



Hybrid learning or blended synchronous learning

An emerging form of blended learning is hybrid learning where both on-campus and remote students simultaneously attend learning activities. Each class session is offered in-person and synchronously online, with opportunities for educators and learners to see each other in real time. Recent studies indicate that educators have found significant benefits in hybrid learning especially in improving accessibility for learners in dispersed locations. Studies also list economic benefits such as increasing enrolments and reducing educators from repeating the same lesson to absent learners.¹ Brian Betty from San Francisco State University provides an overview of hybrid (referred to as hyflex in his work) and its particular role during, and potentially, post-Covid.²

The following provides a snapshot of some research into hybrid from the educator and learner perspective:

Educator perceived benefits of hybrid

A significant study, drawing upon an extensive systematic review of research into hybrid, helpfully provides an overview of educator-perceived benefits of this approach such as exposing learners to a broader range of views and ideas and enabling collaboration between face-to-face and remote learners. Calling upon a range of work, this particular study cites authors who highlight the role of hybrid in enabling learners in continuing their studies and thus, promoting student retention.³ A further notable advantage of hybrid is in preparing learners for their technology-rich professional lives which may frequently require working at a distance for some or all of their roles.⁴

¹ Wang, Q, Quek, C L, & Hu, X (2017) Designing and Improving a Blended Synchronous Learning Environment: An Educational Design Research. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 18(3). <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v18i3.3034>

² Beatty, B. (2020) Can HyFlex Options Support Students in the Midst of Uncertainty? <https://er.educause.edu/blogs/2020/5/can-hyflex-options-support-students-in-the-midst-of-uncertainty>

³ Raes, A, Detienne, L, Windey, I, & Depaepe, F (2020) A systematic literature review on synchronous hybrid learning: gaps identified. *Learning Environments Research*, 23(3) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-019-09303-z>

⁴ Raes, A, Detienne, L, Windey, I, & Depaepe, F (2020). A systematic literature review on synchronous hybrid learning: gaps identified. *Learning Environments Research*, 23(3), pp269-290 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-019-09303-z>

Educator concerns about hybrid

In various studies, educators' detail significant drawbacks of hybrid; these issues can be separated into pedagogical, time, effort, and technological issues.

- Educators in both a Nordic music study,⁵ and work in the United Kingdom⁶ with optometrists, assert that radical changes in pedagogical approaches are required for hybrid, leading to a much stronger emphasis upon human relationships and interactions. Taking an innovative, learner-centred, inquiry-based approach to learning and teaching, is required and may challenge some educators.
- Educators also raise concerns regarding the impact of technology in hybrid. In a study in the USA exploring staff preparedness for hybrid, issues are raised about access in the classroom to dependable cameras and good quality microphones as well as reliable internet.⁷ Such issues are often exacerbated by varying levels of technological proficiency among educators. In addition, often educators feel more resources are required to run a session: in some cases, it may not always be possible for the educator to run a session alone, as noted by the optometrists at City University, UK.⁸
- Educators also raise concerns about learners' choices about hybrid: one study in Australasia noted the negative impact on learner performance in hybrid, stressing learners may make uninformed choices when they are unfamiliar with different modalities particularly if these modalities require learners to be self-motivated and able to manage time effectively (Korson, 2022).

As a consequence of these diverse challenges, educators sometimes feel underprepared to manage the intricacies of hybrid, especially managing learners in two settings (in-person and online) simultaneously. Thus, as highlighted in various studies, educators tend to limit their approaches to learning and teaching to those they are familiar such as conveying information about programme aims and outcomes.⁹ Consequently, as this study highlights, educators are looking for substantial support before embarking upon hybrid delivery. Critically, many educators' concerns are exacerbated by the lack of, or inconsistent, institutional pedagogical approaches to hybrid.¹⁰

