

Chapter 77

The Perception of Faculty Members on Hybrid Learning: A Naturalistic Case Study

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors examine the perceptions of faculty using online and hybrid platforms in teaching. Hybrid/blended is a method in which faculty members use both online and face-to-face simultaneously. The study examined how faculty participants defined hybrid learning. In addition, researchers examined what the participants' thought of hybrid and online learning as vehicles for higher education advancement as well as strategies to attract more students to higher education. The main objective of this study is developing an analytical overview of one of the learning approaches such as hybrid and its effect on the learning process in the higher education. Ten faculty members were interviewed in order to achieve this objective. The results revealed that faculty members have multiple definitions of hybrid as it is not only teaching using face-to-face and online platforms but rather it is a way both teachers and students can meet their teaching and learning needs.

INTRODUCTION

The learning environment has been changing overtime. Traditional face-to-face was the typical learning environment at all universities prior to the entry of technology. 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.

Although distance education started in the last quarter of the twentieth century, distance learning and virtual classrooms did not truly take their place in education, particularly higher education, until the beginning of this century (Moore & Kearsle, 2012).

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Attaching technology to face-to-face instructions in higher education provides flexibility and accessibility to education resources including instructors, faculty, and course materials. It is the magical formula for many students to pursue their graduate education by not being physically on campus. In a world of great economical need, such graduate students can keep their jobs wherever they are and can continue schooling.

Many graduate programs are offered entirely by distance, online, and they are gaining approval. 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 environment.

In our research, we examined hybrid learning as an educational tool in which both face-to-face and online teaching are offered. In addition, its perceived effectiveness will be discussed. We inquired in what ways faculty members in what is considered to be a U.S. Research 1 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 obtain knowledge, while faculty members focus not only in the content but also on the methodology through which that content is being delivered. Thus, we focused in study only on the faculty perspective in an attempt to create a better understanding of the types of learning and their effectiveness.

BACKGROUND

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 degrees that are delivered completely online; whereas, a little over a decade 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, 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

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