From Traditional to Transformed: The Evolving Role of Teachers in Blended Learning

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Abstract

"Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning"- Paulo Freire

In the digital era Education is one of the areas that are experiencing remarkable changes. In the last few years, the advancement of new technologies filled the gap between traditional learning to online learning. Blended learning has emerged as a transformative approach to education, combining the best of traditional face–to–face instruction with online learning tools and resources. After COVID-19 Educators are working harder than ever to tackle some of the most pressing issues that have ever faced in the education system. Online and blended learning are among the fastest-growing trends in education today. It offers an alternative way to involve teachers and students with a remarkable array of learning experiences. The role of teachers is rapidly evolving in so many waysmore difficult than when learning took place only in person. This study delves into the changing role of teachers in the blended learning environment. The researcher also examines the pedagogical shifts and implications. This study also aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations for teachers in designing and implementing effective blended learning experiences.The research method used for the study is descriptive type.The data has been collected from multiple sources of evidence, in addition to books, journals, articles, blogs, websites and newspapers.

Keywords

Blended learning, Traditional learning, Digital era, Pedagogical shifts.

Introduction

Virtual learning presents an effective approach to education and has opened new avenues for teachers to make a positive difference in students' lives (Grace, 2021.The demand for transforming the teaching landscape has led to the adoption of alternative pedagogical techniques, such as blended learning. Blended learning is characterized by the integration of interactive technology into traditional classroom settings, serving as a midpoint between in-person teaching and fully online learning. This approach offers greater flexibility to tailor the learning experience to students' needs and encourages the utilization of multiple learning styles.Blended learning fosters the development of a stronger cognitive connection in students, enhancing their receptiveness to learning. Additionally, it provides a viable solution for overcoming geographical and time constraints through its adaptive framework.

It is important to understand that blended learning is not simply adding technology to the classroom. Rather, it has to be integrated into everyday teaching, thereby emphasizing on rethinking the current pedagogical approach. The study intends to explore and dive into key issues that impact students, teachers, and institutions of Higher Education.

Objectives of the Study

a) Clearing the misconception surrounding the role of teacher in the Blended learning environment.
b) Re-thinking the role of teacher in the Blended learning environment.
c) Skills and prerequisites necessary for fulfilling their role.
d) Effective approaches in the Blended learning environment.

Methodology

The research method used for the study is descriptive type. This study is an attempt to reflect the holistic and long-term thinking of the researcher based on reviews from various resources. It is completely based on secondary data. Secondary sources of data used are (i) journals, (ii) scholarly articles, (iii) company websites, (iii) newspaper reports (iv) research papers (v) case studies and other academic publications that showed the paradigm shift in the role of teacher in blended learning environment.

Literature Review

This literature review examines the research on blended learning compared to traditional learning methods, with a specific focus on the transformation of teachers in the blended learning context. It also highlights the

challenges faced by teachers during the implementation of blended learning and identifies key factors contributing to its effectiveness. Blended learning, which combines in-person and online instructional activities, has gained prominence in higher education, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Chiu, 2022; Moradimokhles & Hwang, 2020). According to Selim (2007), instructor characteristics, technology, and student characteristics are key factors influencing the effectiveness of e-learning and blended learning. Challenges in blended learning include teachers' ability to effectively utilize technology and ensure student participation (Hofmann, 2014). Lack of time, professional development, and support are obstacles faced by teachers in implementing blended learning (Falah, 2019). The shift to emergency remote teaching during the pandemic has highlighted the need for continuity in teaching and learning (Moorhouse &Kohnke, 2021).Studies have shown that blended learning positively impacts students' learning outcomes and emotional well-being (Moradimokhles & Hwang, 2020; Thai et al., 2020). Blended learning approaches have been adopted by universities in Hong Kong and other countries (Moorhouse &Kohnke, 2021). The role of teachers in blended learning is crucial, encompassing teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence to facilitate meaningful learning outcomes (Anderson et al., 2001).Support systems have been established in certain countries to address remote learning challenges, such as toll-free phone lines for student inquiries and scheduling radio lessons (Maria, 2021). Traditional face-to-face teaching alone may not foster higher-order thinking skills and global competencies, necessitating alternative approaches that harness digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning (Raghavendra, 2021).Technology can provide teachers with valuable information to understand individual student needs and support their learning (Monika, 2019). Faculty members have an expanded role in facilitating students' transition to physical classrooms and providing counseling support (Ghosh, 2022).

