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A STUDY ON BLENDED LEARNING IN INDIA – SCOPE AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

In today's era, the method of learning is undergoing a significant transformation. Traditional forms of education are giving way to smart learning, aimed at providing a thorough grasp of utilizing current innovations to adequately equip individuals for a rapidly evolving world where adaptability is the key. As technology progresses incessantly, the landscape of education is also evolving. The integration of technology in education has led to the development of Smart Education, which has gained widespread recognition over time. This new educational approach combines the principles of traditional learning with digital media, offering unparalleled flexibility. The blended learning model not only allows for adaptability but also enhances the effectiveness and enjoyment of the educational process, creating a more engaging learning experience than ever before. The present paper aims to explore the concept of blended learning, key elements, blended learning models, its advantages, implementation, and potential challenges in India.

Keywords: *Blended Learning, Smart Education, Digital Media, Traditional Learning*

Introduction:

The advancement of new technologies has empowered students to engage in learning more efficiently, effectively, and conveniently. Utilizing smart devices, learners access digital resources wirelessly and engage in personalized, seamless learning experiences. The concept of smart education, which illustrates learning in the digital era, has garnered increased attention. With the rising popularity of electronics and specifically digital learning platforms, leading industry platforms continue to progress, opening pathways for interactive, efficient, and outcome-focused learning.

Blended Learning stands as a primary educational approach that leverages digital tools and online methods to enrich and reinforce traditional teaching practices. This method combines the elements of traditional and digital learning, integrating various modes of instruction. For instance, it may involve incorporating in-person classes, computer-based learning at school, and watching educational videos at home. Notably, within these modes, face-to-face learning is fused with online instructions (Dziuban, Graham, Moskal, Norberg & Sicila, 2018).

The face-to-face approach is a crucial component that is combined with other methods in blended learning. Accordingly, solely listening to audio programs or watching videos do not constitute blended learning. Likewise, individuals who exclusively participate in traditional classroom lessons are not experiencing blended learning. Therefore, blended learning encompasses a mix of conventional face-to-face teaching and technology-enhanced online teaching, although learners may be physically separated at certain times during the learning process (Siemens, Gasevic & Dawson, 2015).

In a classroom setting, students learn concurrently under the guidance of the teacher who determines the learning speed. Conversely, in remote or independent learning environments, individuals have the flexibility to learn at their

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preferred times and pace. Blended learning empowers learners to manage aspects such as timing, location, and progression (Staker & Horn, 2012). Educators oversee both traditional and digital learning components in blended learning scenarios.

Key Elements of Blended Learning:

1. **Face-to-Face instruction:**
   In blended-learning, it is crucial for teachers and students to engage in synchronous learning activities. While this typically occurs in physical classroom settings, remote learning necessitates the use of live video sessions to fulfil the requirements of the face-to-face component.
2. **Digital or online instruction:**
   Incorporating a blended-learning approach involves utilizing an online or digital platform. This can be achieved using different digital mediums such as videos, digital text, or interactive websites.
3. **Student control:**
   In blended learning, there is a shift in learning control from the teacher to the student. This emphasizes student autonomy and individualization. Students progress through the material at their own speed. They have the freedom to choose both the location and timing of their lesson completion.
4. **Integrated learning:**
   It is ensured that the in-person and virtual lessons are integrated and aligned towards shared educational goals in blended learning. The learning experiences should be linked and interdependent.

Purpose of the Study:

1) To explore the concept of Blended Learning.
2) To explain Blended Learning Models.
3) To explain the key elements of Blended Learning.
4) To assess the advantages and challenges of Blended Learning.
5) To describe the scope of Blended Learning in Indian Education System.

Blended Learning Models:

There are different blended learning models recommended by researchers and educational think-tanks. They are:

1. Rotation
2. Flex
3. A La Carte
4. Enriched Virtual

1. **Rotation Model:**
   The rotation model of learning involves combining traditional in-person teaching with online learning. In this approach, the schedule is divided between these two methods, either following a set schedule or at the teacher's discretion for a particular course.
   Students in the classroom typically engage in both face-to-face and online learning, with the online component often being conducted one-on-one. They rotate between online learning, small group sessions, and pencil-and-paper assignments.
   The key components of the rotation model of learning include personalized online lessons, teacher-led small group sessions, and opportunities for both independent and collaborative practice.

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The four sub-types of Rotation model are:

- Station Rotation
- Lab Rotation
- Individual Rotation
- Flipped Classroom
- **Station Rotation Model**

  The Station Rotation model enables students to rotate through different stations following a fixed schedule. One of these stations must involve online learning. Students visit each station during the rotation, which may involve various activities like small-group or whole-class lessons, group tasks, one-on-one support, and traditional pen-and-paper assignments.

