Synchronous Hybrid Learning in Higher Education: an ongoing meta-literature review

Stefano Perna @ imaginary.institute v 1.0

Introduction

The landscape of higher education has undergone significant transformation in recent years, with synchronous hybrid learning emerging as a prominent pedagogical approach that bridges traditional classroom instruction with digital innovation. This comprehensive synthesis initially examines findings from three major systematic literature reviews that collectively analyze over 90 unique studies spanning two decades of research in this field. The reviews by Raes et al. (2020), Detienne et al. (2018), and Gudoniene et al. (2025) provide complementary perspectives on the implementation, benefits, challenges, and future directions of synchronous hybrid learning in higher education contexts.

However, this analysis extends beyond these foundational reviews to incorporate additional theoretical frameworks, emerging pedagogical approaches, and recent developments in the field. By integrating insights from contemporary research on educational technology, learning sciences, and pedagogical innovation, this expanded analysis presents a comprehensive examination of both the practical implementation and theoretical foundations that underpin effective hybrid learning in higher education.

Note: To support the literature review process, a combination of AI tools and traditional search methods was employed. Initial literature identification was conducted using Elicit and SciSpace, supplemented by manual searches on Google Scholar to ensure comprehensive coverage. For summarization, thematic clustering, and cross-verification of potential hallucinations or inconsistencies, the large language model Claude Opus 4.0 was utilized in a human-in-the-loop workflow. All outputs from AI tools were manually reviewed, adjusted, integrated to ensure accuracy

This review is an ongoing project and serves as theoretical support for the Hybrid Learning Design Toolkit framework, available in a separate document.

Understanding Synchronous Hybrid Learning

At its core, synchronous hybrid learning represents an educational approach where face-to-face and remote students participate simultaneously in the same learning activities (Raes et al., 2020). This pedagogical model, also known as Here or There (HOT) instruction (Zydney et al., 2019) or HyFlex learning (Beatty, 2007a, b), fundamentally challenges traditional notions of classroom boundaries by creating a unified learning experience across physical and virtual spaces.

The defining characteristic of synchronous hybrid learning lies in its simultaneity – both on-site and remote students attend classes at the same time, enabled by real-time audio and video technology that facilitates interaction between groups (Szeto & Cheng, 2016; Bower et al., 2015). This approach offers remarkable flexibility, allowing students to choose their mode of attendance based on personal circumstances, work commitments, or geographical constraints (Lakhal et al., 2017).

Two primary models of synchronous hybrid learning have emerged in practice. The Remote Classroom model connects one group on campus with another group at a different campus location, facilitating inter-institutional collaboration and resource sharing (Ørngreen et al., 2015). The Hybrid Virtual Classroom model, perhaps more flexible, allows individuals to join remotely from various locations while maintaining a core group of on-campus students (Butz et al., 2016; Hastie et al., 2010). Both models represent significant departures from traditional educational delivery, requiring substantial pedagogical and technological adaptations.

Foundational Pedagogical Theories

Constructivist and Social Constructivist Approaches

At the heart of many hybrid learning implementations lies constructivist theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experience and reflection. In hybrid contexts, this manifests through collaborative knowledge-building activities that span physical and virtual spaces. Social constructivism, pioneered by Vygotsky, emphasizes the role of social interaction in learning—a principle that becomes particularly complex when students are distributed across different attendance modes (Hayes & Tucker, 2021).

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) takes on new dimensions in hybrid learning, where scaffolding must be provided not only for content understanding but also for navigating the technological and social complexities of multi-modal participation. Educators must consider how to create meaningful peer interactions that bridge the physical-digital divide, ensuring that remote students can engage in the social construction of knowledge alongside their on-campus peers.

Connectivism: Learning in the Digital Age

Connectivism, proposed by Siemens, offers a learning theory specifically designed for the digital age, making it particularly relevant to hybrid learning contexts. This framework recognizes that learning occurs through networks of connections between people, ideas, and resources—connections that hybrid learning environments are uniquely positioned to facilitate (Cohen et al., 2020). The theory emphasizes the importance of:

- **Network Formation**: Creating connections across physical and digital spaces
- **Information Navigation**: Developing skills to find, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources
- **Continuous Learning**: Recognizing that knowledge is constantly evolving and distributed across networks
- **Technology as Cognitive Partner**: Viewing digital tools not merely as delivery mechanisms but as integral components of the learning process

Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory provides another crucial foundation for hybrid pedagogy. The four-stage learning cycle—concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—can be distributed across synchronous and asynchronous activities,

with different stages potentially occurring in different modalities. This distribution allows for deeper reflection and more diverse experimentation opportunities than traditional single-mode instruction.

