A Novel Synchronous Hybrid Learning Method: Voices from Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: The current article investigates tertiary level learners' satisfaction with a novel synchronous hybrid learning method (SHLM) that combines face-to-face and virtual teaching simultaneously using real-time audio and video technology to facilitate interaction between two groups. The originality of this approach stems from teaching two groups simultaneously (one group face-to-face and the other online) and rotating them consecutively in order to offer them 50% of the classes face-to-face and 50% virtually. This approach gave students equal learning opportunities by studying at home on specific days whilst not depriving them of face-to-face communication with their tutors, as well as establishing contact with their peers. We believe that this learning model has not been implemented in this fashion before and that the study has not been conducted elsewhere. For the most part, it was introduced as a solution to provide face-to-face teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aimed at examining learners' opinions, motivation, attention, and success in this new learning environment. The study employed a mixed methods approach that included a survey and semi-structured interviews to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The overall results revealed that learners were generally in favor of SHLM. Furthermore, it found that reducing the group sizes from 40 to 20 students had a positive impact on learner satisfaction. Students also highlighted that feeling safe, use of technology, teachers' attention during classes, sense of equality, and collaborative efforts between students contributed to their positive learning experience as a whole. Learners also indicated that their experience during classes with various digital tools such as Padlet, Google Jamboard, and Nearpod had a positive impact on their learning. However, the findings from some of the interviews revealed that there was a variation in opinion dependent on the students' learning style, personality traits, and linguistic ability. Some beginner and intermediate learners pointed out that at times, their proficiency level hindered their understanding when alternating to online classes. The study alluded to the fact that the implemented learning approach is subject to modifications and may remain in place for an extended period in case the pandemic still poses a problem or in the event of a shortage of physical classrooms or faculty. This model can also be applied during emergency remote instruction in educational institutions that have a suitable infrastructure. Since this study only focused on the students' perception of this hybrid approach, it is recommended that the teachers' experience with the approach should be examined. It is also recommended that the teaching of the four English language skills should be examined through this model to find whether all the skills can be taught effectively.

Keywords*:* novel synchronous hybrid learning method (SHLM), Saudi EFL context, learner satisfaction, tertiary level, emergency remote teaching (ERT)

1. Introduction

1.1 Defining the problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically impacted every aspect of our lives, especially education at very short notice. Initially, all educational systems around the world were left with no option but to manage the unprecedented situation and shift to emergency remote teaching (ERT). Hodges et al. (2020, p. 5) defined ERT as "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances." For instance, PKY, a public school in Gainesville (Florida, USA), which is also part of the University of Florida's College of Education, explained how they transitioned seamlessly to ERT (Geiger and Dawson, 2020). The school was closed on March 16th 2020, followed by two weeks of an extended spring break. Before the break, the faculty within the school was looking into the possibility of teaching under the pandemic circumstances. The team came up with an initiative called Virtually PKY, which was based on experimentation through teacher inquiry cycles where teachers identified problems of practice, collected data, consulted relevant literature, modified their practices and, in the end, shared them with their peers. One of the primary aspects that the school took into consideration was teacher-student, teacher-family, and student-content interactions. Multiple platforms were used according to the students' level and type of interaction required. For example, elementary-level students utilized Zoom for student-to-student interaction. In contrast, high school level students used Khan Academy to meet curricular goals for student-content interaction. In short, various platforms were used to meet different goals to adapt to ERT. This study recommended that future research should consider factors that influence the learner experience such as satisfaction and engagement (Geiger and Dawson, 2020).

Unlike Virtually PKY, the experience with ERT was not satisfactory in a Malaysian school (Chuah and Mohamad, 2020). For instance, Chuah and Mohamad (2020) indicated the following challenges associated with ERT: motivating students remotely and unavailability of internet connection in certain areas for some students, which affected communication between teachers, students, and parents. The shift to ERT has also affected teacher efficacy (Reich et al., 2021). Evidently, the sudden shift from in-person classes to remote teaching required teachers to exert efforts and adapt quickly to a new learning environment. As a result, they have become burned out. This is one of the unexpected factors that exhausted teachers when dealing with emergency remote instruction. Consequently, the shift to ERT led teachers to make more effort and experiment with digital tools to meet the new needs of learners (Hodges et al., 2020).

Without doubt, the remote learners' needs are different from the in-person learners' needs. For instance, some learners suffer from societal inequalities, i.e., sometimes siblings share one room and many do not have access to individual devices. In such cases, the learning experience will be greatly affected with challenges including noise, lack of space, and privacy (Hodges et al., 2020). Student needs have taken a different shape during the COVID-19 crisis; therefore, proposing and examining solutions should correspond with the "new needs for our learners and communities" (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 6). Hodges et al. (2020) also revealed that learners' needs vary according to their age. For instance, adult learners' needs might be met through an asynchronous mode of delivery while younger learners' needs may be better met via a synchronous mode.

Further challenges prevalent during the pandemic included difficulty accessing the internet and a lack of technical support. In a Malaysian context, material, and lesson input were affected by the aforementioned obstacles (Chuah and Mohamad, 2020). Malaysian teachers, for example, implemented solutions that incorporated both the instructional goals of a subject and access to the digital material. Usually, in a face-to-face environment, learners had access to hard copies. In the virtual classroom, however, digital copies were affected by several technical factors such as the device type, the browser, and the operating system of a device. In the planning stage, teachers selected the topics, designed the syllabus, and planned activities to provide students with comprehensible input. Lesson input including teacher-student interaction, however, was sacrificed, and instead, students were provided with tasks to work on since not all learners had the same level of accessibility to the internet. Thus, course objectives, lesson planning, and input were notably impacted by technology. Within the Malaysian context, teachers expressed a degree of satisfaction in the way that they explored solutions to adapt to emergency remote teaching. Namely, the teachers who participated in the Malaysian study noted a level of confidence in the way they put their knowledge of online learning into practice. While this level of confidence is somewhat encouraging, it is important to point out the need to also investigate learner satisfaction with this particular experience.

Asynchronous modes of online instruction were also a common way of communicating during emergency remote teaching. Evidently, this mode did not allow live interaction between the teacher and students, which made it difficult to evaluate learner engagement while attending recorded sessions. Furthermore, providing live tailored and effective feedback was drastically affected by this mode (Lapada et al., 2020). In comparison, synchronous modes filled in this gap and allowed direct interaction between teachers and learners.

Having effective interaction and feedback are two key aspects for making the learner experience more meaningful in ERT. Durden (2020) explained that remote instruction will probably still be available either in the form of fully or partially synchronous learning for more effective communication. On the other hand, Genone (2020) emphasized that the focus should be on pedagogy rather than on technology to engage students more in emergency remote education. In other words, the use of technology should serve pedagogy to augment students' motivation, engagement, and enable teachers to provide timely feedback. Reich et al. (2020) found that video conferences facilitated classroom discussion in a synchronous mode, and it was more effective when the learners were split into smaller groups. They further expressed that students felt connected with their peers and were appreciated.

