BLENDED LEARNINGAPPROACHES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Blended learning is becoming a popular concept in education in those developed countries where access to on line tools is easy and affordable. It is interchagably used with other terms such as ' technology enhanced education, web based education etc. Basically it is a combination of on line learning resources and traditional pedogogy. This combination is for better educational product. The paper gives an account of concept, Need, Levels, Bebefits, Advantages and disadvantages of blended learning. The paper focuses the use of blended learning(BL) in teacher education programme. It illustrates the need of BL in teacher education.

Key terms: BL,Definitions, word usage, Levels, Benefits, teacher education.

Definitions of "Blended Learning"

1. Blended learning, the teaching practice that combines teaching methods from both face-to-face and online learning, is an established, rapidly growing instructional model that is proving highly effective in helping schools and districts address the challenges of student achievement, limited resources, and the expectations of 21st century learners.
2. Blended Learning is defined as the combination of offline and online learning.
3. INACOL, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, defines blended learning as "combining online delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction and live instruction to personalize learning, allow thoughtful reflection, and differentiate instruction from student-to-student across a diverse group of learners.
4. The Sloan Consortium, an institutional and professional leadership organization dedicated to integrating online education into mainstream education, describes blended learning as part online and part traditional face-to-face instruction.
5. Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path or pace. While still attending a "brick-and-mortar" school structure, face-to-face classroom methods are combined with computer-mediated activities. Proponents of blending learning cite the opportunity for data collection and customization of instruction and assessment as two major benefits of this approach. Schools with blended learning models may also choose to reallocate resources to boost student achievement outcomes.

What is blended learning?

The concept of blended learning has been around for a long time, but its terminology was not firmly established until around the beginning of the 21st century. One of the earliest references to the term appears in a press release in 1999, when the Interactive Learning Centres, an Atlanta-based education business, announced its change of name to EPIC learning. The article mentions that "The Company currently operates 220 on-line courses, but will begin offering its Internet courseware using the company's Blended Learning methodology." The meaning of blended learning widely diverged to encompass a wide variety of synthesis in learning methods until 2006, when the first *Handbook of Blended Learning* by Bonk and Graham was published. In this publication Graham challenged the breadth and ambiguity of the term's definition, and defined 'blended learning systems' as learning systems that "combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction." Currently, use of term *blended learning* mostly involves "combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical co-presence of teacher and students."
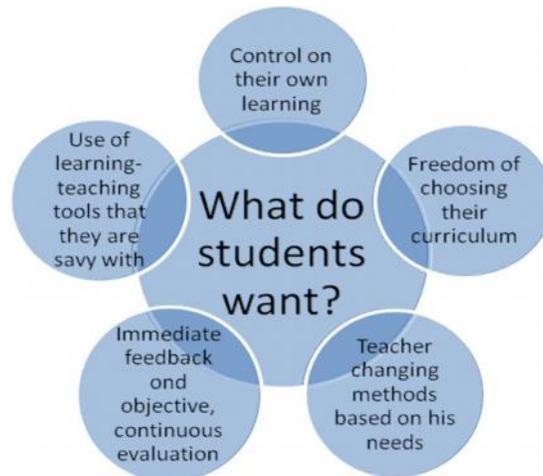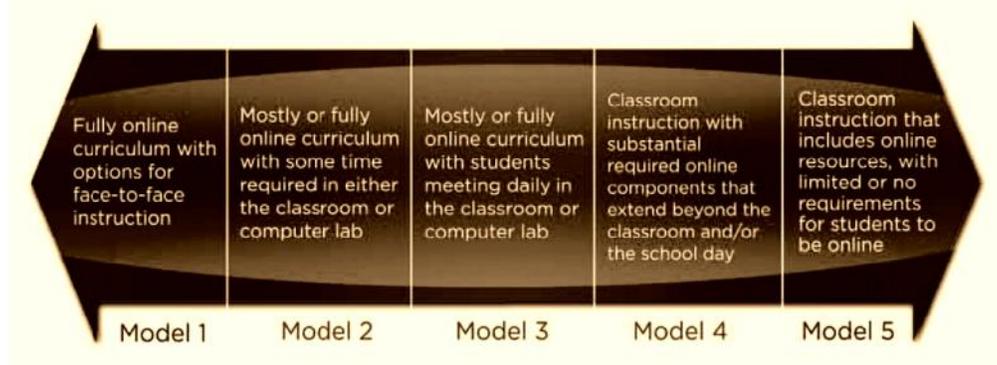

Word usage

The terms "blended," "hybrid," "technology-mediated instruction," "web-enhanced instruction," and "mixed-mode instruction" are often used interchangeably in current research literature. However, recent researchers in the United States tend to use the term "blended learning" with more regularity.

