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Blended Learning as An Evolving Educational Paradigm Opportunities and Challenges

Piyali Paul
Research Scholar, Department of Education, Kalinga University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India.

ABSTRACT

Blended learning is a type of instruction that mixes traditional in-person classroom instruction with online resources and possibilities for online engagement. The instructor and the student must be physically present, and the student must have some degree of control over the setting, the time, the route, and the speed. Teachers and students still meet in traditional "brick-and-mortar" classrooms, but online resources supplement traditional instruction in both content and delivery. This article delves into the philosophical underpinnings, historical evolution, and practical uses of blended learning in modern educational contexts, examining it as an emerging educational paradigm. Blended learning has several advantages, as the study shows. These include more adaptability, more individualized lessons, higher levels of student engagement, and better utilization of technology tools to meet the requirements of students with varying learning styles. Concurrently, the study examines the difficulties of implementing blended learning, including technology limitations, digital divide, insufficient teacher preparation, problems with curricular alignment, and assessment intricacies. A sustainable and adaptable educational approach that can satisfy the increasing demands of twenty-first-century education, blended learning shows promise when it is well-designed and executed, the report says.

Keywords: *Traditional, Teaching, Challenges, Online, Educators.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite its minor drawbacks, the traditional mode of instruction adds a much-needed personal touch to the educational process. Teachers have a profound impact on their students' development as individuals through their demeanor and actions. Affective, cognitive, and psychomotor goals can only be satisfied by in-person contact. A robust value system may be developed by face-to-face traditional methods. The traditional mode of instruction makes it easier to acquire social skills such as teamwork, sharing, expression, and respect for other people's opinions. Not only do students learn from their professors and textbooks in the classroom, but they also pick up a lot of useful skills by interacting with their classmates in small groups, whether it's on the playground or in the cafeteria. Both the traditional method and its modern counterparts have their merits and drawbacks, as we have seen. Example: when the student-teacher ratio is too high, it fails to cater to each student's unique requirements. The following issues plague our educational system: a lack of professional development opportunities for educators, outdated curricula, outdated textbooks, and a general apathy toward professional development among educators.

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One major trend in education over the last decade has been the rise of online courses. Online programs run by states and schools that cater only to online learning have been the main forces behind the expansion of online education. From the days of letter courses to video courses and real-time two-way video, and now to more accessible and effective online delivery, online programs provide the newest evolution in distant learning. In some cases, they emerged from traditional distance learning programs. When compared to these alternatives, online learning stands out due to the abundance of synchronous and asynchronous student-teacher-peer connection and engagement as well as the strong emphasis on individualization within instructor-led classes. The same time period also saw a rise in the usage of online materials and information by educators working in traditional classroom settings. Historically, this shift has been spearheaded by an elite group of educators who are proficient with technology and are always on the lookout for innovative methods to enhance student learning both in and out of the classroom. These endeavors often do not constitute a formal, standalone school or program; rather, they expand upon computer-based teaching resources that existed prior to the Internet's broad acceptance.

However, district-level initiatives that combine online learning with face-to-face education have been encouraged to creation by the proliferation of the Internet, which has substantially improved the quality of digital classroom tools. Online resources from organizations like Apex Learning and the Monterey Institute of Technology and Education have found their way into several of these programs in the past few years. The integration of online and traditional classroom instruction has progressed at a snail's pace in the field of education due to the fact that completely online distance learning programs emerged from a different era and used different methodologies than the utilization of Internet resources in traditional institutions. On the other hand, new models in higher education and other nations like Singapore and Australia imply that a significant portion of the future of education will include delivering information and lessons in both online and traditional classroom settings. The greatest parts of both online and in-person education are brought together in this hybrid method. Far more prevalent than any of them alone, it is expected to become the future's preeminent model. There is no indication that the demand for courses and programs offered entirely online will decrease any time soon, and the number of students enrolled in these programs is rising sharply. The number of online courses will undoubtedly rise, however it is probable that the proportion of Blended Learning.

