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# Blended Learning

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**Abstract**

Despite the fact that its effectiveness promotes more learners to be engaged, developing world faces challenges to make it more innovative in the process of teaching. It leads to some questions about whether or not this new approach is effective, what are the results in terms of learning outcomes, what difficulties can emerge and how they can be overcome. This paper examines these questions and discusses possible answers: increased student engagement and achievement, improved satisfaction and effectiveness are two different positive outcomes of blended learning approach for students whereas technological and learning environment challenges can be dealt with two varied ways: utilization of Learning Management System (LMS) and teachers' competence to apply different techniques during the sessions.

**Keywords**

Blended learning, Learning Management System, online and offline mode of learning, curriculum, effectiveness, student-centred teaching. \

**Introduction**

It is inevitable that technological advancement is one of the most successful achievements of human being. The advent of it has increased work efficiency which has a result in the shift to applying technology in all spheres not excluding education as well. Especially during the Covid 19 period in which people had no other choice but working and studying remotely; distance education has become so common and seen significant improvements. The usage of ICT tools in education was an only way to keep "social distancing" in order to prevent the outbreak of the disease. Undoubtedly, physical mode of learning has its own importance but distance education had far more advantages in this process. So far almost all educational institutions have offered hybrid way of learning to students in which they can study both online and offline according to their preferences and thereby the idea of blended learning, the combination of distant and face-to-face learning, has come into existence. This innovative pedagogical approach has been accepted rapidly, although it has been experiencing a process.

**Increased Student Engagement and Achievement**

One advantage of blended learning approach on student performance is that it allows students to stay engaged and thereby their achievements increase. The integration of technology into teaching process keeps learners interested in, enthusiastic about, and focused on the subjects they are studying while the usage of computers for searching information and data which is a tremendous life-saver, provides students with interaction and involvement in teaching resources for longer time than they would spend on paper-based learning materials, this engagement contributes to develop their learning by exploration and research. The key to students' achievements through blended learning is that this approach prepares them for the future offering them real-world skills which directly translate into life-skills developing their research, self-learning, decision-making, computer literacy skills and sense of responsibility as well as self-driving force as they have to work on their own most of the times.

Accountability is of the essence in providing engagement and success of students while learning remotely. The reason is that blended learning provides student autonomy in which they develop "sense of ownership" which is a propelling factor for students to feel the responsibility for the work they are doing. As they do most of the tasks on their own, distantly, they become self-driven and acquiring self-advocacy skills will help them to achieve their goals later in life. Developing sense of accountability which is a priority in blended learning is generally a key to successful and effective learning. In their article "Using constructivist principles in designing and integrating online collaborative interactions", Blocker and Tucker state that blended learning approach motivated the students to be connected and further their study even when they were absent in the classroom because of health problems or family vacation. The students report that the environment of blended learning does not accept excuses, and avoidance of completing tasks is impossible

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even if they did not attend school. Additionally, they had more control of the place, path of learning and pace, all of which made the students be engaged, take charge and be accountable for their learning.

Implementation of blended learning gives students more class working time in which they learn, practice and apply the course content, and extra online lessons provided by the teacher are considered an extension of learning for those who are less engaged during in-class hours. Another uniqueness of the approach to enable students involvement is its functionality to allow students to partake in the lessons distantly when they are unable to come to campus or if they opt for alternate location using the technology which is an access to the campus in which they could have a live interaction with professsors and other students. In her article "Blended learning in an Upper Year Engineering Course: The Relationship between Students' Program Year, Interactions with Online Material, and Academic Performance", Watson states the report by undergraduate engineering students who benefited from traditional teaching blended with online learning. According to him, Jamieson and Shaw (2016) found out that collaboration, improved class attendance and involvement could be reached by fourth-year undergraduate engineering students. Similarly, Harris and Park (2016) stated some positive feedbacks by students saying the flexibility of watching online videos on their own time, more participation in lectures and material learning at their own pace. The research found out that adopting blended learning improved students' academic performance. Francis and Shannon (2013) reported that more engaged students in blended learning tended to show higher results than their less-engaged collegues and they also stated that the number of hours students spent on reflection of what they have learned could increase their marks up to one half standard deviation.

