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Exploring University Students' Perspectives on Hybrid Learning within the Context of Post Covid-19 in ESL Classrooms

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Abstract

Higher education institutions have changed unexpectedly since the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe. It is a big challenge for most daily routines and negatively impacts higher education institutions. Hence, the situation demands quick changes, from the traditional method of teaching to blended pedagogy as depending on online teaching and learning is not an ideal option. Therefore, in order to optimize teaching and learning experiences, face-to-face learning mode and online learning mode or named as hybrid learning is conducted. This transition of learning potentially raises various perceptions among university students. Thus, this paper aims to investigate the university students' perspectives on hybrid amidst post COVID-19. By using the convenient sampling method, a total of 60 diploma students participated and shared their feedback on hybrid learning implementation. This study was carried out through a survey research design and the data of this study was gathered by using online questionnaire via Google Form. The findings revealed that the students showed positive perceptions regarding hybrid learning in pedagogical and social aspects. Nevertheless, negative perceptions were found in the technical aspects relating to students' concentration in deeper learning and students' difficulties in learning English during hybrid learning. It is concluded that hybrid learning can be considered an effective learning approach as a learning solution in this endemic era.

Keywords: Hybrid Learning, ESL Classrooms, Higher Education Institutions, Post Covid-19

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted all students in the world and the majority of educational institutions were faced with the challenge of transitioning educational platforms from face-to-face classroom teaching to distance learning. These prompt changes to instruction may have affected students' learning outcomes. Teachers are being forced to facilitate instruction within the syllabus without adequate training or the necessary tools for learning. Teachers need to be aware of their students' technology needs and assist with ensuring they have

prevalent access to digital tools (e.g., laptops, smartphones, tablet etc) Before the pandemic, instructors could have scheduled time, before or following classroom hours, to allow students to use technological resources. Instructors must be equipped with the required technology-based knowledge and skills to deliver online instruction in the 21st Century. Use of technology in education has steadily increased with instructors increasingly relying on platforms for posting grades, tracking attendance, and communicating with parents and staff.

Hybrid Learning: What Is It?

In a hybrid learning environment, some students attend classes in person while others participate digitally from their homes. By utilising resources like video conferencing technology and software, educators can instruct both in-person and distant students at the same time.

Asynchronous learning components, such as online activities and pre-recorded video lessons, are sometimes used in hybrid classes to assist in-person classroom sessions. When designed properly, hybrid courses bring together the greatest features of both face-to-face and online education while making education more accessible to many students. The components of a hybrid course must be adjusted to the learning mode, whether it be in-person or online, for hybrid learning to be successful.

Blended vs. Hybrid Learning

Both hybrid learning and blended learning share many of the same instructional features, and they are commonly confused with one another. Both are various learning models. However, asynchronous learning techniques, in which students' complete online tasks and view instructional videos on their own schedules, are combined with face-to-face instruction in blended learning. In a hybrid learning environment, instructors simultaneously guide physical and online learners. Asynchronous teaching techniques can be added to synchronous, in-person training in hybrid learning models.

Literature Review

The notion of hybrid learning is relevantly new in education research and there may be a mismatch of interpretations among researchers. There can be found terms of blended and hybrid learning in pedagogical discourse. However, most of the authors agree that they may be used interchangeably (Graham & Dziuban, 2008; Usova, 2011; O'Byrne et al., 2015). Thus, the term hybrid learning is used in the present article. Concerning the definition of hybrid learning, there is no common view among researchers in the big variety of interpretations. Graham and Dziuban (2008) comment that blended learning environments combine face-to-face teaching with technology-mediated teaching. Fenton & Watkins (2010) argue that teachers' use of blended learning is an innovative form of classroom practice. Whereas, Pombo and Moreira (2010) define blended learning as a combination of pedagogical concepts depending on the focus: a compound of pedagogical strategies, supporting technologies, and/or teaching delivery modes. Considering the above-mentioned ideas, it may be assumed that hybrid learning may be applied as a combination of different pedagogical aspects. Significantly, hybrid learning may also be interpreted as the systemic incorporation of classroom and distance phases of a course. In view of Charlier et al (2012), he stated that hybrid learning is an entire educational programme that combines face-to-face and remote phases. This idea is also supported by Peterson and McGuire (2014) who apply the term

hybrid learning to refer to the entire programme structure, not only a combination of online and face-to-face modes of teaching.