Given the present rise of online programs, the proportion of students choosing a distance-based education will likely be substantially larger than the current student population in purely online programs, but it will still be relatively low compared to the Convergence of Online and Face-to-Face Education student population. On the other hand, there are two distinct varieties of online education: blended learning and remote learning. What unites them is a modern, powerful method of teaching that draws on the greatest features of both types of classrooms. Schools throughout the globe are actively working on and implementing hybrid models of instruction that include online and in-person components; in fact, several of these models have been in use for quite some time. Some people refer to this kind of instruction as "blended," while others use the term "hybrid," and still others don't care what they name it; what matters is that they're using a technique that they think is beneficial for their students.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hill, John & Mpamhanga, Karen. (2023) Research on blended learning tends to concentrate on specific programs rather than how institutions plan to implement it to improve teaching and learning, even though it has been used in higher education since the early 90s and its advantages have been well documented. By conducting an interpretive qualitative analysis of strategy papers and expert interviews, this piece offers a glimpse into cross-institutional policy and practice in the UK prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although not heavily featured in published institutional plans prior to the pandemic, the results demonstrate that there are commitments to blended learning. These strategies acknowledge the need for structures and support, and they communicate their intentions in terms of accessibility, inclusivity, and flexibility. According to experts, in order for adoption to be done on a wide scale, there needs to be strategic leadership, governance, professional development, and continuing support. According to the article's findings, blended learning was not yet a standard practice before the epidemic. In the aftermath of the pandemic, institutions should follow the advice of the research literature and create visions that provide support, structure, and common strategy in order to normalize blended learning and encourage its sustained and broad adoption.

Caporarello, Leonardo & Inesta, Anna. (2016) Many transformation efforts across all industries have been impacted by and even driven by the growth of technology. This technological progress has also impacted educational institutions. Because of this, there have been significant paradigm shifts in education, which have altered the ways in which people learn. One of the most significant outcomes of these shifts in educational paradigm has been the rise of online education, although the relative merits of this trend have yet to be shown. As a result, blended learning has become the new standard in education. This phenomena has been discussed in the literature before, but it is now being embraced as the future paradigm for higher education. This is particularly true among foreign schools who are always striving to provide their students with innovative and exceptional coursework. What challenges are schools encountering when trying to incorporate technology into their curricula? What adjustments are necessary for them to be prepared to implement this learning paradigm effectively? These are the topics we hope to address in this article, along with some suggestions for how educational institutions may spearhead the transformations required to make blended learning a reality in their own classrooms.

Yu, Zhonggen. (2015) From its inception in the early 1990s, when online learning was first considered, blended learning has been the subject of much study in the 21st century. Blended learning within established academic communities is the central focus of this article. The study focuses on research articles and other publications over the past 20 years that examined the origins, evolution, and future of blended learning. Although there may still be some disagreements over blended learning, this study, which drew on more than 30 journal articles indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index and other significant databases, as well as other relevant publications, examined the definition, benefits, and drawbacks of blended learning. It concluded that there may be more shortcomings to solely online or classroom learning compared to blended learning, which

combines the two approaches. In spite of the potential financial and other disadvantages, educational and non-educational organizations may do well to adapt their teaching methods towards a mixed mode.

Kaur, Manjot. (2013) One of the methods to put this idea into practice is through Blended Learning, which is becoming more popular as an e-learning trend. This essay provides an overview of the idea of Blended Learning from a variety of angles, including the Holistic, Educational, Pragmatic, Corporate Training, and Chief Learning Officer (CLO) viewpoints. It goes on to detail the many approaches to blended learning. Blended learning makes use of both synchronous and asynchronous teaching approaches, which are detailed in this article so that readers may pick the one that works best for them. In addition, the article delves into the many aspects of blended learning, including combining offline and online learning, learning at one's own speed or in real-time, learning in groups, and combining organized and unstructured activities. Additionally, the article details the areas where this method excels, as well as the obstacles it has encountered, including those of a technological, organizational, and instructional design nature. Next, we will go over the many benefits of the Blended Learning method. Also discussed in this research are elements that contribute to effective blended learning. Lastly, some suggestions for further study are made.

Fleck, James. (2012) With an eye toward management and business school curricula, this article will discuss the history and current state of blended learning as well as the concept of learning communities. All told, four distinct models are investigated in order to draw attention to a few of the problems and possibilities that are at play. Most of these models are based on what has worked at the Open University in the United Kingdom, which is often considered the gold standard for blended learning and has been copied all around the globe. Specifically, the oversimplified distinction between "content" and "delivery" is questioned, the supremacy of technology over pedagogy is questioned, and the significance of small operational details in attaining a suitable fit for the intended aims is emphasized. The use of blended learning will undoubtedly increase. Online activities will become integral to traditional classroom instruction, and library books will be replaced with knowledge and resources found on the web. This document provides a concise overview of the benefits and drawbacks of blended learning.

