

FACE-TO-FACE, BLENDED/HYBRID AND ONLINE TEACHING

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Abstract:

Traditional face-to-face classes have been replaced by online teaching in the pandemic, while recently there have been numerous educational institutions which promote blended or hybrid teaching. The present paper discusses the main differences among face-to-face, blended/hybrid and online teaching, as well as their advantages and disadvantages for students and teachers.

Key words: *face-to-face, blended, hybrid, online, teaching*

JEL classification: *I2*

INTRODUCTION

Due to COVID-19 pandemic situation and the closing of schools and universities, the educational system worldwide has met serious challenges and changes. Traditional face-to-face classes, sometimes doubled by blended learning, has been replaced by online teaching. If the latter was the only teaching way during the lockdown, for the post-pandemic situation there are numerous debates on hybrid teaching.

The present paper discusses the main differences among face-to-face, blended/hybrid and online teaching, as well as their advantages and disadvantages for students and teachers.

1. Face-to-face courses

These types of courses are traditional and have been mostly used in teaching especially before the pandemic. Classes take place in a real building/room specially dedicated to the educational process. In order to increase learning, technology may or may not be used.

Some of the most relevant advantages of face-to-face classes are the establishment of social presence and support, direct interactions with the colleagues and teachers resulting in innovative thought, psychological strength, and relationship forming among students, immediate and direct feedback, as well as nonverbal communication. The educational space may be organized according to necessities, for role play activities or debates with the division in groups or in couples, as well as for physical activities.

On the other hand, between the disadvantages of face-to-face classes there are the need to commute from home to school and back, as well as the interruptions created by inquiring or incredulous students. These interruptions have a negative effect both on the teacher's plan for the lesson and on the other students. The approving student may

also be disadvantaged as he/she never admits any lack of comprehension of explanations and fails in asking additional clarifying questions. Other disadvantages of face-to-face classes may be related to the lack of equipment in the classroom, to costs (teaching materials, electricity and heating of large school or university buildings), to the central role of teachers in the teaching process (the risk of monologues), to the necessity of adult supervision for young students during breaks. Bullying may also be a high risk in face-to-face classes.

The concept of face-to-face classes has also changed due to the pandemic. Before COVID-19, it meant a collaborative learning in couple and groups without social distancing which required students to be physically present on designated days and hours. Students used to sit in common desks, next to each other, being in direct contact with their colleagues and teachers, while learning included stress of homework and exams. Nowadays, even though it is still a collaborative learning in presence, face-to-face classes place students in individual desks with social distancing and with the obligation to wear masks.

2. Blended/hybrid courses

There have been numerous attempts to define blended learning (Dziuban: 2004; Graham: 2006; Graham, Allen, and Ure: 2005), each taking into account three approaches: blended learning as the combination of different educational methods, as the combination of different modalities or delivery media or as the combination of face-to-face education with computer mediated education. There are also numerous authors who consider blended learning as a combination or integration of the strengths of face-to-face instruction (e.g., live instruction and classroom interaction) and computer-mediated instruction or online teaching (e.g. technologically-mediated interactions between students, teachers and learning resources) (Bliuc, Goodyear, Ellis: 2007; Garrison, Kanuka: 2004; Graham: 2006; Osguthorpe, Graham: 2003; Watson: 2008).

The definition of blended learning provided by Boelens, Van Laer, De Wever, Elen (2015) shares the present papers views: “learning that happens in an instructional context which is characterized by a deliberate combination of online and classroom-based interventions to instigate and support learning. Learning happening in purely online or purely classroom-based instructional settings is excluded. The effective integration of both components depends on context factors such as learning goals, target group, size of the target group, and/or content.”¹ To sum up, blended learning is a combination of traditional face-to-face learning with access to online learning.

As far as terminology is concerned, according to Olapiriyakul and Scher² (2006: 288) “these two terms (hybrid learning and blended learning) are used alternatively but refer to the same concept”. The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching from Iowa State University supports instead the idea of a difference between blended and hybrid teaching in the *Introduction to Hybrid Learning* (2020). If hybrid teaching refers to an equal amount of face-to-face and online courses, blended learning describes a

¹ Ruth Boelens; Stijn Van Laer; Bram De Wever, Jan Elen, 2015, *Blended learning in adult education: towards a definition of blended learning in Adult Learners Online! Blended and Online Learning in Adult Education and Training*.
<https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/6905076/file/6905079>.

