

Blending Learning: Effective Use of Technology in Classrooms

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Abstract: *Nowadays, many learning strategies exist, such as computer-based learning, web-based learning, and others. E-learning is an emerging tool that uses advanced technology to provide training and development in higher education. This particular system is used as a reason to replace the traditional approach that has been used for a long time. However, E-learning still has some limitation and they need to be overcome. Blending of E-learning with traditional learning includes an integration of face-to-face classroom learning with technology enhanced online material. It provides the convenience, speed and cost effectiveness of e-learning with the personal touch of traditional learning. Blended Learning is a mixture of online learning and classroom learning that contains some of the facilities of online courses with the presence of face-to-face communication. It requires new pedagogic skills in order that the learner gains the most from online programs. Oliver (2005) and his colleagues, provided three key elements as guidance for teachers and educators on how to design and develop blended learning. These elements are: learning tasks, learning resources and learning support. The blended learning environment motivates students to participate in online classes more eagerly as they have the opportunity to meet and discuss virtually with their teachers and classmates. The present paper concludes that blended learning approaches offer the most flexible and scalable route to E-Learning.*

Keywords: Blended Learning, E-learning, Traditional Learning

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the implementation of information and communication technology (ICT) in the field of education is a very common phenomenon. The introduction of ICT in education has made revolution in a way of how educators and teachers deliver learning content and materials in order to achieve the learning objectives. For a few decades, before the emergence of the e-learning educators and teachers usually followed traditional approach in their teaching. In the traditional approach, students normally learn from the instructor-led approach or in other words, the instructor meets the learners in face to face set up every day. Due to the great advantages of e-learning, it was accepted by educators and teachers to enrich the traditional approach. E-learning is one of the web-based learning which is popular and it gains educators' and learners' attention due to its flexibility and other advantages. It is an emerging tool that uses advanced technology to provide learning and development in higher education. However, E-learning still has some limitation like: lack of social interaction, the need of the knowledge of computer and internet skills etc.. Also soft skills cannot be taught via e-learning and it is difficult to engage some students in productive and meaningful work in e-learning environment. E-learning is very good for tactical-type learning, but is perhaps not the best medium for teaching curricula, which are deep and broad (Beckett 2004). Due to these limitations of E-Learning a new approach 'blended learning' has been developed. It is argued that successful education involves building relationships from the interaction between the student and his or her instructor and among the students. Blended learning is a blend of fully online and face-to-face instruction. The blended learning environment motivates students to participate in online classes more eagerly as they have the opportunity to meet and discuss virtually with their teachers and classmates. This

approach offers the most flexible and scalable route to e-learning.

2. Blended Learning

The term '*blended learning*' actually describes the manner in which E-learning is integrated or combined with a more traditional classroom setup, offering independent study. This particular learning approach makes sure that the audience remains engaged and their overall learning experience is productive. Blended learning is becoming an educational issue, especially with the new development of e-learning technology and globalization. It merges many aspects of e-learning such as: web-based instruction, streaming video, audio, synchronous and asynchronous communication, etc; with traditional "face-to-face" learning. It has been given many names: blended learning, mediated learning, hybrid instruction, web-assisted instruction or web-enhanced instruction. In recent years, blended learning has been used and it gained popularity in education and training. Blended learning has gone through an evolutionary process of many years and different institution has given a different description of it. Rob and Jordan (2004) claimed that blended learning is a mixture of online learning and classroom that contain some of the facilities of online courses with the presence of face-to-face communication. It requires new pedagogic skills in order that the learner gains the most from online programs. In 2010, U.S. Department of Education found blended learning courses produce statistically better results than their face-to-face equivalents. According to E-Learning India (2007) blended learning model comprises of the following elements which are mixed in varied proportions to meet different organization's requirements.

- Learning through information
- Learning through interaction

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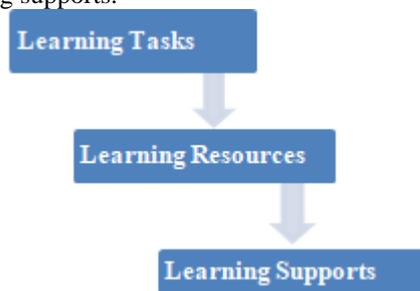
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- Learning through collaboration
- Learning through the classroom

So, we can say that blended learning involves the appropriate blend of different components which includes courses, contents, feedback, and many other things. This means that the blended learning can solve the ubiquitous problems associated with most E-Learning models such as speed, scale and impact (E-Learning India 2007).

