

Balance between Guidance and Self-Regulated Learning: Teaching and Learning Strategies in Online, Hybrid and Blended Learning in Higher Education



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EDITORIAL

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ABSTRACT

This special collection brings together five studies and practices that illustrate how aspects of guidance and self-regulated learning in online, hybrid and blended learning contexts in higher education can be combined. The articles highlight the importance and usefulness, as well as some challenges, of strategies that lead to students' self-regulated learning and autonomy (e.g., self-assessment, co-assessment, co-design, co-creation, learning pathways), while having at their disposal different types of guidance mediated by digital technology. Although the special collection aimed particularly to bring to light educator perspectives along with the students' views, all papers have a stronger focus on the student's side regarding their self-regulation, autonomy and agency in learning, whereas the educator perspective of this balance is not a central topic in any of the articles. Therefore, we suggest that future researchers in the field of educational technology consider the educator perspective as a main focus for flexible learning and for the balance between guidance and self-regulated learning.

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Flexible learning has been a classical topic of study in the field of educational technology (Agudelo & Salinas 2022; Veletsianos & Houlden 2019). In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, it gained momentum and focused in particular on aspects concerning delivery methods and digital tools, on formats for assessment or on design guidelines for activities and strategies (Huang, Liu & Zhan 2020). However, other aspects have scarcely been addressed, even before the pandemic.

The balance between guidance and self-regulated learning and learner's autonomy is one of those issues largely uncovered (Blaschke & Marín 2020; Tchounikine 2019). This balance refers both to the mechanisms that educators design to support the development of student self-regulated learning and to the students' learning strategies. Research has extensively covered self-regulated learning from the students' perspective (Anthonysamy, Koo & Hew 2020; Broadbent & Poon 2015; Hooshyar et al. 2020, Roth, Ogrin & Schmitz 2016), and more recently from the educators' view (Russell et al. 2020). However, addressing the balance between guidance and self-directed learning is still a challenge for both students and educators. The degree to which guidance is executed may be too high, limiting students' self-regulated learning. On the other hand, if too much flexibility is given, students may feel lost in their learning process and may not achieve their (academic) goals. We should also consider the wide diversity that can exist among different students in terms of learning strategies and personal learning trajectories. In addition, the different forms of education modalities in higher education (online, blended and hybrid learning) ask for diverse approaches to establish this balance. Personalised learning pathways (Crosslin 2018; Salinas & de Benito 2020) or adaptive systems and intelligent tutoring systems (Zawacki-Richter et al. 2019) can help educators and students maintain this balance while supporting self-regulated learning.

However, the situated views of students and educators are still missing, and much needed, in order to put into place effective and caring strategies for self-regulated learning that integrate digital possibilities. In addition, this topic should be considered against the pandemic backdrop: many educators and students had limited digital competences and improving educators' practice around the world became an urgent need. Taking into account all of these aspects, this special collection seeks to provide answers to questions related to the balance between guidance and self-regulated learning in online, hybrid and blended learning in higher education from educators' and students' perspectives, and with regard to post-Covid-19 settings.

In our call for papers for this collection we specifically aimed at presenting research articles which focus on analysing students' and educators' situated perspectives of strategies and artefacts to establish the balance between self-regulated learning and educator guidance in online, hybrid and blended learning higher education. Submissions were open to a range of topics that could address this balance, such as personalised learning pathways codesigned by educators and students, or educator and ICT-supported feedback and guidance for self-regulated learning, among others.

The five papers that are included in this special collection represent different ways of addressing this balance, in online, hybrid and blended contexts. Although the special collection aimed particularly to bring to light the educator perspective along with the student view, all five papers have a stronger focus on the students' side regarding their self-regulation, autonomy and agency in learning. Nevertheless, all articles provide some insights regarding the educators' perspective.

Through a qualitative study based on interviews, Peters, Guitert-Catasús and Romero present the student perspective on learning strategies and practices that support and shape lifelong learning in an online postgraduate education context. The findings include the identification of learning strategies in meeting academic requirements but also present learner-determined, self-regulated or co-regulated activities – usually connected to non-academic outcomes. The balance that we are exploring in this special collection is addressed in three ways: a) by emphasising how learners strategically link guided learning with informal strategies, achieving both academic and non-academic outcomes, (b) by describing the role of evaluative judgement in peer collaboration as a co-regulation strategy; and (c) by illustrating the role of an outward-facing connected curriculum in supporting lifelong self-regulated learning across contexts.

