Exploring the Emerging Collaborative Approach in Education: Building Capacities of Teachers for Blended Mode as Future Solution

Rashu Sharma,
Research Scholar, Department of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, India.
Juhi Gupta*,
Research Scholar, Department of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, India.
Email: juhimahajan27@gmail.com
Meenakshi,
Research Scholar, Department of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, India.
Dr. RituBakshi,
Associate Professor, Department of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, India.

Abstract--- The emergence of new digital technologies has influenced all spheres of life including education by unlocking various restrictions and promoting the access to learning. Online education, now days, is gaining prominence and our recent National Education Policytoo recommends the use of blended models of teaching at all levels including HEIs enabling the learners to learn at their own pace. Also, perceiving the present scenario facing the pandemic like situation, the significance of the blended mode of education cannot be undervalued. But the biggest challenge in the way of implementing it is whether our teachers are being capable or proficient of implementing Blended Mode of Education or do they need any training or capacity building programs for enhancing their techno-pedagogical skills. To know the viewpoints regarding the experiences of learning through Blended mode during pandemic situation, the narratives taken from the scholars and students. Reflecting over the narratives and based on current exigencies like COVID time, an emerging model of Blended mode of Teaching learning and 'Train the teachers' or 'Train the trainers' model in the light of National Education Policy has been suggested and elaborated in this paper for both the prospective as well as in-service teachers for their capacity building for Blended mode of education.

Keywords--- Capacity Building, Blended Mode of Education, Technologies, Interactive, Competence.

I. Introduction

With the advancement and the emergence of new technologies, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is having a great potential to make teaching more interesting, real, interactive and participatory. Therefore, there is a great need of ICT based capacity building programs for all coming in teaching profession.Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic-induced school closures, the urgency for digital technologies in all educational institutions, has dramatically increased.To cope up with the demandingrequirements, teachersneed to increasingly acquire skills in order to teach through online classes as well as to make use of digital resources. Hence, it becomes all the more important that, being the part of teacher education, adequate emphasisshould be laid on enabling the teachers in adopting and adapting digital technologies in their classrooms. This requires equipping the teachers with the skills essential for accessing digital content, creating digital resources and using them in their teaching.

II. Need of Capacity Building for Blended Mode of Education

BL is an educational paradigm that mixes numerous types of media such as text, audio, and video at different time scales (synchronous, asynchronous) with the face-to-face method of instruction within the same course (Roseth, Akcaoglu, &Zellner, 2013).The pandemic situation has brought forth the impact of digital divide in the education whether we talk of access divide or use divide (digital literacy). A digitally literate educator or teacher can bring out the best possible use of all the technology-related resources, apps and information to produce better learning. Thus, the quality, competence, as well as the capacity building of teachers in every aspect including for technology usage and BME becomes the need of the hour. There is a need for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers to become need based and demand driven (NCFTE, 2010). NCERT also recommends the National ICT curriculum for teachers, where by teachers take up structured courses to learn technology as well as technology integrated teaching learning through CoP approach. Despite this, the use of Free and Open-Source Software (FOSS) will help a lot in technology learning and integration.

There is a great need for the extensive use of technology in teaching to enhance learning in students by making use of adequate technologies and blended modes of acquiring knowledge, development of digital infrastructure and empowering teachers to develop quality e-learning resources and materials (NEP 2020). It has also been stated in the

policy that while promoting digital learning and education, the importance of face to face in-person learning is fully recognized and thus recommends the use of blended models of teaching enabling the learners to learn at their own pace and to inculcate the spirit of collaboration. Most importantly, BME will help to pursue the objectives of NEP-2020 in internationalizing indigenous knowledge through digitized course contents. Blendedmodel of teaching and learning has also been introduced in universities and colleges recommending the teaching of 40 percent of any course in online mode and the remaining of the 60 percent to be taught in the classroom(University Grant Commission,).Used properly, Blended learning can turn HEIs into a flexible and responsive environment that can quickly adjust to changing circumstances at an inexpensive cost (Oakley, 2016).No doubt, the use of Blended mode of education will necessitate a shift in teaching practices, which will impact many of HEI's fundamental offerings, including content, learning interactions, assessment, credentialing, and student support, as well as technology. These developments need redefining the roles of teachers and students, as well as renegotiating learning obligations (Gibson et al., 2016).

