

Exploring Hybrid Teaching in India for Strengthening Higher Educational Spaces

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Abstract

Seeing the increasing popularity of online courses such as MOOCs and internet-assisted learning activities one cannot oversee the growing possibility of Hybrid teaching as a productive and innovative pedagogical technique. NEP 2020 has emphasised on use of online and digital education. Hybrid teaching and learning have emerged as a growing trend in the field of education around the world specifically in India. It has received this appreciation and acknowledgment from the educators worldwide as it provides flexibility in terms of time, place and the engagement with content; space for individual exploration to the learner; opportunity for innovative collaboration; enriched and comprehensive interaction of learner with content. In this age of digitalization, hybrid teaching and learning facilitate computer literacy. This paper deals with the present scenario and future prospect of Hybrid teaching in India while comparing it with the world statistics for the same. Certain evoking challenges and constraints regarding the pedagogical effectiveness of the technique in Indian context have been discussed. A statistical overview dealing with the challenges and emerging possibilities of Hybrid teaching and learning has been presented by substantiating the same from the researchers that have been already published. In this paper, it has been tried to observe a relationship between the practical aspect of Hybrid teaching and learning at higher education level and our vision for higher education in near future.

Keywords: Hybrid teaching, Traditional classroom, Online courses, Higher education, Innovative pedagogy, Indian Context.

Introduction

The recent developments of bringing four-year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) (MoE, 2021) have initiated the discussions for realistic and practical solutions for providing better education that too in available minimal resources. Universities have started some short-term MOOCs which students may complete for earning 2 Credits in lieu of existing courses. Further, post COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the landscape of education throughout the world. Indian education system also felt this wave of transformation of the education system. The online learning platforms were fully exploited in order to help learners and create an effective learning environment. Although this sudden shift from offline to online mode of learning was haphazard but was affecting in creating an impetus for shift in traditional offline classrooms. National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) also acknowledge the potentiality of online platforms and resources (Gautam & Surjan, 2025). It has suggested the promotion of blended learning in different domains like blended certification courses for in-service and pre-service to train them in subject specific aims and relevant skills for understanding the children with special need (MoE, 2021, pg. 23). It further envisioned high quality teacher education program such as B.Ed. through blended or open distance learning mode.

In light of the above development on 20 May 2021, University Grant Commission (UGC) allowed higher education institutes to teach in a hybrid or blended manner. In this process an institute may allow student to complete 40 percent of the course through online mode and remaining 60 percent through offline mode (UGC, 2021). This has resulted in large scale development of MOOCs. There are many such initiatives which has acknowledged or harnessed the potential of hybrid classrooms. It is further evident from the fact that India has entered the stage of massification of higher education. UGC (2023) clearly states that the total enrolment in higher education was around 38.5 million in 2019-2020, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for the population in the age group 18-23 years being 27.1 (male: 26.9; female: 27.3). Enrolment in distance education programmes constituted about 11.1% of the total enrolment in higher education. Hybrid classrooms are well suited in such scenario.

We are aware that teaching and learning entail active participation of both students and teacher. From the early ages, effective teaching is equated directly with the interacting environment of class and it is the sole responsibility of a teacher that they will make constant efforts to make their classroom engaging and worth participating for. As every student has its own way of understanding or reaching to a concept, a teacher needs to do various innovative changes in their pedagogies.

Hybrid teaching is considered as one of such innovative change in the pedagogies used worldwide. As the word itself suggests hybrid teaching is an intermix of face-to-face traditional way of teaching and technology-assisted teaching. Traditional ways have no other substitution when it comes to imparting in-depth knowledge of any topic but it has its own limitations too. The monotonous and unidirectional set up of the traditional classroom doesn't leave any space for students where they can explore by themselves. Now is the age of competition, one needs to work on their different aspects to keep the pace with this running world. The trend of getting engaged in the part-time courses along with job gave us a glimpse of what our youth demands. In such scenario, if we look at our traditional classroom it seems to have many physical barriers that can easily disinterest a student. In recent times, flexibility and convenience have emerged as one of the prevalent criteria used by students while choosing for higher education. None wants to restrict them on a one-dimensional plane and hence online courses came into the picture which provide them some sort of autonomy in their learning (Bachman & Scherer, 2015). In a developing nation like India where getting a job seems to be the major aspect of education, online courses have gained the status of their own. Online courses cater a large student base at low infrastructure cost. But as it is an emerging field an absolute online course is also not a fruitful option, no one wants flexibility and convenience at the cost of the quality of education. It fails to provide a routine for the candidates who have a less self-studying habit and hence such students may feel confused and lost. The teacher won't be able to construct a bond or an emotional connects with the students and hence ze can't motivate their learners. Although people are accepting online courses with open arms still there is a natural disposition towards the comfort of campus. We have seen the two extremes of higher education and it is clearly understood that none of them can suffice to the needs of today's generation. Also, it is generally said that choosing one among the extremes will make you lose the other completely. So going for the hybrid method in higher education seems to be a well-thought option.

