

## **Blended Learning-SPU's undisputed future**

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*"Dear God: Could you please uninstall and install 2020 again? It has a virus" - Anonymous*

The year 2020 was characterized by worldwide disruptions in the education sector as face-to-face interactions were no longer possible. Some declared it a lost year and memes doing rounds on social media were awash with videos, photos and quotes of people portraying their displeasure in turning a year older while missing out on important things in life. Quite myopic, right? The truth is that life continued for individuals who had prepared adequately and their counterparts who adjusted accordingly to the prevailing volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment.

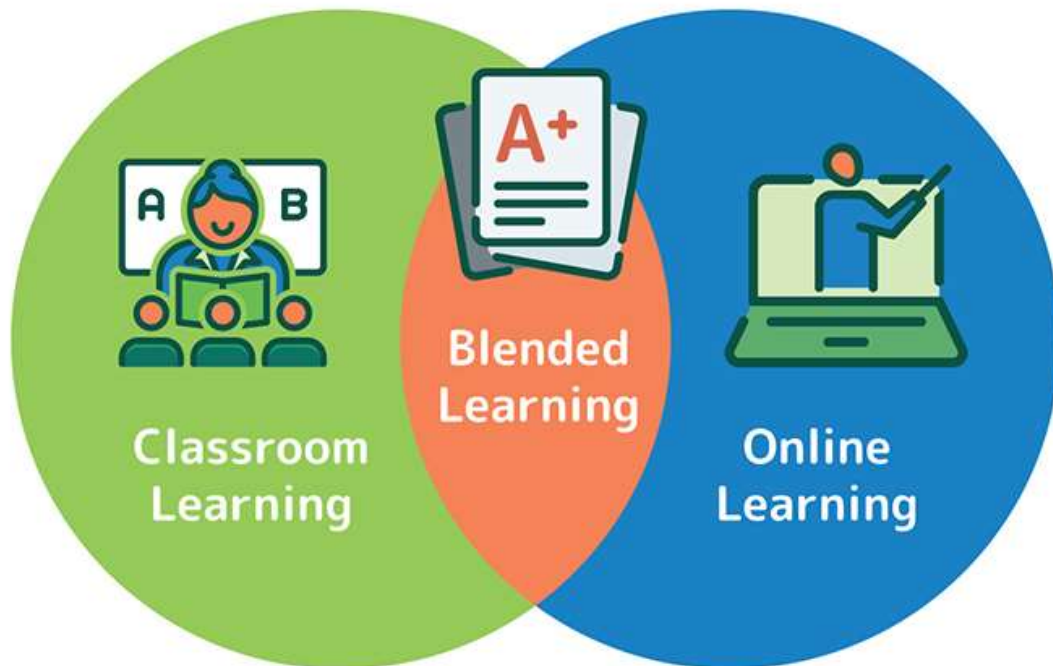
The Covid-19 pandemic just seems to make the future happen. In fact, it is already happening in the year 2021. This is despite the fact that classroom based instruction has and still is the most popular way of dispensing teaching and learning at all levels of education. The outbreak of the novel coronavirus has taught us to embrace new things, and challenged our perceptions and attitudes. Contentment with the status quo and absorbing inertia have proved to not only be expensive but also a real threat to continuity. Technology driven engagements that would be looked at with skepticism and frowned at are now becoming favored as strategic endeavors within organizations.

The Covid-19 pandemic has occasioned closures and transition to the emergency remote teaching in the meantime in the global higher education sector. It is not yet clear when humanity will make its way out of it. As time moves on, it is rather obvious that universities need to rethink their offerings by rising up to the challenge and embracing a paradigm shift towards conscious efforts to adopt quality online education. This can be achieved by putting in a substantial level of investments in capital, human and physical resources. The likely long-term effects will be captured in the movement towards full reopening, quality assurance in online education, dealing with reduced resources, shifting demands, untimely closures in response to the intermittent waves and restructuring.

Covid's lessons for global higher education have necessitated St. Paul's University to curve an operational framework around this reality. Face-to-face instruction and online education are not mutually exclusive. They both complement and supplement each other depending on the desired outcome of the course. Disruptions in our normal ways of operations have promoted a higher uptake of technology among staff and students. Technology has been the medium that has facilitated virtual teaching and learning, but not without its varied shortfalls. In maintaining a balance and appealing to the various needs of our faculty and students, blended learning is the way of the future.

As the University heads towards full resumption of teaching and learning activities, SPU will be characterized by more blended courses. Blended learning is an educational model where technology and teaching inform each other. It combines the best of two teaching environments: traditional face-to-face classroom learning and high usage of technology in online learning. It creates meaningful learning in and out of the classroom.

# Blended Learning



Blended learning combines in-person teaching with asynchronous learning methods where students work on online exercises and watch instructional videos during their own time. In a blended-learning course, for example, students might attend classes taught by a lecturer in a traditional classroom setting, while independently completing online components of the course outside the classroom. In this case, in-class time may be either replaced or supplemented by online learning experiences, and students would learn the same topics online as they would have done in class, the online and in-person learning experiences would parallel and complement one another. By covering all the bases, all types of learners are engaged - those who learn better in a structured environment that includes face-to-face interaction with an instructor, and independent types who learn better with semi-autonomous, computer-based learning.

Generally speaking, blended learning comes with many potential advantages and disadvantages that will largely depend on the quality of the design and execution of a given blended-learning model. Advocates may argue that blended learning gives students the benefits of both online learning and in-person instruction and because students are required to use digital and online technologies in blended-learning situations, they naturally acquire more technological literacy and greater confidence using new technologies. The blended-learning approach more closely resembles modern workplaces, in which employees may work largely on their own to meet specific objectives,

only periodically checking in with their supervisors to give them updates or seek assistance. In this case, students would also be learning skills such as self-discipline, self-motivation, and organizational habits they would need in adult life.

Having said this, blended learning might be an appropriate solution for people who are always in a hurry. There is need to embrace a holistic mindset to ensure it all fits together effectively. A fully competent and dedicated faculty is a requisite in exercising this pedagogical approach by designing and teaching appropriately. Blended learning works well for covering a large amount of course material with learners who are independent and engaged.

To survive through the Covid-19 pandemic and glide into the future seamlessly, the blended learning model is the best fit for the current educational aspirations on institutional level as it:

- Reduces the number of in-class meetings but does not eliminate all.
- Replaces (rather than supplements) some in-class time with online, interactive learning activities.
- Gives careful consideration to why (and how often) classes need to meet face-to-face.
- Assumes that certain activities can be better accomplished online-individually or in small groups than in a face-to-face class.
- May keep remaining in-class activities more or less the same.
- May make significant changes in remaining in-class meetings.
- May schedule out-of-class activities in 24/7 computer labs or totally online so that students can participate anytime, anywhere.

*“If we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow”-John Dewey*