

Pandemic Pedagogy: A Panacea for Learning Inequality

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Abstract

COVID-19 caused an impetus to digitalization and teaching/learning was not an exception. So, pedagogy emerged during COVID-19 colloquially called pandemic pedagogy. Thus in this study, we study first defines the pandemic pedagogy and its evolution during the pandemic. Second its relevance in the teaching/learning environment given the existing and emerging challenges. We argue that its definition is ambiguous and differs from e-learning or online learning. Thus we first define and differentiate various types of pedagogy, their features and limitations and argued for blended learning, also known as Hybrid Learning. We argue that to minimize the unsatisfactory outcomes of any one pedagogical approach, blended/hybrid pedagogy must be adopted.

Keywords: *Hybrid Learning; Pandemic Pedagogy; Online Learning; COVID-19.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

In response to the unexpected closure of educational institutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, alternative methods of teaching and learning emerged to contain COVID-19 without halting pedagogy. Pedagogy here refers to both teaching and learning. The naive world facing such a crisis for the first time attempts to utilize ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to restart the pedagogy, focusing on minimizing the fallout of COVID-19. Such Pedagogical technique came to be known as E-

learning/Electronic learning. We call this e-pedagogy. E-Pedagogy refers to the use of computer technology and the Internet by learners and tutors/trainers. This implies the absence of traditional classroom and face-to-face interaction. But, E-Pedagogy also involves the virtual classroom, online interactions and the availability of electronic materials. This implies that it is flexible and accessible, thus enabling students to continue their education remotely. By utilizing electronic resources, such as online platforms, educational websites, and digital

content, e-learning offers a wide range of learning materials and resources. These resources can include interactive lessons, multimedia presentations, online assessments, and collaborative tools, enhancing the learning experience for students. E-learning also allows for personalized learning experiences, as students can progress at their own pace and access additional support, or challenges as needed. It promotes self-directed learning and encourages students to take ownership of their education.

Arguably the e-pedagogy is not pandemic-pedagogy. E-pedagogy indeed gained impetus during COVID-19. Nevertheless, its relevance started declining as the world headed toward normalization. However, given the efficacy of e-pedagogy during the initial phases of the pandemic, ICT adoption and digital revolution, e-pedagogy was thought and eventually proposed to be combined with traditional pedagogy. For example, it was proposed that 40 per cent of syllabus will be taught online (e.g. in the traditional way) and the rest offline (e.g., in the traditional face-to-face Pedagogy) (Raman, 2021; University Grant Commission, 2021) It happened when COVID-19 still spreading through its variants. So the term Pandemic pedagogy is not clear. Its ambiguity lies in two different concepts of pedagogy. First, E-Pedagogy and second, Hybrid Learning. (Mushtaq, 2024) Hybrid pedagogies, particularly blended and flipped learning, enhance student engagement, academic achievement, critical thinking, collaboration, and personalized learning in digital environments.

Hybrid Learning, more precisely, is a combination of online-Pedagogy/E-Pedagogy and offline/Traditional face-to-face Pedagogy. In a broader sense blended learning also called Hybrid learning. Although the definition of blended learning ranges from merely combining ICT aid in the traditional classroom to online plus offline learning (Ulla and Perales, 2022). The ambiguity in defining Hybrid learning/teaching or blended learning/teaching convinces scholars to define in a more diverse way. For example,

“[Blende, Flipped or hybrid] models represent a departure from instructor-centered pedagogies (e.g., lecture) to student-centred

pedagogies (e.g., active learning), where the focus is less on instructor delivery of content and more on student application of content (e.g., problem-solving). Second, the conceptualization of “class time” (often referred to as “seat time” or time spent physically in a classroom) is more fluid: for example, upwards of 75% of class time can be replaced by learning activities outside of class in some models” (Saichaie, 2020).

However, we defined hybrid pedagogy (teaching/learning) as an approach that integrates ICT in such a way that it provide space for online learning (in a virtual classroom) and traditional learning (physical classroom). Our reference to learning does not mean hybrid learning/blended/flipped learning necessitates instructor to remain in physical classroom only. However, it is equally applicable to instructors or tutors. That is the reason we refer to hybrid pedagogy instead of Learning. This implies that hybrid pedagogy involves a virtual classroom which requires platforms like Zoom, Google Meet and physical classroom. It can also be of kind referred above where half of the course be learned/taught online and the half offline and synchronous learning. Before, we summarize the advantages of E-Learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature and is based entirely on secondary sources of data. The study examines the evolution of pandemic pedagogy during the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular emphasis on e-learning, traditional face-to-face pedagogy, and blended or hybrid learning. Secondary data were collected from published research articles, academic journals, books, institutional reports, policy documents, and reliable national and international databases. Relevant literature published by organizations such as the OECD, University Grants Commission (UGC), and other educational and international institutions was reviewed to understand the expansion of digital education and the challenges associated with it.

