structured. Roles such as questioner, summarizer, connector, presenter, and reflector can ensure balanced participation. The sixth strategy is reflective journaling. Students can write brief reflections on what they learned, what they found difficult, how they participated, and what support they need. This develops self-awareness and gives teachers valuable motivational evidence. The seventh strategy is culturally rooted contextualization. Indian Knowledge System-based examples can make learning more meaningful when used carefully. NEP 2020 emphasizes rootedness in India, holistic development, and experiential learning (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). IKS themes related to ecology, ethics, mathematics, language, yoga, mindful living, leadership, and local knowledge can increase relevance and emotional connection. Singh's works on the Vedas and Upanishads provide resources for reflective discussions on mindful living, leadership, cosmology, and contemporary challenges (Singh, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e, 2024f, 2024g). The eighth strategy is recognition of effort. Motivation improves when teachers acknowledge progress, persistence, improvement, and collaboration, not only high marks. Recognition should be inclusive and sincere.

6. Motivation, Inclusion, and Well-Being

Learner motivation is closely connected with inclusion and well-being. Students cannot be expected to remain motivated if they feel excluded, anxious, unsupported, or invisible. Singh (2014e, 2014f) argues that inclusive education requires transformation in classroom practices to ensure participation of diverse learners. In blended classrooms, inclusion must address both digital and face-to-face barriers. Inclusive motivation means that every student receives opportunities to experience success and participation. Teachers should identify students who are digitally absent, socially silent, cognitively confused, emotionally anxious, or academically discouraged. Action research helps teachers study these patterns and design support. Well-being is also essential. Secondary students may experience stress due to examinations, comparison, family expectations, digital overload, and uncertainty. MANODARPAN and NCERT well-being resources highlight the need for psychosocial support, emotional safety, and teacher sensitivity (Ministry of Education, Government of India, n.d.; National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2022). Motivational strategies should therefore avoid excessive pressure and competition. Instead, teachers should use encouragement, manageable goals, balanced workload, peer support, and reflective practices. IKS-based mindful living can also support motivation and well-being when used in age-appropriate ways. Singh's works on Vedic wisdom and Upanishadic thought can provide reflective material on self-discipline, balance, inner growth, and purposeful living (Singh, 2024d, 2024f, 2024g). Such content should be used through dialogue and reflection, not preaching. Students may reflect on questions such as how discipline supports learning, how balance helps manage stress, or how self-awareness improves study habits.

7. Teacher Professional Development for Motivational Blended Pedagogy

Improving learner motivation requires professional teacher competence. Teachers need to understand motivation, engagement, digital pedagogy, inclusion, feedback, and reflection. Teacher professional development must therefore move beyond technical training in digital tools. It should help teachers design motivationally supportive blended learning. Darling-Hammond (2006) argues that teacher education must prepare teachers for complex classrooms and deep understanding of learners. Desimone (2009) emphasizes that effective professional development should be content-focused, coherent, active, sustained, and collaborative. Avalos (2011) views professional development as a continuous process shaped by context and teacher learning. Guskey (2002) emphasizes that teacher change is linked with evidence of improved student outcomes. These perspectives support reflective action research as a professional development model. Fullan (2007) argues that educational change requires meaning-making and sustained commitment. Blended learning reform cannot succeed if teachers use technology mechanically. Teachers must understand how digital tools affect motivation, participation, feedback, and inclusion. Professional learning communities can help teachers share motivational strategies, analyse evidence, and improve practice. NPST 2023

emphasizes professional standards for teachers, including learner-centred practice, professional growth, and reflective engagement (National Council for Teacher Education, 2023). Motivation-focused action research can help teachers demonstrate these professional capacities.

8. Proposed Reflective Action Research Model for Motivation

A practical model for improving learner motivation in blended classrooms may include seven stages: observe, listen, diagnose, design, implement, evaluate, and refine. In the observe stage, the teacher studies motivational indicators such as attendance, participation, digital task completion, quality of responses, persistence, and classroom interaction. In the listen stage, the teacher collects student voice through feedback, reflection journals, informal discussion, or short surveys. In the diagnose stage, the teacher identifies the causes of low motivation. These may include access problems, unclear tasks, lack of relevance, fear of failure, low confidence, digital fatigue, or insufficient feedback. In the design stage, the teacher develops a blended intervention. This may include shorter digital resources, choice-based tasks, IKS-based contextual examples, peer collaboration, formative feedback, differentiated materials, or well-being check-ins. In the implement stage, the teacher applies the intervention and observes student responses. In the evaluate stage, the teacher collects evidence of motivational change. Evidence may include improved completion rates, richer discussion, better student reflections, increased confidence, and improved learning outcomes. In the refine stage, the teacher revises the intervention for the next cycle. This model reflects the action research orientation of Singh (2014a) and the reflective practice orientation of Schön (1983).

9. Educational Implications

The first implication is that motivation should be treated as a pedagogical responsibility, not merely a learner trait. Teachers and schools must create conditions that support motivation. The second implication is that blended learning should be designed around meaningful participation. Digital tools should be used for inquiry, feedback, collaboration, reflection, and self-paced learning. The third implication is that student voice should be included in instructional improvement. Learners can provide valuable evidence about what supports or weakens motivation. The fourth implication is that motivation must be inclusive. Teachers should identify which students are left behind in digital and face-to-face modes and provide differentiated support. The fifth implication is that well-being must be integrated into motivational pedagogy. Emotional safety, manageable workload, encouragement, and supportive feedback are essential. The sixth implication is that IKS can increase motivation by connecting learning with culture, values, local knowledge, and reflective living, provided it is used critically and inclusively. The seventh implication is that teacher professional development should include reflective action research. Teachers should be trained to investigate motivational problems and improve practice through evidence.

10. Conclusion

Reflective action research offers a powerful method for improving learner motivation in blended secondary classrooms. Motivation is not produced automatically by technology, nor is it entirely dependent on student personality. It is shaped by teaching design, feedback, classroom climate, digital accessibility, inclusion, cultural relevance, and emotional support. Reflective teachers can identify motivational barriers, design interventions, collect evidence, and revise pedagogy through continuous cycles of action research. This paper has argued that blended learning can motivate learners when digital and face-to-face components are meaningfully connected. It has also shown that motivation is closely linked with student engagement, well-being, inclusion, differentiated instruction, teacher professional development, and Indian Knowledge System-based contextual learning. The discussion aligns with NEP 2020, NCF 2005, NCFTE 2009, NPST 2023, MANODARPAN, and NCERT well-being resources. The future of blended secondary education depends not merely on digital platforms but on reflective teachers who can create motivationally supportive learning environments. Reflective action research enables teachers to transform blended classrooms into spaces where students feel interested, capable, supported, included, and connected with learning.

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