Additionally, Kukhareno (2013) mentions two different ways to view hybrid learning:

- 1) In a more general sense, "this is a teaching technique, a delivery, and an approach that blends traditional methods in the classroom with computer-mediated learning activities."
- 2) It refers to a combination of aspects from traditional and online courses. The integration of several technologies into a single integrated learning approach is one of this method's strengths (p. 50). It is safe to infer that many scholars view hybrid learning as a method or programme that blends classroom and online components. Therefore, hybrid learning is a brand-new, crucial educational paradigm that also includes new teaching methods, instructional strategies, and teacher-student relationships.

Considering that it enables students to benefit from both the advantages of real and virtual learning settings, it could be highly helpful. It is ideal for "good virtual learning environments to provide: 1) time flexibility for both students and teachers; 2) simple 24/7 access to the curriculum and learning materials; 3) communication in three formats: a student-teacher, a group of students-a teacher, peer-group communication; 4) collaboration in an online group or pair projects; 5) greater learner autonomy; 6) easy modalities of evaluation and feedback for teachers; 7) simple tracking of students' development and success; 8) The accessibility of supporting materials. It is an effective approach for students with various levels of understanding. Therefore, while stronger students can use additional resources to seek help, lesser students can review the subject and repeat the exercises. Students with different learning styles can choose from several options that are suitable for them. The last but not the least, the advantage is that "hybrid learning facilitates a transition from a 'teacher-centered' classroom to a 'learner-centered' format and shapes the environment of co-learning" (Liashchenko & Babiy, 2017, pp. 94-95)

Throughout the course, students can develop new skills, engage in peer interaction, exchange ideas, and finish practical assignments. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that without strong technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge from teachers who design and manage a learning environment for students, all the aforementioned benefits of hybrid learning are difficult to achieve.

The studies of hybrid learning in English language learning had been conducted previously by some researchers. Vonti & Rahmah (2019) studied that the use of hybrid / blended learning models results in a considerable rise in student learning outcome scores. The digital literacy questionnaire also yielded a positive result. The digital literacy of the majority of the students was greatly enhanced, ranging from 10% to 20%. As a result, it can conclude that a hybrid-learning approach can both improve students' grammar achievement and their digital literacy.

A study by Nashir & Laili (2021) affirmed that the hybrid learning method is effective to be applied since it can increase students' learning outcomes and scores, especially in speaking

class. Additionally, another finding confirmed that students would rather study through the hybrid method than full online learning or face-to-face learning.

However, knowing students' perceptions in hybrid learning are necessary because this model is being utilized in many institutions due to the needs of the present covid situation. According to some expert definitions, perception is a human mental process of a specific phenomenon that occurs after a feeling from the environment has gone through the sense of organs. Perception is a phenomenon that is a release of human brain activity. This process involves a variety of factors, including feelings, needs, motivation, education, experience, and others (Koentjaningrat 2010, in Aprianto) (2017). As a result, understanding others' points of view or opinions on the issues or things in their environment will be valuable.

Alfiras et al (2021) proved that the effectiveness of the hybrid learning model is determined by students' knowledge of online resources available through hybrid classrooms, students' preparedness to integrate hybrid classes, and teachers' efficiency in providing incredible learning experience. The findings also pointed out that the relevance of advanced Learning Management Systems (LMS) and students' emotional connections with their teachers and classmates in strengthening the participants' successful learning experiences. Another study conducted by Lu (2021) claimed that learners had generally positive attitudes toward the atmosphere of hybrid method, and they noticed that it could help them to develop their critical thinking skills in a variety of areas.

Problem Statement

Based on the hybrid learning context, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are diploma students' perceptions of the hybrid learning system in terms of pedagogical aspect amidst the post Covid-19 ?
2. What are diploma students' perceptions of the hybrid learning system in terms of social aspect amidst the post Covid-19 ?
3. What are diploma students' perceptions of the hybrid learning system in terms of technical aspect amidst the post Covid-19 ?

Methodology

This study included 60 ESL Diploma students from various faculties namely Accountancy, Computer Science and Applied Science at University Technology MARA, Tapah, consisting of 38 female students and 21 male students from the second, and third semesters. Additionally, due to the pandemic situation, the data for this study was gathered using a survey online research distributed to students who were participating in hybrid learning. The data was gathered by analyzing diploma students' perspectives based on their personal experiences with hybrid learning. The questionnaire was constructed using the perception theory concept which concentrates on the PST (pedagogy, social interaction, and technology) model. As previously stated, this study is concerned with students' perception of hybrid learning during the pandemic era related to the PST model. The questions were organized in accordance with those main themes. The survey design was chosen in this study as described by Fowler (2014) that survey research is the respondent's answer to questions that are intended to describe the respondents' experiences, attitudes, and other qualities. Closed-ended questions were

chosen in this study aiming at capturing their preferences, including perception and experiences in hybrid learning (Amin & Sundari, 2020).