Core Pedagogical Frameworks

The TPACK Framework: Integrating Technology, Pedagogy, and Content

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, developed by Mishra and Koehler (2006), has emerged as a cornerstone for understanding effective technology integration in education. TPACK represents the complex interplay between three primary forms of knowledge:

1. **Content Knowledge (CK)**: Deep understanding of subject matter
2. **Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)**: Knowledge of teaching methods and learning processes
3. **Technological Knowledge (TK)**: Understanding of technology tools and their affordances

The framework's power lies in its intersections:

- **Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)**: Understanding how to teach specific content effectively
- **Technological Content Knowledge (TCK)**: Knowing how technology can enhance or transform content representation
- **Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK)**: Understanding how technology changes teaching and learning processes
- **TPACK**: The synthesis of all three domains, representing the knowledge needed to teach effectively with technology

In hybrid learning contexts, TPACK becomes particularly crucial as educators must constantly navigate the technological affordances and constraints of dual-modality instruction while maintaining pedagogical integrity and content clarity.

Recent extensions of TPACK include considerations for ethical AI integration (Intelligent-TPACK) and the need for educators to develop knowledge about ethically assessing AI-based educational tools (Celik et al., 2022). This evolution reflects the growing complexity of the technological landscape in hybrid education.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning provides a framework for creating inclusive learning experiences that accommodate diverse learners—a critical consideration in hybrid environments where students may have vastly different technological access, physical locations, and learning preferences. The three principles of UDL take on new dimensions in hybrid contexts:

1. **Multiple Means of Representation**: Hybrid learning naturally supports this principle by offering content through various channels—live lectures, recordings, digital texts, and interactive multimedia
2. **Multiple Means of Engagement**: The flexibility of attendance modes and participation options inherently supports diverse engagement preferences

3. **Multiple Means of Action and Expression**: Students can demonstrate learning through various digital and physical artifacts, synchronous and asynchronous contributions

Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework

The Community of Inquiry framework, consisting of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence, provides essential guidance for creating meaningful learning experiences in hybrid environments (Hayes & Tucker, 2021). Each presence requires careful consideration:

- **Social Presence**: Creating opportunities for authentic interpersonal connections across modalities
- **Cognitive Presence**: Facilitating deep learning through inquiry, regardless of attendance mode
- **Teaching Presence**: Maintaining instructor visibility and guidance for all students

Research shows that achieving balanced presence across all three dimensions is more challenging in hybrid than in single-mode instruction, requiring intentional design strategies (Szeto, 2015).

Self-Determination Theory in Hybrid Contexts

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers valuable insights into student motivation in hybrid learning environments. The theory's three basic psychological needs require specific attention in hybrid contexts (Butz & Stupnisky, 2016):

1. **Autonomy**: The flexibility of hybrid learning naturally supports autonomy, but must be balanced with structure
2. **Competence**: Students need support in developing both content competence and technological competence
3. **Relatedness**: Perhaps the most challenging aspect, requiring intentional strategies to foster connections across attendance modes

The SAMR Model for Technology Integration

The Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) model provides a framework for evaluating the transformative potential of technology integration in hybrid learning:

- **Substitution**: Technology acts as a direct substitute (e.g., digital textbooks)
- **Augmentation**: Technology provides functional improvement (e.g., interactive presentations)
- **Modification**: Technology enables significant task redesign (e.g., collaborative online projects)
- **Redefinition**: Technology enables previously inconceivable tasks (e.g., global collaborative research)

Effective hybrid learning should aim for modification and redefinition levels, leveraging technology to create learning experiences impossible in single-mode instruction (Puentedura, 2012).

