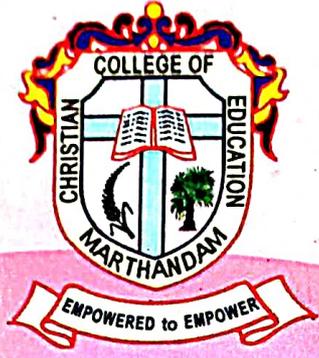# TEACHER-EDUCATION: MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE NEW GENERATION

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BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH TO REDESIGN TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Improving teacher quality is the key ingredient for improving our schools. A web –based platform integrated into a teacher education program offers pre-service teachers more opportunities to experience authentic teaching practice, peers' interaction to form on-line special interest groups and utilize multi-media resources to enhance professional knowledge and skills. ICT can prepare trainee teachers to be well-informed, competent, enriched and thinking professionals by making instructional processes interesting and to establish a learning environment that can effectively nourish the teaching competence of pre-service teachers to cope with the modern teaching demands.

Virtual learning environments makes teacher training a formalized, research-rich, innovative environment of experiences and skills. Teacher education is evolving as a result of the shift towards blended and online training. The move towards blended learning is an extremely important development that is currently taking place in education and one of the trends to emerge in the knowledge delivery industry. . A Blended Learning approach is one, which in most cases, will enhance and extend the learning opportunities for our 21st Century learners. Blended learning is a mix of classroom and online learning that includes some of the conveniences of online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact. BL courses designed from constructivist principles should be relevant, interactive, project-based, and collaborative, while providing learners with some control over their learning.

Introduction

ICT integrated teacher education is more committed to maintain global partnership and leadership in a knowledge-based society. Online learning is an innovation effective in improving student achievement and educational outcomes for the new generation. ICT can facilitate not only delivery of instruction, but also learning process itself, hence teacher training institutions worldwide are undergoing a rapid change in the structure, content of their training and delivery methods of their courses. Many countries are training new teachers in Colleges of Education to teach online to reach more students.

Digital technologies like e-learning can create new learning environments by using e-media for delivery of learning material, supplement libraries, use simulations, discussion areas, assessment and feedback. The emergence of e-learning which uses the network technologies to create, foster, deliver and facilitate learning, anywhere anytime is noteworthy. It is a shift from traditional education to ICT-based personalised, flexible, individual, self-organised, collaborative learning based on a community of learners, teachers, facilitators, experts etc.

The move towards blended learning is an extremely important development which is an application of internet in education and an evolution of e-learning. It refers to a mixing of different learning environments combining traditional face-to-face classroom methods with more computer-mediated activities creating a more integrated approach. While face-to-face learning is referred to as synchronous, on-line learning is termed asynchronous. It includes some of the convenience of online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact. Students in on-line learning complete their assignments on the internet, post their questions and/ or their comments on a discussion forum or electronic board, and meet with their instructor and peers in an internet chat room.

Online community development in hybrid-type courses combine features of online distance education with traditional classroom-based

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learning as in blended learning. Here, a variety of technological tools such as discussion boards, videoconferencing, virtual whiteboards chats, wikis, and blogs can be implemented to facilitate discussion and interaction leading to the development of community and promotion of learning.

To foster collaboration, reflection, critical thinking and decision making skills, e-learning tools can be integrated into teacher education Colleges of Education has to redefine teacher education by adopting standards and preparing teachers for online teaching and virtual learning. New models of teacher education are evolving as a result of the strong demand to integrate online teaching requirements into teacher development.

ICT induced changes in teacher education practices

- Development of computer based skills and integrating them with subjects based on Constructivism,
- Exposure to new ways of learning in their subject
- Apply ICT in practical aspects like developing lessons, assignments etc.
- competency and performance based curricula,
- knowledge construction,
- information literacy
- off-campus delivery through technology facilitated learning participation.
- allows personalized learning, developing e-skills and meta-cognitive skills
- Recorded video to improve the quality of teacher training.

Web-based environment can bring innovation to conventional teacher education programs. ICT can prepare trainee teachers to be well-informed, competent, enriched and thinking professionals by making instructional processes interesting and to establish a learning environment that can effectively nourish the teaching competence of pre-service teachers to cope with the modern teaching demands. The

most obvious benefit for learners is that Blended Learning cou
offer much greater flexibility. Other advantages are that they c
select materials which meet their own interests and needs, facilita
learning and cater to different learning styles.

Learning by BL can also reduce travel costs and time spent o
travel. Although learners have less face-to-face contact with lecture
and fellow students, there are a number of ways to foster communicatio
and group work. Trainees will learn valuable computer and interne
skills which will be transferable to their personal and professional live
such as blogging, Skype and use of VLEs such as Moodle and Blackboar

BL can also increase learners' self-knowledge and self
confidence and encourage trainees to take responsibility for their ow
learning. Advantages for the tutor involve reduced classroom time
and a more flexible way of working as they can choose to mar
assignments and do administrative work at a time that is convenien
to them. They also have a much greater choice of methods o
disseminating information. Teaching practice observations can be don
by video or in person followed by review and reflections.

