

Blended Learning Solution for the LIS Education: AU Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to find out the Assam University library and information science (LIS) students' perspective and desire concerning the use of Blended Learning (BL) in LIS education. Based on the results of this study, this paper will seek to identify their awareness and aspiration towards blended learning.

Design/methodology/approach – A questionnaire was distributed to students of the LIS of Assam University, Silchar. First, they were asked to state their awareness on BL, and then to express their views for the use of BL in LIS education.

Findings – This research revealed that knowledge of Blended Learning is less among respondents. But those who know, they appreciate Blended Learning as compared to traditional one in LIS education. The aspiration of students towards blended learning was examined in their urge to study in LIS course which deals with blended learning format of teaching and learning process. Again it also came to light that students might be more motivated to acquire LIS knowledge through Blended learning.

Originality/value – The implementation of BL method of teaching, especially in LIS departments, is very important nowadays as because the future librarians are to work in a blended environment. There are only a few studies about BL in India. This study will help LIS faculty to understand students' perception regarding BL in order to shape the learning paradigm and adopt BL for their classes.

Paper type: Research paper under Institutional Capacity Building

Keywords: Blended learning, LIS education, Assam University

1. Introduction

The capacity of an institution depends solely upon its physical infrastructure, human resource, curriculum, internship facilities, and social infrastructure. The teaching and learning method which too has equal importance in building an institutional capacity. There are many challenges in higher education today which demands for quality response for diverse students' needs and provide engaging and meaningful learning experiences as because the way of learning of 'net generation' is different from the

traditional ones and the challenge of educators to fulfil the needs of 'net generation' is also daunting. Although Library and Information Science (LIS) education is one of the many fast changing fields in higher education today, adapting them to the changing environment is also important. The revolution of information technology has great implication on information professionals. Now the designation of jobs has been changed to Web Manager, E-Publisher, Knowledge Manager, Information Manager / Officer, Internet searcher etc. To survive in this blended world, LIS professionals must be well educated and professionally competent with different



skills. Therefore, these aspect needs to be given attention, so that our LIS schools produce best of professionals. Introducing blended learning could be one of the means of improving the quality of teaching and learning in LIS education.. It is a blend of two kinds of approaches i.e. traditional face-to-face mode and online mode. The birth of personal computer and Internet has resulted in wide spectrum of instructional strategies taking advantage of these two wonders. Hence blending best part of face-to-face teaching with that of online teaching can be a better solution giving rise to blended learning which could open doors of opportunities for students to interact with their faculty and contents in an effective manner both inside and outside the classroom. This paper attempts to identify what Assam University LIS students know and required concerning Blended learning, however it is faculty's responsibility to take these views into account in order to incorporate such method into their teaching.

2. Blended Learning

The term blended learning is not a new concept, but it is a recent addition to the lexicon of the education profession With the rise of technological and pedagogic advances, many things came into focus which can be included in the blend. Allan (2007) and Graham (2006), more or less defined blended learning in the same tune as "a mixture of face-to-face and e-learning" and "combination of face-to-face traditional learning with online instruction" respectively. Allan (2007) further defined BL as "the use of different internet-based tools including chat rooms, discussion groups, Podcasts and self-assessment tools to support a traditional course". Based on Sharpe et al. (2006)'s work, she

defined 8 learning modalities for the mix or blend which includes time, place, different ICTs, learning relationship, types of students, pedagogy, focus, learning context. Teaching and learning activities are delivered through synchronous and asynchronous formats. The blended learning provides instructors and learners with a comprehensive learning model of physical classroom formats such as lectures, books, labs, handouts and the integration of telecommunication technologies such as technologies in the classroom, virtual communication tools, social-networking software, e-learning systems and mobile learning in their teaching and learning processes. Blended learning is thus a flexible approach to course design offering some of the conveniences of fully online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact. Figure 1 represents the overview of blended learning.

