

Hybrid Learning Models in Legal Education: A Qualitative Evaluation of Student Performance, Engagement, and Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The post-pandemic development of legal education has strengthened the need to evaluate hybrid learning models that combine online flexibility with face-to-face legal reasoning, discussion, and advocacy training. This article presents a concise qualitative evaluation of hybrid learning in Malaysian legal education, focusing on student performance, engagement, and satisfaction. It argues that hybrid learning is most effective when asynchronous foundational learning is intentionally linked with synchronous interactive activities, rather than when online and physical components are combined passively. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative and cross-sectional design based on student and faculty feedback from Malaysian law schools, supported by selected literature on blended learning, online learning, flipped classrooms, and research design. The findings indicate that a well-designed hybrid model may support student preparation, active participation, and professional readiness; however, the study does not claim causal or long-term effects because of its qualitative and cross-sectional scope. Future research should therefore incorporate mixed-method, longitudinal, and comparative designs to strengthen generalisability and measure sustained impact on academic performance and legal skills.

Keywords: Hybrid Learning, Blended Learning, Legal Education, Flipped Classroom, Student Engagement, Qualitative Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

The ever-growing educational context in the world today is marked by a shift towards blended and hybrid learning environments, where integration of digital technology with traditional face-to-face instructional methods and strategies has become a strategic imperative. Such a shift has offered stronger possibilities while posing serious pedagogical demands in the context of legal education. Not only are law students supposed to acquire a profound knowledge of the substantive law, but also the critical, analytical, and advocacy skills required of them in professional practice. Traditionally, these skills have been developed in the strict, highly interactive atmosphere of the real classroom. Nonetheless, overreliance on pure, face-to-face teaching proved a key weakness amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and the legal education sector is fully exposed to disruptions on a scale it has not previously had to withstand. This addiction puts at risk the academic career of students and the further evolution of future lawyers.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the limits of both fully physical and fully online delivery. Purely face-to-face teaching is vulnerable to institutional disruption, whereas emergency online teaching may reduce interaction, student engagement, and practical legal training if it is not carefully designed. Blended learning literature

therefore emphasises the thoughtful integration of online and classroom learning experiences rather than the simple transfer of lecture materials to a digital platform (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Means et al., 2010).

In Malaysian legal education, hybrid learning is relevant because undergraduate law students are required to study complex statutory provisions, case law, legal reasoning, and professional skills within a structured academic environment. This article examines how a strategic hybrid model may support students' performance, engagement, and satisfaction. The assessment draws on qualitative feedback systems to align the views of instructors and students and to implement pedagogical mitigation strategies, including the flipped classroom approach. In addition, the model introduces the concept of a dedicated instructional designer to be integrated into the hybrid mix to make the two pedagogical concepts more efficient and to explore ways to integrate active learning techniques into the hybrid mix. This study will help protect law students from sub-optimal learning experiences, support sustainability in the legal academic pipeline, and contribute to the overall aim of national educational excellence.

METHODOLOGY

This article uses a descriptive qualitative and cross-sectional design. The qualitative data were drawn from reflective feedback by undergraduate law students and law lecturers in Malaysian law schools. The feedback was examined to identify recurring views on three areas: student performance, student engagement, and student satisfaction. The study also reviews selected literature on blended learning, flipped classrooms, online learning, and qualitative research design to support the analysis.

The sampling approach was contextual and purposive because the article focuses on Malaysian legal education. The qualitative comments were organised through thematic coding, beginning with open identification of repeated ideas and followed by grouping into broader themes such as flexibility, synchronous interaction, preparation for tutorials, advocacy practice, and institutional support. Student and lecturer perspectives were compared to improve interpretive credibility. This clarification is added to strengthen methodological transparency without overstating the scale of the study.

As a cross-sectional qualitative study, the article captures perceptions at one point in time. It therefore cannot establish a causal relationship between hybrid learning and academic performance, nor can it confirm long-term effects on advocacy skills or professional readiness. These limitations are acknowledged because cross-sectional and qualitative designs are useful for contextual understanding, but they require caution when making broad claims (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The Pedagogy of Hybrid Learning in Legal Education

The Cognitive Demands of Legal Study

Legal education requires students to process dense reading materials, interpret statutes, distinguish cases, identify legal issues, and apply legal principles to factual problems. This cognitive demand makes the design of learning activities important. If online and classroom components are poorly connected, students may experience fragmented learning. If they are properly sequenced, students can prepare basic legal knowledge asynchronously and use synchronous time for higher-order discussion and application.

