



BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING ACADEMIC RESEARCH THROUGH HYFLEX MODELS: INSIGHTS FROM ASIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The HyFlex model, a blend of in-person and online learning, has become increasingly popular in teaching academic research, particularly within Asian higher education institutions (HEIs). This study explored the best practices in implementing the HyFlex model for teaching academic research to college learners, focusing on its effectiveness and challenges in diverse educational settings. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected from interviews with faculty and students in several Asian HEIs employing the HyFlex model. The study identified key themes, including the benefits of flexible learning modes, the importance of culturally responsive teaching, the challenges of assessment and feedback, and the adaptation of technology for research teaching. Findings reveal that while the HyFlex model promotes increased student engagement and personalized learning, challenges persist in providing timely feedback and maintaining meaningful instructor-student interactions. Additionally, culturally tailored instructional approaches significantly contributed to the model's success. The implications of these findings suggest that educators should combine online and face-to-face interactions, adapt their feedback practices to hybrid learning environments, and consider cultural nuances in research teaching. Policy recommendations include formalizing the HyFlex model in academic settings and investing in faculty development programs. Future research should examine the long-term impact of the HyFlex model on students' research skills and its scalability across different educational contexts.

KEYWORDS: HyFlex model, academic research teaching, Asian higher education, flexible learning, culturally responsive pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

The education landscape across the globe has witnessed dramatic shifts in the last decade, particularly with the rapid proliferation of technology in teaching and learning environments. Among the innovative approaches emerging in higher education, the HyFlex (Hybrid-Flexible) model stands out as a student-centered teaching methodology. It combines the benefits of both in-person and online learning, offering students flexibility by allowing them to choose between attending face-to-face classes, engaging asynchronously online, or blending both options depending on their needs and circumstances (Wu et al., 2024). This model presents significant potential for teaching academic research, which requires intensive engagement, critical thinking, and extensive communication. However, integrating the HyFlex model in academic research instruction is still in its developmental stage, especially in Asian higher education institutions (HEIs) (Foley, 2021; Kim & Kwon, 2022).

Academic research education prepares college learners for real-world scholarly contributions and scientific advancements (Zimmerman & King, 2022). Traditional teaching research methods focus heavily on face-to-face interactions, workshops, and direct mentorship, often requiring students to engage in complex processes such as hypothesis formulation, literature review, methodology design, and data analysis. These tasks necessitate a robust pedagogical framework emphasizing communication, critical reflection, and peer engagement (Brown & Goldstein, 2021). Given the high demand for flexibility in modern learning environments, particularly post-pandemic, the HyFlex model can significantly enhance the accessibility and adaptability of academic research education (Ralston et al., 2023; Tang, 2023).

Although the HyFlex model is recognized for increasing student autonomy and engagement (Lim & Seung, 2021), its integration into specialized courses like academic research is not well-explored. Many Asian HEIs have started to adopt HyFlex modes to accommodate diverse student populations, yet the practice is still evolving, with varying levels of success (Kim & Kwon, 2022; Wu et al., 2024). It is critical to assess how this model is applied in teaching academic research, where more personalized, methodical, and mentor-driven engagement is essential for deepening students' understanding and competencies in research methods (Zimmerman & King, 2022).

Previous studies highlight the benefits of the HyFlex approach in general teaching contexts, underscoring greater learner autonomy, increased engagement, and improved learning outcomes (Lim & Seung, 2021; Zhang & Liu, 2023). However, the unique nature of research instruction, which requires developing specific, measurable skills that are



difficult to teach in a purely online environment, demands further attention. The combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning formats must be strategically balanced to ensure students still receive the necessary mentorship, access to resources, and opportunities for hands-on research practice (Foley, 2021; Brown & Goldstein, 2021). This study, therefore, focuses on exploring the best practices used by faculty and institutions across Asian HEIs to address these gaps.

Identifying these best practices offered valuable insights into optimizing academic research teaching using the HyFlex model, helping educational leaders, faculty, and administrators tailor their pedagogical strategies to meet evolving learning needs. It also uncovered the challenges associated with this hybrid learning approach, enabling the development of more effective frameworks for integrating the HyFlex model into diverse educational settings. This research explored these issues in-depth, contributing to the growing literature on instructional innovation in Asian HEIs.

