

## The Essence of Blended Learning: Challenge and Future

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### ABSTRACT

BLENDED learning is a perfect blend of a modern and traditional way of teaching. The COVID-19 indeed framed a situation to lock everyone in their houses and do all kinds of activities from their home including learning, which gave a major turn to the teaching-learning pedagogy. Now, teaching has adopted an approach that is more hybrid, more technical, and more complex. The study aims to understand the challenges encountered to blended learning including technological issues, content adaptability for blended learning and many more. In this paper, the focus is on the challenges faced by the teachers as well as by the students virtually. The New Education Policy also has a great impact on changing the way of imparting education. As it is a way ahead as far as blended learning is concerned, therefore, understanding the prospects of blended learning and the NEP is also required.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Technology, Challenges, Future Prospect, New Education Policy, COVID 19.

### INTRODUCTION

BLENDED Learning and teaching refer to the mixture of face-to-face classroom learning and online activities. This approach of learning and teaching combines digital learning tools with traditional classroom face-to-face learning (Hrastinski, 2019). It is commonly used in higher education, with some academics calling it the "new traditional model" (Norberg, 2011) or the "normality" in course delivery. However, because of definitional vagueness and institutions' inability to track a creative activity that has often arisen organically, determining the precise degree of its expansion has been difficult (Oliver, 2005).

Students are not needed to be physically present in one location for the technology-mediated components of these learning activities, but they may be connected digitally through online communities. For example, in one blended learning course, students may attend a traditional classroom class given by a teacher while simultaneously completing online components of the course outside of the classroom on an online learning platform. Online learning experiences can supplement or replace classroom teaching time, and online learning can involve varying degrees of an engagement or just time alone in independent study and learning activities. Blended learning is also referred to as mixed-mode learning. These instructional design systems employ a variety of teaching and learning experiences and vary in design and implementation between teachers, programmers, and schools (Martha Cleveland-Innes, 2018).

Technology advancements have changed teaching and learning, as seen by research demonstrating the use of blended learning. This efficacy is essentially tied to the quality of the learning experience, which (Wend, 2006) defines as the range of experiences within the university's concerns in which students see and engage, consequently altering their learning chances. Some critical factors must be addressed to deliver excellent experiences for learners, such as technology, course structure, instructor, technical assistance, assignments (Lionarakis, 2003), student involvement, and learning adaptability.

Blended learning has been used in a variety of designs and has had a significant beneficial impact on the learning process (DeLacey, 2002) of Harvard Business School showed that when online sessions were introduced to regular courses, students not only learned more but their interaction and satisfaction improved as well. Furthermore, blended learning is excellent for students who reside distant from the institution or have other obligations that clash with on-campus class time. Distance learning programs may not provide the learning environment that students seek, or they may not provide certain degrees, such as those that involve experimental work.

Blended mode of teaching and learning was used since 2000 but the pandemic had forced everyone to go digitally. The COVID-19 pandemic is a major problem for education throughout the world since teaching must be done digitally to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 (Rully Charitas Indra Prahmana, 2021). The issue is that some students live in rural locations, yet learning in an interconnected world should be done electronically. This e-learning intends to retain communication with students, improve self-esteem, and boost students' confidence in their abilities amid the Covid-19 epidemic. During the Covid-19 pandemic, universities, too, used

digital media to facilitate student education. With the introduction of the Internet and the World Wide Web, the possibility for access to students all over the world has grown substantially. As a result, online education now offers a wealth of instructional resources in a variety of media and may facilitate both online and offline communication between professors and students, as well as amongst students themselves (Leili Yekefallah, 2021).

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A panel discussion was conducted in 2006 by (Alex Koohang and Johannes Britz). The discussion was on 'Hybrid learning: Advantages, Challenges, Design and Future Direction. The main aim of the panel was to highlight the 4 important points of hybrid or blended learning i.e., the benefits of hybrid or blended learning, the complications in hybrid or blended learning, hybrid or blended learning models, and the prospects of hybrid or blended learning.

