Advantages of Law learning in online and blended learning courses at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez

Ventajas del aprendizaje del derecho en los cursos en línea y semipresenciales de la Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present the findings regarding the advantages of the learning process of law students at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez through online education. The article derives from a broader investigation in which a qualitative methodology with an interpretive approach was used. The development of skills in reading ability and comprehension, writing, as well as the capacity for analysis and synthesis through the preparation of essays, mental and conceptual maps, were identified as learning advantages under this educational modality. Also, the development of library skills by searching for information on platforms and strengthening digital skills through the use of applications to develop materials and work that promote learning. In addition, it was found that learning law in virtual environments constitutes alternatives for people with disabilities or with health problems. It is concluded that the traditional teaching of law must be confronted to transmute to one characterized by the use of Information and Communication Technologies and the digital culture.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar los hallazgos de un estudio sobre las ventajas del proceso de aprendizaje de los estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Derecho de la Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez al cursar asignaturas en línea y semipresenciales durante su formación académica. La metodología adoptada fue cualitativa con enfoque interpretativo. Las ventajas de aprendizaje identificadas en esta modalidad educativa fueron el desarrollo de habilidades en la capacidad y comprensión lectora, la redacción, la capacidad de análisis y síntesis al elaborar ensayos y mapas mentales y conceptuales, la obtención de habilidades bibliotecnológicas mediante la búsqueda de información en plataformas, así como el fortalecimiento de las habilidades digitales con el uso de aplicaciones para elaborar materiales y trabajos que favorecen el aprendizaje. Además, el aprendizaje del derecho en ambientes virtuales constituye una alternativa para personas con discapacidad o con problemas de salud. La conclusión señala que debe confrontarse la enseñanza tradicional del derecho para trasmutar a una caracterizada por el uso de las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación y la ponderación de la cultura digital.

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INTRODUCTION

Our objective is to analyze identified advantages on the learning process of Law by means of online courses and blended learning in the context of the educational syllabi of the Bachelor's degree in Law of the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ, by its acronym in Spanish), in spite of the fact that traditional teaching prevails institutionally, as it happens in most of Mexican universities and other parts of the world (Wiker, 2008; Hernandez, 2008; Gonzalez; 2013; Quesada, 2018).

The results from this research done in 2019 are before the health contingency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced academic organizations in the country and then UACJ to change classroom courses to courses online from March 18, 2020. This was with the purpose of tending to governmental measures and decisions made by the Department of Education and the Department of Health, on the quarantine aimed to face the sanitary problem.

With the purpose of guaranteeing that learners' learning was not affected, the university where the research was made, developed a virtual academic continuance program supported by a digital tool of Microsoft Teams, aimed to support teachers who taught classroom courses and were not familiar with information and communication technologies (ICTs) for their teaching; this happened while this article was being made.

The Virtual Campus platform used by UACJ as a technological and supporting tool to teach online and blended learning courses of the different educational programs, to support classroom lesson activities, in cases where it is used by teachers to receive homework or learners' papers and to supply virtual instruction courses and comprehensive academic update, went on as the main platform of distance education, because these instructional designs of virtual courses already were in place in an usual way and before the contingency.

It should be kept in mind that after having experienced a teaching-learning process 100% under the virtual mode from March to June 2020, in view of the world contingency, during the 2020 August-December academic term, the Teams platform became a medullar tool to teach courses for the different programs of UACJ. Even, during the holiday period, a decision was made to offer teachers with courses on virtual teaching, to manage their voice in this type of

courses, on the use of the technological platform used to teach the subjects, among other updating courses that were well taken by the faculty.

This paper is divided in five sections. In the first section, we present a state of the art regarding the teaching-learning process of Law, which is regularly characterized by banking education as referred to by Freire (1986). Since memorization, repetitions and the instructor's centrality is preferred during the teaching process on other pedagogic paradigms (González, 2013) and other disruptive and extended alternatives of learning Law on the grounds that it is a traditional profession (Camarillo & Barbosa, 2020).

The second section contains a review on the literature published on the virtual teaching of Law. In the third section, we describe, in detail, the methodological design: the manner used to carry out the collection and the analysis of data by using a qualitative methodology of interpretative style. During this process, there rose eleven primary categories which, in accordance to Strauss & Corbin (2002), are identified to be axial in nature; however, we only included data related with one of these in our article, which refers to the learning process and the advantages thereof.

The fourth section is devoted to results obtained during the field work. The voices, perspectives and experiences of whistleblowers are emphasized who describe the learning advantages after having taken the subjects online or as blended learning, offered by the university during their academic instruction. Finally, conclusions are presented in the last section.

THE TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS OF LAW; COMPARISONS WITH THE TRADITIONAL TEACHING OF LAW

Law is one of the most traditional professions in Mexico and in other parts of the world. There is a distinctive seal of culture and tradition which makes it different from other professions (Fernandez, 2001; Perez, 2019). This is due to the peculiarities of the professional practice and academic instruction learners receive (Gonzalez, 2012 and 2013), as the format used to teach law in Mexican and Latin American universities has all the features of a traditional pedagogic paradigm and memorization of several elements, such as topics seen in class; legal precepts and legal doctrine provide the general configuration of the teaching-learning process of law in the above mentioned geographical contexts (Gonzalez, 2013).

