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## EXPLORATION OF BLENDED LEARNING IN INDIAN CONTEXT: AN STRATEGIC APPROACH

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### Abstract

Technology is driving factor of Fourth Industrial Revolution in which digital automation, artificial intelligence, mobile supercomputing, intelligent robots are at its momentum. International competitiveness and global challenges demands highly innovative and competent school environment. Digital era and globalization has led to a new trend in education. One such trend is Blended Learning. The objective of the present paper is to analyse the concept of blended learning and to review the evolution of blended learning. Further, the paper discusses the intricacies and technical complications involved during implementation of blended learning in Indian context. In addition, the paper also critically analyse the competencies needed for handling blended learning along with benefits and challenges of blended learning.

**Keywords:** Blended Learning: Definition; Evolution; Implementation of Blended Learning strategy in Indian Context.

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### 1. Introduction

Blended learning is not doing online worksheets, reading digital materials any technology-related activity unless it allow *student some control over the pace and content of the instruction*. Bates (2015) suggested that blended learning has wide variety of designs:

- technology used as classroom aids (e.g. PowerPoint slides, clickers);
- using learning management system to support classroom teaching (e.g. for storing learning materials or for online discussions);
- using lecture capture for flipped classrooms;
- short periods on campus for hands-on experience or training followed by concentrated time studying online;
- hybrid or flexible learning requiring the redesign of teaching to enable students to do majority of their learning online, coming to campus only for specific in-person sessions (e.g. laboratories).

**Garrison and Kanuka (2004)** stated “blended learning is thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences.”

**Sinzthh adds, .....** “*The concept of blended learning is that learning is not just a one-time event—learning is a continuous process.*”

## 2. The Evolution of Blended Learning

Though the term Blended Learning gained momentum in 2000 with the US report in which the Interactive Learning Centers, an Atlanta-based education business, announced a change of name to EPIC Learning. The release mentioned that "The Company currently operates 220 on-line courses, but will begin offering its Internet courseware using the company's Blended Learning methodology."

In 2006, the term became more concrete with the publication of the first Handbook of blended Learning by Bonk and Graham. Graham defined "blended learning systems" as learning systems that "combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction". Report titled "Defining Blended Learning", researcher Norm Friesen suggested "It designated the range of possibilities presented by combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical co-presence of teacher and students". Blended environment focuses on the student-teacher relationship.

Patrick (2007) most students and teachers still prefer real, live interaction over completely online learning.

## 3. Implementation of Blended learning in Indian context

Today, ‘blended learning’ has evolved to **mean the integration of classroom learning with online or e-learning**. In order to **tackle international competitiveness** Indian Students need to be innovative and well versed to represent their work in global platform. be it any field. In such case, new mode of learning environment is a need of hour. Blended Learning is a emerging trend of teaching. i.e. blend of face to face and computer mediated instructions.

Blended learning in Indian context refers to **a strategic and systematic approach** to combining times and modes of learning, **integrating the best aspects of face-to-face and online** interactions for each **discipline, using appropriate ICTs**.

Blended learning comes in many models although each application or method may have similar ‘ingredients’ or elements such **as face-to-face delivery, flexible options, online components**. **In essence, there is a blending of flexible learning and teaching experiences that may involve assessment, teacher/student communication, student activities, teaching activities and students resources.**

## 4. Designing Unit for Blended Learning

steps involved in designing blended learning include:

- **Planning** for integration of blended learning principles in unit
- **Designing** the learning activities and assessment and developing them as required
- **Implementing** the blended learning design
- **Evaluating** the effectiveness of blended learning designs
- **Making improvements** for the next time before teaching blended unit.

### **Why blend? - examine reason for blending**

Blended learning strategies vary according to the discipline, the year level, student characteristics and learning outcomes, and have a **student-centred approach**.

### **Benefits of Blended Learning**

Blended learning can increase access and flexibility for learners, increase level of active learning, and achieve better student experiences and outcomes. For teaching staff, blended learning can improve teaching and class management practices.

### **What could a 'blend' look like?-**

- A blend might include:
- face-to-face and online learning activities and formats.
- traditional timetabled classes with different modes, such as weekend, intensive, external, trimester.
- well established technologies such as lecture capture, with social media and emerging technologies
- simulations, group activities, site-based learning, practicals.

### **Competency required for handling blended learning**

- Teachers need to be expert in subject area as well as in handling technology of 21 century in order to succeed in **face-to-face and online learning**.
- High expectations from teachers to have **Transformational Potential**
- Teachers need to have competency in **live interaction vs. computer-mediated communication with students**

### **Challenges pertaining to Blended Learning Environment**

#### **Blended Learning as Transformational Potential ?**

Teachers generally say that their course is a blend that consists of  $x$  % online and  $y$  % face-to-face, which is not informative without knowing the nature of the activities occurring in the distinct learning environments and how the course effectively uses the features of the two environments.

#### **Role of Live Interaction vs. Computer-Mediated Communication ?**

Under what conditions is human interaction important to the learning outcomes and learner satisfaction with the experience? Some evidence indicated that learners in blended environments place greater value or emphasis on the face-to-face components, while other findings suggest that the face-to-face elements are necessary (**Graham, 2006**).

## Role of Learner Choice and Self-Regulation

How learners make choices about the kinds of blends in which they are participating? Do choices depend on convenience and flexibility? Online components require greater amount of discipline for learners to succeed.

### 5. 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. Furthermore, blending of face to face and online learning environments should be planned precisely and strategically to have diverse benefit from this approach. As technological innovations spread, new types of blends will occur and education will be blended with different technologies but the key question to be answered will remain same “How should we organize such learning environments in order to support learning effectively?. The answer is we should study 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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