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The Status Quo of Hybrid Education at Moroccan Universities: The Case of Engineering Classes

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Abstract:

The pandemic has undoubtedly forced educational systems across the world to change face-to-face education practices forever. On the other hand, it has also forced online education system practices among Moroccan higher education institutions. With the spread of COVID-19 all over, the Moroccan education system circumstances did not allow face-to-face education, nor did it allow online education as a solution. As a matter of fact, hybrid learning remains the best-proposed alternative, as suggested in the literature. The present paper's main objectives were to investigate higher education English learners' attitudes towards hybrid education and examine the efficacy of hybrid education among higher education learners. After using a qualitative method, a questionnaire of 24 Likert Scale items delivered on Google Forum, and an interview of 18 learners, the findings suggested that Moroccan higher education learners showed that hybrid education does not support the majority of participants' learning process. However, hybrid learning was, to an extent, a successful experience for a number of other participants. The unsatisfying quality of the internet remains an issue to be sorted out in the future, and laziness in attending online morning classes was also evidence of why hybrid learning remained challenging. Learners favoured face-to-face classroom-based instructions over blended learning regardless of the advantages of the latter. A great portion of the population favoured face-to-face rather than online learning. The learners also got confused using the hybrid model. Last, it was evidence that the learners preferred the face-to-face model as their best model to use in many cases.

Keywords: Blended learning, e-learning, higher education, hybrid education, online learning

1. Introduction

Several studies and authors have provided benefits and advantages derived from the adoption of e-learning technologies or Robot Mediated Communication in schools (Al-Gahtani, 2011; Ghoshal, 2020; Klein & Ware, 2003; Tounssi, 2021). As a matter of fact, many educational institutions have adopted the online teaching model (OTM, henceforth) for various reasons. First of all, OTM reduces physical distances to a minimum. That is, higher education learners and their instructors as well do not have to get close to each other physically in one common place. However, these institutions will still offer their learning services. The latter, in turn, diminishes, to a great extent, the chances of spreading the COVID-19 virus as a result.

To start with, Klein and Ware (2003) have suggested that e-learning has a promising investment future, as it "promises cheap and ubiquitous access to learning resources for any student - young or old - with a computer and an Internet connection" (p.34). Furthermore, El-Gahtani (2011) has shown that e-learning has offered learners opportunities to be more autonomous in their learning process; as to the benefits and shortages, Koohang, Britz, and Seymour (2006) have provided a list of each. Qi (2008) provided a short comparison between the two modes of teaching. The following table illustrates the differences.

	Distance Higher Education (based on network teaching)	Traditional Higher Education (based face-to-face teaching)
Educational Notion	Student-Centered Teaching	Subject System Centered Teaching
Teaching Methods	Multimedia	Face to Face
Teaching Resources	Plenty of Digital Resources	Instructors Teaching in Class, Teaching Resources
Learning Methods	Self-study	Follow-up Learning
Learning Support	Space-Time Breaking	Limited
Practice Teaching	Virtual, Limited	In reality
Emotional Communication	Virtual, Loneliness	In reality

Table 1: Comparison of Teaching Mode between Distance and Traditional Higher Education (Qi, 2008)

Apparently, online learning experiences should provide learners with more opportunities to use various multimedia and digital resources to learn autonomously regardless of the loneliness of the learner. While the face-to-face learning mode seems limited in terms of learning support, learning seems more real than in the hybrid mode. Last but not least, Tounssi (2021) has found that online learning encourages language interaction among higher education learners regardless of its limits, learners' preference for face-to-face mode of education, and some of the challenges encountered.

Reasons:

The three modes of learning were favoured variously for different reasons. These reasons could be classified into four major classes. The data will be discussed and analysed from these four major perspectives in the discussion section.