Keeping in view the emphasis over blended and technology enabled learning, it becomes important to empower the teachers for the same.

III. National Professional Standard for Teachers (NPST) with Regard to Quality Assurance in Teacher Education

In this regard, recently on 17th November, 2021 the draft of National Professional Standard for Teachers (NPST) developed by National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has been placed in public domain for getting feedback from all the stakeholders of education. Draft of NPST generally talks of the attributes and the roles that the teachers must possess at different levels i.e.,beginner, proficient, expert and Lead teacher, thereby focusing on preparation and performance improvement of all teachers. Due emphasis has also been laid down on the teacher's competence related to the usage of technology and its integration in teaching-learning process. Teachers need to be proficient in the safe use of ICT, demonstrating knowledge and also remain up to date with the new developments in the field of technology and how to implement new tools and softwarein the classroom.

Consequently, in order to gain the perception of the higher education learners regarding the use and training of teachers for Blended Mode of Education, the narratives are taken from the scholars and students who have studied through the hybrid/blended learning during this pandemic time. The questions addressed while taking narratives are-Which mode of learning do you prefer more? What are the weaknesses that you observed during the implementation of BME? Do you think that there is a need of proper capacity building programme or training of the Higher education teachers for BME?

Narrative 1: *I prefer blended learning, because blended learning is a technique that suits the present condition. According to me, it shifts the role of teachers from only provider of knowledge to a mentor and facilitator. By using blended learning, learners become more active and they control their learning on their own. I thought inadequate training of teachers is the main hurdle and they don't have adequate skills for implementing blended learning. Educational institutions should be fully equipped with technology and teacher educators should be trained for handling technology in better way so that they have enough confidence and skill to use technical equipment.*

Narrative 2: *I prefer only offline mode of instructions because I believe that real and effective teaching is only possible through offline mode. On the contrary, online mode is more prone to distractions and other hindering issues like low connectivity, lack of resources and less proficient teachers as well as students in terms of technology.*

Narrative 3: *I prefer blended mode of learning over individual online or offline. The reason behind it is that regular offline mode makes learning dull and monotonous where as full online learning lacks the physical connections between teacher and students that somehow leads to the gaps in learning. As such I have found my teachers proficient in implementing BME during our classes but still I propose for the further capacity building and development of teachers so that they remain updated with the latest technologies.*

Narrative 4: *I prefer online mode of teaching-learning because it makes anytime, anywhere learning possible. I don't find my teachers fully proficient for implementing online mode of education and there is a dire need for the capacity building of teachers in higher education. The capacity building programmes for the teachers must be focussed on familiarity with advanced technology in education, innovative usage of the technology like m-learning, social media-based learning, etc. Teachers in higher education should be given orientation about ARPIT courses, technology integration-based courses.*

Narrative 5: *As we know, due to Covid-19 pandemic all educational institutions were closed and at that time we had only one option to provide education to students i.e., online education. Now situation is*

getting normal, teachers are moving towards offline mode, but blended mode of learning plays a very vital role in offline mode also. Through blended mode we provide both part-time online and part-time offline education to students.If we add some components of online learning in traditional methods, our traditional methods became more effective.

Narrative 6:   *According to me, blended mode of learning is the mixture of traditional methods and online learning. If I talk about present scenario, today's generation born into digital world as compared to us. We are belonging to technological immigrants but today's generation belongs to inborn technological age. I prefer blended mode over traditional method because it leads to all round development and helps in traditional and online orientation which helps in enhancing their learning. I think teacher faces difficulty in sudden adaptation to this mode of learning without having proper training. As if I talk about myself, I have done one year B.A, B.Ed. and no one prepare us for practical training but the main focus is on theoretical aspects of technology.*

Narrative 7:   *I prefer blended mode of learning because various glitches remain there in online learning like network issues, absence of students, proper discussion among peers etc. While we are learning through online mode of learning during covid period, there are certain problems faced by the teacher to engage the students on regularbasis. I suggest that technical training should be given to the in-service teacher as well as the pre- service teachers to cater with the techno-stress among teachers and to implement the blended mode of learning in more productive manner.*

From the narratives of various students, it is evident that the needs and demands of the learners have been changed in this COVID era pandemic. The study proposes a new emerging model of blended model of learning which is based on collaborative approval of teachers engaged in online learning as well as face-to-face learning.