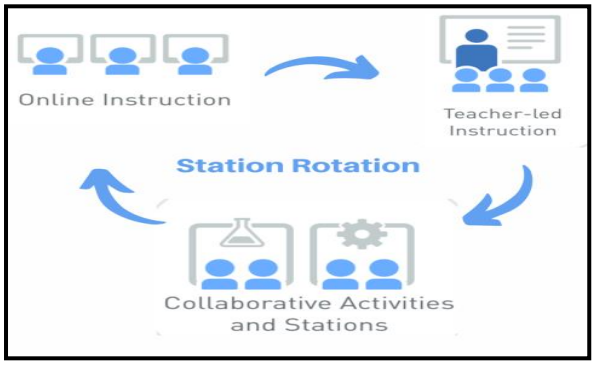

Figure: Station Rotation Model

(Reference:https://lh6.googleusercontent.com/CpVVK4qZ-gi5jW6muAldRC3eiq5NbElKdvUCZ17rfH5MzM4kTRyJwj0w0UEqkK3Q7l9N6eqLdQpwgKFeCxEuX7E4kzgvWtTPfiAlpt0htglpsPs1W8-mXArOXHL0GoPdhMyXYOxH)

- **Lab Rotation Model**

  The Lab Rotation model, similar to Station Rotation, permits students to rotate through different stations following a fixed schedule. Nevertheless, in this scenario, online education takes place in a specialized computer laboratory. This model provides flexibility in scheduling and empowers schools to utilize their existing computer labs effectively.

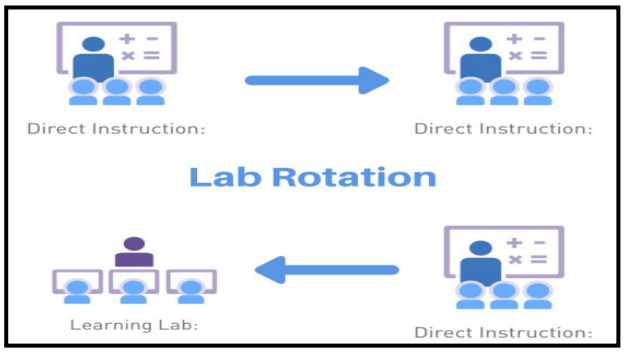

Figure: Lab Rotation Model

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- **Individual Rotation Model**

  In the Individual Rotation model, students rotate through different stations based on personalized schedules determined by a teacher or software program. In this model students do not need to rotate through every station like in other rotation models; instead, they only participate in the activities scheduled on their individual playlists.

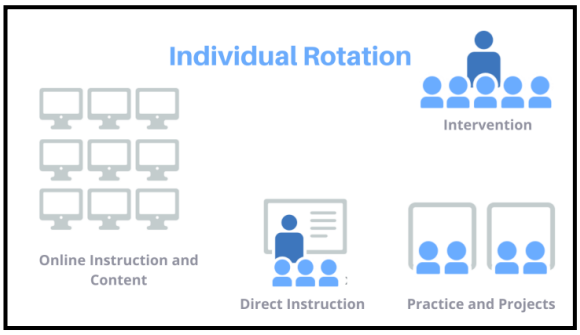

Figure: Individual Rotation Model

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- **Flipped Classroom Model**

  In the Flipped Classroom model, the usual roles of class time and homework are reversed. Students engage in online lessons and coursework at home, while teachers utilize class time for hands-on-activities or projects or teacher-guided practice. This model allows educators to maximize the use of class time beyond conventional lectures. The Flipped Classroom is a teaching model where the traditional lecture and homework components are flipped.

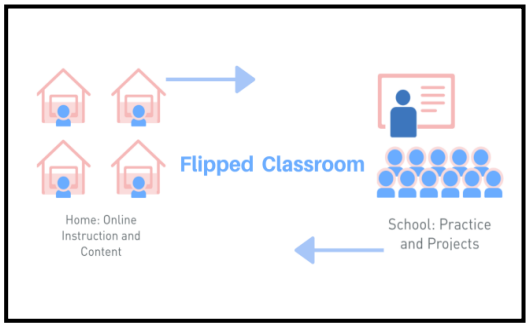

Figure: **Flipped Classroom Model**

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2. **Flex Model**

   In Flex model, online learning plays a crucial role in supporting student education. Teachers offer guidance and teaching as required, while students independently progress through the course material. This approach allows students to have significant autonomy in their learning journey. Although online learning forms the core of the Flex model, students primarily study at their school premises. The Flex model enables students to enjoy the advantages of self-paced online learning alongside direct teacher guidance and support in the classroom.