- Psychological
- Technical
- Organisational
- Pedagogical

2. Methodology

The present paper adopted the quantitative research design. First, it used an online questionnaire with close-ended questions, adopting a Likert Scale with items to choose from. It was used and distributed via the internet (Bhat, sd). Secondly, the targeted population was a large one. It is more than 280 participants. The majority of them are males, with a great increase in the female population. Finally, a short interview was used. A few participants were asked for their reasons why they favoured face-to-face. The study was carried out in February 2021. Finally, the gathered data is analysed using descriptive statistics presented by the SPSS program. The nominal data was numerically converted so the program could transcribe and calculate it into meaningful data.

The majority of this population has never studied in a hybrid learning mode. They have had online and face-to-face experiences. In fact, this project investigates learners' first experience with the hybrid learning mode and the reasons behind their attitude towards the learning mode.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Demography

Males represent most of the learners of the present paper. They are 56.2 per cent of the participants, while females represent 43.8. Furthermore, the majority of the participants are first-year learners. They consist of 83 per cent of the participants. The 17 per cent consists of second, third and fourth years. The latter have had previous experience with online and face-to-face learning practices. Nonetheless, none of the participants has ever experienced hybrid learning practice.

3.2. Learners' Preferred Mode of Learning

The hybrid mode of learning has offered a great opportunity to learn in a more comfortable way. The participants agreed that they liked and enjoyed the hybrid learning mode, as shown in the histogram below. The population that agreed makes up about 37 per cent of the total, while only about 28 per cent disagreed.

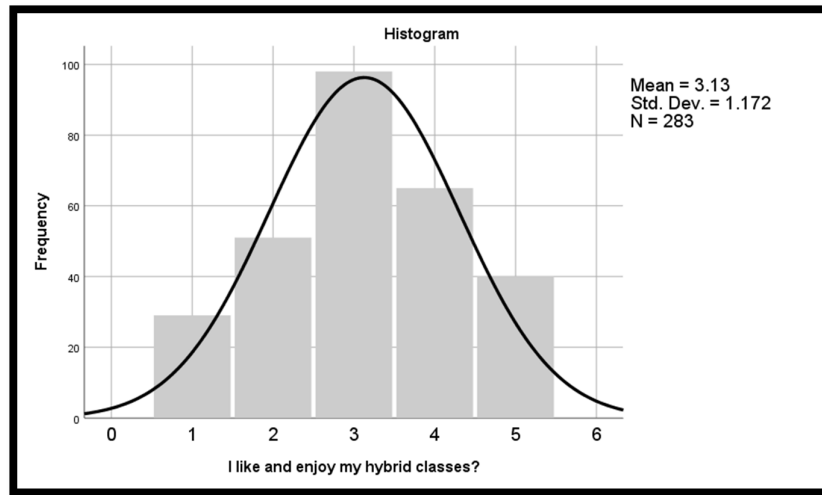


Figure 1

In addition, a great portion of the population did not favour any learning mode. This population is a great one. It constitutes 34 per cent of the global amount of the participants.

Comparing learners' experience, it shows that learners did not like and enjoy online classes more than face-to-face ones, with a mean of 2.29. That is to say, the majority strongly disagree with the statement.

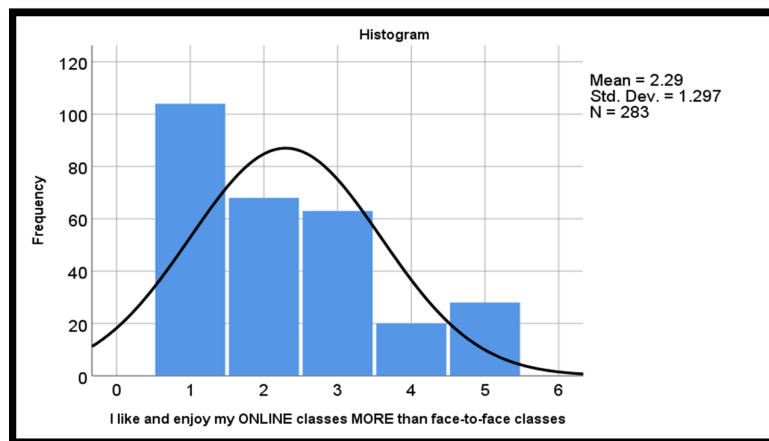


Figure 2

As to the comparison drawn between the online mode and the face-to-face learning mode, the participants, to a great extent, did favour the face-to-face learning mode, as illustrated in the following histogram.