Overall, this review emphasizes the significance of blended learning, the challenges faced by teachers, and the need for appropriate support systems and technology integration to enhance the teaching and learning experience.

**Misconception Regarding Changing Role of Teachers in the Blended Learning**

Peoples have many misconceptions regarding blended learning. Many people fear that blended learning replaces the teacher, if all the content is available online, students will not come to the classes and teachers will no longer be required, this is not true, while a lot of content is available online, teachers are still indispensable, but yes, the role they play in learning process that will change the

blended learning environment. In the traditional classroom teachers are knowledge providers, they are required to teach but in the blended learning environment, they are no longer the only source of information, they are one of the sources. This doesn't mean that their role diminishes or they have a passive role to play in fact they have to play a more active and diverse role in blended learning environment. They still have to identify the learning requirements of the students. They have to develop their learning goals and they also have to design in a structure that will enable the students to meet these learning objectives. They have to introduce flexibility in their teaching-learning process, so that the students can study at their own pace. In short, they have to make the learning student-centered rather than teacher-driven. Thus, the teachers remain an important part of the blended learning environment and continue to play a vital role in the success of the blended environment.

Misconception	Facts
BL replaces a teacher	BL does not eliminate the need for a teacher
BL diminishes a teacher's role	BL redefines the teacher's role from being a knowledge provider to becoming a coach and mentor
The teacher plays a passive and less important role in student's education	The teacher plays an active and important role in student's education

Re-thinking the Role of Teacher in a Blended Learning Environment

1. In a traditional offline class, the teachers are required to teach the students i.e. they deliver the content in the form of lectures. The lectures are aimed at synchronous learning through undifferentiated instruction, which means the students have to actually attend the lecture together at the scheduled class time, if failed to be present due to any reason, they would miss the content delivered at that time through the teacher. Further, the teacher also has to finish the syllabus at the given time, so sometimes the pace of the delivery of the content may be fast and the students have to match their pace of understanding with the pace of content delivery by the teacher. So, there is a lack of flexibility. The blended learning environment overcomes this problem as the part of the content is delivered online in the form of online resources, videos, and webinars and the students can go through it at their own pace and convenience. Learning is asynchronous, the learners have the flexibility to learn at their own pace. Slow learners can devote more time to the fundamentals whereas quick learners can directly proceed to a deeper understanding of the subject and spend less time on the basics, which will lead to better learning outcomes.
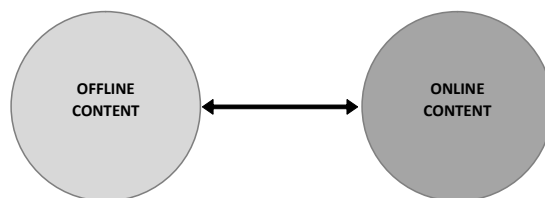
2. In traditional teaching, instructions are undifferentiated, all the students are delivered the same content and instructions irrespective of their learning requirements on the other hand in the blended learning the teacher delivers part of the content online and hence can be designed differentiated instruction.

3. In blended learning large classes may be divided into smaller groups, so learners may meet the teacher fewer times but the interactions are more effective because they are more personalized, and more one-to-one.

Traditional Role	Role in Blended Learning
Teaching	Facilitator
Knowledge provider	Coaching, Mentoring, Supporting
Uniform instructions to the class	Individualized instructions to students
Face-to-face interaction with a large group	The number of interactions may be lesser
Less individual interaction	Qualitatively more effective interaction due to smaller groups
General support to students	Targeted support to learners

