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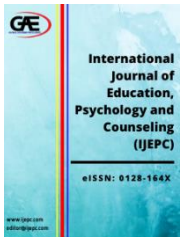

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THE FLEXIBILITY IN A HYBRID LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AFTER COVID-19: A CONCEPT PAPER

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Abstract:

The pandemic coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has altered the landscape of the education system in every country. As academic institutions throughout the world face the global health issue, there is a need to investigate various instructional approaches such as online, hybrid, and blended learning methods and the impact of these approaches on students' academic performance. This concept paper aims to investigate the flexibility of hybrid learning environments on student academic performance in Malaysian higher education institutions. Hybrid learning environments, which combine traditional in-person classes with online learning components, have become increasingly popular in Malaysia due to their potential to enhance student learning outcomes and accessibility, especially in their Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). The paper will review relevant literature on the concept of flexibility in hybrid learning environments on student academic performance. This will include a discussion of the benefits and challenges of flexibility, as well as best practices for supporting student success in hybrid learning environments. This paper will conclude with a discussion of the study's findings for Malaysian higher education institutions and recommendations for optimizing student success in hybrid learning environments. These recommendations may include providing support and resources to enhance student motivation and engagement, promoting clear communication and collaboration between instructors and students, and ensuring access to necessary technology and infrastructure for online learning. By examining the interplay between flexibility and academic performance, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on hybrid learning effectiveness, aiding educators, and policymakers in refining strategies for optimizing student outcomes.

Keywords:

Flexibility, Hybrid Class, Student Academic Performance

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Introduction

Background of the Study

The emergence of hybrid learning environments, which combine both online and face-to-face elements, has allowed for greater flexibility in education. Flexibility in hybrid learning environments refers to the ability of students to access and engage with course materials and resources at their own pace and on their own schedule. This mode of learning has become increasingly popular in recent years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it offers a way to continue education while maintaining social distancing measures. Research has shown that flexibility in hybrid learning environments can positively affect student learning outcomes. For example, a study conducted by Kaur and Kaushal (2021) found that students in a hybrid learning environment performed better on exams and had a higher overall grade point average compared to students in a traditional face-to-face learning environment. This may be due to the fact that hybrid learning allows for greater personalization of the learning experience, as students can choose when and how they engage with course material.

Furthermore, flexibility in hybrid learning environments can also lead to increased student engagement and motivation. According to a study by Song and Hill (2017), students in hybrid learning environments reported feeling more motivated to learn and more connected to course material compared to students in traditional face-to-face learning environments. This may be due to the fact that hybrid learning environments provide students with more control over their learning experience, which can lead to a greater sense of ownership and investment in the learning process. Despite the potential benefits, there are also challenges associated with flexibility in hybrid learning environments. For example, a lack of structure and accountability may lead to students falling behind or not fully engaging with the material. Additionally, students who are not self-directed or who lack access to reliable technology may struggle to succeed in a flexible hybrid learning environment.

Overall, understanding the flexibility in hybrid learning environments is crucial for educators and policymakers as they seek to improve and innovate in the field of education. By examining the benefits and challenges of this mode of learning, researchers can identify strategies to maximize the potential benefits while mitigating the potential challenges.

Problem Statement

Several studies have explored the benefits and challenges of flexibility in hybrid learning environments. For example, a study by Alghamdi et al. (2021) found that flexibility in online learning can positively impact student academic performance, but that a lack of structure and accountability can negatively affect some students. Similarly, a study by Kaur et al. (2021) found that flexibility in online learning can lead to increased student engagement and motivation, but that some students may struggle to manage their time effectively without a structured schedule.

In order to optimize student success in hybrid learning environments, institutions and instructors can implement best practices such as providing clear communication and expectations, promoting collaboration and engagement, and offering resources and support for students. For example, a study by Chen and Li (2021) found that providing clear guidelines and expectations for online learning, as well as regular communication and feedback from teachers, can positively impact student academic performance. Additionally, a study by Saqr

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et al. (2018) found that promoting collaboration and interaction between students and instructors, such as through online discussion forums or virtual office hours, can improve student engagement and motivation in online learning environments.