This survey was conducted online using Google Forms as the instrument for collecting data through a closed-ended questionnaire. It was arranged in the form of a Likert scale with four choices, such as 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree', and 'strongly agree'. The statements were related to the criteria of the PST model: pedagogy, social and technology with a total of 28 items (see Table 1). The students' responses were calculated, analyzed, and described based on the topic.

Table 1

Criteria of the PST model

No	Criteria	Description	Items
1	Pedagogical	the selection of appropriate content, activities, and how to use resources	12
2	Social	the construction of a safe and comfortable environment where students can share and communicate	5
3	Technical	the availability, accessibility and attractability of technical space	11

Results and Discussions

Based on the responses of the students to the questionnaire on diploma students' perception towards hybrid learning, It is possible to draw a conclusion that most diploma students have a positive attitude towards hybrid learning during the pandemic era. The following three main objectives were emphasized as a result of the findings: 1. Diploma students' perception of hybrid learning in pedagogy aspect 2. Diploma students' perception of hybrid learning in social aspect 3. Diploma students' perception of hybrid learning in the technical aspect.

Table 2

Diploma students' perception of hybrid learning in pedagogy aspect

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	In Hybrid learning, the lecturer's supply handbook for face-to-face learning in each lesson	16.6%	75.0%	8.4%	0.0%
2.	In Hybrid learning, the lecturers share extensive information (e.g., resources' links) for online learning	35.0%	61.6%	1.7%	1.7%
3.	The resources in hybrid learning are appropriate to the learning objective in each lesson	28.0%	68.0%	4.0%	0.0%
4.	The content of the course in each lesson is appropriate in Hybrid learning to reach the learning objective	20.0%	78.3%	1.7%	0.0%
No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5.	The content of the course runs well in a Hybrid learning environment	1.7%	70.0%	28.3%	0.0%
6.	Expectations of assignments for learning English in Hybrid learning are clearly stated	11.7%	70.0%	13.3%	5.0%
7.	In hybrid learning, the tasks given in each lesson are appropriate to reach the learning objective	8.7%	73.0%	15.0%	3.3%
8.	The learning objectives are clearly stated in each lesson	3.0%	85.0%	12.0%	0.0%
9.	The organization of each lesson in hybrid learning is easy to follow	8.7%	53.0%	35.0%	3.3%
10.	The structure of the environment in hybrid learning helps me focus on learning	2.1%	53.0%	43.3%	1.6%
11.	Activities in hybrid learning are planned carefully	6.7%	65.0%	23.3%	5.0%
12.	The presentation of the course content in hybrid learning is clear	5.0%	65.0%	26.6%	3.3%

The result in Table 2 showed that most Diploma students had the same positive perceptions towards hybrid learning during the pandemic era, especially in the context of pedagogy. Most of the students found that the lecturers supplied handbooks for face-to-face learning in each lesson during hybrid learning, with a percentage of agreement of 91.6%. Other than that, most of the students positively perceived that the lecturers provided extensive information for online learning such as links for the additional materials to be learned, with a percentage of agreement of 96.6%. Another finding showed that 96%% of students agreed that the resources given in hybrid learning were proper to the learning objective in each lesson.

Furthermore, the students positively agreed with the statement that the content of the course in each lesson was compatible with hybrid learning to reach the learning objective, with a percentage of agreement of 98.3%.

Whereas, 71.1% of the students agreed that the content of the course ran well in a hybrid learning environment. Apart from that, expectations of assignments for learning English in hybrid learning were clearly stated with a percentage of agreement of 81.7% from the students. Next, the percentage of agreement 81,7% of the students showed that tasks given in each lesson were suitable to reach the learning objective. Besides, 88.0% of the students were affirmative that the learning objectives were clearly stated in each lesson. Moreover, the finding showed that the organization of each lesson in hybrid learning was easy to follow, with the students' percentage of agreement of 61.7%. Subsequently, the finding showed that 55.1% of the students agreed that the structure of the environment in hybrid learning supported them to focus on learning. Next, the students found that activities in hybrid learning were planned carefully, with a 71.7% of percentage agreement. Lastly, the students approved that the presentation of the course content in hybrid learning is clear, with a percentage of agreement of 70.0%.