Pérez (2019) reveals this historical traditionalism of study, teaching and practice of law. He describes the Roman tradition from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century and presents, for example, how as of the second half of the nineteenth century, it was considered that memorization of the codes was proper preparation for the professional practice. He affirms that this position was confronted in 1995 by a Brazilian lawyer called Dantas, who sustained that it was not proper for legal training. He also points out that other U.S. lawyers tried to introduce the teaching of law in Latin America in 1960 based on the case method created by Christopher Langdell of the University of Harvard; however, there was complete resistance which forced them to abandon.

Witker (2007) makes a historical account about teaching law and states his position in favor of clinical teaching to compare that of traditional nature. He refers the emergence of clinics in the United States and he even specifies the period of time when it was incorporated by the universities of Pennsylvania, Denver, Harvard, George Washington and Yale, and on how they were promoted in Latin America in the sixties and became relevant in the nineties. Furthermore, he defines the learning process on the basis of legal clinics starting from a series of authors and specifies their main characteristics, their relevance and their purpose.

In addition, Witker (2007) mentions several examples on the clinical teaching of law and on problems approached by several universities in Latin America. He affirms that the application of this type of teaching technologies of law is just beginning because they are unknown. Currently, by the implementation of the new legal system in Mexico, clinics or mock trials of the new legal system in Mexico have been incorporated for a number of years now in universities. Several relevant experiences are shared (Ortega, 2016; Saavedra, 2016) in the work coordinated by Caceres (2016a).

In another research, Witker (2008) claims severe criticism to the traditional oral teaching of law. He proposes to carry on with active methodologies to learn law, where the participation of learners, real problem solution and research are relevant. To Witker, it is paramount that the learning process of law be focused on the learner; in addition, he proposes several teaching methods and techniques to favor the construction of knowledge.

González (2013) concurs in that legal education ought to be transformed and the instruction of both teachers and learners improved. To this author, teaching based on concept repetition,

dogmatic memorization work and the conveyance of legal knowledge ought to change to a novelty teaching-learning process of discovery and research. His analysis work has been configured from "five aspects in the educational process: instruction, the classroom, the teacher, the learner, and academic activities" (p. 500).

In another work, González (2012), highlights the differences between a teaching mediated by legal behaviorism and another one sustained by legal constructivism. The former places the teacher of law in the center of the pedagogic process and is characterized by a transferring process of legal information whereby the teacher instructs or presents his/her knowledge in an acritical manner, without concern on learners' learning or their perspectives and participation. By contrast, in legal constructivism, the learners are not defined by passivity in the learning process, but by an active and nodal role. Furthermore, how learners build their learning and skills is transcendental. In this sense, legal constructivism confronts the pedagogic exercise based on master classes to the monopoly of the teacher in the law teaching-learning process (Gonzalez, 2012).

To Cáceres (2016) there is a generalized coincidence in respect to what is happening at the law school under the Roman-German tradition and this refers to the fact that the teaching of law is obsolete. For this reason, traditional teaching has no impact on the development of certain skills and capabilities that are essential to law learners; for example, the capacity of analysis and the capacity to build arguments crucial to learners, therefore, more active methodologies are to be promoted (Carrillo, 2016). Teaching of law should not be supported by classroom instruction, but by the relevance of the constructivist paradigm, because no significant learning of law is provided (Carrasco, 2016). Other authors refer the need to efficiently implement a competency-based model to confront the traditional model (Arvizu & Romero, 2016).

From the above, it follows that it is important to reflect on the didactics of law (Hernandez, 2008) taught at universities. It must be remembered that law teachers were not regularly instructed in the teaching field and that they became incorporated without any previous knowledge on pedagogic theories or paradigms (Garcia, 2016). This has brought about an absence on the use of didactic resources and materials in accordance with the learning process; therefore, preparation and implementation in law education is relevant (Marin, 2016). The intention is that transformation into other educational paradigms is attained which would enable

learners to be educated in a more reflexive, creative and criticizing way (Merlin, 2016).

THE LEARNING PROCESS OF LAW BY MEANS OF ICTs AND DIGITAL CULTURE

Based on this dynamic, which is documented in literature, the following reflection is relevant: why, in the year 2020, is the traditional teaching of law predominant in universities? Why is it possible that, at the emergence of an informational society and a network society (Castells, 1996), the fourth industrial revolution characterized by astounding disruptive changes (Schwab, 2016), and the emergence of a digital culture strengthened by interactions between digital natives and the adaptation of digital immigrants to this culture (Prensky, 2001 and 2013), the teaching of law is still far from educational innovations by means of ICTs? Is it not inexplicable that, if the society is questioned by technology and new virtual forms of social interaction, law and learning law should also be disturbed to make it more akin to the prevailing reality? In this sense, thinking or affirming that law does not require of the virtual learning environment contradicts without any argument several authors regarding the fact that, from some time now, the educational and learning processes are mediated by ICTs (Moreno, 2012; Brunner, 2002).