Online Learning	Blended Learning	Face-to-Face Learning
100% E-learning		Minimal use of technology

Figure 1: Overview of Blended Learning

3. Blended Learning In Lis Education

Over the years, LIS departments, teachers, and students have adapted new technology in order to bring the best teaching and learning methods and application in their classes and LIS education as a whole. Nowadays the LIS sector is deeply rooted in digital technology, resulting in the use of digital technologies into pedagogy too. As such these changes lead to changes in curriculum content as well as in methods of teaching and learning. Recently, Blended learning has mushroomed and has attracted considerable attention. It calls for blending of traditional face to face method and online learning method.

This method seems to be best for imparting LIS education, without losing hold of basic knowledge and at the same time keeping track of the new digital skills for carrying out library housekeeping operations smoothly. In fact blending learning will help to keep LIS education at par with other courses and retain students to LIS courses in this ICT age. Blended learning approach if maintained in LIS education, then the future librarian continues to cultivate in him/her the good habits of handling electronic information beforehand joining the blended work environment. They can thus serve their clientele without any hesitation. Compared to fully traditional and fully online learning, blended learning, in the true sense, is still new and emerging. Sooner the students and teachers of LIS get along with blended learning methods of teaching and learning; the better will be the position of LIS education in the near future.

4. Department Of Library And Information Science (DLISc), Assam University

Assam University is one the central universities established by an Act of Parliament promulgated in 1989 (Act X111) and enforced by the Notification of the Government of India in 1994.. The University has sixteen (16) Schools on major disciplines and thirty five (35) departments under these sixteen schools. Department of Library and Information Science (DLISc) of Assam University has been established in the year 2009 under the School of Swami Vivekananda School of Library Sciences. It started its 2 years integrated MLISc journey from 2010 academic session with an intake capacity of 25 students. From 2013, DLISc started offering M.Phil and Ph.D programme too. Presently there are three faculties, one Associate Professor and two Assistant Professors.

5. Purpose of The Study

Lately, Blended learning is being used as a vehicle to enhance the educational process. Additionally it is becoming more and more popular among young people as they are a fast and effective for disseminating knowledge in a more attractive and pleasing medium. LIS Education should adapt to the needs of every generation and not lag behind. This research investigates the knowledge of LIS students of Assam University. It is hoped that, the outcomes the study will help the teachers to get an idea of the present status of mind of students towards blended learning. So that they can adapt what to offer to the students' needs. The primary purpose of the study is to identify students' awareness and aspiration towards blended learning and the viability of using technology in teaching and learning in the LIS education and training.

5.1 Research Questions

- ❖ Do the students know what blended learning is?
- ❖ Would they appreciate Blended Learning as compared to the traditional in LIS education?

6. Methodology

The present study has been conducted using survey method. Primarily, the questionnaire has been used as a data collection tool along with observations and informal interviews. The questionnaire consists of questions which have been designed keeping in view the objectives of the study. First, they were asked to state their awareness on BL, and then to express their views for the use of BL in LIS education. A total of 47 questionnaires were distributed to the students of Department of Library and

Information Science (DLISc) of Assam University. The survey was conducted during the month of May - June, 2014.

7. Findings

This section presents the findings from the survey. On the basis of filled up questionnaire,s the data has been analyzed and inferences were made based on standard statistical techniques. All the results have been presented in the form of tables and diagrams to make the data picture clear.

7.1 Response Rate

Table 1 shows the response rate. A total of 47 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, out of which 42 questionnaires duly filled by the respondents were received back. The overall response is 89 %

Table 1: Responses Received from the Respondents

Questionnaire	Nos.	Percentage (%)
Received	42	89
Not Received	5	11
Total Distributed	47	100