Table 3

Diploma students' perception of hybrid learning in social aspect

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Hybrid learning can improve communication with the lecturer, not only face-to-face but also online learning mode through online learning platforms	11.7%	66.7%	21.6%	0.0%
2.	In hybrid learning, I can ask my teacher about anything I do not understand	10.0%	85.0%	5.0%	0.0%
3.	The lecturers timely provide me with comments on my work in hybrid learning	10.0%	70.0%	20.0%	0.0%
4.	In hybrid learning, my classmates and I frequently review each other's work	10.0%	66.7%	23.3%	0.0%
5.	In hybrid learning, I am encouraged by my teacher's and colleagues' positive attitudes	23.3%	66.7%	10.0%	0.0%

Based on Table 3, it can be concluded that the majority of the students had a positive attitude toward hybrid learning related to the social aspect. The result showed that 78.4% of students agreed that hybrid learning helps them to improve communication with the lecturer, not only face-to-face but also online learning mode through online learning platforms. Another finding showed that 95.0% of the students concurred that they were able to ask the teacher about anything they did not understand in hybrid learning. Other than that, another finding showed that the lecturers timely provided the students with comments on their work in hybrid learning, with the students' percentage of agreement of 80.0%. Besides, 76,7% of the students agreed that they frequently got peer reviews during hybrid learning. Lastly, the students perceived that they were encouraged by their teacher and colleagues' positive attitudes toward hybrid learning, with a percentage of 90.0%.

Table 4

Diploma students' perception of hybrid learning in the technical aspect

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Learning English in hybrid learning enables me to concentrate on deeper learning	3.4%	41.6%	55.0%	5.0%
2.	Learning English in hybrid learning enables me to become self-motivated and responsible in my learning	10.0%	70.0%	20.0%	0.0%
3.	It is convenient to learn English through hybrid learning	0.0%	53.3%	43.3%	3.3%
4.	It is boring to learn English in a Hybrid learning	10.0%	31.6%	55.0%	3.3%
5.	It is difficult to learn English in hybrid learning	8.4%	50.0%	36.6%	5.0%
6.	With the Hybrid learning method, I feel motivated to explore the content related to the materials	8.7%	68.0%	23.3%	0.0%
7.	I can increase my English learning abilities through hybrid learning, which enables me to learn whenever and wherever	10.4%	68.0%	18.3%	3.3%
No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8.	With the Hybrid learning method, I can finish my tasks anywhere and at any time	25.0%	55.0%	15.0%	5.0%
9.	Hybrid learning method makes me tend to be more interested in learning English	5.1%	55.0%	36.6%	3.3%
10.	Hybrid learning method enables me to manage my time efficiently in learning English	8.4%	65.0%	23.3%	3.3%
11.	Learning English with a hybrid learning method makes me more active	5.1%	55.0%	36.6%	3.3%

The positive survey result from Table 4 proved that learning English in hybrid learning enabled students to become self-motivated and responsible toward English learning with the students' percentage of agreement of 80.0%. Moreover, 53.3% of the students agreed learning English through hybrid learning was convenient. Additionally, 41.6% of the students disagreed that learning English in hybrid learning was boring, Next, the percentage of the statement about students' motivation in exploring the content related to the materials in hybrid learning was that 76.7% agreed and 23.3% disagreed. Furthermore, 78.4% of the students agreed that they were able to increase their English learning abilities through hybrid learning, which allowed them to learn whenever and wherever. Another finding was related to the students' flexibility in finishing their tasks anywhere and anytime with a total of 80.0% of agreement from agree and strongly agree percentage. Besides, 60.1% of the students

positively perceived related to the statement that the Hybrid learning method made them tend to be more interested in learning English.

An equally important finding from the survey was that 73.4% of the students noticed that the hybrid learning method enabled them to manage their time efficiently in learning English. Lastly, the students agreed that learning English with a hybrid learning method made them more active, with a percentage of agreement of 60.1%. In contrast, the negative perceptions from the respondents according to the table above were in terms of the concentration on students' deeper learning and difficulties in learning English during hybrid learning. 60.0% of students disagreed that learning English in hybrid learning enabled them to concentrate on deeper learning. Furthermore, students agreed that it was difficult to learn English in hybrid learning with a total of 58.4% of agreement from the percentage of agree and strongly agree. Yet, 41.6% of the students disagreed with that statement.