In one of the most recent works, for example, it is documented that, in spite that a highly traditional teaching process prevails in Mexican universities, learners have a disruptive and extended learning of law through online courses, blended learning courses, social networks or by means of technological platforms (Camarillo & Barboza, 2020). These authors argue that if a considerable number of college learners are digital natives, university teachers and officials who coordinate or manage bachelor studies of this discipline ought to turn their eyes to other learning contexts and environments different from the regular ones, and which are not done by means of space and time, but by virtuality, in spite of the resistance to use ICTs or because professors were not aware thereof.

Camarillo & Barboza (2020) provide the hard but realistic concept of the *iusdigital illiterate* person at the presence of a legal society of college learners by means of information sources, the use of technology and the question of life and the world through cyberspace. These authors call a person iusdigital illiterate

(regardless of his/her social role, as a teacher, learner or professional of law) who continues learning law without using or applying ICTs, whether he/she is not aware or because of his/her resistance to do it, that is to say, without weighing disruptive innovations that are different from the regular ones and that enable an extended learning of law which goes beyond the limits of formal education, of temporality and of space (p- 4).

In addition, Mesa (2014) makes a reflection in the sense that, currently, it is necessary to take the challenges of teachers of law into consideration at the arrival of technology, of new dynamics in social relations and interactions and the presence of learners dubbed as digital natives. This author describes as serious the difficulty of professors to adapt to these changes, and he makes an argument on generational logic divergences among actors in the teaching-learning process. In addition, he defines teachers "with no competencies in computer language as digital illiterates (neither as a first or a second language)" (Mesa, 2014, p. 171).

The concept of Mesa (2014) of digital illiteracy and the concept of Camarillo & Barboza (2020) of being iusdigital illiterate are different, as the former is centered on teachers and the latter, on law teachers, learners and professionals. The former speaks of the lack of computer competencies and the latter indicates unawareness of ICTs, and the resistance to use them. The former is located in the teacher's importance and the latter on disruptive and extended learning of law. Both concepts, however, agree on the lack of a digital culture.

In turn, Cicero (2018) affirms that "the teaching of law is called to be amended" (p. 92) and affirms that at the prevailing social reality where information and technology are everywhere, practicing law cannot be an exception. The foregoing is due to the fact that the world where we live in has had considerable changes. The author criticizes the traditional pedagogic paradigm of law. She focuses on a model whereby both curricular contents and the teaching-learning process are more open and flexible. To her, educational innovation of law should be promoted by using ICTs, because this is in accordance with the society we interact with and demand a new profile of law learners and professionals.

One of the problems that arise is that there is little interest in educational programs to incorporate the use of ICTs in the teaching-learning process, for this reason, the digital culture any professional must currently have is ignored (Astudillo, 2016). It has even been

documented that although universities have the infrastructure of technological platforms to enhance the teaching-learning process, law professors are not using them (Sánchez, Flores & Castellón, 2016). This should be addressed and rectified, as it is about current challenges in the teaching of law at universities in the presence of digital native learners and because their professors are confronted by a reality characterized by rapid technological changes (Mesa, 2016).

The inclusion of resources of this kind to teach law fosters skills and distance collaborative work competencies of learners (Cazares, 2016a and 2016b). Therefore, it is essential to link law with ICTs in the presence thereof in the life of human beings in respect of technological advances of daily emergence worldwide and of new ways of communication by means of prevailing social networks (Lozano & Calixto, 2016; Camarillo & Barboza, 2020).

In this context, incorporating the distance education mode by means of online courses and blended learning courses for the teaching of law is appropriate, because it is in accordance with the world where we live in (Ramirez et al., 2016). The best example currently, is that, at the contingency and the health risk due to Covid-19, educational institutions, university officials, learners and us, university teachers, have pondered teaching through virtual means, as classroom attendance activities have been discontinued. Definitely, this is suitable to face the situation; however, ideally, we should have earlier considered (more aggressively and vigorously) disruptive and extended learning through ICTs in view of advantages in the learning process, with no need for the pandemic to force us to do it.

In spite of the fact that the results sections are documented in this article and some findings in this respect in the conclusions section, this does not mean that incorporating new technologies per se fosters changes in the teaching-learning process of law; that is to say, using digital and technological tools and platforms to teach law does not mean, by way of necessity, a change in the traditional pedagogic paradigm by teachers to move forward to a paradigm sustained by legal constructivism or by a more flexible and innovative one in search for a truly significant learning. We have to recognize that a teacher of law who is positioned in traditional teaching could still be teaching in this way, regardless of the technology at hand.

The contingency due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the experiences resulting from this in the educational processes of each academic organization, as well as in the teaching-learning process where

learners and professors partook by virtual means, could be configured as a catalyzing element to consolidate the employment of innovative methodologies in the teaching practice with the advantages provided by new technologies aimed to cause, for example, a pedagogic paradigm change rooted in the teaching of law. There are currently many works where experiences, findings or proposals are documented on the virtual teaching of law in Argentina, Spain, Cuba, Mexico, among other countries, which show the advantages of learning through virtual means. Some of the works published are presented in the following section.

VIRTUAL TEACHING OF LAW

As stated above, it is not enough to use technologies to change a traditional paradigm for teaching law to one which enables the education of more active, reflexive and creative learners. Therefore, it is appropriate to incorporate new teaching methodologies in virtual environments. Thus, virtuality becomes significant to cause changes in the learning process of law.