The flipped classroom approach is particularly useful in this context. In a flipped legal classroom, students engage with foundational materials before class, while class time is reserved for problem-solving, Socratic questioning, case analysis, mooting, negotiation, or drafting. Legal education literature has recognised that blended and flipped models can support active learning when they are intentionally planned rather than treated as a technological add-on (Slomanson, 2014).

Performance Metrics in Malaysian Law Schools

To address the educational vulnerability of Malaysian law students in hybrid models, the cultivation and measurement of performance need to be analysed. The Malaysian educational sector is an important element of

the national development, key to supplying professional capital. Nevertheless, a shift in the sector towards hybrid structures poses a structural problem unless it is systematically introduced. Analyses of pedagogical approaches to legal education in Malaysia have repeatedly shown that the majority of effective performance-enhancing activities are formative and operation-based, mainly in the form of tutorials and moots.

Evidence shows that active application constitutes a large percentage of students' understanding and long-term memory. Since these application exercises represent a disproportionately large portion of the learning process, the academic effectiveness of a law student is very sensitive to changes in their quality. The switch to hybrid learning implies that students' performance is determined by the extent to which asynchronous material helps them realise the performance associated with the synchronous application of knowledge acquired through asynchronous learning, rather than by the time spent in the classroom.

The problem of passive integration

A major weakness in hybrid learning occurs when institutions merely upload lecture slides or recorded lectures while continuing the same conventional teaching pattern. This passive integration does not fully use the potential of hybrid learning. Students may become disengaged if online tasks are not connected to synchronous discussions, assessments, or skills-based exercises.

For this reason, hybrid legal education should be designed around pedagogical purpose. Asynchronous activities should prepare students for live interaction, while synchronous sessions should test understanding and develop professional skills. This structure reflects the broader view that blended learning can improve meaningful learning when online and face-to-face components are deliberately integrated (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

The Impact of Digital Isolation

The worldwide transition to hybrid learning experiences is characterised by high pedagogical volatility due to the complex interaction of factors. These comprise faculty preparedness across various institutions, changes in student study habits, digital literacy, changes in institutional support, and changes in assessment strategies.

For law undergraduate students in the Malaysian population, this volatility would translate into erratic, and in many instances, drastic changes in their academic performance. Qualitative data will show a positive linear relationship between purposeful hybrid design and enhanced student achievement. With hybrid models designed as a flipped classroom, in which the foundational knowledge is acquired asynchronously and the time devoted to the high-level application is allocated synchronously, students, who normally act as active participants in the application stage, can immediately engage with complex legal issues.

The capacity to absorb such pedagogical changes will yield considerable cognitive and analytical benefits. Although well-motivated students may counteract ineffective design by engaging in self-study, most students cannot afford to do so. A long-term experience of poorly integrated hybrid learning can easily erode the performance of undergraduate students, which may translate to shallow understanding, frustration in academics and ultimately, the quality of the legal graduates may decline. This structural weakness underscores the urgency of finding pedagogical models that deliberately leverage the advantages of both online and face-to-face modalities.

The Engagement Barrier in Hybrid Environments

Limitations of Passive Integration

The shift toward sustainable and resilient hybrid law education must be prepared to invest heavily in pedagogy. Teachers should be trained to upgrade instructional design (e.g., transitioning from recording traditional lectures to creating active asynchronous modules), to use modern educational technologies aligned with active learning, and to address logistical challenges of blended teaching. Nevertheless, getting this required pedagogical training is such an uphill challenge for law educators in Malaysia.

Passive integration, which can often involve merely uploading lecture slides to a learning management system whilst keeping traditional in-person lectures, is not making the most of the possibilities of hybrid learning. The over-representation of information, the so-called cognitive disconnect students experience, the absence of integration between online and offline activities, etc., all lead to a significant decline in what educational psychologists call active engagement. Without such active interactions, students will be less likely to complete asynchronous preparation, engage meaningfully in synchronous sessions, and enjoy the strong peer interactions that can only be achieved through active engagement.

