

Blended Teaching: A Positive Legacy of the COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2019 dramatically transformed the global education system, necessitating swift adaptations in teaching methods in line to conform to with social distancing mandates. This paper explores the inception and evolution of blended teaching, an approach combining traditional face-to-face methods with digital technology, which gained prominence post-pandemic. Initially adopted as a fully online solution during lockdowns, blended learning has since become a widespread educational model across various institutions, irrespective of their size or location, due to its numerous benefits.

The discussion also addresses potential challenges such as digital distractions, health implications from prolonged screen time, cybersecurity concerns, and the need for effective information management. Despite these challenges, the study highlights that the pandemic accelerated the adoption and improvement of blended teaching, making it a valuable component of modern education.

In conclusion, balancing traditional and digital methods can maximise the benefits of blended learning, making it a significant and one of the few positive legacies of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Five years ago, in 2019, we all witnessed a devastating pandemic that reshaped the world in ways no one had imagined. It caused chaos and disruptions in societies as a whole and also at an individual level. In many places, entire systems were overhauled, and processes were

redefined to cope with the new challenges brought by COVID-19. For example, educational institutions had to change their teaching and learning methods because of abrupt strictsocial distancing norms imposed by thegovernment. Initially, a fully online approachwas adopted, which gradually shifted to a blended approach. Although blended teaching

had been around for several years before COVID-19, it was not as widespread as now. It was only limited to a few elite educational institutions, especially those offering higher studies. It was only after COVID-19 that blended teaching began to gain momentum and was widely adopted by many institutions. Whether a small or large institution, offering basic or higher studies or professional courses, located in a rural setting, an urban setting, or a metro city, there will be some form of blended education system in the institution. In fact, it was only after the pandemic that the Indian EdTech industry- a key component of blended education system in India witnessed a tremendous growth. Till 2025, it is expected to grow only further at an astonishing CAGR of 39.77% (source: www.ibef.org) making it the fastest growing EdTech market in the world(source: www.grandviewresearch.com). Also, the VC (venture capital) investments in 2019 in EdTech industry in India was \$0.5 billion, suddenly skyrocketing to \$2.3B in 2020, more than 4X which is most out of all other major EdTech market countries (HolonIQ, 4 January 2021).

Objectives of the paper

This paper discusses the introduction of blended teaching in global education system as an implication of due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

1. Personal Observations
2. News Trends Analysis
3. Reflective Analysis

What exactly is blended teaching/learning?

It is an teaching/learning approach that incorporates digital technology in traditional teaching methods, providing a plethora of resources and opportunities for both teachers and students. It incorporates the best of both traditional face-to-face classroom teaching methods and digital learning methods, making it a highly effective teaching and learning approach.

Blended versus Traditional teaching

Comparison Basis	Blended teaching	Traditional teaching
Location	Any place- Flexible	Fixed Classrooms
Learning Approach	Online, and face to face	Face to face
Time	Flexible timing	Fixed timings
Technological requirement	Compulsary	Not required
Internet	Essential and obligatory	Not compulsory
Materials required	Essential and obligatory - devices like smartphones, laptops, tablets, smartboards	Basic stationary
Assignments and study materials	Online in digital format	Basic pen and paper format

What are the requirements?

To be highly effective, a few essential conditions are required:

- It should be properly implemented and integrated into the curriculum, aligning with the needs and preferences of both students

and teachers. Proper research needs to be done to assess these needs and preferences.

- Proper training needs to be provided to teachers on using the internet and digital resources.
- Teachers should be trained on security concerns associated with the internet.
- Internet connectivity is a must for sharing and researching information.
- Required hardware such as tablets, smartphones, laptops, smart boards, projectors, audio systems, hardware for connectivity, and various peripheral devices such as printers.
- Software such as Office suites, online drive storage, and specific software bundle subscriptions as per requirements.
- Most importantly, willingness and motivation to adapt to blended teaching and learning by both teachers and students.