One of the most recent published works documenting the use of innovative technologies on virtual teaching is that of Santos (2019), who proposes looking at the virtual tutoring practice to monitor learning of law learners at the King Juan Carlos University of Spain. Santos argues that tutoring has not been given the deserving relevance with virtual dynamics on the academic training of learners.

On the other hand, Antúnez (2018a) says that using ICTs ought to be considered in the teaching-learning process of law learners in view of the technological impact and other factors of the traditional university. Moreover, he describes the way teaching of law that is performed at the Cuban university by pondering virtual learning environments, he even asserts that this favors access to education to most people, comprising a basic and medullar constitutional right. To this author, the learning process of law should be transformed in the face of technological and digital challenges of the prevailing social reality. Therefore, virtual learning environments "constitute an optimal scenario to promote spaces that would integrate diverse tools by means of computers connected to the network, enabling the realization of the teaching-learning processes in a specific methodological and pedagogical environment" (Antúnez, 2018a, p.73).

In another similar work by Antúnez (2018b) it is proposed that learners of law in Cuba should acquire informational and technological skills and competencies. To insist on that, it is necessary that professors should strengthen the integral instruction of learners and foster the use of ICTs to favor the learning of law in virtual learning environments. In his conclusions, the author makes a call to break paradigms in the Cuban higher education context so that undergraduate and postgraduate virtual education be recognized.

Virtual education of law provides scopes that could be more innovative in the classroom; for example, Quesada (2018) proposes the inclusion of an innovative methodology that would enable Spanish learners of law to approach reality and practice by means of a virtual legal firm where they would be able to mock a trial or cases in different areas of law, such as civil, commercial, criminal, financial and occupational law, so that they would acquire and develop specific skills and competences. The author warns on the need to resort to this virtual learning environment in view of changes of the teaching methods due to the introduction of the Bologna Plan and of informational and technological incidents learners are currently experiencing. She argues that, although the traditional teaching of law supported by master conferences was valid at the mass growth of classrooms in Spain, nowadays it is ideal to promote changes in the teaching methods of law for a better understanding of the practice by means of solving cases virtually.

Higher education institutions are committed with their learners to promote among their faculty members the use of new technologies for a better development of the teaching-learning process. Even so, regardless of how traditional the legal profession is, law schools ought to be aware of the technological reality and digital culture learners experience in this discipline (Camarillo & Barboza, 2020). This is as asserted by Merchán (2017):

Nowadays, universities are committed to insist not only in transferring technological advances to the production sector by ways of management, but also to insist, at the same time, on better methods and ways for the attainment of necessary and continuous training of graduates, and, it is here where applying information technologies would have an incidence in providing these skills to college graduates in observance of constitutional principles (pp. 584-855).

Merchán (2017) makes a review on the way law teaching is made in virtual learning environments. The author asserts that the university ought to contribute to the development of skills and competencies of law learners on how to use ICTs and that it is necessary to articulate the relationship between information sciences and law educational programs. This parallels with Antúnez (2018a) in the sense that virtual pondering fosters access to a greater number of citizens, which guarantees constitutional principles and rights; that is to say, this is about adapting to the changes caused by technology and by the needs of the society. To Merchán (2017), this new society "has generated, as a result of all of the above, a new concept of professional profiles and competencies and qualifications that are characterized, among other aspects, exactly by this capacity to adapt, which may be applied by using digital tools related to the practice of the lawyer" (2017, p. 876).

In 2008, Ruiz (2015) performed an analysis at the National University of Córdoba, Argentina, on the use of twelve virtual classrooms by law teachers for representative subjects within the framework of an institutional project called: A Virtual Space to Supplement Classroom Teaching. This is a qualitative research the purpose of which is to examine the value of pedagogic the character of teaching by means of ICTs, as well as to examine limitations from three main aspects: the institutional, the curricular and the didactic ones.

The work of Ruiz (2015) makes emphasis on the active participation of professors and, at the same time, highlights the lack of technology at the School of Law of the institution as one of the limitations. Regarding how much do ICTs favor the employment of innovating teaching technologies, the author concludes that her work has "some similarities with the background on investigations that show that, although ICTs include some organizational changes both at the institutional level and at the classroom level, they do not necessarily manage to promote pedagogic innovations in the teaching practice" (Ruiz, 2015, p. 83).

Although this may take place, incorporating ICTs in the learning process of law learners requires, as sustained by Gallego & Sánchez (2014), a new relationship between them and their professors, because virtual learning environments should encourage the amendment of the teaching methodologies to switch from one teaching role online to a tutor online. These authors explain that the above does not imply a drastic change of roles or the increase of tasks the professor already has, but a realignment starting from the

manner academic instruction of learners takes place in virtual environments; for example, they become more active in the search and selection of information, in such a way that professors ought to have a more active role in terms of learners' guidance.

Gallego & Sánchez (2014) warn on the need to reflect on what skills and competencies are required to perform as an online tutor and on essential tools for this action. In this sense, the authors analyze the roles of learners and teachers within the virtual teaching framework of law.

