Visioning the role of teacher to facilitate blended learning environment after covid-19

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Abstract: *Globally spread of COVID-19 has disrupted every sector but field of education is most affected by this pandemic. Educational institutions were shut down due to lockdown but to continue the teaching-learning process all universities and schools decided to embark upon online education or e-learning settings. By using online learning platforms learners have became ubiquitous learners and teachers' roles also become more challenging as it shifted from 'sage on the stage' to 'guide by side'. As outbreak changed the way of imparting education and consequently new pedagogies are emerging. In this paper, we are figuring out the future scenario of the learning environment and seeing the blended learning as most suitable and effective mode of learning in post covid-19. The role of the teacher in that environment is also discussed in this paper.*

Keywords*: Covid-19, Pandemic, Blended Learning, E-Learning,*

1. INTRODUCTION:

An alarming event in human lives recently has been the sudden breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pace of the outbreak rose rapidly, it imposed restrictions on public gathering and enforced national lockdown in various countries across the world. An inevitable consequence of this fell upon the education system causing the schools and colleges to remain closed for months at a stretch. This caused panic, stress, and confusion regarding education and it raised anxiety among students, parents, and also for the teachers. As the outbreak continues to worsen, institutional organizations have laid out a virtual teaching-learning regime as a routine practice. As per the current conditions, there is uncertainty about when schools and colleges will reopen and about what will be the future education delivery system. Educationists are also suggesting various ways of imparting quality education in post-COVID-19 so that a teacher can easily engage students in the teaching-learning process. Such drastic changes need drastic measures and call for a reappraisal of the curriculum and methodology in an e-learning format. Blended learning is the only effective way ahead after the pandemic to educate and prepare students for the future by offering successful learning and teaching experiences through the mixture of both classroom teaching and online education.

2. Concept of Blended Learning and Significance:

The term 'Blended' is self-explanatory, meaning the mixing of two or more things. Intuitively, 'blended learning' connotes a blend of various learning styles, models, types, etc. It is an amalgamation of offline (face to face, traditional, in- campus learning) and online learning in a way that one compliments the other. "Blended learning refers to a mixture of online learning and traditional teaching intended to improve practices related to teaching as well as learning."(1). Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation defines blended learning as "a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace." "Learning that happens in an instructional context which is characterized by a deliberate combination of online and classroom-based interventions to instigate and support learning is called blended learning" (2). It involves the successful assimilation of both the learning environment online and face to face teaching rather than simply accumulation of virtual elements to general classroom teaching (3).

It is often also referred to as Hybrid Learning, Mixed Learning, Integrative Learning, or Personalized Learning. In a blended learning environment, students do not need to study together all the time. They can connect or with their teacher digitally anywhere, remotely on virtual platforms over the web. They may also complete their given task or activities independently staying away from the classroom because online learning experiences are the substitute for the instruction given by the teacher in the classroom. All these experiences either in the classroom or outside the classroom are systematically planned, orchestrated by the teachers for the sake of attaining learning goals.

Several previous studies have highlighted the significance of blended learning in breaking the monotony of traditional teaching-learning systems. "Blended learning can help teachers break from teacher-centered, passive classrooms and transition to more student-centered, active classrooms" (4, 5). "Often, a blended learning approach

provides a road map for students to work at their pace. Technology does not replace the teacher or instruction; technology is used to enhance the process of learning (4)." "The blended learning approach capitalizes on the integration of face-to-face verbal and online text-based exchanges and connecting those exchanges to learning tasks, focusing on student individualization." (3) Ultimately, it largely depends on the teachers how effectively and perfectly they manage online teaching-learning experience for the betterment of their students because blended learning is an effective way to maximize the learning opportunities to meet students' needs. But here two important questions have arisen that why should we have to focus on blended learning as an add-on to in-class teaching i) What is the need to alter the current teaching-learning paradigm; ii) How does the role of a teacher change in a blended learning environment?

3. A Paradigm shift to the teaching-learning process :

No doubt, corona virus has disrupted every sector like business, education, public, and private transports, etc. globally. As the outbreak continued different educational bodies were advised to all universities and schools to embark upon online education rather than face to face teaching till lockdown. So, the institutional organizations have laid out a virtual teaching-learning regime as a routine practice. The big shift, a shift in the use of technology that we have seen in teaching in recent times has become the trend, which otherwise we call the pandemic shift. All the educational regulatory bodies in India also recommended online education to continue the teaching learning process. Thus schools have been converted into the digital space. Consequently, teachers started using different virtual platforms, social media online meeting platforms without proper training and institutional support. Such drastic changes need drastic measures and call for a reappraisal of the curriculum and methodology in an e-learning format.