III. HISTORY OF BLENDED LEARNING

A thorough understanding of the principles and tenets of blended learning is essential for developing an effective plan for implementing it. These can only be made sense if we are familiar with the origins of Blended Learning and the pivotal moments in its history that formed its foundational concepts.

1840's: First Distance Course

An online class was offered for the first time by Sir Isaac Pitman. Even if there were earlier iterations of the idea, Pitman's meant to be more like modern-day distant learning. The focus of his class was on shorthand. Pitman ordered his students to return shorthand manuscripts via postcards for grading

and correction. Efficient evaluations and comments were still crucial, even if there were no computers or mobile devices involved (and such technologies wouldn't be produced for about a hundred years).

1960's & 1970's: Mainframe Computer-Based Training

Training on minicomputers and mainframes in the 1960s and 1970s is the ancestor of today's computer-based education. Training for a large number of employees might now be implemented without the need for costly and time-consuming printed materials and in-person meetings. Workers may get to the data by logging onto their character-based terminals. Control Data and the University of Illinois created one of the most famous systems in 1963 with the creation of Plato. As a matter of fact, Plato has not died out yet.

1970's to 1980's: TV-Based Technology to Support Live Training

Video networks were used by organizations to teach their personnel at this point in the blended learning timeline. The instructor's physical presence was no longer necessary for the onboarding of new employees or the enhancement of existing staff members' skill sets. The training became more dynamic and interesting as a result. Learners were able to communicate with their peers, watch the instructor on TV, and even address any questions or concerns sending them by mail. You may think of it as the forerunner of modern forms of online meeting, such as webinars. The Stanford University Interactive TV network is a prime example of a highly effective satellite-based instructional program. In order enable instructors to offer concurrent sessions in different parts of San Francisco, Stanford invested much in its video network in the 1970s and 1980s; the network is still operational today. Learners may now submit their work online for approval instead of via the mail or courier.

1980's & 1990's: CD-ROM Training and Rise of Learning Management Systems

The concepts and uses of blended learning have grown with technology. Video and audio-based interactive learning experiences were among the first to be distributed via CD-ROMs by educational institutions and nonprofits. They were perfect for distant learning since this distribution method could carry more information. Online classes might finally provide a full-fledged education for the first time in the field's annals. Occasionally, it even supplanted traditional classroom education. Around the same time, the first Learning Management Systems (LMS) appeared on the market, however they were far from feature-rich compared to modern alternatives. Companies used these systems to keep tabs on eLearning course completion rates, enrollment information, and user performance on the CD-ROM network, all with the goal of bettering online training courses and keeping learners engaged.

1998: First Generation of Web-Based Instruction

Beginning in 1998 with the introduction of the first generation of web-based education, blended learning and eLearning as a whole have undergone fast transformation. The public, not only organizations and the affluent few, could now own computers. Companies started making PCs easily

accessible for all employees, and more and more families bought personal computers to enjoy. Later on, computers began to provide more interactive features. As browsers improved connection speeds and made online learning resources available to almost everyone, visuals, audio, and video grew increasingly immersive. Organizations might save time and effort by allowing students to access course materials, eLearning evaluations, and assignments online instead of sending out CD-ROMs. When eLearning initially emerged, many CD-ROM creators thought it would be enough to upload their courses on the web without making any changes. On the other hand, they rapidly discovered that web-based learners would require a fine-tuning of their current online curriculum, which included huge video files that took minutes to download.

2000 Until Today Blended Learning Integration

Blended learning is experiencing a period of great growth right now. The advantages of a blended learning strategy are being recognized by an increasing number of corporations and private learning institutions, thanks to the rapid changes in technology. Students nowadays have access to a plethora of technological resources, including online tutorials, webinars, and interactive classroom scenarios. People from all over the globe may take part in online communities and interactive eLearning courses, and businesses can teach their personnel from any location at any time. A growing number of innovative approaches are emerging as a result of the merging of traditional classroom teaching methods with online resources, all with the goal of making education more engaging, relevant, and ultimately more effective for students. Blended learning has a track record of successfully integrating traditional classrooms into the modern era.