The flexibility in hybrid learning environments can have both benefits and challenges for student academic performance, it is important for institutions and instructors to consider the needs and learning styles of their students and provide appropriate support and resources. By implementing best practices and considering the individual needs of students, institutions can optimize student success in online and hybrid learning environments.

Significance of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for educational institutions to be flexible and adaptable to change. Hybrid learning environments provide an opportunity for educators to meet the needs of students who may not have access to traditional educational institutions or who have other commitments, such as work or family responsibilities. Additionally, understanding the flexibility in a hybrid learning environment on academic performance can help educators and institutions tailor their approaches to better support student success. This study is significant as it will provide insights into the effectiveness of hybrid learning environments and offer recommendations for improving educational outcomes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

With the recent advancements in technology, education has been rapidly changing over the years. Hybrid learning, also known as blended learning, is a combination of traditional classroom-based learning and online learning. The flexibility offered by hybrid learning environments is attracting more attention from educators and researchers. In the aftermath of COVID-19, hybrid learning environments have emerged as a pivotal educational strategy. However, a comprehensive understanding of the flexibility inherent in such models remains underexplored, presenting notable research gaps. While initial studies have assessed the adoption and effectiveness of hybrid learning, there is limited empirical research that delves into the nuanced aspects of flexibility in post-pandemic scenarios.

For instance, the work of Smith and Johnson (2022) suggests that while hybrid learning offers adaptable structures, the extent to which flexibility positively impacts diverse learners' engagement and achievement demands further investigation. Additionally, the role of pedagogical approaches in facilitating flexibility within hybrid models remains unclear, warranting deeper examination to optimize learning experiences. Moreover, the digital divide's influence on flexibility requires more attention. Recent studies by Brown et al. (2023) emphasize the unequal access to technology and its potential to hinder students' ability to engage with online components, indicating a pressing need to explore strategies that ensure inclusivity in hybrid learning environments.

Furthermore, faculty experiences in navigating flexible hybrid teaching approaches necessitate in-depth exploration. Research by Anderson et al. (2021) highlights that while educators recognize the benefits of flexibility, they often lack comprehensive training and support in effectively utilizing diverse instructional modalities. Besides, there exist significant research gaps pertaining to the flexibility of hybrid learning post-COVID-19. Addressing these gaps will provide insights into refining pedagogical strategies, bridging the digital divide, and

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enhancing educator preparedness, thereby fostering more effective and equitable hybrid learning environments. The purpose of this literature review is to examine the flexibility in hybrid learning environments on student academic performance.

Academic Performance

With the recent growth of technology, education has become more flexible and diverse, especially after the COVID-19 era. Hybrid learning, a combination of traditional classroom-based learning and online learning, has emerged as a popular method of learning. Academic performance is a crucial aspect of education, and it can be defined in many ways. This literature review will examine the definition of academic performance and how it relates to flexibility in hybrid learning environments. Academic performance can be defined in many ways, depending on the context of the study. According to Kumar and Sharma (2021), academic performance refers to the level of achievement and success attained by a student in a given subject or course. It can also refer to the skills and knowledge acquired by students during their learning process. In a study conducted by Singh and Kaur (2021), academic performance was defined as the grades and marks obtained by students in their academic assessments.

In addition, academic performance is a term used to describe the achievement of students in a learning environment, typically measured by grades, test scores, and other quantitative and qualitative measures. According to Carter (2009), academic performance can be defined as "the extent to which a student has attained the skills, knowledge, and understandings that teachers, schools, or educational authorities have determined are appropriate to a given level of schooling or education." Academic performance needs to be measured accurately in planning students' education. It helps to identify how good the achievement gained by students in educational goals is, and they will determine based on the examinations or continuous assessment (Quenemoen et al., 2003). Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) is the grade that is used by all universities to measure students' academic achievement. (Ali et al., 2013). The institution can observe the students' CGPA by the end of the semester and compare it with the CGPA of a traditional class.

