

Chapter 18

Facilitating Conditions for Hybrid Teaching Among Academics

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ABSTRACT

Hybrid teaching has come to the fore post pandemic disruption. Although universities are making an effort to 'return to normal', the legacy of the pandemic, alongside the ever-present need to remain competitive, is the demand for flexibility in learning and access to online learning. Many academics are now facing the challenge of hybrid teaching. It is much more than simply using technology to transmit the lecturer's voice and classroom images between physical and virtual locations. Educators need to consider how to develop effective learning strategies that provide quality and equal opportunity. This requires creativity alongside knowledge of pedagogy and technology. It must be considered that educators need to be committed to hybrid teaching and fully engage. There are existing studies in the related domain of blended learning which can help create insights into what factors will support effective hybrid teaching. The author reports on a study of factors academics to blended learning strategies and highlights how the results of the study are useful to hybrid teaching.

INTRODUCTION

After the upheaval of the pandemic, many universities have found themselves in a new teaching context. Prior to the pandemic, universities were slowly embedding technologies into learning and teaching. The integration of technology was being fueled mostly by the need for flexibility, to meet the expectations of students, and the need to improve the quality and efficiency of teaching. During the pandemic, universities had to plunge into online learning, and the many universities that were predominantly in-person campuses struggled with going online (but did it nonetheless). Now, post-pandemic disruption, universities are faced with a complex problem – students have raised expectations about flexibility and the ability to

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study online if they want/need to and there are also students who expect to be on-campus now that the ‘pandemic is over’ but still want some flexibility. University leadership is also keen to return students to campus but at the same time, they do not want to lose the online cohorts and provide flexibility with online options to bolster the student experience. It seems that once students got a “taste for it [online learning], it seems the vast majority of students are keen to continue to embrace the benefits of online teaching” (Morrison, 2022).

Many universities are therefore looking towards keeping the hybrid teaching models used during the pandemic in the hope of striking a balance among flexibility, on-campus student expectations, online student expectations, and academic teacher workloads. The term hybrid teaching is being used here to mean:

An educational model in which some students attend a lecture or seminar in-person as normal, while others join virtually from home. Lecturers, therefore, teach remote and in-person students at the same time using tools like Teams or Zoom, alongside the full range of digital tools...As a variation, lecturers may also work remotely to deliver sessions to students in a classroom and online...In some cases, hybrid events might include asynchronous learning elements, including online exercises and pre-recorded video materials, to support face-to-face classroom sessions. (Centre for teaching & learning, n.d.)

The term hybrid teaching is sometimes used interchangeably with blended learning, especially in pre-Covid times (Ulla & Perales, 2022). Post-pandemic the two terms have become more distinct. Hybrid teaching and blended learning differ in that hybrid teaching refers to synchronous teaching of students in face-to-face and online modes, but blended learning refers to a mix of technology-rich strategies with face-face teaching strategies, some of which are synchronous and others asynchronous. Hybrid teaching can be considered to include the use of blended learning strategies.

A report by the BBC estimates that as a follow on from the pandemic, nearly a third of universities continue to offer hybrid teaching as of January 2023 (compared with only ~4% prior to the pandemic) (Standley, 2023). The pressure from students to keep hybrid models is only one of the factors contributing to the increased uptake of hybrid teaching among universities. Some previously face to face only universities are keeping purely online options as well as delivering on campus, which can translate into a greater workload with more course offerings. For example, universities such as the author’s home institution are multi-campus, running the same degree program plus a fully online option – effectively three offerings of each course. As universities seek to recover from the pandemic, competitiveness is more aggressive, and academic teachers are now under greater pressure than ever to evolve their teaching practice, embrace technology to provide excellent learning experiences to students online and on-campus, and maintain reasonable workloads.

Considering that prior to the pandemic, only a minority of academics were successfully combining technology with their face-to-face teaching to provide effective, high-quality learning experiences (Collis & Van Der Wende, 2002; Graham & Robison, 2007; Driscoll, 2002; Hoffman, 2006; Jeffrey, Milne, & Suddaby, 2014). While it sounds simple to teach both online and face-face students at the same time, hybrid teaching is challenging. Some of the challenges of hybrid teaching include: “unequal opportunity among students to be engaged in class activities, inefficient support for online students, technical issues with the platform, lack of devices for online learning, an additional time during the weekend, unresponsive online students, inability to monitor online students, low level of readiness and hesitation among lecturers, unstable internet connection, and sound-related issues” (Nebrida & Bangud, 2022, p.

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