Blended Learning Perspective: A Synchronous Collaboration in the 'New Normal' for Effective Teaching-Learning

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Abstract: *The main aim of this paper is to discuss the Quality Teaching aspect that has become a significant issue in the higher education because of the continuous changes that are taking place in the geographical diversity of the student on the international competitive platform. Quality teaching initiatives are very diverse both in nature and in function. The quantifiable factors to assess the quality of teaching and learning has become a challenging task in determining whether the teaching efficiency has an impact on the future of higher education and quality teaching itself. The interconnection between the students and external stakeholders form a dynamic learning community. Blended Learning in Higher Education in an emerging set-up is looked as a multidimensional concept, which includes all the related functions and activities that form part of the academic life in a university system. Therefore, any framework for the assessment of quality takes place at the level of quality of students, teachers, infrastructure, student support services, curricula, and assessment of learning resources. Blended learning is the use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students both in the online and offline mode. This paper discovers the conceptual understanding on the blended learning style of experience among the facilitators and the learners who feel the need to rethink the potential effectiveness, the new approach will bring as meaningful learning experiences.*

Key Words: *Blended learning, higher education, e-learning, teaching-learning,*

1. INTRODUCTION:

"Education is the most powerful key to unlock the doors of wisdom and knowledge'', from where one may acquire the "Quality Education" as an outcome of learning. Learning is a tool which helps one to accomplish their goals and facilitate individuals to acquire relevant skills and knowledge. Learning is a consistent practice which has to be adopted by every individual to enhance their skills and knowledge. Learning helps one to focus and motivate them to achieve their specific goals. Learning is a continuous process. With the ingress of Covid 19 pandemic, the entire world has drastically affected and witnessed a deprivation of economy. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic has afflicted the education sector due to which the e-learning/ online learning has emerged. Students across the world are experiencing a blend of offline learning and e-learning/online learning. The offline is a traditional form of learning where students visit classrooms for a one to one interaction with the teachers, attend live sessions which help them in understanding the subject in an effective manner and this is the most preferred and practiced form of learning since ages. And traditional form of learning is where the students interact with several people who help in enhancing their social skills. This is also an effective form of learning that inflates the focus and concentration levels of the students to learn and build conceptual understanding. The online or e-learning is a virtual form of learning where students use their personal computers or other electronic gadgets and internet in order to gain knowledge using several online learning platforms. Video conferencing tools such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Udemy, G-Meet etc are on the rise to meet the need of virtual classrooms.The online learning practice has witnessed a rapid growth and demand during the times of Covid 19 pandemic. This is the new form of learning adopted by all the educational institutions in order to provide continuity of education to the students during these tough times. Learning has not stopped in the pandemic. Though people were locked down inside homes, a 'business as usual' phenomenon especially in the educational sector is seen drastically combining with technology for continuity of curriculum. The e- learning is a combination of video learning along with the live sessions. The online learning platforms have witnessed a rise in demand for online learning applications which were able to fulfill the requirements of the students and educational institutions.

Quality teaching has become an topic of importance as the landscape of higher education has been facing continuous change with increased international competition, increasing social and geographical diversity of the student

body, increasing demands of value for money, introduction of information technologies, etc. Quality teaching lacks clear definitions and to some extent can't be disconnected from debates on Quality or Quality culture in higher education, which remains controversial even today. Some scholars regard quality primarily as an outcome, others as a property. Some consider teaching as the never ending process of reduction of defects and so Quality Teaching can never be totally grasped and appraised. In fact, conceptions of quality teaching happen to be stakeholder relative: students, teachers or evaluation agencies do not share the definition of what "good" teaching or "good" teachers is. Theoretical familiarity is meant for acquiring information that can be linked to other learning perspectives which is also another important concept to emphasis on structuring many teaching-learning approaches, Yurniwati, Y., & Yarmi, G. (2020). Therefore, the development of conceptual knowledge must be the primary focus on teacher getting familiar with the latest approaches in teaching and learning.

