PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON BLENDED LEARNING

Dr. Rupan Dhillon

Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Guru Nanak Dev University

Amritsar-143001, Punjab

Email: rupanoberoi27@gmail.com

Abstract

Digital communication for development of Indian Education system is the need of the hour. In the changing phase of the world where the definition of the new normal is fluctuating, students need a platform for enhancing their psychological needs and realizing their potentials. The journey of education system has progressed from traditional classroom teaching to distance/correspondence education courses and has reached the summit with the self paced courses. Blended learning has provided a new dimension and the conventional roles of the teachers and students are undergoing a transformation. Students' social interaction is no longer limited to the classroom. The article highlights the psychological perspective of blended learning practices and how it can be fruitful in academic outputs. Education policy makers need to revisit the current education practices and form future education policies which actualize student's highest potential and external resources.

Keywords: Traditional learning, Blended learning, student effectiveness.

Introduction: Education system in the current times

Education system is undergoing a radical change and in order to meet the challenges of expansion, quality education system is adopting strategies and technologies to adapt to this change.

In 2018, nearly six million students were enrolled in online learning courses in US. Children all over the world are now responding to these online courses because of the advantageous approach

and the flexibility these programs provide. Self paced study is the need of the hour and that's exactly what students look for and online platforms are catering to these needs.

In 2020, 70% of the school population in the world has suffered due to pandemic. UNESCO reports that 1.5 billion students in 195 countries across the world are out of school due to pandemic school closures. The global eLearning market, which was already witnessing massive growth, only grew in importance. There is an unprecedented necessity for students to be able to take part in forms of online learning. Students and teachers are now adapting to this change and have given up the traditional forms of teaching and shifted to the blended learning methods.

However, there has been an inequality in schools as students with better technology and infrastructures have been able to attend the lectures online. Disadvantaged students are attending schools with lower ICT infrastructure and educational resources and feel deprived because of lack of access to such a technology. The rural areas in the underdeveloped countries have faced this problem at a large scale. Though distance learning can be a solution, yet in such countries parents don't approve of it as there is a lack of ICT infrastructure, computers, network, radio or television to provide information on distance learning. It has been a year where Government has failed to give access to students and this inequality has increased crime rate, aggression and depressive symptoms in students. The problem is faced by the teachers as well as they are not equipped with the online teaching techniques, nor do they have the infrastructure to impart education in the current times. Public schools have a limited access to internet. In developed countries, online education was conducted on Zoom, Google meet, Blackboard and Wechat group platforms. However, certain subjects were very difficult to teach through these platforms like music, sport, nursing and art courses. Assessments and evaluations were tough to handle especially when teachers had no training to conduct classes online. Monitoring the students during online exams was also challenging. Therefore, our education system needs to be re-evaluated in order to move with the current times and to meet the challenges of any future crisis.

Research Objective: The objective of this article is to understand that is the hybrid mode better than the traditional learning system? Are we as educators ready for the change and sudden

transition? The purpose of this article is to understand that how the trends are changing and how the students' performance and learning outcome can be enhanced through blended learning.

Design: This article progresses through the different types of teaching/ learning modes and discusses the psychological theories that support blended learning mode. There are also various theoretical perspectives that can be discussed from the viewpoint of education and blended learning. The theoretical models behind these learning systems need to be understood and hence will be elucidated. These theories have been very useful in explaining the psychological aspect of what the education environment should be and how students can stay motivated in the learning environments. It will also provide review of literature to support the effectiveness of the new system and the emerging trends of the hybrid system.

Types of Learning Modes

Traditional Learning

It is face to face learning between the teacher and the student. This method of teaching and learning has the advantages of forming a good interpersonal relationship between the teacher and student, allows plenty of time for discussion for real life examples and gives lots of opportunities to learn and develop social skills. The disadvantage is that students waste a lot of time commuting to study in educational buildings. They are not able to commit to any part time jobs or training. Sometimes, students are just sitting and engaged in passive learning.

