



**BLENDED LEARNING AND WORKING OPTIONS IN THE
AFTERMATH OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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BLENDED LEARNING AND WORKING OPTIONS IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Hybrid or blended learning is any combination of in-person and remote learning. Blended learning could entail learning from lectures online, coupled with the practical part of subjects and tutorials, and exams which are carried out onsite... Such is the state many academic communities and schools are thrown into in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Blended working options have also emerged because workers have had to work from home using varied technological devices during lockdowns and are gradually having to return to their physical workspaces and continue working from home on some schedules.

In libraries, the hybrid situation has seen more e-resources being put to use, and users having to change their use patterns to meet the situations that have arisen. Having to maintain safety protocols in libraries, has changed the nature of library learning spaces as well. Blended learning has widened the scope of learning adhering to the motto – “Bring your own device” to learn. Users of library services and the library professionals serving them take their own devices along with them. The necessary educational inputs, training and skills have to be acquired even during the current pandemic situation. Therefore, a huge impact is being felt in the ways of educational transactions now, and will be so, even in the future. Bordoloi, Das and Das (2021) identified three distinctive features with which hybrid learning could be classified. They are:

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3 “Time (when): which can be synchronous (at the same time, also
4 known as “real time”) or asynchronous (sequential, at different times)
5 or it can have a bit of both.
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9 Space (where): which can be in person (also known as face-to-face,
10 sharing the same physical location) or can be remote (two or more
11 people in different physical locations).
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15 Interaction (how): which can be unpacked in terms of the direction of
16 the communication (one-way; bi-directional or multi-directional) or
17 type of engagement, from no-participation (an individual is learning
18 alone without interaction with others), limited participation (where
19 the interaction with others is limited, structured or controlled) and
20 high participation (active and dynamic exchange with others is
21 regular and essential).” Thus, these variants of a hybrid learning
22 environment are being used now after the pandemic to different
23 degrees, depending on the level of restrictions in each geographic
24 location.
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36 McGill University in Montreal, Canada for example is a
37 research-intensive institution with approximately 40,000 students
38 across its downtown and suburban campuses. It has been operating
39 primarily remotely since March 2020. With physical distancing,
40 virtual meetings and online learning going on, the library re-imagined
41 its spaces and opened some buildings for individual, quiet study in
42 the Fall of 2020. The spaces known as ‘Study Hubs’ have practically
43 replaced the library. Flexibility of the evolving services is maintained.
44 Katherine Hanz and Dawn McKinnon stated succinctly that “as new
45 demands emerge, students, faculty and library staff will discover new
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ways to work, study, teach and learn; the Library will continue to adapt and find ways to meet the evolving needs of the community”. Read more at <https://iflalbes.wordpress.com/>.

Online courses which are mostly favoured in blended learning, are facilitated through a Learning Management System (LMS), like Canvas. These courses can be synchronous or asynchronous. The synchronous course activities require the teacher and the students in the course to be online at the same time – for example, a virtual class meeting via Zoom, while asynchronous course activities do not require teachers and learners to be online at the same time. Students can do a week’s work when they can, and then for example, have a Canvas discussion board to which they submit replies throughout the week, up to the due date. More at <https://library.guilford.edu/teaching-modes/online>.

As efforts at blended learning and working, during and after the pandemic are ongoing, publishing houses trying to adapt to the changes are being taken to task. Amazon Publishing has been noted not to show the same willingness as other publishers to make its catalog available to libraries. This is becoming worrisome and demands are being made for digital content to be provided by them. “Librarians and advocacy groups are pushing Amazon to allow licensing of its published ebooks (and audiobooks) to libraries for distribution, arguing that the company’s ban on library access is endangering the public’s access to information” according to Nancy K. Herther. More can be found at <http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/NewsBreaks/Taking-Amazon->

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3 [Publishing-to-Task-on-Its-Policy-of-No-Sales-to-Libraries-](https://www.infotoday.eu/Articles/Editorial/Featured-Articles/Indigenous-knowledge-and-futuristic-avatars-at-NISOPlus-146616.asp)
4 [146616.asp](https://www.infotoday.eu/Articles/Editorial/Featured-Articles/Indigenous-knowledge-and-futuristic-avatars-at-NISOPlus-146616.asp).

7 Another example of blended learning and working, is reflected
8 in the 2021 NISOPlus conference, held virtually across numerous
9 time zones for four days. With the theme “Global Conversations and
10 Global Connections”, the conference held from Feb15-17, 2021,
11 encouraged collaborative learning and discussion among delegates.
12 As reported by Mary Dee Ojala on 4 May 2021 in a blogpost, some
13 interest was generated on indigenous knowledge and also on the use
14 of cybernetic avatars in future. These were among many interesting
15 presentations. The use of this cybernetic technology for libraries
16 cannot be de-emphasized. Read more at
17 [https://www.infotoday.eu/Articles/Editorial/Featured-](https://www.infotoday.eu/Articles/Editorial/Featured-Articles/Indigenous-knowledge-and-futuristic-avatars-at-NISOPlus-146546.aspx)
18 [Articles/Indigenous-knowledge-and-futuristic-avatars-at-NISOPlus-](https://www.infotoday.eu/Articles/Editorial/Featured-Articles/Indigenous-knowledge-and-futuristic-avatars-at-NISOPlus-146546.aspx)
19 [146546.aspx](https://www.infotoday.eu/Articles/Editorial/Featured-Articles/Indigenous-knowledge-and-futuristic-avatars-at-NISOPlus-146546.aspx) and [https://niso.plus/what-i-learned-at-niso-plus-](https://niso.plus/what-i-learned-at-niso-plus-2021/)
20 [2021/](https://niso.plus/what-i-learned-at-niso-plus-2021/).

