

REDEFINING THE NECESSITATE OF BLENDED LEARNING FOR 'Z' AND 'ALPHA' GENERATIONS

Alex George

Assistant Professor, St. Thomas College of Teacher Education, Pala

Dr. Beenamma Mathew

Assistant Professor, St. Thomas College of Teacher Education, Pala

Abstract

The inculcation of moral and ethical values, attitude and positive thinking can bring changes in the generations. Along with the changes in the society, the teaching- learning environment should create opportunities for students to learn in new ways to meet their individual needs. Generation is the term which denotes the people who are born and living at about the same time. The Generation 'Z' is the first cohort to have internet technology available at a young age. Blended learning breaks down the traditional walls of teaching and offers flexible time frames that can be personalized to each person.

Key words: Generation Z, Generation Alpha, blended learning

Introduction

Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world. It is the acquisition of knowledge through learning. The inculcation of moral and ethical values, attitude and positive thinking can bring changes in the generations. It should be beyond book learning and must make the learner capable to create good culture and values. Along with the changes in the society, the teaching- learning environment should create opportunities for students to learn in new ways to meet their individual needs. Generation is the term which denotes the people who are born and living at about the same time. Historians categorise different generations as per their social performance. In such a way, Generation Z has been born during a time of fast-paced digital growth. Generation Alpha comes after Generation Z and is much more adapted to technology. So, here comes the need to discuss about their education. Innovations are coming up one by one in the field of teaching and learning as in any other fields. Blended learning is one of such methods which incorporate human resources and technological resources. This paper discusses the changes in generation Z and Alpha and redefines the need of blended learning.

Generation 'Z'

It is the term that denotes the generation of children after the Millennials, born in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It is the first cohort to have internet technology available at a young age. They spend more than three hours per day using computers for purposes other than studies. Their parents fear the overuse of internet and dislike the ease of access to inappropriate information, as well as social networking sites which provide access to people worldwide. To educate these students, teachers incorporate technology in the classroom. Here they adopt methods such as blended learning. Educators focus on creating environments and curricula that are student-centered, considering the interests and preferences of the generation and engaging them as active participants. Collaboration technologies make it easier to create engaging and interactive experiences. The education has become more personalized than before. The students tend to enjoy class discussions and interactive classroom environments over the traditional teacher-centric approach. But the teacher appears as a scaffolder in the classroom.

Generation Alpha

Generation Alpha- a term coined by social researcher Mark McCrindle to describe the cohort of people born in 2010 onwards-will play, learn and interact in new ways. They are born into a society where devices are intelligent, everything is connected and physical and digital environments merge into one. As they grow

up, technologies that appear new to older generations will be a normal part of their lives, and will shape their experiences, attitudes and expectations of the world. Today's children are born knowing how to use smart phones, tablet and laptop. So they can also be called as "digital natives". Thus, it is clear that they expect a digital atmosphere in everything. They like to learn in virtual classroom, like to play online games and like to work with Siri and Alexa. Technology in education is prompted by UNESCO as a way of addressing access, inclusion and quality. Embedded in technology from day one, Alpha children are habituated to acquiring knowledge by doing, swiping and hands-on experiencing. As they are most accustomed with artificial intelligence, robots may take over the teacher's role in classrooms. On the other hand, the traditional teacher should be changed as per the time.

The days are gone when children were forced to believe in the crooked up stories. Teachers were the only source of education and hence the students unquestionably accepted whatever was being presented before them. The ability to communicate with the learners is one of the important characteristics of good teaching. In the present education system, teacher is a guide, facilitator, co-explorer, mentor and scaffolder. Moreover, learning is not mere swallowing of ideas but their creation and recreation. In a constructive classroom, learner is at the central position who constructs his own knowledge. In the present scenario, there exists the concept of traditional classroom situation, teacher and peer learners. The mentor has to adopt e-learning techniques to impart information. Thus, blended learning is obviously possible. But, the upcoming generation who is living like a cocoon in the internet world, may not be ready to adjust with such an environment. They may question the need for an actual classroom. Here, the scope of blended learning is questioned.

