

Llorera Philsam, MA student
School of Humanities and Fine Arts
Kapranov Yan, Dr. Habil., Prof.
VIZJA University, Warsaw, Poland

HYFLEX LEARNING AND ACADEMIC LITERACY TASKS IN ENGLISH PHILOLOGY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FIRST-YEAR BA STUDENTS AT VIZJA UNIVERSITY

The rapid digital transformation of higher education has changed not only the technical conditions of teaching and learning but also how students experience language, literacy, academic interaction, and participation in university life. One of the most visible outcomes of this transformation is the development of hybrid-flexible, or HyFlex, learning environments. In a HyFlex course, students are usually given the possibility to participate in face-to-face classes, synchronous online sessions, or, in some cases, asynchronous learning activities. According to Beatty, the HyFlex model is based on several core principles: learner choice, equivalency, reusability, and accessibility [1]. These principles make HyFlex learning attractive for modern higher education because they respond to students' diverse needs, schedules, locations, and life circumstances.

However, HyFlex learning should not be treated as a purely technological solution. Its effectiveness depends not only on the availability of digital platforms, cameras, microphones, recordings, and online materials, but also on the quality of pedagogical design. This is especially important in English Philology, where students are expected to develop complex academic literacy skills. These skills include critical reading, academic writing, textual interpretation, argumentation, source-based reasoning, and participation in disciplinary discussion. Therefore, the central question is not simply whether students can attend classes in different modes, but whether these modes help them engage meaningfully with academic literacy tasks.

The present paper outlines a qualitative study of first-year BA English Philology students at VIZJA University in Warsaw. The study focuses on students' experiences of HyFlex learning and academic literacy tasks during the first year of university study. The first year is a particularly sensitive period because students are entering a new academic environment, adapting to university expectations, and learning how to perform disciplinary tasks in English. In English Philology, literacy is not an additional skill. It is the foundation of the discipline itself. Students must learn to read academic and literary texts critically, construct written arguments, use sources responsibly, and participate in seminars in which language is both the medium of communication and the object of analysis.

The relevance of this topic is supported by previous research on HyFlex learning. Kohnke and Moorhouse show that students generally value HyFlex learning because it offers flexibility and control over participation; at the same time, they report challenges related to interaction, communication, and engagement across different modes [5]. A recent scoping review by Cumming, Han, and Gilanyi also indicates that HyFlex learning can support accessibility and satisfaction. Still, it may create problems connected with infrastructure, digital competence, workload, and the difficulty of maintaining equivalent learning experiences for students attending in different ways [3]. These findings are especially relevant for language and

philology programmes, where interaction, discussion, feedback, and collaborative interpretation are central to learning.

The concept of academic literacy used in this study is based on the academic literacies approach proposed by Lea and Street [6]. From this perspective, academic literacy is not limited to grammar, vocabulary, or correctness. It is a socially situated practice shaped by disciplinary conventions, institutional expectations, and students' developing academic identities. For first-year English Philology students, this means that writing an essay, analysing a text, preparing a response, or participating in a discussion are not mechanical classroom exercises. They are practices through which students gradually learn how to become members of an academic and disciplinary community.

HyFlex learning changes the conditions under which these literacy practices take place. A student who participates in a face-to-face seminar may experience immediate teacher feedback, spontaneous peer interaction, and a stronger sense of classroom presence. A student joining synchronously online may have access to the same lesson content but may experience weaker social presence, technical interruptions, or reduced participation in group discussion. A student working asynchronously may benefit from repeated viewing and self-paced learning, but may also feel isolated from the live academic community. Thus, the same literacy task may be experienced differently depending on the mode of participation.

The theoretical framework of the proposed study combines the Community of Inquiry framework and Self-Determination Theory. The Community of Inquiry framework explains meaningful learning through the interaction of teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence [4]. Teaching presence refers to the design and organisation of learning activities, instructions, feedback, and assessment. Social presence concerns the student's ability to feel visible, connected, and involved in interaction with others. Cognitive presence refers to the process of constructing meaning through reflection, discussion, and engagement with academic content. In a HyFlex English Philology classroom, all three forms of presence are essential. A literacy task becomes productive only when students understand what is expected, interact with others around the task, and use it to develop interpretation, argumentation, and academic thinking.