² K. Olapiriyakul; J. M. Scher (2006). *A guide to establishing hybrid learning courses: Employing information technology to create a new learning experience, and a case study*. The Internet and Higher Education, 9(4), 287–301.

mostly traditional face-to-face course with a few online classes. The difference would thus consist only in the higher percentage of traditional courses involved in blended learning. Regardless of these differences in the amounts of traditional and online classes, blended or hybrid teaching are the present and especially the future of education. The pandemic has opened the door to more teaching activities based on online tools and the post pandemic situation will definitely take the benefits of these activities and will change the educational system.

Among the main advantages offered to the educational process by blended learning one can think of the increased flexibility for teachers in presenting their subjects and for students in their learning approaches, effectiveness in the learning outcome for students due to the multiple teaching methods as well as a higher interaction with students (teachers can interact with individual and small groups of students, feeling gaps and checking their progress). Moreover, there are some cost savings such as classroom space savings and commuting expenses (even traffic and parking places for university students or parents).

On the other hand, one of the biggest disadvantages of blended learning is related to its dependence on technology. Schools and universities are supposed to have tools and finances to support the necessary technology for a blended learning classroom. There are also other costs such as installing, maintaining, upgrading equipment, and even having technical support. Any technological issue, such as lack of electricity or a virus, may immediately interrupt the course. Moreover, teachers as well as students must have some training in the use of technology which requires time. Last but not least, the access of students to technology such as personal computers, tablets, phones and internet also has to be taken into account.

Regardless of its drawbacks, blended learning proved to be extremely useful in the teaching process.

3. Online courses

Online classes are a mixture of video recordings and live lectures conducted using a virtual portal where the majority of interactions, instructions and activities take place online.

After the first online course with open access, called Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), started in 2008 by Dave Cormier from Prince Edward Island University, many other universities such as Stanford in 2011, and Harvard in 2012 offered open online classes. In the next decade, online courses have played an increasing role in teaching and in 2020, due to COVID-19 pandemic situation and the closing of schools and universities, online classes have resulted for a while to be the only way of providing education. As a result, numerous platforms started to be used in the educational system. Teachers started to mix real time interactive platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Moodle, Teams, with collaborative platforms (Google Classroom, Edmodo) and other platforms for assessments, questionnaires, and games (Mentimeter, Kahoot, Wordwall etc.). It is the decision of each teacher which platforms and applications to use during the class. Their numbers and uses are extremely high, depending on the subject matters and purposes³.

³ For a detailed description of various platforms and applications such as Zoom, Google Meet, Moodle, Google classroom, Edmodo, Mentimeter, Kahoot, Wordwall, Socrative, ISLCollective, Liveworksheet see Madincea Pascu, Petcovici (2020: 96-101) while for Quizizz, Lyrics Training, Quizlet, Quizlet Live, Storybird and GoNoodle see Madincea Pascu (2021).

Online classes may be extremely attractive to students due to the audio-visual presentations which stimulate their imagination, but also due to games which increase the speed of reaction. Moreover, students can learn at their own pace, while teachers have their immediate feedback and can correct and overcome any errors or difficulties. Inquiring or incredulous students may ask their questions in the chat box function of the platforms, without interrupting the class while approving students may have the courage to ask for extra explanations from the teacher through the same tool. Other advantages of online teaching are related to the role of the teacher who turns into a facilitator of learning, involving the students more in the teaching activity, as well as to the development of new skills. Both students and teachers have been in the position of discovering and developing their computer skills through the use of various new platforms and applications. Last but not least, students may take part in courses much easier, without having to commute from home to school on specific days and times, while costs are also reduced (no expenses for teaching materials, electricity and heating of large school or university buildings).

On the other hand, some of the most relevant issues that may occur during online classes are the lack of adequate technology (computer, laptop, tablet, phone), different technical problems (internet, electricity), the presence of external temptations for students and teachers (phone, TV, emails, people in the house), the lack of direct contact with colleagues and the teacher, the inadequacy of the course for online teaching, the low computer skills of teachers and students, as well as the inability of the teacher to control and guide the class.

CONCLUSION

The present paper defined and tried to outline the main advantages and disadvantages of the traditional face-to-face learning, online learning, and blended/hybrid learning. The pandemic situation has produced a higher interest of teachers in the online teaching, emphasizing thus the main strenghts and drawbacks of face-to-face teaching. The access to different platforms and applications made lessons more interactive and attractive. As there are still disadvantages in online teaching, blended or hybrid learning seems to be the future of teaching definitely with its own limitations.

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