In Indian scenario, there is need of individualized learning along with the online and recorded interaction of teacher and taught. The author propose that blended mode of learning shall also include collaborative management of two types of teachers viz. on-site teacher and off-site teacher/s. The **figure 1** highlights the emerging model of blended mode of Teaching-learning keeping in mind the geographical and lingua-cultural diversities of our country.
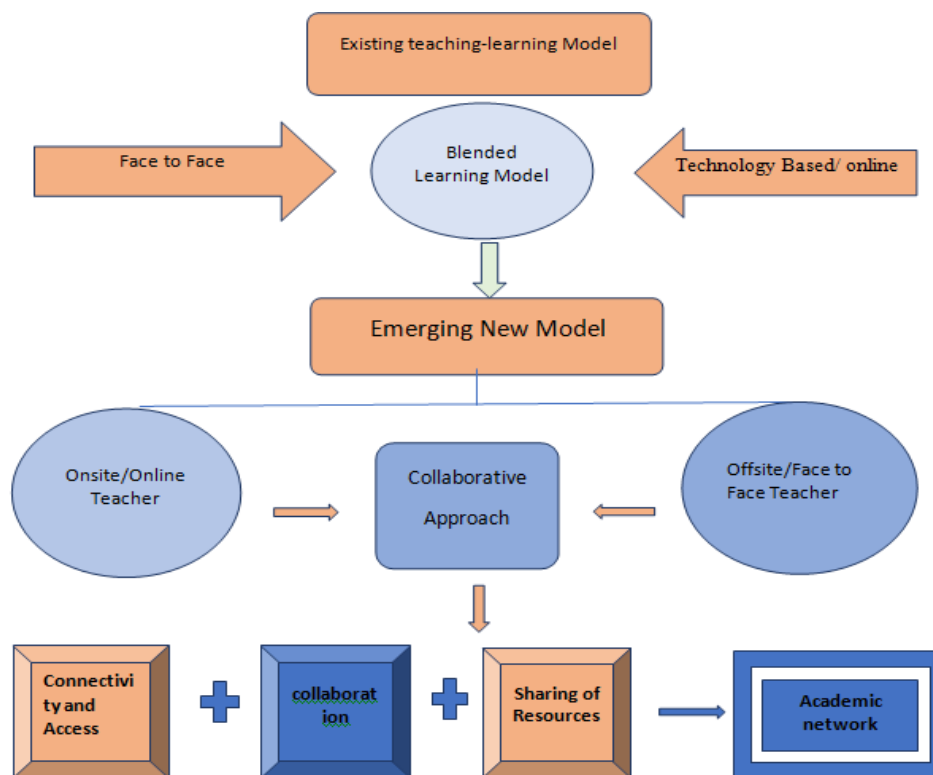

Figure 1: Depicting the Emerging Model of Blended Mode of Teaching-learning

To meet the demands of the emerging model of Blended Learning in the above figure, there is need to build the capacities of the learners in the area of collaborative management, teamwork, creation and dissemination of