Secondary research was conducted with a primary goal to investigate and analyze the available literature on blended learning to know how it has been studied and assessed by various writers working in this field (R.Jayanthi, 2019). Her literature focused on the significance and concept of blended learning and study was focused on the current state of Blended Learning and its prospects for the future. It had been concluded by her study that blended learning removed the cultural and physical barrier and provided flexibility to students and well as teachers.

Researchers (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010) had investigated the nature of hurdles and issues experienced at Saudi institutions when implementing a blended learning method. An overview of the literature on the rationale and designs for blended learning, as well as the state of web-based education in Saudi higher education, is presented. Three major issues associated with implementing blended learning in Saudi higher education are addressed. The adaption of this feature in conventional university culture is a key problem to consider in the deployment of blended learning in Saudi institutions. Another problem that is mentioned is determining the best-blended learning design.

E-learning is an efficient technique of teaching that brings out the best in pupils. To determine students' attitudes regarding e-learning Radha (2020) collected primary data on a national and worldwide scale using Google forms, which included the student population from various schools, colleges, and institutions. The purpose of her research was to investigate the E-learning process among students who were acquainted with web-based technologies. It also aids in the discovery of solutions to improve students' self-study skills. The stratified sampling approach was used in this study, with a sample size of 175 people from all over the world. Her study's findings represented the influence of E-learning, as well as students' enthusiasm in using E-learning resources and their performance.

The purpose of the research done by (Bouilheres, Le, McDonald, Nkhoma, & Jandug-Montera, 2020) was to investigate the benefits of Blended Learning for students' learning experiences at an Australian university's offshore campus in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The displacement of material is the Blended Learning approach used on the university campus. They had mentioned that learning takes place not just in face-to-face sessions at a set time, but also in online spaces, where students may learn whenever and wherever they choose. The purpose of their study was to determine how beneficial and successful it was in increasing interactions between students and their classmates, professors, and course materials.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

**The objectives of the study are: -**

1. To identify the advantages of blended learning.
2. To investigate the challenges faced by the learners and teachers in blended learning.
4. To study the future prospects of blended learning with the new education policy(2020)

This research is conducted primarily on Secondary sources. The data and information used in the research are collected from various journals, books, conference proceedings, articles, lecture notes, and various websites.

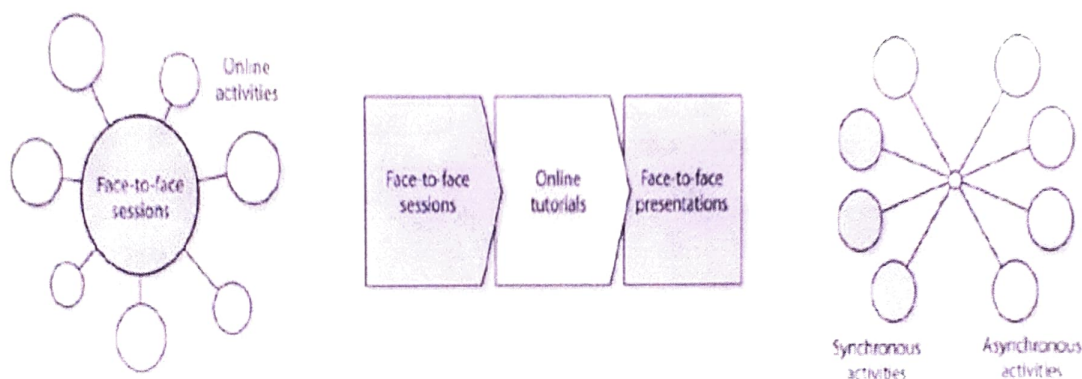
### Role of New Education Policy in Digital Transformation

Given the rise of digital technologies and the growing relevance of using technology for teaching and learning at all levels, from elementary to higher education, the following essential efforts are recommended by the New Education Policy:

