

Bichronous Learning in Practice: How Immigrant Students Learn Swedish Online

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Abstract

As online education becomes increasingly common in language learning, there is a pressing need to understand how students experience bichronous (synchronous and asynchronous) teaching formats in second language learning contexts. Drawing on qualitative group interviews with participants enrolled in an SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) program, the study identifies key benefits and challenges associated with this blended format. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, revealing insights into the advantages and limitations of online sessions for language skills development. The findings indicate that bichronous online teaching supports language skills development, feedback practices, structured participation, flexibility, and autonomy. However, the students reported challenges to self-paced learning, peer interaction, and digital competence. Teacher presence, feedback, and session design emerges as crucial for students' engagement and participation. These insights suggested an enhanced approach to online teaching, combining synchronous and asynchronous methods for second language learning. Recommendations for optimising online second language teaching were discussed, emphasising the importance of adaptive pedagogical strategies, technological support, and individualised approaches to meet diverse learner needs.

Keywords: Bichronous learning; Online language education; Second language learning; Adult migrant students; Student engagement; Swedish for immigrants (SFI)

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Introduction

Globally, migrant and refugee students face complex challenges in accessing online education. While online learning has the potential to increase access to education for displaced and marginalised students, its effectiveness is often limited by barriers such as low digital literacy, lack of devices, and insufficient institutional support (Halkic & Arnold, 2019; Lwin et al., 2022). Teachers also frequently lack the training, confidence, and pedagogical strategies needed to adapt digital instruction to the specific needs of migrant learners (Bradley et al., 2025). Furthermore, although many migrants are familiar with mobile technologies through social media, they often struggle with more formal digital tasks such as navigating online platforms, using computers, filling out digital forms, or interpreting formal online content (Bradley et al., 2025). These difficulties are further compounded by personal and contextual challenges, including unstable housing, trauma, and social isolation. As Witthaus (2023) emphasises, effective online engagement for refugees depends on inclusive design, emotional support, and flexible learning environments that account for learners' lived realities.

In this global context, Sweden offers a unique case through its Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) program, a state-funded initiative designed to support adult migrants' integration via language education. The SFI programme provides free language instruction to adult migrants and international students, aiming to facilitate their participation in the labour market and local communities. There are large employment gaps between native-born and immigrant residents (Calmfors & Gassen, 2019), and there is a need to ensure their effective integration into social networks and local communities (Reichenberg & Berhanu, 2019). Learning the language of the host country is frequently identified as a key element in the integration of immigrants into a new society (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017). Yet, limited language skills remain one of the most significant challenges for newcomers in the country, hindering their successful integration into both society and the labour market (Carlsson et al., 2023). Participating in language classes is a widely recognised method to achieve this goal (Reichenberg & Berhanu, 2018). Adult education in Sweden "has historically been one of the most important tools for adult migrants' initial language learning" (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017, p. 215). Moreover, it has been identified that easy access to and availability of language learning classes are important for sustaining attendance (Foged & Van Der Werf, 2023).

However, the shift to remote teaching within the SFI context has generated concern and academic interest regarding the effectiveness of online modalities for teaching Swedish as a second language (SSL) to newcomers (Alvarez, 2021; Elwan & Mehmeti, 2021). Prior research on emergency remote teaching within the SFI context has primarily explored teachers' experiences with synchronous and asynchronous instructions (Alvarez, 2021; Elwan & Mehmeti, 2021; Kollberg, 2021; Öllsjö & Söderlund, 2020). While these modes offer increased flexibility, accessibility, and personalised learning pathways, several challenges remain. These are reduced opportunities for language practice, students' limited digital literacy, inadequate access to digital resources, and difficulties in replicating the social interaction that is inherent in traditional classroom settings (Kollberg, 2021; Öllsjö & Söderlund, 2020). The transition to remote teaching has also increased the risk of student isolation, with negative consequences for the social interaction of newcomers (Elwan & Mehmeti, 2021).

