Blended Learning: As A Transitional Strategy from Traditional Learning into Online Learning

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Abstract

Under exigent circumstances, for instance, the COVID-19 pandemic, the study adopts a blended learning approach as a safe transitional strategy from traditional learning to online learning. It takes into account the temporal, spatial, and infrastructural conditions, relying on a qualified educational staff who is able to implement an influential and effective learning method-the blended learning. The strategy neither believes in radical solutions nor voices the two options (traditional and online methods). Its philosophy lies in such a compromise which, in return, brings together both methods. It believes that blended learning, during the pandemic, is the best solution which provides a perfect environment where the interaction between the teacher and the student can be achieved. Yet this cannot be fulfilled unless following what has been concluded by the study.

Keywords: Traditional learning (face-to-face), online learning (e-learning), strategy, method.

التعليم المدمج: كإستراتيجية الانتقال من التعليم التقليدي الى التعليم الالكتروني

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الملخص

تنتهج الدراسة التعليم المدمج كإستراتيجية تعليمية تضمن انتقالا سلسا وامناً من التعليم التقليدي الى التعليم الالكتروني عند مواجهة اي ظرف طارئ كأن يكون وبائي على سبيل المثال. تأخذ الدراسة بعين الاعتبار الظروف الزمانية والمكانية والبنيوية وبالاعتماد على قدرة بشرية مؤهلة تستطيع تنفيذ هذه الإستراتيجية والتي بمجملها يمكن ان تضيف او تساعد على اضفاء مزيد من الفاعلية والتفاعل لتحقيق الاهداف التعليمية المنشودة. هذه الإستراتيجية ترفض تبني الحلول الراديكالية، وبذات الوقت لا يمكنها المفاضلة بين التعليم التقليدي والتعليم عن بعد، بل تتبنى حلا توفيقيا يجمع الاثنين يقوي أحدهما الاخر. تؤمن الدراسة بان التعليم المدمج هو انسب الحلول في ظل ازمة جائحة كورونا، فهي توفر مناخا يتحقق فيه المشاركة الفعالة والمثمرة بين المدرس والطالب فيما لو تحقق ما خرجت به الدراسة من استنتاجات وتوصيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم المباشر، التعليم الالكتروني، إستراتيجية، وسيلة.

1. Introduction

Blended learning strategy is one of the forms of education or learning in which e-learning is integrated with classroom (traditional) in one framework, where e-learning tools, whether computer-based or networked, are employed in lessons and lectures, training sessions, often in real classrooms equipped with network connectivity. It is a term for describing a solution that combines several delivery methods such as collaborative learning, web courses, electronic performance support systems, and knowledge management practices with face-to-face classrooms and live e-learning. So, it can be defined as a combination of traditional teacher-oriented training, simultaneous online conferences and asynchronous self-step study. However, blended learning is a new form of training and learning program that appropriately blends classroom and electronic learning according to the requirements of the educational situation, with the aim of improving the achievement of educational goals at the lowest possible cost. The researcher will give more about the concept of blended learning, he will give a detailed explanation of its advantages and benefits.

The paper suggests a strategy involving a set of steps that creates a one-to-one transition from the traditional system of learning into Web-based education. This strategy can secure the desired educational goals in record time and with no complication in the entire educational process. The strategy should be based on two major pillars: technological infrastructure, and human element which can be sub-classified into administration, teacher, and student. Without these requirements, the transitional process will face many difficulties if not failure. Therefore, the whole effort should be directed to these two requirements as well. Neglecting any one of them, the process doesn't meet its goals.

Technological requirements are simply everything related to technology. They provide classes with computers, networks, applications, and programs. In other words, they provide the educational system with an electronic management system. This can be in the form of programs and applications that help both the teacher and the student as well to achieve educational goals. Yet, there should be certain steps should be taken into consideration before implementing this process such as how to prepare the whole educational staff to apply the technological programs.