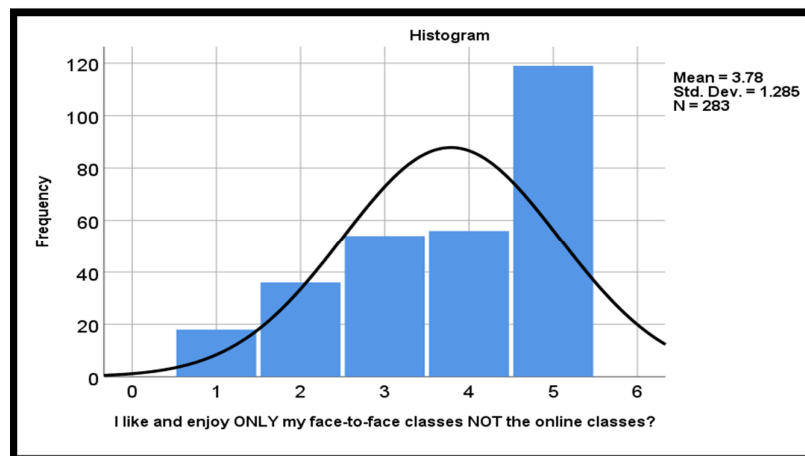


Figure 3

Furthermore, the data shows that 42 per cent of the population strongly agreed that the face-to-face learning mode is the one they like and enjoy most. In addition, 19.8 per cent agreed that they liked and enjoyed the latter mode. As a matter of fact, regardless of the advantages of online and hybrid learning modes they offer learners, it seems obvious that, so far, face-to-face learning mode is irreplaceable to the population under study.

3.3. The Positive and Negative Factors Impacting Learners' Experience

The learning modes under study were either favoured or disfavoured differently for the four major factors: psychological, technical, organisational, and pedagogical.

3.3.1. The Psychological Factors

The learners' hybrid learning mode experience was influenced negatively due to some psychological issues. The following lines show the result of the study. The participants were asked if they feel anxious and nervous when they want to participate online. Their responses were illustrated in the following frequency histogram.

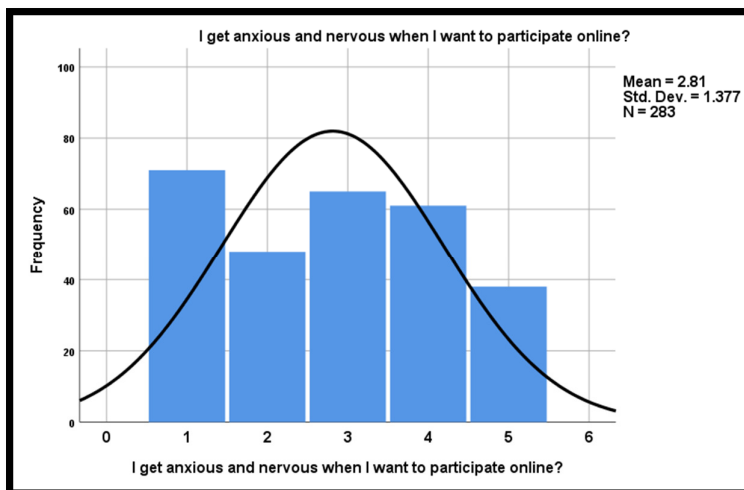


Figure 4

According to the histogram above, the participants' average responses were positive, as the majority disagreed with the statement, with a mean of 2.81. This shows that the participants, in general, had no psychological issues regarding their online interaction. However, it is worth mentioning that about 35 per cent of the population agreed with the statement. This population is important as well.

In the same vein, the population was asked if they had the same issue with face-to-face mode of interaction. The result is shown in the following histogram.

