QUALITY EDUCATION THROUGH CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL HYBRID LEARNING IN CHARACTER DESIGN: A COLLABORATIVE STORYCRAFT WORKSHOP CASE STUDY

Uzda Nabila Shabiriani[1], Arifpermana Ratum[2], and Christie Widiarto[3]
[1,2] Visual Communication Design, School of Design
[3] Film & Television (Animation),Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music
[1,2] Bina Nusantara University
Bandung, Indonesia
[3] The University of Melbourne, Parkville
Victoria, Australia
uzda.nabila@binus.ac.id

Received: 2nd July 2026 / **Revised:** 5th September 2026 / **Accepted:** 28th September 2026

How to Cite: U.N. Shabiriani, A. Ratum, and C. Widiarto, "Quality Education Through Cross-Institutional Hybrid Learning in Character Design: A Collaborative Storycraft Workshop Case Study," *SEEIJ (Social Economics and Ecology International Journal)*, 98 – 113

ABSTRACT

In this research, the focus is on hybrid digital learning in character design teaching through the study of the Collaborative Story craft Workshop which is an international workshop hosted by the DKV BINUS University Bandung together with the University of Melbourne. In the process of organizing the workshop, there were both onsite participants as well as an online international guest, hence making the process a hybrid one where oral storytelling, visualization, digital interaction, and collaborative feedback take place. This research seeks to gain an understanding of the way the hybrid workshop structure helps students visualize character designs from their narration. Analysis is concerned with aspects related to structure, activities, interactions, and the influence of the digital media platform in facilitating collaborative creativity learning. It is clear from the results that hybrid digital learning can be applied in the teaching of character design as it allows for knowledge transfer between different educational institutions, the formation of several perspectives, and helps students understand the link between story clarity and visual coherence. In addition, this workshop serves as an example of how digital media collaboration can extend creative learning experiences outside the physical environment of a class and still ensure engagement in reflection.

Keywords: Quality Education, Cross-Institutional, Hybrid Learning, Character Design, Collaborative Workshop

A. INTRODUCTION

Character design is an essential element in visual communication design education since it necessitates students' ability to represent abstract narrative information in the form of visual designs.

While drawing assignments are focused on the technical aspect of creating designs, character design is a complicated procedure which includes not only interpretation but also visualization, storytelling, and communication (Aditia & Aditia, 2024). With the help of knowledge in the sphere of art and design, there emerge possibilities to develop characters depending on some specific traits that make characters unique, memorable, and communicative (Aditia & Aditia, 2024). Apart from being able to create visually pleasing images, the designer should be able to communicate personality traits, background, emotions, sociocultural status, and narrative roles with the help of expressive qualities. Consequently, character design can be understood not simply as the production of an illustration but as a process of translating narrative information into a structured system of visual signs.

This translation process is particularly important within visual communication design education. Students have to make choices regarding what aspects of a particular story would need to be emphasized visually, what information would need to be condensed, and what visual properties would be required to enable an audience to understand what role and personality a character possesses within that story. For instance, a term such as "introverted," "eccentric," "confident," or "anxious" is not a set prescription for how to make a certain visual representation. Instead, designers use their experience and cognitive schemata in order to interpret these terms visually. Different students may produce substantially different characters from an identical verbal description while maintaining similar narrative meanings. Such diversity demonstrates that visual communication is interpretative rather than mechanically representational.

Educationally speaking, this feature means that the process of designing characters is especially suited for studio-based, reflective learning. While the production of one’s own artifact is helpful, students also benefit from seeing how fellow students understand the same information in the narrative context. By analyzing various ways in which the character is designed, the students will come to understand that the choices they make in their design are communicative choices, too.

Silhouette suggests confidence or insecurity, costume implies social origin, posture reveals emotions, and facial expressions define personality traits.

The process itself highlights the importance of storytelling in design education. Verbal and written stories act as conceptual frameworks within which students construct their connections among the aspects of personality, motivations, setting, physical appearance, and actions. Storytelling enables the learner to move beyond merely making aesthetic decisions on the reasons why the character looks or acts in a certain way. The designer thus becomes both the decoder and encoder of the narrative and its associated visual message. This connection between narrative development and visual messaging makes the field of character design an appropriate medium for exploring the creation of meaning through dialogue, interpretation, visualization, and reflection.