Specialized Pedagogical Approaches

Flipped Learning and Its Variants

While flipped learning is mentioned in the original reviews, its implementation in hybrid contexts deserves deeper exploration. The flipped classroom model naturally aligns with hybrid learning by:

- **Maximizing Synchronous Time**: Using face-to-face or synchronous online time for high-value interactive activities
- **Leveraging Asynchronous Learning**: Delivering content through pre-recorded lectures and readings
- **Supporting Different Paces**: Allowing students to engage with content at their own speed
- **Enabling Deeper Application**: Using class time for problem-solving, discussion, and collaborative work

Recent variants include the "flipped-mastery" model, which combines flipped learning with competency-based progression, particularly suitable for hybrid environments where students may progress at different rates (Zydney et al., 2019).

Problem-Based and Project-Based Learning

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Project-Based Learning take on new dimensions in hybrid environments. These approaches can leverage the distributed nature of hybrid learning by:

- Engaging students in authentic, real-world problems that benefit from diverse perspectives
- Utilizing digital collaboration tools for team-based work across locations
- Incorporating external experts and resources more easily through virtual connections
- Creating artifacts that can be shared and critiqued across modalities

Collaborative Learning Flow Patterns (CLFPs)

CLFPs represent an innovative approach specifically designed for hybrid environments, enabling dynamic group management and collaboration across attendance modes (Carruana Martín et al., 2021). These patterns include:

- **Jigsaw Patterns**: Students become experts in subtopics and teach peers across modalities
- **Pyramid Patterns**: Progressive group formation from pairs to larger teams
- **Think-Pair-Share Variants**: Adapted for simultaneous physical and virtual participation
- **Role-Based Patterns**: Assigning specific roles that leverage the affordances of different attendance modes

HyFlex and Multi-Access Learning

Beyond basic hybrid models, HyFlex (Hybrid-Flexible) learning provides students with complete autonomy over their attendance mode for each class session. This approach requires sophisticated pedagogical strategies to ensure equivalent learning experiences regardless of chosen modality (Beatty, 2007b). Key principles include:

- **Equivalency**: All participation modes must provide equivalent learning opportunities
- **Reusability**: Learning artifacts should be accessible and valuable for all students
- **Accessibility**: Technical and pedagogical barriers must be minimized
- **Student Choice**: Learners select their mode based on needs, not limitations

Robot-Mediated and Telepresence Pedagogies

The use of telepresence robots and advanced communication technologies introduces unique pedagogical considerations (Gleason & Greenhow, 2017). These technologies enable:

- **Embodied Presence**: Remote students gain physical agency in the classroom
- **Enhanced Social Interaction**: More natural communication patterns than traditional video conferencing
- **Mobility and Exploration**: Remote students can "move" through learning spaces
- **Peer-to-Peer Connection**: Direct interaction between remote and on-site students

However, these technologies require specific pedagogical adaptations, including managing turn-taking, facilitating group work, and ensuring equitable participation opportunities.

The Promise of Hybrid Learning: Organizational and Pedagogical Benefits

The adoption of synchronous hybrid learning offers compelling benefits at both organizational and pedagogical levels. From an institutional perspective, hybrid learning addresses critical challenges facing higher education, including declining enrollment numbers and the need for greater accessibility. By offering flexible attendance options, institutions can reach broader student populations, including working professionals, international students, and those with family commitments (Abdelmalak & Parra, 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

The efficiency gains are substantial. Rather than duplicating courses across multiple campuses, institutions can leverage hybrid delivery to optimize resource utilization while maintaining educational quality (Brumfeld et al., 2017). This approach enables multi-campus collaboration and facilitates access to specialized courses and expert instructors regardless of geographical constraints (Bell et al., 2014; McGovern & Barnes, 2009). The flexibility extends to both students and faculty, eliminating travel requirements and enabling participation despite temporary circumstances such as illness or travel (Beatty, 2007b).

Pedagogically, synchronous hybrid learning creates opportunities for richer learning experiences through the integration of diverse perspectives and technological affordances. The combination of face-to-face and online participation modes allows institutions to maintain the guidance and support characteristic of traditional instruction while extending these benefits to remote learners (Szeto, 2014). This dual-mode delivery better accommodates varied learning styles and preferences, enabling students to engage with content and peers in ways that suit their individual needs (Wiles & Ball, 2013).

The social dimension of learning receives particular enhancement through hybrid approaches. By connecting students across locations, hybrid learning strengthens social relations and expands networking opportunities beyond traditional classroom boundaries (Anastasiades et al., 2010). This

expanded social context contributes to the development of global perspectives and intercultural competencies increasingly valued in contemporary education (Liu et al., 2018).