In this reorganization of roles, the urge arises for better communication among the main actors in the teaching-learning process. Rovira (2012) deepens on the relevance of communication in the virtual teaching of law in the context of the Universitat Oberta of Catalonia, Spain. The author does not only refer to communication between teachers and learners, but between the latter and their peers. For that purpose, a series of proposals are listed by the author in view of the university dynamics where the course of studies was made, and one of the proposals mentioned thereby is the methodology of debate to have an impact on communication.

Salamero & Ezquerra (2012) focus their work on debate from the institutional context of the University of Lleida, Spain. They affirm that at the changes proposed by implications of the European Space of Higher Education (ESHE), the universities had to adapt to the new educational model and, therefore, in the traditional teaching of law it was necessary to ponder incorporation of new teaching methodologies. The authors assert that virtual debate is an instrument to fulfill the above as it enables a more autonomous learning of learners.

In their work, Salamero & Ezquerra (2012) highlight aspects such as the attractive nature of virtual debate to learners by the use of platforms such as Moodle and Saki, learning happens in a collaborative manner among peers, on the development of argumentative, communicative and reasoning competencies, and on debate planning. Lastly, they point out that they have found the good willingness of learners to carry out debates by means of ICTs.

Another survey with a clear description to incorporate technological platforms in the learning process of law learners is that of Monterroso & Escutia (2011); these authors, just like Salamero & Ezquerra (2012), have documented the use of Moodle and other

platforms in the learning process. In their work, they describe and analyze a pedagogic practice consisting of a mock trial through virtual means. We have already mentioned a similar work (Quesada, 2018), but the work of Monterroso & Escutia (2011) does more deeply detail the methodological aspect of the pedagogic practice. These authors position themselves on the relevance and advantages of learning law by means of ICTs. They believe that "the legal world, mock trials in Second Life are an interesting and innovative experience where learners may virtually represent the different legal professions of the forensic activity (claiming attorneys, respondent attorneys, prosecutors or judges)" (Monterroso & Escutia, 2011, p. 47). These authors conclude that:

Moodle and virtual environments –especially Second Life– offer an interesting instruction service to learners and a useful means to virtual college teaching, as, in addition to enhancing the acquisition and conveyance of knowledge, this makes learning possible through role games in the different professional fields. At the Degree at Law, it is possible to carry out a more participating and proper educational strategy for the acquisition of individual competencies that should be used in their future professional activity, such as the resolution of practical cases or the drafting of documents as they practice their argumentative skills or manage databases and computer systems for the search of information. In addition, by developing this attractive activity, mock trials in Second Life, learners may perform the different titles of legal operators in an immersive environment (p. 53).

As seen, employing digital and technological tools, along with the use of innovative teaching methodologies, favor the learning of law. Valdovinos et al. (2011) have also highlighted the foregoing, but in respect to the peculiarity of the Criminal Theory in the criminal law area. The authors present some results from the research and related to the design and construction of a software. This is about an interdisciplinary work that combines criminal law, information technologies, software engineering, knowledge of educational software and the teaching of law by means of virtual elements. In the survey they propose a software dubbed as the logic model of the tutorial system to learn Criminal Theory, prepared in accordance with the course of studies of the Bachelor in Law at the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico. The authors describe how the model works and facilitates learning of Criminal Theory as computer-assisted instructions are provided to learners. This is a tool that promotes legal constructivism.

Incorporating ICTs in the teaching-learning process by some teachers, among other aspects, is the result of efforts to adapt to the technological changes taking place in the society. We know that digital culture has had a more preponderant impact on our learners because information is increasingly produced each time, and it is managed and shared by human beings in social networks and electronic platforms. Therefore, the development and management of digital skills is required. To Rubio (2010), this

forces teachers to overcome traditional techniques aimed to penetrate the audiovisual strengths of learners by using their own tools, instruments, such as using films, debate sessions that force learners to participate, or the new technologies are revealed as the only ones capable of recovering education, above all, college education, their intellectual nature (p- 33).

Rubio, however, does not make a stand on the use of ICTs for teaching constitutional law. His work criticizes changes on learners who largely respond to the visual impulse of abstraction capacity due to the fact that "means of audiovisual communication seem to pursue the educational monopoly" (2010, p- 36).

To bring the section to a conclusion, we would like to refer to the survey of Sánchez & Madrid (2008), that describes and compares the experiences of virtual teaching and classroom teaching in relation to a course of History of Law and of Institutions. The relevance is stressed on using the virtual campus as a facilitating instrument of specific tasks among learners. In a way, it is possible to drift apart from the traditional teaching of law, because it incorporates search for the development of skills, capabilities and competencies of learners and considers a more autonomous learning.

Overall, we managed to identify some advantages of virtual teaching from the works we reviewed and, above all, it is emphasized that the use of ICTs does not comprise, per se, learning innovation. To this effect, it is necessary to combine active, flexible and creative teaching technologies in accordance with the life of our learners. This could enable a sustainable change of the traditional paradigm on the teaching of law for another less obsolete one.

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

This article was prepared on the basis of the results gathered from a research whose objective was to know and analyze perspectives and experiences of learners enrolled in the Bachelor's in Law of the UACJ on the learning they earned from the subjects they took under the online and semi-attendance mode, as well as from the social networks they interact with. The research was performed by applying a qualitative methodology of interpretative nature whereby, supported by Erickson (1989), the perspectives of whistleblowers and the meanings they give to events they experience in their lives transcend.