- (a) Online education pilot studies: Appropriate agencies, such as the NETF, CIET, NIOS, IGNOU, IITs, NITs, and others, will be identified to conduct a series of parallel pilot studies to evaluate the benefits of integrating education with online education while mitigating the drawbacks, as well as to study related areas, such as student device addiction, most preferred formats of e-content, and so on. The findings of these pilot projects will be made public and utilized to drive continual improvement.
- (b) Digital Infrastructure: To address India's scale, variety, complexity, and device penetration, there is a need to invest in the development of open, interoperable, evolvable public digital infrastructure in the education sector that can be utilized by different platforms and point solutions. This will ensure that technology-based solutions do not become obsolete as technology improves.
- (c) Online learning platform and resources: Existing e-learning systems, such as SWAYAM and DIKSHA, will be expanded to give teachers an organized, user-friendly, and an extensive collection of supportive tools for assessing learners' progress. As the current epidemic has demonstrated, tools such as two-way video and two-way audio interfaces for holding online lessons are a vital requirement.

Martha Cleveland –Innes (2018) has divided blended learning into three main models, shown in figure 1 as follows:-

Figure 1: Models of Blended learning



**Model 1:** It depicts the blended presentation and interaction, which consists of activity-focused face-to-face sessions supplemented with online resources.

**Model 2:** It represents the blended blocks, which are the combinations of one-day or half-day intensive face-to-face meetings, weekly online tutorials/seminars for activities and interaction, and online information and tools.

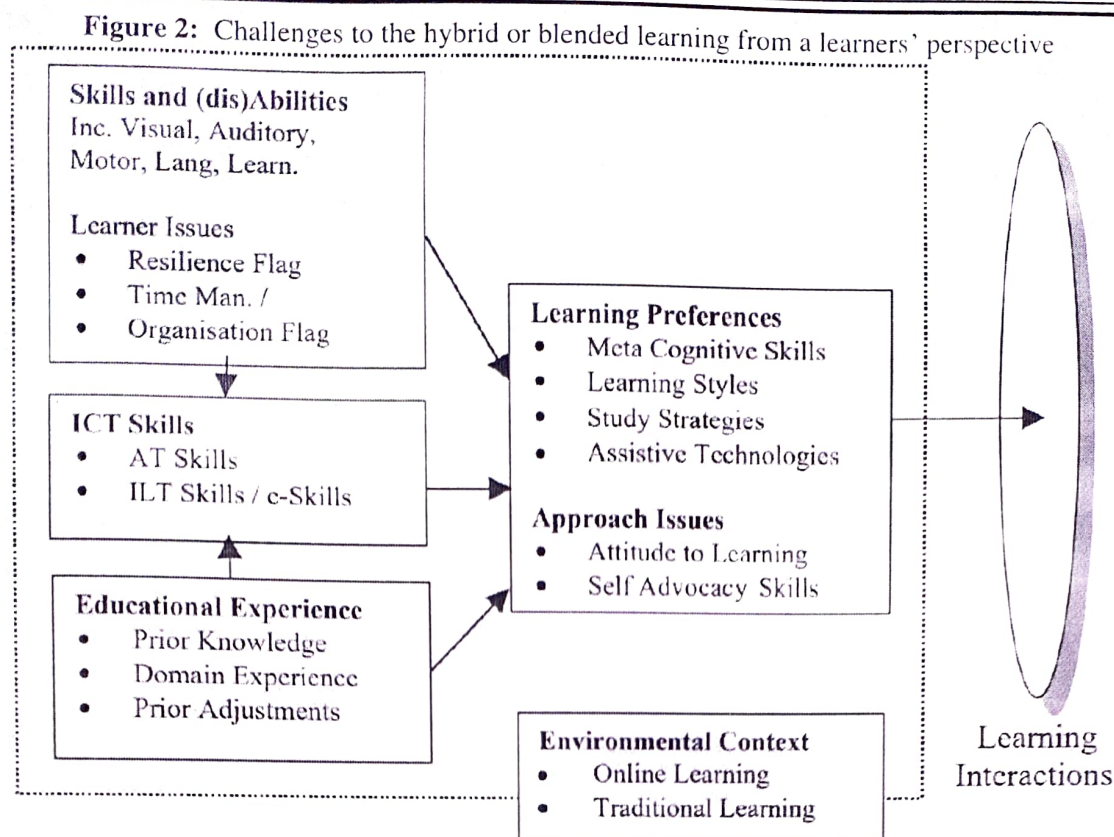
**Model 3:** it refers to complete online interaction. It means interaction is done with the help of online collaborations like online tutorials.

