

Teaching Strategies for Blended Learning Environments at Elementary Level

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Abstract

This paper examines effective teaching strategies for fostering attunement in blended learning environments at the elementary level. Attunement, characterized by a deep connection and responsiveness between teacher and student, is essential for creating a supportive and engaging educational experience. With the increasing adoption of blended learning an approach that combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods, teachers encounter new challenges and opportunities in maintaining this crucial connection. Through a mixed-methods study involving interviews and classroom observations, the researcher identified key strategies that successful elementary teachers use to achieve attunement in blended settings. These strategies include personalized feedback, adaptive learning technologies, synchronous and asynchronous communication methods, and the incorporation of social-emotional learning (SEL) practices. The findings indicate that teachers who effectively integrate these strategies can create a cohesive and responsive learning environment, even in a partially virtual context. The study emphasizes the importance of ongoing professional development and support for teachers to navigate and implement these strategies effectively. Ultimately, this research underscores the pivotal role of teacher attunement in enhancing student engagement, motivation, and academic success in blended learning environments at the elementary level.

Key words : Teaching strategies , blended learning , Attunement

Introduction

Blended learning is increasingly adopted in elementary education, blending online educational materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods. This model aims to provide the best of both worlds, leveraging technology to enhance learning while maintaining the benefits of face-to-face interaction. Attunement, the process of building a deep understanding and connection between teacher and student, is essential in this context to ensure students feel supported, understood, and motivated. Researcher conducted open ended interview and discussion with school educators about Teaching Strategies for Attunement in Blended Learning Environments at Elementary Level. In summer vacation eight teacher conducted and taught through blended learning in Govt. School at Lahore.

Literature Review

Attunement involves recognizing and responding to students' emotional and cognitive needs, creating a responsive and supportive learning environment. Research indicates that attuned teachers can significantly impact students' academic and social-emotional development. Blended learning integrates digital tools and resources with traditional classroom practices. It offers flexibility, personalized learning, and the potential for increased engagement. However, it also poses challenges such as ensuring equitable access to technology and maintaining student

motivation. This method aims to provide a more flexible and comprehensive learning experience by integrating various instructional modalities

Teacher attunement is about teachers being able to understand and empathize with the psychological experiences, worldviews, perspectives, motivations, learning capacities, skill levels, strengths, weaknesses, interests, affiliations, and affective states of students (Hamm et al., 2011). This process of understanding is facilitated through attentive observation, deep listening, following responses, receptive body language, and verbal and nonverbal exchanges (Davis, 2006).

Scholars have put forward different views and perspectives on teacher attunement (Fonagy et al., 2018). Four major perspectives are discussed: 1. Similarity of the effect of the teacher and the student, thereby reducing the dissonance and being in perfect harmony with the student and further the entire needed state was- as students are, teachers should be. 2. Taking an inference-based approach, this concludes that it is not what teachers say or do based on seeing things they can see. However, by going underneath things, they cannot see. 3. Continuous effort of building an empathetic relationship between a teacher and students where the teacher not only looks into the academics of the student but also sympathizes with the child all around socio-emotional experiences along with the peer to peer interactions and 4. Taking a standpoint of the teacher and his effort and fluid process of identifying the student's identities and frame of reference, it thus requires an accurate teacher for a transaction and thus the least information to accurately ascertain student inference; therefore, it will be called a sensitive attuning process of the teacher. Teacher attunement is about teachers being able to understand and empathize with the psychological experiences, worldviews, perspectives, motivations, learning capacities, skill levels, strengths, weaknesses, interests, affiliations, and affective states of students (Hamm et al., 2011).. This process of understanding is facilitated through attentive observation, deep listening, following responses, receptive body language, and verbal and nonverbal exchanges (Davis, 2006). Attunement can have various meanings depending on the context. Stern, D. N. (2004) defined "Attunement refers to the therapist's ability to deeply understand and resonate with the emotional experience of their client, creating a sense of connection and trust." Secondly Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2000) described "Attunement describes the process of becoming finely tuned to another person's emotions, thoughts, and needs, fostering effective communication and empathy" Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2000) in his book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* lecture explained "Attunement involves being in harmony with oneself, others, and the environment, often achieved through practices like meditation and mindfulness ,, in addition another researcher Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994) focused "Attunement refers to the caregiver's ability to recognize and respond to a child's emotional needs, fostering a secure attachment and healthy development. Lastly Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2012) explained "Attunement in music or art involves being in harmony with the expressive elements of the medium, such as tone, rhythm, or color" These definitions provide a broad understanding of attunement across various domains, from interpersonal relationships to personal growth and artistic expression.