But at the same time, contemporary design education becomes increasingly shaped by such factors as digitalization, international collaboration, and hybrid teaching methods. Not anymore are physical design studios the only places for the exchange of design information. Digital technologies enable individuals who work as students, lecturers, professionals, and educational institutions, but who are situated in different geographic locations, to be part of common educational processes. Given the current condition of hybrid learning, physical and virtual learning spaces can work together in a collaborative way, transcending institutional and geographic boundaries (Arfat et al., 2025). Hybrid education can also offer new perspectives on various issues related to design education for students (Amzaleg et al., 2025).

This trend is of great importance to design education, where teaching through studios relies on closeness, observation, demonstration, discussion, and interaction. In the traditional classroom set up, lecturers can directly monitor the progress of their students, look at their drawings, demonstrate skills, and solve any emerging challenges. Peers can similarly observe one another's working processes and exchange spontaneous feedback. Translating such interaction into hybrid environments requires more than simply providing video-conferencing technology. The learning environment

should be deliberately structured to ensure that learners remain active participants rather than passive consumers of online teaching.

Thus, the success of hybrid creative education depends on the interaction of technology and teaching methodology. Screen sharing, digital drawing applications, cameras, microphones, presentation platforms, and real-time communication systems may facilitate interaction, but these technologies do not automatically produce collaborative learning. Meaningful hybrid design education requires pedagogical scaffolding that organizes communication, task sequences, peer review, instructor intervention, and reflection. The technological platform should therefore be considered part of learning ecology rather than merely a communication channel.

Cross-institutional collaboration adds another dimension to this learning ecology. The International Hybrid workshops will allow the students to be introduced to people whose cultural references, professional practices, stories and visual language are different from those in the local learning institution. Such interaction potentially contributes to broader visual literacy and encourages students to reconsider assumptions embedded in their own design practices. At the same time, cross-cultural exchanges may generate misunderstanding because verbal expressions, metaphors, humor, gestures, and visual conventions do not necessarily carry identical meanings across cultural contexts. In character design, where relatively subtle narrative characteristics must be translated into visual form, these differences become particularly important.

The current study examines this hybrid creative pedagogy through the Community of Inquiry (CoI) theoretical framework developed by Garrison et al. (2000) along with Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). According to the CoI framework, a meaningful learning experience in a computer-mediated environment occurs through the interaction of three interdependent areas, namely cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. In addition, while the conventional conception of learning was the transfer of information from the teacher to the learner, the CoI framework views learning as socially mediated where learners construct meaning.

In relation to character design, the term 'cognitive presence' can be described as how much students construct meaning based on the narrative and then develop it into visuals. This involves students being able to analyze the verbal traits of the character, recognizing narrative cues, developing visuals, assessing the connection between those visuals and the character traits, and revising their drawings as needed. Cognitive presence is therefore visible not only in the completed illustration but also within the reasoning and reflection that occur during narrative-to-visual translation.

Social presence concerns the ability of participants to establish themselves as active members of a learning community and engage meaningfully with instructors and peers. In a hybrid design workshop, social presence may emerge through discussion, peer comparison, questions, critique, presentation, and informal exchanges between onsite and remote participants. Because character design is inherently interpretive, interaction with others can expose students to alternative readings of the same narrative prompt. Social presence consequently supports students in understanding visual diversity as a legitimate outcome of interpretation rather than simply as deviation from a supposedly correct solution.

Teaching Presence is defined as the design, facilitation, and guidance of cognitive and social processes that lead to significant learning outcomes. The elements of teaching presence within the hybrid character design workshop would entail the following aspects of instruction: the design of activities, explanation of narrative activities, demonstration of creative processes, digital communication management, discussion facilitation, and formative feedback. The point to stress here is that teaching presence can be spread among several teachers. If there is an involvement of an international facilitator as well as local teachers, the teaching responsibility is distributed accordingly.

There is another theoretical framework through which these processes can be understood using Social Constructivism. From a Social Constructivist point of view, knowledge is not constructed through individual cognition alone but is a result of social interaction. Meanings become apparent as learners construct meaning through interaction with others. In character design, this

means that students' visual interpretations can evolve through conversations with instructors and peers. Oral storytelling therefore becomes an important cognitive and social bridge through which verbal information is progressively interpreted, discussed, visualized, and transformed into an artifact. This theoretical combination is particularly useful for analyzing hybrid character design because the activity connects cognitive interpretation, interpersonal interaction, instructional scaffolding, and technological mediation. The quality of the final artifact cannot be separated completely from the learning processes through which it was produced. Understanding hybrid character design education consequently requires attention to both the resulting visual objects and the interactions through which students developed those objects.