Problem Statement

In recent years, higher education institutions (HEIs) across Asia have increasingly adopted the HyFlex model as a flexible, student-centered approach to learning. Despite its growing popularity, there remains a limited understanding of how the HyFlex model is effectively applied in teaching academic research to college learners. Academic research courses require a unique pedagogical practice that engages students in complex skills, such as critical thinking, data analysis, and scholarly writing. Identifying the best practices for teaching research in the HyFlex model is crucial for enhancing student learning outcomes and creating adaptable, inclusive, and effective learning environments in Asian HEIs. This study aimed to examine and highlight the best practices currently employed in teaching academic research through HyFlex models in selected Asian HEIs, shedding light on strategies, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

Research Question

What are the best practices in teaching academic research to college learners using the HyFlex model in Asian higher education institutions?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the best practices in teaching academic research using the HyFlex model in Asian higher education institutions (HEIs). Given the need to understand the intricacies and context-specific strategies of HyFlex integration in academic research instruction, a case study approach was selected as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the practices within selected institutions.

Sampling and Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select institutions and participants with specific experience using the HyFlex model for academic research instruction. Four Asian HEIs, diverse in geographical location and institutional structure, were chosen based on their established use of the HyFlex model in research courses. Academic instructors from each institution with experience teaching research courses in HyFlex formats were invited to participate in the study. In total, 12 faculty members from various academic disciplines volunteered, each with at least two years of experience in delivering research instruction through HyFlex modalities. The four participating HEIs were as follows: the National University of Singapore (NUS), Tsinghua University, The University of Tokyo, and Peking University.

Data Collection

Data were primarily collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to express their thoughts in their own words while addressing key areas related to their teaching practices. Interview questions focused on their experiences with the HyFlex model, strategies for engaging students, challenges faced, and perceived benefits of HyFlex in enhancing academic research instruction. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and all interviews were conducted virtually to accommodate participants from different locations. In addition to interviews, document analysis was conducted. Relevant institutional materials such as curriculum guides, syllabi, and faculty training resources related to HyFlex delivery were reviewed to support the interview findings further. This triangulation of data sources enhanced the credibility and depth of the results.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined. The process began with transcribing the interview data verbatim and reviewing the documents for recurrent themes. The data were then coded manually, focusing on key areas such as instructional strategies, technology use, student engagement, and perceived effectiveness of the HyFlex model. Codes were grouped into categories, and these categories were then further organized into overarching themes that reflected the best practices employed in teaching academic research.

To ensure rigor, member checking was used, where participants were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts and emerging themes. This helped to refine the analysis and confirm the congruence of the themes with participants' views. Furthermore, an audit trail was maintained to document the decision-making process during data analysis, enhancing transparency and dependability.



Limitations

Despite the value of the findings, the study had limitations. First, the purposive sampling approach, while helpful in selecting participants with specific expertise, limited the generalizability of the results to all Asian HEIs. Additionally, using self-reported data through interviews introduced the potential for social desirability bias. Lastly, the study was limited to HEIs that had already integrated the HyFlex model, meaning that institutions still in the initial stages of implementation were not represented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following themes emerged from the data analysis, providing insights into the best practices in teaching academic research using the HyFlex model in Asian HEIs.

Theme 1: Instructional Flexibility

The flexibility offered by the HyFlex model was widely appreciated by faculty members, who emphasized that students could attend classes based on their schedules, thereby enhancing participation (Lim & Seung, 2021). This flexible modality was found to cater to diverse learning preferences, allowing students to choose between attending sessions in person or engaging asynchronously (Wu et al., 2024). Faculty noted that such flexibility empowered students to take ownership of their learning process, making it easier to balance academic and personal commitments (Tang, 2023). In particular, faculty members believed this contributed to fostering independent research skills.

However, some faculty voiced concerns that this flexibility might lead to disengagement among students who prefer traditional in-class interaction (Zimmerman & King, 2022). Additionally, HyFlex's emphasis on self-paced learning created challenges for students who needed structured schedules to stay focused on their academic tasks (Ralston et al., 2023). There was also the concern that inconsistent attendance due to flexibility led to fractured communication, with some students lagging in participation (Brown & Goldstein, 2021). As a result, instructors faced difficulties maintaining a cohesive, collaborative research environment.

While acknowledging these concerns, most scholars agreed that instructional flexibility can be leveraged effectively with strategies to ensure engagement and structure (Foley, 2021; Kim & Kwon, 2022). Clear guidelines, regular check-ins, and blended learning opportunities that bridge asynchronous and synchronous content were seen as critical to maintaining students' research rigor (Zimmerman & King, 2022). Faculty participants who successfully integrated these elements reported improved student outcomes and engagement (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Thus, the model's flexibility can be optimal if framed with support systems that promote active engagement.