The study adopts a qualitative approach to analyse the advantages and limitations of e-learning and the potential of hybrid pedagogy in reducing learning inequalities. Particular attention is given to issues such as unequal access to digital devices and internet

connectivity, digital literacy, student engagement, self-motivation, social interaction, and access to practical learning opportunities. The literature is comparatively examined to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of online, traditional, and hybrid modes of pedagogy.

The study also analyses the concept of the digital divide, including both access-related and skill-related inequalities, and discusses policy measures for addressing these gaps. Based on the synthesis of existing evidence, the study develops an argument for integrating online and face-to-face pedagogical approaches as a more inclusive and resilient model of education.

3. ADVANTAGES OF E-LEARNING

1. Accessibility: E-learning has made education more accessible to a wider range of students. It eliminates geographical barriers, allowing students from different locations to access educational resources and materials. This is particularly beneficial for students in remote areas or those with physical disabilities.

2. Flexibility: E-learning offers flexibility in terms of scheduling and pacing. Students can access learning materials at their own convenience and learn at their own pace. This allows for personalized learning experiences, catering to individual needs and learning styles.

3. Engagement: E-learning platforms often incorporate interactive elements such as videos, quizzes, and discussion boards, which can enhance student engagement. These tools encourage active participation and collaboration among students, promoting a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

4. Self-discipline and independence: E-learning requires students to be self-disciplined and self-motivated. They need to manage their time effectively and stay focused on their studies without direct supervision. This cultivates important skills such as self-regulation and independent learning, which are valuable in higher education and beyond.

Briefly “Digital technology’s main advantage may be the possibility for enhanced task flexibility and learner autonomy, encouraging greater self-regulation and the following of the student’s own patterns of motivation” (Topping et al., 2022).

The hybrid learning, unlike physical classroom and fully online classroom, provides various advantages and pave the way to resolve the pressing problem of learning inequality. The problem of learning inequality seemingly surged with the emergence of E-learning which gained impetus due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout. Arguably it was already there in various forms. For instance, the existence of stark income inequality and its negative impact on cognitive reasoning across the world (Salahodjaev and Malikova, 2021), low enrollment ratio particularly at secondary and above level in developing nations. E-learning could be the solution for these problems. For example, online education may prove beneficial in achieving high enrollment and access to high-ranked institutions at affordable costs (Hogan, 2011). However, evidence point toward minuscule presence of candidates belong to developing nations in MOOCS (Christensen et al., 2023) With certain shortcomings E-Learning became the norm during COVID-19 as people adapted themselves. So it may achieve the goal of quality education and high enrollment if it would be adopted with careful planning and execution. However there are some open challenges to E-Learning. Some of them are as follows.

1. Technological limitations: E-learning heavily relies on technology, including access to reliable internet connections and appropriate devices. However, not all students have equal access to these resources, leading to disparities in access to educational materials and opportunities. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds or rural areas may face difficulties in accessing online platforms and may not have the necessary devices or internet connectivity. This can create an inequitable learning environment and hinder the learning experience for these students.

2. Lack of personal interaction: One of the drawbacks of e-learning is the lack of personal interaction that comes with traditional classroom settings. In face-to-face classes, students have the opportunity to directly interact with their teachers and peers, ask questions, seek clarification, and engage in meaningful discussions. This personal interaction plays a crucial role in deepening

understanding, building relationships, and fostering a sense of community. In e-learning, the absence of face-to-face interaction can make it challenging for students to establish a connection with their instructors and peers, leading to feelings of isolation and reduced engagement. The lack of interaction lead to dropout form online courses like MOOCS (Wang et al., 2023).

3. Self-motivation and discipline: E-learning requires students to be self-motivated and disciplined. Without the physical presence of teachers and classmates, students must take responsibility for managing their own learning. They need to stay focused, set goals, manage their time effectively, and complete assignments independently. However, not all students possess the same level of self-discipline and motivation, and some may struggle to stay engaged and motivated in an online learning environment. The lack of external accountability and structure can make it easier for students to procrastinate or become disengaged. In fact, reduced motivation eventually results in dropout (Wang et al., 2023).

4. Limited hands-on and practical learning opportunities: Certain subjects or skills require hands-on or practical learning experiences that may be challenging to replicate in an online environment. Science experiments, art classes, or physical education activities often require physical materials, equipment, or direct supervision. E-learning may not provide the same level of hands-on experience, limiting the depth of understanding and practical application of knowledge in these areas. Finding creative ways to incorporate practical learning opportunities in an online setting can be a significant challenge.

