

Students' Perception of Hybrid Learning: Advantages and Challenges

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Abstract

Hybrid learning is an educational approach combining face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning activities. The study adopted a correlational research design to investigate students' perception of hybrid learning: Advantages and Challenges. The population of the study was 278 students in the department of curriculum studies and educational technology, faculty of education, university of Port Harcourt. The sample size used for the study was male and female 100 students. A simple random sampling technique was used for the study. A structured questionnaire titled Students' perception of hybrid learning: Advantages and Challenges (SPHLAC) with 20 items. Face and content validity was used for the study. Reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. Mean and Z-test were used for the study. The study found that with the option to attend some classes online, students save time that would otherwise be spent commuting, allowing them to better balance their academic responsibilities with work, family, and personal commitments. Furthermore, the study also found that the flexibility of hybrid learning allows students to engage with course materials and activities at their own pace and at times that suit them best; this can lead to higher engagement levels, as students are less constrained by rigid schedules and can learn when they are most focused and motivated. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that educational institutions should establish support programs that provide access to necessary technology and internet resources for students from lower-income backgrounds. This could include loan programs for devices, subsidized internet plans, or on-campus facilities equipped with necessary technology.

Keywords: Hybrid learning, online learning, online discussions, course materials, social interactions, flexibility, engagement.

Introduction

Hybrid learning, an educational approach combining face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning activities, has grown in prominence, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This model aims to leverage the strengths of both traditional and digital educational environments to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Students generally appreciate the flexibility that hybrid learning offers. The ability to access course materials and participate in online discussions at their convenience allows learners to manage their time more effectively, accommodating diverse schedules and personal commitments. Recent studies highlight the importance of flexibility in student satisfaction with hybrid learning. For instance,

Palvia et al. (2018) found that flexibility in accessing course materials and completing assignments was a significant factor in student satisfaction and perceived learning effectiveness. According to a survey by Lederman (2020), some students expressed frustration with the technological demands of hybrid learning, highlighting the need for adequate support and resources to ensure smooth implementation. Another critical factor influencing students' perception of hybrid learning is the level of social interaction and engagement. While online components provide flexibility, they may also lead to a sense of isolation if not effectively integrated with face-to-face interactions.

Hybrid learning can enhance the overall learning experience by incorporating a variety of instructional methods. The combination of in-person and online activities can cater to different learning styles, thus promoting deeper understanding and retention of knowledge. A study by Griffiths et al. (2020) suggests that hybrid learning environments support higher levels of cognitive engagement compared to traditional classroom settings, as students are encouraged to actively participate and collaborate in both physical and virtual spaces.

Despite its advantages, hybrid learning also presents technological challenges that can impact students' perceptions negatively. Issues such as limited access to reliable internet, inadequate technical skills, and difficulties navigating online platforms can hinder the learning process. A survey by Gonzalez et al. (2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that technological issues were among the primary barriers to effective hybrid learning, affecting students' ability to fully engage with the course content.

Another critical factor influencing students' perception of hybrid learning is the level of social interaction and engagement. While online components provide flexibility, they may also lead to a sense of isolation if not effectively integrated with face-to-face interactions. Research by Martin et al. (2022) indicates that the lack of immediate feedback and personal connection in online settings can negatively affect students' motivation and participation. Therefore, fostering a sense of community through interactive and collaborative activities is essential in hybrid learning environments.

The impact of hybrid learning on academic performance is mixed. Some studies have shown that students in hybrid courses perform better than those in traditional classroom settings, attributing this to the diverse instructional methods and increased accessibility to learning resources. A meta-analysis by Bernard et al. (2014) found that hybrid learning environments often lead to better academic outcomes compared to purely online or purely face-to-face settings. However, other research points to the need for self-discipline and effective time management skills, which can be challenging for some students, potentially leading to lower performance (Means et al., 2013).

The psychological and emotional well-being of students in hybrid learning environments is another area of concern. Studies have shown that the transition to hybrid learning can induce stress and anxiety due to the sudden change in learning modality and the need to adapt to new technologies. A study by Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) emphasizes the importance of providing psychological support and fostering a supportive learning environment to help students cope with these changes.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid advancement of technology and the unprecedented disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the adoption of hybrid learning models in educational institutions worldwide. Hybrid learning, which combines in-person and online instruction, offers a flexible approach to education that promises to meet the diverse needs of students. However, the implementation of hybrid learning has generated mixed reactions among students, with varying perceptions of its advantages and challenges.