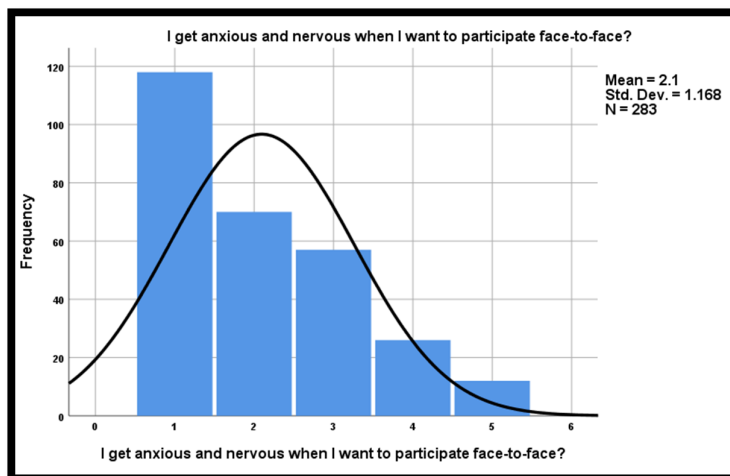


Figure 5

As can be seen in the histogram, the face-to-face mode of interaction did not involve learners' psychological issues like anxiety and fear among a great number of the population under study. To explain, more than 66 per cent of the population strongly disagreed with the statement. To illustrate, 66 per cent of the population enjoy and like face-to-face learning mode. However, it was observed as well that there were learners who were confused and anxious when they used

the face-to-face mode of learning. This population makes up about 13 per cent of the total population. The following lines explain and prove the latter statement well.

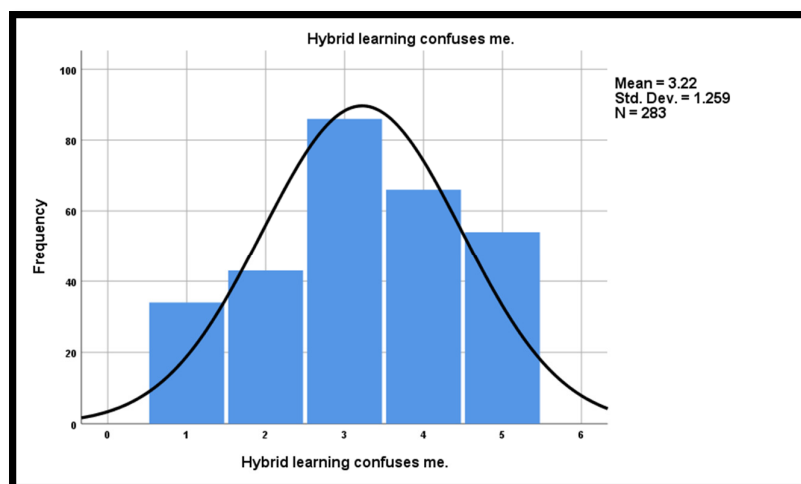


Figure 6

The participants were asked if the hybrid learning mode causes any psychological issues, particularly confusion. The data shows, to a great extent, that the participants were confused using the hybrid learning model. The same data shows that 42.4 per cent of the total participants said that the hybrid mode of learning confused them, and about 30 per cent of learners did not want to say.

3.3.2. The Positive Part of the Hybrid Mode of Learning

As mentioned earlier, the hybrid mode of learning has offered a learning experience with great opportunities to interact well and effectively in distance learning. The present paper has tried to prove the extent to which the population under study has benefited from the hybrid mode of learning. To do that, we asked the participants various questions. Their responses were illustrated as follows.

First of all, the following statement was proposed to them: "Hybrid learning allows me to study at home and interact with my professor at the same time." The histogram below illustrates their responses.