Due to e-learning milieu, knowledge is no longer bound by four walls and learning has become ubiquitous. Consequently, students are becoming self-directed learners; rote memorization shifted to self-initiated knowledge construction efforts. Students no longer merely depend upon teachers for knowledge acquisition because today different tech-based or online resources are accessible to get information on just one click. Current conditions demand thinking about new modes of learning without compromising the quality of education. The pandemic presents a good chance for education institutions to implement another pedagogy that can utilize effectively to facilitate academic activities in post COVID-19.

While blended learning is a lucrative form of learning, advised to be adapted in the education system for improved learning, it may be difficult to implement in its true form during an ongoing health-crisis that constrains the teacher to use only virtual means of teaching (7). In some situations, the move to blended learning has inspired educators to redefine traditional roles. As described earlier, the lack of motivation experienced by students during such times as pandemic can rise at a fast pace, given that education is restricted to virtual means. To compensate for the minimized in-person interaction, the role of teachers now needs to be reassessed. Unlike traditional classrooms, in online classes getting students to pay attention can be a daunting task. Every teacher has a unique teaching method and manner. But if the teaching style does not incorporate creativity, the students quickly lose interest in the subject. Moreover, engaging the students' infrequent activities and interaction with the teacher is especially difficult through a virtual platform. So, to engage the students in digital classes, educators need to become creative to grab their attention. Therefore, the changing paradigm in teaching-learning is demanding, teachers to play an important role in providing a supportive learning environment for their students to learn.

4. Expanding roles of a teacher:

Especially in a blended learning environment teachers' role has shifted to 'guide by side' rather than 'sage on the stage'. In the contemporary teaching paradigm, the role of a teacher has seen a shift in emphasis from teaching to guiding. This accentuates the relay of power in the realm of education from the teacher to the students. While in today's era, the indefinite study material is available in heaps and loads online, it may be difficult for students to find what is required and restrict focus to what is needed. Due to this reason, the teachers' role becomes more crucial and now they have to develop such skills in their students so that they may able to study independently and may able to use a vast variety of un-organised and infinite online resources meaningfully.

The role of a teacher is vital in a student's life. While children get their emotional needs from home, it's the teachers who acknowledge and understand them at school. They are the ones who nourish the child for a better future. From the ancient era, students have considered teachers to be their role models. As children spend most of their day in school, the impact a teacher can have in a student's life can't be understated. However, such a paradigm shift in the teaching-learning environment necessitates strengthening traits like adaptability, creativity, and perseverance in the teachers. This stems from the expansion of an educator's role from being a teacher to now also being a good communicator, risk-taker, facilitator, and delegator to boost student skills and act as a catalyst in their learning process. As a teacher, one needs to keep these key points in mind:

➢ Helping students navigate through the vast online resources to leave them with necessary and relevant content to learn from.

➢ Developing course content and summary using user-friendly and accessible resources and forming course structure and guidelines as a blend of online and offline resources.
➢ Conducting tutorials and video lessons frequently to address individual queries of the students.
➢ Formulating an easy and effective pedagogy of communicating the online content.
➢ The mixed assessment and grading to reflect the true progress of students rather than a test of memory.
➢ Encouraging communication with students, as well as among them to allow easy exchange of ideas and content.
➢ Guiding the learning experience of individual students, and customizing material wherever possible to facilitate the learning experience.
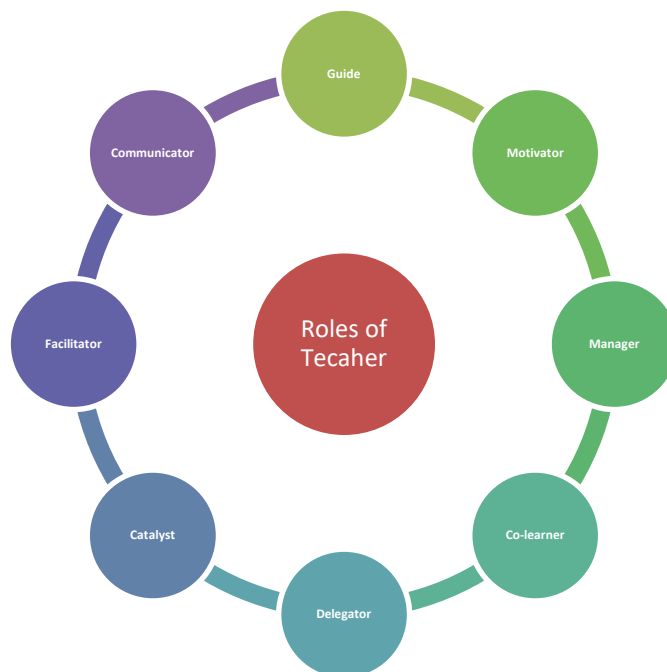
Facilitator: The term "facilitator" has materialised as a substitute to "teacher," thereby slightly shifting the focus from teaching to skill-shaping (8). Assorted ways and resources plus technologies are accessible for the learner today to obtain knowledge on his own. He is not reliant upon the teacher for knowledge acquisition. Teachers are now not the sole dispenser of information; rather they need to motivate and support the learner in active learning accomplishments. They facilitate supportive learning for their students either individually or in a group so that they can be grown as the creator of their knowledge. This helps and encourages their students for discussion and active participation in learning endeavours either on campus as well as online. Students also need their guidance for figuring out how to make any opportunity productive as well as assistance for using online learning technologies collaboratively.