Perhaps most significantly, research indicates that hybrid learning can maintain or even improve learning outcomes compared to traditional formats. Studies by Lightner and Lightner-Laws (2016) and White et al. (2010) found no significant differences in academic achievement between attendance modes, while students reported enhanced motivation and satisfaction due to increased flexibility and control over their learning experience (Butz & Stupnisky, 2016).

Navigating Complex Challenges

Despite its promise, synchronous hybrid learning presents multifaceted challenges that require careful consideration and strategic responses. These challenges span pedagogical, technological, and organizational dimensions, affecting both educators and learners in distinct ways.

From the educator's perspective, hybrid teaching demands fundamental shifts in pedagogical approach. The requirement to simultaneously manage both on-site and remote students creates what researchers term "hyper-zoom" or "hyper-focus" – a heightened cognitive load that can be exhausting for instructors (Bower et al., 2015; Zydney et al., 2019). This challenge extends beyond simple multitasking; educators must reimagine their teaching methods to ensure equitable engagement across attendance modes while maintaining instructional coherence (Cain, 2015; Ramsey et al., 2016).

The complexity of instructional design increases exponentially in hybrid environments. Traditional lecture-based approaches often fail to engage remote participants effectively, necessitating more interactive and student-centered pedagogies (Bower et al., 2015). However, implementing such approaches requires not only new skills but also increased preparation time and organizational support. The challenge of monitoring student understanding and providing timely feedback becomes particularly acute when students are distributed across physical and virtual spaces (Ørngreen et al., 2015).

Students face their own set of challenges in hybrid learning environments. Research consistently shows that remote and on-site students experience lessons differently, with remote participants often feeling less engaged and more isolated (Beatty, 2007a; Szeto, 2014). The phenomenon of ambiguity, as described by Olt (2018), captures the uncertain status of remote students who may feel neither fully present nor entirely absent from the learning community. This ambiguity can manifest in reduced participation, difficulty in forming peer relationships, and challenges in accessing informal learning opportunities that occur naturally in physical classrooms.

The self-discipline required for successful remote participation presents another significant challenge. Without the structure and social pressure of physical attendance, remote students must develop stronger self-regulation skills to remain engaged and productive (Wiles & Ball, 2013). The difficulty in making their presence known – whether to ask questions, contribute to discussions, or seek clarification – can lead to frustration and disengagement (Weitze et al., 2013).

Technological challenges permeate all aspects of hybrid learning implementation. Audio quality emerges as perhaps the most critical technical factor, with poor sound quality capable of derailing entire learning sessions (Bower et al., 2015; Cunningham, 2014). The complexity extends beyond

basic connectivity to include issues of camera positioning, screen sharing, and the management of multiple communication channels simultaneously (McGovern & Barnes, 2009).

The visibility of technology itself creates unique challenges. Unlike traditional classrooms where technology may fade into the background, hybrid environments make cameras, microphones, and screens prominent features of the learning space. This visibility can affect teaching performance, with instructors becoming self-conscious about their on-camera presence (Nortvig, 2013). For students, the technology can become either a barrier or a distraction, interrupting the natural flow of classroom interaction (Cunningham, 2014).

Assessment practices in hybrid environments present particular complexities. Ensuring fairness and integrity across multiple attendance modes requires careful consideration of assessment design and implementation. Traditional assessment methods may advantage one group over another, necessitating innovative approaches that account for the different affordances and constraints of each attendance mode (Raes et al., 2020). The challenge extends to formative assessment, where teachers must develop new strategies for gauging understanding and providing feedback to distributed learners (Gudoniene et al., 2025).

Technological Integration: From Basic to Advanced Solutions

The technological landscape of synchronous hybrid learning spans a continuum from basic video conferencing setups to sophisticated telepresence systems. At the foundational level, successful hybrid learning requires reliable internet connectivity, quality audio equipment, and functional learning management systems (Subramanian, 2022). These basic requirements, while seemingly straightforward, often prove challenging to implement consistently across diverse educational contexts.

