

**SYNCHRONOUS BLENDED LEARNING: AN INNOVATION IN EDUCATION****Manju Gupta, Ph.D,**

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India's growth and development will depend on technology based education, with this in mind the government has emphasized on bringing about modernization in education system. We are living in " Global Village". There is a process of global and cultural unification. Revolutions in the scientific and technological fields and cybernetic and electronic information transmission are sweeping the world. The institutional education is becoming an obscure one. We are faced with a challenge to change. In such a situation, the relationship between the institutions and the student community, between the teachers and the students is bound to undergo major changes. For instance, The students' active participation in the process of learning on their own initiative will remove the one-sided authoritarian teacher-student relationship. The teacher's authority will now be based on his ability and creativity to contribute and help students to learn on their own.

Besides knowledge, students need to develop transferable skills, information and communication skills, social skills and creative thinking and it should be incorporated in the curriculum. Making the Indian Education System future ready, we need to focus on innovative use of Information and Communication technology, reinvigorating research, thrust on vocational education and training and regulatory reforms. It requires tremendous change in attitude of the management, teachers and students. The shift is from knowing the content to exploring the content. And, this cannot be achieved through conventional teaching, in overcrowded classes, with rigid curricula and syllabus.

In the overcrowded classes, learning need and preferences of each learner tend to be different. Teachers must use a blend of learning approaches in their strategies to get the right content in the right format to the right people at the right time. The pursuit of knowledge has never been as exciting as it is today. Computers, the Internet, accessibility to hundreds of thousands of databases all over the world, and the ability to learn in a mobile environment allow us all to participate in a new paradigm of technology-enabled education. It has given a concept of Blended learning which may include several forms of learning tools, such as real-time virtual/

collaboration software, self-paced Web-based courses. Blended learning mixes various event-based activities, including face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning and self-paced learning.

Blended learning, which combines conventional teaching and synchronous [online learning](#) activities into a single course, asynchronous self-paced study, and structured training from an experienced instructor, has experienced tremendous growth during the past few years. A [blended learning](#) course can satisfy students' need for flexibility, as well as alleviate overcrowded classrooms. However, the biggest benefit to a well-designed blended course could be a much improved teaching and [learning experience](#). It's for this reason that blended learning, grounded in sound pedagogical theory, technological skills, ethical values is creating converts among faculty and administrators alike. It is noticed that the students in their blended courses are not only more engaged when they come to class, but are performing better on their final exams than their previous, traditional classes.

Blended learning's aim is to combat the best of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with the best of online learning experiences which allows for:

1. An increase in learning outcome measures
2. An opportunity for students to practice information and communication technology skills in navigating online course materials and possibility in creating digital content for assignments.
3. An increase in student- teacher and student-student interaction through the use of course communication tools like discussion forums.
4. The ability to reserve face-to-face time for interactive activities, such as higher-level discussions, small group work, quizzes, debates, demonstrations, or lab activities.

From a student perspective, blended learning includes:

**Flexibility of schedule:** learn any-time, anywhere.

**Control:** students have some level of control over the pacing of their learning. Difficult concepts can be reviewed as often as necessary.

**Convenience** of an online class with many of the social aspects of a face-to-face class.

Therefore, keeping in view the significance of wide variety of teaching approaches such as conventional, off line and on-line tutoring and/or mentoring approaches for providing effective and efficient teaching –learning experiences, the need of the hour is to make synchronous Blended learning. It requires the following steps;

**Providing facilities:** The infrastructural facilities and sufficient technological equipments are mandatory for Blended Learning.

**Creating environment:** Change in set of minds and attitudes of the teachers and learners is necessary. Focus has to be changed from giving-receiving knowledge to exploring knowledge

**Decision Making:** One of the initial questions that may arise when first considering teaching in a blended format is what the exact make-up of the course should be. The short answer is that there is not a single “right” ratio of face-to-face and online time. Each course is a unique case. What’s right for your course will be a decision you’ll make after considering your course objectives, and weighing the benefits of each of the instructional modalities for reaching those objectives. For the most part, blended learning courses aim to replace face-to-face time. The most exciting part of blending is to decide how to transform the teaching and learning experiences into one.

**Take advantage of better technology :** It is the method of choice to select the most appropriate technology including e-learning authoring tools, web and video conferencing, podcasts, mobiles, CD- ROMs, DVDs etc to make teaching learning process more engaging and effective. Blended learning activities may include conventional teaching followed by activities to use YouTube, the Internet, Powerpoint etc. Blogs can be used to ease students into the online environment with informal reflection: self introductions and comments on what they have learnt in the class and what was important for them. Wikis are used for formal reflection enabling students to Describe, Interpret and Evaluate an intercultural incident.

**Get in the lab:** To learn ICT skills and update those skills, one of the biggest requirements by teacher training departments is to “learn by doing.” Enter the IT training lab. These labs typically come in the form of downloadable software or a program that lives in a virtual environment.

**Training in chunks:** Teachers not only prefer their learning to be online, but also—and more important—for it to be on-demand. They are not so concerned with “learning the knowledge,” but more concerned with having “access to the knowledge” right when they need it. On-demand learning often can be a better solution for today’s teaching professional all around. The obvious benefit is that the information is generally broken up into convenient bite-sized pieces, and that learners can access content according to their individual work schedule. An added benefit is that in most applications teachers and students can revisit the information site as and when a situation arise in which they need a bit of a “refresher.”

**Flexible learning:** There are some methods to make IT training flexible at the Teacher training institutions / schools:

**1. Lunch-and-learn courses.** Scheduling online lunch-and-learn courses that can be pulled up and repeated several times over the course of a week. Learners can sign up for one of several lunchtime slots and an instructor is available online during that week to answer questions as needed.

**2. Podcasts.** IT professionals are multi taskers and regularly have the need to flip between screens on their computers or be away from their machines all together. For these individuals, creating on-demand audio training that can be pulled up at the learner's convenience permits the staff member to keep working while still learning.

**3. n Combo training.** Conducting mentored sessions with a live instructor in conjunction with online learning and labs combines the best of all worlds and they get the first-hand touch of the instructor to answer questions.

**Conclusion:** The blending of conventional teaching and on-line/off-line learning experiences is quite promising. The integrated technology may allow student learning to go beyond the classroom, and enabling teachers to have greater interaction with students and understanding of their needs. Students may take responsibility for their learning by interacting and engaging in reflection inside and outside the classroom. This can be achieved by purposeful use of technology to enhance the learning, teaching and assessment activities, which in turn have been made more relevant and authentic .

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