**Improved Satisfaction And Effectiveness**

Functionality of blended learning to improve satisfaction and effectiveness is another positive effect on students' performance. Student satisfaction has a reliance on several factors such as teaching materials, pedagogy, academic subjects and support provided by professors as well as curriculum provided by educational institution. Learner satisfaction is considered an important factor for the effectiveness of blended learning. That is because everything comes from satisfaction. Learners dissatisfied with the quality of education do not want to further their study. In other words, losing a sense of satisfaction kills one's motivation to go further. For example, if the teacher cannot conduct the lesson more interactively and interestingly by using different teaching methods and techniques, students will not be engaged in the lesson. As a result, positive  learning outcomes would be deterred which leads to student disappointment. In order to avoid such negative consequences, while organizing distance education blended with classroom teaching teachers have to pay attention students involvement in the lesson which highly increases learner satisfaction. By tearing down traditional bricks, blended learning provides reduced isolation, more opportunities for collaboration, improved time efficiency and role-differentiation. All of them are of the importance in increasing satisfaction and thereby improve effectiveness.

In terms of learner satisfaction, technology quality, online tools, and face-to-face support are predictive factors, while learner characteristics such as self-regulation and attitude towards blended learning are predictors. Hadad (2007) states that one of the reasons for the effectiveness of blended learning is having good digital literacy and confidence. The research by him investigated that learners who are competent and self-assured enough about computing found blended courses so effective. A lack of computer skills, on the other hand, leads to failure during the process of learning. Also he mentions that research results by Ankit, Nachouki, and Najhaj (2012) showed that learners were mostly satisfied with the usage of technology which was particularly a video-conferencing. Additionally, according to him, time management for those who should constantly balance between employment, family and study is the main factor for failure in academic performance since they do not have flexible studying hours, on the contrary, his study shows that blended learning was a driver for them to learn effectively as their way of learning was encouraged by their employers.

Student-teacher interactions are known to bring satisfaction within online courses. According to Kingu (2017) in "Blended learning effectiveness: the relationship between student characteristics, design features and outcomes", what brought satisfaction with blended learning is student-teacher interaction Olt (2018) did a research on freshmen who studied synchronous online lessons blended with face-to-face classrooms and investigated learning outcomes. In his article "Virtually There: Distant Freshmen Blended in Classes through Synchronous Online Education", he mentioned some comments by students who were online during

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the courses. Larissa and Pat recalled that they were content when the professor called their names every time he asked a question related to the topic. They also mentioned about the math teacher who kept contact with online students when they were doing math problems asking constantly how the process was going. Kelly commented about an English teacher who wanted to assure whether or not distance students were involved in the lesson giving specifically direct questions. Similarly, Rob was satisfied with science class in which the professor tried to involve online students and to have them the same experience with those who are offline by doing hands-on activities despite the absence of lab section in the class. All mentioned above prove that as well as the technology teacher's role is of the importance to increase student satisfaction in blended learning approach.

Additionally, in terms of learning effectiveness, the research by Kiviniemi (2014) concludes that a shift from traditional classroom teaching to a blended approach lead to a growth in students learning as evaluated by their exam performance and total course points. He mentions that positive feedback by students about the approach which improved their learning outcomes in health science means that it was more preferrable than face-to face course structure. While learning distantly in a comfortable place they could work independently without feeling peer pressure. Not disturbed by the classroom noise or students'talk, being concentrated at their work increased their task efficiency.

**Resolving Technical Issues**

Blended learning approach requires level of proficiency skills from both instructor as well as the students and thereby brings some common challenges involving problems with Internet access, inadequacy of information and available software system, digital illiteracy and inconfidence in the usage of new programs. In his article, "Virtually There: Distant Freshmen Blended in Classes through Synchronous Online Education", Olt (2018) reports that freshmen students who participated in the research faced different technical problems with Zoom software, the failure of screens, microphones of cameras which were continuously out of work all of which resulted in online students to miss important parts of the lesson. For example, one of the students, Rob remembered their missed project explanation and he had to contact his professor for further details, Pat complained that she had to communicate frequently by e-mail as she did not have a chance to physically talk to the teacher about the project and it took several days until professors replied.

These challenges could be dealt with the usage of a quality Learning Management System (LMS) which can be aplied and accessible via any smart devices such as mobile phones, laptops and tablets. It will make life much easier for teachers to adapt to a blended learning approach. It is a software-based platform which is helpful for teacher to manage, deliver and measure the e-content. By using LMS teachers can improve the effectiveness of the lesson applying various learning strategies, as well as different formats such as formal learning and the learning related to society and experience. This system is not only about teacher-friendliness, but its support mechanisms which include guides and community groups provide integrations as the access to different platforms can be gained via the access point. The usage of LMS in learning process facilitates not only student-centred learning environment but improves self-learning attitude in students since they have an access to it whenever and wherever they want. The synchronous platform needs to be mastered by the teacher as it contains a variety of tools such as the presentation window to show course content, chat box to enable students to leave their questions/comments, some tools which allow students to speak and be seen during the lesson and far most importantly, the availability of recording a session so that it is archived and used later by those who missed all or parts of the lesson.