Blended Learning Environment

Developing a blended learning environment that seeks to produce the high-order learning outcomes sought from university studies involves a deliberate design process. Oliver (2005) and his colleagues, provided three key elements as guidance for teachers and educators on how to design and develop blended learning environment. These elements are: (a) learning tasks, (b) learning resources and (c) learning supports.



1) Learning tasks

Due to a strong learning design framework for e-learning and online applications in higher education, authentic learning is suitable to be used in blended learning environment (Oliver, 2005). He highlighted ten characteristics of authentic activities. These are: (1) have real-world relevance, (2) provide the opportunity to reflect, (3) provide the opportunity for students to collaborate, (4) allow competing solutions and diverse outcomes, (5) seamlessly integrated with assessment, (6) can be integrated and applied across different subject areas and lead beyond domain-specific outcomes, (7) requiring students to define the tasks and subtasks needed to complete the activity, (8) comprise complex tasks to be investigated by students over sustained period of time, (9) provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources, (10) create products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else.

2) Learning resources

The second element that must be considered in designing blended learning is the learning resources (Oliver, 2005). Some guidelines need be followed by educators and teachers to make sure that the resources which will be used in technology-facilitated and in conventional set up have the same quality. These guidelines may be Summed up as follows:

- Resources used support the planned learning.
- Resources' scope
- Resources used are suitable in the current situation.
- Media usage is appropriate
- Resources need to be relevant.

3) Learning support

According to Oliver (2005), learning support is a need to support learners in the learning process. This Support can be in terms of peers, mentors, interaction with the system and teachers. He said that communications and discussions occurred will allow higher order thinking and conceptual development which cannot be achieved in independent learning settings. Also, learners will be encouraged and motivated to participate since they were put up in a set up of community belongingness and involvement.

3. Benefits of Blended Learning

Blended learning provides a complementary balance between e-learning and traditional educational environments. Without the 'blended learning' approach, E-Learning courses can be harder to teach. When students learn through a digital and online media, in addition to traditional methods, such as face-to-face classroom instruction, they are not only empowered and engaged, but are able to learn to experience personalized learning. Some benefits of blending learning may be:

- Blended learning improves the efficacy and efficiency of the entire learning process. It is a key tool for building and sharing cultural understanding on a global basis.
- Blended learning is a new idea of mixing the benefits of face-to-face courses with the benefits of online courses. Blended learning makes education more accessible.
- It offers an active learning environment with flexibility in using resources for the students and provides more time for faculty members to spend with learners in small groups or even individually.
- Utilization of technology in physical classrooms offer extra resources for the students and this is expected to enhance learners' confidence and competence as well as improve the quality of learning.
- It helps the students in deep understanding of topics by using web-based resources as well as active participation in class. It can promote deeper learning, reduce stress, and increase student satisfaction.
- It motivates students to participate in online classes more eagerly as they have the opportunity to meet and discuss virtually with their teachers and classmates.
- It also offers a more successful learning experience since it contains some aspects of traditional classes.
- Blended learning increases the options in greater quality and quantity of human interaction in a learning environment.

4. Conclusion

Blended learning is becoming an increasingly popular method of instruction in schools across America, particularly due to class sizes and the push for digital fluency increase. So, It can be concluded that the potential of this new technology can be maximized when one can see, how best to blend e-learning with existing programs, for the benefits of learners. Blended learning environment is seen to be one of the best learning environments that can be implemented when its advantages are considered as it is learning for all the stakeholders of the learning process, i.e. student, tutor, and institution and no one should take it for

granted. It will be the educators' responsibility to create the best learning environment for their learners. Academic institutions should also make efforts for creating a blended learning environment in order to achieve the learning goals and objectives. It is better for both students and teachers to make good use of all the technology available in a modern classroom

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