



XARXES - INNOVAESTIC 2022

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15. Blended Learning in Higher Education: Teachers' Feedback and Students' Autonomy

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education is experiencing changes, and its evolution has been boosted after the adaptations done due to the lockdown of Covid-19 pandemic. One of the main transformations reported by recent researches is the reinforcement of digital resources to conduct learning. This digitalisation of part of the processes may impact in the autonomy of students. In this context, the European project “Fostering higher education students’ autonomy through blended learning” (BLEARN_AUTONOMY, reference: 2020-1-ES01-KA203-082513), aims at experimenting with digital, innovative strategies that improve teachers’ feedback to higher education students, foster collaborative teaching and develop institutional policies of blended learning. The consortium consists of six universities from five European countries: Spain, Portugal, Norway, Poland and France (<https://blearn-autonomy.eu/team>). Within the project, different approaches of research are driven to accomplish the established intellectual outputs. Results will be published in a handbook with research-based guidelines for teachers in higher education (IO1), and a handbook for educational leaders and teachers in higher education (IO3), apart from other reports and the development a digital platform for collaborative teaching across higher education institutions (IO2). In XARXES-INNOVAESTIC, we are presenting a part of this research, which focuses on the objective of analysing the relationship between blended learning and students’ autonomy in Higher Education, and the role of teachers by providing feedback. Data collection is still ongoing. We are following an explanatory sequential design: First, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with a heterogeneous sample of students from the six universities of the consortium. Afterwards, a focus group

with students from different countries delved on the main topics emerged in the previous interviews. Future steps are planned to repeat the procedure (interviewing a similar number of students, and ending with two more focus groups). The questions posed both in individual interviews and in the focus group were directed to understanding their experience on face-to-face learning and interacting using digital tools, the steps they followed to accomplish their grade, and how teaching styles influenced their understanding of education. Preliminary results show that university students do not differentiate adequately blended learning and hybrid learning. From their experience, hybrid learning combining onsite and online students when necessary is considered a very efficient solution if the technological means are advanced (high speed connection, adequate digital devices, good quality sound, and so forth). The understanding of Blended Learning and how it has been conducted in the lectures often causes confusion at first, but once interviewees become aware of its effective use, they agree that it will be promoted in the future. Their perception is positive, although experiences very varied. There is no doubt that complementing face-to-face teaching and learning with digital tools and conducting part of the process by digital means results in a positive impact. More specifically, interviewees point at a kind of transformation from university teaching that they find meaningful: rather than magistral lectures, students do prefer more dialogical sessions, they are not really willing to cope with theoretical instruction, they demand to slow down the rhythm in order to reflect in more depth on the contents. In this regard, the feedback they get from teachers is highly valued and they remark how useful it can be to get it quickly. Students like to have a clear syllabus and guidelines for each subject, but then they prefer being teachers guiding them. From this research, it emerges that teachers can help increasing students' autonomy, but there is work ahead as students are not always responsible enough of their own learning. Thus, Higher Education heads challenges such as Blended Learning, and this is an opportunity to rethink how teachers can promote students' autonomy.

KEYWORDS: blended learning, students' autonomy, higher education, teachers' feedback.