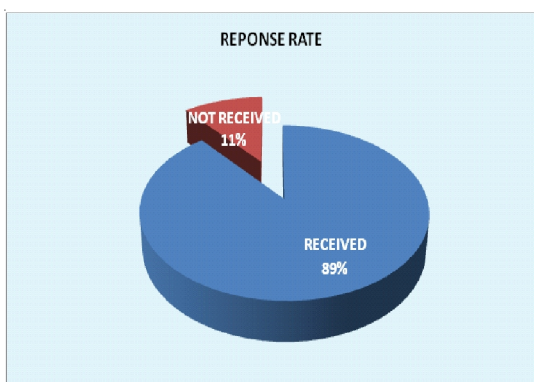


Figure 2: Response rate of the students

7.2 Semester and Gender Ratio of the Respondents

Table 2 reveals that 30.95% responses were received from the male respondents and 69.05 % responses were received from the female respondents. This reflects the proportions of male and female students in the DLISc of Assam University. These respondents were divided into two semesters i.e. 2nd Semester and 4th Semester, the percentage of responses received from the students were 35.71 % and 64.29 % respectively.

Table 2: Semester and Gender wise Distribution of Respondents

Semester	Male		Female		Total	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
2 nd Sem	6	14.28	9	21.43	15	35.71
4 th Sem	7	16.67	20	47.62	27	64.29
Total	13	30.95	29	69.05	42	100

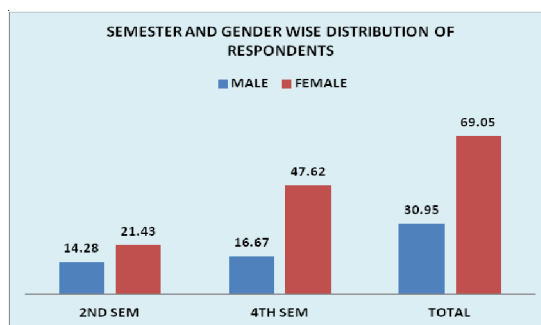


Figure 3: Semester and Gender wise Distribution of Respondents

7.3 Knowledge of Blended Learning

Table 4 reveals the knowledge of Blended Learning among the students. Students were asked “Do they know what blended learning is?” From the table it is clear that knowledge of Blended Learning is less

among respondents. Out of the 42 students only (40%) know about what is blended learning. Rests (60%) of students are unaware of blended learning.

Table 4: Knowledge of Blended Learning

Yes		No	
Nos.	%	Nos.	%
17	40	25	60

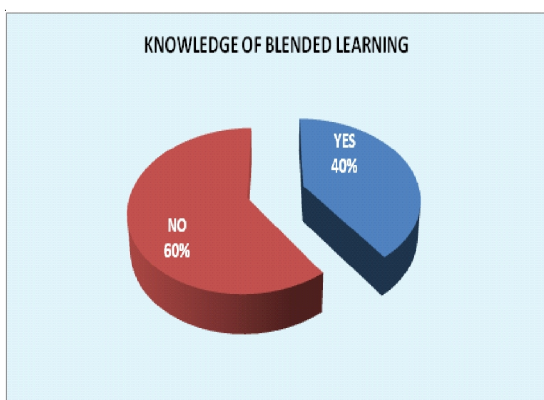


Figure 5: Knowledge of Blended Learning

7.4 Preferences of Blended learning over traditional one in LIS education

Table 5 reveals the preference of Blended learning over traditional method of teaching in LIS education; based on the replies of those who are aware about Blended learning. A follow up question aimed at asking students “If yes, would they appreciate Blended Learning as compared to the traditional one in LIS education?” The table below shows that out of 17 students who have answered the previous question positively, 88% of them would appreciate blended learning as compared to the traditional one in LIS education whereas 12% answered negative. It became clear that majority of the students appreciate Blended Learning as compared to traditional one in LIS education.

