Chapter 11
Blended Learning:
Contributions to the Students' Education Process at University

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ABSTRACT

Blending technology and education is considered a strategy to obtain various benefits, among which one of the most prominent has been enhancing students' engagement. The implementation of hybrid education at university is a clear example of this combination. Thus, considering the relevance of the theme, mainly in the modern world, the purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the contributions of hybrid teaching to the student's learning process in higher education. To this end, a qualitative research was conducted, through in-depth interviews at a private, community, confessional, and philanthropic university in Brazil. The data obtained was processed using the content analysis method, and the following contributions to the students' learning process were verified: flexibility of time, space and pace; greater retention of the content, which is available on the online platform; autonomy and constant updating in the face of changes in the modern world and better performance in terms of grades.

INTRODUCTION

The ways of teaching and learning are being reimagined in the modern world, which has enabled changes in the design of teaching and learning practices. Learning, therefore, is being reconfigured within a process of construction and renewal of knowledge (Torrisi-Steele & Drew, 2013; Costa, 2018). Digital

transformation has broadened access to technologies and introduced them in education (Castells, 2013). It has also promoted new degrees to and enhanced the interaction (student – teacher) as well as the active participation (of the student), both of which nowadays can also occur collectively, in a network and without depending on time and distance (Tsourela *et al.*, 2014). It was by means of its sense of sharing that the Internet managed to involve the whole world (Castells, 2013).

In terms of teaching modalities, the use of digital technology for learning environments can provide students with unique experiences and satisfy their desire for information and knowledge access, in a faster, more interactive and personalized way. For Lévy (2007, p. 158), it is worth the effort to develop "... a new style of pedagogy that favors, at the same time, personalized learning and collective online learning". An example, in higher education, is the implementation of a hybrid modality called blended learning in which digital technology holds a prominent place, as it is a condition for it to be performed (Haughey, 2006; Lencastre & Araújo, 2008; Tori, 2009; Horn & Staker, 2014; Lazem, 2019).

Blended learning has been considered one of the biggest trends in the education sector (Graham, 2005; Batista Júnior, 2018). In the literature, different definitions are found for this modality, but, generally, it is understood that it establishes the convergence of two learning models: the in-person model (in the classroom) and the online model (with the support of digital technology). Although the growth of hybrid education is clear (Graham, 2005; Costa & Lopes, 2016; Batista Júnior, 2018; Costa, 2018), it is necessary to analyze whether students understand the importance of taking courses in this modality – which assumes they will deliver a more active participation in the learning process – and whether they can interact more with the teacher to achieve better performance.

Considering the relevance of the theme, the purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the contributions of blended learning to the student's learning process in higher education, from the perspective of the learning subject, the one who learns. Particularly, this research sought to examine the importance of hybrid disciplines in the learning process; clarify what students understand by active participation in their learning journey; explain the interaction (student – teacher) and assess the students' perception of their own performance when taking courses in this modality.

To that end, a qualitative research was conducted with undergraduate students of different courses distributed in the areas of Social, Exact and Health Sciences who had already attended at least 20% of the credit hours of the course and at least one discipline in the hybrid modality, of a community, confessional and philanthropic private university in Brazil. Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, recorded on audio and using a script as the guide. The collected data were analyzed through content analysis.

Other studies concerning hybrid learning have already indicated the potential of this modality for different actors involved. For example, the studies by Tsourela *et al.* (2014), Chemi and Krogh (2017) and de Costa (2018) demonstrated that cost reduction is an advantage of hybrid education for the institution as well as the possibility to reach a larger number of students. Another study, additionally, presented benefits for the teacher, as it allows the transition from traditional teaching methods, teacher-centered, to a perspective with a focus on students, student-centered (Costa *et al.*, 2012; Ribes-Giner *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, it is also pertinent and currently encouraged to analyze whether the main actors in the learning process, the students, indeed recognize the advantages of this teaching model. In this regard, the aim of this study is to assess, from the students' perspective, what contributions and advantages there are.

The structure of this study presents, firstly, digital technology as an enhancer of active participation (of the student) and of interaction (between student and teacher). Subsequently, the concept, context, characterization and principles of hybrid education at university are addressed. Then, the methodological

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