

Blended Learning and Social Science at the secondary school level: A step towards engaged classroom

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Abstract

Blended Learning is emerging as one of the powerful tools in teaching across the world in recent times. The present paper tries to look at varied aspects of blended learning, and provide resources which can be used for a social science classroom at secondary level in the Indian context. Further, various examples and lesson plans from social science are developed to elucidate usage of blended learning in the classroom at the secondary level. It is an influential resource for teachers, and helps to enhance student engagement and participation.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Social Science, and lesson plan, pedagogy, technology in classroom.

Introduction

Blended Learning is an approach that combines classroom teaching popularly referred to as face-to-face teaching with online methods. It is a model which has gained momentum all across the world due to its flexibility, adaptability and helps one to master skills and aid in becoming lifelong learner. In the lecture style education, there is a possibility that it is passive and does not provides much scope for student's interaction or engagement; especially in the Indian context which are characterised by large student strength in the classes. Blended learning sessions may be synchronous or asynchronous which may be customised and can be used by students at their own pace. It is an intended 'synthesis of face-to-face and online learning experiences' (Garrison &

Vaughan, 2008). The greatest advantage of blended learning is that the learner can be at various places, they may or may not be at one place, it aids learning and provides flexibility to the learners. What is crucial is the accessibility and affordability it provides to the learners as well as the faculty, to have classes with learners from across the country or the globe. It is conducive for classroom environment to have diverse learners as it is helpful for group engagement.

Graham (2006) said that one of the crucial goals of blended learning is to advance pedagogy by merging the benefits of face-to-face instruction with the benefits of computer-mediated instruction (Graham, 2006; Horn & Staker, 2015). While Garrison and Kanuka (2004) put forth that combining face-to-face learning with online

learning may sound simple but in reality it requires abundant depth, knowledge and skills. Similarly, in another study that examined blended learning and its impact on the teaching of mathematics, blended learning approach was established to be more effective than traditional face-to-face learning approach (Acelajado, 2011). In addition, this study shows that blended learning has brought in interested, enjoyable and an attractive activity for students in mathematics learning (Acelajado, 2011). However, Graham cautioned that if not designed properly, the blended learning 'might turn out to be the mix of least effective tools of both worlds' (Acelajado, 2011, p. 8).

The greatest advantage of blended learning is the pace, flexibility and the ability to enhance student learning. However it is to be distinguished from ICT enhanced or online learning, as it is scheduled at a given time and place like school or college etc. However, blended learning offers many advantages as it offers possibility of using various resources from the internet, like various e-resources developed by national bodies like Central Institute of Educational Training (CIET), and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), e-pathshala, SWAYAM, Khan academy, YouTube etc. to improve the classroom learning. Clifford Maxwell (2016) defines blended learning as having three components-the first component defines blended learning as a formal education programme where students learn from online medium such as web based content, online tutorials and so on, as students have some control over

the pace of their learning and their schedules. What is crucial is being able to control the pace, which is an essential requisite of blended learning. The second constituent of blended learning is that learners undertake specific work in a supervised or directed environment that is away from home. It is essential that they have some on - campus experience in their learning schedules like school for which they may visit the institution. The third essential element is that students' progress is tracked in real time. In addition to this, there should be proper coordination between the online content delivery and what is being done at the face-to -face level. Without such coordination the whole exercise would prove to be cumbersome, as there may be a chance(s) of repetition of the same content over and over.

Blended learning takes education beyond the classroom. It is shift away from the rote learning of classroom and helps one to engage and adapt to new technology from home. It opens new avenues for the learners and caters to diverse learners as per their need, helping them take up employment and reduce travel time. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic where teaching- learning is through the online medium, in such a case, blended learning is one of the most suitable and successful option.

Social Science and Blended learning

Social science, as an epistemology, has been widely dominated by two different theoretical strands, which include both positivism and phenomenological. The two strands help the researcher to be critical and objective, as the practice helps one to be impartial and scientific,

as it has to be valid and reliable. The social science researcher relies on various disciplines/subjects which helps one to comprehend social reality in a nuanced way. Social science has largely been concerned with Bentham's principle of utilitarianism rather than being normative (NCF, 2006: vi). Unlike the science, human interaction and inter-relationship are primary in social science as one is constantly interacting with the societal issues. At the secondary stage, social sciences include components of various disciplines/subjects like geography, political science, history, and economics. The main thrust is to develop a critical understanding of various socio - cultural issues and challenges faced in the country and train the learners to be a responsible citizen and take part in the democratic process of the country in the future.