Despite the emerging body of research on remote language teaching within the SFI context, most existing studies have primarily focused on teachers' experiences with

emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (Alvarez, 2021; Elwan & Mehmeti, 2021; Kollberg, 2021). However, less attention has been paid to how students themselves experience online teaching, particularly in SFI courses that intentionally blend online synchronous and asynchronous elements, a model referred to as bichronous online learning by Martin, Polly, and Ritzhaupt (2020). Moreover, as online teaching shifts from a temporary response to a more permanent feature in SFI programmes, it is important to move beyond emergency contexts and explore how students engage with online learning under more planned conditions. This study contributes to the field by addressing these gaps and aims to explore the perceived benefits and challenges of online language teaching from the learner's perspective, something that has been underexplored in previous work. Understanding how factors play out in specific contexts, such as SFI courses, is essential for designing language teaching that meets the evolving digital and linguistic needs of adult migrants. The following research question was framed:

How do immigrant students' experience the adoption of bichronous online teaching sessions on their learning of Swedish as a second language (SSL)?

Bichronous Conceptual Framework: Blended Synchronous and Asynchronous Modalities for Online Teaching

Over the past few decades, digital technologies have become increasingly integrated into everyday classrooms. In the context of second language learning, online education has long presented both opportunities and challenges for teaching and learning (Tao & Gao, 2022). The specific challenges of learning a new language as an adult are often associated with various parameters such as cognitive, social, and emotional factors (Moustakas & Kiakou, 2020; Steber & Rossi, 2021). Doing this remotely—where there is often limited interaction with both teachers and peers—can add further difficulties (Rathert & Ağçam, 2022). In an American case study conducted by Truhlar et al. (2018), focusing on the student perspective on online learning in relation to group work and social presence, the findings suggested that structured roles and group reflections in synchronous online sessions could promote deeper engagement. That, in turn, could be applicable to the language learning context since the identification of strategies to enhance social presence would be important for language learners in both synchronous and asynchronous (bichronous) settings. This aligns with Mays and Ross (2022), who investigated students' perceptions of developing a sense of community (SoC) in synchronous and asynchronous online courses.

However, online teaching can also have advantages, as the format can offer flexibility in terms of both time and space (Tai, 2024; Mays & Ross, 2022; Presley et al., 2023). In formal school settings, students can engage remotely in a variety of ways, utilising asynchronous, synchronous, and blended modalities to enhance their second language proficiency (Utomo & Ahsanah, 2022). Even prior to the pandemic, the use of distance teaching modalities has ushered in a new era of flexibility and adaptability for second language education (Perveen, 2016). Students can participate synchronously in live discussions, video conferencing, and immediate feedback, mimicking traditional classroom environments. Additionally, students can access resources, complete assignments, and review materials asynchronously, accommodating diverse schedules and learning preferences (Martin et al., 2020; Truhlar et al., 2018).

Yet, learning a second language remotely is influenced by the learners' basic technical skills, persistence, effective time-management skills, and overall communication skills. In a study conducted by Villaver and Justiniane (2023), the results showed that

students' greatest challenges with learning a second language remotely were maintaining motivation, attention, and time management, yet increased their self-directed learning skills. The researchers further identified factors that should be considered when using online teaching such as student engagement and interaction with their teachers and peers (Hollister et al., 2022). These findings were also both relevant and applicable to the context of remote language teaching as students' lack of interaction with their peers and teachers affected their language learning and reduced their learning opportunities.

Bichronous online learning is an instructional model that integrates both synchronous and asynchronous communication modes within a single course (Martin et al., 2020) (see Figure 1). While synchronous communication occurs in real-time, allowing for immediate interaction between teachers and students (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022; Lowenthal et al., 2021; Truhlar et al., 2018), asynchronous communication provides flexibility by enabling students to access resources and complete assignments at their own pace (Bailey et al., 2021). This blended format has been described as offering "the best of both worlds" (Martin et al., 2024), as it enhances student engagement, improves access to teachers, supports community building, and fosters communication and collaboration skills (Martin et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the bichronous approach also presents challenges, including the complexity of content design, increased planning demands, and the need to clearly communicate the course structure and expectations to learners (Martin et al., 2024). Previous studies conducted before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, reveal both positive and negative perceptions of integrating both communication modes in language learning courses (Bond, 2021; Murphy et al., 2011).

