

Blended Learning: A New Normal Post Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Covid-19 has affected almost all countries of the world in varying degrees. The entire world came to a halt on account of this pandemic. In this scenario, the whole process of teaching-learning has undergone a noticeable alteration. Initially, almost all the educational institutions began online classes via Zoom app, Google Classroom, Google meet, etc. However, we cannot completely rely on online methods of teaching as online learning can never be an equal substitute of traditional learning. Thereby, blended learning, a new normal has now become a buzzword. The focus has now been shifted just from online learning to blended learning. The present paper focuses on the issues faced by academicians as well as learners during post-covid scenario. Suggestive measures are also given to make blended learning a success.

Keywords: Online learning, blended learning, Covid 19 pandemic, academicians and learners

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Introduction

The year 2020 has proved a very challenging one for the whole world because of Covid-19 pandemic. There has been an uncertainty in every walk of life. The pandemic has confronted almost all the sectors of the economy with numerous challenges. There is hardly any sector which has not been affected by it [1]. Education sector is one of the most disrupted sectors of the economy in this scenario. As per the data released by UNESCO (2021), over 190 countries of the world faced difficulty in formal teaching-learning thereby, impacting nearly 1.5 billion learners across the globe and about 320 million learners are from India alone who has faced disruption [2] The pandemic has left the entire world in a great shock which obligated experts to reconsider the appropriate teaching-learning pedagogy that will be feasible with the worldwide health emergency going on all over the world [3].

The protracted shut down of educational institutions has driven academicians towards extensive use of technology to provide their pupil stability in acquiring knowledge without any academic loss [4]. The teacher community is putting all its efforts to become accustomed with the novel system of teaching-learning to reduce the hardships caused to students by this pandemic. They have included online methods in the teaching-learning practice, thereby, becoming the learners themselves [3]. However, online learning is not an equal substitute of traditional learning. Now, it's time to rethink about the post-pandemic world. A year ago the main challenge was to continue the teaching-learning process through 'non-classroom' methodology but today the focus is on the adoption of hybrid model of learning which is a judicious combination of in person and e-learning methods [4].

Blended learning is one of the best methods anticipated by various educationalists that appear viable and best fit solution for educational institutes [3]. Blended learning flawlessly mingles physical and electronic resources to

create a conducive learning atmosphere for students. The New Education Policy, 2020 also emphasized upon the need to include technology in learning pedagogy so as to provide more holistic experience to teachers as well as students. It sturdily insists on the use of ample variety of e-resources in teaching-learning process [5].

The present paper focuses on the challenges faced by academicians as well as learners in the post-pandemic scenario. The whole paper is divided into IV parts. Part I presents the challenges faced by academicians during Covid-19. Challenges faced by students during home-learning are given in Part II. Suggestive measures to make blended learning effective are discussed in Part III. Part IV concludes the paper.

Challenges faced by Academicians

When all the educational institutions were shut at the beginning of corona virus pandemic in the nation, nobody envisioned that it would totally change the face of education. From no smart phones permitted in schools, to leaving children solely with such gadgets at home, it has been a gigantic transformation that each person involved is still getting acquainted with. With ambiguity still surrounding the reopening of educational institutions, almost all the institutions have initiated online classes [6]. Consequently, with education globally being thrown into dismay by corona virus, increasingly academicians are being bound to deliver lectures to their students from home [7]. From taking online lectures and dealing with fretful parents & students over the phone to concurrently doing household tasks and worry about or confronting pay cuts, the Covid-19 situation has confronted teachers with numerous challenges. An unusual day in the lockdown includes preparing video lectures, cleaning the house, taking live classes with students, cooking, gathering back to subsequent class and attending calls from restless students and their parents [8].

The difficulty is that students as well as teachers were not accustomed with this sort of teaching-learning process. So, they had to make extra efforts just to deliver the lectures and giving response to each and every student remains a difficult task which is simple in classroom teaching to a large extent [8]. Although development in technology over the previous decades have opened avenues for online teaching, but there are yet some problems which is a matter of concern. Many are not skillful enough in handling a new software or app [7]. These days, teachers are occupied in recording video lectures so that students can return to them at whatever point they need, sending study material online and then taking live sessions for handling doubts and queries. Doing this in the midst of all the cooking, cleaning and other household activities is totally an unusual challenge.