In the case of the present study, at the Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (IAU), all faculty were informed on March 9th 2020, to start delivering classes entirely online by utilizing the pre-existing learning management systems (LMS), namely, Blackboard Collaborative Ultra, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. The remaining part of the second term of the 2019-2020 academic year was conducted entirely online. In July 2020, the Department of English Language (DEL) at the Deanship of Preparatory Year and Supporting Studies (PYP) was looking for an emergency remote instruction mode that combined face-to-face and online teaching simultaneously. A

synchronous hybrid learning method (henceforth SHLM) was chosen to ensure an equal chance of face-to-face teaching for all learners by rotating attendance of virtual and face-to-face groups (see Figure 1). SHLM satisfies the four principles mentioned by Beatty (2019), namely learner choice, equivalent learning, reusability and accessibility. In light of the issues encountered with ERTs by learners worldwide, this study aims to explore learners' opinions, satisfaction, motivation, and the technical challenges of applying this model as a case study. In addition, since teachers utilized this mode for the first time, it was essential to investigate how teachers paid attention to both the online and face-to-face classes simultaneously. Furthermore, accessing materials, meeting the needs of learners, and dealing with challenges were considered primary factors that led to the aims and research questions of the present study.

1.2 Goals of the study

The study aims to:

1. Investigate learner satisfaction with the synchronous hybrid learning method.
2. Explore the challenges and benefits of this modality.

1.3 Research questions guiding the study

1. How satisfied were the learners with the synchronous hybrid learning approach?
2. What are the main challenges and benefits of synchronous hybrid learning settings?

1.4 Significance of the study

The significance of this study centers around the novel approach taken by one university to tackle the challenges brought about by the unprecedented spread of COVID-19. In particular, the approach gives all learners equal opportunities of face-to-face and virtual instruction, flexibility, and easy accessibility. It is important to mention that the cohort of the 2020-2021 academic year had experienced an emergency interruption in their high school education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context of this study, the PYP program is essential for ensuring a smooth transition from high school to the university style of learning. Therefore, learner experience during this critical phase of education is of great academic and social importance. Academically speaking, the English language program, which consists of General English and ESP Courses, aims to establish a solid foundation for the students' undergraduate studies. Coming to classes on campus and interacting with peers as well as participating in extra-curricular activities is very important not only academically speaking, but also critical for the students' psychological well-being (Nakayama, Yamamoto, and Santiago, 2007; Irvine, Code, and Richards, 2013; Nae, 2020; Al Rawashdeh et al., 2021).

Results from this study will shed light on future practices in case the pandemic continues or for small-size institutions to accommodate a larger number of students without recruiting more teachers or requiring more classrooms. In support of this view, Raes et al. (2020, p. 281), Bell, Sawaya, and Cain (2014), and Brumfield et al. (2017) believe that the "hybrid virtual classroom eliminates the need to teach the same course twice to different classes on different campuses, which reduces workloads." Liu, Spector, and Ikle (2018) emphasize the importance of providing a fair learning experience to under-represented students by having them interact with one another in this social context. However, the approach implemented in Liu, Spector, and Ikle's (2018) study does not allow switching the learning environments for off-campus and on-campus students. Although the authors allude to the idea that hybrid learning promotes fairness, it would be more evident if their learners were given the opportunity to attend half of the classes online and the other half face-to-face.

Another important aspect of the study is to investigate this novel approach as it has not been applied in this fashion by any other academic institution before. In addition, it shall pinpoint the areas of strength as well as the areas in need of development. Furthermore, the current study aims to provide feedback to the decision makers so as to enhance the student experience with this approach.

2. Literature review

2.1 Emergency remote instruction

COVID-19 has forced transitioning from in-person classes to emergency remote instruction where most educational institutions have utilized similar facilities and infrastructure. In a relatively short period of time, a plethora of studies have emerged to investigate the impact of this on education (Bhuwandeep and Das, 2020; Geiger and Dawson, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Jeffery and Bauer, 2020; Wang and East, 2020; Bond et al., 2021; Kovačević et al., 2021). Several issues have been raised during emergency remote instruction, such as lack of

learner motivation, lack of adequate infrastructure, access to learning materials, and technical support. All these factors have profoundly impacted the speed of transitioning and the quality of learning outcomes.

As in the physical classroom, motivation is critical for keeping learners engaged virtually. Online, students do not always participate in classroom discussions for a number of reasons. For example, they may face technical problems or easily avoid discussion because they are not being physically monitored. Another reason is that teachers may not pay equal attention to all students, especially if the class size is large. Singh, Steele, and Singh (2021, p. 154) added that lacking a sense of belonging to a community can also demotivate learners to participate in remote classroom discussions.

IT support and faculty training on using digital platforms are of paramount importance to implement emergency remote instruction effectively. For instance, if technical support is not available during asynchronous and synchronous online classes, the situation becomes beyond the teachers' individual control. Untrained teachers generally try to apply in-person instruction to online teaching (Sumardi and Nughrahani, 2020). Of course, not all faculty had the chance to receive adequate training, especially if they had not experienced virtual learning prior to the pandemic, or if blended learning was not part of their instructional delivery. There are many institutions that relied partially on e-learning and utilized digital platforms which could have facilitated the transition to emergency remote instruction during the pandemic in a much better manner when compared to other institutions. The lack of awareness in utilizing basic digital tools poses a challenge to providing an effective virtual learning experience (Rapanta et al., 2020; Singh, Steele, and Singh, 2021). In summary, faculty training plays an integral role in enhancing teachers' digital awareness and experience for the sake of providing a better learning experience for learners using emergency remote modes.

Accessibility to material and infrastructure are two important factors in enhancing the quality of the learner experience. Singh, Steele, and Singh (2021, p. 152) added that "limited or no access to appropriate teaching resources such as personal computers/tablets, headsets, and printers led to frustration and struggle for the faculty." Being unable to access material is one of the disadvantages that has left a negative impact on the learner experience. Learners are the key stakeholders whose access to learning material should be made available. Hamilton et al. (2020) reinforced that the lack of high-speed internet and unavailability of technological tools hinder the implementation of online learning. Singh, Steele, and Singh (2021, p. 153) explained that these two obstacles are even more serious for in-person students who rely on "on-campus university resources, library and, computer labs to complete their work." Singh, Steele, and Singh (2021, p. 154) summarized the challenges during emergency remote instruction as a "lack of a humanized learning environment, lack of sense of community, lack of student motivation, and accessibility problems."

2.2 Defining the hybrid learning environment

There have been several definitions of the hybrid learning approach by different scholars (Waddoups and Howell, 2002; Pöysä, Lowyck, and Häkkinen, 2005). Their definitions touch on the possibility of having face-to-face meetings and using distance education technologies and practices. Yet, a more specific definition has emerged introducing a synchronous hybrid learning approach which involves providing instruction to some students who attend classes online while some attend face-to-face using real-time audio and video technology (Roseth, Akcaoglu, and Zellner, 2013). This definition is the closest to the method implemented in this study. However, SHLM takes it a step further by rotating the two learning modes in an equal fashion (see Figure 1).

