

BLENDING PEER-ASSISTED LEARNING NEED OF TODAY IN UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The methodologies applied in classroom and consequently the successful learning is a constant concern and a focus of attention for the scientific community. This concern leads to the exhaustive search for more and better means to strengthen these two elements "methodology and successful learning". Therefore, different methodologies, paradigms, and tools have been proposed to provide an insight on the student's academic and professional development and to consolidate the content taught in classroom, such as Blended Learning and Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL).¹

The field of medical education cannot remain immune to the effects of this aptly called E-revolution.¹ The three primary characteristics of e-learning are the nature of the learning experience, synchronicity of participation, and presence or absence of face-to-face instruction.² The integration of e-learning in medical education is the need of the hour.³

Therefore, there is a growing need of new methodologies, approaches and tools, in order to foster students' socialization and to improve their learning outcomes. In this context, methodologies, techniques and innovating tools, supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been developed to promote better educational experiences.⁴

However, with conditions ever changing, PAL also facing new areas and challenges like increased utilisation of digitalisation, web-based PAL or blended-learning formats of it might receive greater interest. More research is needed to identify formats and combinations that could work in favour of PAL.⁵

Blended learning (BL) is an e-learning approach that

combines the strengths of both online and face-to-face learning, creating meaningful interactions between students, teachers, and resources

Blended Peer-Assisted Learning (ePAL) platform consists basically on the integration of different existing e-Learning tools and platforms in a coordinated way in order to provide the implementation of PAL strategies.⁶

The Col framework has been used to reflect student experiences in blended learning, its strength being in explaining such educational experiences through inquiry learning. The Col model assumes that deep and meaningful learning, particularly in online environments, takes place within the community through the interaction of three core elements. These elements comprise social presence (participants seem like actual people), teaching presence (the design and development of learning experiences), and cognitive presence (the ability of learners to use online communication to construct meaning).^{7,8}

Blended Peer Assisted Learning can be seen as a merge of different learning methodologies and technologies, combining these with different online educational environments, thus developing a more efficient learning process. Blended Learning is very useful, especially when applied to lessons that address complex or dull concepts, since the combination of face-to-face and on-line training (e-Learning) with different didactic resources allows the students to improve their learning outcomes. For instance, a lesson with a complex theme would use face-to-face sessions in order to introduce the theme, while e-Learning sessions could be applied to present complementary information, thus giving additional information about the concepts addressed in the lesson.

Blended Learning increases the options for greater quality and quantity of human interaction in a learning environment. This paradigm provides realistic practical opportunities for learners and teachers to make learning independent, useful and sustainable.⁹

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