Teaching-learning resources, assessment and feedback. The interaction of the teacher with technology is also one of the major areas to be covered under the capacity building of the teacher.The **figure 2** shows the proposed model.
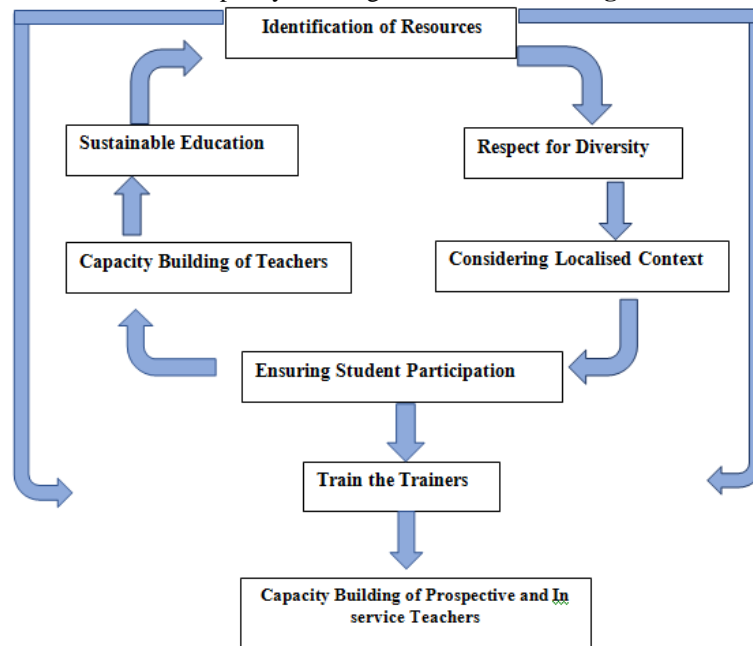

Figure 2: Proposed Model for Capacity Building of Teachers for BME in light of NEP, 2020

On one side we talk of ensuring the access of Quality education to all and on other side we are facing the present pandemic situation, thus it is highly questionable whether the students are really learning through online mode of education?

Identification of Resources: Teachers have been vested with the responsibility pertaining to the all-round development of the students, whether they are teaching through online or offline mode. Education and educational resources offer as a great means to strengthen the teaching-learning process and help students to reach their learning goals. Therefore, ICT and other online teaching-learning resources including OER (Open Educational Resources) firstly need to be identified, that can be brought in use by the teachers for the effective learning of students.

Respect for Diversity: The promotion of human and constitutional values, along with the respect for diversity and local context within the classroom will help a long way to create an enlightened citizenship among the youth.Firstly, a teacher must value diversity with acceptance and respect to all, recognizing their individual differences.

Considering Localized Context: Current school closures demanding blended mode need to consider the different factors like challenges and priorities in the present context, also focusing on the learning outcomes and the learner centered environment for providing instructions.Many new approaches to guarantee the students' performance in online classes and providing them the feedback through synchronous and asynchronous forms should be well-thought-out.

Ensuring Student Participation: Teacher should be skilled in making his/her class more interesting and engaging by adopting different strategies. like making video lectures more engaging, encouraging interactive and online discussions, making content accessible, etc. Also, it is not only the responsibility of the teacher but in return learners should also make an effort to stay engaged as an active participant in the process.

Capacity Building of the Teachers: Being a part of this technological era, we have a number of options to make our teaching-learning more realistic and effective but somehow our teachers are not so familiar in the area related to the technology adoption and its usage in teaching.Thus, its high time to ensure the development of our educators in order to promote the sustainable future.

Sustainable Education: Present focus over 'Education for Sustainable Development' i.e., equipping our present generation with the knowledge, attitudes, skill and values that they need to possess for sustainable future, everybody needs to be expert in each field. Technology has influenced and revolutionized each and every aspect of our daily lives, so the proficiency of teachers as well as students in modern technologies is the urgent need for their survival in highly competent world. Blended learning designs can help to promote sustainable development, including the social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainability, as well as protect global environmental resources to satisfy the demands of current and future generations.

Train the Trainers: In this, mainly the master instructors or trainers being more competent, provides training to the other trainers who are generally less experienced in particular area or skill. This strategy is cost-effective and creates a good work-culture. Thus, the right individuals should be chosen and then trained in technological skillsandafter that they should impart that training to others. This training is required for both the prospective as well as in-service teachers.

It is felt that both the prospective as well as in-service teachers needs to be fully equipped with techno-pedagogical skills in order to cater the demanded needs.

IV. Capacity Building of Teachers for Blended Mode of Education is Required at Two Levels

1)   Pre-service Teacher Trainees

Pre-service teachers can be made competent for blended learning by integrating usage of technology in both theoretical and practical aspect of the curriculum. Curriculum needs to be reviewed and refined to inculcate pedagogical skills related to the usage of technology among the prospective teachers. Experimental schools for the practice teaching should be fully equipped with technological infrastructure enabling the usage of blended mode of education. Including this, some enrichment programs, refresher programs and training to ensure holistic development of pre-service teachers in all aspects of content and pedagogy should be provided.