Video conferencing platforms like Zoom have become ubiquitous in hybrid education, often integrated with learning management systems to create comprehensive digital learning environments (Ayub et al., 2022). However, the effectiveness of these tools depends heavily on their implementation and the pedagogical approaches that guide their use. Simple replication of traditional lectures through video conferencing often fails to leverage the unique affordances of hybrid environments (Okoye et al., 2021).

More advanced technological solutions offer enhanced possibilities for creating immersive hybrid learning experiences. Telepresence robots, for instance, provide remote students with a physical presence in the classroom, enabling them to move around, interact with peers, and participate in group activities more naturally (Cain et al., 2016; Capello et al., 2022). Studies evaluating these technologies report generally positive outcomes, with students appreciating the enhanced sense of presence and connection they provide (Gleason & Greenhow, 2017).

The integration of collaborative technologies extends beyond simple communication tools. Smart Group applications enable dynamic group management, allowing instructors to orchestrate collaborative activities across attendance modes seamlessly (Carruana Martín et al., 2021). Digital whiteboards, shared workspaces, and interactive polling systems create opportunities for real-time engagement and feedback, bridging the gap between physical and virtual participation.

However, technological integration must be guided by pedagogical principles rather than technical

capabilities. The most successful implementations prioritize learning objectives over technological sophistication, selecting and configuring tools to support specific educational goals (Raes, 2022). This principle extends to the physical configuration of hybrid learning spaces, where camera placement, screen positioning, and audio setup must facilitate natural interaction patterns rather than constraining them.

Supporting Success: Faculty Development and Student Preparation

The successful implementation of synchronous hybrid learning depends critically on comprehensive support systems for both educators and learners. Faculty development emerges as perhaps the most crucial factor, as teachers must not only master new technologies but fundamentally reimagine their pedagogical approaches (Bower et al., 2015; Cain, 2015).

Effective faculty development programs address multiple dimensions of hybrid teaching competence. Technical skills, while necessary, represent only the foundation. Educators need support in redesigning courses for hybrid delivery, developing interactive learning activities that engage all students regardless of attendance mode, and managing the increased cognitive load of hybrid instruction (Szeto, 2014). The training must be ongoing rather than one-time, as hybrid teaching skills develop through iterative practice and reflection (Lightner & Lightner-Laws, 2016).

Institutional support extends beyond individual training to include structural changes that facilitate hybrid teaching. The provision of technology navigators or classroom assistants can significantly reduce the burden on instructors, allowing them to focus on pedagogy rather than technical troubleshooting (Cain, 2015; Cain et al., 2016). These support personnel play crucial roles in managing technology, monitoring chat channels, and facilitating smooth transitions between learning activities.

Student preparation receives less attention in the literature but proves equally important for hybrid learning success. Technical orientation sessions help students familiarize themselves with learning platforms and communication tools, but preparation must extend beyond basic technical skills (McGovern & Barnes, 2009). Students need guidance in developing self-directed learning strategies, managing time effectively across synchronous and asynchronous activities, and building social connections in distributed learning environments.

The importance of clear communication cannot be overstated. Successful hybrid courses establish explicit expectations regarding participation, communication protocols, and technical requirements from the outset (Bower et al., 2014). This includes practical considerations such as equipment recommendations (headsets for better audio quality, wired internet connections for stability) and behavioral guidelines for online participation (Ramsey et al., 2016).

Assessment and Feedback in Hybrid Contexts

The complexity of assessment in hybrid learning environments demands innovative approaches that maintain rigor while accommodating the diverse circumstances of learners. Traditional assessment methods often prove inadequate when students experience courses through different modalities, necessitating a fundamental reconsideration of how learning is measured and feedback is provided.

Formative assessment takes on particular importance in hybrid contexts, where instructors cannot rely on traditional visual cues to gauge understanding. The implementation of diverse assessment strategies – including online quizzes, discussion forums, peer reviews, and project-based assessments – allows instructors to gather multiple forms of evidence about student learning (Alhusban, 2022). Technology can enhance these processes through automated feedback systems and analytics that provide insights into student engagement and progress (Gudoniene et al., 2025).

The timing and structure of assessments prove critical for maintaining student engagement. Research by Ayub et al. (2022) demonstrates that clear deadlines and well-defined expectations significantly reduce procrastination and improve submission rates. This finding suggests that the structure provided by formal assessment schedules helps remote students maintain engagement with course materials and activities.