Distance Learning

Distance or online learning offers students' incredible flexibility and the ability to learn on demand. Also, these courses are generating a lot of revenue in the current scenario. If we go back to the historical antecedents, Distance education originated in America in 1800's in Chicago, when teachers and students tried to connect with each other through correspondence programs. The establishment of the Open University in the United Kingdom in 1969 encouraged several countries to deliberate on the new concept and its potential in making higher education more

accessible, flexible and innovative. India was one of those countries which examined the possibility of establishing an Open University in the early seventies. Distance Learning in India for higher education in India was initiated in the form of Correspondence Courses in 1962, in response to the increasing demand for higher education which could not be met by the conventional system. It also catered to the needs of the students who did not have the means to go for regular education. The formal system of education could not be undertaken by the students from lower class families or by the students who were staying in remote geographical regions. Hence, many students got attracted to these correspondence courses.

Moore and Kearsley (2012) have defined, "Distance education is teaching and planned learning in which teaching normally occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies as well as special institutional organization." They have also given various reasons for promoting distance education. A few of the reasons are that it can improve cost effectiveness of various educational resources, it can enhance existing educational structures, can bring equality in various age groups, can provide training to target audiences, can increase capacity in subject areas and also offer combination of education with work and family life.

Online Learning

Online learning typically involves a teacher uploading tailored content onto learning management software (LMS) and sharing it with the class digitally. The learning content can be accessed on devices that are connected to the internet. This type of education can be transformative if it incorporates critical learning in its courses in which students can increase their capacities of analysis, imagination and self awareness. Online learning has opened up new markets for higher education as adult learners are now able to manage home responsibilities as well as study online. Even youngsters, who were earlier hesitant to study face to face because of their shyness or other physical characteristics, are more comfortable as the anonymity is maintained on online platforms. Questions can be written in the chat box and that makes it

convenient for them to interact more. According to Bell and Friedman (2013), online education system allows the teachers to collect data, gather feedback and evaluate their teaching experience further.

Moore and Kearsley (2012, p. 8) in their study identified the following reasons as to: increase access to learning and training as a matter of equity, provide opportunities for updating skills of the workforce, improve the cost effectiveness of educational resources, improve the quality of existing educational structures, enhance the capacity of the educational system, balance inequalities between age groups and deliver educational campaigns to specific target audiences Online learning can be categorized into two categories: University Based Online Education : where students join Diplomas or Degree Courses and Massively Open Online Courses: where students are self motivated to learn and these courses are mostly self paced. Most of these are open to public free of charge.

Blended Learning

"Blended learning is defined as an amalgamation of traditional classroom learning and e-learning, where the methodology for blended learning is based on formal or informal, scheduled or self-paced physical class-based or virtual learning environment designed for students"(Wang et al., 2007). "Blended or hybrid learning is slightly different from traditional online learning in a way that it is a blend of face to face interaction with computer mediated and technologically oriented approach" (O' Byrne and Pytash, 2015). Therefore, blended learning is a combination of self paced study and scheduled delivery system.

Technology is an integral part of education these days and is optimizing potential behavioral and motivational benefits for education. Blended learning may be an important tool which can enhance student's motivation. In order to accommodate blended learning in the current educational systems, educational policy makers will have to bring changes in the future curriculum and classroom pedagogy. With offline and online approach in combination, students

can create a multitude of opportunities for interaction. The activities need to have a meaningful rationale and should enable the students to realize their resourcefulness. The emphasis should be on choice rather than on control and dominance. Blended learning can be divided into four levels or classes of varied complexity ranging from simple (least integration between traditional and online learning) to complex (most integration between traditional and online learning forming a new learning that has its unique qualities and inseparable components).

It can be applied in four different ways according to Graham (2006):

1) Activity level: In this level, there is a single classroom meeting and it will be followed by online class/ meeting.
2) Course level: In this level, there are a number of online classes and has classroom meetings too which are face to face interactions.
3) Program level: This level has total online courses and face to face courses coexist.