The research done by Digambar and Ghodke (2021) shows that the usage of the LMS was advantegous to both the teacher and students during the online-teaching process while the Covid-19 hit the world. They found Canvas and Moodle perfect and useful tools for a blended teaching approach. The teacher was constantly informed about the participation and engagement of students by observing their page viewing activity on the platform after each session. Therefore, it helped them to boost creativity and productivity as well as involvement in the course. Similarly, study by Dias and Diniz (2014) found out potential strengths of LMS in blended learning process. It is said that LMS played an important role encouraging collaborative activities and supporting self-regulated learning. For example, one of the students commented that LMS was useful to download files, video lessons and documents, all of which they needed to write reflective analysis and essays.

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Another feedback by students was the possibility of using LMS as a social media tool since it enables them to interact with their teachers, especially while sharing sharing and submitting their assignments.

**Overcoming Learning Environment Challenges**

For its sophistication and complexity, blended learning is not always welcome by students so that achieving engagement and participation of students can be tricky. Since blended learning is a new approach, adaptability of both student and teacher is the main problem. To be more precise, managing both face-to-face and distant students is difficult for the teacher as students, especially online ones have easily interrupted attention by the environment. Similarly, students find it challenging to interact with the teacher and each other due to lack of classroom involvement. In his study with freshmen students who experienced blended learning, Olt (2018) found out that some distant students felt isolated because of their virtual presence in the lesson as they had to be muted all the time or while making a presentation they had to look at the camera in order to keep eye contact with audience on campus actually not seeing the people.

All challenges could be overcome by imroving adaptability to self-study and extra time to work. E-blended sessions will be effective if the student feels that devotion of specific hours has a high relevance to him/her as an individual learner. It requires that the lessons should be more than meetings or chats including a specific lesson plan fulfilling the ability to deliver the information and instruction. Other ways to ensure the attendence at synchronous education involve scheduling the sessions before the beginning of the class which allows students to rearrange their time and place so that it will not cause any discomfort during the session. Similarly, well-organized and structured teaching materials which are prepared in advance give a chance for elaboration on academic content. If the content is straightforward and promoting it will enable a quality education for students. Teachers have a significant role in dealing with such difficulties because boosting students motivation to learn and engagement in class activities are higly dependent on the teacher competence. Successful blended learning session is the outcome of professor's preparation to the lesson beforehand and his skill to link the session with the content which refers to students's learning (Ward, et al., 2010).

Other effective ways which are not included in the content of academic course is greeting the students by calling their names as soon as they arrive; showing a slide which introduces technical requirements such as using audio input or unmuting in terms of questions or discussions; organizing and finishing the session on time; connecting the end of the lesson to the topic of the following lesson and recording the whole session making it available to absent students to listen at their convenience. In his study, Olt (2018) found out that for Rob, one of students who participated online in the research, in addition to the content, sharing cookies was unforgettable event. The professor brought some cookies to the class and sent them to online students as well so that they could feel real classroom environment. Delivering cookies was forethought and showed how the teacher cared about distant students' inclusion in the whole class experience.

**Conclusion**

Analyzing and accepting innovations, ideas, methods and techniques of the new era are required by every educational system and institution for progression and development. Changing the mode of teaching traditionally to online education and blending these two ways in teaching process requires a shift in the way of delivering the course while it has to still ensure a qualitative education and must not harm the content. It has been effective for students learning outcomes in many ways although it has led to some challenges during teaching process. This paper has mentioned several advantages of this new approach on students' performance during the sessions, provided evidence for its effectiveness for improving learners' engagement, satisfaction and achievements, and it proposed possible solutions to overcome existing problems with technology and learning environment challenges.

The proper and constant usage of technical devices while conducting a lesson could increase student online engagement and learning effectiveness as a result of which they are more satisfied with learning process. Regular and scheduled use of LMS in the process helps to  present the content as well as enabling increased student-teacher interaction. Additionally, teachers' skill to use different methods and approaches help students to deal with learning environment problems.

Education system using the approach should create a teacher-centered and student-centered learning environment, promote self-development rather than expectation and encourage challenges rather than

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stability. The introduction of blended learning approach to curricula prepares students to function in a modern and dynamic global society as well as for the future of advanced technologies.

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