



ISSN -PRINT-2231-3613/DLNE2455-8729
International Educational Journal

UGC APPROVAL NO. - 42652

CHETANA

Received on 4th Oct 2017, Revised on 8th Oct 2017, Accepted 09th Oct 2017

RESEARCH PAPER

A study of Teachers' experience of switching over from traditional to blended learning approach.

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Key words: *distance education, blended learning approach, traditional learning approach etc.*

The modality of imparting education is changing as the profile of higher education students is evolving from full-time to part-time working, seeking continuous up-gradation and specialization. There is also increasing pressure on education systems to economies their running and expand their reach to cover all those who are interested in learning. Add to it the extent of possibilities that technology has opened up for us. All these factors combined are beckoning colleges and universities to think of new modalities to offer education. Online, Hybrid/Blended learning is two such modalities that have come up in addition to their earlier counterpart- distance education through postal methods and the traditional Face-to-face (F2F) mode.

Research questions

1. What are the main challenges faced by the faculty team in the design and Implementation of blended modality of learning for the B.Ed. programme?
2. What is the nature and extent of technological support required by faculty of the B.Ed. programme to offer blended learning?
3. What are the best practices and positive faculty experience of the blended learning project of the B.Ed. programme?

Objectives of the study

The study was done with the following objectives in mind:

Main Objective

1. To gain an understanding of the faculty experience during the first year of implementing blended learning in B.Ed. programme.

Minor Objectives

1. To highlight challenges/ problem areas and arrive at possible solutions
2. To document best practices those resulted in rewarding experiences and bring them into the formal framework of the project.
3. To suggest strategies which streamline transition into future phases of blended/hybrid learning (30 % by 2018)

Methodology of the Study

Research method

Descriptive Survey method was employed for this study

Population of the study

All faculties who taught using blended modality in B.Ed colleges in the first Academic year (AY- 15/16) of its initiation made-up the population of the study. The population for the study was taken as 60

4. Sample

Purposive and Snowball Sampling method was followed to draw a sample of 25 % from the target population. To avoid representing only one side of the picture, the researcher paid attention to taking equal representation across teaching experience bands, gender, centers and tech-friendliness.

Hence the sample for the study was 15 faculty members.

A thorough Content Analysis of the responses during Interview, from reflective logs and to the open-ended questions in the survey indicates that robust Infrastructure and technical training and support from the first level of challenge for most. Many feel demotivated, reluctant or exploited if expectations from them are high but necessary support is not in place. It is also clear that if the faculty has a positive first-hand experience with students on the online medium and can see it being an improvement when used in F2F modality, then their eagerness to engage with the modality helps them learn

quickly and overcome the basic challenges, like navigating the software. The need for making the faculty members understand 'why' it's the way forward is felt strongly and the researcher would advise a revised communication strategy to senior management that prioritizes the 'why' over the 'What'. The perception among the faculty members is such that it's a top-down order to go digital and might make them redundant in the future as one teacher will do where earlier five were required. Most of the long term teachers don't see how it can help them help their students and make them indispensable. So, instead of focusing on the 'HOW' in training immediately, where the learners (faculty members) in the room are not participating of their own free will, it's better to first take the time to win them over, make them see the benefits for themselves and then train them when they show interest and willingness to pick -up this new modality that is definitely a game changer in education, as many of the 'New to teaching' Faculty members have expressed.

Major findings of the study

1. The following challenges/ problem areas were identified:
 - a. Faculty team (mostly) was still not convinced, inspired and on-board with the need for shifting to blended modality. A communication plan, with a convincing 'why' rationale that can inspire them and make them motivated to engage at a deeper level is needed.
 - b. Internet, Computer and Software related infrastructural support has glitches that need to be eradicated for smoother, consistent experience.
 - c. Video-recording facility in terms of equipment, space and editing studio is required to generate quality content.
 - d. A need for periodic and incremental training sessions (perhaps even recorded online) is felt to recap and develop greater proficiency.
2. The following best practices were noticed:
 - a. Average student reading levels have improved; they come prepared for class discussions and even share additional relevant links with each other that they have discovered while surfing online.

- b. Quality and frequency of peer feedbacks have increased and it's beneficial for 360 degree development of student.
- c. Appropriate depth for important topics can easily be reached and made available for interested students and day to day issues don't affect what could be taught.

Implications of the study

The following Opportunities came to light:

- a. It's important to immediately develop a communication intervention that addresses the 'why' for faculty members and is able to convince them to engage wholeheartedly with the project.
- b. Greater involvement of students (immediate seniors and alumni) can help improve the designed experience to better match the expectations of the current Generation via Blackboard.
- c. Industry connect can improve through live projects, with an Academic and Industry mentor, facilitated through Blackboard.

Conclusion

Placed within a rapidly evolving eco-system, higher-education systems are flocking to online platforms to engage more students and to offer a value- add over traditional F2F modalities.

This article aims to document the teachers experience in B.Ed Colleges, as regards to the strategic decisions to implement blended learning, their rationale, the tools and systems that were designed, content development and also the challenges and rewards of the first year of operation.

The main objective of this study was to understand and learn from, for future streamlining, the faculty experience during the first year of implementing blended learning in B.Ed. programme degree.

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