IV. BLENDED VS TRADITIONAL LEARNING

Blended learning provides students of all abilities with a flexible learning environment by combining online and traditional classroom instruction. By integrating online courses with in-person instruction, it meets the requirements of individual students and lets them study at their own speed. Students are interested and motivated by this individualized approach, which also improves student and teacher collaboration and communication. Blended learning also promotes the development of strong digital literacy skills, which are essential for academic performance and potential employment in the digital sector. Blended learning provides a great chance for Pakistanis to acquire these abilities. Due to their greater adaptability to distant learning, blended learning models were more advantageous during the COVID-19 epidemic, demonstrating the significance of educational flexibility. This adaptability helps students juggle their studies with additional commitments, such as part-time employment or families. Blended learning is also cost-effective for schools and families since it eliminates the need for physical textbooks and materials, simplifies the grading and feedback procedures, and decreases the expense of transportation and school supplies.

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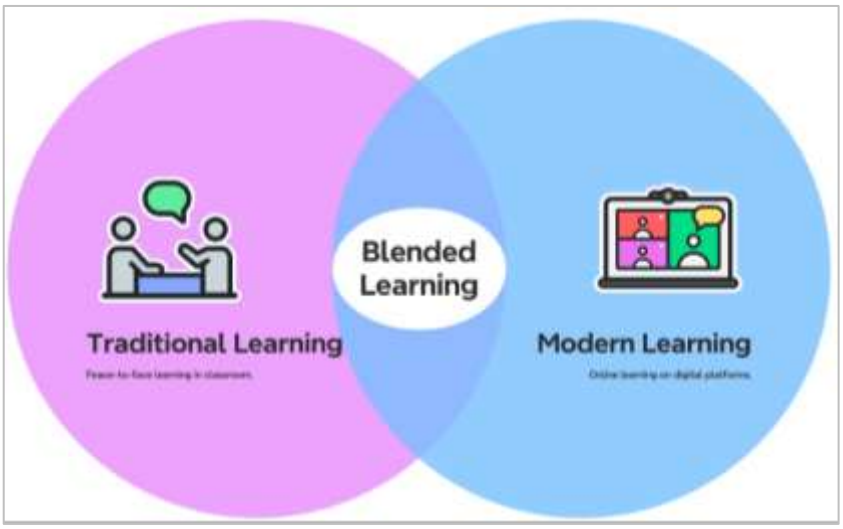

Figure 1: Blended Learning

(Source: Secondary source taken from https://xmind.com/blog/blended-learning)

There is a long history of traditional education. Meeting in person is the main emphasis, both for students and professors. This approach prioritizes scheduled in-person discussions with prompt, timely feedback. Examining the similarities and differences with online education is crucial. Teachers in conventional classes take the lead and deliver lessons in a more traditional fashion. This method assists students in maintaining focus and self-control. Apt for people that thrive when given strict time constraints. Some students prefer the consistency of traditional classrooms over online ones. Still, there are major challenges, such as going to school and studying independently. Both teachers and students consider these factors while deciding on the most effective method of instruction. The benefits of traditional methods of instruction include student-teacher relationships, practical experience, effective classroom management, and opportunities for social growth. A sense of belonging and participation are both encouraged by these approaches.

The use of technology, however, may improve education by facilitating more tailored lessons, easier access to a wealth of information, more chances for students to work together, and more accurate evaluations in real time. Finding the right balance between traditional teaching methods and technological integration calls for a variety of strategies, ongoing professional development, intentional integration, a focus on student needs, and a nurturing classroom climate. Educators may better equip their students for the technology-driven future by integrating traditional and digital teaching approaches into a cohesive whole that encourages students to work together, think critically, and experience dynamic learning. Educators may better equip their students for the technologically driven future by incorporating elements from both worlds into a student-centered classroom that emphasizes cooperation and critical thinking. Conventional lecture halls often include the following:

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- **Structured Schedule:** Students can easily organize their days because classes start at a defined time.
- **Teacher-Led Instruction:** Teachers guide class discussions and administer exams; they are the primary information providers.
- **Limited Flexibility:** Altering your learning style might be challenging and impact your educational experience.
- **Access to Resources:** Students may experience difficulties in some areas due to a lack of resources.

It is crucial to compare various learning approaches since our learning style is evolving. Blended, traditional, and entirely online learning are all considered. Students' performance is impacted by the advantages of each.

