

# BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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**ABSTRACT-** Blended learning an effective learning approach that selects from a range of traditional face-to-face methods and e-learning technologies to facilitate student engagement, develop independent learners and enhance the learning experience. Its superiority over online learning, which lacks face-to-face interaction, is evident from studies that examined both student achievement and satisfaction. This article explores the benefits of blended learning in teaching and learning from the perspective of students, faculty, and administration that have had direct experience with this form of course delivery. Students indicate that a blended learning model provides them with greater time flexibility and improved learning outcomes. Faculty suggest that blended courses create enhanced opportunities for teacher-student interaction, increased student engagement in learning, added flexibility in the teaching and learning environment, and opportunities for continuous improvement. Taking an evidence-informed approach, institutional experts, management and staff developed a strategic framework, covering ICT support, the E-learning system and curriculum development to meet the specific needs of these students. It is concluded that learning process can be improved by the use of technology; it nurtures a world-class and universal workforce, Blended learning builds self-esteem and confidence in students. It fosters independent habits for learning and orientation.

**Key words:** Blended learning, Face-to-face learning, ICT, teaching/learning process, distance education.

## Introduction

“Blended learning approach is a combination of the classical face-to-face teaching plus additional e-Learning features...” (UNESCO, 2002). Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2010) defines blended learning as: “A method of educating that uses e-learning techniques, i.e. online delivery through the web, discussion boards and e-mail, combined with traditional face-to-face lectures, seminars, and tutorials.”

Over the past few years, teaching/learning process has become more pragmatic in their approach to technology-based and traditional forms of training delivery (Brennan, 2004). This trend has led to the rise of the term “blended learning.” In defining “blended learning”, most authors concentrate on the word blended. To blend means to “form a harmonious compound...” (Concise Oxford Dictionary 8th edition, 1990). Blended learning refers to the use of two or more distinct methods of training. A combinations of blending classroom instruction with online instruction using computer, cellular or Smart-phones, Satellite television channels, video-conferencing and other emerging electronic media. The ultimate aim of blended learning is to provide practical opportunities to make learning independent, useful, sustainable and ever growing. Blended learning means many things to many people. “Blended learning integrates contrary approaches, such as formal and informal learning, face-to-face and online experiences, directed paths and reliance on self-direction, and digital references and collegial connections, to achieve individual and organizational goals. (Rossett & Frazee, 2005).” According to Singh and Reed (2001), blended learning focuses on optimizing achievement of

learning objectives by applying the “right” learning technologies to match the “right” personal learning style to transfer the “right” skills to the “right” person at the “right” time. Blended learning agenda has the ability to cater for individual needs. Successful blended learning, is like a successful recipe, and mingles a range of complementary ingredients in order to support the unique purpose of each learning event.

Today learning can occur ubiquitously due to the technological factors that have broken the geographical barriers to learning. Current status requires innovative ways to support education for all (UNESCO-IITE Report, 2003). Detecon (2002) observes that the potential of e-technology for the developing countries is breathtaking. Downes (2007), learning will increasingly be available not so much in learning institutions but in any given environment in which learners find themselves. One of the key is the significant increase in demand for higher education in both developed and developing countries. Philip O. and Ayoo (2008), demand for higher education is expected to grow from 48 million enrolments in 1990 to 159 million in 2025 – an annual growth rate of 3.5 percent. From an economic perspective, the International Data Corporation (IDC, 2004) has estimated that world revenues in the corporate e-learning market will surpass \$21.1 billion by 2008, compared with a \$7.9 billion market in 2004.

The positive effect of a timely response can be intensified by additional phone calls and face-to-face conversations and will provide a sense that there are real people behind the online environment (Serveau, K. 2004).

Romanov & Nevgi (2006), students using Blackboard (WebCT) generated significantly higher assessment results compared to students using a conventional web site displaying the same course material. Giardiello (2006), to keep PowerPoint presentations to an online format is important to bear in mind that the bullet points were designed to be "*aides memoire*" to the verbal presentation. Animations, graphics, digital photographs (Swartz, 2004), video clips and sound recordings can engage the learner to utilized better in an electronic rather than a paper-based format Whitson, (2006). Presenting information in varied ways provides the learner with an enriched learning atmosphere and possibility of maintaining interest. Winer & Cooperstock, (2002) integrated various technologies such as audio, video, slides and digital notes on an electronic whiteboard/digital tablet during a live lecture which was recorded and made available for the students. Implementation of online quizzes/ games to the course material had the potential to increase student participation and improve the learning process. (Jones and Jones 2006). Interactivity can have advantageous effects for the learner causing their memory skills and understanding to increase to approximately 70% - in contrast to 20% when they only 'see', and 40% when they 'see and hear' (Lindstrom, 1994).