In relation to diploma students' perceptions of the hybrid learning system in terms of pedagogy, the first finding gave the response to the first research question. The results showed that students had the same positive opinions about the lecturer's method and style of instruction during hybrid learning. This demonstrated that, in order to assist the students in learning, the lecturer had addressed the pedagogy component, such as teaching plan competency, teaching-learning process competency, and teaching-learning assessment and evaluation competency. Thus, this finding was in line with some previous studies (Baharun & Porter, 2009; Talis et al., 2018). Baharun & Porter (2009) stated that students perceived hybrid learning had a positive impact on learning outcomes in terms of student mastery of topics and student confidence in learning. Talis et al (2018), similar in their study, confirmed that students had a positive perception towards hybrid learning since it is more efficient and effective which could make them easy and enhanced in understanding the materials. On the contrary, these findings found were rejected by previous findings by Vaksalla et al. (2019) and (Mohamad et al., 2015). Vaksalla et al (2019) proved that students had negative perception on hybrid learning as the instructions of the assignments were unclear.

The second finding addressed to the second research question, which concerned diploma students' perceptions of hybrid learning related to the social aspect. The findings proved that the students shared the same favourable opinions of the learning environment created by the lecturer in the classroom. Simply expressed, during hybrid learning, the lecturer and the students generated meaningful learning interactions together. This finding was aligned with Hediansah & Surjono (2020) study, where hybrid learning had a positive impact in creating a positive environment among teachers and peers, shaping the students into autonomous learners to upgrade their skills, and enhancing teachers' performance in learning management.

According to Nashir & Laili (2021), lecturers and students could still communicate with one another via hybrid learning despite differences in space, time, and distance. Napier et al. (2011) made a related discovery and confirmed that student-teacher contact was high. However, the comparison finding on student involvement and blended learning indicated that some students found it difficult to collaborate with their teammates and develop a sense of community with their classmates in blended learning (Holley & Oliver, 2010).

The third finding responded to the third research question, which centered on how diploma students perceived hybrid learning from a technological perspective. The outcome demonstrated that the student's opinions of the technical environment provided by the lecturer during hybrid learning were generally favourable. The speaker provided the proper availability, accessibility, and attractiveness in the learning process, it may be assumed. This

result was supported by earlier research (Talis et al., 2018; Kazi & Moghal, 2019; Bakeer, 2018). According to Talis et al (2018), students had positive perceptions of blended learning in ELT in terms of their comfort, interest, activity, and responsibility in the classroom. Similar to this, Kazi & Moghal (2019) found that students had favourable perceptions of blended learning because of its adaptable environment, accessibility, learners' decreased commute times, and cost-effectiveness.

Additionally, Bakeer (2018) found that students had a favourable attitude toward the implementation of blended learning because it helped students develop their motivation, language abilities, and autonomy in learning. In contrast, Hafiza et al (2022) found that students' behavioural perceptions of hybrid learning were negative because they were not paying attention to the teacher. As a result, they were reluctant and paid less attention throughout the teaching-learning process when students have a negative attitude toward language learning (Abidin et al., 2012). Additionally, according to Vaksalla et al (2019), the students' poor opinion of hybrid learning was brought on by the slow internet connection. In addition, Sriwichai's (2020) research on students' preparation for and challenges with blended learning revealed that the students lacked motivation to learn English since they encountered challenges both within and outside the classroom. However, the unfavourable opinions persisted.

Conclusion

Technology's quick progress has aided in the rise of creative teaching methods in higher education. One of them, hybrid learning, refers to an environment that has been specially created and blends virtual and face-to-face learning as its main components in a classroom setting. In general, survey findings indicate that students are open to embrace this educational innovation and have a favourable opinion of hybrid learning. Nevertheless, students require assistance with information regarding the use of contemporary ICT tools and better technical educational materials. Overall, diploma students had favourable opinions on hybrid learning from a pedagogical, social, and technical standpoint. However, the technical issues pertaining to students' concentration in deeper learning and students' challenges with English language acquisition during hybrid learning were where the unfavourable impressions were identified. According to the data, hybrid learning may be identified as the efficient method of learning as well as the learning solution in the present pandemic period, regardless of the positive and negative judgments. Some recommendations are made for the lecturer and the students in light of the results of this study. By encouraging students to learn more deeply and easing their struggles with English hybrid learning, lecturers are expected to be flexible enough to handle the learning transition that will occur throughout the pandemic. For the students, it is expected that they will be able to make the most of their time during the learning process in order to pay closer attention to deeper learning and adjust to the learning transition that places a strong emphasis on technology. Research on hybrid learning may lead to modifications to teacher preparation courses that emphasise the significance of strong technological topic knowledge and pertinent technical setups for the efficient instruction of the English language at the university level. In line with this, if this shift in learning is not fully utilised to optimise the use of technology for the goal of building a successful hybrid learning, Malaysia will lose the huge potential to improve education in the nation.

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