

Prospects of Blended Learning Approach in Teacher Education

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Abstract

In the recent decade, blended learning approach has altered the educational process with respect to teaching-learning method, curriculum transaction, application of TLMs, assessment and evaluation. This has been done, keeping in view, the convenience of both the teachers and students so that whole process can be made flexible and accessible to all. Blended learning appears to be an effective approach that combines the benefits of both online and offline classroom practices. Teachers are considered as the key personnel in bringing about transformation in any educational programme. Hence, it becomes imperative to endow preparation of teachers in order to accomplish any current needs of the students at all levels of learning. This paper aims to open up new ways for better understanding about the concept of blended learning and teacher education, the importance of blended learning in teacher education and conditions essential for its successful implementation. The present paper also highlights on its major drawbacks and prospects of incorporating blended learning approach in teacher education programme.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Teacher Education, Importance of Blended Learning in Teacher Education, Essential Conditions Necessary for Implementation, Drawbacks, Prospects

Introduction

Education is regarded to be potent factor in shaping the life of an individual. Education programme should aim in developing students' various skills such as ability to apply academic knowledge and experiences, facilitating socialization in general. Students are to be provided with sound theoretical as well as practical knowledge that can enhance and upgrade their learning opportunities and capabilities of solving work problems. Such learning opportunity can be made possible with the help of blended learning that aim to ensure equity and justice, equal access to learning for all students without any sorts of discrimination. Such learning approach aims to engage students in procuring valuable and relevant learning experiences at their own place and pace that are considered important in the field of education. However, the covid-19 pandemic has brought considerable change in the sphere of education where offline or face-to-face mode of transaction has been accompanied with virtual or online mode. Since then, the usage of blended mode of teaching-learning process has been gradually accelerating at various levels of educational spheres. Blended learning is helpful in bridging the gap that exists between geographical location and accessibility for both the teachers and students. Therefore, it is necessary to implement blended learning approach in teacher education programme in order to impart necessary skills and knowledge among the student-teachers and teacher educators too. This will enable them for successful delivery of the course content at different stages of education through the proper utilization of both the online and offline mode of learning.

Blended Learning

With the advent of modern information and communication technologies in educational sphere, the term ‘Blended Learning’ has been gradually gaining its importance. Blended learning is learning approach that aims to purposefully integrate online learning tools with the conventional face-to-face teaching learning methods.

In the words of **Clark (2003)**, Blended Learning is the use of two or more distinct methods of training. According to **Garrison and Kanuka (2004)**, blended learning means the thoughtful fusion of both the classroom face-to-face learning experiences with the online learning experiences.

Graham (2006) defined Blended Learning as a system of learning that combines the traditional face-to-face instruction with the computer-mediated instruction.

Georgsen and Lovstad (2014) defined that blended learning as an effective combination of instructions, both methods as well as delivery media from two types of archetypical learning environments, that are the traditional face-to-face teaching- learning environment and an Information and Communication Technology-mediated or e-learning environment.

Such type of learning programme is very much flexible in nature, cost-efficient and easily accessible. Therefore, it provides a wonderful promising opportunity for all to benefit. In recent times, the teaching-learning process has been continuing through blended mode at some stages of education. Blended learning is being encouraged always that aims to instill required techno-pedagogical skills for imparting education effectively as well as for participating in any sort of learning activities properly. Existing curriculum of higher education specially teacher education programme must be judiciously framed to integrate blended learning practice. It is required since modern information and communication technologies constituted a very vital and integral part of the contemporary world in education system. Information and communication technologies are now being widely accepted in higher education for effective delivery of the course content leading to the desired outcomes of student learning.

Computer-assisted teaching learning process is no longer said to be an alternative approach to the traditional form of learning. Hence, blended learning is regarded to be successful design of teaching-learning process.

Teacher Education

Teacher Education is an educational programme that mainly focusses on the development of teaching proficiency and competence of the teachers in order to enhance the quality of learning and achievements of the learners.

It is a programme that is related to the development of teacher proficiency and competence that would enable and empower the teacher to meet the requirements of the profession and face the challenges therein. The **National Council for Teacher Education** has defined the concept as a programme of education, research, and training of persons to teach from pre-primary to higher education level.

According to **Goods Dictionary of Education**, Teachers Education means “all the formal and non-formal activities and experiences that help to qualify a person to assume responsibilities of a member of the educational profession or to discharge his responsibilities more effectively”.

