BLENDED LEARNING: IT'S UTILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF B.ED. TRAINING PROGRAM

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Abstract
As technology continues to evolve and impacts all aspects of our daily lives, learning and education of these new technology cannot be overlooked. The concept of blended learning has gained great popularity over the last few years. It combines the benefits of traditional classroom teaching with emerging technology to make learning more real-time, contextual and engaging. It combines the best of two training environment- traditional face-to-face learning and e-Learning to meet the evolving needs of new age learners. It takes learning outside the walls of the classroom, making it possible to access resources both online and offline. This helps engage all types of learners both-those who learn better in a traditional classroom environment as well as those who work best with semi-autonomous, computer-based training. In this paper we will see its utility in B.Ed. training program.

Key words:- Technology, Blended learning, Training, Environment, Education

Blended Learning - A style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media as well as traditional face-to-face teachings

Concept of Blended learning

Now a days many students are already doing some form of blended learning by using a computer to complete an assignment. So, they have already been introduced to the concept of Blended learning in superficial way. Many of the students are probably also familiar with tablets, smartphone and other forms of technology, which they may be using for non-academic purpose i.e. for recreation. By using these tools into an educational setting i e. classroom, a hybrid setting or distance learning, it's possible these students can learn even more effectively. Blended learning is an educational methodology that blends online or digital components with face-to-face instructions.

Blended learning is a term increasingly used to describe the way of e-Learning is being combined with traditional classroom methods and independent study to create a new hybrid, integrate teaching method. It is an approach to education that combines online education materials and opportunities for interaction online with traditional place-based classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and students with some elements of students control over time place, path or pace. Blended learning is also used in professional development and training setting.

The term "blended learning", "hybrid learning", "E-learning", "technology meditated instructions", "web enhanced instructions" and "mixed mode instructions" are often used interchangeably. First of all, let us clear the concept of these terms: -

- **Hybrid learning**: Blended learning focuses on the combination between offline and online learning, whereas hybrid learning is about finding the right mix for you out of all the possibilities in learning, no matter if they are offline or online.

- **E- Learning**: The key difference between e-Learning and blended learning is that e-Learning is a method of learning that only uses online platforms, whereas blended learning provides a mixture of online methods and traditional face-to-face learning methods in the classroom.
- **Technology meditated instruction**:Technology meditated instruction is the term applied collectively to a variety of methods that use digital technology in its many forms to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge by students.
- **Mixed mode instruction**: Mixed mode is also known as Blended learning and distributed learning. It means study that combines traditional face-to-face learning with learning at a distance in a structured program. The web may be used to enhance learning during study by one or both of these modes.

Thus, their names are different, but working mode and purpose are almost the same. In educational research, blended learning refers to a mixing of different learning environment. It combines traditional face-to-face classroom method with more modern computer meditated activities. It is a form of instruction that incorporates both traditional face-to-face instructions with web-based multimedia instructions. Like blended learning the term flipped classroom is also being used extensively. But there is a difference between the two. Although the term blended learning and flipped learning are presented with different meaning, they actually have much in common. Blended learning is an educational strategy which combines the traditional classroom with on-line activities and finds its best application in the Flipped classroom where the responsibilities for the teacher learning process is somehow transferred to that of the students who have direct access to the contents of the lesson before going to school. Both E- learning approaches have the different theoretical and pedagogical implications.

Types of blended learning models

There are a variety of effective blended learning models available for teachers to incorporate into their classrooms depending on the needs of their students

- **Face-to-face driver model**- Which is closest to traditional classroom training as most of the training takes place in a classroom setting under the guidance of an instructions. This approach offers individual personalized support to learners who are struggling to grab the new concept.
- **Flipped model**- A flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning, which aim to increase student's engagement and learning by having pupils complete reading at home and work online problem-solving during class time. This can be done in the form of discussions, case studies or group projects.
- **Rotational models** - Rotational model of blended learning mixes face-to-face teaching with online learning organised in a strictly structured manner. Although its schedule is fixed but flexible.
- **Flex model**- The flex model is a method of teaching for students who are not-traditional learners. Learning materials and instructions are given online and the lesson are self-guided. Although the teacher is available on-site but the students work independently and learn to develop and create new concept in a digital environment

- **Enriched virtual model**- It is similar to flax model. In this model students have required face-to-face learning sessions with their teacher of record and then are free to complete their remaining course work remote from the face-to-face teacher. This as model has become increasingly popular in this area of remote work.

It's utility in the context of teacher's training program-

Before explaining the usefulness of blended learning in B Ed training program, I would like to briefly introduce the syllabus of B.Ed. program. We can keep its curriculum under the main twocategories: -

- **Theory**- In which they study the theoretical aspects of the curriculum of this program like educational implications and utility of Education, Philosophy, Psychology, School management and administrations, Action research, Educational technology and ICT, Principles and methods of teaching, Language across the curriculum etc which can be teach effectively through blended learning model. Education technology and ICT completely emphasizes on the theoretical and practical knowledge of technology. It is fully applicable in third unit of language across the curriculum, where many topics are related to technology and ICT. If during their teaching, the teacher educator does face-to-face teaching by using above mentioned different models of blended learning as per needs, then that learning will be more effective and permanent.