Performance, Engagement, and Satisfaction

Student performance

The qualitative feedback suggests that students perform better when asynchronous materials are concise, structured, and directly connected to tutorial or seminar activities. For example, students may study recorded mini-lectures, guided readings, or online quizzes before class, and then use synchronous sessions to analyse cases, apply statutes, and defend legal arguments. This design supports learning because online preparation becomes a foundation for active legal reasoning rather than a replacement for classroom interaction.

Student engagement

Engagement improves when students understand why online preparation is necessary and how it will be used during synchronous learning. Students are more likely to complete asynchronous tasks when those tasks are clearly linked to moots, problem-based learning, peer discussion, drafting exercises, or formative assessment. The quality of lecturer presence and facilitation remains central because hybrid learning does not reduce the importance of teaching; instead, it changes how teaching is structured.

Student satisfaction

Student satisfaction is linked to flexibility, autonomy, and the perceived usefulness of synchronous sessions. Students value the opportunity to review materials at their own pace, especially when dealing with complex legal doctrine. At the same time, they continue to value live interaction because it allows them to test arguments, receive immediate feedback, and develop confidence in professional communication.

Evaluation focus	Hybrid design feature	Observed qualitative indicator
Performance	Pre-class readings, short videos, and formative quizzes	Students enter tutorials with stronger preparation for case analysis.
Engagement	Live problem-solving, mooting, discussion, and peer drafting	Students participate more actively when online tasks are linked to class activities.
Satisfaction	Flexible pacing combined with lecturer feedback	Students value autonomy but still need structured interaction and guidance.

Strategic Hybrid Integration Framework

Based on the qualitative evaluation, this article proposes a Strategic Hybrid Integration Framework consisting of three connected elements. The first element is asynchronous foundation, where students acquire basic legal knowledge through structured readings, short recorded explanations, and formative quizzes. The second element is synchronous application, where students apply the knowledge through discussion, case analysis, drafting, negotiation, or advocacy practice. The third element is pedagogical bridging, where lecturers explicitly connect pre-class preparation with in-class tasks and assessment.

This framework responds to the need for a balanced model of legal education. It does not suggest replacing face-to-face legal pedagogy, nor does it reject online learning. Instead, it treats hybrid learning as an intentional instructional design that combines flexibility with active professional formation. Such a design is consistent with evidence that blended learning can be effective when online and classroom elements are coordinated around meaningful learning outcomes (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Means et al., 2010).

Tools for Enhancing Application and Collaboration

The efficient implementation of the strategic hybrid model presupposes the integration of specialised active learning strategies during synchronous lessons. Problem-Based Learning (PBL) scenarios enable students to collaboratively study complex real-world legal disputes and foster not only analytical skills but also teamwork. Clinical simulations and role-playing allow students to train client interviewing and advocacy in a safe setting.

Moreover, the rigorous drafting exercises of legal practice, simulated through peer-review and collaborative drafting, require the student to recreate them, including having their legal documents carefully scrutinised and critiquing the work of their peer-reviewers. In addition, the rigorous drafting exercises of legal practice, simulated by peer-review and collaborative drafting exercises, require the student to recreate the rigorous drafting exercises of legal practice, including having their legal documents carefully scrutinised and responding to the work of their peer-reviewers.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Hybrid learning can contribute positively to legal education when it is intentionally designed, carefully facilitated, and supported by appropriate institutional infrastructure. The qualitative analysis indicates that students may benefit from the flexibility of asynchronous learning while still requiring high-quality synchronous interaction for legal reasoning, advocacy, and professional communication.

For Malaysian law schools, the main implication is that hybrid learning should be treated as a pedagogical model rather than a temporary technological solution. Institutions should invest in lecturer training, instructional design support, reliable digital infrastructure, and quality assurance mechanisms. Within the limits of this qualitative cross-sectional article, the proposed framework offers a concise and practical approach for improving student performance, engagement, and satisfaction in post-pandemic legal education.

Future research should adopt mixed-method or longitudinal approaches. A mixed-method study could combine interviews and focus groups with performance indicators such as assessment results, attendance, online participation analytics, and advocacy-rubric scores. A longitudinal study could examine whether hybrid learning produces sustained improvements over several semesters. Comparative research across countries or legal systems would also improve the broader applicability of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

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