Chapter 11
Students Skills in a Blended Learning Environment: A Qualitative Research

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to determine participants' perceptions about the characteristics that students must have to be successful in a blended learning environment. The authors adopted a qualitative approach in which 91 learners participated. Data collection was carried out through guided interviews over three months. The results of the research emphasized the need to have a good level of English and new digital skills as essential requirements to study an English degree in a blended learning modality. Participants were strongly aware of the necessity to master synchronous and asynchronous technological tools to communicate online with their virtual classmates, and to do assessment and self-assessment e-activities. Learners also considered that it was essential to be mature enough to be able to reflect and evaluate their own learning. Results showed that students must be organised and tenacious, and must have the ability to innovate and collaborate inside the created e-learning community.


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INTRODUCTION

The development of technology has allowed the convergence of two learning environments: traditional face-to-face learning and distributed learning systems (Coaten, 2003; García-Peñalvo, 2008; Güzer & Caner, 2014; López & Matesanz, 2009). The combination of these two teaching-learning models has led to the development of the blended learning modality that according to Graham (2006) is defined as:

(…) part of the ongoing convergence of two archetypal learning environments. On one hand, we have the traditional face-to-face learning environment that has been around for centuries. On the other hand, we have distributed learning environments that have begun to grow and expand in exponential ways as new technologies have expanded the possibilities for distributed communication and interaction. (p.5)

Other authors, such as Garrison and Kanuka (2004), emphasized the same idea and stated that “blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (p.96). Yen & Lee (2011) also added that “blended learning, thoughtfully combining the best elements of online and face-to-face education, is likely to emerge as the predominant teaching model of the future” (p.138). The direct consequence of the convergence of these two learning environments is the development of a different kind of education that exploits the advantages of both types of instructions (García & García, 2005; Graham, 2006; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). On one hand, there are face-to-face interactions between teachers and students due to the different face-to-face activities in which they meet in a certain place and in a strict timetable in order to carry out the different lessons previously defined. And, on the other hand, the different synchronous and asynchronous tools (chat, forum, wiki, online glossaries or online questionnaires) facilitate the distribution of contents, learning experiences and interaction between all the participants of the teaching-learning process without sharing the same time and physical place. As Thorne (2003) points out:

(…) blended learning represents a real opportunity to create learning experiences that can provide the right learning at the right time and in the right place for each and every individual, not just at work, but in schools, universities and even at home. It can be truly universal, crossing global boundaries and bringing groups of learners together through different cultures and time zones. In this context blended learning could become one of the most significant developments of the 21st century. (p.18)
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