

REDEFINING BLENDED LEARNING; THROUGH A CASE STUDY APPROACH

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Abstract

With the evolution of technology education has become more modernized as the expectations of it keep on growing on a day-to-day basis. From sage on the stage concept to a student centred learning approach everything is subject to continuous changes in the education sector. Blended learning is one such concept which stresses on continuous student engagement & holistic development through online & traditional face to face teaching. But the real challenge was when an unexpected pandemic paralyzed the entire world, it was a standstill experience when recalled. This article through a case study talks about how blended learning was redefined by overcoming all the challenges, by an institute which attempted to push forward leaving behind all the voices and notions of resistance. Researchers have also attempted to reframe the model of blended learning as an amalgamation between teacher's facilitated learning and self directed learning mode.

Keywords: *Blended Learning, Teacher's Facilitated Learning, Self-Directed Learning Mode & Pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

Blended Learning was fairly new and unexplored until recent years; until everyone realized & recognized the significance of blended learning. But we all know that change is the only constant and now blended learning holds the reins of modern day education. Students at first indeed felt ambiguous about the learning through blended form, because many students have experienced and known only the traditional inculcation of education over their developmental years. Blended learning is an art of combining online and traditional modes of education and when perfectly done it is indeed a wonder that has reflected in the career of students. The traditional mode talks more about the teacher dependent learning, whereas the online mode chalks out the self directed learning. Both have their own advantages & disadvantages but when we bring both the modes together their advantages and disadvantages get unified, and then develops a perfect blend which helps in reproducing learning more effectively. Looking at the practicality of learning through blended form, there are a lot of questions that arise and it becomes our responsibility to answer all. As students or as a teacher it becomes one's duty to get adapted with the environment and change if required. Thus this change will give scope for a lot of questions to arise, but those questions should not stop us from going towards what is the need of the hour. Answering all these questions becomes essential and sometimes facing such questions itself, enables us to think better, make adjustments and change our perception.

Looking at the change in our environment today, all the stakeholders of the academic circle would understand the need for blended learning and use this opportunity in an optimistic and progressive way. When we look at the self directed phase of learning there are numerous advantages associated with that. There being a new phase of learning in the store, we need to look at blended learning in a little different

perspective. This new and different perspective is indeed a lesson which helps us understand that learning is sustainable. All sectors were affected by COVID-19 pandemic, and the educational institutions were not spared from it in any way. There was a lot of confusion amidst us, which paralyzed our thinking capacity. But time teaches us that nothing is an obstacle to development and each stone in the way can be used as a step to reach the goal.

During the pandemic, people realized that the academic progression should continue to happen and if stopped the repercussions will be very costly. Hence with the benefit of technology in hand, educational institutions started implementing online modes of teaching. Now the question that arises is how to inculcate blended learning model into the curriculum. This context is where we need to look back at blended learning model and adapt the same with the current environment. When we see blended learning, we view it as a blend of traditional & online mode of learning. But this pandemic has illustrated us to see blended learning as a **blend of teacher facilitated & self directed mode of learning**. This might be a new mode of viewing but the essence of blended learning remains the same and this becomes the correct way of seeing blended learning in the current time.

OBJECTIVES:

- To redefine Blended Learning in view of the current environment.
- To understand the redefined Blended Learning through a Case Study approach.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Researchers have referred to various journals, magazines, articles & working research papers for the purpose of this research. A concentrated study on School of Commerce JAIN (Deemed-to-be University) was carried out, the significance and benefits achieved of this redefined blended learning approach was collected from the students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