There should be a qualified administrative staff who has the ability to hold training courses for teachers. The staff can be considered as the focal point for providing teachers with the latest technology and experiences. Everyone has a role no less important than the other to make this type of education fulfill the task. Regarding the teacher, he has to accommodate technological developments in teaching. The student, who is the target, prefers to practice a central role that has more responsibility than what he has been given in traditional learning. According to the teacher's role, he should have the ability to do the following: 1) apply the technology concerning designing classes, tests, and charts while using a computer, 2) search what is new and then develop his courses, 3) have psychological methods to keep his students active. In the blended learning strategy, the student needs to recognize that he is involved in this integrated educational system. He has to make more effort than what he is giving in traditional learning. So, the student must feel that 1) the whole process depends on his interaction, 2) he is a participant, not a recipient, and 3) he must practice online conversation.

1.1 The Problem Statement

Under the Covid-19 pandemic, the whole world has been facing daunting challenges. Education, as one of the crucial lead sectors, has been suffering a lot from this urgent situation. Consequently, educational institutes have begun, with great efforts, to rectify the adverse impact of the pandemic when traditional education (face-to-face learning) cannot be practiced anymore.

1.2 The Hypothetical Questions

The study questions have been captivated by the perplexity of the educational institutes during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it seems that these institutes have been perplexed by two major questions: should they keep going with the traditional way of learning, i.e., face -to-face learning? or depend on the e-learning? Both options are, by no means, risky since the first may lead to more cases of COVID-19, while the second option may not achieve the desired educational goals.

1.3 The Objectives

Within these two perplexing questions, the paper commences with attempting to achieve the objectives by finding the best solution for the problem. From his own experience, the researcher adopts the blended learning method as the proper strategy for learning during the pandemic. it is the strategy that keeps educational transition safe from traditional learning into e-learning.

1.4 The Methodology (Philosophy)

The researcher's philosophy is launched from the idea of neither overusing nor negligence, which means how to find a compromising method (solution) that hybridizes the two ways of learning to be one. Both traditional and e-learning have advantages. Yet we have to believe in the idea that the traditional (face-to-face) learning system cannot be dispensed with or ignored.

The strategy depends on what is so called the incremental change philosophy. It usually applies a set of steps within a short time. This philosophy focuses on a single idea that any program shouldn't disregard what exists but add something innovative to meet the educational goals. The researcher believes that this strategy is adequate for countries, like the Third World or Middle east countries—the countries that completely depended on the traditional method for many decades. Definitely, the strategy stands against the radical solution or changes. In other words, it is not with the idea that the educational system should fully neglect traditional learning or adopt e-learning completely.

2. The Conceptual Meaning of Blended Learning

Though definitions vary, blended learning can be meant by an integration process of multiple approaches to learning. defines it as "hybrid learning" "mixed learning" or "multimethod-learning" [1]. It seems that the concept of hybridity lures not only Kerres, but also other thinkers. For instance, describes blended learning as a " hybrid approach"[2]. Yet, all of these definitions share broadly with similar idea that this kind of learning is the process of a combination of two methods: face-to- face, and e-learning in terms of tools, techniques, and human resources [3].

Friesen finds that blended learning is almost any combination of technologies, pedagogies and even job tasks'. The term 'hybrid learning' appears to be almost synonymous with 'blended

learning' [4]. He claims that what makes blended learning effective is to hybridize the traditional learning with e-learning. Both thinkers are fully satisfied with the idea that the best solution for learning, especially in urgent cases, is to mix the two models, i.e., traditional and e-learning [4]. Blended learning is not merely concerned with hybrid methods, but it also tries to collect different theories in one crucible. According to [5], he refers to blended learning is a " combination " of different " models" and styles of learning". It is in such a way to apply these theories by using both traditional (face -to-face) and new media (online) in different levels: the theoretical, methodical and media levels. The theoretical level is concerned with how to mingle some different theories of learning, like constructivism, behaviorism, and cognitivism in a hybrid theory. The methodical level combines self-directed• the methodical level (combining self-directed with instructor-led learning, individual with cooperative learning, receptive with explorative learning, etc.) • the level of the media (combining face-to-face with online elements; using different media, like books, video, etc.).