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36 Aaron Tan posted on 4th May, 2021 about the New South Wales
37 transport agency that used a machine learning model in designing a
38 programme which restored confidence in the populace during the
39 COVID-19 pandemic in Australia in 2020. They analyzed the travel
40 history recorded by Opal transit cards (on getting an individual’s
41 permission) and informed the commuter if the regular buses and
42 train services that they had been taking were COVID-safe. This
43 machine learning model predicted how full a bus or train carriage
44 was going to be at a given time. Such models could be replicated for
45 libraries, archives and museums. Artificial Intelligence (AI),
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3 automation and robotics are trending technologies. See more at
4 https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252500166/How-Transport-for-NSW-is-tapping-machine-learning?src=7560176&asrc=EM_ERU_160435011&utm_medium=EM&utm_source=ERU&utm_campaign=20210505_ERU+Transmission+for+05%2F05%2F2021+%28UserUniverse%3A+333028%29&utm_content=eru-rd2-control.
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18 Aaron Tan further blogged about using machine learning to aid
19 differently abled hearing persons. He described a situation where
20 such persons could be better communicated with, by using assistive
21 technology. A machine learning model that was trained on sign
22 languages was built that used images of a person gesturing in sign
23 language that were captured from a camera. The model could
24 recognize and translate gestures into text, and convert spoken words
25 into text for a deaf-mute person to see. With the writing of a code, the
26 machine learning model can be trained. A useful tool that libraries
27 could make use of! Read more about this trend at
28 <https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252483463/How-machine-learning-can-bridge-the-communication-gap>.
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43 Caralee Adams, in a blog posted on June 9, 2021 described the
44 teaching method of a university professor in New Jersey who uses
45 78rpm record collection from the internet archive for student
46 podcasts. This resource stimulates the interest of the students, in
47 doing their projects. The podcasts are consulted, to give material for
48 their projects or class assignments. Description of these learning
49 resources can be found at <https://blog.archive.org/>
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3 Much as the blended learning approach used in the pandemic
4 era has advantages, it is prone to failure if tools are not provided for
5 its implementation. Reliable superfast broadband is highly necessary
6 for its success. So also will accessing cloud-based electronic learning
7 portals or streaming video content be difficult for those who do not
8 have or cannot afford high-speed internet connectivity. Affordability
9 of access to the portals must be ensured. Digital skills of the students
10 or learners could pose a problem, so also the digital skills of the
11 teachers and parents have to be upgraded. More of Dr Paul
12 Armstrong's views on this can be found at
13 [https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/opinion-and-](https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/opinion-and-blog/increased-emphasis-blended-learning-could-be-one-positive-outcome-covid-crisis?utm_source=smc_email_authorship&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ace_shee_edugocomms_April2021_lit_existing_2021_0422_free)
14 [blog/increased-emphasis-blended-learning-could-be-one-positive-](https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/opinion-and-blog/increased-emphasis-blended-learning-could-be-one-positive-outcome-covid-crisis?utm_source=smc_email_authorship&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ace_shee_edugocomms_April2021_lit_existing_2021_0422_free)
15 [outcome-covid-](https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/opinion-and-blog/increased-emphasis-blended-learning-could-be-one-positive-outcome-covid-crisis?utm_source=smc_email_authorship&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ace_shee_edugocomms_April2021_lit_existing_2021_0422_free)
16 [crisis?utm_source=smc_email_authorship&utm_medium=email&ut](https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/opinion-and-blog/increased-emphasis-blended-learning-could-be-one-positive-outcome-covid-crisis?utm_source=smc_email_authorship&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ace_shee_edugocomms_April2021_lit_existing_2021_0422_free)
17 [m_campaign=ace_shee_edugocomms April2021 lit existing 2021](https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/opinion-and-blog/increased-emphasis-blended-learning-could-be-one-positive-outcome-covid-crisis?utm_source=smc_email_authorship&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ace_shee_edugocomms_April2021_lit_existing_2021_0422_free)
18 [0422 free.](https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/opinion-and-blog/increased-emphasis-blended-learning-could-be-one-positive-outcome-covid-crisis?utm_source=smc_email_authorship&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ace_shee_edugocomms_April2021_lit_existing_2021_0422_free)
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37 The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) has planned
38 activities that are blended, in spite of difficulties encountered due to
39 pandemic and lockdown. Permission to order materials and do online
40 programming was given and programmes that involve live or recorded
41 videos, while some others are video lead, like out Science Club, which
42 will start through Zoho Meeting. Students can have virtual
43 instructions with a librarian live for more hands-on, critical thinking,
44 question and answer type of programming. Virtual library and
45 makerspace services will be provided this summer as announced at
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3 <https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2021/06/technology-planning-where-we-go-from-here/>.

8 I end this column with reference to an article on “Lessons from
9 a Year of Working from Home” by Travis Spence posted on 30th May,
10 2021 on the Technical Services Law Librarians (tslltechscans) blog at
11 <http://tslltechscans.blogspot.com/>. The technology issues are
12 trending!

19 **Reference**

20 Bordoloi, R., Das, P. and Das, K. (2021), "Perception towards
21 online/blended learning at the time of Covid-19 pandemic: an
22 academic analytics in the Indian context", Asian Association of Open
23 Universities Journal, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 41-60.
24 <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAOUJ-09-2020-0079>.