⁵ Nykvist, S S, De Caro-Barek, V, Støckert, R, & Lysne, D A (2021). Key Factors Needed for Developing a Higher Education Cross-Campus Learning Environment in a Nordic Context. *Frontiers in Education*, 6. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.763761>. DOI: 10.3389/feduc.2021.763761

⁶ Subramanian, A (2022) Two years on: what has COVID-19 taught us about online (telerehabilitation) visual impairment teaching clinics? *Clinical and Experimental Optometry*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164622.2022.2121642>

⁷ Romero-Hall, E, & Ripine, C (2021). Hybrid flexible instruction: Exploring faculty preparedness. *Online Learning*, 25(3), 289-312. doi: 10.24059/olj.v25i3.2426

⁸ Subramanian, A (2022). Two years on: what has COVID-19 taught us about online (telerehabilitation) visual impairment teaching clinics? *Clinical and Experimental Optometry*. DOI: 10.1080/08164622.2022.2121642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164622.2022.2121642>; Wang et al. 2017

⁹ Romero-Hall, E., & Ripine, C. (2021). Hybrid flexible instruction: Exploring faculty preparedness. *Online Learning*, 25(3), 289-312. doi: 10.24059/olj.v25i3.2426

¹⁰ Nykvist, S S, De Caro-Barek, V, Støckert, R, & Lysne, D A (2021). Key Factors Needed for Developing a Higher Education Cross-Campus Learning Environment in a Nordic Context. *Frontiers in Education*, 6. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.763761>. DOI: 10.3389/feduc.2021.763761

Learner perceived benefits of hybrid

Learners also have a mixed perspective on hybrid; for some online learners, hybrid can provide an equivalent learning experience to studying face-to-face with their educator.¹¹ It can offer flexibility and is more convenient, providing a choice of where to attend the classroom - face-to-face or online. Hybrid can also save students' costs related to travel and time.¹²

Learner perceived challenges of hybrid

- As for educators, there are undoubted challenges for the remote learners who often find it difficult to communicate and collaborate with classmates or other remote members of the class, resulting in poor motivation.¹³
- The online learners in a hybrid context may also feel frustrated when they encounter technical difficulties at a separate site without a nearby technician to provide immediate support.¹⁴ In addition, the classroom students may feel ignored as the educator may spend much time addressing the questions raised or technical problems encountered by the online students.¹⁵

Overall, hybrid has much to commend it, allowing learners flexibility but studies indicate that it is one of the most challenging learning environments in which to teach and learn.¹⁶

¹¹ Wang, Q, Quek, C L, & Hu, X (2017). Designing and Improving a Blended Synchronous Learning Environment: An Educational Design Research. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 18(3). <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v18i3.3034>

¹² Wang, Q, Quek, C L, & Hu, X (2017) Designing and Improving a Blended Synchronous Learning Environment: An Educational Design Research. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 18(3). <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v18i3.3034>

¹³ Szeto, E (2015) Community of inquiry as an instructional approach: What effects of teaching, social and cognitive presences are there in blended synchronous learning and teaching? *Computers & Education*, 81, 191-201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.10.015>; Wang, Q, Quek, C L, & Hu, X (2017) Designing and Improving a Blended Synchronous Learning Environment: An Educational Design Research. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 18(3). <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v18i3.3034>

¹⁴ Capdeferro, N, & Romero, M (2012). Are online learners frustrated with collaborative learning experiences? *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 13(2), 26–44. <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v13i2.1127>

¹⁵ Szeto, E (2015) Community of inquiry as an instructional approach: What effects of teaching, social and cognitive presences are there in blended synchronous learning and teaching? *Computers & Education*, 81, 191–201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.10.015>

¹⁶ Wang, Q, Quek, C L, & Hu, X (2017). Designing and Improving a Blended Synchronous Learning Environment: An Educational Design Research. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 18(3). <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v18i3.3034>

Published by QAA, and produced by the sector and QAA Scotland, this report/resource has been commissioned by the Scottish Funding Council to support its duty to secure provision for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable further and higher education provision.



Published - September 2024

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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