Education system in any country is the most strengthening tool for its growth and prosperity Griffin, P., Care, E., & McGaw, B. (2011). Blended learning is a term increasingly used to describe the way e-learning is being combined with traditional classroom methods. Independent study to create a new, hybrid teaching methodology is being continuously explored and experimented by the institutions. Blended Learning represents 'online and on campus experience' and is a much greater change in basic technique than simply adding computers to classrooms; it represents, in many cases, a fundamental change in the way teachers and students approach the learning experience. It is alternatively termed as hybrid, mixed, or integrative approach of learning.

Blended learning is a combination of in-person activities with digital tools and resources designed to deliver the best possible learning experience. The use of learning tools can occur before, during or after an in-person session and support a variety of pedagogic purposes. The blended component, for example, might aim to extend the time students spend on a task, develop their information literacy skills, stimulate their interest before a class, or enable them to work at their own pace afterwards. The term suggests careful and deliberate integration of online and in-person activities. A Blended learning program focuses on the learning experience and outcomes that have clear aims and objectives along with the assessment criteria. It demands active participation and strong content learning ability. There is a wide range of basics need to be considered for the maintenance of effective blended learning programmes such as clear understanding and alignment to the teaching-learning tools, assessment and institutional framework. The nature of digital and pedagogical skills that are required by staff to design, develop and deliver blended learning programmes orient well in the short term, medium term and long term perspective of education.

Blended learning can have great Impact on a well-developed program which will enhance the student experience, potentially improve student outcomes and progresses user-friendliness and inclusion. However, Blended learning will also have risks in terms of cohesion, challenges of the differences between the physical and virtual student experience, Internet connectivity and bandwidth issues, very low student experience due to insufficient skills and capabilities across staff and students. The educational institutions have now continuously changed the overview for delivering teaching modes and are looking at mitigating risks for high quality services such as the use of digital technology (Linn, M. C., & Eylon, B.-S, 2011). One of the best modes of learning in the new normal is the SPOC among the many blended learning approaches. SPOC - (Small private online Course-Blended Learning): A SPOC refers to a version of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) used locally with on-campus students. University of California Berkeley Professor Armando Fox coined the word 'SPOC' in 2013 to refer to a localized instance of a MOOC course that was in use in a business-to-business context. SPOC as a new approach, support blended learning and flipped classroom learning, which variously combine online resources and technology with personal engagement between faculty and students. When a SPOC is implemented at an institution, in connection with students, the faculty will be able to determine which feature and course content to utilize. This may include video lectures, assessments (with quick feedback), interactive labs (with immediate response) and discussion forums used in MOOCs. Faculty can use the MOOC technology to organize their time with students in allowing more time in class for project-based work instead of grading assignments or preparing lectures. SPOCs have been analogized to "next generation textbooks". In a SPOC as in a MOOC, students typically access interactive content at their own pace where instructors set their own grading scale. Colleges and universities can create SPOCs, or license them where the instructor gets an opportunity to deliver the material directly to students using video delivered by another expert, instead of assigning an article to read.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:
This blended learning concept was introduced in the year of 2000. And due to the emerging technologies and development of the software and online learning platforms, the demand for blended learning increased rapidly and most of the teachers along with students are more fascinated to conduct classes online. This research paper tells us how the blended learning should be implemented for effective results. There are research studies which states that online learning or e-learning is considered as a complement to traditional learning or offline form of learning and also it is regarded as

a most effective form of learning because, the online learning enables the faculty to share the online resources and materials for the reference of students which saves lot of time when compared to that of traditional form of learning. And this indeed facilitates an effective understanding of the subject and also helps in better interaction between students and faculty, Bonk, C. J., & Graham, C. R. (2007). Students also experience a better and effective understanding of the subject in e-learning or online mode when compared to that of traditional form of learning. But in the online form of learning, the faculty will have to focus not only on the content to be explained but also, should possess a better understanding about operating the e-learning platforms.

In today's world where technology is advancing at a blink of an eye pace, traditional form of learning which concentrates on problem- based approach, is drastically replaced with blended problem-based learning strategies. Dziuban, Picciano, Graham, & Moskal, et.al (2016) mention that the online based approach motivates the students in understanding the concepts and theories in a very effective form of learning through the electronic media. This helps the teacher and learner to interact in a much better way enhancing creativity and motivation in the online form of teaching-learning.