In psychology, attunement often refers to the process of being fully present and responsive to another person's emotional state, needs, and experiences. It involves empathy, understanding, and emotional resonance. For instance, in parent-child relationships, attunement describes the caregiver's ability to tune in to the child's emotional cues and respond appropriately (Stern, D. N. (1985). In spirituality, attunement can signify a state of alignment or harmony with higher spiritual principles, energies, or frequencies. It involves being receptive to spiritual guidance,

enlightenment, or the divine presence. This concept is often associated with practices like meditation, prayer, or mindfulness. (Assagioli, R. (1965). Lastly In music, attunement refers to the adjustment of one's musical pitch to match or harmonize with another, such as when singers or instrumentalists tune their instruments to a standard pitch or when musicians adjust their playing to match the tonality of a piece. Cross, I. (2001).

Domains of Teacher Attunement

Three domains make up teacher attunement: cognitive, emotive, and behavioural (Korthagen, 2017; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). All three go in that order. Teacher attunement cognitive domain goes first because that is when teachers evaluate things about their students, for example, their needs, prior experiences, academic abilities, and interests. The four-teacher attunement cognitive strategies are formal assessments, observations, inquiry, and reflective journaling. Next is the teacher attunement emotive domain, which is how teachers become aware of their students, for example, things like students' feelings, perceptions, and emotions. There are three teacher attunement emotive strategies: self-awareness, empathy, and emotional intelligence.

Cognitive Domain: Orientation gathering background information about the child such as family, education history, culture, language spoken, learning difficulties, academic level, challenges, and obstacles (collect school records). Meeting with key stakeholders to gain insight about the child-like parents, counsellors etc. Observing the child in the class/playground to understand the child and their interaction in the peer groups and their behaviour etc. Mapping the child's concept-ego, forms of inhibition/complex, coping mechanism, temperament etc.

Cognitive Domain: Organization Classifying knowledge of the child into different categories in order to assist with comprehension of the child Easy method is to design a mind map for each child

Cognitive Domain: Information Acquisition Assessing the knowledge achieved by student such the level of clarity in the concept, demonstrations of the managements, level of dexterity etc. Assessing the learning rate—fast or slow, and the stature of the understanding Assessing the core competency and the non-understanding areas Assessing the degree of expression and ideas, thoughts exchanges with the child to understand their thought process Seeking, locating and inventing the critical non-verbal comments/remarks—the body habits, face habits, environmental cues etc.

Behavioural elements are the details of behaviours you perform as a person who does the Dimensions. 1. Giving individual students customized prompts/cues to keep them engaged during instruction. 2. Using different teaching practices for identified learning profiles (auditory, visual, kinaesthetic) (Gardner, 2011). 3. Simplifying explanations further when students still do not understand the concept. 4. Matching your written or verbal communication to the student's level of fluency with that language. 5. Use a scan of the room to pick up on bored or distracted students and re-engage them. 6. Act promptly if the students display signs of becoming disengaged, confused, disruptive, or in conflict, etc. 7. Use immediately constructive feedback aligned to the student's current skill/understanding level to improve their learning.

Strategies for Teacher Attunement

In order to increase teachers' responsiveness to the learning and socio-emotional needs of their students, various approaches can be implemented (Farmer et al., 2019; Gasser et al., 2022; Hoffman et al., 2015). Initially, providing a student orientation at the outset of the term could be beneficial. This entails engaging in informal one-on-one discussions with students to

gain insight into their hobbies, aspirations, obstacles, and other personal dimensions. Moreover, distributing anonymous student questionnaires to inquire into their learning preferences, attitudes, and concerns can offer rich viewpoints.

By analyzing historical data, like previous test scores, common mistakes, comments from past teachers, valuable knowledge could be discovered to highlight students' strength and areas that are needed to be improved. In addition, cooperation with counsellors could add current information to the educators' personal perception, for example, family situation, thinking processes, companion relationship which contributed to designing an effective shop. Furthermore, displaying students' works, such as writing or art, to understand their imagination.

