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Advantages and Disadvantages of Hybrid Learning for International Students

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of using a hybrid learning format on the example of the contingent of international students in pre-university learning programs of the preparatory school for international students at Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University. In order to find out the views of foreign students about the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid learning format, as well as to assess the level of their adaptation to the distance learning system, a sociological survey was conducted among 144 students of the preparatory school for international students of Kazan (Volga region) Federal University studying in the 2020/2021 academic year. The results of the survey allow us to conclude that the majority of foreign students consider distance learning in general and the hybrid format, including, not completely acceptable for education in the Russian Federation. Most of them prefer to return to the traditional education system. At the same time, students declare their satisfaction with the work of teachers and positively assess the quality of knowledge gained during learning in a hybrid format. Of course, the use of distance learning elements can diversify the learning process of foreign citizens, but personal communication and direct interaction with teachers and classmates, immersion in the language environment, individual and team work in the classroom, as well as an objective and high-quality assessment of their activities by teachers are very important for international students.

Keywords: distance education (learning), distance learning, hybrid learning format, foreign students, pre-university learning, pre-bachelor's degree, pre-specialty.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the largest disruption to the classical education system. During the period of self-isolation, at the beginning of the pandemic, there was a forced transition from classroom to distance learning (Graham, 2017; Dziuban, Graham, Moskal, Norberg, & Sicilia, 2018; Makhmutova, Shimkovich, & Zalyalova, 2020; Krivopalova, 2013). By the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year, the epidemiological situation had improved somewhat, borders with some countries were opened, and a small part of international students were able to arrive at the Kazan Federal University at the preparatory school for international students to study in a traditional format. Study groups were formed in such a way that a smaller part of the students studied offline in the classroom, and the majority – online. Thus, a hybrid learning format was applied. The practice of using this format has shown that it is not always convenient for both teachers and students of the preparatory school, it has a number of significant disadvantages, both in comparison with distance and classroom work (Abramova, Boyarov, & Stankevich, 2020; Fomina, 2014).

Purpose and objectives of the study

Purpose of the study: to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of using a hybrid teaching format on the example of the contingent of foreign students in pre-university learning programs of the preparatory school for international students at Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University.

In accordance with the purpose of the study, the following tasks were set:

1. To conduct a sociological survey of the students of the preparatory school in order to assess the effectiveness of using the hybrid learning format.
2. Identify the positive and negative aspects of the hybrid learning format compared to the distance learning format.

Literature review

Having analyzed the dictionary entries that explain the term hybrid (blended) learning, we can say that this is learning, which is characterized by the preservation of the traditional principles of building the educational process with the inclusion of elements of electronic technologies (Azimov & Shukin, 2009). According to Averkova, Mihajlova, & Elshina (2020), an important concept in the definition of hybrid learning is the interaction between learners, teaching and learning resources.

The uniqueness of blended learning is due to the integration of traditional and high-tech e-learning, which allows you to get the best result due to the synergy of the strengths of each method (Ndioho, Etokeren, & Kingdom-Aaron, 2021).

Some of the main benefits of hybrid learning include:

- possibility of greater spatial and temporal flexibility compared to the traditional format (Garcia, Redel, & Martiny, 2021);
- variety of didactic teaching approaches (Nagaeva, 2016);
- student gets the opportunity to master the necessary knowledge and skills in a convenient format (Nagaeva, 2016);
- reduction of financial costs for learning without losing the advantages of the traditional approach (Alsalmi, Eltahir, & Al-Qatawneh, 2019; Garcia et al., 2021; Nagaeva, 2016);
- possibility to provide students with educational / scientific materials in a quick, simple and understandable form (Ndioho et al., 2021);
- interaction between learners and learning materials in an electronic environment without the presence of a teacher allows students to develop self-learning skills, which will lead to an improvement in the quality of education (Taylor, 2017);
- integration of electronic technologies and classical teaching enriches and mutually complements each other, which arouses the interest of students and increases their enthusiasm in the learning process (Nagaeva, 2016; Tunmibi, Aregbossola, Adejobi, & Ibrahim, 2018);
- possibility to take into account the individual characteristics of the perception of information by students;
- possibility to organize group learning activities, which allows students to be liberated and gives them greater freedom of speech (Albarrak, Zakaria, Almulhem, Khan, & Abdul Karim, 2021).