Table 5: Preferences of Blended learning over traditional one in LIS education

Yes		No	
Nos.	%	Nos.	%
15	88	2	12

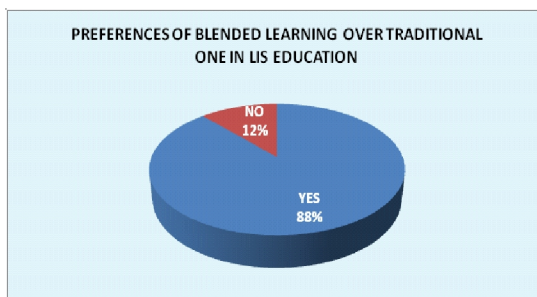


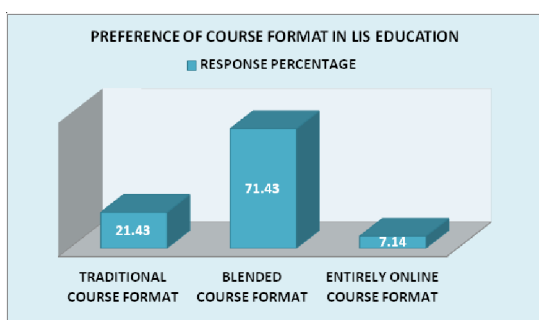
Figure 6: Preferences of Blended learning over traditional one in LIS education

7.5 . Preference of course format in LIS Education

An analysis has been made to know the preference of the students regarding the different course format in LIS education. Students were asked “If the LISc course is being offered in three different formats viz traditional, blended online, which course format would they prefer?” Majority of them (71.43%) preferred Blended course format in LIS education, (21.43%) preferred traditional course format and (7.14%) preferred entirely online course format. It shows that students have an urge to study in LIS course which deals with blended learning format of teaching and learning process. Below table 6 shows it all.

Table 6: Preference of course format in LIS Education

Course Format	Responses (N = 42)	Percentage (%)
Traditional course format	9	21.43
Blended course format	30	71.43
Entirely online course format	3	7.14

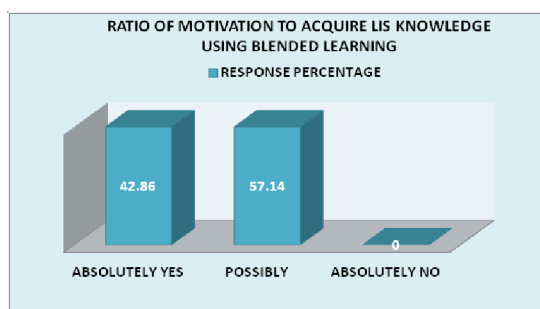
**Figure 7: Preference of course format in LIS Education**

7.6 Ratio of motivation to acquire LIS knowledge using Blended Learning

A follow up question aimed to examine whether students felt that they would be more motivated to acquire LIS knowledge using blended learning. Majority of the students (57.14%) answered “Possibly”, that is they might be motivated more to acquire LIS knowledge through Blended learning, while (42.86%) of the students were confident enough and answered with “Absolutely Yes”. No one indicated negatively. Below table 7 highlights it all.

Table 7: Ratio of motivation to acquire LIS knowledge using Blended Learning

	Responses (N = 42)	Percentage (%)
Absolutely Yes	18	42.86
Possibly	24	57.14
Absolutely No	0	0

**Figure 8: Ratio of motivation to acquire LIS knowledge using Blended Learning**

8. Discussions And Conclusion

This research provided valuable information on LIS students' knowledge and expectations regarding the use of blended learning and their formal education in LIS. Even though at first students were seen not having enough knowledge on Blended learning but later in their preferences came in favour of blended learning method of teaching and learning. It is most encouraging that 71.43 per cent of the respondents are willing to study LIS in blended learning course format.. During informal interview and observation of the students of DLISc of Assam University, it seemed that the students were more eager to know about this new concept of teaching and learning method. Students believed that using blended learning in LIS education would motivate them more to acquire knowledge on LIS. Introducing Blended learning would stimulate and enrich teaching, and

move teaching methods closer to today's library science students which would keep students alert.. The teachers of LIS need to update and review the teaching and learning method, keeping in touch with the students view. LIS departments should concentrate on building framework for blended learning in order to implement them into teaching process. Though it is yet to be proved that blended learning has value and importance in LIS education, but still it is believed that incorporation of traditional face-to-face and technology into the teaching and learning process will move forward LIS education to stand in the near future of competitive world.

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