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Implementation of Blended Learning in Teacher Education Program in India

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Abstract

India is a country of millions, and in order to keep up with global advances, quality education for its population is required. Teachers are the most important medium to achieve this quality education. The national and educational development of our country is directly connected to the type of training given to our prospective teachers. Unfortunately, the programs of teacher education in India have severe quality issues. The Indian education system has relied on traditional ideas and methodologies of teaching from a long time, but now it is trying to adopt new technologies and explore new paths. Hence, it becomes important that, as part of teacher education, adequate focus is given on enabling the prospective teachers in adopting and adapting digital technologies and the most effective way of doing this, is through blended learning. This paper analyzes the concept, models and benefits of blended learning. The paper also suggests some ways to adopt blended learning model in Indian teacher education system. The result of this study can be used to reflect on the necessities of including blended learning in teacher education programs and assisting in the development of a better education system.

Keywords: Teacher education, blended learning, NEP (2020)

Introduction

Education is one of the significant factors instrumental to the development of a country. Moreover, it allows for critical reflection on the social, economic, cultural, moral, and spiritual issues confronting humanity (Solanki, 2019) ^[17]. To accomplish this educational purposes, either for a nation or humanity by large, teachers serve as an important medium. Therefore, the quality of teacher education in a country is supposed to be of prime importance for the success of both the nation and education. Unfortunately, the programs of teacher education in India have been suffering from several quality issues. For instance, these programs do not provide enough opportunities to the aspirant learners to develop fundamental teaching skills. The training that they get during internship and/or practice teaching does not suffice them for becoming good teacher. Somewhere, the training lacks in developing abilities to cope up with the increasing technological demands in empowering themselves as a teacher as well as to be able to face the classroom situations successfully. This is the reason that the professionals trained in teacher education, are frequently being questioned about their professional qualifications and the credibility of the degrees they have earned.

Till now the Indian education system has relied on traditional ideas and methodologies of teaching. Recently, the introduction of the Internet and technological growth has revolutionized the entire world including the education system and specifically the teacher education program all over the world. Through and through the educators are trying to incorporate new changes in the system. New technologies are being adopted and new paths being forged in order to achieve the goal of providing quality education for all.

Given the emerging importance of leveraging technology for teaching and learning, the National Education Policy-2020 has recommended the use of blended models of learning from school education to higher education. The spread of COVID pandemic has also increased the need for the use of digital technologies in educational institutions. Hence, it becomes all the more important that, as part of teacher education, adequate focus is given on enabling the teachers in adopting and adapting digital technologies in their classrooms.

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This will surely equip them with the skills needed to access digital content as well as to create digital resources and use them in their teaching.

Objectives of the research

- To understand and describe the meaning of Blended learning and Teacher education in India.
- To understand the needs of using blended learning in teacher education in India.
- To understand the major consideration before implementation of Blended learning in Teacher education program in India.

Method and Procedure

This study relies on information obtained from primary and secondary sources to compile its findings. The different sources of information include research papers, journals, articles, websites, blogs, government documents and reports of various commissions.

Meaning of Blended Learning

Blended learning refers to a method of teaching in which students attend traditional in-person classes supported by technology, and utilize both offline and online materials. ("What is Blended Learning", 2022). It is also referred to as hybrid education. It combines digital media and technology with conventional instructor-led classroom activities to allow flexibility in learning mode, so as to reshape the educational experiences of students. (Defining Blended Learning - What...2019).

Graham (2006) ^[4], claims that "*Blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction*". Whereas, Sharma and Sarkar (2020) ^[16], are of the view that Blended learning is an innovative teaching strategy which includes presence of both physical resources and e-resources at a time for proper utilization of time; it meets the individual need of the child and also helps to draw out the best learning outcomes.