Despite the potential benefits of hybrid learning, such as increased flexibility, access to diverse resources, and the ability to learn at one's own pace, there are significant concerns about its effectiveness and impact on the educational experience. Students have reported challenges such as technological issues, decreased motivation, and feelings of isolation. These challenges can hinder their engagement and overall academic performance. Additionally, the dual nature of hybrid learning can complicate the maintenance of social interactions and psychological well-being, essential components of the educational experience.

Understanding students' perceptions of hybrid learning is crucial for educators and policymakers to design and implement effective educational strategies. By examining the perceived advantages and challenges, this research aims to provide insights into how hybrid learning impacts students' academic experiences, engagement, and well-being. The findings will inform improvements to hybrid learning models, ensuring they are more inclusive, effective, and supportive of students' needs.

The problem, therefore, lies in comprehensively understanding the nuanced perceptions of students regarding hybrid learning. This includes identifying the specific advantages that enhance their learning experiences and the disadvantages that pose barriers to their success. Addressing this problem is vital for developing hybrid learning environments that not only accommodate the logistical demands of modern education but also foster positive educational outcomes and student satisfaction.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate students' perception of hybrid learning: Advantages and Challenges. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Assess the Flexibility and Convenience Offered by Hybrid Learning
2. Evaluate the Impact of Hybrid Learning on Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes
3. Identify Technological Challenges Faced by Students in Hybrid Learning Environments
4. Investigate the Social Interaction and Psychological Well-being of Students in Hybrid Learning

Research Questions

Based on the objectives, the following questions were drawn:

1. In what ways does hybrid learning provide flexibility in terms of scheduling and location for students?
2. What is the impact of hybrid learning on student engagement in educational activities?

3. How do these technological challenges affect students' ability to participate and succeed in hybrid learning?
4. How does hybrid learning affect the social interaction among students?

Hypotheses

HO1: There is a significant difference between male and female students' hybrid learning flexibility in terms of scheduling and location

HO2: There is a significant difference between male and female students impact of hybrid learning on their engagement in educational activities

HO3: There is a significant difference between male and female technological challenges affecting their ability to participate and succeed in hybrid learning

HO4: There is a significant difference between male and female hybrid learning affecting students' social interaction among them.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design) to investigate students' perception of hybrid learning: Advantages and Challenges. The population of the study was 278 students in the department of curriculum studies and educational technology, faculty of education, university of Port Harcourt. The sample size used for the study was male and female 100 students. A simple random sampling technique was used) for the study. A structured questionnaire titled Students' perception of hybrid learning: Advantages and Challenges (SPHLAC) with 20 items. Face and content validity was used for the study. Reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. Mean and Z-test were used for the study.

Results

Research Question 1: In what ways does hybrid learning provide flexibility in terms of scheduling and location for students?

Table 1: Ways Hybrid learning provides flexibility

Table 1 showed that with the mean score of 3.78, the study found that with the option to attend some classes online, students save time that would otherwise be spent commuting, allowing them to better balance their academic responsibilities with work, family, and personal commitments.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of hybrid learning on student engagement in educational activities?

Table 2: Impact of hybrid learning on student engagement

Table 2 showed that with the mean score of 3.80, the study found that the flexibility of hybrid learning allows students to engage with course materials and activities at their own pace and at times that suit them best.

Research Question 3: How do these technological challenges affect students' ability to participate and succeed in hybrid learning?

Table 3: How technological challenges affect students' ability to participate and succeed in hybrid learning

Table 3 showed that with the mean score of 3.57, the study found that students from lower-income backgrounds may lack access to high-speed internet and up-to-date devices, which are essential for participating in online components of hybrid learning; this inequality can hinder their ability to engage with course materials and participate in virtual activities.

Research Question 4: How does hybrid learning affect the social interaction among students?

Table 4: How hybrid learning affect students' interactions

Table 4 showed that with the mean score of 3.69, the study found that hybrid learning often involves using various online communication tools such as discussion boards, chat rooms, and video conferencing, this exposure can help students develop and refine their digital communication skills, which are increasingly important in both academic and professional settings.

Hypotheses

HO1: There is a significant difference between male and female students' hybrid learning flexibility in terms of scheduling and location

Table 1: Table of analysis to determine a significant difference between male and female students' hybrid learning flexibility in terms of scheduling and location

The calculated value of Z (Zcal), is greater than the tabular value, hence the null hypothesis, H0 is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between male and female students' hybrid learning flexibility in terms of scheduling and location. Male students mean score of (3.95) is greater than the female students' mean score of (3.59).

