

BLENDED LEARNING: A POTENTIAL TOOL TO DEAL WITH DIVERSE LEARNING STYLE

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ABSTRACT

Learning styles are the way how people learn and how they approach information. All may have different learning styles. In the regular classroom settings teachers can optimize learning of the students by finding out the person's characteristic learning style and then matching the learning environment accordingly. Thus in the present classroom situation, educational methodologies of the conventional kind are not adequate for the new challenges of the time. Moreover the rapid changes in the new information and communication technologies necessitate corresponding paradigm shifts in the teaching- learning process. In this environment that demands the use of technology, educators would be knowledgeable of the components that make up the overall computer attitudes of the students and be willing to investigate the processes and techniques of effective teaching and learning that can take place with computer technology. Considering it, present paper recognizes blended learning as a potential tool to deal with diverse learning styles.

People learn in different ways. They have different learning styles. Some people find that they use particular learning style dominantly, with far less use of other styles. Others may find that they don't learn effectively through the same method. There is no one common learning style for everyone. Here learning styles are the approaches that individual prefer to adopt while learning and gradually it become their consistent behavior. Thus the way person prefers to learn is called his/her learning style. Learning style is a concept that has been developed from the extensive work into cognitive styles, that is, how people think and act in certain ways. The idea of individualized learning styles originated in 1970s and has gained popularity in the field of education recently. The term learning style and its types are variously defined and discussed by

various experts. Reynolds, Kolb's, Dunn & Dunn have given a theory of learning styles which is widely used in education.

According to Reynolds (1999), there are generally three types of learning styles: Visual learning (learn through seeing), Auditory Learning (learn through listening), Kinesthetic Learners (Learn through moving doing and touching).

Kolb defined "learning style is a method of personal choice to perceive and process information. In this sense, learning style is theory, which defends that learning is a combination of experience, cognition, perception. He proposed a theory in school settings. According to this theory, there are four basic types of learning styles; The Convergent Learning Style, the Divergent Learning Style, The Assimilating Learning Style, The Accommodating Learning Style.

It has been recognized widely that each person prefer different learning styles. As a person's learning style has to do with the way he or she processes information in order to learn it and apply it. Learning style is, thus, the application of particular cognitive style to a learning activity. It is seen as relatively fixed and are not easily changeable. It takes some special efforts and extra time to change. That is why, it seems as an easier and more effective way to select and organize methods and strategies, classroom environment and teaching materials according to learning styles rather than expecting the students to adapt to the existent organization or develop other learning style. But the problem with the present scenario is the over use of conventional method of teaching, which does not provide benefit to the students of different type of learning styles. So, it is not ethical to compel the students to alter their learning style according to the teaching method. Also it is not possible for the teacher to adopt different teaching methods for students with different learning styles. This problem can be resolved only when a teacher adopt such method of teaching, which can cater the needs of students with diverse learning styles in the same class and at the same time. In this context technology based methods prove more suitable and relevant.

In the field of Education, these methods are most simply and comfortably defined as an array of tools that might prove helpful in advancing student learning. It provides an easy-to-access course

material. Instructors can post the material or important information on a course website, which means students, can study with the help of different learning styles. Thus, in order to create open learning environment and to increase the level of students learning various innovations and emerging techniques are there in the field of educational technology. But among all those emerging methods the most important and relevant method, which can be used in present context is ‘blended Learning’. It can be used to enhance the students learning. Blended learning is a mixture of virtual classroom, computer assisted instructions, web based instructions and e-learning etc. This method can be proved very helpful for catering the needs of students who has different type of learning styles. With the use of this method student’s interest, problem solving ability, open mindedness, creativity can be enhanced. Here learning is organized at reflective and understanding level. Blended learning can combine face to face instruction with computer-mediated instruction.

Blended learning is not a new method. However, in the past, blended learning was comprised of physical classroom formats, such as lectures, labs, books and handouts. Today, organizations have a myriad of learning approaches and choices. The concept of blended learning is rooted in the idea that learning is not just a one-time event- learning is a continuous process. Blended learning provides various benefits over using any single learning medium alone. It is a technique in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instructions with some element of student control over time, place, path or pace. Along with this blended learning technique consider various interactive, innovative and constructive method of teaching. Thus, unlike conventional method of teaching blended learning technique cater the needs of students of different learning styles. By applying blended learning technique maximum number of students of different learning styles get benefitted, which may directly influence their achievement, performance, abilities, skills, adjustment etc.

The instructor can combine two or more methods of teaching. A typical example of blended learning methodology would be a combination of technology based material and face to face sessions of present content. An instructor can begin a course with a well – structured introductory lesson in the classroom and then proceed with follow up material online. Blended

learning can also be applied to the integration of e-learning with a learning management system using computers in a physical classroom along with face to face instructions.

Blended learning has many specific meanings based upon the context in which it is used. A community of learners can interact at anytime and anywhere because of the benefits that computer mediated educational tools provide. Blended learning provides a good mixture of technology and instructions resulting socially supported, constructive, learning experience, this is especially given the profound effect that it could have on distance learning.

Blended learning is the learning that facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning and is based on transparent communication amongst all parties. The use of Blended learning is increased in present era because it increases the flexibility of learning.

There are main three component of blended learning. These components are:-

- Synchronous(live classroom) format which includes: Face to face tutoring, Coaching or mentoring sessions, Classroom, Workshops, Conferences, Meeting labs
- Synchronous(online)) format which includes: Internet conferencing, Audio conferencing (i.e. phone conferencing), live video via satellite or video conferencing, Virtual, Online Classroom, Instant Messaging
- Asynchronous(not live) format which includes: Online self paced learning content (web pages), E-mail, Discussion forms<Web/computer based instructions, Books, CD-ROM, Audio (Disc/tape), Video (Disc/tape), White papers, Archived Live Events

With the use of blended learning we can learn anytime, anywhere which leads to the time savings as no travel required to go anywhere. It is also every cost effective method. Moreover, it allows the learner to make choices and use their time in a way they feel is valuable. It allow the students to select learning materials or content that meets their level of knowledge, interest and what they need to know to perform more effectively in their particular activity. Blended learning provides learners and teachers a potential environment to learn more effectively. At the last but not the least blended learning increases the options for greater quality and quantity of human interaction in a learning environment. Blended learning Blended learning offers the opportunity for learners “to learn together and apart.”

To conclude, we can say that by using blended learning approach the classroom environment can be made more interactive, interesting and conducive, which enhance the way students learn. Because the instruction provided with this method matches to the students' learning styles. Moreover blended learning does not put demand over students to change according to the given methods of teaching. It is too flexible that it can be used by the teachers in different ways to cater the needs of students with diverse learning styles.

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