Modes of Blended Learning

The University Grants Commission, in its concept note on Blended Learning, lists seven different blended learning arrangements

1. **Blended face to face class:** It is classroom-based, although significant amount of the time is spent online.
2. **Blended online class:** The class is largely online, however, there are in-person lectures and laboratories.
3. **The flipped classroom:** Students watch a lecture video online and complete group work, projects, and other exercises in class.
4. **The rotation model:** Students rotate between different learning modalities within a course, such as full-class instruction, group projects, tutoring, and assignments.
5. **The self-blend model:** Students select one or more completely online courses to supplement their traditional courses.
6. **The Blended MOOC:** Blended MOOCs use in-person class meetings to enhance an online course. Students access MOOC materials outside of class and then attend class for discussions or activities.
7. **Flexible-mode courses:** Provides all the courses in multiple options i.e. face to face and online modes. And the students choose how to complete their course.

Meaning of teacher education

Teaching is a profession and the process of professional preparation of teachers is known as teacher education. This process demands multidisciplinary viewpoints and knowledge, formation of values and their dispositions and development of practice under the best mentors. It encompasses all of the formal and non-formal experiences and activities that aid in preparing people to take on the responsibilities of a member of the teaching profession and to perform his tasks more effectively. According to NCTE it is a program of education, research and training of persons to teach from pre-primary to higher education level.

Teacher education programs in India

The NCTE recognizes teacher education programs from pre-primary to higher education levels. Therefore, it includes diploma in pre-school education, diploma, undergraduate degrees and postgraduate degrees in elementary education, secondary education and physical education. Some of these courses are available in open and distance mode too. Apart from these, various integrated programs are available. In addition, courses for a diploma in the performing and visual arts are also available.

Need of Blended Learning in Teacher education in India

Teaching as a profession entails a great deal of responsibility on the teachers. The Secondary Education Commission (1952-1953) rightly stated, "We are convinced that the most important factor in the contemplated educational reconstruction is the teacher- his personal qualities, his educational qualifications, his professional training and the place that he occupies in the school as well as in the community". According to the Education Commission (1964-66), "The destiny of India is shaped in her classrooms". Therefore, the training for this profession ought to be special and distinct from other fields. It is needed to make "E-Learning" an integral part of every teacher's formal training program. The reasons for implementing blended learning in teacher education are given below:

- The only program that understands the art and science of enhancing learning outcomes is teacher education. It has to be updated to reflect the most recent innovations so that students can benefit from the best education possible.
- This program encompasses the what, why and how of education (Mukhopadhyay, 2008) ^[11]. Thus, it recognizes the need of infusing the most recent technologies. It requires physical engagement between students and teachers too. Blended learning is best option for giving the benefit of both.
- As suggested by the National Curricular Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE), there is need for Continuous Professional Development of teachers. This can be done by adding blended learning to the teacher education courses.
- Blended learning also aligns with the NCERT, National ICT curriculum for teachers, which recommends teachers to take structured courses for technology learning and technology-integrated teaching through Open educational resources.
- Teacher education institutions have been under pressure to evaluate and change their programs as a result of rising curricular and professional demands. The

advantages of blended learning have been seen by many as a potential answer to the ever-growing requirement for course content and competence.

- The blended learning approach can help teacher educators to bridge the gap between theory and practice by emphasizing pedagogy based learning activities.
- Blended learning can be used as a potential way to improve the quality of teacher education and provide solutions to issues with its funding for commercialization, quality concerns and lack of government funding have degraded the quality of teacher education in India (Pratap, 2022) ^[15].
- Teacher training in India does not practice what it preaches. It continues to practice the teacher centric instruction model while preaching of student centric activities. The implementation of blended model can be used as a method of students centered learning. (Mukhopadhyay, 2008) ^[11].
- The blended mode of learning can also enhance the methods of evaluation. The use of technology can upgrade the techniques of testing, measurement and evaluation.