Blended learning is implemented in a variety of ways, ranging from models in which curriculum is fully online with face-to-face interaction to models in which face-to-face classroom instruction is integrated with online components that extend learning beyond the classroom or school day. The rapid growth of blended learning has been a catalyst for additional instructional transformation, including:

• Evolving pedagogy in which teachers' roles include facilitation, student mentoring and differentiating instruction for individual learners,

• Increased flexibility and personalization of students' learning experiences, and

• Strategic uses of technology as districts tap the capabilities of the learning management systems to support a wider range of instructional programs

Blended learning seems to offer what education technology has long promised but rarely delivered: greater student learning and improved school efficiency. Education Elements works with schools to deliver on that promise, and make sure that blended learning offers more hope and help than hype.

San Diego State University also offers an interesting perspective on blended learning. In the university's online Encyclopaedia of Educational Technology, the article Blended Learning Solutions notes, "…blended learning combines the engaging benefits of traditional instructor-led training with the advantages brought by a variety of technologies to create an optimum program." The article also underscores that many "ingredients" can comprise a blended learning model, including instructor-delivered content, e-learning, webinars, conference calls, live or online sessions with instructors, and other media and events.

Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Fully online curriculum with options for face-to-face instruction	Mostly or fully online curriculum with some time required in either the classroom or computer lab	Mostly or fully online curriculum with students meeting daily in the classroom or computer lab	Classroom instruction with substantial required online components that extend beyond the classroom and/or the school day	Classroom instruction that includes online resources, with limited or no requirements for students to be online

Teacher education programme and use of on line tools:

Teacher education programmes have included components on ICT in D. T. Ed. , B. Ed. and M. Ed. syllabi. But it has remained as an isolated ICT paper in the curriculum. Theory and practicals are given for the component on nICT but the objective of integrating ICT in Teacher education curriculum is rarely served. Today's student teachers are quite techno savy. They not only like to use various technology tools but they know the best possible use of technology. Technology tools such as laptops, mobile- smart phones, internet etc can easily be handled by them. They want to use these tools in their work. the curriculum provide little opportunity to do it.

Blended learning is a combination of on line and off line resources. Whilew reframing teacher edeucation curriculum we must think about strengths of on line tools as well as strengths of traditional approaches and use them together to strengthen the curriculum. Most of the students complain about old and rhetoric B. Ed. curricul. they find it uninteresting and unuseful for future teaching learning programme. the curriculum should have activities that can be completed by student teachers using on line resources. For in stance, they can make review of a particular unit using on line resources such as websites, surveysd, youtube etc and submit them as their assignment. For doing this they can use online facilities like e- mail, drop box, G drive etc. Using blended learning in teacher education programme is not only for the sake of using online tools nor it should be used just because the technology is available. It should ben used for better academic output.

Why blend?

There are many reasons why an instructor, trainer, or learner might pick blended learning over other learning options. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) identified six reasons why one might choose to design or use a blended learning system: (1) pedagogical richness, (2) access to knowledge, (3) social interaction, (4) personal agency, (5) cost effectiveness, and (6) ease of revision. In the BL literature, the most common reason provided is that BL combines "the best of both worlds". While there is some truth to this, it is rarely acknowledged that a blended learning environment can also mix the least effective elements of both worlds if it is not designed well. Beyond this general statement, Graham et al. (Graham, Allen, & Ure, 2003, in press) found that overwhelmingly people chose BL for three reasons:

(1) Improved pedagogy, (2) increased access/flexibility, and (3) increased cost effectiveness.

Blended learning in teacher education:

1. Time frame available for B. Ed. and M. Ed. courses is very limited. It often becomes difficult for teacher educators to give justice to the entire curriculum in such limited time span. If we integrate on line tools , students can work beyond the brick wall classroom and complete a part of curriculum on line.Teacher educators can devote more time for practicum part that needs one to one interaction with students.

2. Student teachers have positive inclination for use of on line tools. THose who are from urban and semi urban areas, have access to these tools.

3. If student teachers undergo learning process of blended type , they will get ideas for implementing blended learning for their students.