Challenges involved in delivering courses via BL

- Many trainers feel that online or computer-based learning will lead to a decrease in the quality of teaching and learning as classroom interaction is less.
- Teachers' roles will change than that they will disappear.
- Difficult to build and sustain effective working relationships with and among trainees.
- It can also be very hard to motivate learners with poor study habits or poor time management.
- All trainees may not communicate through on-line tools

Certain Methods of Delivering Blended Instruction

Primary mode of instruction:- face to face classroom/ workshop sessions. Online materials or learning resources are made available as background material.

Balanced mode:- Online materials integrated with classroom instruction used as required 'before and after resources' and are featured in classroom discussions. eg. Using screen shots to make concrete links or to motivate the learners.

Classroom and online learning coupled with competency development plans:- Supplemented by on the job coaching or support to fulfill practical job related assignments by integrating theory and practice.

Components of Blended Learning

Synchronous physical/face-to-face components- Face to face tutoring, coaching sessions, classroom , workshops, conferences, meetings etc.

Synchronous Electronic components- Internet conferencing, audio conferencing, live video conferencing, .virtual online classroom, instant messaging etc.

Asynchronous Components- On-line self paced Learning content (web pages), E-mail, Web/Computer based instruction, books, articles, CD-ROM, audio(disc/tape), video, white papers etc

Types of Blended Learning Environments

- full provision of module related documents in electronic format;
- regular formative assessment with feedback,
- opportunities to learn from each other collaboratively,
- electronic personal development planning,
- the opportunity to submit all appropriate summative assessments electronically,
- all face to face learning is interactive,

Design of the course

The core components of the courses are divided into those to be delivered in the face-to-face presence of the teacher; those that could be directed and guided by the teacher but not have the teacher present; and, those that the students would work on independently. The online

learning environment for each individual course contains a combination of electronic resources that form the static content and a set of core communications tools like asynchronous discussion forums, synchronous text chat facility, voice chat facility or email facility that enable and accommodate the dynamic content of the course in the form of a variety of communicative interactions .

Advantages of Blended Learning

- Use of online tools and resources in classroom instruction
- Students are given the power to choose the means of communication most suitable to them — storybook, PowerPoint, drawing, web pages, podcasts, etc.
- Fosters diverse learning styles, independent learning and self directed learning skills.
- Provides pedagogical richness, flexibility, access to knowledge, social interaction, ease of revision and cost effectiveness.
- It extends teaching and learning beyond the classroom walls, developing critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration and global awareness.
- Learners have 24/7 access to all learning content, and to ensure equality of access;
- gauge their progress against the learning outcomes, to receive supporting feedback on this progress, and for staff to have information on student progress;
- participate in, and engage with interactive learning opportunities in her or his face-to-face learning sessions.
- use asynchronous collaborative learning which extends the face to face learning, creating supportive learning networks, managed by learners at a time and place best suited to their needs;
- understand better her or his learning process, act on feedback, so as to become more effective and successful, as well as collecting evidence on achievement to enhance our learners employability;

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- save time and paper, and provide feedback quickly to each learner.

Blended models for teacher training

Each module begins with online learning and exercises via closed access website. This model is strongly differentiated as trainees are required to work through the materials that are relevant or necessary to them and then post assignments to get feedback from peers and tutors via the website. Following this, they are required to attend a workshop aimed at encouraging critical thinking and analysis of the learnt materials. They then have follow-up activities to complete after the workshop. Their completed assignments are uploaded to a blog where they can only be seen by the trainee and their tutor. Trainees are expected to contribute to discussion groups and also to web-blogs which are used to encourage trainees to reflect on various aspects of teaching and learning. More difficult work is covered in the face-to-face sessions. Communication is also done by means of the website, email and phone.

Means of communication and methodology that could be used:

1. Virtual Learning Environments.

2. Blogs. -to communicate with trainees and to monitor their progress and give feedback.

3. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Ning and Multiply as a means of disseminating information and encouraging communication

4. Skype to conduct group work or role play.

Course materials can be uploaded in order to give trainees greater access to course resources. Other resources to support their studies can be internet links to articles. Videos of people teaching can be uploaded for trainees to watch and comment on.. Applications like Moodle and Facebook are used extensively by trainers to try and encourage greater involvement. Tutors can upload links from Word and PowerPoint as well as Internet links, and can set and grade assignments.

Conclusion

The teacher education system empowered by ICT-driv infrastructure can have a great opportunity to ensure acaden excellence, quality instruction and leadership in a knowledge-bas society. The educational potential of blended learning to transfor the present isolated classrooms into rich, student focused, interacti knowledge environments is gaining importance. Technology developing at an incredible pace and has completely changed the wc we work and communicate. Teacher educators must keep up wi these changes to provide the skills and knowledge needed by the ne generation teacher trainees.

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Veb resources.