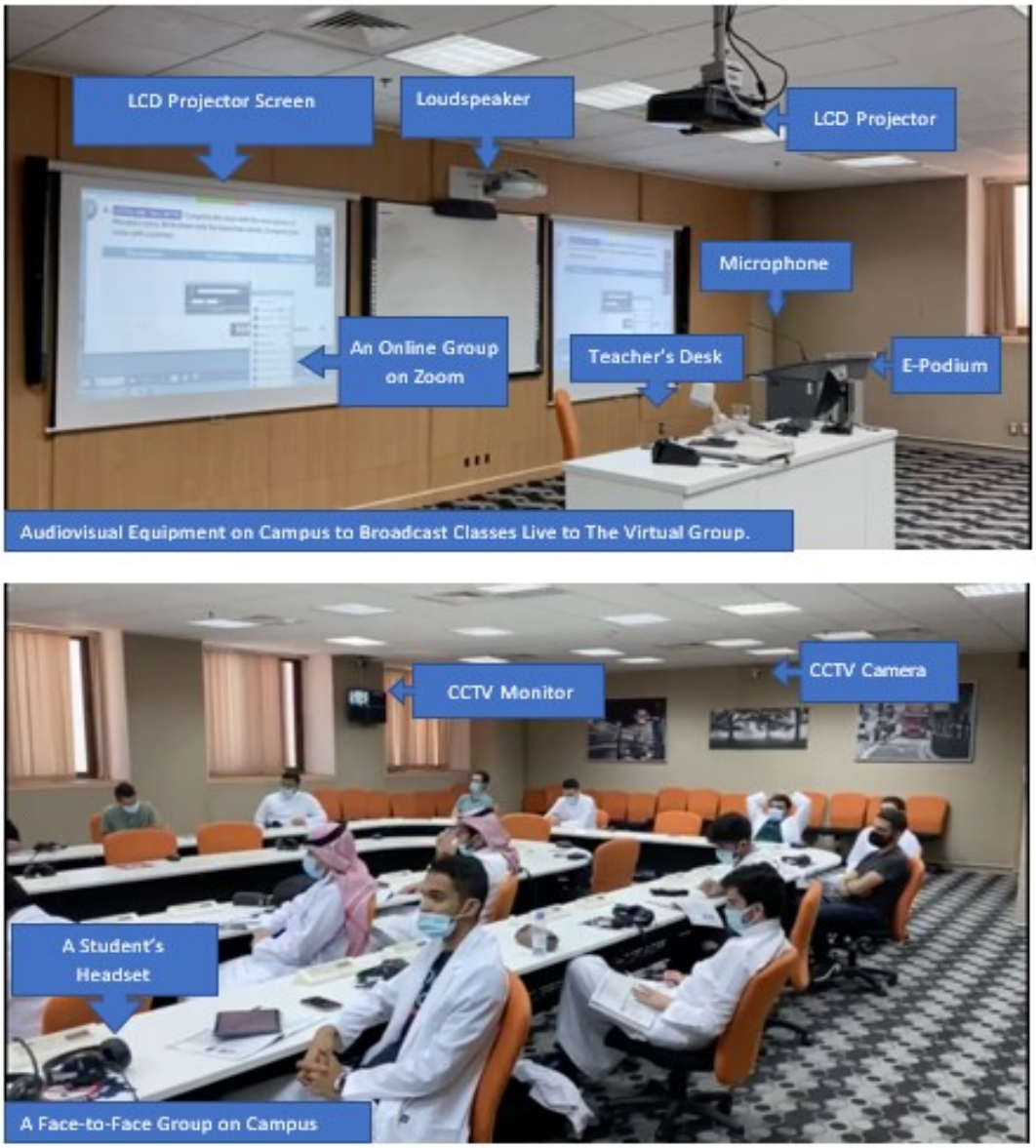

Figure 1: The structure of the synchronous hybrid learning model (SHLM)

2.3 Learner satisfaction of the synchronous hybrid learning model

Glazer and Wanstreet (2011) reported that online students are prone to feelings of social isolation due to a lack of face-to-face interaction (Butz et al., 2014). In the same vein, Butz and Stupnisky (2016) investigated the relationships among students' needs, satisfaction, motivation, and achievement in synchronous hybrid learning environments. One of the aims of their study was to explore student-peer relatedness. They found that the online group expressed that they had less in common with their peers than the on-campus students. Hence, the authors mentioned it as one of the disadvantages of attending classes only online in a synchronous learning environment. A sense of belonging and connectedness are fundamental human needs that are essential to achieving learner satisfaction (Arslan, 2021; Singh, Steele, and Singh, 2021). Furthermore, Singh, Steele, and Singh (2021, p. 155) have emphasized that utilizing hybrid or blended methods of learning can ensure a "safe way to learn digitally" during emergency remote learning.

Integrating face-to-face and synchronous teaching together is seen as a solution that provides face-to-face interaction in the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic which allows physical distance in the classroom, and ensures smooth running of the English program. Romero-Hall and Vicentini (2017) found that distance learners who attended synchronous hybrid classes expressed enjoyment when working with other classmates. The participants also felt that they were involved in the physical classroom community. Distance and face-to-face learners bonded and could maintain connection throughout the entire program. In the aforementioned study,

learners were taught either face-to-face or online. Therefore, students' experience and satisfaction in the present study may not necessarily show the same result since they alternate their learning environment as per their teaching timetable.

2.4 Common challenges faced by learners

Romero-Hall and Vicentini (2017) pinpointed that one of the main challenges posed in the hybrid learning environment was associated with classroom participation. Furthermore, they (2017, p. 153) stated that technical issues sometimes caused "a feeling of embarrassment and discomfort to ask for repetition due to having missed key information created the greatest differences between the distance learners' and the face-to-face learners' experience." Another challenge discussed by Romero-Hall and Vicentini (2017, p. 153) was the lack of "adequate infrastructure (microphones, speakers, and adequate wireless internet) to help establish the interactions, communication, and sense of equality between all learners in the hybrid synchronous classroom." In addition, Evans, Kensington-Miller, and Novak (2021) added that one key challenge was the size of the course including the number of students enrolled in it per term. Thus, the aforementioned factors shall either contribute to the success and satisfaction of integrating hybrid learning or make it more challenging. Other challenges reported in the Saudi EFL context by Gulnaz, Althomali, and Alzeer (2020, p. 323) are "financial obstacles, lack of enough resources, and teaching expertise to effectively deliver online instruction" and computer compatibility which might be similar to other contexts outside of Saudi Arabia.

2.5 Context of the study: Case description

In July 2020, restrictions started to be cautiously eased in Saudi Arabia, and the next academic year (2020-2021) was about to commence. As preparations for the new academic year were underway, the Department of English Language (DEL) at the Deanship of Preparatory Year and Supporting Studies (PYP) searched for feasible solutions that could be implemented using the existing infrastructure and the available faculty members to teach face-to-face. Online teaching was not preferred as off-campus learners were generally found to be more passive and would learn less than their on-campus counterparts. From a pedagogical standpoint, teaching verbal and non-verbal skills is more effective through a face-to-face student-centered approach. In support of this view, Weitze (2015) argues that sometimes students tend to act as if they were watching TV rather than attending a class. Raes et al. (2020) explained that teachers usually deliver online classes using more monologue-based teaching strategies, which is not adequate in our learning context.