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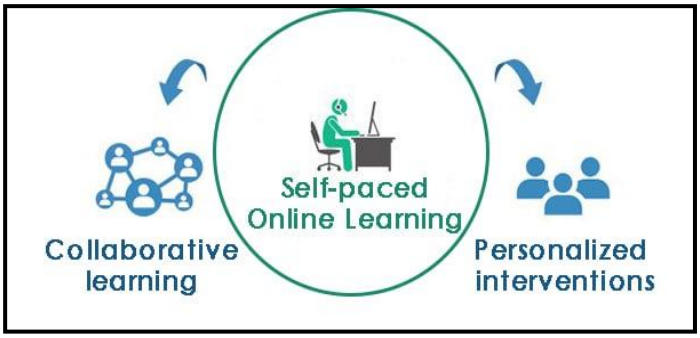

Figure: **Flex Model**

(Reference: https://www.commlabindia.com/hubfs/pillar-pages/Flex-Bended-Learning-Model.jpg)

3. **A La Carte Model**

In this program, students have the opportunity to enrol in one or multiple courses online, taught by an online instructor, while still engaging in traditional face-to-face educational settings. Students can opt to take the À La Carte course either at the physical school campus or off-site. Within the À La Carte approach, students are empowered to select specific online courses to supplement their current course load on the brick-and-mortar campus.

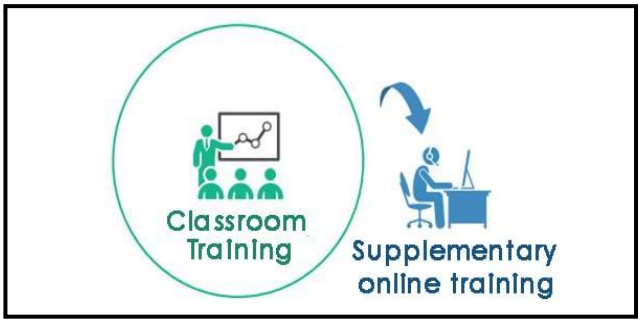

Figure: **A La Carte Model**

(Reference:https://www.commlabindia.com/hubfs/pillar-pages/%C3%80-La-Carte-Blended-Learning-Model.jpg)

4. **Enriched Virtual Model**

The Enriched Virtual model offers a flexible option for students, combining online coursework completed at home or elsewhere with mandatory in-person learning sessions at school. This model enables students to primarily engage in remote online learning, supplemented by essential face-to-face interactions with their teacher.

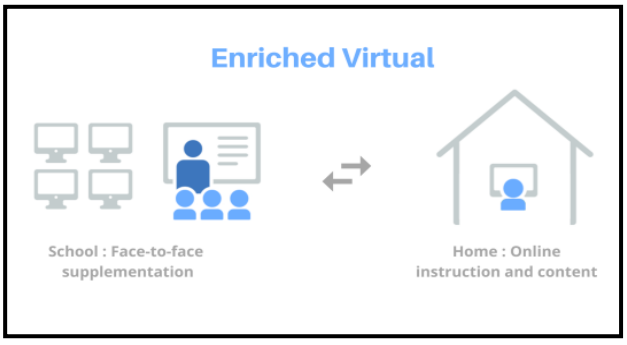

Figure: **Enriched Virtual Model**

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Advantages of Blended Learning:

Blended learning offers a unique educational experience that combines traditional in-person instruction with online learning components. This approach provides flexibility in scheduling allowing students to access course materials and participate in discussions at their own pace. Additionally, blended learning encourages the use of a variety of resources, such as videos, interactive activities, and online assessments, to cater to different learning styles. By blending face-to-face interactions with digital tools, students can enhance their critical thinking abilities, and technological proficiency, preparing them for success in an increasingly digital world.

Advantages of Blended Learning for students:

Blended learning, which combines traditional in-person instruction with online learning, offers numerous benefits for students. This approach provides flexibility in how students learn, allowing them to access materials and resources at their convenience. Additionally, blended learning encourages interaction and collaboration among students through online discussions and group projects, promoting a deeper understanding of the material. By incorporating technology into the learning process, students can develop digital literacy skills essential for success in the modern world. Overall, blended learning enhances student engagement, personalized learning experiences, and academic outcomes.

Advantages of Blended Learning for teachers:

Blended learning, a teaching method that combines traditional in-person instruction with online learning activities, offers numerous advantages for educators. By incorporating technology into their lessons, teachers can provide a more personalized learning experience for students, catering to individual needs and learning styles. Additionally, blended learning allows teachers to easily track student progress and performance through online assessments and analytics, enabling them to adjust their instruction accordingly. This approach also helps educators save time on grading and administrative tasks, giving them more time to focus on engaging with students and enhancing the overall learning experience.