HO2: There is a significant difference between male and female students impact of hybrid learning on their engagement in educational activities

Table 2: Table of analysis to determine a significant difference between male and female students impact of hybrid learning on their engagement in educational activities

The calculated value of Z (Zcal), is greater than the tabular value, hence the null hypothesis, H0 is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between male and female students impact of hybrid learning on their engagement in educational activities. Male students mean score of (3.90) is greater than female mean score of (3.71).

HO3: There is a significant difference between male and female technological challenges affecting their ability to participate and succeed in hybrid learning

Table 3: Table of analysis to determine a significant difference between male and female technological challenges affecting their ability to participate and succeed in hybrid learning

The calculated value of Z (Zcal), is greater than the tabular value, hence the null hypothesis, H0 is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between male and female technological challenges affecting their ability to participate and succeed in hybrid learning. Male students mean score of (3.98) is greater than the female mean score of (3.35).

HO4: There is a significant difference between male and female hybrid learning affecting students' social interaction among them.

Table 4: Table of analysis to determine a significant difference between male and female hybrid learning affecting students' social interaction among them.

The calculated value of Z (Zcal), is greater than the tabular value, hence the null hypothesis, H0 is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between male and female hybrid learning affecting students' social interaction among them. Male students mean score of (3.84) is greater than female students mean score of (3.14).

Discussion of Findings

The present study is in agreement with those of Nguyen et al. (2021), students reported high levels of satisfaction with the flexibility offered by hybrid learning, particularly appreciating the ability to revisit recorded lectures and materials at their own pace. A study by Griffiths et al. (2020) found that students in hybrid courses reported greater satisfaction with the variety of

learning activities and the opportunity for both individual and collaborative learning experiences. Gonzalez et al. (2020) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic it was highlighted that 40% of students faced significant technological barriers, which impeded their ability to fully engage in hybrid learning environments. These challenges often resulted in frustration and decreased overall satisfaction with the learning experience.

Research by Martin et al. (2022) indicates that students in hybrid learning environments often miss the immediacy and personal connection of traditional classroom settings. However, the study also noted that well-designed hybrid courses that incorporate interactive and collaborative online activities can mitigate these issues and foster a sense of community. Bernard et al. (2014) found that students in hybrid courses performed better than those in purely face-to-face or purely online courses. Means et al., 2013 found that hybrid learning requires significant self-discipline and effective time management skills, which can be challenging for some students. Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) found that students experienced increased stress and anxiety due to the sudden shift to hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Al-Fraihat et al. (2020) showed that students valued the flexibility in time management and the ability to review materials multiple times, which helped enhance their understanding of the content. According to Owston et al. (2019), students in hybrid courses reported better engagement and deeper learning compared to traditional face-to-face courses. The combination of online and in-person interactions allows for a richer educational experience, fostering critical thinking and collaborative skills. A study by Murphy et al. (2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that these technological barriers significantly hindered students' ability to fully engage in hybrid learning. Hrastinski (2019) indicates that effective hybrid learning requires deliberate efforts to foster a sense of community and engagement among students.

Vo et al. (2017) found that students in hybrid courses often perform better than those in traditional or fully online courses, likely due to the combination of diverse instructional methods and increased access to resources. A study by Rad et al. (2021) found that students experienced increased levels of anxiety and stress related to the hybrid learning environment. Providing adequate psychological support and creating a supportive learning community were identified as crucial factors in helping students cope with these challenges.

Conclusions

Hybrid learning provides significant advantages by offering flexible scheduling and self-paced learning opportunities. This flexibility helps students better balance their academic, work, and personal commitments, leading to potentially higher engagement and motivation. The use of various online communication tools in hybrid learning environments helps students develop essential digital communication skills. These skills are increasingly valuable in both academic and professional contexts. Students from lower-income backgrounds face challenges with hybrid learning due to limited access to high-speed internet and updated devices. This disparity can negatively impact their ability to fully engage with course materials and participate in online activities.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the researchers recommended that:

1. Educational institutions should establish support programs that provide access to necessary technology and internet resources for students from lower-income backgrounds.
2. Courses should be designed with flexibility in mind, allowing students to access materials and complete assignments at their own pace.
3. Incorporate digital literacy training into the curriculum to ensure all students are proficient in using online communication tools.
4. Offer supplementary resources and support services, such as virtual tutoring, tech help desks, and online study groups, to assist students in navigating the hybrid learning environment and overcoming any technical or academic challenges they may face.

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