Teacher's Vital Role in a Blended Learning Environment

Blended learning is neither a replacement for traditional classroom instruction nor a simple integration of online and in-person elements. Instead, it is a meticulously crafted fusion of purposeful activities in both physical and virtual settings. Below is a list of all the roles the teacher takes in the Blended Learning classroom:

a) **Facilitator**: In the blended learning approach, the teacher's role undergoes a transformation, shifting from a traditional "Sage on the Stage" to a more supportive "Guide on the Side." The primary responsibility of the teacher is to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and comprehension of information.

b) **Coach and tutor**: In the blended learning method, the teacher takes on the crucial roles of a coach and mentor, providing guidance, support, and encouragement to students, fostering their growth and development throughout their learning process.

c) **Classroom Planners:** As a classroom planner teacher must to Advance the planning of curriculum and instructions and also design an accommodative curriculum design for differentiated instructional strategies.

d) **Content Developers:** Content developers play a crucial role in the blended learning method by preparing a variety of materials for both online and in-class use. They assign online resources for students to study at home, allowing for flexible learning. Moreover, they engage students by establishing and reinforcing rules, routines, and positive behavior.

e) **Classroom Managers:** As classroom managers in the blended learning method, teachers have the responsibility of setting appropriate learning norms to create a conducive environment. They establish learning checkpoints to monitor students' progress and ensure they stay on track. To engage all learners effectively, teachers employ differentiated tactics, considering individual needs and abilities. They also keep a close eye on each student's learning path, providing necessary guidance and support.

f) **Teachers as facilitators and evaluators:** Teachers in the role of facilitators and evaluators play a crucial part in the blended learning approach. They facilitate classroom activities that encourage learners to engage in discussions, share their thoughts, ask questions, and interact directly with their facilitator and peers. By guiding learners through various techniques and providing immediate practice opportunities, teachers enable them to develop and apply new skills effectively.

g) **Motivators:** In addition to facilitating learning, teachers also follow up on the learning process. They collect data on students' performance and analyze metrics to gauge content engagement. Based on this information, they provide constructive feedback to students, highlighting areas of improvement and acknowledging their successes. Through engaging activities and feedback, teachers motivate students, fostering a positive and encouraging learning environment.

Furthermore, teachers focus on building strong learner-student relationships. They establish a sense of trust and support, ensuring students feel comfortable seeking guidance and assistance. By creating a supportive learning community, teachers promote collaboration, empathy, and respect among students, enhancing their overall learning experience.

Challenges for Teachers in Blended Learning Environment

The advent of COVID-19 has brought about substantial changes in the global society, especially in the field of education. With classrooms becoming inaccessible,

education has transitioned to homes and various makeshift spaces worldwide. This shift has encompassed more than traditional teaching methods like memorization and basic literacy and numeracy training, as it has also fulfilled diverse social functions(Ratna, H.2023). The study also focused on exploring the physical and psychological challenges faced by educators in Indonesia as they navigated the new virtual world of education (Ratna, H.2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a revaluation of how teachers allocate their time to teaching, student engagement, and administrative tasks. In Brazil, a survey conducted by Instituto Peninsula revealed that 83% of teachers felt unprepared for remote teaching, 67% experienced anxiety, 38% reported feeling tired, and less than 10% expressed happiness or satisfaction. This global crisis has emphasized the importance of flexibility and increased opportunities for student-teacher interactions (Maria, B.2021) For instance, in Estonia, teachers were granted autonomy to adapt the curriculum, lesson plans, and time management according to their needs. (Maria, B.2021)Teacher organizations in Kerala have expressed opposition to the University Grants Commission's (UGC) decision to implement blended learning, which permits higher education institutions to deliver up to 40% of each course online and the remaining 60% offline. These organizations have raised concerns regarding this approach, as reported in an article by The Hindu. Teachers face challenges in managing their schedule due to various factors in blended learning environment.

Suggestions and Recommendations for Teachers in a Blended Learning Environment

1. Educational resources such as video lectures, podcasts, recordings, and articles are provided to students before each class.
2. Classroom time is optimized as students receive core knowledge before the in-person session.
3. Teachers can use freed-up classroom time to provide support, facilitate discussions, and encourage active participation.
4. Blended learning empowers students to control the pace and subjects of their learning.
5. Digital tools enable customization of the learning experience, fostering student autonomy.
6. Specific skills and learning objectives should be targeted in each lesson.
7. Content should be relevant, concise, and engaging.
8. Incorporate a variety of activities to maintain student engagement.
9. Keep activity durations brief and focused for optimal learning outcomes.

