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TEACHING IN VIRTUAL CLASSROOM : CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract- Teaching is an art and it depends on the techniques adopted in the classroom and the skills of the teacher. Globalization has brought about a lot of technological changes around the world and it has been reflected in teaching too. The concept of virtual classroom is one of the recent trends in education and teachers are adapting to it, in order to overcome the barriers of teaching and learning. A virtual classroom is a set of teaching- learning tool which intends to improve learning experience of students with the help of various technological devices. The main objective of the study is to focus on the barriers/obstacles within the teachers and faced by the teachers; the techniques and strategies to overcome them and to acknowledge the advantages of teaching-learning in virtual classroom.

Key words: Teaching, Globalization, Virtual Classroom.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education, to Adams, is a bi polar process, where the two important components are the teacher and the taught. The art of teaching plays an important role in the educational set up and this depends on the skills employed and the techniques adopted by the teacher in and outside the classroom. Burton (S.S. Chauhan, 2005) has defined as the process of stimulation, guidance, direction and encouragement provided to the learners, by Burton (S.S. Chauhan, 2005). To Mark K. Smith, teaching is a process which helps to attend to the needs, experiences and feelings of people/ learner, with the intention to help them learn something. It is a process of sharing of knowledge and experience, formal and informal; it may or may not be structured but it should be organised in order to be effective. A brief exploration of the history of Indian education shows that, the method of teaching in Ancient India was based on shravan, manana and nidhidhyasana and it

was the prerogative of the Brahmins to be the teachers. Gradually during the Buddhist Period, the need for teacher education was felt and the concept of training of teachers came into existence. Although it was not so prominent in India during the Muslim Period, it was after the advent of the Europeans in India, Teacher Training Institutions were established. The art and science of teaching has undergone rapid changes with vast changes in the field of technology. The basic criteria of good teaching is its focus on the content or subject matter, proper methodology and the art of delivery. Good teaching also aims at fostering/ nurturing the creativity and curiosity of the learners and help them to delve deep into their mind, so that they ask questions. Good teaching also involves deeper introspection on the part of the teachers. Some of the common characteristics of good teaching, according to UNESCO (2004) and Scheerens (2004) are – relevance of the subject matter or content, time allotted to teaching the same, active participation of the learners, monitoring their level of understanding and application, regular feedback from them and finally, an environment of respect between the teacher and the taught.

To Margaret Rouse (whatis.techtarget.com/definition/virtual-classroom) a virtual classroom is an online learning environment which may be web-based and accessed through a portal or software-base and require a downloadable executable file. To Justin Ferriman, (Dec 12, 2013) it allows participant to communicate with one another and view their presentations. The main characteristics of virtual classroom are- unlimited learning, easily accessible, affordable, flexible as per the need and time of the learner, practical and proven. Virtual classroom is important at this stage as it delivers messages fast, save time, money, paper; it brings back direct learning in an e-learning course as there is provision for recording and re-watching. It encourages social learning, helps to share personal experiences like classroom teaching and acts as clinic, it maximizes the industry network



and brings the workplace into the classroom. A virtual classroom not only delivers course materials to the learners, but also provides a live, contextual and interactive environment for them. In addition, teachers can control the learning and teaching process as they do in the traditional classroom (Yang & Liu, 2007). Advances in technology have been used to propagate distance education as a system of choice especially for adult learners. Virtual classrooms provide one example. A virtual classroom is an online learning environment that contains all course materials(<http://www.elearnportal.com/resources/getting-started/how-do-virtual-classrooms-work>).

II. OBJECTIVES

To find out the challenges and opportunities for teaching in virtual classroom.

III. CHALLENGES FOR TEACHING IN VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

The challenges in a virtual learning may be internal/ subjective and external/ objective from the perspective of the teacher and the taught. Being teachers, perhaps it is better to probe into the internal challenges first, so that we can introspect into it in order to create better teaching learning situation for all. Some of the challenges/ obstacles within are –

1. Lack of interest within teachers to learn and adapt to new learning situations – it has been observed that there is a lack of motivation and interest among some teachers to learn new things, as they often feel that ICT based learning is only for students of science stream. Even if it is learnt, teachers should use the techniques regularly, otherwise may be difficulty in retaining the knowledge.
2. Unwillingness to learn and apply ICT in classroom – even if the techniques are learnt, there is inhibition in applying in the classroom. Teachers do not feel comfortable in presenting it in front of students/ audience.
3. Age old belief into the effectiveness of chalk and talk method of teaching – teachers unwilling to adapt to this technology often cite the effectiveness of the age old method of teaching.
4. Time consuming with respect to preparation of lecture materials – teachers often feel that preparing for virtual classroom, especially in the initial stages, is wastage of time.