Social sciences have a normative concern to develop a broader horizon, and improve the understanding of learners about their environment, social, economic and political contexts. The aim is to cultivate a critical understanding of the various subjects namely, History, Geography, Economics, Political Science, Sociology etc. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2006: 4-5) envisaged the following reasons for studying the social science for children as:-

- to know about the Constitution and the values enshrined in the Preamble;
- to question, examine ideas, institutions and practices;
- to grow up as dynamic, accountable, and thoughtful members of society.

At the secondary level the objectives of

studying social sciences are as follows:-

- to appreciate the constitutional rights and duties of citizens in an egalitarian and secular country;
- to know the roles and responsibilities of the government;
- it is also to understand the problems of the country in relation to world economy (as mentioned in NCF 2006: 6).

What is important is that, social science prepares one to actively engage in a democracy in the future as citizens of a country. So it's important for the students that such themes are chosen where there's an inquiry/issue/perspective/context and students can reflect and discuss with their peers and comprehend multiple perspectives. It is also significant in social science to relate it to their everyday lives. Like, for example educational visit to neighbouring villages to understand the working of Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha can be undertaken or visit to National Museum, Parliament Museum etc. aid the teachers to appreciate various digital resources as well as the cultural sites and their significance in the sub-continent. Like the Indus Valley civilization - various artifacts, utensils, pottery and jewellery etc. are on display at the National Museum, Janpath, New Delhi which helps to understand the architecture, people, social and cultural life, advancements in science during that time.

Blended learning style can be used in a social science secondary level classroom. Some of the examples are discussed below:

- While taking a History lesson on the religions in class VI social science class, the teacher can discuss the time period and context of the rise of the 'Buddhism' as a religion. Then, a video to show the life of Siddhartha (Gautama Buddha) can be shown to complement their understanding of the life and context of Buddha apart from elucidating the rise of Buddhism. Further, the Viharas and Vinaya Pitaka and their role in the serving of the Buddhist followers can be explained. This will help to bring out and describe the historical background to the rise of Buddhism and can be done with pictures, videos to help students understand history through visual aids. The lesson afterwards can be proceeded to show the pictures and videos related to the life of Buddha.
- While taking a History lesson on the Mughal dynasty in class VII, students can be grouped in 4-5s and asked to choose any one Mughal emperor and present the significant facts of his life to their peers. Then they will be asked to make a timeline of all these emperors, their period of rule, and their significant life instances and/or socio - economic conditions, political administration. The class will then be asked to take an online quiz on the Mughal dynasty and assess their understanding.
- In Economics class IX, chapter 'Environment and Sustainable Development', the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2030 can be discussed as a part of our everyday life, students can make short video on how it affects their daily life or discuss plans or strategies to protect climate crisis in their community. The recent videos by teenage Swedish activist Greta Thunberg can be discussed on global climate strike in September 2019, which was the largest demonstration on climate in human history.
- The book on 'Social and Political Life' class VII chapter 'Markets around Us' the students may interview the shopkeepers in their neighbourhood market and understand how they get raw materials, supply chain, storage, their challenges etc. or they could take pictures from weekly markets and the items on sale and the variety of goods sold.
- While taking a History lesson on nationalism in India in class X, students can be explained the different phases of the colonial struggle, leaders during the nationalist movement in India while complementing the classroom teaching with resources, audios, videos and instances that have happened during that period, apart from showing pictures and movie clips etc. to describe the nationalist struggle.
- While teaching a Geography lesson on types of drainage system in class IX, students can be shown the different types of drainage systems (images and videos) and will be asked to notice any differences they observe in the drainage systems of Harappan Civilization and now, or it could be done with reference to differences with Indus Valley

Civilization and twenty first century urban planning. Further, similarities and transformations can be discussed in pairs in the class noting down the main points. A detailed discussion and presentation will be held on their observations and then finally the critical analysis, evaluation.

