VIRTUAL CLASSROOM: LEARNING BEYOND THE FOUR WALLS

Prof. B. J. Mundhe, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor in Education (Selection Grade) Janata Shikshan Mandal's, Sane Guruji Vidya Prabodhini, Comprehensive College of Education, Khiroda. Dist. Jalgaon.

E-mail: drbjmundhe@gmail.com

Abstract

A virtual classroom is an online teaching environment. The environment can be web based accessed through a portal or software-based and requires a downloadable execrable file. Just like in a real world classroom, a student in a virtual classroom participates in synchronous instruction, which means that the teacher and student are logged into the virtual teaching environment at the same time. Just as the term 'virtual means a simulation of the real thing, a virtual classroom is a simulated classroom via Internet, which provides a convenient communication environment for distance learners just like traditional face/to/face classroom. A virtual classroom allows teachers to attend a classroom from anywhere in the world and aims to provide a teaching experience that is similar to a real classroom.

Keywords: Virtual Classroom, Virtual Teaching, Virtual learning

1.1 Introduction

Due to high advancement in area of Science and Technology, particularly information technology, many alternate of leaning came into existence in global differentiae. Advancement in computer's differ modems, different style of mainframes the best facilities of internet, comprehensive software programming's, cables and telephone lines help to develop virtual classroom in developed and developing countries. However, in India, virtual classroom are taking place gradually for alternate way of learning.

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Virtual classroom software applications often employ multiple synchronous technologies such as web conferencing, videoconferencing, love streaming and web-based VOIP to provide remote students with the ability to collaborate in real time. To enhance the educational process, applications may also provide a student with asynchronous communication tools such as message boards and charts capabilities.

1.2   What is Virtual Classroom?

As we already said, the purpose of incorporating virtual classroom in training and development programmes is to eliminate the limitations posed by learner being present at distant geographical locations. In addition to that, a virtual classroom setup reduces travel expenses. Also, for facilitators (educational institutes and organizations), it cuts down the cost of arranging classroom and various other learning facilities.

Do you know that a virtual classroom takes almost 60% less time than learning the same material in a traditional classroom? **This reflects that your learners can have a lot more time to actually apply the learned concepts in the real world outside the virtual classroom.**

Virtual classroom platforms are unlike correspondence courses. Virtual classroom is a higher interactive platform that uses videoconference technology to simulate a real classroom environment wherein the participants interact fact-to-face with the professor seeing, hearing and asking questions just like in a real classroom. A virtual classroom is a powerful and interactive platform that brings together professor asking professionals from across the nation.

The curriculum has been designed to meet the demand for quality management education while addressing the resource and time. The programs are aimed at enhancing the knowledge skill level of the participants as well as improving their career prospects. The certificates are issued by the respective institute or university.

1.2.1 Definitions

Virtual classrooms consist of a mixture of synchronous i.e. real time and asynchronous events i.e. self – paced –they are special application of computer and network technologies to the task of education.

Virtual education refers to instruction in a learning environment where teacher and student are separated by time or space, or both, and the teacher provides course   content   through course management applications, multimedia resources, the Internet,

videoconferencing, etc. student receive the content and communicate with the teacher via the same technologies.

1.3 Objectives of the Virtual Classroom

The objectives of virtual classrooms are to improve access to advance educational experiences by allowing students and instructors to participate in remote learning communities using personal computers; and to improve the quality and effectiveness of education by using the computer to support a collaborative learning process. Explosion of the knowledge age has changed the context of what is learnt and how it is learnt –the concept of virtual classrooms is a manifestation of this knowledge revolution. There are a lot of different virtual classroom systems and platforms you can use: everything from Adobe Connect. WebEx, and Citrix Go To Training content is designed and facilitated. This is the key to successful knowledge transfer.

1.4 Types of the Virtual Classroom

- Remote learning
- Distance learning

Remote learning

When student enters classroom they find coordinator instead of faculty and

Fellow learners

Distance learning

Students sit differently. The platform offers interactivity similar to a live classroom session where a student sitting in any part of the world at any given point of time can interact freely with the faculty raising questions, queries etc.