5. Grasp over language often acts as a barrier as virtual classrooms. A teacher may be academically sound but may not be communicative with the students. Communication skills of the teacher play an important role in this respect as it is essential to sustain the interest of the students in the virtual classroom, so that they are also motivated to interact with the teacher and among themselves.
6. Difficulty in preparing the study material with respect to the medium of instruction (for example, preparing virtual learning materials in vernaculars) after act as a barrier.
7. Fear of students looking into inappropriate sites (Tipton et al, 1998).
8. Inability to motivate the students to use virtual learning mode, to prepare study materials.
9. Due to absence of face-to-face contact, the bond between teacher and taught is not formed.

Some challenge/ obstacles found among the students are –

1. Lack of awareness among the students regarding the importance and benefits of virtual learning.
2. Lack of interest and motivation among the students to learn.
3. Lack of interest and motivation among the students to use it for learning purpose, although they use latest technological gadgets.
4. Financial condition of the students is an important challenge.
5. Sustenance of the interest to attend virtual classes.
6. Inadequate practice on their part also results in forgetting the techniques.
7. Language problem is a challenge. Inability of students to understand and use English is still a challenge for the students of our country.

The external challenges are –

1. Lack of interest of authority in preparing/ providing the appropriate infrastructure.
2. Lack of awareness of the benefits of virtual learning.
3. Lack of coordination between the educational institutions and the community.



4. Does not provide hands on experience as required in some subjects/ courses.

In order to overcome the challenges, it is essential to have an idea of the advantages/ benefits of virtual learning. They are –

1. Virtual learning has no boundary.
2. Virtual learning saves paper as study materials are provided online.
3. It saves time and money. Virtual learning can take place anywhere provided there is an internet connection or resources available.
4. Saves the time of going through handwriting of the teacher and the taught.
5. Can save space and effort as the books need not be physically stored and maintained.
6. It helps to categorize study materials easily.
7. It is easily accessible by the teachers and the taught (Jason, 2001).
8. Increases intellectual and social partnership, group cohesion and mutual support (Husu, 2000).

IV. OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHING IN VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

The strategies that may be adapted in order to overcome the above challenges and create new opportunity to teach and learn are –

The challenges in a virtual learning may be internal/ subjective and external/ objective from the perspective of the teacher and the taught. Being teachers, perhaps it is better to probe into the internal challenges first, so that we can introspect into it in order to create better teaching learning situation for all. Some of the challenges/ obstacles within are –

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2. Unwillingness to learn and apply ICT in classroom – even if the techniques are learnt, there is inhibition in applying in the classroom. Teachers do not feel comfortable in presenting it in front of students/ audience.

3. Age old belief into the effectiveness of chalk and talk method of teaching – teachers unwilling to adapt to this technology often cite the effectiveness of the age old method of teaching.
4. Time consuming with respect to preparation of lecture materials – teachers often feel that preparing for virtual classroom, especially in the initial stages, is wastage of time.
5. Grasp over language often acts as a barrier as virtual classrooms. A teacher may be academically sound but may not be communicative with the students. Communication skills of the teacher play an important role in this respect as it is essential to sustain the interest of the students in the virtual classroom, so that they are also motivated to interact with the teacher and among themselves.
6. Difficulty in preparing the study material with respect to the medium of instruction (for example, preparing virtual learning materials in Bengali) is an important factor.
7. Fear of students looking into inappropriate sites (Tipton et al, 1998).
8. Inability to motivate the students to use virtual learning mode.
9. Due to absence of face-to-face contact, the bond between teacher and taught is not formed.

V. CONCLUSION

Correct application of electronic gadgets in teaching and learning environment can make a difference in the educational status ultimately to the prosperity of the virtual classroom. Giving attention to the pedagogical and instructional aspects is a basic remark as one of the most important aspects of the virtual classroom. The study found that there are so many obstacles for teaching in virtual classroom. And there are many advantages for teaching in virtual classroom. If we continue to assess, improve, and therefore accumulate knowledge of teaching and learning effectiveness in an online environment, we hope that both teacher and student will achieve a greater understanding and enjoy the learning. Therefore all will get benefit from the new mode of instruction.

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