Hybrid teaching doesn't mean that you have incorporated technology just by transferring few sections of your traditional course to the web but to engage students virtually in such challenging learning activities that provide them individual time for knowledge constriction. The content on the web should complement the content that you have taught in the classroom. They have been designed to enrich one another but if not properly with due diligence them they can add to the confusion and make it more complicated. There should be a harmonious synchronization between the two. The hybrid model can serve as a highly effective tool for facilitating meaningful, cross-border collaborative learning that would be difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom (Pollock and Winton, 2011).

Bringing the world into the picture

Several studies have been conducted worldwide to see the effectiveness of the hybrid teaching and learning methods while comparing it with either online or traditional courses. Although many of the research the result of online and hybrid teaching method comes to be undifferentiated. Still, the studies found it effective than the traditional ones.

Research by Roy and Sharma (2023) examined the role of hybrid learning in Indian legal education within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It highlights how combining face-to-face and online teaching can enhance legal education by integrating diverse perspectives, pedagogical approaches, and technological tools. The study also identifies the strengths, limitations, challenges, and policy gaps associated with hybrid learning, particularly in professional legal courses. It emphasizes the need for further refinement and effective implementation of the hybrid model to achieve the transformative objectives of NEP 2020 and strengthen legal education in the post-pandemic context. Gallagher and LaBrie (2012) mentioned that North eastern University in Boston has adopted hybrid teaching in its online courses and here the hybrid method has created a level of convenience for students and also their learning in class is maximized. Aly (2013) in its study found that it is the course content and pedagogy that matters and not the media. The undergraduate students who were given hybrid instructions were equally good to the one who has attended online courses. One should focus more on the quality rather than the type of media. In similar lines Andres (2015) proposed the tripartite continuum conceptual framework that consolidates pedagogical theories into three categories of MOOC learning design: content-based, community/task-based, and network-based applications. Martin et.al. (2015) in their study came to a conclusion that in medical courses hybrid teaching seems to be a very effective tool. He stated that those courses which have a massive coursework need different alternative pedagogy so that the course can develop an appeal in itself that promotes students' productive engagement with it. Martinucci et al. (2015) examined faculty members' conceptual understanding, misconceptions, and knowledge gaps regarding hybrid teaching environments across diverse academic departments. Their findings indicate no statistically significant disciplinary differences in overall comprehension, though specific training readiness varied notably by field. Lamport and Hill (2012) studied ideas of different people for their research paper and came to a conclusion that in hybrid teaching students has shown an improved level of achievement which is contradictory to the findings of Kakish et al. (2012). He also referred to the findings of Detwiler's study who has discovered that the students who have opted for hybrid learning have underperformed. And according to him, completely online courses

are better even in terms of performance of students which is a similar finding of Potter (2015). Williamson et.al. (2013) refers to the idea of Ozkan that due to our extensive busy life and early goal accomplishment life plans, one is left with a very small time for education. Also, technology has involved in the fabric of our lives to such an extent that online courses grab our interest easily. A primary challenge within this transition is scaling interactive learning, particularly when managing large-enrolment courses in hybrid instruction modes was discussed by Khanna (2016). She states that navigating this shift requires balancing the flexibility of asynchronous online components with the structured engagement of face-to-face sessions. She furtheremphasize that successful implementation depends on robust digital infrastructure and deliberate instructional design, ensuring that large student cohorts remain actively engaged rather than isolated by the technological medium. Hybrid teaching in higher education is not limited to academic courses. The digitalization has also found its way in the teacher preparation courses as well. Surjan et al. (2023) has also highlighted in their critical analysis of the Four-Year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) proposed under NEP 2020 that the new proposed course promote multidisciplinary preparation through effective emphasis on technological integration. Teaching of educational technology may help future teachers to become developer of online courses and using them in classrooms at school level.

Why Hybrid in India?

In India, hybrid teaching has its scope as it promotes interaction and engagement. It provides a space for individual exploration that not only provides an opportunity for self-learning but also equips with computer literacy which is the need of the hour. Recent Researches shows that traditional classrooms even though give a higher degree of student satisfaction (due to their natural disposition towards it) but fails to empower a student so that they could deal with the growing challenges of the competitive world outside. The recent statistics provided by Statista (2021) portrays a clear picture of the scope of hybrid teaching in India. The statistics show that India stands as a second largest online market just after China and by the time we will reach 2021, around 165.8 million of internet users will be added to it. It has been observed in recent researchby Shah (2016)that students who have enrolled in massive open online courses in 2016 were 23 million which has taken the total number to 58 million. Before 2016 the total no of students who were already enrolled in this course was 35 million. In the age of digitalization, when India has taken 'Go Digital!' as a mantra for development, hybrid teaching fixed aptly in the context. It would be helpful in developing a tech-friendly attitude among the among the students.

Apart from that a very important point for considering this method of teaching is that it presents education in a manner that it interacts with both the spheres of life of an individual- the personalized sphere and the public sphere. The nature of this method is that it promotes collaborative learning being in a constant engagement with the person at both individual and public level. Students could personalize their engagement with the content as per their own cognitive demand. It also gives a platform for engagement for those who are not much vocal in the classroom. Along with that it also gives a platform for common discussion true learners catering their needs of interacting at the public level.