#### Advantages of Blended Learning and Teaching

Blended learning has so many benefits for teachers as well as for students. Individual students participate virtually together in an intellectual discipline as a learning activity, allowing them to collaborate at a distance. It has increased flexibility as technology-enabled learning allows students to learn whenever and wherever they choose, removing time and geographical limitations while still allowing for in-person involvement (Khawaja, 2013). The students and teacher can interact more as it provides a platform for increased involvement among students as well as between students and professors. It also enhances learning by adding new sorts of learning activities that boost engagement and help students reach greater and more meaningful levels of learning. It is capable of fostering a professional learning environment. Last but not least, it has the potential to save money and resources. (Poon, 2013).

#### Challenges to Blended Learning as a Learner's Perspective

The impediments of blended learning in higher education are massive which are consistently fostered by creative technical advances and engagement through conventional learning venues, which emphasizes blended learning's transformative power. E. A. Draffan & Peter Rainger (2006) has beautifully described the challenges from learner's and teacher's point of view with the help of figure 2 as below:



The figure suggests that the student's physical and cognitive abilities and capacities, attitudes, coping techniques, previous knowledge, and technological competency may all lead to obstacles in a blended learning situation. These difficulties can arise if a student's specific physical consensus and perceptual abilities are not taken into consideration while preparing the learning and teaching environment, interactions, and activities.

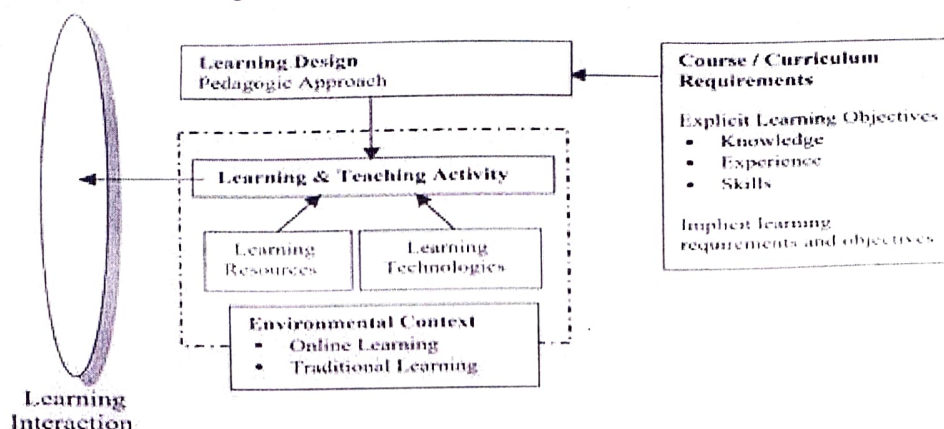
In any blended learning environment, a learner's competency with information communication technology (ICT) is as vital as their attitudes, motivation, and comprehension of e-skills and e-learning capabilities. But, if there is a lack of e-skills and e-learning competencies then students may feel dubious or confused with the ample information available; likewise, if ICT skills are weak, it makes content interaction limited. In short, all these basic incapacibilities make the situation jeopardized (Rainger, 2006).

**Inadequate self-pacing and self-direction:** Learner freedom and management are both required and encouraged in online learning. According to some studies, many students would view multiple weeks' worth of video lectures at once rather than following the course format. Students arrive at online learning with varying levels of learning competency; facilitating such learning self-management (Martha Cleveland-Innes, 2018).