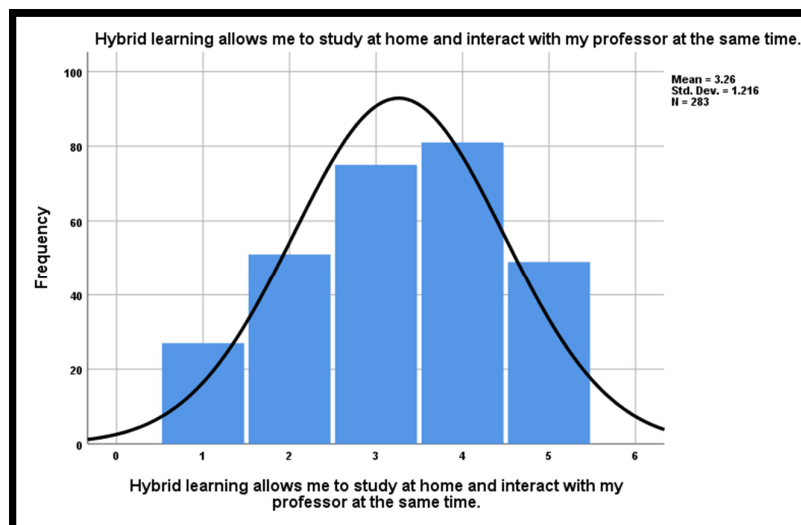


Figure 7

As can be seen, the hybrid learning mode allowed a great number of learners to study at home and interact with their instructors at the same time. For example, 45.9 per cent of the population agreed that the statement is true in their case. On the other hand, 27.5 per cent disagreed with the above statement. The reasons will be discussed later.

Moreover, the participants were asked about the extent to which they learn more when they study in a hybrid than from a face-to-face mode of learning. The data collected shows that 58.3 per cent disagreed, while only 21.6 per cent agreed with the statement of the following histogram. Needless to say, some of the population strongly agreed that the hybrid learning mode offered them more learning opportunities than face-to-face. This population makes up about 12.4 per cent.

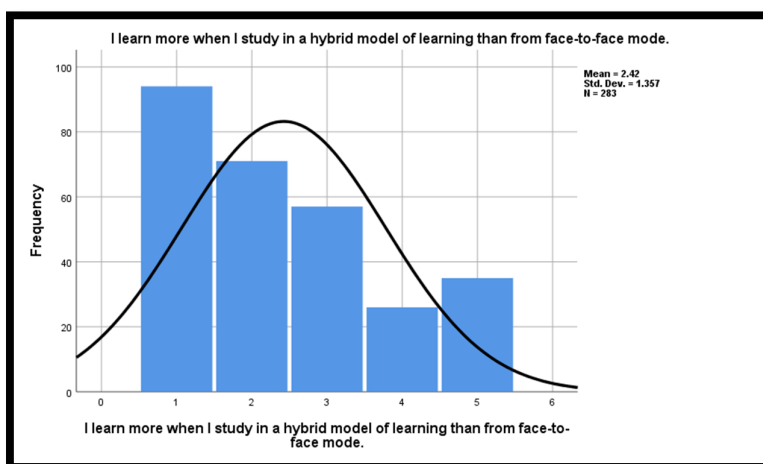


Figure 8

Concerning the productivity of the learners under study, they were asked to compare it in both modes. The collected data shows the following result. It is clearly obvious that learners had some issues regarding productivity using the hybrid mode. The majority said that they did not feel productive in the hybrid mode.

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	62	21.9	21.9	21.9
	Disagree	69	24.4	24.4	46.3
	Neutral	69	24.4	24.4	70.7
	Agree	47	16.6	16.6	87.3
	Strongly Agree	36	12.7	12.7	100.0
Total		283	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: The Hybrid Model Makes Me Feel More Productive

To illustrate, the table above shows that 46.3 per cent disagreed that they felt more productive when they used the hybrid learning mode. On the contrary, it is about 28 per cent of the participants agreed with the statement.

The extent to which the hybrid mode offers learners more flexible learning opportunities, the "I feel at ease with the hybrid learning Model" statement was provided. The data shows the following result, as presented in the table below.