The disadvantages of hybrid learning include:

- significant time spent by the teacher on the development of high-quality electronic resources / online courses;

- sometimes relearning of teachers in the field of information and computer technologies is required;
- selection of the optimal platform for synchronous interaction between the teacher and the student, which would satisfy the needs of the educational process (Garcia et al., 2021);
- difficulties in controlling the knowledge of foreign students in the hybrid learning format (manifestations of "academic dishonesty" of students) (Afuro, 2021)

The use of hybrid learning expands educational opportunities for students due to its flexibility and accessibility and, of course, will develop in the future.

Methodology

In order to find out the opinions of international students about the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid education, as well as to assess the level of their adaptation to the distance learning system, a sociological survey was conducted among 144 students of the preparatory school for international students of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University (learning levels: pre-bachelor's and pre-specialty), who study in the 2020/2021 academic year in distance and hybrid formats. The participation of students in the research was voluntary.

The survey takes into account the age / gender / citizenship of the students, emotional, organizational, and social aspects during the hybrid and online training of the students. The questions are formulated in accordance with the level of Russian language proficiency of international students.

Qualitative statistics are presented in percentages. The confidence interval (CI) was calculated by the Wilson method. In order to test the hypothesis of equality of shares, the Chi-square test was used.

Results

According to the survey results, out of the indicated 144 respondents, 59% study in distance format, 41% – in hybrid format.

Most of the students mastering additional programs in a hybrid learning format came to Kazan from Egypt (91.5%), as well as from Turkey, Yemen, Algeria, Ecuador; respondents studying online – representatives of 21 countries, the overwhelming majority is from Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, China, Ecuador, Iraq, Syria.

The average age of students studying in a hybrid format is 19.2 years, in distance format – 20.5 years.

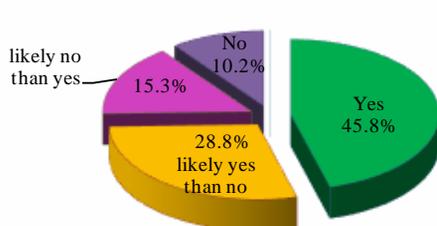
The gender ratio in both hybrid and online formats is dominated by men – 58.8 and 83.1%, respectively.

A significant part of the students, studying both in a hybrid and distance format, noted a greater predisposition to a hybrid learning format (54.2 and 44.7%, respectively). Only 20.3 and 22.4% of students expressed their desire to study online. This suggests that a blended learning format is the most acceptable in the current situation for teaching foreign students.

Thus, the proportion of students who are satisfied with hybrid learning differs significantly from the proportion of students who are satisfied with online learning ($p < 0.0001$).

Students understand that a full transition to traditional education is not yet possible, and blended learning is the most optimal alternative for further education in the Russian Federation. This is also confirmed by the results of the survey (fig. 1a): 45.8% of respondents consider the blended learning format to be completely acceptable for learning in Russia, 28.8% – rather acceptable than unacceptable, and only 10.2% of students consider this format unacceptable (95% CI: 62.2-83.9). At the same time, the online format is unacceptable only for 27.1% of students wishing to continue their education in the Russian Federation (95% CI: 62.7-81.2).

a) Is a hybrid learning format acceptable for education in the Russian Federation?



b) In a hybrid learning format it is for you ...

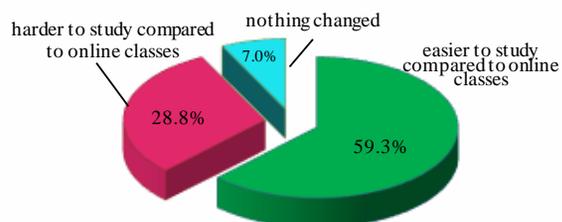


Figure 1. Results of the survey

When assessing the level of comfort during learning in the hybrid format, the majority of students are satisfied with the conditions of learning in this format (76.2%) (fig. 2a). For respondents studying online, the level of comfort is significantly lower – 52.9%, and 47.1% of students are not comfortable studying online (fig. 2b).

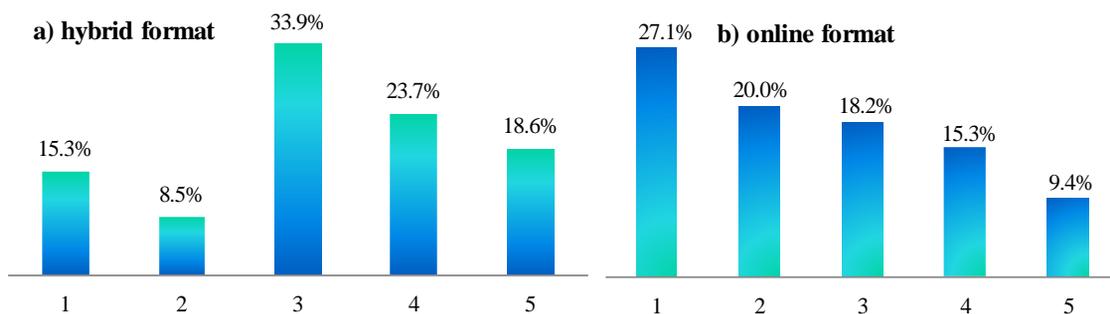


Figure 2. Results of the survey: «Do you feel comfortable to study in hybrid (a) and online (b) format (where 1 - not comfortable, 5 - very comfortable)?»