The current research examines the Storycraft and Character Design Workshop, an international collaborative activity jointly hosted by Bina Nusantara University (BINUS) Bandung, Indonesia, and the Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne, Australia. The workshop brought together face-to-face participants at BINUS Bandung and an online international guest facilitator, creating a synchronous hybrid learning environment based on oral storytelling, digital sketching, cross-institutional interaction, and real-time feedback. Students used digital drawing software, video conferencing, and screen-sharing technology to visualize, communicate, compare, and negotiate their character designs.

These activities involved listening to the oral descriptions of characters, recognizing the narrative characteristics of the characters, translating these characteristics into visual images, discussing the designs in small groups, and presenting their character designs for evaluation. Students were also encouraged to compare the different visual interpretations generated from similar narrative descriptions. Such differences should not necessarily be interpreted as procedural errors. Rather, they are representations of the impact of the cognitive schema, culture, imagination, past experiences of images, and individual perception of the narrative information on the design process (Abu Tair et al.,

2025). The workshop therefore provided an opportunity to examine character design simultaneously as a creative production process and a socially mediated meaning-making activity.

Despite the potential benefits of this model, previous studies also indicate that hybrid creative environments can experience systemic friction. Audio video latency, spatial connectivity limitations, technical problems, asymmetrical communication, and cultural barriers could influence the interaction between individuals who are physically present and those who are telepresent (Moraes Gil et al., 2025; Song et al., 2025). This is an issue in relation to the field of design education because of the significance of visual feedback and discussions. Reduced image quality, delayed communication, or linguistic ambiguity may therefore affect how students understand a narrative prompt or respond to critique.

Existing discussions of hybrid learning often examine student engagement, digital accessibility, technological adoption, or general learning outcomes. Comparatively less attention has been given to micro-process through which narrative information is interpreted and transformed into visual artifacts during synchronous creative activities. There is also limited understanding of how cognitive, social, and teaching presence operate simultaneously when an activity involves students located physically in one institution and a facilitator participating remotely from another cultural and institutional context. Character design offers a particularly useful setting for investigating these issues because its learning process makes interpretation visible through the artifacts produced by students.

Accordingly, this study investigates how a structured cross-institutional hybrid environment supports narrative-to-visual translation in character design education. Specifically, the study examines how teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence are manifested during a synchronous international character design workshop; how digital technologies facilitate or constrain the transformation of narrative descriptions into visual character representations; and what technical, cultural, communicative, and pedagogical challenges emerge within real-time cross-border design collaboration.

By examining the structural organization, interaction patterns, student-generated visual artifacts, and participant experiences of the BINUS–University of Melbourne Storycraft and Character Design Workshop, the study contributes empirical evidence concerning hybrid studio pedagogy in visual communication design. Rather than treating hybrid education simply as a technological alternative to face-to-face instruction, this research approaches it as a pedagogical system in which narrative interpretation, visual communication, technological mediation, cultural exchange, and collaborative meaning-making interact. The findings are expected to contribute practical recommendations for educators designing international, cross-institutional, and digitally mediated creative studios while also extending understanding of how hybrid environments can support active and reflective character design learning.

B. IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

The current study uses the methodology of a single-case qualitative study (Moraes et al., 2025) to examine the operational process, communication process, and creativity involved in hybrid digital learning in character design education. The use of the qualitative case study design is highly appropriate for this study since it enables a detailed and contextual understanding of a modern and real-life educational experience that is based on the process of digital collaboration between institutions from different countries (Song et al., 2025). The unit of analysis in this research is the Storycraft and Character Design Workshop, which is a cross-institutional project implemented through collaboration between the DKV program at BINUS University Bandung, Indonesia and VCA, The University of Melbourne, Australia.