In the beginning, seeking a solution that allowed face-to-face interaction, maintained social distancing in classrooms, and permitted approximately 40 students in each group whilst complying with preventive and precautionary measures as instructed by the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Health, 2020), seemed unfeasible. Three primary obstacles that prevented the department from implementing face-to-face instruction were identified. First, the physical space of the classroom did not allow more than 22 students with social distancing measures. Second, the available number of faculty members and classrooms has remained the same, thus, dividing students into smaller groups was not manageable. Finally, the PYP program is intensive, and the official teaching slots were restricted from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

After taking the aforementioned parameters into consideration, SHLM was proposed and approved by the university's administration. The PYP program included 6,500 students, 120 teachers, 141 groups spread across 12 campuses. The plan involved dividing each group into two subgroups i.e., 1-A and 1-B. Each subgroup comprised 20 students to make a total of 40. On the first teaching day of the week, Sunday, subgroup A attended face-to-face while the teacher broadcasted the same class live to subgroup B. Then, on the second teaching day of the week, Monday, the subgroups switched their learning environment so that subgroup B attended classes face-to-face and subgroup A attended classes online (see Table 1). In short, all students attended 50% of all classes face-to-face and 50% online. This novel method of instruction enabled the provision of face-to-face instruction while using the same infrastructure, keeping the same number of faculty, and complying with COVID-19 health and safety measures. After implementing this novel method with relative success for one full academic year, it was paramount to investigate learner experience regarding this learning method, ensure safety, and enhance its modality in case similar circumstances arose.

According to Raes et al. (2020, pp. 277-281) hybrid learning has benefits that fall under two "categories, namely, (1) organizational benefits related to educational access and efficiency in teaching; and (2) pedagogical benefits related to the quality of learning." Overall, the chance to create a connection between on-campus and off-

campus students is believed to create a more positive and richer learning experience (Bower et al., 2015; Bell, Sawaya, and Cain, 2014).

Table 1: A student teaching timetable showing the implementation of SHLM

Teacher's Name Paul Kerton		Sunday 8 a.m.-10 a.m.	Monday 10 a.m.-12 p.m.	Tuesday	Wednesday 1 p.m.-3 p.m.	Thursday 3 p.m.-5 p.m.
Group 1	A	Face-to-Face	Online	-	Face-to-Face	Online
	B	Online	Face-to-Face	-	Online	Face-to-Face

One of the most critical issues in implementing this method was that teachers were unfamiliar with teaching online and face-to-face simultaneously. To ensure that the students received high-quality instruction, effective feedback, and attention from their teachers to both groups, teachers were provided with a six-day professional development (PD) program on delivering synchronous hybrid learning classes. The PD unit invited three international speakers (i.e., Nigel A. Caplan, George Vassilakis, and Nick Thorner). Furthermore, recurring PD sessions were offered throughout the academic year by qualified training staff from the Department of English Language and the university's Deanship of E-Learning to prepare and support teachers. Teachers were introduced to a set of digital learning tools such as Padlet, Google Jamboard and Nearpod to facilitate communication between teachers and students. Additionally, high-internet speed, e-podiums, overhead projectors, IT support, hand sanitizer, and social distancing stickers were made available in classrooms.

3. Methodology

A cross-sectional study was conducted adopting a mixed methods approach to meet the goals of this case study. It is considered exploratory because it examines learners' satisfaction with the hybrid learning modality, a model they have not experienced before. Moreover, it is an initial study that seeks to investigate the specific nature of the issues faced by the learners while implementing this modality. So, identifying its challenges will assist educators in addressing them. The first method was an online survey conducted via QuestionPro, and the second method was in the form of semi-structured interviews. Another reason for using a mixed methods approach is the complementary nature it provides and the possibility to elaborate (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019) and enhance (Bryman, 2004) the results. In other words, the semi-structured interview may enhance the validity of the data collected quantitatively via the survey. Participants' quotes will elaborate on some of the results by providing examples and explanations relevant to the questionnaire items.

3.1 Survey

The survey was divided into two main sections. The first section recorded biographical data, including the track and English proficiency level (questions 1-2). The second section explored learner satisfaction and experience with this modality (questions 3-26). The survey implemented a three-point Likert scale as follows: agree, neutral, and disagree. A link to the survey was sent to all PYP students via Blackboard announcements. The survey was available for one month. After that, the numerical data generated from the responses was quantitively analyzed via the QuestionPro analytical feature and SPSS.

3.1.1 Validity

For the purpose of the survey's validity, students with lower proficiency levels were provided with an Arabic translation to ensure their understanding of the questions. The translation was made by two Arabic EFL teachers and edited by the author. They were also provided with the definition of synchronous hybrid learning in Arabic and English. The questionnaire was also piloted prior to carrying out the main study which was sent to 10 students. Furthermore, it was sent to two arbitrators in the field of e-learning, which then was modified in response to their feedback. Finally, the survey was distributed to all the PYP students enrolled in four tracks across 12 locations.

3.1.2 Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used in this study to look at the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006, p. 625), this test estimates the "internal consistency based on a determination of how all items on a test relate to all other items and to the total test." Furthermore, Paltridge, and Phakiti (2015, p. 83) explained that a value which ranges from 0 to 1 demonstrates "the extent to which the items are measuring a single (unidimensional) construct. The closer this coefficient is to 1, the more consistently the items are measuring the same thing." It is important to note that the Likert scale data can be analyzed as "interval data" in which "the mean is the best measure of central tendency" (University of St Andrews, n.d., p. 1). Dörnyei

and Taguchi (2010) explained that a small Likert scale ranging from three to four items should have a reliability coefficient alpha no less than 0.70.

The results of the close-ended questionnaire were divided into four categories and analyzed statistically for the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and the range description of the mean as follows: Agree 1-1.66, Neutral 1.67-2.33, and Disagree 2.34-3. The three-point Likert scale uses alignments which Pimentel (2010, p. 111) called an interval measurement where "the information to all the respondents are summarized in the form of weighted mean … then interpreted using an interval, which in turn corresponds to a verbal description." The Likert scale, therefore, can be interpreted as follows: 1 stands for agree, 2 neutral, and 3 disagree. A summary of the weighted mean is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Description of the weighted mean

Likert Scale	Interval	Difference	Description
1	1.00-1.66	.66	Agree
2	1.67-2.33	.66	Neutral
3	2-34-3.00	.66	Disagree

Cronbach's alpha test was conducted to measure the reliability and internal consistency of the four fields used in the survey. Cronbach's alpha values were found to be reliable as they fell between (α = .80) and (α = .92). Therefore, the values were statistically acceptable (see Table 3).

Table 3: Internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha test

	Field	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
1	Satisfaction/Opinion on Hybrid Method	0.831	7
2	Learner Motivation	0.803	6
3	Teacher's Attention During Hybrid Classes	0.918	9
4	Technicality	0.857	2

Furthermore, a sample size formula was conducted to select the representative sample of the total population (n = 6,500) via the sample size calculator (Creative Research Systems, n.d.). This non-probability judgment sampling technique calculated the representative population with a confidence interval value of (95%). Although the sample size needed for our 6,500 population was only 363, 1,577 participants have completed the survey.