10. Provide hands-on experiences for students to practice taught skills.

11. Offer choices and alternatives to cater to diverse learning preferences.

12. Schedule regular enjoyable activities and check-ins to uphold student motivation and well-being.

13. Select relevant technology tools and resources to personalize the learning experience.

14. Ensure seamless integration of online and offline elements to reinforce each other.

Effective Approaches in Blended Learning Environment

In the blended learning environment, implementing effective approaches is crucial for a successful educational experience. Firstly, meticulous curriculum planning, tailored to the blended learning model, ensures a seamless integration of online and offline components. Selecting a reliable Learning Management System (LMS) facilitates content delivery and management, providing a centralized platform for students and teachers.

Crafting attention-grabbing and interactive content is essential to engage students and maintain their interest. Striking a balance between online and offline learning experiences offers a comprehensive educational journey that combines the benefits of both modalities.

Promoting the practical application of knowledge to real-world problems or scenarios encourages students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Collaboration among students fosters peer learning, teamwork, and social interaction, enhancing the overall educational experience.

Developing assessments and providing meaningful feedback allows students to monitor their progress and identify areas for improvement. Moreover, incorporating inclusive practices, customized instruction, and clear communication ensures that all students can actively participate and understand their tasks in the blended learning environment.

By following these effective approaches and providing additional support to teachers, blended learning can be optimized to meet the diverse needs of students and create a successful educational experience.

Skills and Prerequisites Necessary for Fulfilling Teachers' Role

Fulfilling the role of a teacher in the modern educational landscape requires a diverse range of skills and prerequisites. Firstly, teachers must possess technical and digital skills to effectively navigate the digital tools and platforms used in blended learning environments. This includes proficiency in using learning management

systems, online collaboration tools, and multimedia resources. Additionally, strong planning and classroom management skills are crucial. Teachers need to adeptly organize and structure their lessons, ensuring a smooth flow of activities and maximizing student engagement. They must also possess the ability to effectively manage classroom dynamics, ensuring a positive and inclusive learning environment. Data analytics skills are becoming increasingly important for teachers. They need to collect and analyze data on student performance, engagement, and progress, allowing them to make informed instructional decisions and tailor their teaching strategies accordingly. Content expertise is another vital aspect of a teacher's role. They should have in-depth knowledge of the subjects they teach, enabling them to deliver accurate and comprehensive instruction to students. Teachers also need to be motivators, inspiring and encouraging students to actively participate in their learning journey. They should employ various strategies to foster intrinsic motivation and a growth mindset among students.

Lastly, collaboration and risk-taking are essential qualities for teachers in the blended learning setting. They should be willing to collaborate with colleagues, sharing best practices and ideas to enhance the learning experience. Moreover, they should be open to taking risks, experimenting with new teaching methods, and adapting to the evolving educational landscape.By possessing these skills and prerequisites, teachers can effectively fulfill their roles in facilitating meaningful and engaging learning experiences for their students in a blended learning environment.

Conclusion

Blended learning is recognized as the future of education, leveraging technology to enhance teaching and learning. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that a child's holistic development goes beyond technology. Extracurricular activities, personal communication, experiential learning, and teacher-guided interactions remain integral to education. Teachers play a pivotal role in guiding students through the vast technological landscape. While technology provides abundant data and resources, teachers provide the expertise and guidance necessary to navigate and make sense of this information. They ensure that technology is effectively utilized to enhance efficiency and transform the overall educational experience. To fully harness the potential of blended learning, policymakers must support teachers in their professional development. Empowering teachers with the necessary skills and capacity-building opportunities is essential. Additionally, reducing administrative burdens and emphasizing pedagogically effective approaches can further enhance their effectiveness. Blended learning offers significant benefits for both educators and students, allowing for the reimagining of pedagogy and holistic development.

By recognizing the crucial role of teachers and providing the necessary support, education systems can effectively leverage technology while prioritizing the growth and well-being of students.

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