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Navigating the Terrain:

Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

Examining students' learning experiences in hybrid environments

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In the aftermath of the pandemic, a generation of students who are comfortable with learning online and prefer having the autonomy to decide how they want to learn – in-person or remotely – has emerged. Hybrid learning, where teaching instruction is given to students in different spatial settings at the same time, is a modality that has the potential to deliver stimulating learning experiences to support diverse learning needs. The experiences in various forms of learning – in-person, fully online and hybrid – have exposed students to various modalities of learning and access to resources. However, the absence of physical presence and the lack of feedback from remote students has caused lecturers to be uncertain of the effectiveness of hybrid lectures and tutorials. Thus, understanding students' learning and their considerations when determining their preferred modality will provide lecturers with clear strategies for supporting students. This qualitative study aims to examine students' learning experiences in a research-intensive public University in New Zealand university. The study was guided by the following questions: (i) What are students' perceptions of learning in a hybrid environment?; and (ii) How do students learn in hybrid environments? In-depth interviews with 15 students who have experienced hybrid education in a research-intensive public university in New Zealand was conducted using a descriptive case study. Three categories that described students' considerations and dispositions towards learning in hybrid environments, and how various conditions and resources within their learning environment influenced their behaviours emerged.

Preliminary findings found that students' dispositions towards learning were critical factors that contribute towards their behaviours in a hybrid environment. Unlike traditional conceptions of teaching and learning, hybrid education requires students to be active participants in their learning and take charge of their own learning in aspects such as deciding how they best learn. Despite minimal social and physical interaction with lecturers and their peers, students found hybrid learning to be effective. Interviews with students who had experienced hybrid education highlighted perspectives that differed from previous studies. Remote students showed willing and drive to excel in their studies despite being disconnected from their peers in the physical spaces, and did not feel that they had less of a learning experience. This finding echoes that of Zhong et al., where social presence was not found to be significantly related to learning persistence. Students found having immediate access to information and lecturers to be more important than whether they could communicate and interact with other in-person classmates.

The study recommends strategies lecturers can employ to improve teaching practices in hybrid environments. This includes ensuring all materials are digitally captured synchronously and having a student partner to monitor questions or teaching assistant to address questions the chatroom will help remote students greatly. Further analysis of the current data will take a closer look at how students' dispositions play a part in students' engagement levels and their behaviours in hybrid environments.

Keywords: Hybrid environments; students' experiences; learning strategies; student engagement

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