5. Potential for distractions: Learning from home or other non-traditional environments can expose students to various distractions that can hinder their concentration and impede the learning process. Common distractions include household responsibilities, noise from family members, or the presence of other technological devices such as smartphones or televisions. These distractions can make it difficult for students to stay focused and fully engage in their online learning activities. Creating a conducive learning environment at

home and teaching students effective strategies for managing distractions can help mitigate this challenge.

6. Increased workload and screen time: E-learning can sometimes lead to an increased workload for students. Navigating through various online platforms, completing assignments, participating in virtual discussions, and consuming digital content can be time-consuming. This, coupled with the lack of clear boundaries between school and personal life, can result in students spending excessive amounts of time in front of screens. Prolonged screen time can have negative effects on students' physical health, mental well-being, and overall productivity. Balancing screen time with other activities, encouraging breaks, and promoting healthy habits are necessary to address this challenge.

7. Limited social interaction and networking opportunities: E-learning may limit students' opportunities for social interaction and networking with their peers. In traditional classrooms, students have the chance to build relationships, collaborate on projects, and engage in informal discussions. These interactions contribute to personal and social development, as well as the exchange of ideas and perspectives. In an online setting, students may have limited opportunities for spontaneous social interaction, which can affect their social skills, teamwork abilities, and sense of belonging. Incorporating virtual group activities, discussion forums, and interactive platforms can help foster social interaction and networking in e-learning environments.

Fundamentally the majority of these challenges are the outcomes of one approach. So these can be overcome by blending the two approaches together namely Traditional and E-learning pedagogical approaches. However, the technological limitation formally called Digital Divide is worthy to discuss. This gap can manifest in various forms, including differences in access to the Internet, availability of devices like smartphone and computer, and digital literacy skills. The problem of digital divide is unchallenging to address. Although world has seen ICT revolution two decades ago and started experiencing digitalization. COVID-19 compel to utilize the ICT tool maximally as possible. There

are increasing trend in the connectivity, broad band and mobile phone subscription across the world. So we propose some measures to bridge the digital divide with reference to Learning/Teaching. The term digital divide refers to gap to access to digital technologies and competencies and skill to use. Whereas the inaccessibility called as first digital divide and gap between competencies and skill to use technologies is termed as second digital divide. Developed economies performed remarkably well in bridging the first digital gap and second remains priority, whereas developing economies need to work to bridge the first as well as second digital gap. So we first task is to provide with digital technological technologies.

(OECD Digital Economy Outlook 2020, 2020) noted that there is an increasing trend in broadband and mobile phone subscription across the globe. However, developing economies experiencing stark inequalities and making the marginalized more vulnerable e.g., women. Important to note that developing nations observe low enrollment even at secondary level. Education as one of the determinants of ICT adoption, must be focused so that benefit of ICT be realized. Education or literacy is a multipronged tool assist in achieving the objectives of digitalization. Education also means chances of getting employed in productive activities which can generate income. (Asrani, 2022) argue that education and income are the important determinants of ICT adoption. Second, infrastructure development in terms of community WiFi , broadband expansion to rural areas be given priority. For instance, Government of India initiative PM VANI is noteworthy. The second digital divide is concerned with digital literacy. So community workshops (as financial literacy) be organized to enhance skill of adult population especially. Integrating ICT literacy into school curricula may help the students to develop essential skills. It is equally important for teacher. (Gabriel et al., 2022) noted that “investment in teacher training on how to use digital technologies is more important than simply providing teachers with access to digital technologies. Countries with strong teacher professional development strategies designed to develop teacher confidence to use digital technologies find that

teachers are more likely to use these technologies in their classes”.

4. CONCLUSION

In this article, we argued that e-learning must be combined with traditional learning to address the existing challenges and the challenges emanating from the e-learning. This is known as blended-learning or hybrid learning. We also argue that even though learning/pedagogy during COVID-19 pandemic experience shift from traditional face-to-face to online, it was subject to severe criticism and hence discouraged after the normalization. This criticism led the recommendation of blended learning. Additionally, we argued that majority of the challenges are the outcomes of on another, so can be resolved by combining the online and traditional face to face learning. As (Topping et al., 2022) argued that blended learning is considerably better than online learning and online learning performs better than traditional pedagogy. These approaches combinedly can advance the existing challenges of learning inequality and improve the enrolment particularly of female in developing economies. As pointed out earlier, online learning performs better than traditional pedagogy, in long term as the world is heading to experience almost everything digitalized in the coming decades, the hybrid learning currently pave the way for complete online learning in future. The future which is prone to disaster. (Ayebi-Arthur, 2017; Dhawan, 2020) argue that online learning is a panacea during disaster.

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