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

For the purpose of elaborating on the results collected from the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were used in the present study. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019, p. 437) defined semi-structured interviews as non-standardized interviews which start with a systematic "predetermined list of themes." This type of interview was deemed appropriate since the present study is exploratory in nature. As such, the semi-structured interview method was utilized as a second tool in the present study to yield the needed answers for questions in mind. Meetings with 21 participants were conducted via Zoom. The responses from the recorded sessions were transcribed verbatim. Since students were allowed to use either Arabic or English, the Arabic responses were translated into English by two Arabic EFL teachers which were then revised by the author. Responses were then analyzed using a thematic approach which were labeled under 11 categories. While the interviews were based on predetermined themes, other themes were included in the analysis due to their importance and repetition by the participants. The themes that were already present in the survey were taken into consideration while interviewing the participants to provide further explanation or illustrate key concepts from a learner's perspective. Reoccurring key concepts were included in the analysis such as learner success and peer-relatedness. Briefly, the thematic analysis was guided by the research questions of the present study. The survey results and the main findings from the interviews were discussed in accordance with the predetermined and emerging themes.

3.2.1 Reliability

For reliability purposes, the interviewer needed to follow the exact wording of the interview questions (Brown, 2001). The interviewer used follow-up questions based on the flow of individual interviews.

3.3 Participants

The participants in this study belonged to four tracks, namely, health, science, engineering, and humanities. Within the Science Track, participants from two community colleges i.e., Dammam Community College (DCC) and Qatif Community College (QCC) also took part in the study, as shown in Table 4. Learners were placed in three proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced (see Table 4 below). 2,306 students took part in the survey, but only 1,577 completed all the questions.

Table 4: Biographical data

Track	Engineering	113	5.12%
	Health	524	23.75%
	Humanities	469	21.26%
	Science (DCC)	179	8.11%
	Science (QCC)	133	6.06%
	Science	788	35.70%
Proficiency Level	Beginner	539	24.17%
	Intermediate	587	40.4%
	Advanced	451	35.43 %
Completed	1,577		68.35%
Dropped	730		31.65%
Total	2,307		100%

4. Results

4.1 Learner satisfaction

As illustrated in Table 5, the satisfaction field indicated that most of the learners were neutral across all the components except for Item 2. The majority of learners agreed that they felt safe as the class was not crowded with many students (M = 1.542, SD = 0.753).

Table 5: Student satisfaction with SHLM

No.	Question	Count	Mean	SD	Description
1	Hybrid learning offers the same learning quality as traditional learning.	1,996	2.036	0.773	Neutral
2	Hybrid learning makes me feel safer because the class is not crowded with students like in a traditional classroom.	1,761	1.542	0.753	Agree
3	I prefer the hybrid learning environment more than the traditional environment.	1,757	1.843	0.83	Neutral
4	The hybrid learning environment facilitates better communication with my teacher more than in the traditional learning environment.	1,757	1.933	0.823	Neutral
5	Hybrid classes have helped me understand English classes overall.	1,757	1.848	0.793	Neutral
6	Hybrid classes make it challenging to communicate with my instructor.	1,612	2.154	0.818	Neutral
7	Information is not delivered the same way in hybrid classes compared to traditional classes.	1,612	2.063	0.835	Neutral

The majority of learners were neutral in terms of feeling motivated to learn English across four items out of six (see Table 6). However, learners agreed that hybrid classes encouraged them to self-learn more than in traditional classes. Furthermore, most of the learners disagreed that the teacher did not encourage the online group to participate in class as they did with the face-to-face students (M = 2.512, SD = 0.701).

Table 6: Student motivation with SHLM

No.	Question	Count	Mean	SD	Description
1	Hybrid learning motivates me to participate more than in a traditional environment.	1,757	1.963	0.814	Neutral
2	I feel more engaged in hybrid classes than in traditional classes.	1,757	1.963	0.819	Neutral
3	Hybrid classes are more interactive than traditional classes.	1,757	2.065	0.819	Neutral
4	Hybrid classes encourage me to self-learn more than traditional classes.	1,757	1.644	0.785	Agree
5	Hybrid classes have helped me enjoy English classes overall.	1,757	1.873	0.821	Neutral
6	The teacher does not encourage the online students to participate as they do with the face-to-face students.	1,612	2.512	0.701	Disagree

In terms of the teacher's and learners' attention in hybrid classes, the results showed that the learners' responses across the following items (1, 5, and 8) were neutral (see Table 7). On the other hand, the learners disagreed that the teacher ignored the face-to-face learners and focused on the online group instead (M = 2.547, SD = 0.663). Furthermore, they disagreed that the teacher did not respond to the online group as they did with the face-to-face group (M = 2.373, SD = 0.755). They also disagreed that the teacher did not give feedback to online students as they did with the face-to-face group (M = 2.341, SD = 0.77). Moreover, learners disagreed that the teachers did not correct mistakes of the online students as they did with the face-to-face students (M = 2.525, SD = 0.693) (see Table 7).

Table 7: Teacher-student attention during SHLM

No.	Question	Count	Mean	SD	Description
1	In SHLM classes, I usually get distracted by other things such as TV, phone, food etc.	1,617	1.754	0.818	Neutral
2	I feel the teacher ignores the online group and focuses on the face-to-face group instead.	1,612	2.324	0.812	Disagree
3	I feel the teacher ignores the face-to-face group and focuses on the online group instead.	1,612	2.547	0.663	Disagree
4	I feel the teacher does not give equal attention to face-to-face and online groups.	1,612	2.547	0.828	Disagree
5	My attention span is short in hybrid classes, unlike in traditional classes.	1,612	1.823	0.834	Neutral
6	The teacher does not respond to the online students as much as they do with the face-to-face students.	1,612	2.373	0.755	Disagree
7	I feel the teacher does provide feedback to the online students' as much as they do with the face-to-face students.	1,612	2.341	0.77	Disagree
8	The teacher directs questions to face-to-face students more than they do to online students.	1,612	2.212	0.818	Neutral
9	The teacher does not correct the mistakes of the online students as much as they do with the face-to-face students.	1,612	2.525	0.693	Disagree

Speaking of challenges related to technology, most of the learners indicated that they were neutral when it came to internet connection (M = 1.706, SD = 0.762). Likewise, they had the same attitude towards using digital platforms (M = 2.251, SD = 0.808) (see Table 8).

Table 8: Technical issues during SHLM

No.	Question	Count	Mean	SD	Description
1	The internet connection always hinders learning for the online group.	1,612	1.706	0.762	Neutral
2	The use of digital platforms for hybrid teaching (i.e., Blackboard, Zoom, Microsoft Teams) is problematic.	1,612	2.251	0.808	Neutral

4.2 Students' grades

To investigate the impact of applying SHLM on learner success, the student grades were compared across three academic years: pre-COVID-19 (2018-2019), during COVID-19 (2019-2020), and the previous academic year (2020-2021) in which this model was implemented. An ANOVA test was carried out to see the impact of SHLM on students' grades in comparison to the previous two years to examine whether there was a statistical significance in the students' final grades. The means of the students' final grades over the following academic years (2018-2019), (2019-2020), and (2020-2021) were (M = 69.92), (M = 71.52), and (M = 72.32) respectively. The result was statistically significant at p = .000 (see Figure 2).