This research was performed from January to June 2019; we started by reviewing literature; then, we studied reports, institutional plans and rules of the UACJ related with distance education with the purpose of analyzing the context of online courses as well as of blended learning courses offered by the institution; we also reviewed institutional documents, as well as the law regarding the platform of the university dubbed as Virtual Campus.

Subsequently, we prepared the aspects of the field work. In order to select whistleblowers, we considered the following on the learners: gender equity, that they have taken one or more subjects under the distance mode (whether online or blended learning), that they interacted with one or more social networks, the variety of subjects taken under this mode, that learners were from a different semester tem of the Bachelor's in Law and that they were from a different age range in view of digital gaps (this ranged between 20 and 62 years of age).

After making an invitation to learners, some of them agreed to participate and others preferred to not participate. In whole, we interviewed eleven whistleblowers, because emergence of new analysis categories stopped due to data saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). According to these authors, saturation consists of "reaching the point of the research, when gathering data seems counterproductive because 'new' developments found do not add mucho to the explanation" (p. 149); that is to say, we made the decision to not continue with the interviews because the data and their analysis process did not provide any new or different information to the information we have gathered. The above is valid from the epistemological and methodological point of view of qualitative research of an interpretative nature. The number of interviews was not determined from the beginning of the research, but it was dependent on data saturation.

In order to know about learners' perspectives and experiences from their own voices, we resorted to a semi-structured interview based on a script that enabled freedom and flexibility during the application thereof. At the beginning of each interview, we set a period of rapport so that the interviewee was comfortable and we were able to perform the interview in an environment similar to that of a conversation. The most favorable question to open the dialogue was: Why did you study law? Then, we went into detail on aspects like his/her perspective around digital culture, his/her experience with courses online and blended learning courses, the Virtual Campus platform, his/her interaction with social networks, the learning process of law under the distance mode, among others.

At the beginning of the interviews we, simultaneously, began to do the relevant transcription and analysis. This was done immediately to understand the course of the investigation, as referred to by Taylor & Bogdan (1994). For the analysis process, we based ourselves on open codification (paragraph by paragraph analysis to find categories) and on axial codification (by relating categories and sub-categories) as specified by Strauss & Corbin (2002). Open codification allowed us to dissect the transcription per paragraphs to obtain categories, therefore, once they emerged in a general manner, we classified them in categories and sub-categories by means of relationships. This type of analysis process is called axial categorization (Strauss & Corbin, 2002).

Altogether, we obtained eleven axial or medullar categories. Axial categories were as follows: complexity, digital culture and use of ICTs, the learning process, performance of professors, challenges, discussion, leaving the comfort zone, stigmatization of distance courses, impact on the professional practice, how is the platform seen and the feasibility to turn the subjects into virtual ones. Because of the extent of the results from the research and of the size limit of this document, this article is only focused on the axis of the analysis of the learning process and, specifically, on the advantages of learning law through online and blended learning subjects.

RESULTS

In this section we share the findings obtained in respect to the advantages of the learning process of learners in the law education program of UACJ, as they take subjects online and as blended learning courses offered by the institution and as part of their academic instruction to earn the degree as Bachelor's in Law. The findings are rewarding because they present the voices of

whistleblowers, as well as the interpretation they themselves give to their narratives; this is in view that the data emerged from a qualitative research process of interpretative nature. Therefore, we have included the advantages of learning identified under an institutional environment where the traditional teaching of law generally prevails, as it happens in Mexican and Latin American universities, and as revealed by the literature we reviewed.

From the data analysis process, it follows that online courses and blended learning courses offered by the institution where we performed the research had their development process and acceptance among the university community at a slow but steady pace. In 2006, distance education structuring began officially as the Directorate General of Academic Development and Educational Innovation was created based on the vision of three officers: Jorge M. Quintana (chancellor), Manuel Loera de la Rosa (planning director) and María Teresa Montero (head of said office). In accordance with the Institutional Development Plan, it was formed to "improve the coordination of the different offices involved in developing innovations in and out of the classroom aimed to invigorate comprehensive academic instruction" (UACJ, 2007, p. 13).

From 2006 to 2012, the development of distance education was at an embryonic stage; and from 2012 to 2018, it was characterized by a positioning process which resulted in the increase of online and blended learning courses offer in different educational programs, of the number of teachers who taught courses of this kind and of the number of learners enrolled in courses under this mode (Madero, 2018). Even so, during this period, bachelor's degree programs gradually launched more subjects online and on blended learning mode. One of the most outstanding cases was the education program of Graphic Design, which, as of the August-December 2015 semester, is taught under the combined mode or the blended learning mode. This is the first bachelor's degree program with these characteristics with favorable results at an institutional level (Madero, 2018); according to information at the Virtual Campus, there currently are 21 subjects online and two on blended learning mode.

Advances of the UACJ have been rewarding as greater acceptance by learners and professors has been obtained under the distance modem, which has demanded that awareness be raised among the university community on the goodness of online education (Madero, 2018). It must be said that, in the Bachelor's Degree in Law program,

upon which we did the field work, is still being developed. At the end of the research (June 2019) which is the result of this article, there were only two subjects in the academic offer: Constitutional Law II and Electoral Law, from the total included in the course of studies. In addition, an instructional design for the subject of Constitutional Law I was under construction, so that it would be taught for the first time during August-December 2019. During the semester of January-June 2020, in accordance with available information at the Virtual Campus, there were three subjects offered online: Human Rights, Constitutional Law I, and Electoral Law (UACJ, 2020) that are directly related with law.