In a hybrid learning context, Martín-del-Pozo and Martín-Sánchez employed questionnaires, to explore pre-service teachers' self-regulation skills in connection to self-assessment through a digitised rating scale. This scale, also called digital follow-up questionnaire, was developed within the study with the aim of supporting decision-making on the adoption of self-assessment to improve teaching practice. The balance of guidance and self-regulated learning is present in the same self-assessment strategy and its materialisation in the digitised rating scale. On the one hand, educators define the assessment criteria and the sections of the assignment to

be developed, which are reflected in the kind of scale developed. On the other hand, students can organise themselves in a free way in the order to follow, the depth or the development of the assignment, and then use the scale weekly to reflect on their progress in each specific part of the assignment. The results show that students are more aware of the quality of their performance by following this self-assessment practice and were more positive than negative about the use of the digitised rating scale for weekly monitoring their progress, which motivates instructors to continue implementing this practice.

Finally, the other three contributions to the special collection refer to blended learning contexts, with two articles focusing on the use of personalised learning pathways, and one article on the co-creation of assessment.

Villatoro Moral and De Benito Crosetti present a pedagogical model based on elements of co-design, learning pathways and self-regulated learning, which was created and evaluated by using a mixed-methods design-based research approach. The balance between guidance and self-regulation can be identified in the model when the educator proposes the co-design of learning pathways to the students, in the presentation of the sequences with their guides and learning objects using the Flexible Learning Itinerary Configurator (FLIC) App. Through tutoring and monitoring, the educator accompanies the development process of these sequences, the co-creation of activities and supports the final reflection by the students through group reflection sessions, interviews and a final questionnaire. The creation of the learning pathway of each student requires a process of self-regulation on their part, but also the intervention of the educators in the design of the sequences and in the accompaniment of the learning process.

Lindín, Steffens and Bartolomé present an educational experience about students' use of learning pathways through a specific application that helped students control their learning. The evaluation of the experience shows that the strategy of individualised learning with synchronous and asynchronous human support, managed through technological tools, promotes self-regulated learning. On the part of the educators, the proposed approach does not require additional efforts, nor does it reduce the quality of feedback. The necessary balance between educator-developed guidance and self-regulated learning was provided by: a) students' freedom to choose pathways and peers, the students' responsibility required to make decisions and self-directed learning, and b) the support of educators.

In their mixed-methods multi-case study, Santana-Martel and Pérez-Garcías investigate co-created assessment related to students' self-regulation and agency. The study shows that participating in the co-creation of assessment helps students to better understand the assessment process as well as the nature of the tasks. Students also perceive themselves to have acquired different skills, both academically and with regard to lifelong learning, improving their motivation, proactivity and collaborative participation in their own learning process. Co-creation in the curriculum, specifically involving assessment, provides an opportunity for educators and students to democratically and creatively design assessment. This turns the process into an element of motivation rather than purely measurement, as both educators and students are active in a relatively balanced process.

The fact that the articles included in this special collection do not focus on the educator perspective involved in establishing a balance between guided learning and self-regulated learning points to a persisting research gap. Therefore, we hope that this special collection serves as a wake-up call for the production of research about the educator perspective. The balance between guidance and self-regulated learning should be more oriented towards the integration of both of these aspects, instead of one being secondary to the other. First, in the design, the educator should adequately design the aspects of self-regulated learning. Second, in the development, he/she should accompany while allowing students' autonomy to be encouraged. Third, in the evaluation, there should be a reflection on the process, of each of the actors and of both together. Finally, we suggest that future researchers in the field of educational technology consider the educator perspective as a main focus for flexible learning and for the balance between guidance and self-regulated learning.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

VIM worked between 2010 and 2016 in the same institution as the authors of two papers of the Special Collection (University of the Balearic Islands, UIB) and is a collaborator of the research group of which they are members (Educational Technology Group - GTE). JS is affiliated to the UIB and is the principal investigator of the GTE. There are no further competing interests to declare.

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