Communicator: Communication plays a vital role while teaching in both environments. Teacher-to-student and student-to-student communication always helps in creating positive and healthy relationships during the teaching-learning process. Whenever this process begins communication starts automatically with the teacher talking to orient the student about the objectives of the lesson to be taught. Teachers provide a verbal roadmap to complete all the activities through e-mails or messages. In that way, teachers create a positive environment for learning and moving forwards to achieve desired learning outcomes. One thing is very important for being a good communicator, teachers should be active listeners and attentive so that they can correctively respond to the students' queries, and also every student feels valuable and welcome. In this reference, the teacher works as a supporter, learning structure director, and provider.

Guide: In a blended learning environment, students are active pursuers of knowledge and they spend more time on their screen for learning. Teachers need to guide how to learn online effectively and how to manage time for maximum learning outcomes. They are only who can judge or determine better what should be the next learning attempt for the betterment of every student.

Motivator: Sometimes students felt de-motivated and isolated during online learning whenever unable to do any task or any activities. So, teachers always play a role like a motivator. They give positive reinforcement and use encouraging words for students' attempts. They provide positive and constructive feedback with necessary negative feedback for

pointing out the weak points of the students. As a motivator, teachers provide relevant solutions for their problems and suggest a better way to overcome the fear of technology.

Co-learner: Teachers are life-long learners and active participants while managing online teaching. Before presenting any content or activity, teachers read the content and attempt all the activities themselves. They also actively participate in discussion forums; build healthy relationships with students and collaborative learning communities. They always cultivate a sense of shared responsibility among the students in a blended learning environment.

Manager: In a blended learning environment, management makes teaching-learning more achievable. As a manager, teachers have made planning, organizing the resources according to the environment to maximize students' progress. They manage various differentiated learning tactics to engage students purposefully using different learning norms.

Delegator: Managing and facilitating the learning experience of individual students can become a very involved task. An educator needs to now work smart rather than work hard. Often, delegating to students to help each other can brush their combined learning and teaching skills. Not only that, but it also encourages team-work and brushes their communication skills. This is an often-overlooked activity but a very efficient method to boost learning by students in a team-like manner.

Catalyst: A teacher's role as a catalyst, in a literal sense, takes into account all the expanding roles discussed above. A 'catalyst' is referred to as an instrument to speed up a certain event; in this case, the teaching-learning experience. Facilitating the skills of students to be self-sufficient learners, guiding them with responsible browsing and learning, helping them manage their independent study routines, encouraging them into collaborative learning and growing as well as learning alongside them can prove to be a mentally and academically nourishing practice inevitably leading to a rapid and effective learning experience.

5. CONCLUSION:

Current conditions demand thinking about new modes of learning without compromising the quality of education. Over the period we will be forced to go in such a form of education that is the amalgamation of offline (face to face, traditional, in- campus learning) and online. Therefore, blended learning is considering worldwide as a future delivery system of education. As blended learning is the mixture of online and in campus teaching so teachers' role becomes more challenging. Every teacher would have to play different roles to provide a supportive learning environment for their students. Consequentially, the teachers should have to be a tech-friendly, and supporter to keep students more active and for their positive engagement in a blended learning environment.

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