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BLENDLED LEARNING IN THE POST PANDEMIC ERA IN INDIA

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Abstract

Online and hybrid learning could better satisfy the academic demands of students in times of crisis, such as a pandemic, war, or natural disaster. Following the shift to a learner-centric pedagogy brought about by the usage of information and communication technology (ICT), the ability to use technology effectively is now seen as one of the most important qualities for both teachers/educators and students. Therefore, the goal of this study is to comprehend how teachers and students view the application of online and mixed learning environments in teaching and learning processes. Finding out the opportunities and difficulties of offering online or blended learning in a nation like India, particularly during and after COVID-19, is another goal of the study. The answer to providing education in the context of India in the twenty-first century may be blended learning. In recent years, a wide range of online and e-learning platforms have been created that can be used in blended learning to enhance the abilities of the learner.

Keywords: Blended Learning, COVID-19, Pandemic, Online Learning, Lockdown.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown several challenges at almost all sectors of the economy. Numerous institutions, Universities, Colleges and public and private school systems worldwide, have been severely impacted by the highly contagious coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). One of the key sectors most seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic is education. According to Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, "the current educational disruption is unprecedented in its global magnitude and pace and, if it persists, it could jeopardise the right to education" (UNESCO Press Release, 3 March 2020). According to this organisation, "the closing of educational institutions has had an impact on close to 900 million learners" (Nicola et al., 2020, p. 187). As all education institutions were shut down during the pandemic, alternate methodologies were applied to continue education delivery. The extended forced closure period has compelled educators throughout the world to use technology more extensively so that their students may continue to learn without stopping. Experts have been pushed by COVID-19 to reconsider the most effective teaching-learning pedagogies in light of the current global health challenges. Blended learning is one of the models that many educationalists and research academics have suggested, and it appears to be a realistic and suitable solution for educational institutions for at least a few months post-pandemic. Blended learning refers to the blending of digital content with in-person lessons and activities. Between classroom instruction and content delivery in a fully online mode comes a stage called blended learning. Though the term was first introduced by Bonk and Graham in the year 2006, in their book 'Textbook of Blended Learning' it was formerly known as hybrid learning and can be categorised under Computer assisted learning or ICT based education. Blended learning is the term given to the educational practice of combining digital learning tools with more traditional classroom face to face teaching. A blended learning mode provides ultimate flexibility in many aspects. It can be applied to any program which holds on to the values of traditional learning and incorporates digital media with that. Thus, blended learning is the outcome of combining the best aspects of face-to-face interaction between teachers and students with a deliberate and methodical approach to technology deployment. In actuality, this combines the greatest aspects of two learning environments. A key component of a blended course is that online resources are not utilised to replace face-to-face instruction; rather, they are meant to supplement and advance the material covered in class. Although the terms blended and hybrid learning are sometimes used interchangeably, there is a difference because hybrid courses incorporate online components to replace in-person class time. Students can participate online in a hybrid learning environment either synchronously (using real-time meeting sessions) or asynchronously (at various intervals) (Siegelman, 2019). The strength of blended learning approaches resides in their capacity to enhance the learning environment for students. For teachers, the combination of in-person and online learning enhances the overall learning experience. Numerous studies have found that it improved learning for pupils, decreased failure rates, and increased engagement.

In light of the pandemic, blended learning has suddenly assumed critical importance for education, and significant higher institutions around the world are moving towards it (Jowsey, 2020). According to (Farahani, 2020) a blended learning strategy can help students' communication and counselling abilities. Prior until now, blended learning was primarily utilised in programmes for international students (Klenner, 2017). The idea that learning is a continuous process rather than a one-time event forms the basis of the



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blended learning concept. Compared to adopting a single learning delivery method alone, blending provides a number of benefits. (Singh, 2015) Many previous studies prove that blended learning technique has an excellent potential to meet the new challenges of ever transitional education system. Blended learning (BL) is being adopted worldwide in higher education, corporate training and K-12 education. Many have predicted that BL would “emerge as the predominant model of the future” (Watson, 2008), become the “new traditional model” (Gage, 2006), or “the new normal” in course delivery (A. Norberg, 2011) The dynamism of face-to-face learning can be supplemented by online learning and teaching. This is consistent with the most widely used pedagogical ideas and course delivery methods in higher education today, which are blended learning approaches and designs. According to Garrison and Vaughan, a blended learning environment consists of a combination of carefully chosen online and in-person methods and designs that are in line with students' performance and the learning objectives of particular coursework. A diverse strategy is then needed to improve blended learning and teaching.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present paper are as follows:

1. To study the pre-requisites of blended learning.
2. To analyse how relevant it is to adopt and implement blended learning in Indian Education System.
3. To explore how blended learning will act as a way forward in post pandemic era.
4. To comprehend how teachers and students view the implementation of blended learning and online learning.