Dynamic group assessment presents unique opportunities in hybrid environments. The ability to create, modify, and manage groups across attendance modes enables collaborative assessment approaches that leverage the diversity of the hybrid classroom (Carruana Martín et al., 2021). However, ensuring equitable participation and fair evaluation across group members in different attendance modes requires careful design and clear rubrics.

Feedback mechanisms must adapt to the hybrid context, where traditional face-to-face conversations may not be feasible for all students. Multimedia feedback, including audio and video comments, can provide richer, more personal responses than written text alone (Subramanian, 2022). The challenge lies in scaling these approaches while maintaining their personal quality and ensuring timely delivery.

Emerging Pedagogical Considerations

Artificial Intelligence and Adaptive Learning

The integration of AI in hybrid learning introduces new pedagogical possibilities and challenges. Intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning platforms, and AI-powered feedback mechanisms can provide personalized learning experiences across modalities. The Intelligent-TPACK framework extends traditional TPACK to include ethical considerations for AI integration (Celik et al., 2022).

Key pedagogical implications include: - **Personalized Learning Paths**: AI can adapt content and pacing to individual needs - **Intelligent Feedback**: Automated yet meaningful feedback on student work - **Learning Analytics**: Data-driven insights into student engagement and progress - **Ethical Considerations**: Ensuring fairness, transparency, and privacy in AI-mediated learning

Hybrid Lifelong Learning

Nørgård's (2021) conceptualization of hybrid lifelong learning presents a holistic vision that transcends traditional boundaries between formal and informal learning, physical and digital spaces, and synchronous and asynchronous engagement. This framework emphasizes:

- **Fluidity**: Learning flows seamlessly across contexts and modalities
- **Complexity**: Embracing rather than simplifying the multifaceted nature of learning
- **Entanglement**: Recognizing the inseparable nature of technology, pedagogy, and content

- **Transformation**: Moving beyond adaptation to fundamental reimagining of education

Competency-Based and Outcomes-Focused Approaches

Hybrid learning environments are particularly well-suited to competency-based education (CBE) models, which focus on mastery of specific skills and knowledge rather than time-based progression. This alignment stems from:

- **Flexible Pacing**: Students can progress at their own speed across modalities
- **Multiple Assessment Opportunities**: Various ways to demonstrate competency
- **Personalized Pathways**: Different routes to achieving the same learning outcomes
- **Real-World Application**: Authentic assessments that span physical and digital contexts

Design-Based Research and Iterative Pedagogy

The complexity of hybrid learning demands an iterative approach to pedagogical design. Design-Based Research (DBR) methodologies enable continuous refinement of teaching strategies based on empirical evidence and stakeholder feedback. This approach involves:

- **Collaborative Design**: Involving students, teachers, and technologists in co-creation
- **Rapid Prototyping**: Testing and refining pedagogical approaches quickly
- **Evidence-Based Iteration**: Using data to inform pedagogical decisions
- **Context Sensitivity**: Adapting frameworks to specific institutional and disciplinary contexts

Impact on Learning Outcomes: Evidence and Insights

The ultimate measure of any educational innovation lies in its impact on student learning. The evidence regarding synchronous hybrid learning's effect on learning outcomes presents a generally optimistic picture, though with important nuances that deserve careful consideration.

Quantitative studies comparing learning outcomes across attendance modes consistently find no significant differences in academic achievement. The research by Raes (2022) found equivalent conceptual understanding between physically present and remote students, suggesting that well-designed hybrid courses can deliver comparable educational value regardless of attendance mode. This finding is reinforced by earlier studies showing similar or improved test scores, grades, and skill development in hybrid compared to traditional formats (Lightner & Lightner-Laws, 2016; White et al., 2010).

However, the picture becomes more complex when considering affective and social dimensions of learning. While cognitive outcomes may be equivalent, students' emotional engagement and sense of connection vary significantly by attendance mode. Face-to-face students consistently report greater emotional engagement and stronger peer relationships compared to their remote counterparts (Raes, 2022). This disparity suggests that while hybrid learning can effectively deliver content and develop skills, creating equivalent social and emotional experiences remains challenging.