Most of the students (59.3%) noted that after the transition from distance learning to hybrid learning, it became easier for them to assimilate the learning material than online. This is probably due to immersion in the language environment, and the absence of the need to spend most of the time at the computer while assimilating educational material with the help of a teacher online with synchronous learning, and when working independently in asynchronous learning mode. For 11.9% of respondents, nothing has changed during the transition from distance learning to hybrid education (fig. 1b). For some students the process has become more difficult in terms of learning (28.8%), which can be explained by the difficulties associated with adapting to a new country, language and social environment.

This hypothesis is also confirmed by the answer to the question about the level of self-organization of students in a hybrid learning format: only 40.7% of respondents use their time rationally, adhere to the compiled daily routine and complete it on time. This is where the elements of flexibility and parallelism are manifested as the positive aspects of online learning. A significant part of students (35.6%) cannot properly organize their time and, accordingly, have enough time for everything.

It is worth noting that when answering the question about the level of self-organization of students of the pre-masters and pre-PhD levels of training during the period of self-isolation, for the majority of students (47.1 %) it is quite easy to organize their time during online training. 17.6% of pre-masters and pre-PhD do not always adhere to the plan drawn up for the day, they cannot organize their time and do not have time (Makhmutova et al., 2020). Thus, a higher level of self-organization is observed by pre-masters and pre-PhD compared to pre-bachelors, which is due to a higher level of motivation, interest in learning and the presence of self-learning skills.

The students noted the positive aspects of the hybrid learning format: 52.5% of the respondents noted the advantages in communicating with teachers and classmates in the classroom; 28.8% began to better understand the educational material in this format of learning and communication; 35.6% of students find it much more convenient to use textbooks in paper form; 30.5% noted an improvement in the quality of learning in hybrid format compared to distance learning.

Students note a number of difficulties in assimilating educational material in a hybrid learning format: it is difficult for them to understand new information in Russian (40.7%), a large amount of independent work received from a teacher (39%), an insufficient amount of theoretical material in the classroom (28.8%). Only 16.9% of students have no difficulties. The results of the answers to this question allow teachers to understand the need to improve the organization / methodology of independent work and educational and methodological resources for foreign students in the conditions of hybrid and online learning.

At the same time, almost half of the respondents (47.5%) noted that the teacher pays the same amount of attention both to the audience in the classroom and to those who are online; the second half of the opinion was divided: 27.1% of students believe that there is more attention to students in the classroom, 25.4% – to students online.

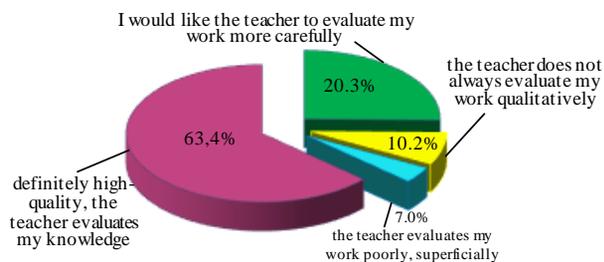
A significant part of the respondents (81.4%) do not experience problems in expressing their point of view during classes, the teacher always gives them the floor, takes into account their opinion. Only 6.8% of students believe that the teacher rarely asks them.

Most of the students highly appreciated the communication between classmates: 66.1% of respondents believe that there is teamwork in the group, students constantly communicate with each other; only 8.5% of foreign students are dissatisfied with communication in the group.

59.3% of students consider the assessment of their knowledge by the teacher to be quite objective during the current and intermediate control, 28.8% of students consider the assessment to be quite objective, but are dissatisfied with the prevalence of written tests over oral questioning, only 1.7% of respondents consider the assessment to be completely biased.