- Another example is from class VII Geography, lessons on Water and Deserts. Students can be presented with online material related to geographical description of deserts in India and any country outside India, climate in deserts, how scarcity of water can affect us, what is the vegetation, flora and fauna at these locations; where we can see the deserts and so on like for example Jaisalmer in India. Along with this, carrying a map in classroom with locations of deserts and places with high rainfall can also be used which will be as extremely helpful. Students can also be asked to fill the locations on their own on a map of India

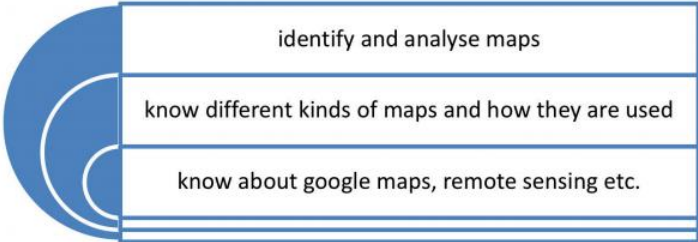
by bus or car, ordering a pizza from a restaurant and how it's delivered at a designated place. The various aspects can be discussed in the class, and various online resources mentioned below at p. 6 can be explored. The NCERT portal bhuvan (https://bhuvan-app1.nrsc.gov.in/mhrd_ncert/) can be explored by the students, which has various dimensions related to the topic and has varied levels, apart from being fun and entertaining for the learners. There are various additional e-resources for advance learners also, mentioned for the learners who would like to explore and understand other aspects of social science learning.

A sample of blended learning lesson planning and how it can be used is discussed in Table-1.

Social Science- Sample Lesson Plan

This section describes the lesson plan from the chapter Maps from class VI. Geography textbook of NCERT, which has tried to explore the different types of maps and explain the concept of distance and direction on a globe and map, use different symbols which will help one to identify different places like hospital, airport, railway station, wildlife sanctuaries etc. Another method can also be used to explore the google maps and how it can be used for day-to-day needs. Like travelling to home, school

Table-1: A sample of blended learning lesson planning

<p>Social Science – Geography</p>	<p>Topic - Class VI - Maps Time 40 min</p>	
<p>Learning objectives</p>	<p>The learner will be able to-</p> 	
<p>Instructional Design Steps-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand what is a map, distinguish it on a globe • Distinguish between different kinds of maps • Identify distance, direction • Using different symbols, letters, pictures etc. on a map • Know about Google map - remote sensing – GPS <p>Introduction – 2-3 min</p>	
<p>Teaching- Learning Process</p>	<p>Face to Face – Classroom 15 min</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding Map; • Different kinds- political, physical, thematic; • Identify distance - small scale map and large scale map; • Recognise about directions, cardinal points; • Symbols - colours, letters, shades, pictures, lines etc., conventional symbols; • Plan, sketch. 	<p>Computer- based/Online Learning- 10 mins.</p> <p>Locating places on map NCERT resources which can be accessed here- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKr8l-CHCszA&list=PLUgLcpnv-1YieVe-Epsww-engrBFIntgB-h&index=69&t=0s A portal developed by NCERT to sensitise the learners about India’s physical and natural resources and the environment which can be accessed on the bhuvan app- https://bhuvan-app1.nrsc.gov.in/mhrd_ncert/ While the E- course on Geospatial Technology and Remote Sensing can be accessed on https://elearning.iirs.gov.in/ which is IIRS and ISRO joint collaboration.</p>

Learning Outcomes 2-3 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learner will be able to distinguish among different types of maps, know about cardinal points, different symbols used, and recognise them on a map. • Locate any place on a map. • Use google maps
Feedback 5 mins Comments/ Suggestions/Any other	Quiz

Further, some e- resources which can be used for the social science for advanced learning as given in Table-2.

Table-2: e- resources which can be used for the Social Science for advanced learning

<p>Advanced Resources - NCERT which can be accessed through the following:</p> <p>Teaching- Learning Resources in Social sciences</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2Loa-T7Cc8&list=PLUgLcpcnv1YieVe-Ep-sww-enrBFIntgBh&index=94&t=0s</p> <p>Concept Mapping</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_z_Jy_YBxdo&list=PLUgLcpcnv1YieVe-Ep-sww-enrBFIntgBh&index=24&t=0s</p> <p>Visuals in the teaching of history</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9F95AolQpk&list=PLUgLcpcnv1YieVe-Ep-sww-enrBFIntgBh&index=41&t=0s</p>

The next section describes the lesson plan from the chapter Rural Livelihood from class VI. NCERT's textbook of Social and Political Life. The section is more interactive and is engaging for the learners as the content is discussed in the class around rural livelihood, their work and how they earn and their life in the village. The chapter is interesting as it discusses various examples of issues people in rural area face, and the challenges associated with it. The various activities are discussed in the class, which can be done online, which

is followed by a Quiz at the end. The lesson plan from class VI- Social and Political Life is given in Table-3.