Student satisfaction with hybrid learning generally runs high, particularly regarding the flexibility and accessibility it provides. The study by Alhusban (2022) found overwhelming student appreci-

ation for the ability to choose attendance modes based on personal circumstances. This flexibility appears particularly valuable for non-traditional students balancing education with work and family responsibilities (Han et al., 2022).

The role of emotions in hybrid learning outcomes deserves special attention. Research by Butz et al. (2016) reveals significant correlations between emotional states and perceived success, with enjoyment positively associated with achievement while anxiety and boredom show negative correlations. This finding underscores the importance of designing hybrid experiences that not only deliver content effectively but also foster positive emotional engagement.

Individual factors mediate the impact of hybrid learning on outcomes. Student comfort with technology, self-regulation skills, and prior online learning experience all influence success in hybrid environments (Li et al., 2021). Technical disruptions can significantly impede learning, particularly for students with limited digital literacy or unreliable internet access (Lohiniva & Isomöttönen, 2021). These findings highlight the importance of providing comprehensive support to ensure equitable outcomes for all learners.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Despite the growing body of research on synchronous hybrid learning, significant gaps remain in our understanding of this educational approach. The three reviews consistently identify the predominance of exploratory and qualitative studies, with limited empirical research examining the effectiveness of specific pedagogical strategies or comparing outcomes across different implementation models (Raes et al., 2020).

Longitudinal research remains notably absent from the literature. Most studies capture snapshots of hybrid learning experiences without examining how these experiences evolve over time or impact long-term learning outcomes (Detienne et al., 2018). This gap is particularly concerning given that adaptation to hybrid learning likely involves developmental processes for both instructors and students.

The scalability of hybrid learning approaches remains largely unexplored. While small-scale implementations show promise, questions persist about how these approaches function with larger class sizes, across different disciplines, or in resource-constrained environments (Raes et al., 2020). The economic dimensions of hybrid learning, including cost-benefit analyses of technology investments and faculty development programs, require systematic investigation.

Research on peer relationships in hybrid environments reveals concerning gaps. While studies document challenges in forming connections across attendance modes, few examine interventions designed to foster inclusive learning communities (Gudoniene et al., 2025). Understanding how to create authentic peer relationships in hybrid contexts remains a critical challenge for the field.

Assessment practices in hybrid environments require deeper investigation. While studies describe various assessment approaches, systematic evaluation of their effectiveness in measuring learning outcomes equitably across attendance modes is lacking (Gudoniene et al., 2025). This gap extends to understanding how different assessment methods might advantage or disadvantage students based on their mode of attendance.

Future research should prioritize several key areas. Larger, more diverse samples would improve the generalizability of findings and enable detection of subtle effects that current small-scale studies might miss (Raes et al., 2020). Empirical real-time data on engagement, social presence, and learning processes could provide insights into the mechanisms underlying hybrid learning effectiveness. Comparative studies examining different pedagogical approaches, technological configurations, and support structures would help identify best practices for various contexts and objectives.

The pedagogical foundations of hybrid learning continue to evolve as new technologies emerge and our understanding of distributed learning deepens. Future developments may include:

- **Neuroeducation-Informed Hybrid Pedagogy**: Incorporating insights from neuroscience about how the brain learns in distributed environments
- **Quantum Learning Theories**: Exploring non-linear, interconnected models of knowledge construction
- **Posthuman Pedagogies**: Considering how human-AI collaboration fundamentally changes the nature of teaching and learning
- **Global Collaborative Pedagogies**: Leveraging hybrid formats for unprecedented international educational collaboration
- **Immersive Hybrid Experiences**: Integrating virtual and augmented reality into hybrid pedagogical frameworks

Synthesis and Integration

The pedagogical landscape of hybrid learning is characterized by its complexity and dynamism. Rather than viewing these various frameworks and approaches as discrete options, effective hybrid pedagogy emerges from their thoughtful integration. Educators must develop what might be termed "pedagogical fluency"—the ability to fluidly move between and combine different approaches based on learning objectives, student needs, and contextual factors.