V. BLENDED LEARNING IN PRACTICE

Blended learning, often called hybrid education, changes the game when it comes to education by combining traditional in-person classroom instruction with online materials and student participation. The last ten years have seen the gradual but steady adoption of blended learning by educators at all levels of schooling as a viable strategy for student achievement both in and out of the classroom. The flipped classroom model is a well-known example of a mixed learning environment. This approach has students study instructional videos or recorded lectures in advance of class. Class time is devoted to student-teacher dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and other forms of active participation. Some Blended Learning modes include the following:

- **Face-to-Face:** Learning sessions that are traditionally taught by an instructor and enhanced with technology so that students may study at their own speed. Benefits include feedback, coaching, practical experience, and role-playing.
- **Rotation:** Students go from one learning activity to another, either in a teacher-led, scheduled session or independently on an online platform. Labs, learning stations, and the flipped classroom model are all examples of instructional strategies that allow students to complete assignments and assessments outside of class time.
- **Flex:** The words "flex learning" and "personalized learning" mean the same thing. Students have agency over their education by selecting their own courses of study with the use of an LMS (Learning Management System). As a mentor, the teacher is frequently there to field students' inquiries.
- **Gamification:** The ability to play is one of the best methods to inspire students to study! Gamification techniques, such points or levels, provide students a sense of accomplishment and encourage them to study at their own pace.
- **Online Lab:** With this blended learning strategy, students engage in digital activities before, during, or after a training session, with minimal or no teacher engagement. Mobile learning, computers, and tablets are all viable options for students to access course materials. Learning is engaged and solidified through this medium.

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- **Self-Blend:** A self-blended learner is one who is self-motivated and who uses supplementary material such as webinars, white papers, industry blogs, or video tutorials to go further into a topic. As a means of fostering interest and development, a powerful LMS may bring together many material sources inside a single framework.
- **Online Driver:** The learner in this mixed paradigm works alone on their own time and in an online setting. Chat, email, and message boards allow students to interact with teachers. The scheduling flexibility and individualized learning it offers are advantages over other blended learning options, but it doesn't have the same face-to-face connection. With the help of a learning management system (LMS), students may take charge of their own education and keep tabs on their progress while they watch videos and participate in group projects. You have the option of developing a custom learning management system from the ground up or selecting one of the current options.

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Blended Learning

The possible benefits of blended learning are enormous, but whether or not they materialize depends on several key considerations:

- **Quality of Instructional Design:** The combination of online and in-person components is crucial to the success of blended learning. The goal of instructional design should be to ensure that the two learning modes work in tandem to provide a seamless and integrated learning experience. To do this, one must meticulously plan the course outline, coordinate learning goals, and choose appropriate digital resources.
- **Technological Infrastructure:** The effective implementation of blended learning depends on a readily available and dependable technological framework. This encompasses not just the accessibility of hardware and software, but also dependable internet connectivity and technical support. If schools really care about their students' ability to access and participate in digital information and online activities, they will invest in robust technological platforms.
- **Readiness of Educators and Students:** Success depends on your ability to adjust to a new learning mode. While students necessitate digital literacy and the ability to self-direct their own learning, educators must possess digital abilities and engage in continuous professional development. Engaging with digital information is essential for both. By fusing traditional and digital methods, blended learning improves student achievement and enjoyment. Good instructional design, trustworthy technology, and thorough training of both teachers and students are essential to its success.

VI. CHALLENGES IN BLENDED LEARNING

Blended learning has a lot of promise, but there are a number of issues that need fixing before it can be put into practice. Major investments in technology are necessary, but so is ongoing professional development for teachers, the development of robust evaluation techniques, and worries about digital fairness.

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Investment in Technology

A large investment in technical infrastructure is necessary for blended learning. Software (learning management systems, or LMSs) and hardware (computers, tablets, and interactive whiteboards) are necessities in any school. In order to participate in online learning activities, you must have a reliable and fast internet connection. Particularly for institutions of higher learning that are already strapped for cash, these investments may add up quickly.

Ongoing Professional Development for Educators

Educators need to be tech savvy and able to incorporate digital resources into their lessons for blended learning to work. To keep educators abreast of the latest innovations in educational technology and best practices in the classroom, ongoing professional development and training is essential. Instructors' continuing education should address both the technological aspects of blended learning and the ideas of instructional design that work alongside it. The advantages of blended learning might be diminished if instructors aren't well prepared to integrate online and offline learning. The feasibility of large-scale professional development that emphasizes responsiveness to intervention is an open question. The views of educators on fundamental principles of response-to-intervention (such as data-based decision making and the significance of good instruction) should be a primary focus of professional development.