Theoretical perspectives that support Blended Learning

Self Determination Theory

To build motivation in the students is a difficult task. Teachers struggle to keep the students motivated and persist in efforts to encourage them for hard work. Students are rewarded for grades externally by the teachers but the intrinsic motivation is not externally rewarded. The interplay between the extrinsic forces of the students and the intrinsic motives and needs inherent in human nature is the domain of Self-Determination Theory. Students should be kept in motivated environments so that they are naturally inclined to attain knowledge and show self regulated behavior. According to Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (2000), successful learning is a result of mutual engagement of learners and teachers in the learning process. Autonomy-supportive environment provided by teachers determines the motivation of the students to achieve and increases their academic competence. SDT proposes that the degree to which any of these three psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness is

unsupported or thwarted within a social context, it will have a robust detrimental impact on wellness in that setting. The dynamics of this theory have been studied within classrooms, teams, and in organizations. Blended learning provides with the characteristics that can enhance these psychological needs. It can create scientific attitude in teachers and students. Among the various domains, SDT has been applied in school settings and has found greater empirical research in the field of education. Many primary and secondary school settings, take into care these psychological needs when designing infrastructure and classroom curriculums and practices. To facilitate healthy psychological development, it is important that students' potentials are energized and they feel the freedom to answer lot of questions in the classroom. Classroom contexts should provide choice, optimal challenge, informational feedback, interpersonal involvement, and acknowledgment of feelings (Deci et al., 1996). Research suggests that when teachers are more supportive of student autonomy, students display high motivation toward learning and greater conceptual understanding, better psychological adjustment (Williams & Deci, 1998), self-regulation for learning, academic performance and well-being.

Rotter's Locus of Control Theory and Blended Learning

Rotter's theory (1966) talks about the opinion people have for the causation of events in their lives. There can be an internal and external locus of control. The responses vary because of different perceptions. Some people attribute the causes to their personal efforts while others attribute it to luck or destiny. Rotter (1990) argues that "people acquire their general expectations about their personal performance through their past experiences with different kinds of reinforcements or through their expectations to get a specific reinforcement as a result of performing a certain task". Internal or external locus of control plays an important role for students to sustain the efficacy and usefulness of learning performance (Konan, 2011). Many studies have been done using locus of control in several topics such as management, education, achievement, motivation, attitudes, parenting, and health. There are also studies that focus on the interplay between technology and locus of control. Barnard, Lan, To, Paton, and Lai (2009)

found that the e-learning environment is beneficial for the students with an internal locus of control as they believed that they had control over events and situations in their lives. Bowen (1996) concluded that students with internal control and beliefs generally perform better than students with an external locus of control in online courses. In Cascio, Botta, and Anzaldi (2013) study, the researchers found that online learning degree is influenced by the combined effect of internal locus of control.

Vygotsky's Theory has been taken to understand blended learning: The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is Vygotsky's terms for the range of tasks that are too difficult for learner to master alone but that can be mastered with guidance and assistance from educators or teachers. A learner's thinking skills are aided if there is skillful and knowledgeable educator. The educators utilize modeling and supporting techniques when they teach learners concept which are above their current skills and knowledge level in ZPD, motivating them to excel beyond their current level.

Maslow's theory (1943) is helpful for understanding motivation of the students. Learners will lose attention and not be able to learn well if their physical conditions are not stable. Learners should also be provided with reading and learning materials. Safety is the next level in Maslow's theory which means that the learner should feel secure and safe in his learning environment. There should also be sound inclusive facilities for disabled learners or international students. Psychologically the learners feel safe to communicate with the peers and teachers. Teachers should also create a loving learning community which provides a sense of belonging to the learners. The personal strength of the students should be focused on in this level which can lead to the fifth stage where the learner will develop the full potential as a human being. He will try to realize the purpose and find meaning in his life. According to Maslow, all these stages are connected.

A practical approach: Jones's Blended Learning Continuum (Jones, 2006): This model is highlighting a number of strategies that can be employed for blended learning. The model states

that there should be Basic IT Usage in which power point presentations are used. In E enhanced phase, there should be an access to online resources. Information about lectures, meetings and appointments should be communicated via E technology. In the third phase, assessments and discussion boards are set up and this is called as E focused. Last phase is called as E intensive, in which online teaching is conduced along with face to face inductions. The challenge that we can face in blended learning should be resolved with a flexible approach. Depending upon the discipline, it can be decided if the online approach is more useful or the face to face interactions.