This integration requires:

1. **Pedagogical Flexibility**: Adapting teaching strategies in real-time based on student engagement across modalities
2. **Theoretical Grounding**: Understanding the theoretical foundations of different approaches to make informed decisions
3. **Technological Pedagogical Reasoning**: Considering how technology mediates and transforms pedagogical choices
4. **Inclusive Design Thinking**: Ensuring all students, regardless of attendance mode, can fully participate in learning
5. **Continuous Reflection**: Regular evaluation and adjustment of pedagogical strategies based on evidence

Implications and Recommendations

The synthesis of these comprehensive reviews yields important implications for various stakeholders in higher education. For institutional leaders, the evidence supports continued investment in

hybrid learning infrastructure, but with important caveats. Success requires more than technological upgrades; institutions must commit to comprehensive faculty development, ongoing technical support, and systematic evaluation of outcomes (Gudoniene et al., 2025).

Educational institutions should approach hybrid learning as a strategic initiative rather than a tactical response to immediate needs. This involves developing clear policies that address issues ranging from intellectual property rights for recorded sessions to equitable access for all students. The European context's challenges with GDPR compliance illustrate how regulatory frameworks must evolve alongside educational innovations (Gudoniene et al., 2025).

For educators, the research underscores the need to reconceptualize teaching for hybrid environments rather than simply adapting existing practices. Student-centered pedagogical approaches prove particularly effective, emphasizing active learning, collaborative activities, and frequent interaction across attendance modes (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). The evidence strongly supports the value of teaching teams, with technology navigators or teaching assistants playing crucial roles in successful implementations (Cain, 2015).

Educators must also recognize that hybrid teaching requires ongoing development rather than one-time training. The iterative nature of developing hybrid teaching expertise suggests that institutions should create communities of practice where educators can share experiences, challenges, and solutions (Capello et al., 2022).

For policymakers, the research highlights critical areas requiring attention. The digital divide emerges as a significant equity concern, with student success in hybrid environments partially dependent on access to reliable technology and internet connectivity. Policies supporting universal broadband access and device lending programs become educational imperatives in a hybrid learning landscape (Gudoniene et al., 2025).

Quality assurance frameworks must evolve to encompass hybrid delivery modes. Traditional metrics focused on seat time or physical attendance prove inadequate for evaluating hybrid courses where engagement occurs across multiple modalities. New frameworks should emphasize learning outcomes while remaining flexible enough to accommodate innovative pedagogical approaches (Detienne et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The synthesis of these comprehensive literature reviews reveals synchronous hybrid learning as a complex yet promising educational approach that reflects broader transformations in higher education. The convergence of technological capability, pedagogical innovation, and changing learner needs has created conditions where hybrid learning can thrive, offering benefits that extend beyond mere convenience to encompass enhanced accessibility, flexibility, and potentially improved learning outcomes.

The pedagogical foundations of hybrid learning extend far beyond simple technological integration or modified classroom management strategies. They encompass a rich theoretical landscape that draws from established educational theories while pioneering new frameworks for the digital age. Effective hybrid pedagogy requires educators to become skilled orchestrators, weaving

together multiple theoretical perspectives, practical strategies, and technological affordances to create meaningful learning experiences that transcend the limitations of any single modality.

Yet the research also sounds important cautionary notes. The success of hybrid learning depends not on technology alone but on thoughtful integration of pedagogical principles, comprehensive support systems, and ongoing adaptation based on evidence. The challenges identified – from instructor cognitive load to student engagement disparities – are significant but not insurmountable, provided institutions approach hybrid learning as a fundamental shift in educational delivery rather than a simple add-on to existing practices.

The path forward requires continued research, particularly empirical studies that move beyond description to examine causal relationships and long-term impacts. The field would benefit from standardized frameworks for evaluating hybrid learning effectiveness, enabling meaningful comparisons across contexts and implementations. Most critically, future development must center on creating equitable learning experiences that provide all students, regardless of attendance mode or personal circumstances, with opportunities for meaningful engagement, social connection, and academic success.

As higher education continues to evolve in response to technological advancement and changing societal needs, synchronous hybrid learning represents not merely a temporary adaptation but a fundamental reimagining of how teaching and learning occur. The evidence synthesized here suggests that this reimagining, while challenging, holds significant promise for creating more inclusive, flexible, and effective educational experiences. The future of hybrid learning lies not in choosing between various approaches but in their creative synthesis, adapted to specific contexts and continuously refined through practice and research. The task ahead involves translating this promise into sustainable practice through continued innovation, rigorous evaluation, and unwavering commitment to student success.

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