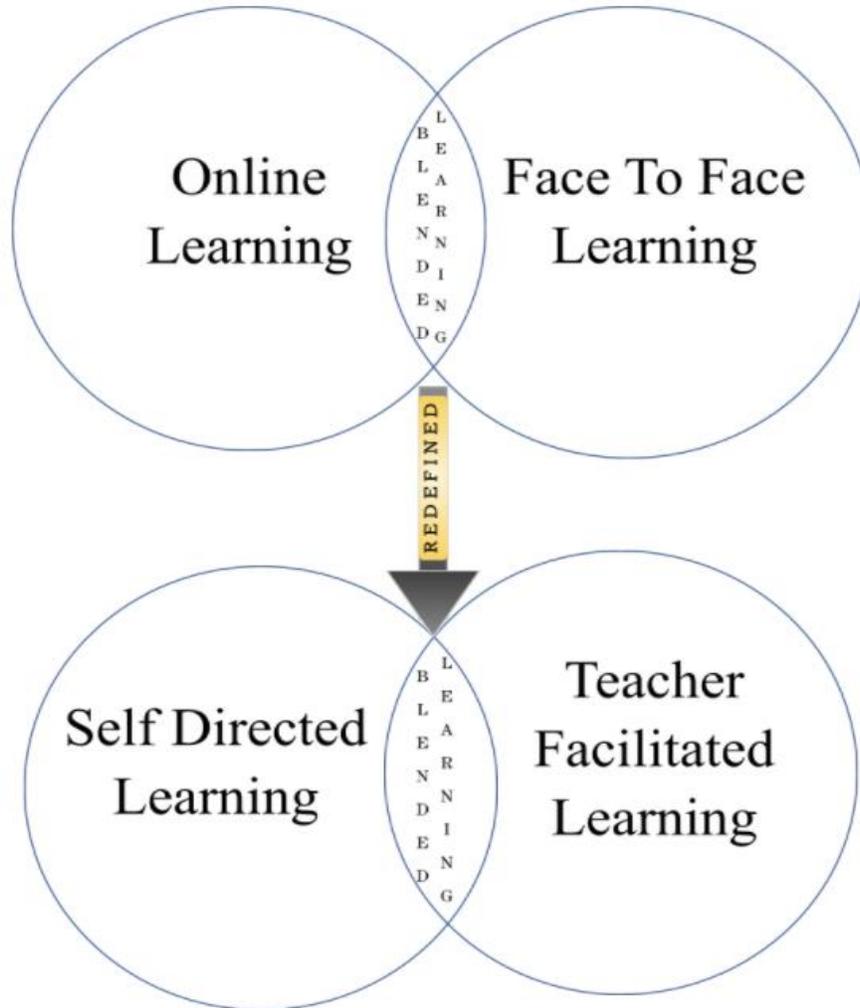
Consilz Tan (2021) in their paper “The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on student learning performance from the perspectives of community of inquiry” states that significant differences were found between Online learning and Face to Face learning. Consilz Tans concludes that students lost motivation due to lack of physical presence of the peer groups and suffered in learning. However the situation improved once the face to face learning presumed but they suffered to adjust to the new environment with all the precautionary measures surrounding them.

Marieke Versteijlen et.al (2021) in their paper “Exploring sustainable student travel behaviour in The Netherlands: balancing online and on-campus learning” found that students adjust their travelling hours to campus based on the Content, teacher and even their mood. So this blending of online and offline has helped students to make those decisions without any fear of missing lectures. Alternative learning methods have provided students with more choices to make decisions as per their needs.

Hani Yousef Jarrah et.al (2021) mentions that students 75% feel blended learning level is high but the rest of the students has different opinions ranging from self development, motivation and time management in their paper “Blended learning: the amount of requisite professional competencies in faculty members of Al Ain University from viewpoint of students”.

Aida Kamysbayeva et.al (2021) through their research found that online learning is an efficient tool for learning hard skills but very less effective when it comes to soft skills. They also revealed that institutes lack in taking into consideration the aspects of professional development while forming a curriculum for online learning and importance should be given to various pedagogical tools as well as bringing the social interaction to online classrooms in their article “E-learning challenge studying the COVID-19 pandemic”.

REDEFINING BLENDED LEARNING MODEL



CASE STUDY- REDEFINING BLENDED LEARNING at School of Commerce, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University)

School of Commerce JAIN (Deemed-to-be University) is one of the most prestigious institutions, sheltering more than 3000 students from various parts of the world for their career development. School of Commerce provides a wide range of programs like B.Com, B.Com (Honors) in ACCA, CMA, CF etc., and BMS in Aviation Management, Strategy & Leadership and International Finance etc. The highly renowned educational institution is best recognized for its unique approach towards students to equip them with skills that are highly prioritized for both personal and professional development. This case study describes how School of Commerce JAIN (Deemed-to-be University) outperformed most of the other colleges in India providing the same programs, time and again, especially amidst this pandemic(COVID-19).

The viral outbreak that shook the world to its core with its abominable attack on humanity started in the early weeks of December 2019. However, the world reckoned that this was just the beginning to a really long battle by February 2020. The virus began to make its touchdown in India by late February and by the

mid of March the government decided to shut the nation down instead of putting people at risk, including all the education centers. The sudden onset of this lockdown put the whole country at a standstill. But above all sectors, the biggest question faced by the education sector was how to initiate and take learning onto a digital platform. One such institute was the School of Commerce, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), which began by sketching out a plan to continue the learning process for its students without any interruption or compromise on the quality of education.

With the possibility of a nationwide lockdown in the talks, the aforementioned institute had already started virtual classes and the students began learning online from 21st of March 2020. The entire country went on lockdown from the evening of 24th of March 2020. This is a small example of how the institution was well prepared for the worst to come.

There was an extensive use of various digital platforms like Google Classroom & Whatsapp Messenger for the interaction, it was made a mandate for the student teacher interaction. And for the delivery of the lectures online, the video conferencing platform Zoom was relied upon. However, a tough challenge they faced during this course of action was to identify the new Blended Learning Method that they had to adapt. Teachers had to learn new methods to engage & evaluate students. The Challenges in store were huge. Under normal circumstances, blended learning is believed to be the combination of face to face teaching and online teaching. However, as the entire process of teaching turned to be online, it became a tough nut to crack to make the students comfortable with Blended Learning as a practice.

