

BLENDED E-LEARNING: A BEST PRACTICE IN TEACHING LEARNING FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Dr. Manju Gera

Associate Professor, Department of Education, USOL, Panjab University, Chandigarh

ABSTRACT

Presently, the educational structure is in an advanced phase. To deal with the increasing needs of an individual student in the growing challenging world and to provide quality education to them, innovative technologies and up-to-date approaches for teaching learning need to be adopted. However, the conventional face-to-face teaching learning may impede the transformation somewhere as it provides a great deal of required personal experience to the instructional process. Blended e-learning is a latest model that holds the benefits of both the conventional face-to-face instruction and technology supported learning comprising both offline and online learning. It offers an opportunity for the shared learning, constructive learning and computer aided learning. It requires a careful attempt, right mind-set, immense financial resources and extremely enthusiastic educators and learners for its prospering implementation. As it integrates various modes so it is intricate and systematic. It offers innovative elements to the instructional practices and opens up countless opportunities to learn. Both the forms have enormous potential in the teaching-learning processes. Therefore, the need of the hour is to develop such a system that is based on an integrated approach and that incorporates and blends the qualities of both the learning systems. This paper will discuss about the blended e-learning as a best practice in teaching-learning. Moreover, we will also try to represent that how blended e-learning being a best practice helps in enhancing the quality of teaching-learning process.

Keywords: Blended E-Learning, Best Practices, Quality Enhancement.

INTRODUCTION

The educational system at present is in a transition stage. To meet the challenges of expansion and for catering the individuals needs it is trying to adopt new technologies and exploring new paths to reach the goal of quality educational opportunities for all. Purposes such as developing and strengthening critical thinking, creative thinking, self-confidence, human relation and communication, mutual understanding, respect for people, deep learning, self-reliance, problem

solving skills, learning self-direction, interactions, social cooperation (Lindsay, 2004) learning ways, production and evaluation of knowledge, lifelong and independent learning (Fook et.al, 2005) can be achieved better through compound learning. The traditional teaching-learning despite its few shortcomings provides a much needed human touch to the teaching-learning process. The teachers behaviour persuades the budding personality of the students. Only face-to-face interaction meets the affective objectives along with cognitive and psychomotor (Lindsay, 2004). It helps in developing a strong value system that is necessary for proper personality development Traditional approach has its own benefits but it is not free from deficiencies.

BLENDED E-LEARNING

Blended e-learning is the integration of e-learning systems into course design to enhance the teaching and learning experiences for students and teachers by enabling them to engage in ways that would not normally be available in usual environment. To make the students knowledge correlate with the present technological advancement and globalization, to minimize the teaching errors, to improve the quality, to increase students exposure to e-learning supported teaching-learning process, blended e-learning is a good option. Blended e-learning provides new dimension to teaching-learning process, introduces students to the wide pool of knowledge and opens before them innumerable opportunities to learn. All types of learners can be benefited by this mode of teaching. We have to design such a system that is based on an integrated approach, a system that incorporates the main features of both traditional approach of teaching and e-learning systems supported teaching. The demand of today is an approach that blends the advantages of both the modes for the student's learning i.e. blended e-learning (Friesen, 2012).

Blended e-learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction (Bonk and Graham, 2006). Blended learning is expressed as a learning advancement as it unites the diverse delivery modes and styles of learning. Recently there has been an increasing movement toward blending e-learning and face-to-face activities with students participating in collaborative learning and interaction with their instructors and classmates. This is called blended e-learning or blended e-learning system (Graham, 2006; Singh, 2003). It enables the students to achieve more while enjoying the learning. In a study conducted on student's views on blended e-learning environment, the results illustrated that the students benefited from taking part in the blended e-learning as their achievement levels increased and participation in discussion influenced their views about blended e-learning environment. Face-to-face interaction in blended e-learning had the maximum score. It was revealed that interaction and communication are imperative for the success of on-line learning (Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2006). It has been highlighted that blended e-learning enables the learner to become more engaged in the learning process (Wang, Shen, Novak and Pan, 2009). In addition to the opportunity to make use

student's habit of using e-learning to boost their learning, it was stated that blended e-learning appears to advance student's learning experience by increasing their capacity to reflect (Cooner, 2010). The teachers need to facilitate their students with the best learning approach that works for them. The present day students are millennials, whose learning preferences tend towards teamwork, experiential activities, structure and the use of technology. Multitasking, goal orientation, positive attitudes and a collaborative style are their strong points (Oblinger, 2003). Therefore, blended e-learning has been considered as the best approach that incorporates both the modes i.e. face-to-face teaching-learning and e-learning system supported teaching-learning to give direct and indirect instruction, form collaborative learning and encourage computer assisted learning.

BLENDED E-LEARNING – A BEST PRACTICE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Various educational institutions have realized that blended e-learning is the way forward. Many of them have even started their version of blended e-learning as they have considered it a best practice in teaching-learning process. The reasons that have made blended e-learning a best practice in teaching-learning are as follows -

- **Sufficient Interaction Time** - There is greater possibility of interaction in traditional classroom teaching as the students get much time it interact with their classmates and teachers. Hence, they will get persuaded by their personality, behaviour and value system. Thereby, both are able to get immediate feedback that in turns is favourable for teaching-learning process (Bonk & Graham, 2006).
- **Online Teaching-Learning Methods** - There are various methods in blended e-learning that can be used for online teaching-learning. For Example - Videos related to the content, sharing on blogs and visiting e-books provide new and updated perspectives to the content. A ipilot study was conducted on online teaching methods in secondary schools, which reported that it improves practices in both virtual and face-to-face settings (Shinde & Deshmukh, 2012).
- **Peer Group Interaction** - Inside the school campus, students learn by formal means and they also learn informally when they interact with their peer groups. Many needed life skills and social values are practised in non-formal interaction with their peer groups either face-to-face or online.
- **Group Discussion and Exchange of Ideas** - Blended e-learning provides interaction between teachers and students but well-designed strategies give students to undergo discussions with their classmates on different aspects of the course and exchange ideas.