4. Secondary school curriculum and text books are changing more frequently. They are based on constructivism. Lots of activities, games, Projects are given for students. To fit all these activities in school time table is very diffiucult. Students , parents and teachers are supposeed to work beyond scholl and make their learning more comprehensive. Use of ICT tools with internet provide very rich and complete experience for students. To give these experiences to students, our student teachers need to undergo such experiences during their training.

Four different Levels of Blended Learning:

• **Activity level**: Isolated on line activities conducted along with traditional methods by teacher while teaching- learning is going on for a particular unit/ subject (In/ Out side the class)

• **Course level:** A particular course in the curriculum taught by integration of on line and off line methods.

• **Program level:** A particular certificate or degree program implemented using blended approach.

• **Institutional level:** An institution conducting all courses using BL.

Students can also take part in face-to-face lessons and communicate with their teacher and classmates using a suite of secure online tools inside the password-protected LMS. These tools help students learn or review key concepts, stay organized, show what they have learned, submit assignments, track their achievement, and communicate with others. This suite of online secure tools includes: Blog, Checklists, on line Discussions, Drop box, Email, e-Portfolio, Journal, News, Pager, Quizzes, e-Survey etc.

Benefits of blended learning

Like any other great blend, Education Elements believes blended learning works because it combines two things in a way that makes each better than they are on their own: teachers' talent and technology tools. Blended learning allows teachers to do what they do best – work directly and closely with individual students and small groups – by harnessing the adaptive power and precision of technology. Ryan notes that blended learning is the future because it helps address students' diverse needs and learning styles, supports effective response to intervention and gives learners direct experience with technology-supported skills essential for 21st century success. The benefits of Blended learning are summarized below:

1. It provides students online tools to supplement classroom instruction and extends learning beyond the classroom.
2. One can have tailored learning experiences for students based on their needs.
3. It engages students with online tools similar to those used outside the classroom.
4. It provides convenient easy communication with students and parents.
5. It helps to create, deliver, and analyze formative and classroom assessment.
6. It increases communication among teachers enriches professional development.
7. It helps to manage curriculum and curriculum development.
8. It also helps to generate student, class, and district performance reports.
9. It helps in curriculum development.
10. It saves time.

What blended learning isn't?

Simply adding online computer games or videos to a student's day or homework time doesn't count as blended learning. Neither does rolling a laptop cart into a school. Nor does it mean that students are isolated at their keyboards with no social interaction. In great blended learning schools, technology and teaching inform each other. Students alternate regularly between engaging with teachers and peers and focusing on online content tailored to their learning pace and progress. Education Elements believes that tightly integrating online content and offline instruction helps students get exactly what they need when they need it – and that regularly reviewing student progress data and dynamically adjusting student groups optimizes student-teacher interactions.

Exploring the possibilities

The result of smart blended learning is richer and deeper interactions between teachers and students (and between students themselves) than in traditional classrooms. Integrating technology and teaching allows students to fully master content and skills, and at the pace that's right for them.

Think about it this way: an average classroom sets a "speed limit" for the class – bounded by grade-level standards and assessments – making it hard for some kids to catch up and holding others from moving ahead when they're ready. But blended learning revs up students' learning velocity, allowing them to go further and faster. Who knows how far they'll go?

Advantages

Proponents of blended learning argue that by incorporating the "asynchronous Internet communication technology" into courses serves to "facilitate a simultaneous independent and collaborative learning experience" and this incorporation is a major contributor to student satisfaction and success in such courses. The use of information and communication technologies has been found to improve access to as well as student attitudes towards learning. By incorporating information technology into class projects, communication between lecturers and part-time students was improved, and students were able to better evaluate their understanding of course material via the use of "computer-based qualitative and quantitative assessment modules" in a study by Alexander and McKenzie (1998).

Disadvantages

Blended learning has a strong dependence on the technical resources with which the blended learning experience is delivered. These tools need to be reliable, easy to use, and up to date in order for the use of the Internet to have a meaningful impact on the learning experience. Additionally, IT literacy can serve as a significant barrier for students attempting to get access to the course materials, making the availability of high quality technical support paramount. It has been observed that the use of lecture recording technologies can result in students falling behind on the material. In a study performed across four different universities, it was found that only half of the students watched the lecture videos on a regular basis, and nearly 40% of students watched several weeks' worth of videos in one sitting.

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