Smith K and Hill J, (2018), discusses the impact of the blended learning on the educational institutions and also on the corporate sectors and also explains the earned advantage of implementing the blended learning to the students, teachers and employees. And this paper describes different methods, approaches to understand about the impact of blended learning in current scenario. Castro (2019), opines that various trends in blended learning brings about change in the thinking perspective on how people adapt to the new technology and more importantly the benefits children receive from the self -direction in learning phenomena. The research identifies trends in blended learning implementations in higher education especially the use of capabilities provided by the technology. There were few common capabilities among digital educational technologies particularly, digital tools that automate the processes for blended learning delivery modes. It interprets the way it helps the educational institutions to implement the blended learning in an effective manner.

Randy Garrison and Heather Kanuka (2004) write in their research paper that blended learning plays a very important role in current scenario where blended is enhanced one on one interaction in learning. Support and retention by the learners towards blended learning creates a great impact on students. This approach also works effectively for the students who build greater interaction among the teachers and students.

Boelens, R., De Wever, B., & Voet, M. (2017), in their research paper discusses four key challenges (1) incorporating flexibility, (2) stimulating interaction, (3) facilitating students' learning processes, and (4) fostering an affective learning climate and how these challenges can be resolved for an effective and efficient blended learning. There are many research areas that explain about the factor that leads to contribution to the success of the electronic education, the factors like: technical resources should be provided and the faculty should be motivated for online form of teaching with good communication skills. Regular evaluation of students is also to be done and all the process should be transparent, consistency to be maintained. And some of the pedagogic considerations are made regarding to the maintenance of the class room atmosphere in the electronic form of learning.

3. RESEARCH METHOD:

The design of this study was a non-experimental and fundamental research. Current research is conceptual in nature and only comprehends the teacher and student perspective on the blended learning approach. The study involves only an observational style of collecting information through a direct, unstructured interviewing method. Participants are teachers of the management course from tier-II B-schools and conventional college going students

Research Objectives

* To study conceptual Blended Learning approach in the "New normal" scenario
* To understand the effect of Blended learning for effective Teaching-Learning
* To understand the perspective of the student and the teacher towards blended learning.

4. DISCUSSION:
The Pros and Cons of the Blended Learning in the 'New Normal'

Blended learning contributes tremendously to the development of society which can be seen useful mostly in the higher educational sector and is changing the perspective of view by creating a structural patterns of learning in the "New normal". The educational institutions are facilitating flexible learning through online learning platforms which resulted in being more effective in comparison to that traditional method of teaching during and post covid-19. While the blended learning is observed to have more benefits, it suffers limitations such as teacher's difficulty in adapting to the new technology, Students difficulty in connecting it right with the e-classroom lectures etc. are discussed and also

this article discusses the effective way of using blended technology and how it contributes to the future development from the teacher and learner's point of view. A well-developed blended learning program can enhance the student's experience in potentially improving their participation and accessibility on the course and curriculum which results in overall outcomes.

Effects of Blended Approach on Teaching-Learning

As the world goes through tough times and as unsafe environmental situations impact many lives, the student community is benefitting to a great extent on completion of course especially in the higher education system. The blended learning approach offers a long term solution to the staggered lives having a positive and negative effect to the learner. The method of learning under the blended approach make it convenient to move through tasks and learning modules at their own pace and sometimes in-person teaching is adopted for those who struggle with learning assignments. It increases scope for student activities. It improves the retention of information. It helps students to progress that experience increased engagement and motivation with blended learning, their achievements will likely increase too. When students are engaged with learning, they have higher chances of retaining information, understanding topics and work towards assignments and assessments. Classroom time can be focused on more meaningful activities. In a blended learning environment, students are able to complete tasks online or watch lectures in their own time which means that classroom time can be freed up for more interactive, instruction-focused lessons. This will make much better use of valuable face-to-face teaching sessions. Blended learning approach enhances student experience in facing situational challenges by creating an environment that all students can fully access within the limits of their abilities, lifestyle, location or course. The blended approach allows students to organize and interact with online course materials on their own with the help of e-instruction from the teacher. They are given access to online resources at all times where there is a flexibility to schedule their learning hours and also dedicate themselves to part-time jobs. Whilst blended learning deals with a number of progressive benefits for students, there are also a few negative effects to consider, such as the fall in the percentage due to self-led part of blended learning. Few students lack the skill to be part of online learning tasks. Those who have access difficulty to the technology face a huge difficulty in joining learning communities, specialized teams thereby having a downward impact on academic achievement.

