



EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This paper is written for the purpose of our growing consciousness about the role of teacher in classroom management in a blended learning environment. Blended learning is relatively a new approach to teaching learning process. It is a practice that combines digital media with traditional teacher led teaching methods. It is now considered as one of the most effective ways to teach and blended learning programs can now be found at all levels of education. However, one of the major concerns for the teachers while implementing blended learning strategies is how to manage the classroom. It is indeed a legitimate concern since all the students aren't used to flexible learning environment. Teachers in a blended learning system have to follow certain rules for an effective classroom management. This paper aims at pointing out the various factors which affect proper implementation of the blended learning system and the various ways as to how to properly manage a classroom in such a flexible environment so that the teaching learning process is not hampered and students are benefitted.

Keywords: *blended learning, external factors, internal factors, classroom management, student motivation*



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Introduction

Teaching learning system is a complex process. The role of a teacher is said to be very important in achieving good result in the teaching learning process. Previously traditional methods were used for classroom management. But now with the introduction of blended learning system new challenges have emerged in the sphere of classroom management. Blended learning is the term given to the educational process which involves both online teaching and traditional face to face classroom teaching. Institutions across the world have been quick to adopt this new way of learning. In fact, blended learning has made

education accessible and relatable for people of different age groups. Classroom management in a blended learning environment requires certain novel approach in order to maximize the positive outcomes.

A well-managed classroom is a prerequisite to learning. By management we mean the complex set of plan and action that the teacher uses to ensure that the teaching learning process in the classroom is effective and efficient. If a classroom is not managed properly the teaching endeavor can become chaotic and perhaps even disruptive. Effective teachers are the managers who organize and conduct their classroom to prevent any classroom related problems from happening in the first place.

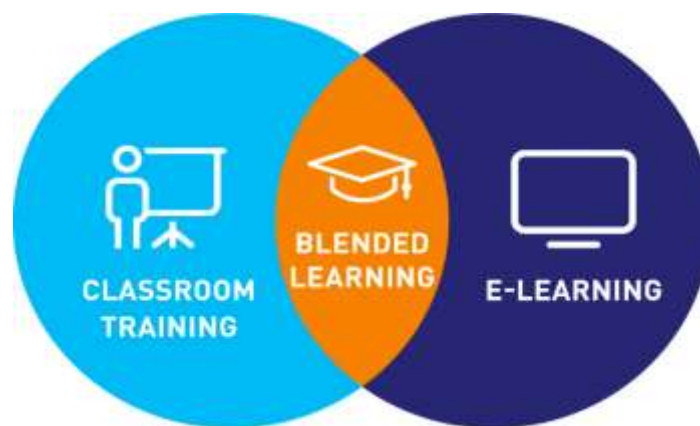


fig 1: blended learning

Benefits of blended learning

Blended learning represents a fundamental shift in the teaching learning process. It has the potential to optimize the outcome in the ways that traditional teaching can't. Now as blended learning is becoming more common place in the educational system, the benefits are becoming more obvious.

The following are the advantages of the blended learning system:

1. Using multiple modalities dramatically reinforces student engagement, learning and retention.
2. Blended learning approach makes learning safe by reducing the learning hours the student spends together offline but still provides them with live communication.
3. By combining new technology like AR (augmented reality) and VR(virtual reality) along with traditional methods learners are getting a more inclusive learning experience.
4. One of the most popular blended learning models called flipped classroom has resulted in better comprehension by allowing the learners to study all theoretical materials remotely

alone at their own pace and practice new knowledge and skills during interactive class session.

5. Blended learning has resulted in efficient use of instructor's time by allowing instructors more time in helping students and developing their skills.
- 6 It has been found that student achievement is considered to be higher in blended learning environment when compared to full time online and offline teaching. Blended learning is known to improve the theoretical coherence by disseminating information pragmatically.

Factors affecting classroom management in a blended learning environment

Though blended learning has its own advantages but there are certain factors which hampers its proper implementation. These factors can be classified as both external factors and internal factors.

External factors or the first order barriers are those factors or obstacles which are extrinsic to teachers (Ertmer1999). These factors include technology tools, technical support system, physical environment and other administrative support base which are essential for the proper implementation of the blended learning system. Because these obstacles are easy to measure and eliminate, the majority of the efforts are focused in eliminating these barriers (Fisher, Dwyer & Yocam, 1996). Any institution keen on implementing blended learning system must first address these issues.

Internal factors or second order barriers include beliefs about teaching, established classroom practices and unwillingness to change. Teachers' personal pedagogical beliefs plays a key role in pedagogical decision regarding how to integrate technology in their classroom practices. These pedagogical beliefs are described by Ertmer (1999) as internal or second order barriers. In short internal factors are sometimes so deep-rooted that it creates many internal conflicts in the minds of the teachers while working in a blended learning environment. Overcoming these barriers can be much more challenging than external factors.