### Challenges to Blended Learning as a Teaching Perspective

Any model of a teacher's perspective needs to be viewed from different levels of context and the different learning challenges. Their association determines by the level at which the teacher is working, it might be a course planning stage, course reviewing stage, or the course delivering stage. At the course planning stage, for example, it is important to ponder learner skills, which at the moment generally contain a student's incapacibilities but not necessarily their capacities or coping plans. In this case, quality assurance, educational standards and professional or vocational requirements also need to be taken into account. Likewise, at the delivery stage, a teacher should consider the learner's characteristics, accessibility requirements and assistive technology and so on. At this level, the accuracy in evaluation has its own impact on learners' preferences in light of the accessibility issues. The below-mentioned figure 3 provides a procedural explanation about the learning design, learning and teaching activities, resources and technologies, online and traditional learning environment, and overtly about the explicit and implicit learning objectives like knowledge, skills and experiences from a teacher's angle and challenges faced by them during the formulation of teaching pedagogy and strategies.

Figure 3: Challenges to the hybrid or blended learning from a teachers' perspective



For learning design, course necessities can be placed outside the environmental context box, as it is important to decide on the use of a specific learning environment with its associated interactions and activities to fulfill the needs of a learning objective, rather than forcing the learning objective to fit into a pre-defined environment with a set of rigid exercises (Rainger, 2006). The major challenge faced by the teachers is a lack of knowledge, quality control, and educational standards regarding ICT. Therefore, to facilitate inclusive learning, we need to ensure students can interact successfully with the technologies, themselves (through reflection), peers, teachers, support workers and learning materials. This means that the key issue in guaranteeing inclusive learning is the identification of any challenges to learning posed by the learning interactions.

However, concerns remain that the present models and tools do not target e-skills and e-learning aspects of a blended learning environment with sufficient rigor. It is felt that it is important to investigate micro-scale accessibility issues from the macro perspective of the learner's overall learning experience and suggest adjustments that include practical (e.g. working in pairs) and/or pedagogic changes to the learning activity without compromising the learning experience or academic probity; for instance, changing the interaction requirements to an appropriate alternative possibly in different learning and teaching environment. (Rainger, 2006).

### FUTURE PROSPECTS

Blended learning environments (BLEs) hold great potential for the future of higher education and business training. With the growing availability of technology and network connection over the last decade, the use of BLEs has progressively expanded (R.Jayanthi, 2019).

The future appears to be becoming more digital, wireless, and networked. Along these lines, it is expected that the rationale used to support web-based courses would soon be reversed. Previously, it was believed that little, if any, effective training could take place online. Many educators, maybe the vast majority, were skeptical about online technology replacing face-to-face education. It is expected that in the future, the change will be in the other direction (Alex Koohang and Johannes Britz, 2006).

### Road Map with New Education Policy

As per the new education policy, the current surge in infections and pandemics mandates that we be prepared with alternate forms of quality education whenever and wherever conventional and in-person modes of education are not available. In this sense, the National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes the necessity of exploiting the benefits of technology while also noting its inherent hazards and perils. It advocates for properly designed and adequately sized pilot projects to establish how the benefits of online/digital education may be realized while addressing or limiting the drawbacks. Meanwhile, existing digital platforms and continuing ICT-based educational efforts must be enhanced and extended to address present and future difficulties in delivering excellent education for all.

### CONCLUSION

It has been concluded by the research that blended learning and teaching have improved the way of imparting education. The prevailing pandemic situation has forced us to go digital. So, schools and colleges have changed the way of providing education, i.e., via online platforms such as Zoom, google meet, Microsoft, Webex, and many more. Blended learning helped the students who are far from the colleges and schools as they are not

supposed to be physically present, they get education by sitting at home. The students also get benefitted that they can do extra courses just through the use of technology. This will help them in improving their skills. Technology has provided students as well as teachers to communicate via communication apps. There are so many challenges faced by the teachers as well as the students in blended learning but at last, it helped both. The spreading of the deadly virus has enforced us to go for a blended model of education.

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