5. FINDINGS:
Educator's Perspectives of Blended Learning:

The new approach to higher education demands teachers to adopt online form of education with the new technologies. Personal interaction and proper network skills are on the rise for effective teaching with traditional methods of teaching. The educational institutions have now continuously changed the overview delivering teaching modes and are looking at mitigating risks for high quality services such as the use of digital technology. Effective use of digital technology is seen as fundamental in helping to ensure continuity of learning, A combination of hybrid curriculum working in this way requires specific skills for both learners and staff and a well-planned, blended learning programme which effectively integrates a range of techniques and resources. Positive attributes of the blended learning in Teacher's perspective is given to understand that the resources are developed and customized as per the reference of students that can be explained by visual display.

Learner's Perspective on Blended Learning Approach:

Learners have prominently like the flexibility and the ease of online learning, although they like the face-to-face interaction with teachers and fellow students in building their personal network. Students have a great expectation on learning-delivery mode, seeking equality among the diverse groups. They are sometimes very critical of the quality of online involvement and lecture recordings. Students explore different aspects of learning the course and blended approach has been proved supportive in a range of learning styles. Students believe that electronic form of education is the best form, budget friendly and very convenient type of attending classes. Even If the students miss the class due to various reasons, class recordings are made available to listen and raise questions to the teacher at a convenient time. While the students learn to adapt to the advanced technology, they face difficulties such as the technical glitches, no exchange of information among the peer group, more possibilities for distraction in blended form of learning, lack of individual attention and constant monitoring from teachers. Due to lack of personal attention by the teacher, students may not be at ease or understand the subject taught online.

6. SUMMARY :

There is a tremendous change that is seen in the higher education landscape. Experts mention that the change will continue to an extent where existing models of blended learning may be practically replaced with delivery modules

which is adjusted to fit to the future needs. Successful active blended learning does rely on fluent, purposeful and thoughtful use of technologies for learning. Facilitators have identified that the work done around the active blended learning approach has challenges where new relationships and class cohesion will have to be built from scratch in an environment with limited face-to-face interaction time. Blended learning is a form of learning which combines both online and traditional form of learning, providing more and more flexibility to the user. Since the virtual learning is a combination of both recorded and live sessions, there is a chance where the student can revert back to the recorded videos to get his/her doubts clarified which saves time. So, both the forms of learning pay different roles in student's education.

7. CONCLUSION:

As every coin has both the sides, the advancement of technology is facilitating students to get access to their education at any point of time from any place but the offline mode of study may decrease the scope of interaction between teachers and students. And offline mode of study may promote healthy competition and create motivation for both students and teachers. Students might not be able to take the pleasure of classroom communication which helps in understanding the concepts in an easier manner. But this blended form of learning is preferred by most of the students and lecturers because it is provides the flexibility in education according to their convenience. Both the forms play significant role in effective learning. In conclusion, as the study explored the use of blended learning approaches, with respect to the learning style, assessing and evaluating the effects of blended learning in the higher education seems to have achieved more meaningful learning experiences. Blended approach has proven to both enhance and expand the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning in higher education across various disciplines

Research Implication

Ultimately, this research considers theoretical concepts and empirical findings about blended learning and their relationship to the new normal as it evolves. Blended learning is the harbinger in the institutions to frame learning activities to furnish the needs of all levels of learners. Further study can be done on blended learning in relation to other new techniques of teaching and identify the impact factor of the techniques on student learning.

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