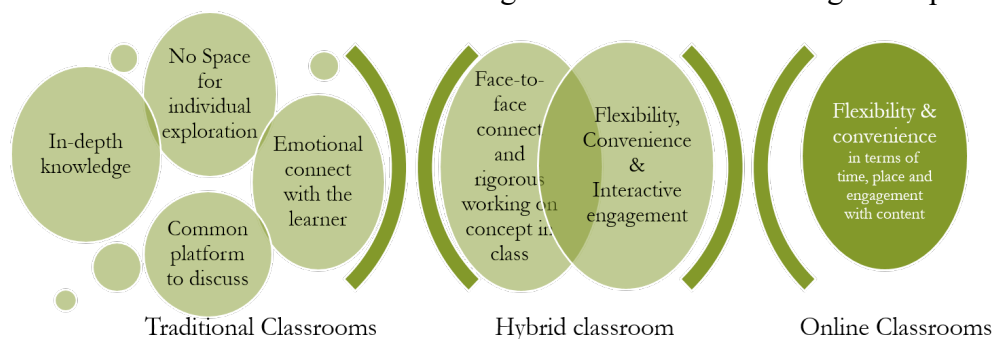


Figure 1. Hybrid Classrooms: A blend of Traditional and Online Classrooms

Even if there is such a wide scope of it in our country but it needs an exhaustive and a well-planned signing of the course. It should reflect its uniqueness and all the essential characteristics of it must be stated and reflected for sure. Many times, it has been seen that even those students who are a part of it are ignorant towards the fact that in a hybrid set up one would have fewer classroom lectures but apart from that, they have been assigning some other work also which they need to do consistently even when they are outside the classroom.

Challenges in incorporating hybrid teaching in the Indian context

Access: In India when we talk about technology-assisted classroom not all of us feel at ease with the concept. A very large section of our society got alienated from it. Apart from that internet connectivity is an issue that can't be neglected when we talk about engaging our learners on the web. Even in those areas where there is a majority of internet users, the gender disparity could be easily seen. From the recent statistics provided by the Statista, it is inferred that out of total internet using population 71% are men and 29% are women. It is a huge difference that portrays the depravity clearly.

Equity: India is a country with 22% of its population residing below the poverty line. The distribution of resources is not uniform at every level of society. A very few people enjoy the absolute fruit of these resources and the rest would starve even for its smell. In

such a scenario where we are struggling for the basic amenities bringing people from marginalized and economically weaker section into the hybrid classroom setup is surely a challenging task (Dutta, 2016; Shree Ram & Selvaraj, 2012).

Infrastructure: For a developing nation with such a huge population the economic facet of any new methodology also holds a considerable value. In our country, the infrastructure continues to be a problem for a very long time and we are in continuous need of improving it. Here infrastructure can be understood in three categories-

1. The physical one which includes building, labs, computers, Wi-Fi, etc.
2. The academic one this includes the course content, textbooks, etc.
3. Faculty.

Although we lack in all three the physical infrastructure and the faculty affect us a lot. Building a technologically sound infrastructure is not like eating a piece of cake it needs a considerable funding (Khanna, 2016). There is an acute shortage of funds, we are spending only 4.4% of our GDP on the different educational programme running all over the country.

Overcoming the mental barriers: For making hybrid teaching and learning a success one must have to learn some of the new strategies and get rid of old pedagogical skills (Santosh & Panda, 2016) and conceptions (Harrington, 2010). It's a tough job to incorporate a totally new thing and replace it with the one which has been prevalent for eons. The most difficult process is considered to be the process of 'unlearning' where one needs to change its way of dealing with concepts (Parris et al., 2011).

Conclusion

Hybrid mode of teaching and learning can be seen as a stepping stone in the evolutionary path or journey of course content delivery. It is not the terminal although there is a long way to go, we should see every new thing with hopes and positivity. Our country has rich diversity which is not easy to cater by relying on one single method or tool. Also, it has been seen that in many of the research the online courses and the hybrid courses have almost the same result or performance. In a country where developing an infrastructure is still a tough goal to reach, opting for the hybrid course instead of online ones doesn't seem to be a judicious decision. Further, National Educational Policy 2020 (MoE, 2021) also recognize the importance of leveraging the advantages of technology while acknowledging its potential risks and dangers. It calls for carefully designed and appropriately scaled pilot studies to determine how the benefits of online/digital

education can be reaped while addressing or mitigating the downsides. But online courses are comparatively cheap and hold a big number of learners with the limited infrastructure. Although it has been proven through many studies that the course that has rich foundational knowledge body and rigorous practicum (Hall & Villareal, 2015) like medicine, engineering, management may get benefitted by the use of hybrid teaching method. For the classrooms of the 21st century, it is expected from the teachers and learners to inculcate advancing teaching technology into their continuously evolving classrooms. Traditional methods of teaching, however, fall short our context has changed widely and there is not much alteration in the traditional setup. But as it is hegemonized in our mental concept, one has a natural disposition and comfort towards it.

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