It was then that the School of Commerce redesigned blended learning & started a pattern of teaching which involved Teacher Facilitated Learning and Self Directed Learning. Teacher Facilitated Learning involved the mundane work of online lecturing via virtual platforms like Zoom, Google Meet etc. Whereas Self Directed Learning involved students learning on their own through platforms like LinkedIn, Coursera and various similar platforms. School of Commerce JAIN (Deemed-to-be University) collaborated with platforms like LinkedIn, Coursera etc., and provided unlimited free access to its students for the enhancement of their overall learning and development which even helped teachers to keep track of their individual development thus making them feel that they're getting the required attention.

Surprisingly, this method acquired a lot more success than anticipated during its formation. The highly qualified faculties were really quick to adapt to this circumstance, and the students' participation in it made it worth the effort. There were provocations in the initial stages, but every good innovation has been poached with a lot of doubts in the beginning, hasn't it?

Towards the same goal of re-conceptualizing Blended Learning, the institute started making it even simpler by calling Teacher Facilitated Learning as synchronous mode of learning and Self Directed Learning as asynchronous mode of learning. Synchronous mode of Learning is that which involves all the activities that a teacher facilitates inside and outside the classroom. This was just the classic student-teacher connection, now taken to a virtual platform. Asynchronous Mode of Learning is where the students navigate themselves to learn new things which will help their overall development through previously mentioned online platforms. This helped the students learn things by themselves, which opened their minds to new questions and their curiosity found the answers. Learning from these platforms like LinkedIn, Coursera and Swayam has resulted in students following a multidisciplinary approach towards their education and many students have learnt various new programs which typically are not a part of their college curriculum.

TRADITIONAL MODE OF LEARNING AS TEACHER FACILITATED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Traditional mode of learning says that learning happens only with the help of the teacher. The teacher serves the role of an instructor, facilitator & initiator. The teacher helps students to identify, articulate, analyze and interpret the learning. In return the teacher also evaluates and measures the performance of

the students. All this was a practice in all schools some time back but the pandemic did change everything and introduced us to the new normal. We might attempt to show some resistance but being practical we got to walk with it. Online mode of teaching has become very popular, almost all educational institutions are teaching through virtual platforms and we need to accept the reality and consider that these online virtual classrooms are our new traditional mode of learning which is teacher facilitated. Virtual classrooms also remain as the place which primarily looks in through a lot of teacher enabled services. The name can be an online method of teaching but the program followed is still that of traditional mode only, the virtual classrooms are filled with teacher instructions and evaluations.

Hence we clearly find that the first item for the blend is all set. Thus we can also claim that Online Classroom is entirely a teacher facilitated learning space, thus the first item for blend is teacher facilitated learning. There are pros & cons attached to this but when these match with the second item of the blending learning all the disadvantages get matched and are converted as positives. The practicality of this can be understood through the case study which will be discussed in the later part of the article.

ONLINE MODE OF LEARNING AS SELF DIRECTED LEARNING

The second item for the blend is the online mode of learning which is getting redefined as self directed learning. Previously when classes used to be conducted in physical mode, online teaching techniques were deployed and used to engage in blended mode. But after Covid-19 impact when things started changing, it was indeed time to accept reality. It took time for institutions to get settled as no one was yet to be prepared, but it indeed was necessary to understand and redefine. There came self directed learning which enables students to learn through various online paths which enable to have an add-on effect on their overall progression. Self Directed Learning could be a new language but it's an old concept, some time back they used to call it as autodidacticism and this medium was completely learning some skill without master itself. But the self-directed learning which we talk about here is not completely a master lesson but the artifacts being given by the teachers with which learning happens with a student initiated process and through a self analysis it comes to an end.

Student learning through a self initiated process is indeed a difficult process; there are a lot of challenges from stage to stage. But there are indeed ways to overcome that and when we blend this with our teacher-facilitated learning there brings a magic. Student directed and teacher facilitated is a great blend and this creates efficiency and builds better career progression.

STUDENTS OPINION ON BENEFITS OF TEACHER FACILITATED LEARNING AND SELF DIRECTED LEARNING

- Can learn from a place of comfort.
- Very resourceful with teacher's guidance & self interest both at the same time.
- Effective learning as there is a complete engagement.
- Certificates through online courses become valid for career progression.
- Exploration of various interest apart from the regular curriculum
- Sessions could be recorded and revisited whenever required which made understanding and conceptualizing easy.
- Synchronous & Asynchronous learning boosts interest in curriculum.
- Boosted confidence and improved communication skills.
- Better time utilization & skill management.

CONCLUSION

Change is an inevitable factor and all sectors are prone to change, at times resistance is shown but it cannot stay for longer. When we take the education sector, this sector needs to be a model for all other sectors because here in this sector leaders are created for tomorrow's world, the initiatives taken at the institutions level will help people mould themselves to face the future world. The environment being

turbulent it was indeed a need of an hour for all to adopt for something new and therefore set a new normal. Blended learning is indeed a great initiative and a proven successful model which talks about complete student engagement over face to face and online engagement. But implementation of this blended learning model at Covid-19 pandemic times was a challenge, thus redefining it was not an option but a necessity. This redefinition of blended learning in accordance with a case study illustration is briefed through this article; the scope of the same is not limited but is always open for future study. The understanding of this new model helps readers to customize and recreate the concept of blended learning by keeping the essence of the blend alive.

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