Some thinkers, like Launer [4], Chew et al. [6], and Graham et al. [7] link blended learning with technology. They assume that blended learning cannot be practiced without a computer and net web. they define it as " the combination of two fields of concern: education and educational technology. They focus on the basic idea that blended learning, by no means, is one of the formulas of education or learning (training that integrates) in which e-learning integrates with classroom (traditional) in one framework, where the tools of e-learning, whether computer-based or networked, employ lessons and lectures, training sessions, which are often conducted in real classrooms equipped with the possibility of networking.

Watson and Murin [8], give an expanded definition of blended learning. He assumes that online learning completes what is taught in traditional learning. according to him, the whole process is divided into two parts: one is done traditionally and the other is completed by e-learning learning within controlling time. So, he defines it as "a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time". Krasnova's definition focuses on traditional learning's" technique" with online learning's interaction. He claims that blended learning is a process of a combination of " effective technique" and " interactive collaboration" [9].

Moreover, in the study of Yu et al. [10], the authors believe that blended learning is not merely a combination of two methods (traditional and online), but also it integrates " many factors: "learning environments (home, online, school, workplace, other), competence development process (lifelong learning and professional); affective domain (motivation, satisfaction discouragement, frustration), and people (learners, teachers, parents, other staff ".

3. The Transitional Strategy

Blended learning is an approach and strategic way to integrate learning methods to achieve perfection of the best learning methods in class (face-to-face learning) with online learning methods, it can be assumed that it is a learning method that adopts a wide range of design fundamentals, which improves the use of technology in an exploratory and beneficial way to create the best consistency between e-learning and face-to face learning, such as traditional lectures and changing responsibility ratio, where the student acquires highly responsibility in the learning process. This type of learning makes the student merge significantly with the school

system. Though [11], supports the idea that online learning is a more effective method, while [12] refuses this idea to say that the integration of traditional and online methods has a great deal since the two methods strengthen each other.

It is an educational method that combines opportunities through the effectiveness of teaching methods within the classroom, with technological possibilities in creating an active and improved learner in online environments, although all these definitions differ, there are some common aspects among them which is that integrated education moves to a wider stage of teaching that relies on direct classes and expands the teaching strategies available to the teacher.

Some may think that blended learning is an alternative method of e-learning. However, ignoring traditional learning is really a risky step. It is impossible to leave the educational system with its strong methodology, academic support, and strong trained teachers. However, to create a well-built strategy, there are three important factors that should be considered: they are technological infrastructure and management, the teacher, and the student.

3.1 The technological infrastructure and management

In light of the information revolution which is being accompanied by excessive speedy techniques concerning processing and storing information, as well as the emergence of the network "internet", learners and teachers can access easily, quickly and at any time for more information. Thus, so many programs, applications, and devices are being employed to help both the teacher and the student as well to reach knowledge. However, the technological revolution has created a new reality that needs to look for new methods and educational methods such as blended learning. In fact, technology is used in an effective, beneficial and educationally motivated way to expand the range of educational technologies used by teachers, which increases student interaction, improves their learning process and provides them with opportunities for active learning. Therefore, there are many ways to integrate traditional education with online education. For influential blended learning, it is important to establish a well-built infrastructure that keeps the blended learning meet the current needs. The infrastructure includes network, power, and broadband.

3.1.1 Network:

The network can be defined as multiple devices with each other. It can be two or more computers in the form of desktops, laptops, smartphones, tablets, TVs, smart applications, and other electronics. Network is divided into two categories: LAN (Local Area Network), and WAN (Wide Area Network).

3.1.2 Power:

Power should be given special consideration since it plays a vocal role in the entire technological system. No device can work without power. A lack of power can stop the whole process of blended learning.

