

Blended learning: Its Scope and Significance in Higher Education

Monal K. Desai¹ & Dr. Surendrasinh Gohil² & Dr. R.N.Joshi³

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, C.U. Shah University, Wadhvan, Gujarat, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, NMCA, Navsari Agricultural University, Navsari, Gujarat, India

³Dean, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, C. U. Shah University, Wadhvan, Gujarat, India

Received: May 09, 2018

Accepted: June 18, 2018

ABSTRACT

Due to advancement in the technology, Higher Education is facing the paradigm shift in teaching-learning process. For many years, the lecture was the most commonly practiced approach for teaching. Nowadays, due to an increased presence of the technology, learners' attitude and behavior towards learning is changed and has reoriented their style of learning and communication inside and outside of the classroom. Firstly, they get more exposure to the materials related to learning and ways to communicate with people from every nook and corner of the world. Secondly, the teacher has to finish the prescribed course in a stipulated time allotted for the teaching of the subject. This is sometimes hindrance for learners. They cannot learn at their own time and pace according to their learning styles. Hence universities demand to change the teaching-learning style to cope with learners' need and interest. So there has been a demand to incorporate new approach and teaching style which caters the learners' need and make teaching-learning process more interesting. Blended learning can be one of the avant-gardes to overcome hurdles: 1. The learners can learn at their own time and pace 2. The different modes of learning help to increase interest and motivation for teaching-learning process. 3. Dropouts or learners who are working simultaneously to study can opt for the learning. This study illustrates the commencement of Blended Learning, the positive ways and pitfalls in implementing Blended Learning in higher education.

Keywords: Blended learning, Learner's style

1. Introduction

Due to advancement in the technology, Higher education is facing a paradigm shift in teaching-learning process. For many years, the lecture was the most commonly practiced approach for teaching. Nowadays, due to increased presence of the technology, learners' attitude and behavior toward learning is changed and has reoriented their style of learning and communication inside and outside of the classroom. Firstly, they get more exposure to the material related to learning and communication with others. A study by Microsoft Corporation reports that digital lifestyle has impacted our ability to stay focused, with the human attention span shortening from 12 seconds to 8 seconds in more than a decade. Students of university opined that the content they are learning in a classroom is boring and isolated from the employer's need. They tend to skip the lectures due to the availability of same contents on the internet. Secondly, the teacher has to finish the prescribed course in a stipulated time allotted for the teaching of the subject. This is sometimes hindrance for learners. They cannot learn at their own time and pace according to their learning styles. Hence universities demand to change the teaching-learning style to cope with learners' need and interest. So there has been a demand to incorporate new approach and teaching style which caters the learners' need and make teaching-learning process more interesting.

Hence the university demands to change the teaching-learning style to cope with learners' need and interest. So there has been a demand to incorporate material and teaching style which caters the learners need and make teaching-learning process more interesting for the learners. Singh (2003) noted that the learners with different learning styles and preferences demand the different modalities to learn and get material in the right format. Ever accelerating scenario of technology demands learners to update with technology and education to cope with growing demand of industries and other workplaces. The amalgamation of face to face instruction with technology can strengthen learning environment and learning outcome. (Singh(2002), Smyth (2012) and Brush (2008)). Blended learning can be one of the avant-gardes to overcome hurdles: 1. The learners can learn at their own time and pace 2. The different modes of learning help to increase interest and motivation for teaching-learning process. This study illustrates the commencement of Blended Learning, the positive ways and pitfalls in implementing Blended Learning in higher education. To conclude, the study suggests some practical ideas on how to implement Blended learning within higher education.

2. Elucidation of Blended Learning

The expression "Blended Learning" is a buzz expression, however, there is no specific definition, it varies from person to person according to different contexts. The quintessential definition denotes Blended

learning as a course containing face to face instruction with distance learning wherein there is room to study beyond the classroom.