Self-Determination Theory is also useful because it explains students' motivation in terms of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness [7]. HyFlex learning seems to support autonomy because students can choose how to participate. However, this autonomy may become a burden if students do not know which mode is most suitable for a particular literacy task. For example, a student may choose online participation for convenience but later discover that a complex writing workshop or text-based discussion would have been easier to complete in the classroom. Competence depends on whether students receive enough support, scaffolding, and feedback. Relatedness depends on whether students feel included in the academic community, regardless of their chosen mode of participation.

The following research question guides the study: How do first-year BA English Philology students describe their experiences with HyFlex learning? How do they engage with academic literacy tasks across face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous modes? What challenges do they identify when completing reading, writing, interpretation, and source-based tasks in a HyFlex environment? How do they perceive the role of teacher support, peer interaction, and digital tools in their academic literacy development?

Methodologically, the study uses a qualitative research design with a phenomenological orientation. This approach is appropriate because the aim is not to measure learning effectiveness statistically, but to understand students' lived experiences and the meanings they assign to HyFlex learning. The study may involve a purposive sample of first-year BA English Philology students who have direct experience of completing literacy tasks in a HyFlex environment. The main data collection instruments include semi-structured interviews, short reflective journals, and selected anonymised student-produced artefacts, such as drafts, written responses, or discussion posts.

Semi-structured interviews are useful because they allow students to describe their experiences in their own words. They can explain which participation mode they prefer, what difficulties they face, how they understand academic literacy tasks, and how they perceive feedback and interaction. Reflective journals can provide more immediate insight into students' ongoing learning processes. Instead of relying only on retrospective accounts, journals can show how students experience tasks during the semester. Student-produced artefacts may help connect self-reported experiences with actual academic literacy practices.

The data may be analysed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase model [2]. The process includes familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analytical interpretation. Possible initial codes may include "mode choice", "online silence", "teacher feedback", "peer support", "difficulty of academic writing", "digital fatigue", "task clarity", "academic confidence", and "sense of belonging". These codes may later be grouped into broader themes such as "HyFlex autonomy and responsibility", "literacy tasks as disciplinary entry points", "presence and invisibility in multimodal learning", and "digital tools as support or barrier".

The expected contributions of this study are both practical and theoretical. Practically, it can help lecturers design more inclusive and transparent academic literacy tasks for HyFlex English Philology courses. The study may show that students need clearer instructions, explicit models of academic writing, structured peer interaction, and consistent feedback across participation modes. It may also show that some literacy tasks require stronger synchronous interaction, while others can be effectively supported through asynchronous materials. Theoretically, the study contributes to the discussion of HyFlex learning by shifting attention from general satisfaction to discipline-specific literacy development.

This focus is important because HyFlex learning is often evaluated through broad categories such as flexibility, convenience, or technological accessibility. These categories are useful, but they do not fully explain how students learn to perform complex academic tasks in a specific discipline. In English Philology, academic literacy tasks are not secondary to learning. They are the core mechanism through which students become more competent readers, writers, interpreters, and participants in academic discourse. Therefore, HyFlex learning should be assessed not only by whether it allows students to attend classes flexibly, but also by whether it supports their gradual formation as academically literate philology students.

In conclusion, HyFlex learning has considerable potential for English Philology education, but this potential is not automatic. Flexibility may support access and autonomy, yet it may also create uneven participation, weaker interaction, and additional cognitive load. First-year students are especially vulnerable because they are still learning how to study at the university level and how to perform academic literacy tasks in English. A qualitative study of

their experiences can reveal how HyFlex learning is actually lived, negotiated, and interpreted by students. Such research is relevant to applied linguistics, information technology in education, and English language teaching because it connects digital learning environments with the human process of academic literacy development.

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