To analyse it further, it is necessary to understand what blended learning is. It is the combination of online exposure and offline instruction. Digital classrooms are the basic forms of it. It integrates teaching and technology. It combines and aligns learning facilitated in face-to-face classroom mode with learning opportunities created online. Students learn lessons partly through the instruction of the mentor and partly through the materials delivered online. So it promotes student autonomy and the ownership of learning. It also allows students to work at their current level of understanding. By integrating technology, teachers can better prepare the children for future careers and life. This method of learning provides access to high quality course materials and offers learners more exposure. Although blended learning is not that much practiced in schools in India, it will be there in the near future. It is different from e-learning. Students alternate regularly between engaging with teachers and peers and focusing on online content suitable to their learning speed and progress. It gives the learner the combined benefits of classroom learning and e-learning.

Generation Alpha will be the most technologically literate one in the history of humanity. So, teachers have to adapt the classrooms as per the demands and needs of the students. Smart phones and social media have influenced their mind, health and brain, so that it is necessary to cling to appropriate teaching methods and styles. The new generation would always intend to be engaged in the smart phone or laptop screen. Hence, the curriculum operators should implement such situations and should try to give the other offline experiences too. Usually children learn values from their home. But the role of teacher is to lead them to embrace social reality. Despite the generation is Z or Alpha, they must be moulded up for the nation. To accomplish such goals, traditional or online classroom would help well. As per the technological innovations and changing time, the educational system should meet up the needs of the busy and intellectual pupil on the other side. Though it is online or offline, the mentor will be able to refine the skills and abilities of the wards.

Blended Learning Models

All students learn differently according to Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. The theory suggests that all learners learn in a combination of eight different ways or intelligences: Interpersonal intelligence, Intrapersonal intelligence, Linguistic intelligence, Logical-mathematical intelligence, Visual-spatial intelligence, Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, Musical intelligence and Naturalistic intelligence. Technology can be used to support and foster the different skills of the learners. Teachers can use various multi-media formats to share information. Social media, video tutorials and collaboration portals can also be

tapped into to offer students a varied and rich learning experience. There are different kinds of blended learning models. It includes;

- Online – Instruction through online platform and periodic face-to-face meetings.
- Rotation – Learner rotates between self-paced online learning and face-to-face instruction.
- Flex – Mostly through online, but give needed support in small-group settings.
- Personalized blend – Anywhere, anytime learning options are provided.
- Online lab – Instructions delivered in a lab by an online teacher and monitored by paraprofessionals.

Blended learning breaks down the traditional walls of teaching and offers flexible time frames that can be personalized to each person.

Educational Importance

Modern classrooms are slowly taking new approaches to cater the needs of the digital generation. Traditional classroom teaching techniques are giving way to new system of blended learning. It makes education more flexible and students can pace themselves. Teachers can stay in touch with student progress, while the students can clear their doubts. Learning becomes more interesting and learners can access a wide range of academic materials. Moreover, it develops the technological skills of both the guide and the learner. Assessment is also possible in this method. Students are advised to submit assignments electronically and it ensures regular formative and summative assessments with feedback.

Conclusion

Recently, scholars have turned their attention to the new or next generation learner. Technology is embedded in almost every aspect of our lives, and this will be even more true for Generation Alpha. They will have increased access to existing and emerging technologies and will interact with digital content in new ways. Education should aim to meet their needs. Blended learning helps students learn or revise learning, stay organized, express what they have learned, submit assignments, track their achievement, and communicate with others timely and more effectively. This article has analysed the importance of blended learning in the new generation. Teacher should address and tackle all the skills and problems of the students. He/She should try to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills. To conclude, virtual reality creates a completely different environment, an artificial world, which in turn suits the intelligentsia of the digital generation. So the educationalists should use the scope of blended learning to cope up with the needs of the evolving generations.

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