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# Online or Hybrid Learning: Post-Pandemic COVID-19 Scenario

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**Abstract**

*The main aim of this article is to shed light on the issues of online and hybrid teaching and learning and their applicability in the post-COVID-19 era. Previous literature and studies were examined to develop a feasible solution for educators and the education sector on the most preferable action to take as a complementary approach to the restoration of the physical and onsite classes. Data and information were taken from the literature and studies gathered from peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO, and other indexes and after which, insights were given after analyzing the findings to provide possible solutions of what could be the teaching strategies that can be implemented in the post-Covid era. Sets of recommendations were suggested based on the study findings to adopt online and hybrid learning in a sustainable capacity which can be reviewed, evaluated, and applied by the higher education institutions (HEI) without prejudice to the existing decrees and circulars implemented by the concerned authoritative bodies.*

**Keywords:** Hybrid teaching, online learning, post-Pandemic COVID-19, teaching pedagogy

## INTRODUCTION

The two years of struggles brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic are undeniable evidence of the adoption of online learning mechanisms experienced not only by the industries but even the education sector. Many colleges and universities worldwide have utilized online systems in shock as educators are generally unprepared to deliver classes online. The study by Ulla and Perales (2022) confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic altered the view of educational institutions worldwide because of remote and online teaching, thus, transitioning from traditional physical classroom teaching. This scenario has brought numerous challenges to the teachers considering the difficulties faced in migrating from traditional class delivery into online teachings such as perceived issues in teaching abilities to deliver classes online, questionable achievement of learning outcomes, and challenges related to classroom pedagogical practices (Maatuk et al., 2022; Ulla & Achivar, 2021). Furthermore, teachers also encountered issues with time management in the preparation of teaching materials and resources, internet connectivity, learning management system designs, and others (Nhu et al., 2019).

With the global trend of lockdowns, self-isolation, quarantines, and curfews, institutions of higher learning worldwide have resorted to remote learning suddenly at

all class levels facing the main issue of how to meet the conditions of this remote learning (Eder, 2020). Further, as per a report by UNESCO in 2020, 188 countries have imposed temporary shutdowns of their educational institutions while local closures were made by many countries affecting 1,576,021,818 students (Mohmmed et al., 2020). But even though these challenges occurred especially in the early stages of the pandemic, the educational community has become dynamic in embracing the use of online platforms for teaching which has caught the attention of education practitioners, academic scholars, and researchers by searching for ways not only to utilize the online system but to foster innovative mechanisms to cater to the recent educational context (Ulla and Perales, 2022). According to Moorhouse and Wong (2022), online and remote teaching became effective during the pandemic using varied online applications as well as electronic and online platforms wherein both synchronous and asynchronous teaching have become crucial teaching modalities in the teaching and learning process. These online platforms include but are not limited to Google Meet, Zoom, and Microsoft as virtual classrooms synchronously and asynchronously by using Moodle, Facebook, and Google Classroom. In other words, the changing landscape of the educational system during COVID-19 has enabled teachers to learn from experience and become innovative and creative, resourceful, and flexible to change.

The study of Saleem et al. (2023) found that teachers have expressed intention to continue online teaching in the post-COVID era as the findings showed that the perceived usefulness and ease of use of technological/online tools significantly impact behavioral intentions to teach online positively. However, this situation differs from Oman's educational setting wherein a decision was made to restore on-site teaching and learning by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation dated back in 2021 (Times of Oman, 2021). The main problem that this paper tries to address is, what could be the most preferable course of action that the education sector considers aside from traditional classroom instruction, hybrid teaching, or online? To address this issue, previous studies and literature were examined to shed light on the possible solutions that could help educators and the sector decide the most preferable actions that could have been taken for the benefit of its stakeholders.

## METHODOLOGY

To address the main issues of choosing the preferable course of action that the education sector can take into consideration, analysis was taken from the literature and studies gathered from peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO, and other indexes and after which, insights were given after analyzing the findings to provide possible solutions of what could be the teaching strategies that can be implemented in the post-Covid era.

## ONLINE TEACHING: ACCEPTABLE APPROACH AFTER COVID-19?

Many studies have focused on the examination of online teaching amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and this has become an avenue for countries to communicate and deliver instructions globally through the web. Reiterating the results of the study of Saleem et al. (2023) using the mixed research design, the perceived usefulness and ease of use and attitude towards online teaching significantly impact the academic staff's intention to stay with online teaching after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Even with the earlier

struggles experienced in using the technology acceptance model (TAM), teacher respondents have realized the significance of online teaching that should be continued as a teaching tool. This finding is supported by the study of Mohmmed et al. (2020) who expressed that there is a need to adopt emergency remote teaching (ERT) as an alternative to onsite teaching so that teachers and students will not be caught unprepared in case of emergencies and ready to face future challenges like COVID-19 scenario. They added that while transitioning from onsite to online teaching has been full of struggles the transitioning process became smooth which leads to their recommendation of continuous use of ERT even beyond the pandemic era. Moreover, the recommendation of implementing the asynchronous activities was emphasized to allow the students to comply with assigned tasks or activities in a flexible atmosphere and without necessarily completing them along with other students in the same class. In other words, utilizing the ERT provided enormous benefits to teachers and students among those are: ERT enables students to become self-learners or student-led learners, they can also access recorded lectures and discussions any time and as frequently as possible, and access online resources for consolidation of knowledge. For the academic staff, it gives them added knowledge and value by acquiring new skills and experience, adapting easily in cases of emergencies and uncertainties, and bridging the gap between traditional teaching technology-based and advanced technology-driven teaching for teachers' competitive advantage.