- **Accessing E-library** - In traditional mode students get access to school library that is limited but digital library gives them access to different books related to their topic and on diversified areas. This widens their outlook and enriches their knowledge.
- **Virtual Classroom** - The virtual classroom provides students the option to learn anywhere and anytime. The students can be the part of a virtual classroom meeting with his/her co-students and teacher in cyber space irrespective of the geographical boundaries.
- **Online Assessment** - Immediate feedback is a key factor in learning as it motivates the learner and is based on principles of readiness. Online assessment helps to make evaluation system more formative, transparent and more fast. It becomes more reliable and objective.
- **E-tuitions** - Some students do not get benefit from classroom teaching as they continuously require personal guidance and complete attention. Such students may choose the option of e-tuition that is meeting a private tutor and getting personal guidance in cyber space via video conferencing.
- **Accessing and Maintaining Educational Blogs** - The students get lesser chances for cherishing their creativity in traditional classrooms because of rigid time table but educational blogs provide students a platform to show their creativity and can get feedback also.
- **Webinars** - Webinar means that the students participate in seminars in different topics relevant to them via internet connection. All the participants are united through idifferent software's like Skype, Google talk etc. to present their paper and participate in the discussions through video conferencing.
- **Viewing Expert Lectures on YouTube** - The blended e-learning provides student to gain advantage of the experts of the course content they are studying as they can easily watch the different lectures by renowned experts from different fields available on the you tube.
- **Online Learning through Videos and Audios** - Various recordings, animated videos are available that explain various concepts very easily and in interesting way that represent reality and connection with life.
- **Virtual Laboratories** - It can be used in professional courses where the laboratory work is very crucial and sometimes the cost of establishing is not feasible then in such cases students can access virtual laboratories to learn need skills by working in this virtual laboratory.

BLENDED E-LEARNING AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Implementation of blended e-learning needs a full dedication on the part of educational authorities from top to bottom of the educational hierarchy. For preparing educational institutes for blended e-learning, we need to enhance educational funds. Implementing blended e-learning is not an easy task. It requires certain fundamental preparations in all the elements of teaching-learning process i.e. teacher, student, content designing and infrastructure. The quality can be

enhanced in teaching learning processes following the requirements for implementing blended e-learning that are as follows (Bonk & Graham, 2006) -

- **Well Trained Teachers** - Teachers should be well acquainted with the concept of blended e-learning, fully trained and skilled. They should be trained technologies used educational purposes.
- **Teachers with Scientific Attitude** - It is very important that teachers should have good observation skill, optimism and problem solving skill. Scientific attitude will help them to deal positively with failures while working on this innovative concept.
- **Wider Outlook and Positive Approach of Teachers** - Blended e-learning need teachers having a wider outlook, flexible, readiness to accept changes, innovation and dynamicity.
- **Facilities and Flexibility** - For blended e-learning schools should have well-furnished computer laboratory with sufficient number of computes, internet facility, flexible system in terms of time table and examinations.
- **Students Access to Internet at Home** - In addition to school having fully ICT friendly campus students should have basic hardware support to learn online and offline at their residence also.
- **Parents Awareness** - The parents should be made well aware of this innovative approach to teaching so that they can support their wards for the blended e-learning.
- **Evaluation** - The school authorities should be ready to completely implement continuous internal assessment and other tools of formative evaluation as summative evaluation is not supported in the blended e-learning.

The right type of attitudes towards this new concept among parents, community, teachers and students can be developed through awareness programmes, seminars, discussion forums (Epic, 2009). These can be utilized to make people aware about the benefits of blended e-learning so that a right mind set is prepared for its implementation. Mass media can well be utilized for this purpose. Teacher training programmes both in-service and pre-service have to be reoriented to prepare teachers for blended e-learning approach. The finance and efforts that are put in for various projects to meet education for all should be re-directed for blended e-learning so that both finance and efforts can be fruitfully utilized (Epic, 2009).

CONCLUSION

In nutshell, we can say that blended e-learning combines the advantages of traditional and online learning. To some extent, it is the solution to problems prevailing in our educational system. The implementation of blended e-learning develops reflection; collaboration and autonomy on the part of teachers and students thereby would lead to quality in education and continuous self-

development. Blended e-learning activates the role of student and teachers, increases their positivity in teaching-learning and develops self-learning skills which is essential to the planning of teaching-learning processes. The educational institutions must take initiative to blend the teaching-learning practices and should provide necessary training to teachers about the latest technology and e-learning systems. It will develop the required skills and expertise on the part of teachers as these are essential for fulfilling the educational purposes in today's time. The teachers must be enthusiastic to learn new and innovative technologies so as to use them in teaching-learning processes. The educational institutions at all levels of education should empower the area of teaching-learning through blended e-learning. However, current trends of practices indicate that the future of blended e-learning will have a strong impact on quality enhancement of teaching-learning in educational institutions. As a consequence, it is very urgent to meet the challenges of blended e-learning implementation. Its successful implementation will bring wide range of educational reforms. If implemented in well-planned, organised way, it can become the future of our educational system. It is in our own benefit that steps for adapting blended e-learning as a best practice in teaching learning for quality enhancement are soon initiated.

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