3.1.3 Broadband:

Definitely, blended learning depends on electronic communication. In order to send messages simultaneously and quickly, the communicative process needs fast internet connections. However, the technology in blended learning can play the following roles:

- It can save teaching time in class.
- It focuses on learner-centered activities rather than teacher-centered teaching in traditional forms of teaching methods
- It provides students with live lectures.
- It hybridizes the advantages of the two systems (traditional and e-learning).
- It supports teachers with new and good means to help them evaluate and learn about higher levels of thinking among students and can also exploit the classroom in effective ways.

Regarding management, it is considered a cornerstone for any project. Without it, no success can be fulfilled at all. Its main function is to organize the entire work to achieve the goals. Blended learning demands a very professional leadership that encourages the teacher and the student to use technology in education. Definitely, modern school management is the process of planning, organizing, managing and supervising activities carried out by an educational institution through the use of humanitarian resources (teacher/student) and educational materials and technology to achieve the teaching function efficiently and effectively. Smart school management can provide the blended learning processes with a safe learning environment. So, in order to get a successful strategy for blended learning. Any institutional management carry out the following:

1-modifying educational policy at school or university that adopts technology as an essential tool in the educational process at all levels.

2-Forming a team of specialists in several educational fields such as curriculum development and education technology.

3-StudyIng the reality of the use of technology in school or university, i.e. determining the available educational programs.

4-Supporting the school or university financially

5- Encouraging and training the staff (teachers) to integrate technology with education in different courses.

6-developing a long -term comprehensive vision or plan to integrate technology with education in different courses.

7-Setting a scheduled time for the implementation of the integration plan.

8-Allocating financial budget for the integration plan.

9-Establishing a technological infrastructure that includes computers, labs, networks, and all technological equipment.

10-Training educational staff on how to use educational programs.

11-Setting the desired goals.

12-Planning how to reach these goals.

13-Organizing the resources (human resources, time, educational materials, and technology) in order to achieve the desired goals very inexpensively.

14-Controlling the learning process by measuring the achievements and how far the rates of success are achieved.

15-Setting and improving organizational standards for school management.

3.2 The teacher:

Blended Learning needs a qualified teacher who has the ability to deal with modern technology, modern programs, internet connectivity, and electronic test design so that he can explain the lesson, which it has been used to be presented traditionally, in a new way. It can give the teacher the opportunity to customize lessons or understand each student's individual needs. In fact, blended learning tries to change the role of the teacher from direct guidance to the facilitator and mentor, i.e. it mediates between direct and indirect education. To apply the process well, the teacher should be qualified by the following:

- - Having the ability to combine traditional and electronic teaching.
- - Having the ability to design tests and deal with multimedia.
- - Having the ability to create a spirit of participation and interaction within the chapter.
- understanding the purpose of education.
- - Having the ability to teach traditionally and then apply what has been taught via computer.
- - having the ability to search for what is new online and having the desire to develop a new course of information in his continuous capacity.
- - Having the ability to deal with course design programs that require special skills.
- - dealing with e-mail and exchanging the latest information with his students.
- -Having the ability and the desire to move from traditional education to e-learning.
- - Everything he explains from his rigid image to a living reality that attracts students' attention through multimedia and hypermedia through the Internet.
- -Keeping in mind that the entry of e-learning and the complete transformation into virtual classes, electronic courses and electronic management is inevitable in order to be motivated to work and train well during the period of integrated education and benefit from it.

The blended learner's philosophy is in the idea that the teacher should be experienced. [13], claims that the teacher should be exposed to the blended learning process before practicing his role as a teacher. For more emphasis, [14] focuses on the idea of teacher-as-student. He supposes that the teacher practices blended learning as a student first. He believes that the teacher's " desirability" and " readiness' should be examined before dashing to teach in blended learning. This experiment can give the teacher a real experience to judge what is possible and what is not. [3], supports this idea to claim that the best idea to teach the teacher blended learning is the blended learning itself. Yet, the teacher should have first the desire to be an influential part in blended learning.