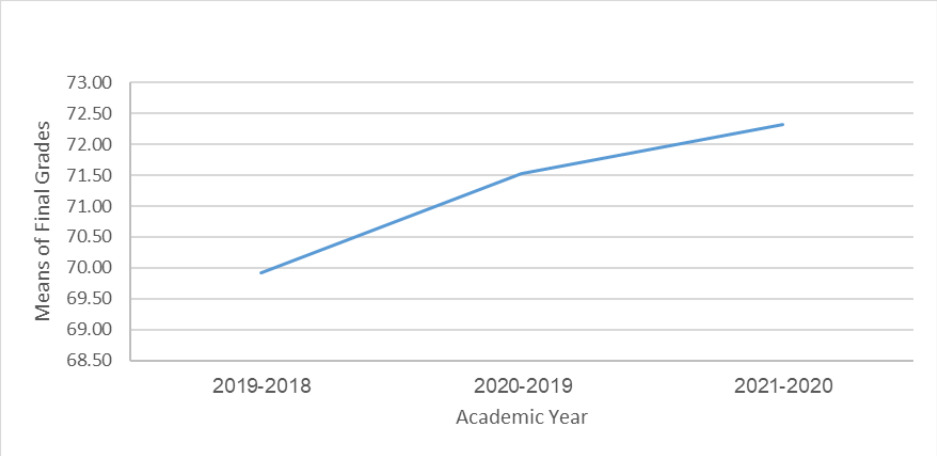

Figure 2: Means of students' final grades

4.3 Efficacy of SHLM

21 participants were interviewed to investigate the model's success from the students' perspective. Most of the participants felt that this model was successful, especially given the circumstances of the pandemic. Although most of them preferred to only have the usual traditional classes, they did believe that the overall experience was positive. The participants then provided an explanation for the model's success. Three common reasons bring this to light, namely the teacher's efforts, students feeling equally treated, and being in a safe environment. Participants' comments included:

The teacher's role was very effective… (A Science Track student)

There is equality when it comes to attending classes. All students get the same chance to come to face-to-face and online classes. (A Health Track student)

… I feel safe because there are not many students in the class. (An Engineering Track student)

4.4 Students' perception

Three factors contributed to the positive impact of the integrated learning environment on students' perception. To begin with, a learner should be able to search for information, exert effort, socialize with their colleagues, and establish a routine convenient for both learning modes. Participants' observations included:

…the other thing is searching for information on the internet, using different platforms and websites. (A Science Track student)

I believe that this experience was a success … Learners need to make efforts to learn by themselves. (An Engineering Track student)

*… focus on communicating with my face-to-face group and socializing with them. (*A Science Track student)

I feel establishing a convenient routine is what makes me succeed in this environment such as sleeping early, waking up early, the environment … I should not attend the class in bed ... it is not important to have my own bedroom but any other place where I feel it is suitable for attending online classes. (A Health Track student)

4.5 Students' needs

Regarding learners' needs, participants mentioned different needs to enable them to adapt and meet the basic requirements of this model, such as internet connection, electronic devices, linguistic ability, and a reliable platform. Participants mentioned:

A laptop, internet, a charger, books, handouts, and vocabs are important needs that the students require in order to be able to succeed in hybrid classes. (A Humanities Track student)

Language ability is very important … to focus and understand what the teacher says. (A Health Track student)

4.6 Face-to-face vs. online classes

Participants were asked how face-to-face classes were different from online classes. Most of the learners mentioned that they preferred to have face-to-face classes since they had a higher level of concentration than in the online sessions. Furthermore, when learners woke up early, they were better mentally prepared for

classes and assignments. Although students were only asked about the English course, they gave examples related to other subjects which served the purpose of the study. They also mentioned that there were differences between both modes of delivery. Participants' comments included:

I do not forget what I have learned face-to-face. (A Science Track student)

I pay attention to the teachers' body language and their eye contact. (A Humanities Track student)

Most learners believed that some of the downsides of online classes were unavoidable as they were in a family-controlled environment. Naturally, each student's circumstances varied according to their family background. For example, participants said:

I get distracted in online classes in the presence of people … chatting with them. Sometimes, siblings share bedrooms and attend classes simultaneously from the same room. (A Science Track student)

… sometimes, my parents ask me to do something during my class time. (An Engineering Track student)

4.7 Student satisfaction with synchronous hybrid classes

Most of the students expressed their satisfaction with this approach as a solution during the pandemic. They were pleased that they did not study remotely, as was the situation in many local universities, and had the chance to be physically present at the university and interact with their peers and teachers. Students mentioned:

I cannot deny that it is the best solution during the pandemic. (A Humanities Track student)

I am satisfied with this model and if they sort out the technical issues, it will be fine. (An Engineering Track student)

4.8 Access to materials

Accessing learning materials was very easy, all students agreed that course materials were available on Blackboard. For instance, two students mentioned:

Books and handouts were available, and we also sent each other materials. (A Science Track student)

I got most of my resources from Blackboard and WhatsApp groups. It was easy to access all materials. (A Health Track student)

4.9 Challenges

Learners encountered various social and technical challenges, but none of the learners indicated health issues related to COVID-19 or their fear of the pandemic. The comments below show the challenges mentioned by the participants as follows:

One challenge was following up on my classes, quizzes, and announcements. (An Engineering Track student)

Some of the challenges I faced were many things I could not understand in class. (A Humanities Track student)

Another challenge was stress … we have long days, many classes that are mixed between face-to-face and online … on the same day we have quizzes or online exams …time management was challenging. (A Science Track student)

Stress … (A Health Track student)

4.10 Receiving teachers' instruction, peer relatedness, class discussion, and SHLM's benefits

In terms of receiving the teachers' instructions, most of the students agreed that the instructions were provided clearly. Furthermore, instructions were delivered in two modes, verbally and written. Participants said:

With regard to assignment instructions, I could understand everything in both online and face-to-face classes. (An Engineering Track student)

My teachers … sent us written instructions via Blackboard just in case some students missed anything. (A Humanities Track student)

With regard to peer-relatedness, most learners felt they could communicate and make friends with both groups. However, learners were able to establish new friendships within face-to-face classes more than within the online ones. Yet, they almost all agreed that it was only a matter of time until they could make friends and communicate with the other group. Additionally, face-to-face learners considered their counterpart group (virtual learners) as competitors during class discussion. Most of the students agreed that social media applications, particularly WhatsApp and Telegram groups, enhanced their relatedness and assisted them in sharing documents, answering each other's inquiries, and explaining parts of their lessons. Participants reported:

> *WhatsApp and Telegram groups have helped me a lot in catching up with any points I missed in class.* (A Health Track student)
> *During class discussions, I participate more and debate issues with the other group…* (A Health Track student)
> *I feel like I really wanted to meet everyone who supported me and responded to my inquiries…* (A Humanities Track student)

Overall, learners felt they could participate in classroom discussion regardless of their learning mode. Nevertheless, they felt more comfortable and engaged in face-to-face group discussions. Participants reported:

> *It was excellent … the environment in the online classes sometimes affects your communication.* (A Science Track student)
> *It was more comfortable to discuss things with the face-to-face group. We get a piece of paper and get a pen, then we start jotting down ideas and talk together.* (A Humanities Track student)

Many students mentioned that there were many benefits to this model. Since this model adhered to precautionary measures and limited the number of students in class, it helped reduce the number of COVID-19 cases among students. Moreover, many students indicated that transportation issues could be easily coordinated when they missed the bus. Or, if there was no available transportation on a specific day, they could attend their classes online on that respective day. Also, when a positive case was reported, the educational process continued remotely following the pacing schedule. Most of the students expressed that they became more autonomous learners. Additionally, students found more time to study instead since they commute to the university only twice weekly. Some students mentioned they had overcome shyness when they spoke. Participants reported:

> *When we realize that a student has COVID-19, we take all the classes online until all students take the COVID-19 test, and if the results prove to be negative … we are already familiar with the procedures of taking online classes*. (A Science Track student)
> *I learned by self-studying and research … I look up information myself and from different sources.* (A Health Track student)

5. Discussion

5.1 Student satisfaction with synchronous hybrid classes

The application of SHLM was employed in response to emergency remote instruction. It has been applied for two consecutive years, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 and will probably continue. The quantitative results revealed that the learners were neutral with the integrated hybrid model. However, the findings from the qualitative data showed that the learners were satisfied with this model considering the circumstances of the pandemic. They liked it as it provided them with an equal opportunity to attend both face-to-face and online classes. As such, it created a sense of equality among the learners. These findings contradict Romero-Hall and Vicentini's (2017) study in which their participants reported a feeling of inequality in the distance learner group in a synchronous hybrid environment. Their participants felt this way as they did not have the opportunity to attend face-to-face classes or were not given the chance to do so.

Learners in the present study confirmed their awareness of the consequences of the pandemic, and that they felt safe as they were physically distanced and, at the same time, not deprived of communicating with their peers and teachers on campus. Feeling safe was the main reason that contributed to the model success from the learners' perspective. In line with this finding, Singh, Steele, and Singh (2021 p. 163) reported that the "usage of limited on-campus sessions will minimize in-person contact, which in turn would lead to better health outcomes in the long run."

SHLM offered flexibility and balanced variety to learners in terms of attending classes, time, and place when online classes were given. Although the learner timetable was fixed, it was flexible because they were attending classes two days face-to-face and two days online weekly. Gulnaz, Althomali, and Alzeers (2020) reported similar results that flexibility in time created a safe environment for learners. Most of the participants in this study felt at ease in face-to-face classes while taking precautionary measures with a limited number of students in class. Besides, they attended 50% of their classes online which enabled them to save the commuting time and getting ready for face-to-face classes everyday. Furthermore, they were able to independently carry out their e-learning activities at their own pace which was an integral part of the English language program.

Another factor that contributed to the success of this model, perhaps, was the six-day program of professional development prior to implementation and the continuous professional development for teachers. This perhaps played a role in creating a safe and successful environment for the learners as their teachers were trained in utilizing available digital resources and tailoring their teaching methods to suit virtual and traditional classes. This finding is compatible with Chertoff et al.'s (2020, p. 1322) findings which emphasize that "faculty development is key in ensuring competence and confidence" in a new learning environment. Moreover, Raes et al. (2020, p. 284) affirm "that it is important that the educational institution provides sufficient training and support for teachers, both pedagogically and technologically." So, when the course started, the teachers were fully prepared to perform their duties and know how to deal with potential challenges when they appeared, as well as help points being set up on all campuses to provide assistance whenever needed. During emergency remote instruction, Singh, Steele, and Singh (2021, p. 159) reinforced the importance of providing professional development to faculty members since it ensured their success and led "to a better learning environment for students." In short, the SHLM professional development sessions helped teachers diversify forms of hybrid teaching through combining face-to-face and online groups simultaneously and rotating the learning mode consecutively each other day. Therefore, both students and teachers were exposed to a wide variety of digital learning tools such as Padlet, Google Jamboard, and Nearpod which may have enhanced the students' e-learning experience.

5.2 Student motivation in SHLM classes

Motivation is key. The qualitative data revealed that this model has motivated learners to self-learn. Thus, the finding is supported by Al Rawashdeh et al. (2021) in which they explain that lack of self-motivation and lack of self-regulation reflect a tendency to not assign time for completing assignments in online courses. So, since this course combined virtual teaching, e-learning activities, and face-to-face classes, it has forced engagement in the course. Even if learners pay less attention during online classes, they will have to attend the next class face-to-face. Therefore, this constant switch between face-to-face and online modes allows the students to engage in their English courses and with their peers. One learner said:

I learned by self-studying and researching ... I look up information myself and from different sources.

In support of this finding, Ma et al. (2018) stated that flipped classrooms enhanced motivation, critical thinking, self-regulated learning, and problem-solving in environments that were not solely lecture-based. That is to say, integrating e-learning and lectures in a learning environment had a positive impact on the learner experience. This finding is consistent with Singh, Steele, and Singh (2021) who found that one of the strengths of emergency remote instruction was that it led to an increase in learner self-efficacy, self-awareness, and self-paced learning.

Additionally, Gulnaz, Althomali, and Alzeer (2020, p. 322) add that the combination of learning approaches "enhance learners' motivation and enthusiasm for learning as they get the opportunity to feel and work beyond the walls of school" and, "broadens learners' horizons and enables them to receive knowledge and information from diverse channels." Likewise, Watson et al. (2012) agree that combining online and in-person environments aid teachers by using the best of each mode to support learners.

5.3 Student and teacher attention during SHLM

Student and teacher attention is another area that has been investigated in this study. Most learners indicated that they were not ignored by their teachers and teachers gave attention to both groups (see Table 7, Items, 2, 3, 6 & 7). They were mostly positive regarding receiving feedback, receiving instructions, and being treated equally regardless of the teaching mode. A significant factor that may enhance student satisfaction during emergency remote instruction is the e-competency of the teacher. A teacher should be aware of the right platform and how to utilize it to deliver instruction, provide feedback, and treat students in both modes of SHLM equally. This finding is consistent with Singh, Steele, and Singh's (2021) study which also emphasized that motivating students is dependent on the teacher's digital competencies. It is worth mentioning that the majority of the interviewed students stated that they preferred to have only face-to-face sessions because they did not feel as attentive as in the online classes. For example, all the interviewed participants agreed that their attention span in the physical classroom was more evident than in an online setting. Similarly, Raes et al. (2020, p. 283) reported that it "gets more difficult to activate and engage the remote students to the same degree as the students attending face-to-face." The participants provided reasons such as "*I get distracted in online classes especially in the presence of people … chatting with them*." Another factor the students highlighted was not being able to see the teacher's body language which affected their understanding, leading to hesitation in participation in the online mode.