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	24	8.5	8.5	8.5
	Disagree	59	20.8	20.8	29.3
	Neutral	111	39.2	39.2	68.6
	Agree	57	20.1	20.1	88.7
	Strongly Agree	32	11.3	11.3	100.0
Total		283	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: I Feel at Ease with the Hybrid Learning Model

As the table demonstrates, 29.3 per cent do not feel at ease with the hybrid learning mode. On the other hand, 31.4 per cent feel at ease with the mode. As a result, the present learning mode makes the learning process an easy task for our learners.

As the participants expressed their opinions concerning the mode of learning, they were also asked whether to recommend the hybrid mode of learning or not. The collected data shows the following result.

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Face-to-face	183	64.7	64.7	64.7
	Online	31	11.0	11.0	75.6
	Hybrid	69	24.4	24.4	100.0
	Total	283	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: If You Are to Choose among These, Which One Would You Prefer?

As can be noted from the table above, 64.7 of the population preferred and chose Face-to-face learning mode, 24.4% preferred and chose hybrid mode, and only 11% recommended the online mode.

Based on their experience with both the face-to-face and the hybrid modes of learning, the participants could recommend their best thinking. The following discussion illustrates their responses.

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	61	21.6	22.1	22.1
	Disagree	61	21.6	22.1	44.2
	Neutral	76	26.9	27.5	71.7
	Agree	44	15.5	15.9	87.7
	Strongly Agree	34	12.0	12.3	100.0
	Total	276	97.5	100.0	
Missing	System	7	2.5		
Total		283	100.0		

Table 5: I Would Highly Recommend Hybrid Model of Learning

The participants, to a large extent, disagreed with highly recommending the use of the hybrid mode of learning. For example, 22.1 per cent strongly disagreed; similarly, 22.1 per cent disagreed to recommend the mode. On the contrary, 28.2 per cent agreed that they would highly recommend the use of the hybrid learning mode.

3.3.3. The Atmosphere

The hybrid mode of learning experience highly depends on different prerequisites. Among the prerequisites, we find the learning atmosphere of the learner. The participants were asked to provide us with ideas about their learning atmosphere. The table below illustrates their responses.

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	69	24.4	24.6	24.6
	Disagree	64	22.6	22.9	47.5
	Neutral	57	20.1	20.4	67.9
	Agree	33	11.7	11.8	79.6
	Strongly Agree	57	20.1	20.4	100.0
	Total	280	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.1		
Total		283	100.0		

Table 6: My Atmosphere at Home Does Not Support My Online Learning

It was assumed that these participants' learning atmosphere supported the hybrid learning mode. Apparently, the present data shows that the learning environment supports their learning. To explain, 47.5 per cent of the participants' learning atmosphere supports their online learning. However, 22.2 per cent stated that they did not have a supportive atmosphere for their online learning. The latter population is considered large compared to the whole population. Furthermore, this population was assumed to have a supportive atmosphere at home as they belong to the middle-class population. The present data, so far, has proven so. Nonetheless, it has been clearly observed that the participants fell asleep when they were studying online.

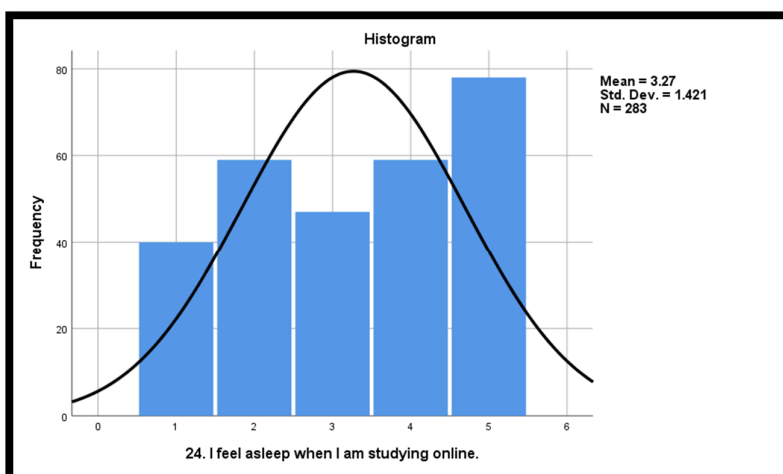


Figure 9

To illustrate, the histogram above shows that the majority fell asleep while studying online, with a mean of 3.27. That is, 48.4 per cent did not concentrate on their online classes. In other words, a large number of people do not study their online courses. As a result, online classes could be said to be a vacation or a break for them.

