

## **Cooperative Learning Promotes Successful Learning. A Qualitative Study to Analyze Factors that Promote Interaction and Cooperation among Students in Blended Learning Environments**

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**Abstract :** Potentials of blended learning are the flexibility of learning and the possibility to get in touch with lecturers and fellow students on site. By combining face-to-face sessions with digital self-learning units, the learning process can be optimized, and learning success increased. To examine whether blended learning outperforms online and face-to-face teaching, a theory-based questionnaire survey was conducted. The results show that the interaction and cooperation among students is poorly provided in blended learning, and face-to-face teaching performs better in this respect. The aim of this article is to identify concrete suggestions students have for improving cooperation and interaction in blended learning courses. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with students from various academic disciplines in face-to-face, online, or blended learning courses (N= 60). The questions referred to opinions and suggestions for improvement regarding the course design of the respective learning environment. The analysis was carried out by qualitative content analysis. The results show that students perceive the interaction as beneficial to their learning. They verbalize their knowledge and are exposed to different perspectives. In addition, emotional support is particularly important in exam phases. Interaction and cooperation were primarily enabled in the face-to-face component of the courses studied, while there was very limited contact with fellow students in the asynchronous component. Forums offered were hardly used or not used at all because the barrier to asking a question publicly is too high, and students prefer private channels for communication. This is accompanied by the disadvantage that the interaction occurs only among people who already know each other. Creating contacts is not fostered in the blended learning courses. Students consider optimization possibilities as a task of the lecturers in the face-to-face sessions: Here, interaction and cooperation should be encouraged through get-to-know-you rounds or group work. It is important here to group the participants randomly to establish contact with new people. In addition, sufficient time for interaction is desired in the lecture, e.g., in the context of discussions or partner work. In the digital component, students prefer synchronous exchange at a fixed time, for example, in breakout rooms or an MS Teams channel. The results provide an overview of how interaction and cooperation can be implemented in blended learning courses. Positive design possibilities are partly dependent on subject area and course. Future studies could tie in here with a course-specific analysis.

**Keywords :** blended learning, higher education, hybrid teaching, qualitative research, student learning

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