Table-3: Lesson plan from class VI- Social and Political Life

<p>Social Science – Social and Political Life</p>	<p>Topic- Class VI- Rural Livelihood (NCERT Textbook) Time 40 min</p>											
<p>Learning objectives</p>	<p>The learner will be able to-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know the functioning and dynamics of rural economic life. • Describe the various factors responsible for availability of different occupations in rural areas. • Classify different types of farmers. • differentiate between farm and non-farm activities • Understand the concepts of debt and debt trap, credit, farmer suicide and factors associated with it. <p>Introduction 5 min</p>											
<p>Instructional Design Steps-</p>	<p>Face to Face – Classroom 15 min</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What all things are required to live life in rural India? • What all jobs/work people in villages do to earn a livelihood? • Discuss various activities which go on in a village (kalipattu) like pot making, basket making (non –farm), however the main activity is farming; • Life of landless labour, small farmer, how they get caught in debt trap, which may lead to farmers suicide; • How Thulasi (landless labour), Shekar (small farmer) are different from Ramalingam (rich farmer). 	<p>Computer- based/Online Learning- 10 mins Identify Kalpattu village in Tamil Nadu on the blank map of India</p> <div style="background-color: #d2b48c; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p>Identify the different types of work that are related to farming and those that are not. List these in a table.</p> </div> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr style="background-color: #0056b3; color: white;"> <th style="padding: 5px;">RELATED TO FARMING (FARM)</th> <th style="padding: 5px;">NOT RELATED TO FARMING (NON FARM)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	RELATED TO FARMING (FARM)	NOT RELATED TO FARMING (NON FARM)								
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<p>Learning Outcomes 2-3 mins</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learner will be able to distinguish among different types of activities undertaken in rural India with the help of examples discussed. • To understand the farming activities and the concept associated like debt trap, loan, credit and factors leading to farmer suicide.
<p>Feedback -5 mins Comments/Suggestions/Any other</p>	<p>Quiz</p> <p>Q1. Which is the main source of livelihood in rural areas? a. Farming b. Fishing c. Pot making d. Weaving</p> <p>Q2. Who is most likely to borrow money? a. Small farmer b. Mill owner c. Rich farmer d. Landlord</p> <p>Q3. Which of the following is not a farm activity? a. Sowing b. Ploughing c. Weeding d. Mining</p> <p>Q4. Which of them is a farm activity? a. Fishing b. Dairy produce c. Harvesting d. Pot making</p> <p>Q5. Give 3 examples of non-farm activities.</p>

Discussion

Since social science is a discipline that demands the depth as well as breadth in thoughts and perspectives, apart from developing critical and evaluative skills, blended learning has immense scope to provide children the opportunity to read and understand the various viewpoints, perspectives which may be diverse, contrasting view points on a particular issue through

research articles, journals etc. which are available online. Hence, instructions combining online and both face-to-face elements can surely be seen to have a greater advantage relative to purely face-to-face instruction. The resolved of blended learning is to augment education by joining together the online as well as the offline elements of education. Along with this, it appears to lend itself to encouraging student’s self-

study interest through online method as the motivation to interact in a newer medium is challenging as well as more productive. Therefore, it somewhere seems to encourage students to learn on their own, without depending much upon the teacher's viewpoints and instructions as it is flexible and offers one the opportunity to learn at one's own pace.