Methodology

The present paper is both a qualitative and review-based piece of work. It is entirely founded on secondary information. The citations for the supporting evidence come from books, journal papers, UNICEF reports and other relevant documents. The research paper also used a variety of papers and data from the UGC's Web resources, as well as information from the SDGs from 2016 and AISHE 2019.

This study aims to comprehend the value of online education or blended learning during times of emergency or pandemics like the COVID-19.

Review of Literature

Numerous studies conducted worldwide, including one by Hirata Yoko et al (Hirata, 2008), found that most students preferred online learning to traditional classes and that combining online and face-to-face learning was beneficial for students. In order for students to develop a set of skills and strategies for successful language learners in hybrid learning environments, the study found that some instructional factors, such as flexibility, a goal-focused approach, as well as close connections between in-class and online instructions, are essential. (Subramaniyam, 2015) published a review-based study. It includes in depth analysis of previous papers to understand the characteristics methodology and pedagogical perspective of blended learning strategies in Indian context. To meet the new challenges of 21st century it was concluded as a result that blended learning strategies are very much useful and could be the future of Indian teaching learning environment. It is a sustainable approach which can also an innovative process and can meet the individual need of a student.

Blended learning policies and practices were surveyed by (M. Barbour, 2011) in several geographical areas. This is a thorough statistical analysis of online and blended learning in K–12 settings worldwide. The adoption of such learning techniques has been noted to be significantly hampered by the absence of clear government policies and goals for online learning practises. In-depth criteria that pose the biggest obstacles to adopting online and blended learning programmes in various locales have been produced as part of this survey. A thorough country-by-country profile for educational initiatives is also being produced. This profile offers details on private and publishing partners, financing sources, difficulties, present circumstances, student data, teacher-training programmes, and other concise information regarding online and blended learning programmes.

Yen and Lee (2011) examined blended learning in specifically 3 areas, including online learning, classroom instruction, and mobile learning. The study's mission statement was to expose whether or not blended learning is able to address problem-solving strategies and their effects on academic success. Three groups make up the entire study: the hybrid-oriented group (N=17), Groups focused on technology (N = 12) and efficiency (N = 5) make up the entire sample size of 34. The hybrid group received instruction using both face-to-face and online teaching methods. Technology-based groups were mostly taught using online learning methods and efficiency-oriented group received task-focused instruction. Efficiency-focused groups displayed higher more success than other groups on the achievement test. Hybrid group displayed greater than the technology group in the current study.



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Islam et al. (2018) looked into the connections between mixed learning and motivation and accomplishment ratings. By using a control group design for a quasi-experiment, they have carried out their study. Those in the control group received traditional instruction, while those in the experimental group received three weeks of instruction using a mixed learning approach. Findings from the study demonstrates that blended learning has been very successful in raising motivation levels. Additionally, children who participated in an experimental group had higher achievement levels, which demonstrates that using blended learning methodologies can help students achieve higher levels of scores as well.

In order for blended learning to get the momentum it needs to become a widely used and highly effective style of instruction, (Kundu, 2018) undertook his study to define blended learning, highlight the problems in the Indian educational system, and identify adjustments that need to be implemented.

With three groups of 40 participants each, an experimental study was conducted by (Koul, 2019) with students from India. This research was done to look into various learning resources. Doodling, note-taking, doodling, and note-taking were divided into three groups. Blending is the ideal strategy for achieving successful learning outcomes, as evidenced by the group dealing with doodling and note taking, which both demonstrated improved memory effectiveness.

(Ożadowicz, 2020.) discussed the value of integrated learning in the COVID 19 era, which every student has since realised and put into practise. By altering the blended learning strategy in the instruction of building automation engineers at a technical institution, this work has examined the significance of the blended learning approach. The adopted methods met COVID-19 times' requirements, increased student engagement and performance, and established the procedures, techniques, and tools for adopting distant learning to deal with catastrophes, pandemics, and other situations in the future, according to the results.

Findings

The Government of India launched the "Bharat Padhe Online" initiative during the Covid-19 lockdown to motivate educators to produce digital educational materials, exchange concepts and innovations in open forums through the development of educational blogs and wikis, as well as the creation of an increasing number of open educational resources (OERs). This was done in an effort to reconsider the idea of pedagogy from the traditional chalk-and-talk method to online learning. A number of task forces were established to monitor the online learning environment across the country, from the national to state and then from the state to district levels, in order to give the ongoing learning support services to the learners at all levels.

According to data from 2019 accessible at www.statista.com, with more than 560 million internet users, India is the second-largest online market in the world, behind China. According to estimates, there will be more than 650 million internet users in the country by 2023. Despite the enormous number of internet users in India, the country's internet penetration rate is expected to be around 50% in 2020. This implies that over half of India's 1.37 billion people will have internet connection this year.