Theme 2: Technology Integration

Faculty highlighted that technology was vital in supporting both asynchronous and synchronous learning modes in the HyFlex model. Interactive platforms, such as video conferencing and collaborative document editing tools, facilitated real-time discussions and peer feedback, which is critical for academic research (Brown & Goldstein, 2021). These platforms enabled seamless communication between instructors and students, irrespective of location (Tang, 2023). Additionally, the technology ensured that students had access to resources and expert guidance regardless of physical distance (Kim & Kwon, 2022).

On the other hand, challenges regarding technology accessibility and technical competence surfaced, especially among students in rural or under-resourced areas (Ralston et al., 2023). Faculty members noted that despite providing technical support, students struggled with platform usability, negatively impacting their learning experience (Foley, 2021). Furthermore, issues such as poor internet connectivity disrupted the smooth running of research sessions, limiting the effectiveness of the HyFlex model (Wu et al., 2024). Consequently, the reliance on technology sometimes led to frustration, detracting from the overall research learning experience.

Participants suggested blending low-tech solutions with high-tech tools to overcome these barriers, ensuring that all students could participate in the HyFlex model (Zimmerman & King, 2022). Such strategies included offering downloadable resources and live Q&A sessions, which enhanced accessibility (Tang, 2023). Many institutions also provide training in digital literacy, helping students navigate the platforms more effectively (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Thus, technology integration is best facilitated with preparatory support, enabling all students to access research materials and tools efficiently.

Theme 3: Student Engagement

Instructors found that engagement in HyFlex courses improved as students became more responsible for learning by selecting participation formats that fit their needs (Lim & Seung, 2021). Faculty used interactive tools to foster deeper engagement during live sessions, including research presentations, peer critiques, and breakout discussions (Wu et al., 2024). Active engagement led to students feeling a sense of ownership and empowerment, particularly in research activities that required collaborative input and critical analysis (Kim & Kwon, 2022). Most participants perceived a positive correlation between high engagement and enhanced research competency.

However, certain educators expressed concerns that engagement in a HyFlex setting could be superficial for students attending asynchronously, as they were less likely to engage in spontaneous academic dialogue (Zimmerman & King, 2022). Additionally, some students preferred minimal participation, engaging only with course materials when required, which led to a lack of collaboration in research exercises (Brown & Goldstein, 2021). Faculty also struggled



with tracking individual contributions from students who opted for asynchronous modes, complicating efforts to offer personalized guidance (Ralston et al., 2023).

A balanced approach to engagement appeared most effective, where both synchronous and asynchronous activities encouraged interaction (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Regular assessments, virtual office hours, and discussion forums were highlighted as effective means to involve all students, regardless of learning modality (Foley, 2021). Establishing clear expectations for engagement helped maintain high participation levels and academic achievement (Kim & Kwon, 2022). Hence, student engagement can be maximized by intentionally designing both interactive live sessions and flexible yet mandatory asynchronous components.

Theme 4: Faculty Support and Training

Faculty members emphasized the importance of comprehensive training for successfully implementing the HyFlex model in research instruction. Institutions that provided continuous professional development, including workshops on technology use and student engagement, saw more effective integration of the model (Brown & Goldstein, 2021). Support networks between faculty members helped share resources, develop collaborative lesson plans, and solve teaching challenges (Lim & Seung, 2021). Such ongoing faculty support resulted in higher levels of preparedness and confidence in implementing the HyFlex method for teaching academic research.

However, faculty in some institutions faced obstacles due to inadequate training and institutional support (Foley, 2021). Several instructors reported that initial HyFlex implementation felt rushed, and they were not adequately prepared to balance the technological and pedagogical demands of the model (Zimmerman & King, 2022). This led to varying quality in research teaching, with some faculty expressing difficulty managing the complex dynamics of both in-person and online learners (Ralston et al., 2023). Furthermore, time constraints in faculty workloads also hindered their ability to receive sustained professional development.