Al-Balas et al. (2020) and Gautam (2020) verify the application of online learning podiums in teaching clinical medical subjects and findings revealed that students are generally satisfied at a rate of 26%. It has shared advantages and disadvantages and advantages include 24/7 accessibility, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness while its disadvantages are comprised of lack of integration, technical problems, and training in the utilization of online resources. Conserving a good IT technical infrastructure is required for colleges and universities, for example, to succeed in delivering online classes and activities (Nikdel et al., 2020). According to Rosell (2020), online platforms regardless of time and place are flexible and students can make them according to their preferences. On the other hand, online learning has its also share in limitations and problems. Attendance and engagement issues became a real concern as students have options to close cameras for security and other cultural implications. Teachers' technological skills and teaching strategies play a vital role in attaining higher student engagement and participation as Palanisamy et al. (2020) exclaimed that there is a need for teachers in the future to enhance their teaching skills to accelerate the transfer of knowledge and exchange of information to the students. Furthermore, the aftermath of COVID-19 has instituted fear and psychological stress in the students and lessened their willingness to study online (Al-Salman & Haider, 2021). Hence, it is equally important for teachers to monitor the student's feelings and emotional needs and their impact on their learning (Morgan, 2020).

## HYBRID LEARNING: POST-PANDEMIC APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING?

Hybrid learning is often confused with other terms such as blended learning or dual-mode learning where an observable difference exists between these terms (Heriot-Watt Learning Teaching Academy, 2022). In the study of Linder (2017), hybrid learning is the act of utilizing technology intentionally to alter the face-to-face classroom with online learning thereby combining the two teaching approaches in teaching and

learning. Saichaie (2020) also defined hybrid learning as an approach to teaching and learning wherein a class is substituted with enhanced activities using technology to be finished as self-paced or collaboratively with peers. Gaebel et al. (2021) similarly define hybrid learning as an approach to learning that can be applied synchronously to both on-campus and off-campus with in-campus using face-to-face instruction while off-campus through video conferencing. One of the main advantages of hybrid learning is the shifting from teacher-centered instruction into student-centered teaching pedagogy applying asynchronous and synchronous teaching and learning activities (Saichaie, 2020). Moreover, the flexibility brought about by hybrid teaching provides students the choice of where to likely excel and a preferable approach considering their present situation or conditions. Neuwirth et al. (2021) stressed that the current educational system is confronted with uncertainties and the likelihood of teaching in a new normal environment is the most likely scenario. They explained the importance of readiness for the changing educational landscape where the implementation of hybrid learning is necessary to overcome uncertain situations during COVID-19 and even beyond. Ananga and Biney (2021) claimed that the combination of face-to-face and online learning served as the best option for recent learners and this calls for academics to adopt hybrid learning pedagogies.

Ayub et al. (2022) stressed that attaining a learning design for hybrid learning in the classroom setting is needed for both off-campus and in-campus learners to ensure that they equally contribute to discussions for collective activities and efforts. In addition, they have proposed from their findings from their pilot study the following:

1. Appropriate implementation of hybrid learning with balanced activities of online and face-to-face through teachers' techniques and pedagogies.
2. Learning is customizable to the student's capabilities and distinctive situations and flexibility relative to study time and the practical classroom.
3. Minimize incidents of delay in student assignment submissions considering that the system has definite deadlines, and it also enables students' learning in a self-directed, increased self-awareness, and independent learning.
4. Students in online classes were not isolated but equally participated with teachers and peers just like in a face-to-face classroom.

However, there are problems and limitations encountered in using the hybrid system and one of them is the internet stability for online teaching. In a synchronized instructional setting, online learners would be dependent on the internet network to keep up with the on-site learners and this paves the way to integrate non-synchronized hybrid teaching and learning. For instance, in the Oman setting, students that are situated outside the capital city of Muscat struggled with connectivity issues and poor internet connections which are beyond their control. Another problem that may be encountered for the continuance of hybrid learning after COVID-19 is the teachers' ability to manage the learning processes sustainably. While many teachers have adopted the system, few academics have been facing enormous challenges to breaching spatial gaps from the traditional to the new normal approach with hybrid teaching although they have endured using the model.