Implementation of Blended Learning in Indian Education System:

The scope of blended learning encompasses a wide range of possibilities, from supplementing in-person classes with online resources to fully virtual classrooms where students interact remotely.

Blended learning holds significant potential in education by combining traditional and online elements. It accommodates various learning styles, promotes flexibility, allows for personalized learning experiences, enhances digital skills and prepares students for the demands of the modern workforce. From a broader perspective, blended learning aligns with the demands of a digital age, cultivating essential skills like digital literacy and self-directed learning. However, complete commitment from educational authorities and school managements is needed for the successful implementation of blended learning in educational institutions. To ensure educational institutions are prepared for blended learning, they must expand their educational budgets through collaborations with NGOs and partnerships with the industrial and corporate sectors.

In order to adequately prepare teachers for a blended learning setting, both in-service and pre-service teacher training programs must be fundamentally transformed. It is crucial to modify existing programs to ensure that educators possess the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively implement a blended learning approach. This transformation is vital for ensuring that teachers are equipped to meet the changing needs of today's students. Also, to promote a change in attitudes among parents, communities, teachers, and students, awareness programmes such as workshops, conferences,

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and awareness campaigns should be organized. Utilizing mass media can also be effective in supporting the successful adoption of blended learning methods.

In conclusion, it can be suggested that blended learning is, in some ways, a response to the challenges faced by our education system. A prompt implementation of blended learning will be beneficial for all involved.

Challenges of Blended Learning:

- Infrastructure: Ensuring reliable internet access and suitable devices for all participants. Teachers and students may need training to effectively use various digital tools.
- Pedagogical shift in teaching strategies and Assessment methods: Balancing traditional and online teaching methods requires pedagogical adjustments. Also designing fair and effective assessments that suit both online and offline components will be the challenging task.
- Equity and Access: Disparities in access to technology and internet connectivity can create educational inequalities. Ensuring that blended learning accommodates diverse learning styles and needs.
- Student Engagement: Maintaining student engagement in both online and offline activities. Fostering meaningful interaction and collaboration among students in virtual environments.
- Assessment Integrity: Addressing concerns related to academic integrity in online assessments. Ensuring assessments accurately reflect students' understanding and skills.
- Enhancing Faculty Skills: Assisting teachers in acquiring the essential competencies for successful blended teaching. Overcoming possible obstacles to embracing novel instructional approaches.

The challenges identified from the perspectives of students, teachers and institutions are outlined below:

Challenges from students' perspective:

- Technical Challenges: Limited access to reliable internet and suitable devices can hinder participation. Issues with software compatibility or technical glitches may impede the learning experience.
- Time Management: Juggling between online and offline components along with other responsibilities, requires effective time management. Synchronizing online and in-person tasks to meet deadlines can be challenging.
- Engagement and Motivation: Lack of face-to-face interaction may lead to feelings of isolation and reduced motivation. Home environments can introduce distractions that impact focus during online sessions.
- Learning Style Adaptation: Adapting to a different learning format may be challenging for students accustomed to traditional classroom settings. Some students may struggle with the self-discipline required for independent online learning.

Challenges from teacher's perspective:

- Technology Proficiency: Teachers may face a learning curve in adopting and effectively using technology.
- Individualized Support: Providing personalized assistance to students can be challenging in a virtual environment.
- Acquiring fresh technology and instructional abilities: Teachers must overcome their apprehensions and reluctance by gaining hands-on experience with different tools and software applications.
- Time management: A lot of time is required for designing and delivering in a blended learning course as compared to conventional classroom teaching.

  According to Johnson (2002), creating and designing a blended course with a large number of students demands two to three times the effort needed for developing a traditional course of similar nature.

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Challenges from institution's perspective:

- Alignment with Institutional Objectives and Priorities: According to Twigg (1999), the successful adoption of blended learning hinges on an institution's dedication to enhancing the overall quality of student education affordably. This implies that the institution must be fully dedicated to integrating coding into its campus culture.
- Infrastructure: Maintaining robust IT infrastructure and support services is crucial.
- Consistency: Ensuring uniformity in the quality of blended learning across different courses and departments.
- Resource Allocation: Balancing financial resources for technology, training, and support. Also some higher education subjects may require advance technology such as specialized software or equipment.

Conclusion:

Today, relying solely on traditional face-to-face learning is no longer sufficient. Educational institutions must now embrace various approaches to stay ahead of the curve. Giving technology the recognition it merits is crucial, with blended learning emerging as a key element of the contemporary education system.

However, implementing blended learning successfully demands thoughtful preparation. Educators must carefully determine which aspects are best suited for in-person instruction and which can be effectively taught online.

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