Thus, the number of subjects under the distance education mode in the law program is extremely low if we consider that the previous course of studies had a total of 46 subjects, and the plan that became effective in the January-June 2020 semester included 49 subjects. This is emphasized, above all, if we see that there were three subjects directly related to the legal discipline. Whistleblowers say they have also taken the subjects titled 'Reading and Writing' and 'Documentary Research Techniques' under the distance mode, coordinated by other programs of the institution and whose contents are not directly related to law, but they are part of the previous course of studies because they were appropriate for the academic instruction of law learners and their professional practice.

Findings from our research have allowed us to affirm that the development of virtual education in the law program is emerging. The foregoing notwithstanding, this should not be surprising to institutional policy. We have to recognize that this is about the effects of the conservative paradigm control of the legal profession and of the teaching of law. Even so, it seems that this has become the normal resistance of most teachers to resort to virtual learning environments and educational innovation as they do not want to leave their comfort zone, due to how comfortable master classes are, or because they are not aware of ICTs.

In spite of context, it must be highlighted that this resistance has been gradually receding. Both the head of the Department of Legal Sciences of UACJ and the coordinator of the Law program have held working sessions with the Distance Education Office of the university and have stated that they are open and willing to make more virtual subjects. This is maybe due to the generational context of these university officers (as in average they are forty years of age), to their instruction and to their understanding of the appropriateness of the digital culture in teaching law.

Likewise, more and more, albeit gradually, some professors have incorporated the use of the Virtual Campus platform to their classroom classes to upload readings or to receive tasks left to learners. These actions are even encouraged and recognized by the Stimulus to Teaching Performance Program of UACJ; however, most of law professors prefer to practice their teaching activity under the traditional classroom mode.

Here, we must underscore that the above situation had a sudden change in view of the health contingency originated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced institutions and teachers to continue with their educational process in a virtual and generalized mode. This issue could be considered the expected scenario to promote, once and for all, an abrupt change of the traditional paradigm of teaching law to a paradigm characterized by the use of ICTs and by pondering digital culture in the legal profession, not only within UACJ, but throughout Mexico and Latin America.

The foregoing does not only lie in adapting to the prevailing social reality or in facing collateral problems (such as the suspension of classes because of the pandemic) by using ICTs, but also to the advantages provided by distance education to learn law. Findings in the research enable us to affirm the above and to agree with some of the papers mentioned herein.

From the voice of whistleblowers of UACJ it is suggested that online and blended learning courses provide advantages, as vast majority affirmed that they have had a favorable learning by means of distance education. Data reveal that, once the education process has been experiences through online and blended learning courses by whistleblowers, they said they have learned more than they expected or had expected when they enrolled in any of the subjects offered by the institution. Below is a verbatim quote from a narration about learning:

I believe it was good because I learned a bit more. I think it was more than what I thought I would learn! I liked it, I was pleased and there is material that may be used in other areas. For example, to write an essay, there, they give you a book on how to write it. They are handbooks easy to digest. Perhaps you can use this material for another subject, I mean, they add to, as they are very helpful (Eh/32:13-33:05).

In addition, the research showed that learning subjects online and under blended learning mode favors the development of cognitive

skills that are essentially appropriate for the legal profession, such as reading understanding skills, writing skills, as well as analytical and synthesis skills through preparation of essays, brain maps, and concept maps. This also contributes to the development of library-technological skills by searching legal platforms that keep issues, electronic books, etc., and to the promotion of computer skills as applications (apps) are implemented to prepare materials and tasks to strengthen learning.

In addition, we found that due to the fact that online courses and under blended learning mode have clearly defined their instructional design, it seems to learners that courses of this type are more organized than classroom courses and that learning happens in the same way. They also think that distance course provides them with more supporting material and each of the curricular subject contents are completed, which mostly favors learning law.

From the voice of whistleblowers, the use of more elaborate learning techniques and strategies than in classroom courses is noted; for example, one of the interviewees acknowledged that he had never had to study so much in classes under this mode as in online subjects (Ef/14:56-15:1). Another whistleblower shared a revealing narrative where we were able to tell that distance courses foster a higher academic commitment than classroom courses, in parallel to the production of learning with higher advantages:

To tell the truth, I learned a lot! Well, I wonder if it is because of the subject, but knowledge was sought there, that is, true knowledge; you discover a lot of concepts. I used to say; "This is the same!" But then you learn how to make maps and to write. I have always been a person who disregarded spelling. That is, not that I have a horrible writing, but, for example, I didn't even consider the position of margins, among other things; and the teacher was highly strict there. Then, I was educated there and now I make perfect files. Then, I believe I acquired a lot of knowledge regarding writing, preparing files, making more organized brain maps. You get more knowledge because you comply with those assignments, that is, you feel you are compelled because your percentage goes down much if you do not do so. Then, with this obligation you feel, you learn more. I never liked to read all the time, but with this subject, I learned how to get better reading comprehension. It was exhausting, but you learn a lot. To me, that subject was a challenge! Are you doing Law? Then, this subject is going to be burdensome to you because you are not used to having three assignments each week and reading five articles from different files; there's a lot of discipline to hand in assignments. You

discover a lot because you learn how to better manage the platforms, you have to download files, to look for applications to do specific assignments because they sometimes ask for them using a specific application. Then, I think you get a lot of knowledge to manage several platforms and an extra discipline regarding digital use (Eg/27:29-34-37).