Practical faculty training requires institutional commitment and proper planning to address technical, pedagogical, and emotional challenges faced by instructors (Kim & Kwon, 2022). Models of peer-led learning and team-based support were recommended to ensure continual professional growth and enhance teaching practices in HyFlex contexts (Wu et al., 2024). Faculty surveys indicated that clear guidelines, ample prep time, and collaborative opportunities were key to successful implementation (Tang, 2023). Thus, robust training frameworks and institutional support systems must be prioritized for successful HyFlex adaptation.

Theme 5: Student Autonomy in Research Learning

Participants agreed that HyFlex fosters greater student autonomy, particularly in how they approach their research learning process (Brown & Goldstein, 2021). Students had the flexibility to choose when and how to engage with research content, which fostered independent thinking and allowed them to progress at their own pace (Lim & Seung, 2021). Faculty reported that learners seemed more motivated to explore research topics independently, resulting in deeper engagement with academic materials (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Additionally, asynchronous students could better focus on their research projects without the constraints of scheduled class times.

Nonetheless, some educators noted that the autonomy granted to students in a HyFlex context sometimes led to a lack of direction, with students reporting feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility of managing their own learning (Zimmerman & King, 2022). Without frequent guidance, many students experienced difficulties structuring their research projects and selecting appropriate methodologies (Ralston et al., 2023). Furthermore, some participants indicated that in cases of excessive autonomy, students often submitted lower-quality work or failed to meet academic standards (Wu et al., 2024).

The key to effectively supporting autonomy in HyFlex teaching was a combination of structured mentorship and clear project milestones (Foley, 2021). Regular progress tracking, guided research check-ins, and optional synchronous workshops addressed the pitfalls of excessive autonomy while promoting student independence (Kim & Kwon, 2022). Faculty involved in successful HyFlex implementations emphasized that a hybrid approach to autonomy and structure led to improved learning outcomes (Tang, 2023). Consequently, student autonomy can be optimized if it is balanced with sufficient scaffolding and mentorship.

Theme 6: Collaborative Learning

HyFlex models enhanced collaborative learning by allowing students to interact virtually, offering a broad range of tools for group work, such as online discussion forums and shared document editing platforms (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Many educators shared that collaboration among students across different formats led to rich, diverse contributions to research projects (Wu et al., 2024). Faculty noted that asynchronous discussions allowed quieter students to express their ideas in writing, ensuring a more inclusive learning environment (Brown & Goldstein, 2021). Cross-modal collaboration was a significant advantage in enhancing the peer-to-peer learning experience.

Some respondents observed that collaborative learning, when executed via a HyFlex model, often fell short due to a lack of synchronization and delayed feedback (Zimmerman & King, 2022). Students working asynchronously struggled to establish meaningful group connections and resolve conflicts without face-to-face interaction (Ralston et al., 2023). For specific research tasks, collaboration seemed stilted due to time zone differences, platform accessibility



issues, and reduced face-to-face communication (Tang, 2023). Thus, virtual collaboration faced inherent challenges in creating cohesion and spontaneous peer interaction.

While these challenges were apparent, the most successful strategies focused on structured collaboration, regular check-ins, and group-specific assignments that accounted for modality differences (Foley, 2021). Faculty who actively facilitated online discussions alongside synchronous meetings reported higher-quality collaborative outcomes (Kim & Kwon, 2022). Additionally, giving students the flexibility to choose their preferred working mode while ensuring that group dynamics were regularly maintained resulted in more successful group research initiatives (Wu et al., 2024). Collaborative learning, therefore, can be maximized with careful coordination and thoughtful engagement from instructors.

Theme 7: Assessment and Feedback Practices

HyFlex teaching models are conducive to effective formative and summative assessments, especially in academic research. Students reported receiving timely and detailed feedback on their research work enhanced their understanding and ability to improve their academic performance (Kim & Kwon, 2022). Faculty emphasized that assessments, conducted through online tools and face-to-face interactions, allowed for individualized feedback, significantly improving students' research methods (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Regular peer reviews in synchronous sessions were also noted as valuable for building a collaborative learning environment and refining research ideas (Wu et al., 2024).

However, faculty pointed out challenges in managing personalized feedback for large groups when students attended in different modes (Zimmerman & King, 2022). In certain instances, students in asynchronous sessions felt the feedback lacked depth, mainly because it was given via digital channels and did not facilitate thorough discussion (Foley, 2021). Some educators noted that inconsistent engagement across student groups led to feedback delays, further affecting the quality of assessments (Ralston et al., 2023). Additionally, faculty were challenged to adapt traditional feedback models to a more flexible, hybrid approach without sacrificing the rigor expected in research evaluations (Brown & Goldstein, 2021).