For the participant group, N=45 Visual Communication Design undergraduates were involved in the synchronous engagement with a facilitator, Christie Widiarto, M.F.A., from the University of Melbourne who was operating online, facilitating the engagement of the participant group through a high-definition video conferencing interface. To provide a methodological transparent context for this

work, the participant group consisted of 2nd year and 3rd year design students who already had basic skills in terms of digital drawing and visual narrative ideas.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a multi-method qualitative triangulation approach to maximize construct validity and minimize researcher bias. Primary data were obtained through document analysis, field observations during the workshop, student-generated visual artifacts, audio-visual session recordings, and post-workshop qualitative feedback forms. The analyzed documents included workshop syllabi, learning objectives, operational structures, participant technical preparation requirements, and reflection guidelines. Field observations were executed by two independent observers using a standardized observation protocol to systematically record the learning process, including the sharing of oral character descriptions, real-time visual interpretation, small-group discussions, cross-border interaction patterns, and instances of technical or linguistic friction. To evaluate cognitive outcomes, all student visual character artifacts produced during the narrative-to-visual translation exercises were collected digitally along with their corresponding verbal narrative prompts. Further, observations examined the ways in which digital infrastructure, such as screen sharing and translation programs, enabled hybrid interaction and feedback loops.

Data Analysis

To analyze the collected qualitative data, Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework was conducted in conjunction with multimodal artifact analysis. The analytical process began with complete data familiarization, followed by initial line-by-line coding of observation logs, transcriptions, workshop documents, and survey responses. The initial codes were then organized under more general theories based on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) approach, especially related to the indicators of Teaching Presence (instructor-led teaching, instructional task, and technological orchestration), Social Presence (peer-to-peer interaction, feedback, and interborder rapport), and

Cognitive Presence (interpretation of narrative, visual interpretation, and reflection). At the same time, multimodal artifact analysis assessed how the students conveyed verbal descriptions of characters' emotions, personalities, and socio-cultural roles in visual terms such as posture, body language, facial expression, costume, and silhouette. In addition, the perceptions of students about the relationship between narrative understanding and visual presentation were also assessed.

Research Procedure

The research process was structured into four main operational phases. First, the documentation of the workshops, syllabus frameworks, and technical arrangements procedures was analyzed to set the foundation for understanding the educational intentions and structure. Second, real-time observations and audio-visual documentation were undertaken to document the interactions and use of digital media as well as drawing sessions. Third, the collected qualitative data and visual data were organized and categorized according to the CoI structural framework, type of interaction, use of digital media, and learning outcome. Finally, thematic analysis and multimodal interpretation were used to assess how the hybrid model of workshop helps the students develop visual character designs based on oral narrative descriptions.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community of Inquiry Dynamics in Hybrid Pedagogy

The Collaborative Storycraft Workshop successfully demonstrated the viability of a hybrid learning model for character design education by fostering a synchronized Community of Inquiry across geographic boundaries. The structural design enabled students at BINUS University Bandung to transition from oral narrative decoding to visual storytelling through a sequenced workflow: verbal description exchange, digital interpretation sketching, peer group review, plenary presentation, and structured reflection. Using the perspective of the CoI model, Teaching Presence was formed through the co-facilitation of the local staff at BINUS Bandung and the remote direction of Christie Widiarto, M.F.A., from the University of Melbourne. The presence of both teachers made scaffolding apparent, and students were actively involved in the process of learning rather than passively watching the

lecture remotely. Cognitive Presence was represented by students as they transcended simple drawing to see character development as an intensive process of semiotic translation and alignment of stories. Lastly, Social Presence was formed through digital channels where physical attendees could express their thoughts, ask questions and get immediate feedback from an international expert and remote participants. This fits the results of research into cross-institutional hybrid learning where spatial distance becomes irrelevant when coupled with digital infrastructure and active tasks (Amzaleg et al., 2025; Arfat et al., 2025).

Narrative-to-Visual Translation and Multi-Interpretation

Among the main insights of the workshop, it can be noted that oral narrative descriptions result in varying visual renderings, thereby exemplifying how the visual rendering of characters is influenced by subjectivity and socio-cultural interpretation. While one single oral narrative description of characters was given, different designs were generated by individual designers in terms of several aspects related to visual characters such as facial expression, proportionality, posture, costume, visual style, and mood. The differences above provide an insight into the extent to which visual translation relies on cognitive schemes, imagination, and socio-cultural construction (Abu Tair et al., 2025). Through peer-reviewing activity, it became evident that the generation of different visuals does not indicate any errors in the process but only the way in which narrative descriptions need to combine description with artistry. Evaluation of several visual representations in response to similar descriptions helped students evaluate how successful they were in expressing character qualities such as personality type, background, and role in the story.