Review on Blended Learning

While some studies have concluded that a blended learning approach is more effective (Dowlin et al.,2003), many others have found no differences in the outcomes of blended learning and traditional learning modes (Larson et al., 2009; Anderson et al., 2010).Literature also suggests that online delivery is preferred for lower level skills but traditional mode of delivery is preferable for higher level skills. It is also stated that freeing the person from traditional learning may also lead to lower levels of engagement in students and hence may not be very effective (Ross and Bell, 2007).

 Longitudinal studies (Henrie et al., 2015) found out that the student satisfaction in engagement with the blended learning environment was mainly due to the instruction's clarity and relevance of activities more than the medium of instruction. Hence, they had a higher that motivation and thus achievement. Further on, review of literature highlights more benefits of blended learning. Spanjers et al. (2015) used the variables of satisfaction, self efficacy and knowledge implementation. His study found out the students who were taught in blended learning environments had higher scores in all the measured variables. Similarly, study conducted by Ain et al. (2016) reports that there is high performance expectancy in students when taught through LMS. Hashemyolia et al. (2014) established the success and importance of LMS by proving that LMS is a source of enhancing self regulated learning strategies.

A study by Krasnova (2015) showed that blended learning has increased the quality of higher education in Russia. Lee at al. (2016) has reported an increase in conceptual understanding, eagerness and confidence in learning science with the help of Moodle LMS. Another study conducted in Hong Kong by Cheng and Chau (2016) showed a significant relationship of online participation in a blended learning course and learning styles with academic achievement. Students also reported a high level of course satisfaction. In many other studies conducted in East Asia as well, the positive influences of Learning Management System on academic achievements were highlighted. Al-Shyukh (2008) stressed on technological hindrances such as software programs, server speed, and abrupt technical troubles. In addition, there are the human hindrances of blended learning that are related to lack of skills and sufficient training qualifying students, teachers, and administrators to effectively manage the blended learning approach (Vaughan, 2007). The results of Vaughan's (2007) study showed that blended learning allows flexible time schedules, improves learning outcomes, encourage learners take responsibility on their own learning, allow learners to use modern technology, creates opportunity for teacher-student interaction, increase student involvement in learning, change educational environment into one more elastic, and open for development and continuous improvement.

While using blended learning programs, the goals should be carefully planned and implemented strategically for them to work. Teachers should be prepared to respond to the student queries. Student teacher communication should be in place so that a student knows his role and is engaged in self learning. There can be hindrances of improper implementation of the programs especially if the teachers and administrators are not trained. Some lessons also require lot of preparations and are difficult to administer online. Evaluations can also be tough.

Review Outcome: Conclusive Remarks

From the review, it can be said that blended learning has very effective outcomes. While using blended learning, the educators should have clear cut viewpoints and distinct idea of purpose. The only way for blended learning education system to work is if technology and education are

combined. The latest trends need to be adapted in both the areas. Pedagogical implications of Maslow's theory need to be adopted if one wants to design and practice blended learning curriculum. It is also suggested that blended learning researchers should understand and develop principles or framework which recognize disciplinary differences and are enmeshed in educational theory. Transforming from traditional learning to blended learning is not easy. The faculty will have to take a very different perspective in instruction delivery. Definitely, the hybrid mode is full of potential especially during the current times. It also requires Organizational readiness for implementation. One has to understand the heart of both education and technology. The system cannot be blamed.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals has named "quality education" as its fourth goal. One target of that goal is ensuring that by 2030, all children have the means to complete a "free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education." Blended learning becoming a part of the policies and will be implemented at all levels universally. The advantages of Blended learning have been stated in the review that it increases engagement, participation, preparation and interest. It is more flexible and there are more meaningful discussions in classrooms. Therefore, it can be concluded that blended learning is the future. Online education will spread in the coming years and hence educators need to be prepared for making this transition.

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