According to Driscoll(2002) Blended learning is combining affirmative ways of two approaches: student-centered and teacher-centered, whereas Colin and Moonen (2001) explained that to blend means intermixing of traditional classroom teaching with online learning. Irrespective of definitions, integration of technology in the language classroom has made a major impact on the teaching-learning process. Due to ubiquities of technology, there are many tools which can use for language teaching such as synchronous and asynchronous communication with applications like WhatsApp,wechat, emails, social networking sites, discussion forums so on and so forth to incorporate technology with traditional teaching.

3. Rational to implement BL

With the ocean of studies related to online learning and technology aided learning in language education, the major perspectives for studies can be categorized in areas such as attrition, interaction and student satisfaction.

Attrition

Moskal, Dziuban, and Hartman(2013) compared traditional face to face learning, online learning and blended learning at University of Central Florida. The result suggests that the dropout rates were 4.3% for the fully online course, 3.1% for face-to-face setting and 2.8% for blended learning. Addition to that the study reports that continuous evaluation is a basic necessity to achieve target goal in Blended learning. The blended course has better performance as compared to other modes of learning. The dropout rates were less (6%) as compared to traditional face to face teaching (4%), the study indicates the reason for this is student engagement with peers and teacher. (Hensely,2005).**López-Pérez et. al. (2011)** studied the overall perception of BL and the ratio of the dropout students in the course. The sample of the study was 1431 undergraduate students. The result showed that learners got affirmative perceptions on BL. It also helped in reducing the ratio of Drop out learners and increased the pass ratio for the end semester exam.

Interaction

The success of teaching learning process depends on two-way communication among teacher and students. Sometimes due to stage fright, few learners never show initiation in the classroom while they take part in the online communication without any hesitations. Riffell and Sibley (2003) reported that their study found better communication among peers and teachers in Blended learning than in traditional classroom teaching. Similarly, Granham and Kaleta(2002) noted the learners who have not participated in the classroom, they actively participated in an online discussion. The study infers that the blended mode of learning provides room for communication for shy learners.

Satisfaction

Moore and Kearsley (2005) noted that achievement cannot correlate with satisfaction, however, satisfaction can be considered as one of the components for the successful completion of the course. Maria et al. (2009) reported that the blended learning is feasible option to retain student satisfaction.**Miyazoe and Anderson (2010)** conducted a study to find out the effectiveness of forum, blogs, and wikis especially in the field of Language teaching with BL in Japan. The analysis proved that in terms of collaboration and discussion wiki was very effective. Even to share material and connect with peer blog was useful for samples. Overall they found blended learning very easy and interesting mode of learning. Similarly, Owston et al. (2006) reported the blended learning helps to increase critical thinking and provide room for collaboration among teachers and students, so the students were encouraged to actively participate in a learning process.

4. Impediment and shortcoming of BL

It is said that every coin has two sides; blended learning is also no exception to it. It has some pitfalls which need to overcome for the successful implementation of the Blended course. The reasons are:

1. Unavailability of electric power continuously or power cut-outs.
2. Lack of immediate response as can be possible in traditional face to face classroom(Vonderwell,2003)
3. Lack of IT skills to explore the course materials and participate in discussion forums(Holley and Oliver,2010)
4. Socio-cultural and socio-economic differences
5. Lack of IT skills of faculties.

Thus the need analysis of students and analysis of students' background is prerequisite to implement successful Blended learning course.

5. Suggested Classroom activities

The technology can help to provide real-life experience for communication. Assignments or project help learners to work in a team, with technology in a classroom it caters teamwork and leadership skills. Learners can collaborate even from distant places with technology such as discussion forums through Moodle, Google classroom, Edmodo, Wikispaces, blog so on and so forth. These tools provide room for creating the student-centered environment. Students can learn at their own time and pace with Blended learning. These types of tools provide a platform to share different types of material with text, audio, video files which can be useful to learn out of a classroom.

6. Conclusion

The new generation surrounded by technology enjoys the use of technology in the classroom and can learn better with the Blended mode of learning. The technology provides easily available contents for learning and facility to collaborate with peers and teacher out of the classroom motivates them to learn at self-pace. Blended learning increases the satisfaction of learning though it has some pitfalls that need to overcome through future researches in language educations.

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