### 1. Features of Blended Learning

Blended Learning (BL) is devoted to learning and performance. It has some identified features:

- It promotes connections and conversations
- It guides, directs and tracks
- It nurtures a world-class and universal workforce.
- It provides consistent and updated messages.
- It tries to utilize the technologies in a healthier and profitable way.
- It fosters independent habits for learning and orientation.
- It encourages learning and work.
- It Improves student engagement and motivation

### Blended Learning in Teaching/Learning Process

Teachers' roles are changing as they evolve from "lecturer" to instructional guide. Independent student work and mentoring are becoming more common instructional strategies as teachers assess student progress and then use a variety of tools and resources. The blended learning models are also flexible and adaptable so teachers can create instructional activities and assignments that give students the opportunity to work collaboratively, tapping their interest and abilities in social learning. Lowes, S. (2005) at Columbia University describes the dimension to the efficacy of blended learning. This research found that teachers' instructional practices are transformed by

learning how to teach online, because they develop new skills and build pedagogical strategies using technology. Further, 75% of the teachers in this study said that teaching online had a positive impact on their face-to-face teaching. Teacher's success factors are:

- Ongoing pedagogical and technical support through membership of a blended community of practice is a proven model that sustains such teacher innovation (Garrison, 2008).
- The importance of dealing with teachers' fears of loss of control, lower student feedback grades and general uneasiness about the impact of online learning on classroom relationships should be considered (Vaughan, 2007).
- The impact on teachers' workloads must be taken into account. Littlejohn and Pegler (2006) identify the costliness in terms of both institutional and teacher investment and suggest the creation of shareable digital resources in an effort to ensure that blended learning is sustainable.

Today's digital native students expect their learning environment to include technology because it is an intrinsic part of their lives. Blended learning offers learners the opportunity "to be both together and apart." Education's stakeholders demand and deserve proof that instructional models support and improve student outcomes. Here the data is clear. Blended learning performs as well or better than face-to-face instruction. According to a 2009 report from the U.S. Department of Education, "In recent experimental and quasi-experimental studies contrasting blends of online and face-to-face instruction with conventional face-to-face classes, blended instruction has been more effective, providing a rationale for the effort required to design and implement blended approaches." Student's success factors

- Students' learning maturity and readiness for blending learning with its demands for independent learning must be considered (Tabor, 2007).
- Student expectations, especially their ideas that fewer face-to-face classes mean less work and the need to develop more responsibility for their learning and time management skills must be taken into account (Vaughan, 2007)
- Consistent and transparent communication around the new expectations is needed in order to help students understand the blended learning process (Francis (2006).

### Blended Learning in Distance Education

1. **Blended learning brings learning, information, and support to work.** *The American Management Association offers a blended learning approach that leverages convergence (Leonard, 2005). Many use our e-courseware for online training.*
2. **Blended learning promotes connections and conversations.** *Blended learning encourages the organization to extend lessons and conversations beyond the classroom and into the workplace through coaching.*
3. **Blended learning provides consistent and updated messages.** *Instructors are a great resource, but their messages can be idiosyncratic and their smarts and enthusiasm depart after class. Technology, lingers to deliver standardized messages, consistently, tirelessly, swiftly, repeatedly, patiently, around the globe.*
4. **Blended learning improves performance and controls costs.** *Nelson (2005) and Bersin (2004) reported enhanced employee retention and reduced training time for blended approaches. In addition, online resources can be easier and cheaper to update*

*and distribute. The costs of real estate are reduced, as organization take lessons and messages to workers, no matter where they are.*

#### Statement of the Problem

The study was conducted as “Blended Learning Environment in Teaching and Learning”.

#### Method

The present study was descriptive type. Population of the study comprised of all the academicians of Faculty of Education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. Questionnaire was used to collect the data.

Questionnaire were validated both professionally and small scale try out was also made. Observation/ comments of this try out were accommodated before actual administrating of tool to sample. Questionnaire was administered personally. The data collected through rating scales was analyzed by using percentage, mean score and t-test.

#### Data Analysis

S.No	Statement	Mean score
1.	Blended Learning prepares to students to work interactively	3.75
2.	Blended Learning creates new ideas in students	3.88
3.	Blended Learning provides social environment for distance learners	4.25
4.	Blended Learning develop appropriate rationale for the use of Information communication technologies ICT	4.38
5.	Blended Learning provide user friendly environment	4.00
6.	Blended Learning promotes positive interdependence among student and teacher	4.25
7.	Blended Learning encourages group discussion	4.25
8.	Blended Learning keep connected the learners to the global world	4.00
9.	Blended Learning provide feedback on assessment work	4.25
10.	Blended Learning provide the advanced knowledge	3.75
11.	Blended Learning support the distance education significantly	4.00
12.	Blended Learning creates mental picture during communication process	4.12
13.	Blended Learning have permanent effect on students' minds	4.50
14.	Blended Learning is a combination of more then one medium of learning	3.94
15.	Blended Learning may be applied to long classes	3.62
16.	Blended Learning creates decision making ability about the task assigned	3.75
17.	Blended Learning develops critical thinking among distance learners	4.38

#### Conclusions

Blended Learning prepares to students to work collaboratively and creates new ideas for students. Blended Learning provide social environment for distance learners and develop appropriate rationale for the use of communication technologies. Blended Learning provide user friendly environment and Blended Learning promotes

positive interdependence among student and teacher. Blended Learning encourages group discussion and develop team work skills. Blended Learning provide feedback on assessment work and provide the knowledge. Blended Learning support the distance education significantly and creates mental picture during communication process. It reveals the differences among

the students and encourages team work. Blended Learning is easy to work in grouping and creates decision making ability about the task assigned. Blended Learning develops critical thinking among distance learners.

### Recommendations

1. Learning process through Blended Learning may be improved by using modern technology during the workshops.
2. Blended Learning strategy may be implemented practically during workshops to make whole sessions of workshops more successful.
3. Learning technology may be made accessible to all participants.
4. Working in groups may be encouraged.

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