2)   In-service Teachers

In-service teachers too need to update their knowledge and techno-pedagogical skills. They can update themselves from various orientation and refresher courses. Other online courses such as MOOCs related to technology are also there, joining which one can enhance their competencies. Teaching institutes should organize different capacity building programs for their teachers.

Government on its part is also helping a lot in the capacity building of teachers by launching different digital platforms like National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA) and Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA) to make them well equipped in digital world of education.

V. Pre-requisites for Capacity Building Programs

Prior to conduct the capacity building programme, some factors need to be looked at such as-

- What support is required for online learning and learners?
- What support do Higher Education Institutions offer to learners?
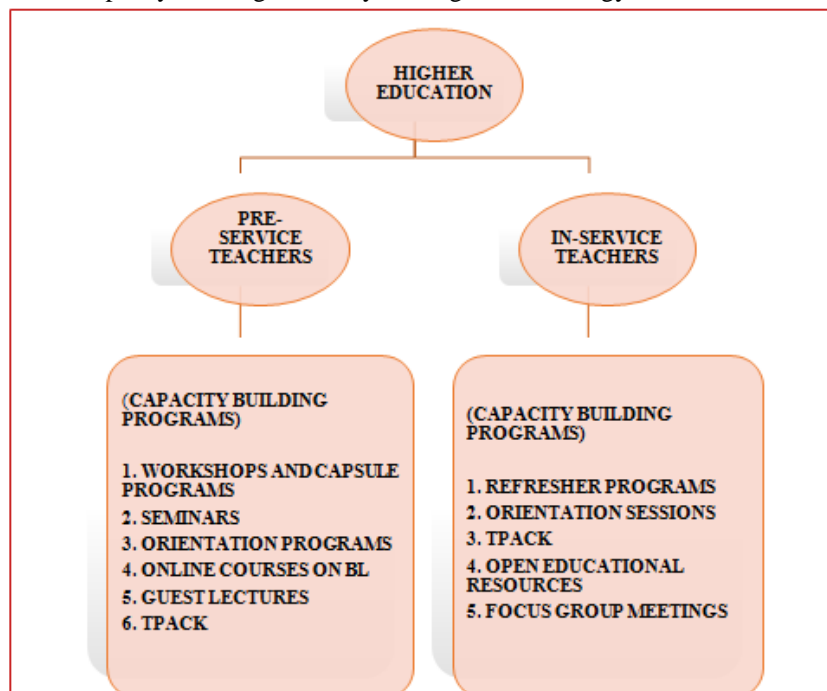- How to establish capacity building of faculty to integrate technology?

Figure 3: Capacity Building of Pre-service and In-service Teachers in Higher Education

Capacity building programme demands the consideration of different factors such as,