Benefits of Blended Teaching

Blended teaching has gained tremendous popularity recently, and that is not without a reason. It provides numerous benefits to both teachers and students, making it a successful teaching approach.

Various benefits of blended teaching are:

- It is in accordance with the social distancing norms, making use of remote-location teaching and learning, which was crucial during the pandemic.

- Students are able to access the materials and make progress through courses at their own pace and convenience, making it flexible for them.
- Teachers can customise materials and resources according to individual student needs and provide personalised feedback and additional resources if needed.
- The World Wide Web offers limitless resources, such as videos, multimedia, articles, and interactive resources, enhancing the learning experience and motivating students.
- It familiarises students with the newer digital technologies, helping them gain digital literacy skills to stay competitive in the fast-paced digital world.
- It fosters greater openness in educational concepts and more compassionate teaching methods.
- It addresses students' weak self-directed learning, lack of initiative, and insufficient practical abilities with modern digital solutions, which traditional methods couldn't.
- It helps both teachers and students in being up-to-date with the latest knowledge and information.
- It greatly reduces the need for paper stationery, thus saving trees and benefiting the environment. Notes can be shared digitally, preventing the printing of numerous copies, and the same applies to books.

These benefits have been observed in a lot of cases recently after COVID-19. During the pandemic, when the world came to an abrupt halt, educational institutions hurriedly adopted fully digital teaching. Corporate institutes followed suit.

However, the results were somewhat limited, and the overall potential was held back due to the few disadvantages digital approach had, which will be discussed below.

This sudden introduction of digital teaching kindled the beginning of a new teaching era. As soon as the restrictions were lifted after the pandemic, these institutions not only returned to their traditional teaching methods but also embraced elements of digital teaching methods, leading to the widespread adoption of a mix of both.

The effectiveness of blended teaching is evident in the flourishing EdTech industry. Numerous high-quality online courses have been launched. Schools, colleges, universities, and coaching institutes have been incorporating elements of blended teaching. Teachers are using projectors to present custom-tailored presentations and clarify concepts more effectively. Notes and assignments are being shared and submitted on digital platforms, making it convenient for both teachers and students. In almost every other institute, biometrics are installed for keeping attendance record, saving time and effort, and providing flexibility and easy record-keeping. Wi-Fi is made available throughout campuses, offering convenience for both students and teachers.

Drawbacks of Blended Teaching

While blended teaching has many merits, it also has its own share of drawbacks, especially when elements of digital methods are excessively used, making it more akin to fully digital teaching.

A few drawbacks along with their solutions are as follows:

- Digital devices can be significant distractions if not used responsibly. Institutes sometimes install custom management software or locks in devices to prevent users from using them for anything other than their intended purposes.
- Prolonged exposure to screen can cause eye strain and headaches. Blue light from screens is partly responsible for this. Adjusting blue light levels, using blue-cut lenses, taking regular breaks, and maintaining proper distances can mitigate these effects. A balanced approach, using both pen and paper and digital devices, can minimise screen time.
- The ocean of information on the internet can be overwhelming, making it challenging to find accurate information.
- Lack of motivation to adapt to new technology can be addressed through training sessions and workshops.
- Technical issues can be managed with proper troubleshooting training and support.
- Cybersecurity concerns can be countered with digital awareness lessons for students and teachers.

- Increased responsibility can be managed with proper planning, scheduling, and management.
- Limited social learning exposure was a significant concern during the pandemic lockdown, mainly because the teaching then was fully online. It can be mitigated by incorporating some traditional teaching episodes in between.

Conclusion

Had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic, blended teaching might not have become as much widespread and evolved.

Therefore, it has proved to be a great boon from the otherwise disruptive COVID-19 pandemic.

To make the best use of it, a proper balance of traditional and digital teaching methods has to be maintained, taking the best from both worlds to ensure that blended teaching effectively serves its purpose of educating our future generations.

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