During instruction, teachers have freedom of mobility to check student levels of engagement on the spot. By asking questions and taking lead of discussions in the classroom, teachers can see where students have gaps in skills, allowing them to narrow the focus to providing coaching and support. Furthermore, having self-tests allows students to take time to stop and reflect on their learning journey, which can be very powerful.

The melding of collaborative projects and mixed ability groupings during academic activities provides the opportunity to watch and nurture interpersonal and collaborative skills. By blending cooperative learning opportunities and constructing these mixed ability clusters, students can be assessed on their ability to work well together and communicate across many different levels of skill development. By combining group work aspects and mixed ability partners teachers can create an environment where the development of two very important interpersonal and collaborative skills can more easily be developed. Additionally, exposing students to their preferred venue of learning through extracurricular activities exposes segments of their identities and motivational levels (Eccles et al., 2003).

Organizing class gatherings or home visits offer insight into informal attitudes and behaviours of students (Eshach, 2007). Engaging in periodic peer evaluations and helping students learn how to provide constructive feedback about learning behaviours of peers may offer more comprehensive investigation (Cestone et al., 2008). Lastly, keeping detailed records of observations and systematically logging interactions over passage of time with necessary tools is important in identifying trends and achieving a comprehensive understanding.

Teachers who consistently employ student-centred strategies ground themselves in learning needs and social experiences that propel student growth. The understanding gained translates into individualized interventions that respond to each learner. Likewise, the connection cultivated establishes trust, communication, and a readiness for both student and teacher to learn from each other. In order to increase teachers' responsiveness to the learning and socio-emotional needs of their students, various approaches can be implemented (Farmer et al., 2019; Gasser et al., 2022; Hoffman et al., 2015). Initially, providing a student orientation at the outset of the term could be beneficial. This entails engaging in informal one-to-one discussions with students to gain insight into their hobbies, aspirations, obstacles, and other personal dimensions. Moreover, distributing anonymous student questionnaires to inquire into their learning preferences, attitudes, and concerns can offer rich viewpoints.

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Active Listening

Actively listen to students to understand their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. This involves giving full attention, paraphrasing, and asking clarifying questions. (Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2012)

Empathy

Show empathy towards students' experiences and emotions. Understand their challenges and celebrate their successes. (Davis, M. H. (1996)

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence recognizes and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. Learn about their cultures and integrate culturally relevant teaching practices. (Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (Eds.). (2010)

Nonverbal Communication

Teachers' pay attention to nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice to gauge students' emotions and reactions. (Knapp, M. L., & Hall, J. A. (2013)

Teaching Strategies in Blended Learning

Effective teaching strategies in blended learning environments include differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and the use of formative assessments. These strategies can help cater to diverse learning needs and foster a sense of community and engagement.

Teaching Strategies for Attunement in Blended Learning

Building Relationships

Conducted regular one-on-one check-ins with students to understand their progress, challenges, and emotional well-being and provided personalized feedback that acknowledges students' efforts and guides their improvement. School educators Utilized interactive platforms that allow for real-time communication and collaboration.

Promoting Engagement

Incorporate gamified elements to make learning more engaging and enjoyable and design varied learning activities that cater to different learning styles and preferences.

Supporting Social-Emotional Learning

Integrated mindfulness practices to help students manage stress and improve focus and
Establish peer support systems to foster a sense of community and collaboration.

Utilizing Technology Effectively

Used adaptive learning technologies that personalize the learning experience based on students' needs and progress and Incorporated multimedia resources to make learning more dynamic and accessible.

Case Study

A case study of an elementary school implementing blended learning strategies to enhance attunement provided practical insights and real-world examples. This section examined the school's approach, the strategies employed, and the outcomes observed. 9th class teachers conducted and taught through blended learning in summer vacations. Researcher conducted interview with teachers about experience challenge and opportunities about blended learning activities at school level.

Method

A group discussion was organized with elementary school teachers to explore teaching strategies in a blended learning environment. The researcher posed three key questions to the panel:

1. What specific teaching strategies can promote attunement in a blended learning setting?
2. How do digital tools and technologies support or hinder the development of attunement between educators and students?
3. What role does student-teacher interaction play in achieving attunement in a blended learning environment?