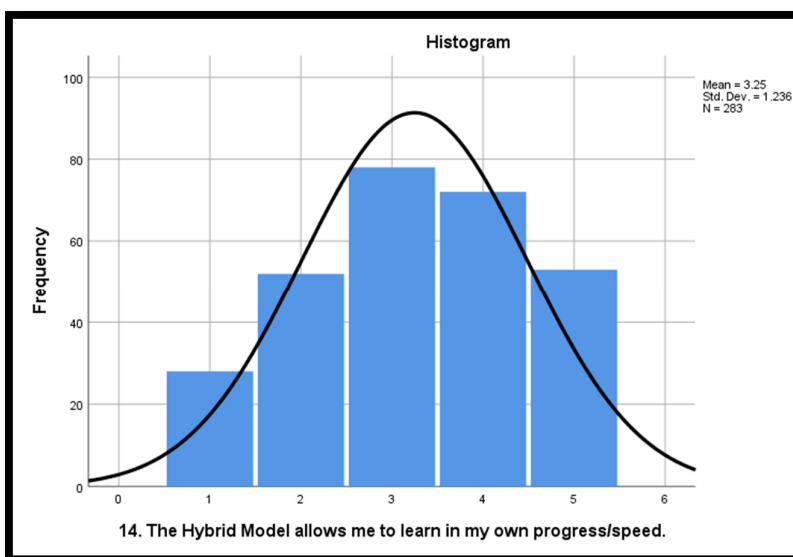


Figure 10

Surprisingly, it seems that the participants learn better when they study in the hybrid mode. The histogram below clearly shows that hybrid learning supported several participants' learning paces. These participants made up 54.1 per cent of the population, and hybrid learning supported their learning pace. However, hybrid learning did not support about 29 per cent of the population's learning pace.

4. Conclusion

Hybrid learning, as an evolving pedagogical approach, stands at the intersection of traditional face-to-face instruction and online learning, presenting a multifaceted landscape that merits in-depth exploration through comprehensive research endeavours. One crucial dimension in the examination of hybrid learning involves delving into technical issues, with a particular focus on the challenges posed by limited bandwidth. The efficacy of hybrid learning is intricately tied to the seamless integration of both physical and virtual learning components, making it imperative to address technical constraints to ensure a cohesive and effective educational experience for students. Furthermore, the recognition that hybrid learning accommodates diverse individual learning styles adds an additional layer of complexity to its study. Understanding how hybrid models can be tailored to cater to the unique needs and preferences of students is essential for optimising the benefits of this educational approach. While conventional face-to-face instruction remains a cornerstone of education and is likely to continue as the preferred mode of learning for a substantial portion of the studied population, acknowledging the capacity of online learning to effectively satisfy specific learning styles underscores the importance of fostering a flexible and adaptive educational environment. In this expansive exploration of hybrid learning, it is also pertinent to consider the role of coaching within this educational framework. Personalised guidance and

mentorship are integral components of effective learning, and understanding how coaching strategies can be seamlessly integrated into hybrid models becomes a key aspect of refining the overall educational experience. Therefore, a nuanced investigation into the interplay between coaching and hybrid learning is warranted to discern how these elements can complement each other to enhance the learning outcomes for students. In conclusion, the intricate dynamics of hybrid learning, encompassing technical considerations, individualised learning styles, and the synergies between traditional and online instruction, underscore the necessity for thorough and sustained research efforts. Only through such comprehensive inquiries can we unlock the full potential of hybrid learning and refine its implementation across diverse educational settings, ensuring its adaptability and effectiveness in meeting the evolving needs of the modern learner.

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