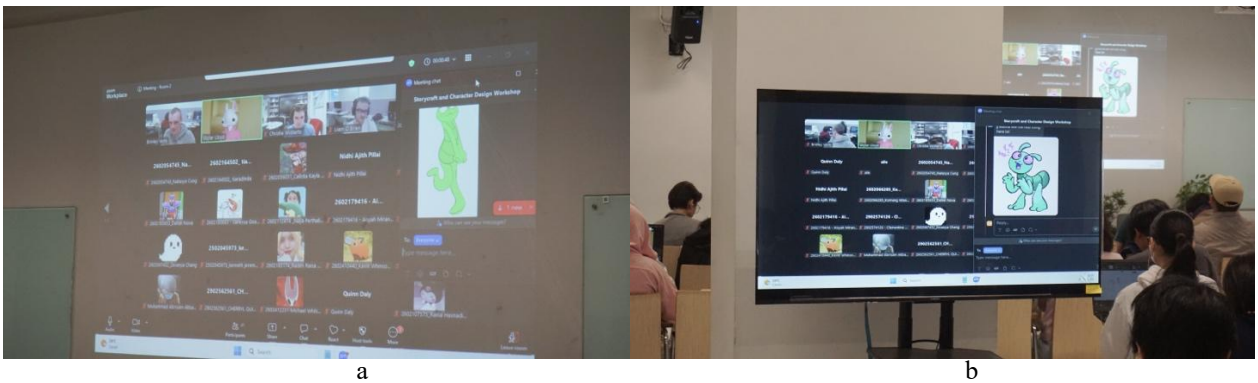


Figure 1. Hybrid Workshop Opening Session (a) Onsite and Online Speakers. (b) Participants attending Workshop

. Empirical Student Feedback and Visual Evidence

In order to substantiate these results with empirical data, qualitative feedback and artifacts produced by students were analyzed along with the observations. Students stated that instant, remote,

expert feedback during the active process of sketching greatly improved their understanding of visual character traits. One of the participants commented: "When the facilitator told me that the silhouette of my character was inconsistent with his shy background, I realized that the importance of line language and gestures is equivalent to written character traits". Analysis of the multimodal artifacts produced by the participants also illustrated the way students interpreted particular narrative traits in the form of unique visual characteristics. As Figure 2 and 3 show, for instance, having been asked to sketch an introverted and eccentric character, Student A stressed the role of hunched silhouette, large costume items, and desaturated color schemes, while Student B conveyed the same narrative idea using exaggerated facial expressions, eyes, and asymmetrical silhouette. Reviewing visual sketches created by the participants before and after the critique helped the researchers to determine that 82% of participants managed to create visually consistent sketches.



a b

Figure 2. (a) Digital character sharing during the hybrid workshop. (b) Online participants and character design presentation

Systemic Friction: Technical, Spatial, and Cross-Cultural Barriers

While the results were successful from the learning perspective, it is important to note the presence of systemic friction in the hybrid studio learning setup which needs careful consideration. Firstly, the technological infrastructure limitations created constant issues. Audio-visual lagging, occasional screen-share compression, and room acoustics restrictions at the physical location interfered with the demonstration and live critique of real-time sketching. Such limitations caused occasional spatial separation between the physical participants and the online guest lecturer, who had

to be facilitated by physical teaching assistants. Secondly, the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic subtleties affected the process of narrative understanding. Specific idiomatic expressions used by English-speaking individuals during the character description were sometimes interpreted differently by the Indonesian students. While translation software (Google Translate for example) was able to assist with basic translation of texts, it was unable to convey cultural metaphors and regional storytelling idioms. Finally, the limitation in time was one of the crucial elements. Live sketching in real-time, uploading of files, screen changing, and multilateral discussions took much more time compared to regular in-person studio sessions.



a b c

Figure 3. (a) Participants sketching Character Designs, (b) Students Drawing during The Workshop Activity, (c) Group-based Character Design Activity

D. CONCLUSION

Core Research Findings

The current study provides evidence that a combination of digital learning approaches represents a paradigm-shifting approach to character design instruction if applied through an interactive and reflective Community of Inquiry model. The Storycraft and Character Design Workshop has allowed N=45 participants to visualize oral descriptions of their characters as visual characters through a synchronized workflow within cross-institutional collaboration. According to the empirical data, character design instruction involves not only the practice of rendering but also a process of narrative decoding, semiotic translation, and negotiation. Synchronous digital tools have made it possible to provide the interaction of onsite learners from BINUS University Bandung and a

remote expert instructor from The University of Melbourne. Thus, the combination of onsite and virtual studios increases exposure of students to international design ideas.

