THE CONCEPT AND RECENT APPEARED MODELS OF BLENDED LEARNING

Yoqubova Nigora Nizomiddin qizi
PhD student, Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers National Research University
Email: eshmurodovanigora707@gmail.com

Abstract: *This thesis explores a clear comprehension of blended learning that has evolved over the years and recent actively used models that are being implemented all over the world. This thesis also addresses main reasons why blended learning is so important to deliver into each lesson. The research culminates in a framework for educators to confirm their suitable model of blended learning according to their preferences and conditions to create an engaging and dynamic learning environment.*

Keywords: *blended learning, models, HyFlex, personalized learning, project-based learning.*

Introduction

Blended learning, as a pedagogical approach that combines online and face-to-face instruction, has undergone significant evolution and modification since its inception. Its journey reflects advancements in technology, changing educational philosophies, and the adaptive needs of learners and institutions. In recent years, blended learning has transcended its role as a supplementary educational tool to become a transformative force. Fundamentally reshaping pedagogical approaches and curricula, it cultivates essential 21st-century skills such as digital literacy, self-directed learning and critical thinking, thereby enhancing student preparedness for an increasingly complex and interconnected world. In the contemporary educational landscape, blended learning is no longer a novel experiment but a strategic pedagogical framework that thoughtfully integrates the strengths of both online and face-to-face learning environments. It helps to create more effective, engaging, and personalized learning experiences. It's not simply about adding digital elements to a traditional classroom, but about a deliberate design that leverages the unique affordances of each modality to achieve specific learning outcomes.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

While the rapid adoption of blended learning in recent years has presented significant opportunities for personalized learning and expanded access to educational resources, its continued success hinges on effectively addressing persistent challenges related to digital equity, pedagogical innovation and the cultivation of robust student-

teacher relationships. Here's a breakdown of its core concepts and manifestations in recent years:

Core Principles Driving Recent Blended Learning:

1. **Intentional Design:** This is the cornerstone. Blended learning in recent years is characterized by purposeful planning. Instructors meticulously consider *what* content is best delivered online (e.g., foundational lectures, practice quizzes) and *what* is best experienced in person (e.g., complex problem-solving, collaborative projects, in-depth discussions, skill-building workshops).
2. **Student-Centered Approach:** Blended learning increasingly prioritizes the learner. It aims to offer flexibility in pace, place, and path, empowering students to take ownership of their learning. This often involves providing choices in how students engage with material and demonstrate understanding.
3. **Maximizing Strengths of Each Modality:**

✓ **Online Component:** Often used for content delivery, asynchronous discussion, practice, personalized learning pathways, access to a wider range of resources, and data collection for formative assessment.

✓ **Face-to-Face Component:** Leveraged for higher-order thinking activities, collaborative projects, immediate feedback, building community and rapport, hands-on activities, and addressing complex questions or misunderstandings.

4. **Technology as an Enabler, Not the Driver:** While technology is crucial, recent trends emphasize that technology should serve pedagogical goals. The focus is on using tools that enhance learning, not simply adopting the latest gadget.
5. **Data-Informed Instruction:** The online component provides rich data on student progress, engagement, and challenges. This data is increasingly used to inform face-to-face interactions, allowing instructors to target interventions more effectively.
6. **Flexibility and Choice:** Modern blended learning offers varying degrees of flexibility. Students may have options in *when* they access online content or *how* they participate in face-to-face sessions, contributing to a more inclusive learning environment.

Common Models of Blended Learning in Recent Years:

While the core models from the Clayton Christensen Institute (Rotation, Flex, A La Carte, Enriched Virtual) remain relevant, their implementation has become more nuanced and sophisticated. A prominent evolution is the **HyFlex Model (Hybrid-Flexible):**

- **HyFlex Model:** This model offers students the choice to attend class in person, participate synchronously online, or engage with asynchronous online materials for each scheduled session. This provides maximum flexibility and caters to diverse student needs and preferences.

- **Flipped Learning (Advanced):** The flipped classroom model is considered the most widely known blended learning model. It flips the traditional order of instruction and homework. Students must complete the coursework and lecture online at home using materials given by teachers. Then, teachers use class time for practice and feedback. (Quynh, 2023). Beyond simply watching lectures online, flipped classrooms now often incorporate interactive simulations, flipped labs, and pre-recorded demonstrations that allow for more complex and engaging in-person activities.
- **Project-Based Learning:** This could be another topic to explore further in-depth. But, again, in the spirit of keeping it simple, project-based learning is where students learn through projects and is not to be confused with a culminating lesson or unit project. Rather, PBL is an opportunity for students to learn through projects. Think of PBL as learning through a unit of projects rather than a lesson. Essentially, this 'hands-on, minds-on' learning takes place over time. The integration of online learning is an essential component of PBL strategies and is often a perfect fit for STEAM classrooms.

Benefits of Blended Learning in Recent Years:

- **Enhanced Engagement:** By offering variety, interactivity, and personalized learning paths, blended learning can boost student engagement and motivation.
- **Improved Accessibility and Flexibility:** Caters to diverse learning styles, schedules, and geographical locations, making education more accessible.
- **Personalized Learning:** Allows students to learn at their own pace and focus on areas where they need more support. (Celisa, 2024).
- **Development of 21st-Century Skills:** Fosters digital literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and self-directed learning.
- **Cost-Effectiveness (Potentially):** Can sometimes reduce the need for physical classroom space and optimize resource allocation.
- **Data-Driven Insights:** Provides valuable data to inform instructional decisions and interventions.
- **Resilience and Adaptability:** Proven to be a robust model for navigating disruptions and maintaining educational continuity.

Challenges of Blended Learning in Recent Years:

- **Digital Divide:** Ensuring equitable access to reliable internet, devices, and digital literacy skills for all students remains a significant challenge.
- **Faculty Training and Support:** Educators require ongoing professional development to effectively design and deliver blended courses.
- **Maintaining Engagement and Community:** Creating a strong sense of community and fostering deep engagement, especially in fully online components, requires intentional strategies.

- **Workload for Educators:** Designing and managing effective blended courses can be time-consuming and demanding.
- **Assessment Design:** Developing authentic assessments that accurately measure learning across both modalities can be complex.
- **Technological Glitches and Limitations:** Reliance on technology means potential disruptions due to technical issues.

Conclusion

In summary, blended learning in recent years has matured into a sophisticated and intentional pedagogical approach. It's characterized by thoughtful design, a student-centered focus, and the strategic leveraging of both online and face-to-face environments. While challenges persist, its capacity to enhance engagement, accessibility, and skill development continues to make it a dominant force in modern education. The efficacy of blended learning in recent years is not solely determined by technological advancements, but rather by the deliberate and innovative integration of pedagogical strategies that leverage digital tools to foster deeper student understanding, collaborative learning, and the development of critical digital literacy skills.

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