Discussion / Findings

The discussion centered on the effectiveness of various proposed strategies, acknowledging potential challenges and limitations. It also considered the importance of teacher training and professional development in implementing these strategies effectively. Promoting attunement in a blended learning setting involves creating a responsive and harmonious learning environment where instructors and students align with each other's needs, goals, and experiences. Here are some specific strategies discussed:

1. Personalized Learning Paths:

Teachers utilized adaptive learning technologies to assess students' comprehension and provide tailored content, assignments, and feedback. They also offered choices in assignments and projects, allowing students to explore topics of personal interest. (Participants 1)

2. Active Learning Techniques:

Incorporation of activities such as discussions, problem-solving sessions, and group projects, both online and in-person. Tools like online discussion groups, breakout rooms, and interactive polls were used to encourage participation. (Participants 2)

3. Frequent and Constructive Feedback:

The use of automated quizzes for instant feedback, peer assessments for diverse perspectives, and instructor comments on assignments was emphasized. Regular check-ins and personalized feedback through digital platforms were also highlighted. (Participants 4)

4. Building Community and Relationships:

Online discussion forums, group workspaces, and virtual office hours were created. Icebreakers and social activities were employed at the course's start and periodically to build rapport, with encouragement for students to share experiences and perspectives. (Participants 3)

5. Cultural and Contextual Sensitivity:

The integration of culturally relevant materials and examples into the curriculum was recommended. Students were encouraged to share their cultural perspectives, with mindfulness towards different time zones and access issues during synchronous activities. (Participants 5)

6. Flexible and Inclusive Pedagogy:

Providing materials in various formats (videos, readings, interactive modules) and flexible deadlines, as well as using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to ensure accessibility for all students. (Participants 1)

7. Use of Technology to Enhance Engagement:

Incorporation of multimedia resources, simulations, and gamification elements to enhance the teaching and learning process. (Participants 4)

8. Open Communication Channels:

Utilizing multiple communication channels (email, chat, video calls) and encouraging students to ask questions and seek help, with clear expectations for communication and response times. Digital tools and technologies significantly impact attunement between educators and students, defined as

the harmonious connection and mutual understanding that facilitates effective communication, empathy, and responsiveness. Key aspects discussed included: (Participants 5)

Adaptive learning technologies and learning analytics were highlighted for their role in tailoring content and providing insights into student engagement and progress. The use of communication platforms like email, messaging apps, and video conferencing to maintain continuous communication was emphasized, along with digital tools for timely and constructive feedback. The role of interactive content, such as multimedia elements and gamification, in making learning engaging and fostering a sense of belonging was discussed. The importance of assistive technologies like text-to-speech and closed captioning for creating an inclusive learning environment was highlighted. The discussion also acknowledged potential drawbacks of relying heavily on digital tools, including: A potential decrease in non-verbal communication cues, which are essential for building trust and understanding. It is also the risk of focusing too much on data, potentially overlooking the emotional and human aspects of education. Student's faced Issues related to unequal access to technology and the digital divide.

Conclusion

Attunement is crucial for the success of blended learning in elementary education. Effective teaching strategies can create a supportive and engaging learning environment that meets diverse student needs. The challenge of managing digital overload and maintaining focus were noted during teaching process. Panel shared the potential for digital tools to feel impersonal, lacking the warmth of face-to-face interactions. Student-teacher interaction is vital in achieving attunement in a blended learning environment. Panel suggested for the improvement in the attunement process during blended learning, understanding students' individual needs and providing tailored support. It is very important to fostering trust and a supportive learning environment. This process needs Providing immediate responses and guidance. Panel suggested to ensuring students understand course requirements. Lastly teacher suggested to create Creating a collaborative learning environment.

Recommendations:

- Clearly outline what students are expected to learn both online and in-person.
- Select educational technologies that enhance learning rather than distract from it. Tools should be age-appropriate and align with learning objectives.
- Use online platforms that offer interactive elements like games, quizzes, and simulations. These can make learning more engaging and help reinforce concepts.
- Encourage collaboration through online group projects or discussion boards. Tools like Google Docs or Padlet can facilitate group work and idea sharing.

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