1.5 Typical Class Activities in Virtual Classroom

Virtual classroom software package provides the following facilities:

- Full online courses with modules
- Online quizzes and surveys
- E-discussions and chats with students, parents and guests
- Group and individual learning activities.
- Forms and synchronous chat sessions
- Web quests hotlists scavenger hunts etc
- Homework activities and assessment documents.

1.6 Features of Virtual Classroom

a) Live audio –video possibility

Audio and video support both contribute towards the E- learning process in a virtual classroom.

b) Session recording

The entire classroom session can be recorded in video format and stored in library for future reference.

c) Using a board

Whiteboard is an alternative to the tradition method, used as a tool for drawing graphics or diagrams in virtual classroom.

d) Sharing of resources

The resources can be shared by faculty in the virtual classroom situation by using MS-Office, PDF files, Flesh Video etc.

e) Active participation of students takes place

All the participants from the virtual classroom are connected through audio or video conference during the teaching. They can clarify their doubts. This is indeed a very significant process where students get answer to their queries and questions then and there while interaction with teachers and peers makes the learning process interesting and enriching for students.

f) Internet problems

If the students lose Internet connectivity then the successive portion of the class is conducted through telephone.

g) Flexible time

Students may participate at any time of the day i.e. learning is flexible

h) Virtual classroom

Provides the community and control some learners need.

i) Economical efficient learning location

Students are not limited to courses offered in their geographic locality.

j) More active learning

The computer forces response and attention

k)   Equivalent equipment

Virtual classroom also needs equivalent equipment and tools is the form of network-based software application to allow a group of instructors and students to carry out the learning process.

1.7 Virtual Classrooms and the Modern Learning Environment

How does virtual learning meet the formal learning needs and fits into an advanced learning environment? Well, that is simple. No matter if you are offering a virtual classroom

to learners or employees, it still addresses all the aspects of formal learning.

These may include scheduled, formal, and evaluated learning patterns. A virtual classroom allows people to come along as coaches, peers, facilitators and even learners with

specific goals in a formal yet virtual space.

In addition to that, a virtual classroom offers and encourages a much deeper understanding, and learning through practice, discussion and collaboration. For this, you may use

various tools such as podcast, video, interactive simulations and other modern tools. On the other hand, when we talk about modernizing the

Virtual classroom, we don't refer to technological advancements to create a better learning experience. This is just one aspect of virtual learning; we should focus more on learning environments and experiences. After all, the overall learning and teaching fundamentally involve people and that is exactly what our focus should be.

Nonetheless, this is more about developing a comprehensive learning experience which takes the learner away from the point and clicks approach. To create a modern leaning experience, facilitators play a crucial role in establishing relationships and engaging learners.

To make this possible, a virtual instructor must:

•   Establish deeper connections amongst learners and with a student in that virtual environment.

•   Gain skills and competent behaviors that are requires for success.

•   Ensure to be willing, ready and enabled to carry out a virtual lesson.

•   Keep the targeted audience both engaged and active throughout the learning experience.

1.8 Why Should You Opt for a Virtual Classroom?

Virtual classrooms offer countless opportunities for adaptive learning to the learners as well as facilitators. When you opt for a virtual classroom, you can easily reach a large audience at

a global level and just in a fraction of the time. With that, there is no need to travel to the classroom, bear travel costs and travel prohibitively long distances. To be more specific, a virtual classroom offers the following benefits to participants:

- **A Flexible, Affordable and Non-Restricting Learning Environment**

  A virtual classroom is not about writing down notes. Instead, it enables students to record the provided information as it happens. With that, learners can easily access all the visual and audio presentations. To be precise, the content remains accessible even after it has been delivered and a student can have a quick refresher if he/she fails to fully comprehend it the first time. All of these facilities can be availed at a very low cost and this is one of most common and major advantages of a virtual classroom. as stated earlier, all a participant needs to get the best of a virtual classroom is a good internet connection. The idea of the virtual classroom, as it takes up modern learning preferences, allows participants to have a strong connection with other participants and even facilitators all around the globe. They can easily interact in live classes along with direct participation and collaboration. Many

  companies and educational institutions are now incorporating virtual classrooms with their online learning technology. For this, these institutions are now using virtual classroom software and other tools to offer an interactive and effective training module for their learners worldwide. With all these technological advancements and globally shifting learning platforms, ensuring learners' ensuring learners' engagement is not an easy task. That is why many institutions are now making the most of online learning technology to boost their learners' motivation. From the beginning of the introduction of virtual classes, there has been a much technological advancement in this regard, which has improved and given rise to this virtual learning platform-significantly.

- **Immediate feedback and improved digital skills**

  As you take up a virtual classroom, you don't need to wait for days in order to get your results or performance reviews. You get your scores or performance evaluation as soon as you finish your test so that you can instantly review the areas where you are performing well and the ones in which you need to improve further. Similarly, you can interact with your facilitator in a private window and get the feedback right away and in real time.

  With that, another advantage of taking up a virtual classroom is that along with improving your skills and knowledge through learning material, you also hone your skills and

knowledge through learning material; you also hone your digital skills –that too with modern and sophisticated learning technology.

1.9 Virtual Classrooms and a Look into the Future

Since the beginning of the21st century, there has been a lot of progress in the way we are utilizing the electronic media. As we crossed the barriers of high-cost technology integration and lack of speedy internet networks, many modern businesses and educational institutions decided to fully incorporate eLearning through a virtual classroom to facilitate students and employees in terms of L&D (learning and development).To give you an example, the groundbreaking modern technology of 3D hologram is supporting eLearning platforms like never before. While this still has a lot of space for improvement and full integration, this creative innovation is now changing the course of online education. It provides all the participants a semblance of the formal classroom regardless of wherever they are in the world, offering them a more lifelike experience. Just a few years ago, who would have imagined having field trips just by sitting in a classroom but organizations like Google have now made it possible with their virtual reality system. These technological advancements are now changing educational plat forms and making them independent of physical location and time. All of this and even more is coming in the near future. The future will create a classroom scenario using an eLearning framework with exceptional accuracy which will make participants forget about their actual presence and the long distance between them and the instructor. By now, virtual classrooms have already stepped into the learning world and gradually it will completely take over the online education market, enabling better audio-visual interactions between participants.

1.10 Advantages of Virtual Classroom

- Virtual classrooms are more accessible, flexible and convenient in their approach towards education of students and teachers.

- Virtual classrooms promote collaborative learning attitude among students

- Virtual learning environment encourages freedom of expression and students are more open to communicate and express opinion

- Virtual classrooms use videoconferencing and teleconferencing to make the Presentation more attractive and likely

- It can be used as a solution for live delivery and interaction that addresses the entire process of creating and managing the teaching-learning process.

- One- to-one communication: In a virtual classroom environment learners can talk to the class and to teach other and although this communication is not as rich in a traditional classroom; it still can help learners, since it is one to one.

- Students develop their language and critical thinking skills.

- Virtual classroom is accessible via Internet 24 hours a day.

- Training can be organized more quickly than traditional classroom.

1.11 Conclusion

Virtual classrooms have offered flexible accessibility and many new ways of interactions for both teachers and students. More and more institutions and students are now embracing this new online educational platform –a virtual teaching which indicates the effectiveness of these media forms. With virtual classroom trend evolving like never before, these modern classrooms are surely staying for long and who knows when they will permanently replace the traditional four-walled classrooms. Similarly, in a business setup, it will be a lot more interesting to experience all of these new ways that a business would incorporate and collaborate to get more innovative with their employees' learning and development models.

Nonetheless, our paradigm of education is growing with a lot more technological tools than before. These advancements are surpassing the traditional and physical boundaries and opening a totally new world of interactive learning. After all the applications of virtual

 Learning are endless!

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