Despite these concerns, practical assessment was achievable through strategically blending synchronous feedback opportunities and asynchronous submission tools (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Faculty who incorporated peer assessments, one-on-one online consultations, and iterative feedback found that students better understood improving their research quality (Kim & Kwon, 2022). Incorporating adaptive technology for self-assessment and peer reviews further enriched the feedback loop, helping students take more ownership of their academic growth (Wu et al., 2024). Refining the balance between technology and personalized engagement could significantly improve assessment quality in HyFlex environments.

Theme 8: Cultural Considerations in Research Teaching

In Asian contexts, cultural considerations played a crucial role in successfully implementing HyFlex teaching practices. Faculty emphasized that students often preferred hierarchical, teacher-centered instruction, even in a flexible learning environment (Lim & Seung, 2021). Incorporating culturally responsive pedagogical practices that respected students' values while incorporating active research skills was essential (Tang, 2023). Faculty adapted the HyFlex model to align with local cultural norms, balancing independent learning with appropriate support from the instructor, which was positively reflected in student attitudes (Wu et al., 2024).

However, some challenges emerged related to differing cultural expectations of authority and participation. In certain countries, students hesitated to openly critique research in public forums or online platforms (Zimmerman & King, 2022). There were instances where students felt uncomfortable in the virtual, less personal format, leading to disengagement with research content and reduced participation in group-based activities (Ralston et al., 2023). Some instructors also found it challenging to respect local educational traditions while implementing a more flexible, collaborative model like HyFlex (Foley, 2021). These cultural clashes occasionally created friction between expected student behaviors and the collaborative ideals of the HyFlex model.

To navigate these cultural tensions, successful instructors adopted hybrid approaches that respected students' need for structure while offering flexibility in research teaching (Kim & Kwon, 2022). In practice, this meant using culturally relevant case studies and research topics, incorporating synchronous online discussions that allowed for respect-based dialogues, and clearly outlining expectations for student participation (Brown & Goldstein, 2021). By aligning the HyFlex approach with local cultural norms, instructors reported improved student engagement and academic performance in research tasks (Tang, 2023). These adjustments facilitated a harmonious integration of global teaching strategies with local educational expectations, demonstrating the adaptability of the HyFlex model.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study suggest that educators in Asian HEIs should adopt a blended approach in implementing the HyFlex model, ensuring that both online and in-person components are equally robust and supportive. Teachers are encouraged to provide consistent, timely feedback and utilize technology to facilitate meaningful assessment practices that meet students' varying learning needs. Furthermore, integrating culturally responsive teaching methods will allow for better engagement and respect for local educational expectations, improving student outcomes. It is also crucial that faculty receive ongoing professional development to effectively navigate the demands of hybrid teaching while



maintaining academic rigor. Lastly, an emphasis on creating collaborative learning environments, whether synchronous or asynchronous, will support peer interactions and knowledge co-creation.

At the policy level, HEIs should consider formalizing the HyFlex model as an essential part of their digital learning infrastructure, ensuring adequate resources for both faculty and students. Policies that support faculty development programs in technology integration and HyFlex pedagogy will be critical in enhancing teaching quality and learning experiences. Universities should also develop clear guidelines and frameworks for assessments in hybrid settings, addressing challenges related to feedback and participation. In addition, there should be a stronger focus on inclusivity, ensuring that policies support all students, regardless of their learning modality. Finally, future policy recommendations should include monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the long-term effectiveness of the HyFlex model and make data-driven adjustments accordingly.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the effectiveness and challenges of adopting the HyFlex model for teaching academic research in Asian higher education institutions. It reveals that integrating flexible learning modes can enhance student engagement, particularly when tailored to students' diverse learning preferences and cultural expectations. While technological tools and digital platforms proved essential, maintaining a strong connection between instructors and students remained crucial in successful research teaching. The findings also emphasized the need for culturally responsive pedagogical approaches to ensure students felt comfortable and supported, regardless of their chosen learning mode. Assessment and feedback practices, when managed effectively, can further contribute to fostering a collaborative learning environment. However, challenges in providing personalized feedback across different learning platforms indicated the need for refined strategies. Educational institutions should invest in professional development for faculty and equip them with the skills necessary to deliver effective hybrid instruction. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing exploration of best practices for optimizing academic research teaching through the HyFlex model, offering actionable insights for educators and policymakers alike.

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