## WHICH IS WHICH? HYBRID OR ONLINE?

Many countries have been restored after the COVID-19 crisis and Oman is one of those that implemented full on-site learning since 2021. Reckoning with the COVID-19 crisis,

it is recalled that many institutions experienced uncertainties about how educational instructions can be delivered sustainably since the pandemic has caught the teachers and the students unprepared in shifting from the traditional classroom to online learning. However, many colleges and universities were able to adjust and embrace the online medium of instruction that fosters the student-centered learning (SCL) approach to teaching and learning, and it practically helps students in completing the task asynchronically. The aftermath of COVID-19 is an avenue for institutions to review their online courses to determine what needs to be done in the future. The management of the educational sectors, in general, has learned the innovative methods of delivering instructions to the students outside the usual lecture-type of class delivery into sustainable online teaching and learning wherein students can become self-learner in an independent learning environment. As Colleges and universities are moving into student-centered learning, especially in European and other countries (Klemencic et al., 2020), online learning has become more relevant to the needs of higher education institutions in line with their learning outcomes and teaching pedagogies. Also, the Post-COVID-19 situation can be an opportune time for higher education institutions (HEI) to devise plans for effective distance learning coursework to ensure that education is not only contained in a physical classroom but even beyond for sustainable and well-placed teaching and learning that, whenever similar situations of COVID-19 may occur, it will not become a surprise to everyone. The management of different educational institutions may develop long-term and sustainable policies, procedures, and guidelines by assessing and determining the best technologies and methods of delivery for online courses which benefits the teachers and students. There is a need to increase the technical skills of the teachers in line with their delivery of the subject to the students so that the learning process would become mutual between the teacher and students.

On the other hand, choosing and applying hybrid learning correctly for practical courses coupled with pedagogy and methods implemented by the teachers to balance face-to-face and online learning has been proven to have a positive impact on the student learning process (Ayub et al., 2022). Moreover, the flexibility of the approach helps students to be flexible in terms of study time and practical classroom adjusted based on the student's capabilities and exceptional circumstances. Beatty (2019) introduced the concept of Hybrid Flexible Learning (HyFlex), an approach that enables learners to become flexible in selecting the choice of learning that matches their needs. Previous studies aimed at providing students with the option of not being solely confined to physical space but also giving virtual space to permit class schedules flexibility. While there is no substitute for establishing a teacher-student relationship in the physical classroom setting (Hindustan Times, 2023), hybrid provides a balance between the traditional classroom and online learning where the technological skills of the students can be best enhanced. The concept of hybrid learning is not to fully transition to online learning but to complement the traditionally used physical class and at the same time upgrade the teachers' and students' skills to keep abreast with the fast pace of technological advances. Considering how different institutions overcame and managed the pandemic crisis especially the ultimate transition from onsite to purely online learning during COVID-19 is evidence that the world of the educational system is ready to pursue hybrid teaching if a crisis of the same magnitude or more will happen again in the uncertain future. For the education sector, undeniably hybrid teaching has helped the delivery of the teaching and learning process especially at the ending stages of the pandemic and during the transition back to the physical classroom

setting. Hence, it is helpful for the sector to revise the teaching curriculum to highlight flexible activities that will complement the traditional class which may include the redesigning of assignments, evaluations, methods, and techniques by teachers to fit the needs of hybrid learning in the classroom. It can be reiterated in the study by Ayub et al. (2022) of their successful application of hybrid learning in a pilot study in a Malaysian private university by introducing a curriculum that integrates hybrid learning.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed at providing insights into the problem identified in this study about the most preferable course of action that the education sector considers aside from traditional classroom instruction, hybrid teaching, or online. Previous studies and literature were evaluated to provide some possible resolutions as a contribution to educational institutions in choosing their means of delivery of instruction to the students. Based on these studies, both online and hybrid teaching and learning are instrumental in overcoming the pandemic crisis and have the potential to be continued in the post-pandemic scenario though it has accounted for advantages and disadvantages. Online learning has helped greatly in transitioning from the traditional class to online instruction immensely when all colleges and universities are in a state of shock because of lockdowns and other related situations. It also contributed to a new learning experience wherein teachers and students were able to acquire new skills and techniques to handle their tasks along with technological advances and modes of learning. The consensus from the studies gathered showed that hybrid learning is the best complement to physical classrooms as it combines face-to-face and online learning synchronically and asynchronically. In countries and academic institutions that have been restored to the traditional physical gathering, insights were taken that online and hybrid learning can still be pursued to ensure that related unprecedented situations in the future will be dealt with a high degree of preparedness and utmost attention. In conclusion, while there is no perfect substitute for the physical classroom, the demand for technological advancement and the proliferation of student-centered learning approaches in different parts of the world, the necessity to adopt online and hybrid learning in a sustainable capacity can be reviewed, evaluated, and applied by the higher education institutions (HEI) without prejudice to the existing decrees and circulars implemented by the authoritative bodies**.**

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