Role of the teacher educator and the students in a blended learning environment

Blended learning environment has indeed changed the role of the teacher from a knowledge provider to a mentor. Traditionally classroom teaching has been teacher centric, top -down approach but with the introduction of blended learning system it has become more student driven, bottom up and customized, where technology plays an important part in the instruction. Blended learning does provide an appropriate balance between online instruction and teacher led classroom instruction. This new change has benefited the students and the

teacher alike. Students have become active learners who gain knowledge directly and assume some control over their learning and develops self-reliance. On the other hand, blended learning provides the teacher with more accurate picture of how each student is performing. Thus, blended learning combines the best aspects of online instruction with the best aspects of direct classroom instruction and thus helping the teachers to manage the teaching learning actively more effectively.

Classroom management strategies in a blended learning environment

Managing students in a hybrid learning environment has some unique set of challenges. Here are some ways as to how a teacher can effectively manage a classroom in a blended learning environment.

Setting out clear expectations beforehand- In any blended learning environment, many students may find it quite confusing. These students find it uncomfortable in digital platform. In this situation the teacher should organize digital resources that are easily accessible, and provide several communication options for students so they can get in touch with them if they are confused or struggling in this set up.

Develop technology guide lines for the students- For any effective blended learning environment teacher should develop technology guidelines for the students beforehand. These guidelines may include some of the following like not allowing to change the setting without permission, make sure that the device is charged every night, not allowing to download or print anything without teachers' permission etc.

Allow students for socialization- In a hybrid learning environment the teacher should allow socialization among the students, especially when they are not seeing each other face to face every day. Chat channels do provide a good platform where the students can discuss their progress with their peers. This will create a positive classroom environment for the students and will help the teacher to manage the class effectively.

Cooperative learning strategies- In a blended learning system, cooperative learning strategies such as jigsaw, team pair share, fishbowl PQP, teamwork etc. have proven to be effective in face-to-face modes. These strategies help in developing sense of responsibility and interdependence. In this strategy teacher can ensure participation of all learners in a more meaningful way.

Setting up procedures for grading, monitoring and feedback-The most important part for the teacher in a blended learning environment is knowing when a student is ready for

feedback. In order to get proper feedback an effective teacher can create a google form and post it as a material resource. In this form the students can give their feedback mentioning their names and roll number.

Developing a comprehensive learning management system- A comprehensive learning management system is essential for an effective blended learning. This comprehensive system should include course material, assignment, web resources etc. and should be access to all the students. A good learning management system supposed to offer flexibility, ease of use and unhindered accessibility. It should be equally useful for the teachers and students alike.

Teachers' flexibility- A teacher's ability to be flexible is a crucial component needed for conducting a class in a blended learning system. An educator must have that flexibility which is an individual capability of responding to change and adapting to this new situation. In a blended learning setup, the teacher should regularly reflect on each of his lesson ask himself did the student enjoy the lesson? Did I handle the situation well? Self-reflection is crucial in improving teachers' performance in a flexible learning environment. Teacher educator should continue the process of self-analysis and reflect on their teaching abilities to improve the teaching and classroom management in a blended learning environment.

Student motivation-In a blended learning scenario student motivation naturally has to do with student's desire to participate in the teaching learning process. There are students who are intrinsically motivated and others who are extrinsically motivated, while many students may remain unmotivated. The first step for any teacher in this scenario is to recognize the problem that causes the student to be unmotivated. The teacher may give a choice of assignment to the students. This choice makes them feel happier and they take interest in this new type of hybrid learning atmosphere. The teacher may also follow a practice called 'attribution retraining' which involves modelling, socialization and practice exercises and these can be used to motivate the unmotivated students. The main aim of attribution retraining is to help the students is to find our alternative ways of approaching a problem instead of giving up or attribute their failure on the lack of effort rather than lack of ability.

Future of blended learning system

The future of the blended learning looks strong and encouraging as all it signs points to its continued growth from both the perspective of the students and teachers. With the advancement of new technology like 5G connectivity, more gaming-based learning system

and easier communication method in a digital classroom, blended learning is proving to be an effective means of providing modern educational needs along with the benefits of traditional teaching learning methods. Blended learning provides students a way to make learning more enjoyable. It can give a new lease of life to the entire teaching learning process. Keeping all these things in mind, it has become important for schools, colleges, and other institutions of higher learning to start offering inclusive learning solutions to their students.

Conclusion

A teaching endeavor can easily become stressful in a blended learning environment if not managed properly. Managing classroom means managing student activities and behavior in a classroom. This act of managing student activities becomes more challenging in a blended learning environment. However, there can be no denying of the fact that blended learning is here to stay. In today's hyper connected world both physical and virtual learning spaces matter. A teacher should possess abilities to understand the phenomena that affect a classroom management in a blended learning situation. Nevertheless, the issues and problems of blended learning come from the issues related to implementation and integration. So, the teacher educator must catch up with this new trend and address these issues and help the students to succeed through effective blended learning approach.

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