

Chapter 1

Hybrid Learning: Perspectives of Higher Education Faculty

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ABSTRACT

Hybrid learning has been utilized as a transitional learning method to make advantage of both face-to-face and online learning platforms. In this article, the authors explored how faculty members perceive using simultaneously multiple platforms in higher education such as face-to-face, online, and hybrid platforms in teaching. In this study, the authors examined how faculty members defined hybrid learning. They also explored how the participants perceive both hybrid and online learning as vehicles for higher education advancement as well as strategies to attract more students to higher education. The purpose of this research was to develop an analytical overview of one of the learning approaches such as hybrid and its impact on higher education. The authors have interviewed ten faculty members in order to achieve this objective. The results illustrated that faculty members do not have one single definition of hybrid learning but rather they have multiple definitions. Faculty members also demonstrated that they support online learning because it achieves more accessibility to higher education, yet, they believe the face-to-face learning achieve more quality of education.

INTRODUCTION

The learning environment in higher education has been changing overtime. Prior to using distance technology in higher education, face-to-face was the typical learning environment at all universities in which instructors were the center of the learning process, because they were the main source of knowledge in addition to curriculum. However, those are bygone days. Moore and Kearsle (2012) indicated that distance education was initiated in the last quarter of the past century, but it did not truly take a significant place in higher education until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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When technology is integrated with face-to-face instructions in higher education classrooms, there is flexibility and accessibility to education resources including instructors, faculty, and course materials. Such flexible courses are taught in a hybrid format to achieve the balance between face-to-face and *entirely* online learning. Many graduate programs are offered entirely by distance, online while a mixture of face-to-face and online, or hybrid or blended, is sometimes requested by students. That said, many students and faculty prefer the traditional face-to-face as an effective vehicle of learning, because it allows a direct interaction between students and their instructors. Online learning may be valuable; however, students and faculty find that face-to-face learning has another value that cannot be ignored. Students create an interactive rapport with their instructors as well as with their peers in the face-to-face, physical environments.

We focused our study on the exploration of hybrid learning, sometimes called blended learning. We defined this as an educational tool or delivery of instruction in which both face-to-face and online teaching are offered simultaneously. We specifically determined perceived effectiveness of hybrid learning within higher education and inquired in what ways faculty members in a U.S. Research I university college of education perceive hybrid/blended learning. Students' perceptions of learning might be different from the faculty perspectives, because students focus on the instructions and the techniques with which they obtain knowledge, while faculty members focus not only in the content, but also on the methodologies through which that content is delivered. In our study, we focused our attention to the faculty members and their perspectives on the delivery of instruction using a hybrid learning approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hybrid learning and blended learning are two terms usually referring to one concept. They are usually used to define a mixture of two or more techniques of instructions. Olapiriyakul and Scher (2006) described blended or hybrid learning as the use of "mixed mode of instruction, formally combining traditional face-to-face instruction and pure online learning" (p.288). However, Hinterberger, Fassler, and Bauer-Messer (2004) argued that blended and hybrid do not describe the same term. For those researchers, hybrid learning is a method with which distance education is the main focus that is supported with traditional education, but blended learning refers to the best practice of old and new pedagogy combined.

In order to further understand the reason that made us choose to conduct this study, it was observed that the online learning approach has increased, and sometimes it replaces the traditional method of learning for an entire degree. For instance, many institutions now provide Masters, and even some doctoral, degrees delivered completely online; whereas, about 15 years ago, such students received knowledge traditionally through the face-to-face means. With the rapid advancement in educational technology, most of public institutions possess powerful online learning management systems through which courses can completely be offered online. Students with good technological backgrounds prefer having courses online, because it gives them flexibility in time and location. Students who work off-campus or live far from campus may prefer online or hybrid than entirely face-to-face courses. Still, we offer that face-to-face is necessary for some courses and degrees such as Ph.D. degrees in which students need to physically meet with their advisors in order to get personal mentoring for their research and for understanding the academy. However, the change from completely face-to-face to hybrid or completely online is increasing; therefore, we found that it important to explore how faculty members perceive such changes, particularly at a Research 1 university (We used Research 1 since most readers will understand

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