1. **Vision and Policy Alignment:** Vision of the institution must be parallel to the national policy of the education. It ensures the proper implementation of the national policy at gross root level. Aligning the vision of the institution with the national policy also helps in developing quality building of the teachers.
2. **Partnership and Collaboration:**Partnership as well as collaboration among higher education institutions and educational agencies fosters the quality capacity building and holistic advancement of the teachers.
3. **Infrastructural Facilities:-**It is also important to look whether the institutions have been fully furnished with the required resources, materials and tools needed to teach online effectively.
4. **Collaboration:**Team-work and collaborative efforts along with Network and networked learning needs to be assured for capacity building.The concept of networked learning has also been proposed by Ivan Illich in his book 'De-schooling society'.Currently the idea of networked learning has a popular resurgence, demanding the development and maintenance of connections between people, their interpersonal communities, knowledge, and digital technologies, so as to support each-other's growth. The prime element here is connections where learning takes place both in relation to others and in relation to learning resources. Networked learning offers more functional efficiency to the teachers of all educational institutions.
5. **Connectivity and Access:** Talking in context of India,digital divide is one of the factors inhibiting the online education including the issues of low or restricted connectivity, lack of smartphones, data costs, etc. Despite this, the lack of digital skills is also one of the issues to be thought of and sorted out.
6. **Student-centeredness:**Mostly, if we talk of the online learning, it is mostly a one-way process causing the less interaction on the part of learners. This matter is also of great concern and thus a learned- centered environment needs to be ensured.
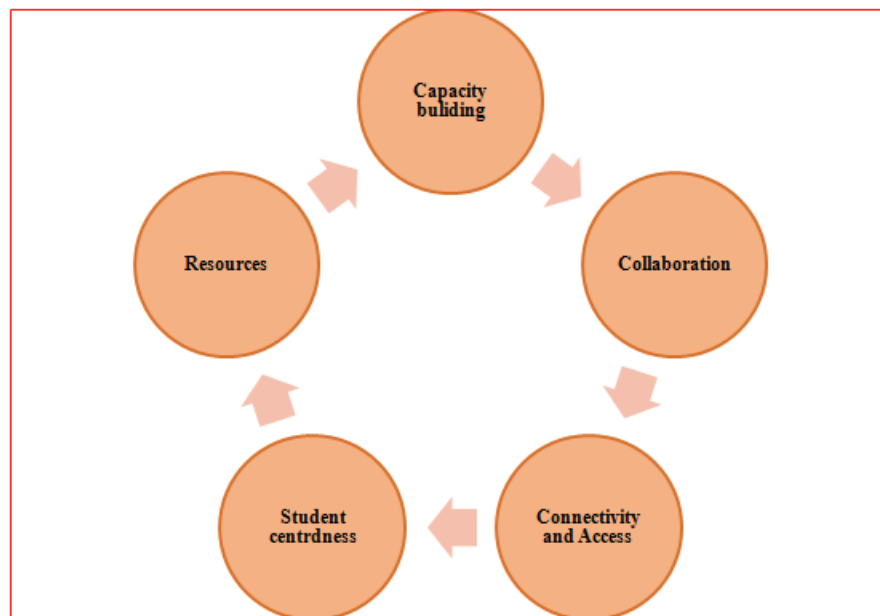

Figure 4: Showing the Factors to be Considered While Capacity Building Programme

VI. Key Elements to be Covered in Capacity Building Programme

Teaching-Learning Practices: Digital literacy is one of the matters of concern confronted by all. Therefore, the capacity building programs should firstly focus on the online teaching-learning practices, digital-skills and also train them regarding the designing of packages and modules.

Content Construction: Strategies regarding the online content construction and managing the use of technological resources to make their teaching more effective.

Assessment and Evaluation: Knowledge and training in regard to continuous assessment and evaluation strategiesthrough online assignments and quizzes and others such as development of rubrics for all courses should be provided.

Inclusive Infrastructure: Digital friendly infrastructure should be ensured so that the learners as well as the teachers can freely participate and interact while teaching-learning.

Student's Motivation in Blended Classroom: Blended learning classroom must provide the students with opportunities like to collaborate and interact freely, autonomy, flexibility, curiosity etc.

VII. Conclusion

Overall, it can be said that as a result of the Covid-19 incident, online teaching and learning has gained widespread acceptance all around the world. It has transformed traditional education to an educational technologies (EdTech) framework, with online teaching, learning, and evaluations. However, online programmes are losing their attraction and reverting to the same rate at which they were formed due to the abrupt acceptance and constant adaptation of online classes without face-to-face encounters. Thus, the blended education mode merging the benefits of both offline and online learning prove to be very advantageous. Significance of technology is also highly recognized by all higher education institutions, and they should take steps to adopt technology-driven education. In the event of a future crisis, HEIs must alter their existing policy frameworks by adopting new methods and technological structures to assist their teachers in successfully accepting Education Technology.Due to pandemic, there are sudden pressures on teachers for online teaching. Teachers who are updated and technology literate easily adjust in these situations but the teacher who do not know how to operate computer and who are in the age of retirement faces great difficulty in this situation. Practical exposure related to the technology usage should be provided at both pre-service and in-service levels so that teachers can effectively explore and use new tools and technology in their teaching-learning.

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