The interviewees recurrently said that taking subjects online or under the blended learning mode provides them more freedom with their schedules; we have mainly identified these advantages on participants who study and work, as they sustain that under this mode, it is possible for them to attend to their academic activities when they have the opportunity to do so, because of their job. They also highlight the freedom of schedule:

I could enter the platform at midnight, at three o'clock in the morning, on Saturday or on Sunday, on holidays; it didn't matter, what I couldn't do was to move forward [on activities] (Eb/29:15-29:27).

At the beginning I had questions whether I was going to be able to learn or not, but in the end, most of all, it was the facility to be able to use my time, to take a subject when I could. It could be on the weekend or in the afternoon; even at some free time because you can set your schedule (Eb2/13:53-14:22).

Findings not only mention learning advantages in view of schedule flexibility or in having to go to the institution; there are other favorable conditions about learning law by means of more empathetic online courses or under the blended learning mode that are taught at UACJ, which consist of the facility that may be provided to learners with health conditions or to disabled persons if more virtual subjects were taught. When we asked one of the whistleblowers about the appropriateness of having more subjects online than the ones currently taught, he said:

After this experience, I would look for more subjects online because this would facilitate my schedules. I am currently looking for a subject on 'amparo' that would suit my needs, and I expect to find it. I think this would also help other classmates, for example, I know one with cerebral palsy. Another classmate had a motorcycle accident, I used to tell me: "I have to climb to the second floor and with crutches". Then, I say, regardless of my things and of my schedules, there are classmates who would find it very well physically to take a subject online because there are difficulties,

whether by accidents or in the case of another classmate who moves on a wheelchair. In my case, I can also say as an experience, I had problems to finish the semester. I took three classroom subjects plus one online. I had health problem and then the only subject I was able to complete was the subject I was taking online, because I went on a sick leave. I had to talk to teachers to tell them that I wasn't able to attend physically. In the online subject, I turned in all my assignments on time and, therefore, I earned a very good grade". Better than on the other ones, but this was for health reasons (Eb3/23:32- 26:12).

This finding allows us to emphasize on the urgent need to consider online and semi-attendance courses in the institutional policy of every academic organization as serious alternatives to favor the learning of law and as pedagogical support to people who work, to those with a health condition that prevents them from going to the institution or to disabled persons. This would guarantee the most basic fundamental rights to the society.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the literature we reviewed and on the analysis of data from the research process of the university where we performed the survey, we can conclude that, in view of documented advantages about learning law by means of online and blended learning courses, appropriateness should be pointed out of switching from the prevailing traditional teaching of law (which we have criticized) to the learning of law where they use virtual environments and which ponders the digital culture we live in; this with the purpose of fostering educational innovations. We would have to acknowledge, however, that incorporating new technologies does not necessarily have an impact on changes in the teaching-learning process of law. To attain this efficiently, the application of innovative methodologies is required in the teaching practice with the advantages provided by new technologies.

It is not our intention to generalize on the results of our research, as the methodological feature is of a qualitative nature and this implies limitations on this kind of studies to be able to propose general affirmations; but, documented findings on the academic institution where we performed the survey were useful to understand the problems in other institutional contexts. Furthermore, contribution of this article lies on six key aspects. The first one revolves around three interlinked topics in an analysis derived from a research project: law, education and digital culture.

The second aspect is the effect of problems related to the need to move along a traditional teaching paradigm of law to one characterized by the use of virtual learning environments through ICTs and by pondering the digital culture; this is reflected on the criticism and on the designations of reviewed literature regarding the fact that the manner law is currently taught in most of the universities is obsolete.

The third aspect is linked to affirmations we have made, supported by the research process and that show appropriateness and justification at the events that arose due to the pandemic caused by Covid-19. The prevailing social reality forced educational institutions, teachers and learners to look to virtual learning contexts and environments, regardless of the fact that they had any experience or not in the teaching practice of law through ICTs, or regardless of the fact that the different actors are considered to be neophytes regarding digital culture.

The fourth aspect consists of the relative absence of papers that document learning of law under virtual environments as an alternative to disabled persons or with health conditions. The fifth one also lies in the fact of a relative absence of papers where they apply a qualitative methodology with an interpretative focus and where the voice of whistleblowers is presented, as well as the meanings and interpretations they give to their experience under virtual law learning environments.

As a last contribution, we may consider the following reflection: at the current situation of the health contingency due to Covid-19, learners, teachers and university officials of the Law program at UACJ ought to take the advantage to try and make an impact on changing the traditional paradigm of teaching law for a paradigm characterized by using ICTs and pondering the digital culture in the legal profession. Even so, this urgency may not only be applied within UACJ, but in other institutional contexts. This, in view that law and learning law ought to be close to the social reality involved thereby.

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