However, for a nation like India, providing quality learning with the aid of ICT-based technology still poses a significant problem in terms of accessibility and equity. Although flexibility in time and location was thought to be the most important aspect of online learning, (Hasan, 2020) also discovered that inadequate network connections were one of the main obstacles. To build online learning specifically to encourage meaningful peer interaction, relevant technical improvements must be done. Only when instructors and students are able to comprehend the right implementations of the newest techno-pedagogies that have the potential to alter the educational system will the motto "Bharat Padhe Online" be effectively fulfilled. As Hasan (2020) and (Garg, 2020) both pointed out, it was necessary to specify the obstacles and learning preferences of the students in advance rather than beginning online teaching and learning in an unprepared and hasty manner. The educators went from using a blackboard to a computer screen when Indian educational institutions suddenly shifted to online instruction. However, in actuality, online instruction in the strictest sense was seldom ever used. Additionally, it has been discovered that in order to establish a productive learning ecosystem, online and blended learning require systematic planning, designing, and thorough definition of educational goals. Although teachers are frequently involved in a variety of online activities during the pandemic, this is essentially only a temporary situation and "not" online learning per se, which should encompass the "four quadrants" of online learning. According to (Bozkurt, 2020) making this distinction will be crucial to the growth and success of online education in the post-Covid era.

To ensure the efficiency of the current systems of teaching and learning, educators must be trained in the use of the newest technology. They should instead take on the role of facilitators. In addition, the materials offered should have a strong connection between in-person resources and online technologies in order to reflect the social presence, instructional presence, and cognitive



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presence, which are the three pillars of quality online/blended models. The pandemic has actually been a boon in disguise, establishing a changed role for online/blended learning for all forms of education in a country like India. In fact, the employment of online/blended approaches in the teaching learning process is getting more and more vital day by day.

The key issue with higher education in India is how to preserve and guarantee access, equity, quality, and expansion while delivering education so that genuine democratisation of education may be achieved. For a better collaborative experience, the convergence strategy between traditional and ODL institutions should be encouraged so that students from both modes can benefit from studying at their own speed and location.

Because of the large size of the Indian economy, there are some differences in how easily teachers and students can use modern, sophisticated technologies for educational transactions. Additionally, it has been discovered that access to completely online or synchronous teaching and learning facilities by everyone is not achievable in an equal manner due to the low level of internet connectivity for educational reasons. As a result, asynchronous learning methods in education can give everyone the best learning chance in a more flexible and comfortable way. Therefore, the blended learning approach, which is often learner-centric and economical, will have an impact on the entire Indian education system in the days to come.

Suggestions

In the field of education, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us the importance of adaptability and flexibility in the dissemination of educational resources. When implementing blended learning, some factors need to be taken into account, including the necessity for institutions to have a well-equipped ICT infrastructure and a hardware and software support system to Continue to effectively teach and learn in an online environment. Teachers and students should both have access to appropriate devices, application software, and online learning platforms. Teachers should also be trained to deliver lessons using a blending model because studies have revealed limitations in their use of technology. Last but not least, but most importantly, the government should take appropriate action and support efforts to reform education.

Conclusion

The world is now experiencing a peak in technological development and adoption. Children of today, who are exposed to technology devices like mobile phones and tablets from a young age, have a deep link with ICT and have developed a digital addiction. (Ali, 2019)

Thus, one of the best methods offered during post pandemic times is blended learning, which uses online techniques and can be combined for teaching and learning while maintaining social distance, the norms of working from home and avoiding crowds. Blended learning is a method that makes use of the internet to utilising technology in both teaching and learning for the purpose of enhancing the educational process and appeal to more people, especially those who would like to participate but can't because of distance. Most students have access to the internet and mobile phones, and they utilise these things in addition to conversing to text each other and interact on social media. ICT has already experienced widespread acceptance. Therefore, incorporating online media into traditional schooling creates new educational potential.

However there have been numerous difficulties as far as blended learning is concerned. Although some teachers were successful in adjusting to the online setting, this was not the case for all of them. Additionally, teachers claimed that problems like receiving emails while they were not working were caused by the lack of set working hours in the online world. However, the socioeconomic environment and/or internet availability posed a significant difficulty because, among other things, there could be problems with equipment, resources, and facilities. As far as students are concerned blended learning's shift to an online format, may have an impact on the ones who are having trouble connecting to the internet, are struggling financially, lack school infrastructure, etc. The government should take measures to satisfy standards through careful planning, and work to create a blended learning system to prevent these kinds of challenges in the education sector in any future pandemic period. More funding and investment from the government to guarantee that blended learning is widely adopted and used in emerging societies after a pandemic is needed. Institutions of higher education also require to take part in managing and improving existing methods of online education and growth of access to the internet and electronic library materials. In India, fully implementing online learning at a broad scale is a very challenging endeavour, but blended learning can be adopted, ultimately paving the way for a totally online method of education in the future, if necessary.



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