Robust Assessment Strategies

Another important goal is to develop reliable evaluation tools that can accurately record learning that takes place both online and off. In a mixed setting, the variety of learning experiences could be too much for conventional assessment tools to handle. Teachers need to design assessments that can gauge students' active engagement, participation, and understanding in a variety of ways. Assessments in this area may take several forms, including digital portfolios, peer reviews, project-based learning, and both formative and summative assessments. Thorough planning and coordination among educators are necessary for the development and implementation of these comprehensive assessment systems. There should be effective ways to evaluate the performance of students, according to UGC's recommendations for Blended Learning Assessment and Evaluation. The student's progress and achievements may be evaluated with clear and concise instruments. A greater emphasis should be placed on objectivity and uniformity. Additionally, this will motivate students to engage in activities that involve self- and peer-assessment.

Digital Equity

Blended learning presents a formidable obstacle when it comes to digital equity. The technology and connectivity needed for online education are not universally available to all students. There are already inequalities in school, and the digital gap may make them worse for some students. It is the responsibility of schools to ensure that all students have the necessary resources to properly engage in blended learning. Among these measures might include the provision of devices and internet

access to students, the establishment of partnerships with community groups to advance digital access, and the implementation of legislation tailored to the unique requirements of underserved populations. Blended learning offers flexibility, engagement, and personalized learning, but in order to realize its full potential and enhance learning outcomes, it has to make major investments in professional development, robust evaluation systems, and digital equity.

VII. BLENDED LEARNING-FUTURE OF EDUCATION

With the 2017 Union Budget's focus on digitalization of education, skill development, and employability, the discussion about India's higher education system's quality has been heating up. An online learning portal called "Swayam" was one of several measures announced by the government. Other measures included a revamp of the National Education Policy (NEP), the creation of a single regulator for higher education called the Higher Education Empowerment Regulation Agency (HEERA), and a mandate from the University Grants Commission (UGC) for educational institutions to create massive open online courses (MOOCs). Universities throughout the world are reshaping and revolutionizing the way students' study, even as India makes progress in digitizing its educational system. There is a strong emphasis on traditional classroom instruction because the country's educational system has always relied on human teachers and gurus. But it's important to remember that the chasm between classroom instruction and industry standards for students to fill is widening daily. University curricula undergo the most rapid revision once a year, but technological advancements have far outpaced and will continue to outstrip them. Students sometimes spend more than 20 years in the educational system and are then burdened with unappealing employment prospects. 'Blended learning,' an idea that is catching on quickly in the Indian setting, is the key. Blended learning, to put it simply, is the fusion of traditional classroom settings with online learning resources. Striking a balance between more traditional forms of education and more tech-driven approaches is one of its primary goals.

The essence of blended learning is empowering the student to take charge of his or her own educational journey, with technology serving just as a facilitator; this is in contrast to technology-rich teaching, which is not what blended learning is all about. Blended learning is revolutionizing the way students and instructors interact with the internet. It's a win-win for everyone involved. In order to equip the future generation to deal with the intricacies of a world that is changing at a rapid pace, it prioritizes a learner-centered approach. Blended learning offers a lot of flexibility, allowing students to pursue their interests in a variety of ways. Because they are not limited to the confines of a traditional classroom, students are free to acquire knowledge at their own speed and level of complexity. The educational system should alter its focus from being prescriptive to being more learner-driven.

Because blended learning does not promote a prescriptive style of learning, it relies on a balance between in-person and online instruction to alleviate instructors' workloads caused by an excess of course material. Instead of being authoritarian, the teachers will take on the role of guides, easing the

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students out of the shackles of traditional schooling. This trend allows instructors to prioritize student understanding above the specific distribution method, providing students with more flexible alternatives that align with their material, topic, and skills.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Blended learning, often called hybrid learning, is an approach to education that combines online and traditional classroom instruction. It is a wonderful chance for students to have an unforgettable, personalized learning experience. For the professional growth of students, it is a crucial idea. These two novel ideas work well together; they are truly original. The idea of mixed learning, like a coin, includes both positive and negative aspects. With careful implementation of the blended learning idea and mitigation of its drawbacks, we can harness the power of digital self-paced learning in conjunction with traditional classroom instruction to provide students with a higher-quality education that will serve them well in their careers and personal lives.

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