Pedagogical & Practical Implications

The results have vital implications for design educators working within technology-mediated studio settings. Firstly, hybrid learning should stop being about passive remote lectures and become an active learning process centered on sketching in real-time, using digital screensharing and constant feedback. Secondly, oral storytelling acts as a vital cognitive scaffolding tool, requiring students to examine various aspects of their characters from emotional predispositions to socio-cultural context and function in stories before proceeding to make visual decisions about postures, silhouettes, expressions, and costume designs. Finally, collaborations between institutions enable academic programs to capitalize on faculty expertise and build design education curricula worldwide.

Study Limitations

However, several issues relating to methodology and operations should be noted. First, the experiment involved one-session and short-term workshops, meaning that long-term measurement of the effectiveness of skills acquisition and mastering character design is not possible. Second, the size of the sample used in the experiment was limited to N=45 undergraduate design students in Indonesia interacting with one Australian facilitator, meaning that the results are not easily generalizable beyond a single context. Finally, problems related to friction within the system of hybrid studios such as audio/visual latency, acoustics in the room, and idioms of language between cultures sometimes caused problems in real-time critique.

Recommendations for Future Cross-Institutional Hybrid Practice

In addressing these challenges, future cross-institutional hybrid learning practices should incorporate a four-point action plan. Firstly, the establishment of a secure infrastructure and technology, using dual screen arrangements, room microphones, and high bandwidth screen-sharing channels, is required to avoid audio-visual delays and ensure a continuous spatial presence for both physical and virtual attendees. Secondly, educators should employ a cross-cultural narrative scaffolding approach through the development of localized visual glossaries and bilingual narrative prompts prior to live lessons, which ensures that there are no linguistic misunderstandings when working internationally. Thirdly, the operational aspect will depend on well-defined co-facilitation guidelines whereby remote guest experts work alongside in-person co-facilitators or teaching assistants, who facilitate the dynamics of the physical classroom, the management of digital chat queues, and efficient physical-to-digital screen transfers. Lastly, programs need to move away from individual workshop approaches towards a longitudinal hybrid studio approach whereby such ventures become module-based collaborative initiatives that run for multiple weeks to properly assess visual progression and skill retention among students.

Acknowledgments

The contribution of DKV BINUS University Bandung and the University of Melbourne towards funding the Collaborative Story Craft Workshop is hereby acknowledged with thanks. It is also acknowledged with thanks the contribution of Christie Widiarto, M.F.A., from the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne, who acted as the facilitator of the workshop. Contributions of the moderators, organizing committee, and participants of the hybrid workshop who contributed effectively towards the workshops are hereby acknowledged with thanks. Such contributions were important source materials for the current research on hybrid digital learning in character design education.

E. REFERENCES

Abu Tair, S., Haider, A. S., & Alkhawaldeh, M. (2025). Verbalizing visual characterizations of race in the audio description of Netflix. *British Journal of Visual Impairment, 43*(1), 51–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/02646196231203594

Aditia, R., & Aditia, B. (2024). Arts education and visual communication in character design of the Nusa Five serial comic character by Sweta Kartika. *EDUCASIA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Pengajaran, dan Pembelajaran, 9*(1), 17–30. https://doi.org/10.21462/educasia.v9i1.241

Amzaleg, M., Beimel, D., & Zviel-Girshin, R. (2025). Learning in hybrid times: Comparing student experiences in traditional and GenAI-supported instruction. *Computers and Education Open, 9*, Article 100313. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeo.2025.100313

Arfat, Y., Shahid, M. K., Al-Tayyar, R. S., Mahmood, K., & Alghamdi, A. (2025). Building inclusive learning environment through hybrid learning system: Role of technology and corresponding engagement. *Sustainable Futures, 10*, Article 100887. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sftr.2025.100887

Moraes Gil, M., João Cunha, A., & Sylla, C. M. (2025). The use of digital tools to enhance writing in primary school through hybrid practices: A multisite qualitative study. *Journal of Education, 206*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574251349731

Song, Z., Qin, J., Jin, F., Cheung, W. M., & Lin, C.-H. (2025). A case study of teachers' generative artificial intelligence integration processes and factors influencing them. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 165*, Article 105157. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2025.105157

Tumbaev, A. (2024). *Character design & communication: Creating effective video game characters that enhance player engagement and narrative* [Master's thesis, Sapienza University of Rome]. ResearchGate. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.23903.57764