Blended learning has emerged as a growing trend in the arena of 'progressive learning'. It can be viewed as a kind of symbolic way to diminish the gap between 'traditional educations' and connect it with 'digital learning'. It somewhere seems to strive to bring out the balance between the traditional teacher-centered education model as well as the modern computer based model. With the recent push by the government on the use of e-resources and technology at higher education, blended learning is gaining ground and proving to be a valuable resource for all. It is quite useful for learners with diverse needs and contexts. Apart from it, Right To Education (RTE) has mandated learning from home that is home schooling, it is in this context that blended learning assumes significance. There are areas in the classroom teaching especially in social sciences such as, facts, or analytical thinking or different viewpoints, perspectives, which need more elaboration. Here blended learning is most suitable and productive. Further, the learners with diverse needs like with autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or physical or motor needs, hearing impairment (for details see Rights of Persons with Disability Act

2016 <https://www.ncpedp.org/sites/all/themes/marinelli/documents/RPWD%20Act%202016%20Rules-copy-En.pdf>) may require additional or advanced resources sometimes to supplement the classroom teaching. Blended learning provides scope to learners who may need customized methods of teaching and are not able to cope up in large classroom. Apart from it, mixing face to face learning and online learning is extremely useful although it is at one's own pace, and blending them together is a specialization, difficult to master, and needs concise articulation and precision with appropriate resources and technology as per the suitable level and class of the learners. It is a valuable source and can be used for practice and encourages learners to stay engaged, apart from being fun and entertaining. One of the keys to develop successful blended learning programme is self-pacing, as it helps learners to stay in touch with the module and ensures that they don't drop off, as students who are focussed learn easily and can work independently. But if students are given some targets or study is planned unit wise, it helps students to retain and sustain the programme, otherwise there is a high possibility of dropping off or not completing the course. It is also essential that diverse learner's are taken care of, in blended learning programme so as to provide audio- video recording, podcast, readable text, etc. should be integrated with technological resources and applications for example for differently abled learners

While generally seen as a 'trend' in 'progressive learning', Blended Learning can also be viewed as a kind of symbolic

gap between 'traditional education and digital learning'. This, of course, does not imply that digital - only is the future and the ultimate incarnation of learning, which is really a short-sighted view. The point, though, is that blended learning is a mix of old and new as much as it is a mix of physical and digital learning. The real strength of blended learning can be said that it can be used as an effective tool to transform the traditional classroom based teaching into a really an interactive one.

We are living in an age where each school is striving to be more competitive and rise in school rankings, thus quality becomes very crucial. Due to the shortcomings of our traditional education identification of the major factors contributing in this has started. One of the major factors that have emerged in the failure of our education system is the limited scope provided to teachers to adopt and modify their own pedagogical style. By confining teacher's space to only didactic learning, we have shut down the scope of experimenting in classroom with respect to pedagogy. But with the introduction of ICT the 'dream of providing *quality education to all*' it can be achieved.

Among all the strategies introduced with the emergence of ICT, blended learning can be said to be the most likable for both teachers and students. It has provided the scope for both face-to-face as well as of ICT in classroom. It can truly be referred as the blend of computer assisted learning, collaborative teaching and of the instructions provided by the teacher. Thus, ICT mediated learning help children to master their content knowledge through classroom

discussions as well as through online mode, including videos, quizzes, tests etc. However, in order to adapt blended courses, what is more crucial is the change in mode of assessment by the teachers, which will give scope and flexibility to learner to adapt to these courses and support them to be more inclusive.

Conclusion:

Blended learning supports developing communities of learning in the virtual world, which is one of the major advantages of blended learning, as it can be accessed from anywhere. The 'physical space' as a concept is slowly dwindling, and virtual world allows it to be accessed from anywhere. Blended learning helps one to explore the varied available e-resources and move outside the classroom and impart it with an amalgamation which is quite beneficial and is successfully used at all levels and across the globe. The teachers are the bridging link between the content and the learners and it's in this process, where interesting and meaningful content is developed.

Blended learning is a great tool, but as it is at a nascent stage in India, there are problems with respect to accessibility, speed etc. and institutional support for students and teachers. However, the challenge is related to technological access as the accessibility to computer, laptop, internet, connectivity, speed etc. is quite valid in the Indian context. Apart from it, when it comes to the delivery of classroom - that is, the place to hear audio or video content and interact freely with peers, colleagues, teachers etc. as silent zones in the library or at

home are not easily available; apart as the resource material is negligible from diverse needs of our learners, in vernacular or regional languages like language is also a constraint at times Hindi, Punjabi, etc.

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Online Resources

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- <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/resources/online/>
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- <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/embedding-blended-learning-in-further-education-and-skills>
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- <https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/nc-framework/nf2005-english.pdf>
- <https://ncert.nic.in/textbook/pdf/fess308.pdf>
- <https://ncert.nic.in/ncerts/l/fess204.pdf>