3.3 The student:

Blended learning provides the learner a reasonable level of comfort and flexibility as they have the ability to control the pace of learning and how to learn. Many researchers suggest that blended learning gives learners a more comprehensive understanding of the content of the course. According to his experience, Kirkwood, for instance, assumes that *information and communication of technology (ICT)* has a great impact on students. It has a "magical power" to change him into self-dependent. Kirkwood says that:

"ICT possess magical powers to bring about

amazing transformations in learners. For example, a university teacher indicated that for one course he had put not only his lecture notes but also audio recordings of his lectures on the Intranet that could be freely accessed by students on campus and at a distance. He expressed surprise that the students still turned up to his series of lectures. he was expecting young people who spent much of their lives as dependent. learners in highly structured institutional environments to suddenly turn –as if by magic – into self-directed independent learners!"[15].

It can be said that blended learning allows both "old" and "young" learners to interact with teachers, at the same time there is good interaction among the learners too [16]. He can share his ideas, opinions, and information with his teacher and his colleagues. Since it a student-centered learning, blended learning encourages the student to take a greater part in participation. The teacher's role here is only to guide the student leaving most activities done by the student himself. However, the blended learning can give students enough time for the following [17]:

1- For the best preparation of materials which are going to be discussed.
2- Writing more effective papers.
3- Fors deeper understanding of concepts.
4- For acquiring greater responsibility than what has been got in traditional learning.
5- For discussing the curriculum in depth.
6- For higher quality of project implementation.
7- For reviewing the activities required of the learner within the classroom.
8- Review the activities required of the learner to prepare for the next semester.
9- Foe reviewing the various activities required after to follow up on the information mentioned within the chapter.

4. Conclusion

Definitely, blended learning can be considered as the best suitable solution during the pandemic. So, the researcher encourages any educational institutions to adopt it since it achieves the following:

The effectiveness of education:

integrated education greatly helps to increase the effectiveness of education, by improving educational outcomes by better linking the needs of the learner with the education program, increasing access to information, and achieving the best results in the field of work.

The diversity of means of knowledge:

through integrated education, the learner can employ more than one means of knowledge and choose the right means for his or her abilities and skills, among many electronic and traditional means, helping students gain more knowledge and raise the quality of the educational process.

Active learning for learners:

the integrated education system relies on education through activity and focuses on the active learner's role and interaction in obtaining his or her learning by combining individual,

collaborative activities and projects rather than the learner's negative role of receiving information.

The interaction during education:

this system helps enable learners to have the pleasure of dealing face-to-face with their teacher and colleagues through electronic and traditional means of interaction, helping to strengthen the human and social relationships and trends of learners during education.

The educational flexibility:

through a built-in education system, learners have sufficient flexibility to meet the individual needs and learning patterns of learners at different levels, ages and times.

Mastering practical skills:

through integrated education, many scientific subjects and skills that are difficult to teach fully electronically, particularly practical skills associated with practical colleges such as medicine, engineering, education technology and other practical disciplines, can be provided.

Providing practice and training in the education environment:

this system delivers training in the study environment, provides hands-on training, and actual skills practice and provides appropriate performance enhancement to achieve educational goals.

Satisfaction with education:

through this system, the learner can communicate with internet programs to support information and increase attainment, and follow up on actual training and practice in the educational institution, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the education process and increasing the learner's satisfaction towards learning.

The credibility of the assessment:

integrated education achieves the greatest credibility on the educational evaluation system through live and direct follow-up of learners during evaluation.

Recommendations:

The researcher concludes that to adopt such a strategy which ensures a safe transition from the traditional learning into e-learning, the officers (or those who are responsible) would prefer to apply the blended learning. Yet to create a good plan for this transition, the study suggests a strategy that should have a design which:

- Focuses on achieving the goals of education and meeting the requirements of learning outcomes.
- Meets the needs of learners, and reaches the widest segment of learners.
- Takes into account the preferences of learners and the way they use various electronic applications.
- Should take into account the characteristics and nature of the courses and meet their needs according to the quality of these courses.

- Contains options and alternatives that suit the characteristics of learners, and their learning methods.

- Takes into account interactive aspects, participation, and social relationships between learners.

- Should be scheduled and continuously developed.

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