Considerations prior to implementing blended learning in Teacher education in India

- The online learning environments are different from face-to-face classroom situations. In blended learning, social interaction, peer collaboration, feedback and learning experiences are different, so the program designers should incorporate these basic concepts in teacher education program rationally and logically.
- In teacher education programs, blended learning should be put to use in more interesting and engaging forms than other higher education programs in order to complement face-to-face learning.
- The blended courses in teacher education must be designed in a manner to support the individual learning styles of students, so as to fulfil the growing curricular needs of individuals.
- Program developers should also try to link online learning with fieldwork. For better understanding of the curriculum, Collaborative learning and problem-based learning should be made a part of blended curriculum.
- Framing of ordinances in the online environment should be taken care of while designing blended courses for teacher education, for the reason that online learning raises a number of issues, such as cyberbullying, cyber stalking, and cyber harassment.

Benefits of Blended learning in teacher education: Kennedy E (2021) ^[7] identifies three major benefits of incorporating blended learning in teacher education

1. **Flexibility:** Blended learning gives trainee teachers more freedom than face-to-face classes as the time and location boundaries are decreased. Flexible attendance allows them to learn in their own style.
2. **Cost effectiveness:** Cost savings arise from various points in the delivery cycle of blended learning. Trainees can do their observation work from online classes. It is also cost effective in terms of scalability, breadth, time, value and infrastructure.
3. **Collaboration:** Blended learning can create opportunities for communication, collaboration and community among trainee teachers. Online presence as

part of a group project can help in building relationships with each other.

Current status of blended learning in teacher education in India

In India, ICT and related technology have been a part of teacher education for about a decade and a half. The NCTE in its annual report of 2008-2009, documents that it collaborated with Intel teach and signed a MoU in 2006 for jointly providing professional and technical programs to teacher educators in all teacher education institution in the country. The technologies such as internet, electronic devices, multimedia etc. have been a part of the curriculum and syllabus of the teacher education programs, yet they have failed to yield the desired results. Except for few centrally funded universities, Teacher education institutions have failed to blend these technologies with daily classroom practices and other components of the program.

The Departments of Education of various central universities, have ICT and Computer Labs but neither the teaching staff nor the students make enough use of the available resources rather they misuse them. This is the condition of technology utilization with centrally funded universities and the situation can be extremely severe in the private institutions in India. By combining ICT with traditional classroom pedagogical approaches and the abovementioned reforms, blended teaching and learning can be seen as the second generation of ICT use.

The views of NEP (2020) on incorporating blended learning in teacher education program in India

India is trying to evolve into an information rich society. Integration of technology in the field of education has become like mandatory now, in all educational institutions right from the level of pre-primary to higher education. The NEP-2020 considers this fact. Therefore, one of the major ideas guiding the education system (according to this Policy), is wide use of technology in teaching & learning. NEP recommended to integrate quality online courses into curricula of HEIs and preferred to use blended mode. It suggested that colleges and universities providing the 4-year integrated B.Ed. degree should adopt blended mode for students in hard-to-reach areas, as well as for practicing teachers who needs professional development. It also recommended to make arrangements for using blended learning in mentoring and practice teaching program in teacher education.

Conclusion

In the words of famous educationist and philosopher John Dewey "*If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow*". Therefore, it is needed that we bring our educational practices up-to-date, and blended learning is a suitable method for that. The findings of this paper show the effectiveness of blended learning in teacher education as well as the prerequisites for obtaining the advantages of this approach.

Various studies show that the incorporation of blended learning in the classroom can be helpful in improving the quality of education, benefiting both students and teachers because it gives them opportunities to acquire more skills, study independently and with more flexibility (Jachin, 2017) ^[5]. Similarly, it can benefit prospective teachers by educating them to use variety of ICTs and to identify their

students' interests, in order to promote an engaging learning environment, both online and offline (Duhaney, 2012) [2]. However, the integration of blended learning in teacher education cannot be completely recognized until its technologies are used throughout the curriculum as a central component of the teacher preparation programs. Blended learning has the potential to improve teacher education in India, if it is implemented on the basis of need and practicality. On the other hand, teachers and students are the primary human factors involved in its adoption. Technology itself does not provide solutions to various issues rather it is the creativity, cooperation, critical thinking, empathy, and leadership of humans that harness the technologies to emerge as life-changing innovations. Therefore, enough attention must be paid to the needs, inclinations, beliefs, and aspirations of the humans involved.

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