  In this context **Garrison** and **Kanuka** have studied blended learning. Their research concludes that blended learning has the proven potential to enhance both the effectiveness and efficiency of meaningful learning experienced. Thus, for a variety of learning possibilities, the teacher educator can blend traditional method of instructions with digital instructions in their classroom.

- **Practical& Co- curricular activities**-Practice of teaching is the most important component of teacher's training program. In which it's very essential to be proficient for every trainee.

  We can use blended learning model during this training program in the following way:

- It's very important for the trainees to imbibe different types of skills to be proficient in teaching. Teacher educator can use various techniques to explain the concept and importance of these teaching skills.

- During practice of teaching, the trainees can also use this mode to teach various topics in various subjects like Maths, Science, Social study etc. If he teaches his students by using blended learning mode, it will become more interesting and understandable for his students. And trainees will able to learn the use of technology properly during classroom teaching.

- Use of blended learning during classroom teaching will increase the confidence of the trainees.

- When trainees learn in a blended learning setting, they do more than master the subject they are learning; they also master the use of technology.

- Blended learning helps teacher educator to stay organised and connect in more meaningful ways with their trainees. Now teacher's educator can easily schedule

assignments, trainee submissions and tracks trainees progress through an online mode.

- It is a modular and scalable.
- Learners can control the pace of their learning.
- Different learners learn different things in different ways.
- Blended learning approach provides ultimate flexibility in presenting content. Different topics can be presented in the classroom while other subject matter can be available online.
- With a well-planned blended learning strategy, teacher educator can effectively and quickly deliver training to their trainees.
- The reviewed research indicates that student's engagement, student achievement and positive students' perception of learning increased when blended learning was used. Trainees also developed additional skills through the use of blended learning like the ability to self-pace and self-direct.
- The teacher educator is able to provide some content delivery to his trainees when and where it meets the trainee's needs.
- The trainees are able to access this instruction through their own web connection or via college's computers or tablets or iPod at set time (before/during after the college days).
- Teacher educator gets proper time in blended learning to engage their trainees in classroom discussions, labs, and project based on problem-based assignment.
- Teacher educator can help and guide their trainees in their any types of misunderstanding of the concept.
- Course can access 24 hours / 7 days anytime anywhere.
- The use of information and communication technology have been found to improve trainee attitude towards teaching and learning.
- Blended learning is well suited for large group.
- Blended learning saves money. This learning can lower cost by putting classrooms in the online space and it essentially replaces pricey textbook, with electronic devices that trainees often bring themselves to class. E- Textbook, which can be accessed digitally, may also help to drive down textbook budgets.
- Blended learning often includes software and automatically collects trainee data and measures their academic progress.
- Some researches stated that Blended learning can enhance trainees learning outcomes and improve their motivation.
- It is effective way for achieving learning objectives of Bloom Taxonomy.
- Teacher educator can become more engage with their trainees. This mode of learning provides an increased opportunity for trainees and connect them with their professions and teacher educator.
- It exposes the trainees to a wide range of knowledge and opens up innumerable opportunities for teaching and learning. All types of learners whether in service, physically challenged can all benefits from it.

Drawbacks of blended Learning:

It's very important to consider its drawbacks when adopting Blended learning approach. In spite of above-mentioned merits, we cannot ignore its drawback like: -

- Blended learning often realises heavily on technology to deliver on line learning experience.
- Not every learner will have equal access to the resources, which can make online learning difficult or even impossible.
- To build the essential infrastructure within an educational institution is a very big challenge. Due to costly infrastructure of this model, all institution cannot afford this model. Because acquiring software technology and hardware for blended learning program may be very costly for them.
- Teachers become overburdened, which has a negative impact on their personality.
- It's not easy to switch to a new method if you are already an accustomed to a traditional approach.
- Every blended learning model is not suited to every person, task, subject or organisation.
- Trainees who don't feel easy with technology, dislike sitting in front of a screen for too long.
- Everyone i.e. teacher educator, trainees, as well as students must have a basic knowledge of technology to take lessons and complete assignment online.
- They won't learn too much from a screen, if they don't know how to do it or are not interested. Thus, literacy of Information Technology is very big issue which may be a significant barrier for teacher educator and trainees.
- It also has a negative impact on trainees when their cognitive load is increases.
- Plagiarism is a well-known issue in the e-Learning world, but by using plagiarism checkers, we can prevent it.

Conclusion

Although we cannot say that blended learning approach is always better than the traditional one. But we must not forget that period when due to corona the educational institutions were closed, the virtual mode was adopted to speed up the training work, through which everyone got the maximum knowledge of the practical side of technology. Various types of cultural programs, national festivals, micro teaching, and practice of teaching were organised by the trainees through online mode. Which was possible only then blended learning was being used by the teacher educator in the training colleges. Although it's has many drawbacks, but if we use it carefully and according to the need of the topics, then we can avoid its defects and make our teaching more effective and interesting. In fact, it is the best option to enhance the performance of the trainees, to improve the quality of training, to reduce teaching errors, to correlate their knowledge with the current technological advancement and globalisation. It provides a new dimension to the entire teaching-learning process. Thus, in the light of above-mentioned statements, I would like to say that blended learning is very useful, fruitful and relevant in the context of B.Ed. training program.

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