It encompasses three core elements viz teaching skills, pedagogical theory, and professional skills. Teacher education is regarded to be a comprehensive and continuous process that aims to prepare teachers for the development of the society. It helps to keep update about various recent trends and emerging issues relevant to this contemporary world. Hence, teacher education is very much significant in developing the

academic as well as professional standards of an individual for achieving any positive educational transformation effectively.

However, teacher education programme encompasses various aspects that are mainly related to teacher educator, student teacher, course content or curriculum and methods of teaching. It helps in the preparation of teacher educators first by enhancing various professional skills.

According to NCTE, teacher education is a programme of education that includes research as well as training of individuals so that they can acquire necessary skills to teach students from pre-primary to higher education level of learning.

Importance of Blended Learning Approach in Teacher Education

According to NEP 2020, the new methods of teaching and learning process must incorporate adequate information and communication technologies for proper acquisition of knowledge. Such an educational transformation leads to a life-long learning process that gives greater emphasis on the notion of multiple entry and exist in order to create the educational system more flexible for all through merging various modes of teaching-learning process. The major importance of blended learning approach in teacher education programme are discussed below.

1. Blended learning approach is much **flexible, transparent, cost-effective** in various regards. Such learning programme holds the actual value of conventional learning and also intends to assimilate digital tools and technologies efficiently.
2. Policy-makers, teachers, students, and various other stakeholders in the recent period, appreciate and adopt blended learning approach that enables all **to meet their present learning requirements**.
3. It has been observed through various studies, research works that blended learning method is helpful in **gaining students' active engagement** in teaching-learning process.
4. **Students are motivated** to interact directly with the course content, teachers and their peer groups for enhancing any sort of learning skills and experiences.
5. It enables students to take their own responsibility of learning whereby they are also encouraged to learn various other skills such as **proper time management, collaborative works etc**.
6. It is a **life-long learning approach** where it provides ample scope to the students for experiential learning.
7. Such learning helps students to **improve their skills for managing behavior** in order to resolve practical conflicts arising out of any unfavorable conditions in various educational aspects.
8. It aims to **provide better opportunity for collaborative learning** where students from similar or diverse backgrounds interact and work with each other through online platforms as a learning practice.
9. The usage of blended learning approach has been gradually **accelerating at various levels of educational spheres**. Such type of learning is much flexible and cost-effective and easily accessible.
10. It is **helpful in bridging the gap** that exists between geographical location and accessibility for both teachers and students.

Essential Conditions Required for Implementation of Blended learning in Teacher Education

For successful implementation of blended learning method in teacher education programme, teachers and other stakeholders must give adequate emphasis for proper planning and formation of curriculum frameworks related to meaningful fusion of online and offline learning approach. The conditions

considered prerequisite for implementation of blended learning in teacher education are vividly discussed below.

1. **Provision for effective online mode of learning:** This provides opportunities for greater access to digital educational resources, their proper utilizations, sharing as well as accessing digital libraries, virtual laboratories, multimedia by both the students and teachers.
2. **Utilization of computer-assisted technologies:** The teachers must utilize this to facilitate smooth teaching-learning process, delivering course contents, reconstructing the existing curriculum and techno-pedagogical approaches. This also helps the teachers in developing technologically-mediated new TLMs, creating sound LMS and adopting innovative assessment and evaluation methods through digital settings.
3. **Readiness and awareness for using ICTs:** For using any information and communication technologies or related platforms in teaching-learning process, sufficient awareness and readiness are needed for both the learners and teachers to make the whole learning programme enjoyable and fruitful.
4. **Well-management of educational institutions and concerned authorities:** Implementation of blended learning in teacher education programme demands a suitable and well-planned framework of curriculum so that it may address the present needs and problems of the students in achieving better educational outcomes.
5. **Presence of adequately trained and competent teachers:** It is necessary to employ skilled and experienced teacher to conduct teaching-learning process in blended mode effectively. Trained teachers are generally capable of adopting appropriate pedagogy that aims to meet the educational requirements of the students and enlarges scope of educational opportunities. Hence, IT literacy of the teachers is considered as essential for making the blended learning programme successful.

Drawbacks for implementing Blended Learning Approach in Teacher Education

1. **Lack of Techno-pedagogical skills:** Very often, it can be found that most of the teachers lack sufficient knowledge about information and communication technologies that are necessary for smooth curriculum transaction. Hence, they lack enough confidence in using those innovative techniques for the formulation of teaching-learning materials. Due to this reason, in teacher education, most of the existing teachers prefer to use conventional form of teaching-learning process.
2. **Network Issues:** Another important drawback is problem suffered by both the teachers and students related to network connection. As a result of this problem, it is not possible to conduct online mode of learning successfully.
3. **Lack of adoption of appropriate course content:** The existing teacher education programme needs to be redesigned in order to follow appropriate course content for inclusion of blended learning approach. More time is required to design blended learning courses which appears to be another major challenge in adopting course content.
4. **Lack of proper training of teachers:** It seems to be another major drawback to implement blended learning method in teacher education. Adequate training on ICTs and other computer-assisted technologies must be imparted to the teachers for developing suitable LMS. Teachers are needed to be very familiar with the digital educational resources and tools so that they can integrate them in the teaching-learning process for bringing about valuable results.