Insomnia, backaches, fretfulness, stress and anxiety are among the consequences people are confronting due to prolonged work from home to prevent the spread of novel corona virus. They are required to invest greater part of their energy before their laptop screens or on mobile phones because of which back problems have sprung up and headaches have gotten continuous. Work from home has not just obscured the string unscrambling personal and professional life but has additionally made people restless [9]. In contrast to regular teaching, working hours are not defined anymore. Anxiety and nightmare have now become basic issues. All the time teachers are required to check their whatsapp groups for any important notification from the institute or queries from students' side. Situation is exceedingly difficult for female teachers in light of the fact that there is a restricted chance of having an appropriate schedule and keeping up work-life balance [8].

Internet connectivity and a proper place at home to attend online classes is another issue. Some students often forget to mute themselves which creates a lot of distraction due to personal conversation or the background noise of kitchen or TV. Therefore, maintaining discipline online is really a challenging task for teachers [6].

Challenges faced by Learners

The brunt of Covid-19 on students' life is noticeable. Be it is the private life of students or the atmosphere of schools and colleges, this pandemic has distorted everything. Students carry on their education through online alternatives via Google classroom, Google meet, Zoom app, etc. [10]. Many countries all over the world have taken up this approach. Online methods proved to be the best choice in this scenario because keeping schools open

poses a health risk for students as well as the other staff members. However, it is extremely challenging for all [11].

Despite the multiple advantages of online learning, there are numerous hurdles as well in the future towards making education exclusively a digital phenomenon. Moving from conventional educational methods to the digital one cannot happen instantly. It necessitates appropriate training for teachers as well as students and requires more user-friendly platforms to make them accustomed with digital technology [12]. Learning from home gives students a feeling of loneliness. Without the buzz of classroom setting and the company of their fellows, there is no doubt that some students began to feel a strong sense of isolation that gradually mitigate their aspiration to learn. Several students realized that they miss school when the alternative is to be desk-bound at home. Isolation can also curtail many of the activities like group work, classroom discussion and collaborative activity. All has vanished from the program entirely. Therefore, there is lack of impetus in online learners [7].

Many students involved in home-learning programs felt that the burden of online classes is much more than that of regular classes as it is a novel concept [11]. Things are all right for the families who can manage to pay for a laptop or a smart phone along with the monthly cost of internet plus other variables but there are large sections of the children whose parents are not financially strong enough to afford such gadgets for online classes [12].

The real sufferers are those who are in less favorable situation and those who are in schools that are not well financed. This is because they lack the devices and internet access to be able to join online classes and the schools have shortage of resources to teach online. This leaves many students in severe pressure and anxiety where they are unable to receive an education [11]. Online classes have an adverse impact on the eyes of students as it necessitates them to sit for long hours in front of the mobile or laptop screens. The situation is exceedingly terrible for small children who have minimal concentration power and unable to sit for a prolonged period of time in front of the screens [13]. Furthermore, it is not possible to instill the habit of discipline and decorum among students in such an environment. These are the times that will never come back. Students are devoid of real study environment of a school or college. Numerous social and cultural activities are missed because of this. The life and future of the students are left in dilemma and there are no indications of getting the things back to normal [12].

Suggestive Measures for Effective Blended Learning

Blended learning offers immense benefits to both teachers and learners. Building an effective blended learning environment requires careful planning and preparation. One of the essential requirements is a comprehensive learning management system which offers flexibility, ease of use and accessibility to all. The educators should prepare a well defined course structure which clearly defines which part of the course would be covered online and which part would be covered offline.

Like traditional learning, blended learning should also promote group activities in which learners should get the opportunity to interact with their teachers as well as peers by sharing their ideas and opinions.

Students should be encouraged to maintain self-discipline during online classes. They should be asked to keep their cameras on during the classes. Teachers should keep them engaged by asking the questions randomly in between the lectures.

Continuous assessment of students' progress should be there through online quizzes, assignments, power point presentations, etc. without which goals of blended learning would not be achieved.

Conclusion

The pandemic compelled educational institutions to adopt online teaching-learning platform to provide learners with continuity in acquiring knowledge. However, in the present scenario online learning is not enough as it is not an equal substitute for traditional learning. Online learning is not a departure from the traditional learning methods as it does not mean the abandonment of traditional teaching-learning system. There is a need of hybrid

learning in the post- covid era which provides flexibility to learners by making them able to carry out both form of learning. At the same time it prepares them for a futuristic and tech-oriented world. Blended learning, by making use of online apps and software, breaks up the monotony of traditional classroom learning. Therefore, we can say that blended learning is an ideal form of learning in the post-pandemic era.

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