Hybrid Learning

Hybrid courses offer greater flexibility for students, as they can complete some course activities online and can attend in-person classes on a part-time or full-time basis. In contrast, face-to-face courses require students to attend classes in person on a fixed schedule. Hybrid learning, also known as blended learning, is a type of learning environment that combines both traditional in-person instruction with online learning components. According to Vaughan et al. (2013), hybrid learning is defined as a course where "a significant portion of the learning activities have been moved online, and time traditionally spent in the face-to-face classroom is reduced but not eliminated." In other words, hybrid learning offers students the opportunity to engage in both synchronous and asynchronous learning activities, with a mix of online and face-to-face interactions with instructors and peers.

In the context of hybrid learning environments, academic performance can be influenced by various factors, including the quality of online learning materials and resources, the level of engagement and interaction between students and instructors, and the effectiveness of assessment and feedback mechanisms (Sitzmann et al., 2016). It is also important to consider how flexibility in a hybrid learning environment can impact academic performance, as students may have different learning styles and preferences that can influence their ability to succeed in

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a hybrid class. Overall, understanding the definitions of hybrid classes and academic performance is crucial for conducting research and evaluating the effectiveness of hybrid learning environments. By examining how different factors impact academic performance in hybrid classes, educators and researchers can develop strategies and interventions to improve student outcomes and enhance the quality of hybrid learning experiences.

Flexibility

According to a study conducted by Lee et al. (2020), flexibility in hybrid learning environments had a positive effect on student academic performance. The study showed that students who had access to flexible learning options had better academic performance compared to those who did not. The study also found that the flexibility offered by hybrid learning environments reduced stress levels among students, which resulted in better academic performance. Similarly, a study conducted by Wang et al. (2020) found that flexibility in hybrid learning environments increased student engagement and motivation, which in turn improved their academic performance. The study found that students who had access to flexible learning options such as asynchronous learning had higher levels of engagement and motivation compared to those who did not.

On the other hand, a study conducted by Nong et al. (2022) found that the impact of flexibility on student academic performance in hybrid learning environments was dependent on the student's learning style. The study found that students who had a strong preference for traditional classroom-based learning had lower academic performance in hybrid learning environments compared to those who had a preference for online learning. In support of these findings, as stated by Rehm et al. (2021) found that the flexibility offered by hybrid learning environments had a positive impact on student academic performance. The article also highlighted the importance of flexibility in meeting the diverse needs of students, which could improve student engagement and motivation, leading to better academic performance.

Discussion and Conclusion

Hybrid learning, which combines online and in-person learning, has become increasingly popular in higher education due to its flexibility and adaptability to diverse student needs. This paper will discuss the benefits and challenges of flexibility in a hybrid learning environment and provide recommendations for optimizing student success. One of the key benefits of flexibility in a hybrid learning environment is the ability for students to engage with course content and assignments at their own pace and on their own schedule. According to a study by Huang et al. (2020), students in a hybrid learning environment reported higher levels of satisfaction with the flexibility of their courses compared to students in traditional face-to-face courses. Additionally, hybrid learning environments can provide students with opportunities for more personalized learning experiences, as they can choose to focus more on areas in which they need additional support or challenge themselves with more advanced content.

However, there are also challenges associated with flexibility in hybrid learning environments, particularly in terms of maintaining engagement and motivation among students. As noted by Pardo-Ballester and Esteve-Mon (2020), the lack of structure and accountability in online learning can lead to lower levels of engagement and motivation among students. Additionally, the flexibility of hybrid learning environments can create challenges for instructors in terms of managing student progress and providing timely feedback. To support student success in hybrid learning environments, it is important to promote clear communication and collaboration

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between instructors and students. According to a study by Conrad and Donaldson (2011), effective communication and collaboration between instructors and students can help to mitigate some of the challenges associated with hybrid learning environments. In addition, providing access to the necessary technology and infrastructure for online learning is critical for ensuring that students can fully engage with course content and assignments.

In conclusion, flexibility in hybrid learning environments can provide students with opportunities for personalized learning experiences and greater control over their learning. However, it is important to also address the challenges associated with flexibility, particularly in terms of maintaining student engagement and motivation. To optimize student success in hybrid learning environments, it is recommended that higher education institutions provide support and resources to enhance student motivation and engagement, promote clear communication and collaboration between instructors and students, and ensure access to necessary technology and infrastructure for online learning.

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