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TEACHER-EDUCATION: MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE NEW GENERATION

(A Peer-reviewed Research Papers of
the Fourth National Conference of Teacher Educators)



Christian College of Education
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Kanniyakumari Academy of Arts and Sciences
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SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH VLE - A PANACEA FOR QUALITY TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Virtual Learning Environment offers opportunities to enhance soft skills through the experience in virtual environment. It is now used as a means to acquire basic and complex soft skills. It provides experimental and active learning. This encourages participation, thereby encouraging motivation. The present paper explores the scope Virtual learning environment in developing soft skills which naturally enhances quality teaching.

Soft Skills

Soft Skills is a sociological term relating to persons "EQ". It is the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that characterize relationships with other people. Soft Skills complement hard skills which are the occupational requirements of a job and many other life related activities.

Soft Skills are personal attributes that enhances an individual's interactions, job performance and career prospects. A person's soft skill is an important part of their individual contribution to the success of an organization and there by their life success. Soft skills are behavioral competencies. They are also known as Interpersonal skills, or people skills. They include proficiencies such as communication skills, conflict resolution and negotiation, personal effectiveness, create problem solving, team building, influencing skills and selling skills to name a few.

Virtual Learning Environment

A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) or learning platform is an education system based on the web that models conventional real world education by providing equivalent virtual access to classes, class content, tests, homework, grades, assessments and other external resources. It is also a social space where students and teachers can interact through threaded discussions. It typically uses Web2.0 tools for 2-way interaction and includes a content management system.

A Virtual Learning Environment can also include students and teacher 'meeting' online through a synchronous web-based application. The teacher is also required to present lessons through video, power point or chatting. The students are able to talk with other students and the teacher as well as other students collaborate with each other, answer questions or pose questions. They can use the tools available through the application to virtually raise their hand send messages or answer questions on the screen given by the teacher.

Virtual Learning Environment is an online learning environment which supports both real time interaction with others and access to learning materials. The Virtual Learning Environment is used for teaching, learning with the use of the internet. Learners and instructors use the World Wide Web (WWW) and video conferencing for the collaborative development, present their design project, deliver learning materials online, use specially developed CAL materials and serve as a bulletin board system for student's questions. They also utilize new technologies such as email, discussion lists and Internet based resources to supplement the more traditional telephone, Fax and letter help services. Thus Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is not only used to share experiences across the country but also to integrate several resources using the new information and communication technologies to support new pedagogical approaches for learners. It supports collaborative learning, heterogeneous grouping, problem solving and higher order thinking skills.

Important features of Virtual Learning Environment

Virtual Learning Environment has some interesting features that will enhance learner's learning experience.

- Its library has a collection of reference including many full text books and articles.
- Another important feature of Virtual Learning Environment is 'Campus Clubs' which are open to all members. The learner can create a club whose membership is controlled by him or his organization and use it to share information with a group of people sharing a common interest.
- Virtual Learning Environment is an information system based on new information and communication technologies.
- Virtual Learning Environment can work as a virtual extension of ordinary life and academic activity. The concept of Virtual Learning Environment not focuses on individualism and the independent initiative to study.
- In addition to Virtual Learning Environment the same kind of learning environment employs telemetric by the terms 'Electronic Education', 'Electronic Class Room (ECR)', 'Electronic College', 'Electronic School', 'Online Education', 'Computer-Assisted Teleconferencing (CAT)'.

Tools in Virtual Learning Environment

Various telemetric media and programs are used in Virtual Learning Environment. Its basis is formed by the e-mail connections between inter-actors, which also enables their personal communication. E-mail connections can be supplemented with mailing lists. The essential tool of the virtual learning is, however the computer conference, which is usually a part of larger conference or message transmitting system. Due to advanced information and communication technologies, Virtual Learning Environment can also utilize other recent developments such as various news groups and hypertext-based programs. In addition to e-mail, it offers computers conferences, telephones and telefax .

The media used in virtual learning environment will probably include various video and audio conference system, such as videophones and satellite communications.

Functions of Virtual Learning Environment in developing soft skills

- The Virtual Learning Environment provides learning resources to develop soft skills.
- The Virtual Learning Environment is a community of learners who are interested in developing the essential life skills.
- The Virtual Learning Environment is a Student 'Advisor' and helps in enhancing the soft skills..
- The Virtual Learning Environment provides 'information' as to the ways in developing soft skills.
- It helps for assignment so that one may work out tasks of soft skills.
- It is a great tutor support.

Advantages of Virtual Learning Environment for soft skills enhancement

- 1) It lets people without being in close proximity either spatially or temporarily.
- 2) It can develop a sense of community.
- 3) In Virtual Learning Environment online discussion groups or forums can accommodate many more individuals than offline meeting rooms can accommodate so that one develops in soft skills acquisition.
- 4) It increases motivation and encourages learners progress.
- 5) People can explore new relationships or even new identities online, they are not constrained by their physical appearance or offline identity.

Boons of Virtual Learning Environment in developing soft skills

Virtual Learning Environment offers opportunities to enhances

the soft skills through the experience in virtual environment. It is now used as a means to acquire basic and complex soft skills. It provides experimental and active learning. This encourages participation, thereby encouraging motivation.

Virtual Learning Environment relies on the possibility of creating significant first hand experiences of knowledge of the soft skills to be trained. The virtual learning experiences will be organized in such a way that the experiences seem real and the students would feel emotionally and cognitively present in the situation. The virtual experiences hence can be considered as a key feature to enhance soft skills as it ensures the transferring of the soft skills from the virtual learning contexts to the real life ones.

Virtual Learning Environment is a new kind of learning tool which is highly effective and useful to the training of different soft skills like critical thinking skills, motivational skills, decision making skills, communication skills, leadership skill etc. The Virtual Learning Environment improves soft skills which could be applied in real life situation.

The teachers are the builders of the future society. They are embedded with the responsibility of carving the future citizens who are brave enough to face the realities of the world boldly and to win in life. So it is high time to recognize the importance of soft skills training for teachers. As a root level realization we have to start it from teacher training centers itself. In this technologically bombasted world that we are living in, it is highly opted to depend on virtual learning environment so that one can learn the skills at their own pace. Hence it can be concluded that virtual learning environment is a boon of the technology in providing training to soft skills and bringing out quality in teaching.

Conclusion

The twentieth century has seen a remarkable expansion in student enrolment numbers in higher education which creates greater

challenges for institutions. Higher education institutions have invested in learning technologies, so expectations increase for traditional learning and teaching systems to adapt and change. VLEs are the most common ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) technology that is used world-wide nowadays to support traditional learning in higher education institutions. Virtual Learning Environment is an online learning environment that provides a globally accessible learning resources, supporting the characteristics of the conventional class room. However, without effective implementation that addresses the users' needs and requirements, failure could be expected. Also it can not entirely substitute the conventional methods as there are numerous factors that affect their execution such as psychological, sociological and cultural impacts.

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