5.4 Technical issues during SHLM classes and challenges

One of the aims of the study was to reveal the challenges associated with SHLM. The quantitative data illustrated that internet connection was an evident issue to some learners, yet most students agreed that the use of digital platforms was not problematic. In opposition to this finding, Nae (2020) reported that learners from some areas in Japan suffered from limited access to the internet and the unavailability of sufficient devices. The interviews revealed other challenges besides technical concerns, such as learning style, personal characteristics, and linguistic ability. This comes in line with Hodges et al.'s (2020) view that learner needs during emergency remote instruction are naturally different from learner needs in an in-person learning environment. For example, participants reported that sometimes they were disconnected from the internet or did not pay the internet bill on time, meaning that they missed classes or part of them. Such a need would not be there in a face-to-face learning environment. Attending to this need, students made up for these classes by relying on their peers or meeting their teachers during their office hours to make up for what they had missed. However, if the teacher was disconnected from the online group, they had to make up for this class either online or face-to-face. In this case, the online group learners fell behind the pacing schedule, and the on-site learners were ahead of them. Another technical challenge was that microphones often did not work, wasting class time conveying the message to the teacher or using the chatbox. The use of technology has become essential since technology-driven education equips the learners with the latest learning skills. In short, these technical challenges can be overcome by learners.

The second challenge was related to participants' learning styles. Some students indicated that they were audiovisual learners who needed to see and listen to the teacher simultaneously. This kind of model affected their understanding and attention span, especially on female campuses where female teachers did not switch on their cameras when teaching the class remotely. However, the benefit of integrating two different learning modes did meet participants' different styles of learning. Furthermore, this model also gave the learner the opportunity to find a learning style that suited them and enhance their self-learning. This result is consistent with Gulnaz, Althomali, and Alzeer's (2020, p. 322) study, which affirms that the "physical learning environment and technology-driven instructional models ideally trigger learners' insight of the course content, meet the needs of varied learning styles and ultimately help accomplish desired learning outcomes."

The third challenge was related to personal traits such as shyness which affected learner participation. For example, one shy student stated that the online mode of teaching has made her feel embarrassed to speak in English and hesitant to speak as this made her feel nervous and uncomfortable. Also, learners' attitudes towards feedback was not always positive, and not all students felt comfortable towards their mistakes being corrected.

Finally, linguistic ability was the most critical obstacle that made it difficult to adapt to this model. To clarify this point, some students from the beginner and intermediate levels thought that a lack of a good command of English language hindered their understanding, especially in online classes. This finding was consistent with Toor's research (2005, p. 36) which touched upon the difficulty "to ask questions and queries through the internet using the English language."

5.5 Receiving teachers' instruction, peer relatedness, class discussion, and SHLM's benefits

According to Evans, Kensington-Miller, and Novak (2021, p. 163), the new typical model of instruction in the 21st century is "the integration of face-to-face and online instruction," which, "is now widely adopted … in course delivery across tertiary institutions." In the present study, most of the students expressed their satisfaction with the instruction delivered by their teachers for classroom discussion and assignment instructions. From the learners' perspective, as indicated in the interviews, participants praised their teachers for giving constant instructions to both groups. Additionally, teachers sent them written guidelines via Blackboard for solidifying the instructions. Moreover, they also added that they communicated with one another on technology-based communication channels such as WhatsApp and Telegram groups to further their understanding and to facilitate their daily assignments. Singh, Steele, and Singh (2021) and Arslan (2021) reinforce that a sense of belonging and connectedness are profoundly important for learner satisfaction during remote emergency instruction. Participants in this study reported that they felt connected to their peers during emergency remote instruction. This finding comes in lines with Arslan's (2021) view that if students are unable to feel socially connected, this feeling may lead to a sense of isolation and disconnectedness from their peers and teachers. Nevertheless, participants did raise one concern regarding instruction and lecture delivery: their wish to have the lectures recorded. However, recording lectures can reduce student attention as the recordings are accessible anytime.

In a study conducted by Evan, Kensington-Miller and Novak (2021, p. 168), it was discovered that "attendance at lectures dropped significantly, and in many cases below 30%" due to the mandatory policy of recording lectures.

It seems that students are comfortable in establishing discussion with their peers either from the face-to-face group or online groups. Therefore, it is easier to initiate conversation and engage in classroom activities with peers from the same learning environment (see 4.10).

Furthermore, this model was beneficial for learners as it promoted learner autonomy, reduced the commuting time, and most importantly, reduced COVID-19 cases during the pandemic. This finding corroborates Toquero's (2020, p. 2) view on "strengthening the educational planning and health measures in the university which provides the students and the rest of the stakeholders with an opportunity to continue learning while preventing the spread of the virus." In short, utilizing digital platforms during remote emergency instruction creates a safe and flexible learning environment (Akcil and Bastas, 2020), and the ultimate goal is to maintain safety. As illustrated in Figure 2, the mean score of learners' grades was slightly higher than the previous years. Learner success might be attributed to the following reasons:

- Students seemed to have gained independent study skills and become more self-reliant. This might be the case because students were required to independently complete e-learning activities on Oxford iQ online platform such as listening comprehension skills, reading comprehension skills, writing assignments on different genres, and grammatical and vocabulary quizzes. Some of the activities were graded, and others were available as scaffolding. Moreover, some of these activities were gamified which might have increased their engagement and motivation.
- Since students attend 50% of classes from home and 50% face-to-face, they gained extra time by reducing the commuting time from home to campus and vice versa. Student might have utilized this time for studying.

In light of the present data, results and findings, learner success may be related to the aforementioned advantages of SHLM application. However, further studies are needed to examine teachers' experience in the approach and the efficacy of the approach in teaching the four English language skills.

6. Conclusion

The evidence from this study suggests that this novel approach of teaching is a workable solution during the COVID-19 pandemic and similar circumstances. Furthermore, most of the learners were overall satisfied with this model. They voiced that the main factors contributing to the success of this model were: the sense of equality among learners, feeling safe, engagement with their peers, and the suitability of the model for different learning styles as it integrated virtual and face-to-face classes simultaneously. In particular, audiovisual learners benefitted from this learning model.

In summary, integrating face-to-face and synchronous online classes is an effective method to transfer knowledge and facilitate learning environment without relying solely on traditional methods. It is worth mentioning that one of the remarkable results which has emerged from the data is that learners have improved their self-learning skills and over time have become more autonomous. Furthermore, using various means of communication has increased discussion between peers, teachers, and learners by means of applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram, office hours, and emails whenever they required further support. Educational institutions with similar infrastructure as of the present study may benefit from the application of this emergency remote instruction mode. Furthermore, this mode may solve the problem of inequality for students who are relying on a single learning environment mode. During emergency remote instruction, learning material should not be sacrificed as was the case in the Malaysian school (Chuad and Mohamad, 2020). Solutions are available, and the application of SHLM can be tailored to the specific needs of an institution.

Most importantly, the semi-structured interviews revealed that the lower proficiency learners raised concerns related to their language ability rather than encountering technical issues, which consequently hindered their comprehension and learning. In other words, the SHLM model was a convenient solution considering the current circumstances caused by COVID-19; however, it should be subject to modifications based on learner proficiency levels. Further research is needed to examine learner satisfaction in acquiring the four skills of the English language separately. These investigations would shed more light on the pedagogy, technology, and training

support needed for this novel approach. Future studies may also look at implementing this approach in secondary level education and gauging young learners' satisfaction with the approach. Besides, future studies may look at teacher satisfaction with SHLM as this study was limited to the students' perspective.

Conflicts of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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