5. **Inadequate Planning:** Inappropriate planning such as adoption of improper curriculum, insufficient uses of TLMs, unsuitable content delivery, irrelevant assessment and evaluation methods hampers proper implementation of blended learning approach specially in the field of teacher education.
6. **Insufficient interaction:** It can be observed that blended learning method lowers the level of interaction of students with teachers and their peer-groups. This may hamper their thinking capacity, communication skills and development of other cognitive abilities.
7. **Lack of infrastructure:** For successful implementation of blended learning method in teacher education, adequate infrastructural facilities are required. These include sufficient software technologies and assistive devices, hardware etc which are highly expensive to acquire properly.
8. **Decrease in motivation:** Sometimes both the learners and teachers remain reluctant in using digital learning or blended method of learning. Lack of self-directedness and low motivation negatively effect on the implementation of blended learning approach in an efficient way.
9. **Credibility problem:** Though the technologies used for blended learning method are generally user-friendly but the teachers as well as students sometimes remain unconscious about the authenticity of the digital resources. Such problem may lower the quality of the work and learning process.
10. **Time constraints:** Though the blended learning method is considered to be flexible enough, yet it requires proper time framing as well as management for developing and structuring the online course content.

Prospects of Blended Learning Approach in Teacher Education

1. **Purposeful fusion of face-to-face mode and online mode:** Since blended learning approach incorporates both the face-to-face traditional method and online methods, the students, and the teachers both are able to receive the immediate feedback from this learning approach. This enables them to upgrade their learning experiences.
2. **Improves interaction of students with teachers and peer-groups:** Blended learning method provides various opportunities for students to interact with the teachers as well as their peer groups. Such interaction in the learning process leads to collaborative learning where the students can benefit from both offline and online modes to learn different skills. These are needed for them to participate in learning and social activities.
3. **Creates meaningful scope for students to interact with the course curriculum:** As a result of this, it enables students to improve their learning experiences, creativity, various other life skills. It helps in developing confidence to access, share and judiciously utilize e-learning materials in order to enrich their knowledge base in both theoretical and practical aspects.
4. **Enables students to enhance learning experiences:** Blended mode of learning aims to enhance motivation of the learners in learning. Hence, it improves the learning experiences of the learners that can bring about desirable outcome of the course.
5. **Helpful in initiating and managing virtual classrooms, virtual laboratories and ICT supported teaching- learning process:** Through the proper initiation and management of ICT-supported learning processes, blended learning method in teacher education aims to upgrade various skills related to technologically-mediated teaching-learning practices, leadership capabilities, innovative evaluation and assessment systems, community outreach programmes and other support services for solving immediate problems.

6. **Accessing and utilizing digital educational resources:** Such learning approach motivates learners as well as teachers to access and utilize different types of educational tools and resources properly. This helps them to attain the expected goals and improve their performance in any activities according to their pace and interests.
7. **Provision for online assessment:** Teachers are highly encouraged to upgrade and update their competencies in adopting and using innovative approaches related to online assessment and evaluation system. It enables both the teachers and students to receive their immediate feedback from teaching-learning process at any time.
8. **Active participation in discussions and others:** Blended learning method helps students to acquire various skills and also to apply them for enriching their learning programme. Hence, students gain confidence and are motivated to present their papers and participate in discussions through online settings in an efficient manner.

Conclusion

Blended Learning method appears to be one of the effective approaches that can make efficient curriculum transaction in teaching learning process. Such approach in teacher education is very much required to improve the competence of the teachers in managing online learning activities together with conventional form of learning. It has been observed from various studies and review of related literatures that despite of various shortcomings, blended learning approach can enhance interest and curiosity of the learners and can be an effective method of teaching practice also considering the resources available and the existing curriculum. Hence, the implementation of blended learning approach is very much needed in teacher education programme in order to make the teachers confident and competent enough in using innovative teaching techniques. In teacher education programme, it aims to instill the required techno-pedagogical skills for imparting education effectively as well as for participating in any sort of learning process properly.

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