At the same time, 67.8% of students highly assess the quality of control of their knowledge by the teacher, 20.3% of students want the teacher to evaluate their work more carefully, 11.9% are completely not satisfied with the quality of assessment of their knowledge (fig. 3a). This analysis of the answers sets the task for teachers to eliminate the problem of academic dishonesty among foreign students when conducting knowledge control.

a) What do you think, how good is the control of your knowledge?



b) Evaluate the quality of knowledge gained during your studies at the preparatory school in a hybrid format:



Figure 3. Results of the survey

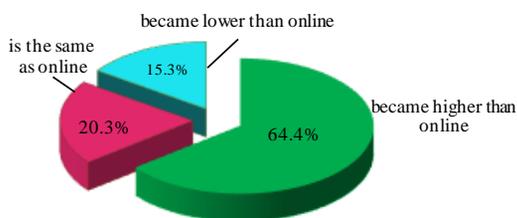
Most of the respondents (72.9%) have enough educational materials (textbooks, presentations, online resources) that the teacher uses during classes, 16.9% of respondents have enough material, but they would like to fully cover certain topics; only 10.2% of students believe that teachers use not as many materials as they would like.

For a significant part of the respondents (81.4%), the demonstration of the screen used by the teacher in the lesson is convenient, 15.3% of students do not always see individual elements on the screen, but in general they are satisfied with the presentation of the educational material in the classroom; 3.4% are not satisfied with the presentation of the material.

Students generally highly appreciate the quality of knowledge gained during their studies at the preparatory school in a hybrid format: excellent and good – 79.6%, satisfactory – 13.6%, unsatisfactory – 6.8%. This once again confirms that this format of learning is acceptable for teaching foreign students in Russian universities (fig. 3b).

64.4% of respondents noted an increase in the success of learning in a hybrid format compared to distance learning; 20.3% of students did not note any changes in the success of learning when switching from a distance learning format to a hybrid one; according to 15.3% of students, their success became lower in the hybrid learning format, which may be due to difficulties in adapting to new learning conditions, as noted above (fig. 4a).

a) The success of your learning in a hybrid format:



b) Would you like to use the elements of distance learning in further training in the classroom?

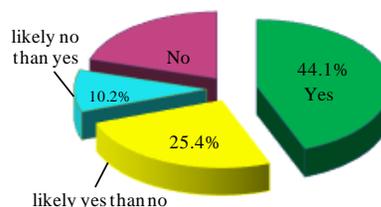


Figure 4. Results of the survey

The above results are confirmed by a high degree of satisfaction with learning at the preparatory school for international students of Kazan Federal University: 62.7% of respondents are completely satisfied, 28.8% are partially satisfied, 5.1% are rather dissatisfied than satisfied, and only 3.4% of students do not like studying at the preparatory school.

At the same time, the bulk of international students (86.4%) plans to continue their studies at the Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University on the main educational programs of higher professional education (bachelor's and specialty).

A desire to use the elements of distance learning in further education in the classroom was revealed by 69.5% of the respondents, while 20.3% of the respondents were against (fig. 4b). Thus, the majority of students understand that in modern realities one cannot do without the use of computer technologies.

Discussion

The results of the survey allow us to conclude that the majority of international students consider distance learning in general and the hybrid format, in particular, to be quite acceptable for getting an education in the Russian Federation. But most of them prefer to return to the traditional learning system. At the same time, students declare their satisfaction with the work of teachers and positively assess the quality of knowledge gained during learning in a hybrid format. Of course, the use of distance learning elements can diversify the learning process of foreign citizens, but personal communication and direct interaction with teachers and classmates, immersion in the language environment, individual and team work in the classroom, as well as an objective and high-quality assessment of their activities by teachers are very important for international students.

Conclusion

The analysis of the sociological survey and the experience of working in a hybrid audience shows:

- hybrid learning is the only format possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the use of this form of learning will continue to evolve;
- the teacher is recommended to have experience in the development of online courses / digital educational resources for asynchronous interaction with students;
- in the process of hybrid learning, it is recommended to apply / mix different teaching methods;
- at the initial stage of hybrid learning, the attention of the teacher and the students is scattered, but over time, everyone adapts to this form of learning and active interaction begins;
- the result of hybrid learning to a greater extent than in classroom work depends on the level of motivation of the students;
- for comfortable and productive work in a hybrid learning format, it is necessary to have a stable Internet and modern equipment for students and teachers.

The research results can be used in the practice of preparatory faculties and preparatory departments of Russian universities in the context of a pandemic and during the transition period of returning to traditional forms of education. There is also an annual problem with the late arrival of students to the territory of the Russian Federation, and a hybrid teaching format in this case can serve as a means of eliminating the academic backlog of students.

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