

Synchronous hybrid teaching: a more flexible and inclusive mode of school instruction?

Conference abstract

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Abstract

In recent years, there have been various calls for teaching and learning spaces to become more flexible, to allow them to better cater for the needs of the increasingly diverse student population (see e.g., Raes, 2022; Wang et al., 2018). One way in which such flexibility in teaching and learning can be achieved is through the merging of instructional modalities, with 'synchronous hybrid teaching' (henceforth SHT) representing one such example. SHT, that is, the concurrent delivery of online and in-person teaching, allows both on-site and remote students to attend lessons simultaneously. As such, it provides increased flexibility and promotes greater inclusion through enabling students who, for various reasons, cannot physically go to school to attend lessons online from home or from elsewhere.

The first time that SHT emerged as an instructional possibility for schools globally was during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, infected students and their close school contacts were required to self-isolate at home, a measure taken to reduce virus transmission. To minimise the disruption to these students' learning, many schools around the world attempted to implement SHT. Following this experience, SHT has been viewed by many as one strategy which schools could adopt post-pandemic to make learning more flexible and, by extension, more inclusive (see e.g., Joshi, 2023; Weller, 2021). For example, with SHT, ill students, students with mobility issues, as well as international students needing to spend some time in their home country, would still be able to attend classes. This would, in turn, help mitigate the learning loss that they would otherwise experience.

To explore the feasibility of this proposal, that is, the incorporation of SHT into schools' post-pandemic instructional toolkit, this study examined the experiences of primary and secondary teachers who employed this mode of teaching during the pandemic. Its aim was to develop a better understanding of SHT and to gain insight into schools' readiness to implement it.

The study drew upon a series of 90-minute, in-depth interviews with 12 teachers. The teachers worked in schools located in different countries, thereby helping to provide a more global perspective on the affordances and constraints of SHT. The interviewees constituted a diverse group: they represented different education sectors (primary and secondary), worked in different types of school (state-funded and private), taught different subjects, and their teaching experience ranged from six to 35 years. The interviews were transcribed and were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) using MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2021).

Overall, the study exposed the socio-technical nature of SHT by illuminating the interplay between the social and the technological aspects of the hybrid learning environment. It indicated that SHT, albeit affording more flexibility, is a demanding mode of teaching, one involving four different types of challenges: coordination challenges, administrative challenges, interaction challenges, and engagement challenges. More importantly, it demonstrated that SHT can often struggle to operate as an effective inclusion strategy due to its inability to consistently provide on-site and remote students with comparable learning opportunities and experiences.

This paper will present the challenges involved in SHT, as these were identified through the study, and will discuss their implications for learning. It will also provide a series of directions for improving the quality of SHT in the future to render SHT a more viable and promising instructional option for schools.

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For more information about this research, please see the relevant published journal article:

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