

Research Questions for FLEX-PoR subprojects

Problematising flexible learning

Research has indicated various strengths and weaknesses of flipped classrooms, online learning and Hyflex versus face-to-face learning, but how does choice of mode affect student satisfaction, academic outcomes, or university student retention?

Western is an Australian pioneer in HyFlex learning, and in 2020–2021 our experience with online and flipped learning stood Western in good stead when the COVID pandemic forced a move to working and studying from home. Now there are opportunities to capture and build on this knowledge for the benefit of all current and future students.

Perceptions of flexible learning

1. Do students understand what they are “paying for”? Role of learning outcomes rather than engagement with physical resources (human or otherwise); the importance of a physical environment; dissatisfaction independent of learning.
2. Is there a stigma attached to online/flexible learning whereby it is seen as a cheap and easy but second-rate option for universities? (<https://www.smh.com.au/national/victoria/online-courses-are-not-enough-for-uni-students-in-lockdown-20210826-p58m49.html>)
3. Does a poor media image of flexible learning affect its acceptance? Most news reports, (e.g., above), seem to present flexible / online learning as a compromise in response to a pandemic. Does this affect retention / sense of belonging indirectly?
4. Generational differences in perceptions: How do parents perceive flexible learning/new paradigm of HE, and does this perception affect retention/choice of university? Does the gap between parental past experiences with HE and the HE experiences of their young adults impact the retention of students?

Pedagogical considerations

1. How can students access the social/community/informal aspects of university in a flexible model?
2. Students may not be forced to develop social skills, language skills or meet people from diverse backgrounds, or confront different perspectives on life because they can choose to avoid it. If they are introverted, they can avoid being pushed out of their comfort zones. Flipped classroom or flexible model research use grades and subject knowledge as the dependent variable, but how could we assess the broader set of social/critical skills? Do they develop a ‘sense of belonging’ in the same way? Can a shared ‘university culture’ develop through a flexible learning?
3. Are quality controls for flexible offerings robust enough? If so, are students reassured? Do students understand Western’s delivery options and reality of learning in different environments?
4. Can academic integrity be maintained in assessments in a flexible format?

Transitional Andragogy: maturity/stage of study

1. Does the effectiveness of flexible learning depend on stage of learning – do students need to start on campus and transition to it?

2. Cultural differences: Are there any cultural aspects to flexible learning – does it appeal to people from different cultures to differing respects?
3. What social or personality factors influence student motivation for or satisfaction with flexible learning?
4. Does gender, loss of control, self-efficacy have a role in retaining students in flexible courses?