Moallem (2015), for example, conducted a case study examining how different communication methods impact critical factors in online learning, including self-regulation, social presence, immediacy, intimacy, collaboration, and learning outcomes. The study highlighted that combined methods promoted the highest levels of social presence and immediacy, which contributed to students' sense of cognitive and emotional support. However, Moallem's findings suggested that communication methods alone may not be the determining factor for learner self-regulation, with other elements such as instructional design and learner characteristics playing a potentially more influential role.

Recent research has moved beyond the context of emergency remote teaching to examine how different online modalities function under more stable and intentional conditions. For example, Viriya (2022) investigated how synchronous, asynchronous, and bichronous online learning modes influence students' self-regulated learning and perceived English language development in a university setting. The study revealed that the learning environment when thoughtfully designed can either support or hinder learners' ability to self-regulate (Viriya, 2022). In particular, the asynchronous mode allowed for autonomy and self-paced learning, while the bichronous model offered the potential for deeper engagement but required more advanced self-management skills, which not all learners possessed. These findings emphasised that the effectiveness of online learning depends not only on the modality itself but also on how it aligns with learners' digital readiness, autonomy, and experience levels.

Another study by Zuhriyah and Fajarina (2022) has demonstrated how structured bichronous learning environments can enhance students' engagement, comprehension, and confidence, particularly in language learning contexts. They implemented a blended approach in a reading comprehension course where asynchronous sessions using Google Classroom alternated with synchronous meetings via Google Meet. The asynchronous format allowed

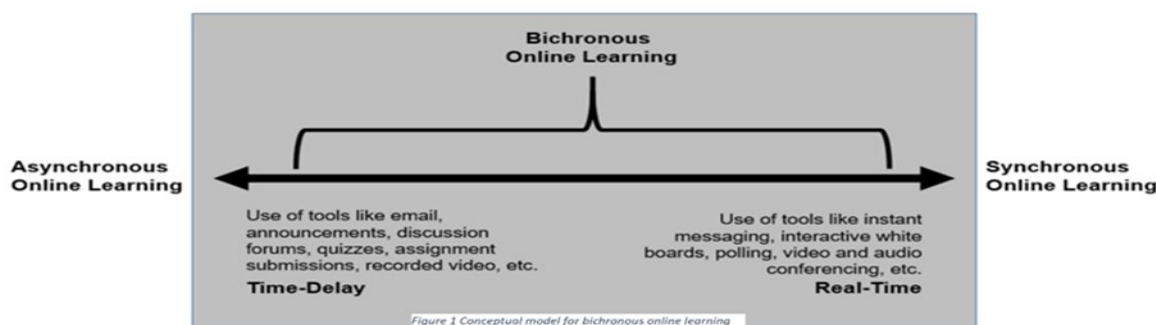
students to engage deeply with reading texts, reflecting on questions, and posting their answers without the pressure of real-time interaction. These sessions were complemented by synchronous meetings that enabled real-time clarification of difficult vocabulary, peer-supported responses, and immediate teacher feedback (Zuhriyah & Fajarina, 2022). Their findings confirm that combining both modalities can improve motivation, comprehension, and interaction especially when designed to support learner autonomy and engagement.

Mohammadi (2023) also notes that bichronous learning supports active participation, improved learning outcomes, and a stronger sense of teaching and social presence. This is achieved by combining the immediacy and real-time interaction of synchronous sessions with the flexibility and reflection time of asynchronous learning. However, while these bichronous models offered benefits, challenges were evident. One major challenge is the increased demand for self-regulated learning skills, as learners must navigate shifting schedules, manage independent tasks, and remain motivated without constant instructor presence (Viriya, 2022). This mode may overwhelm students who lack digital competence, especially when the structure demands a high degree of autonomy and technological fluency. Similarly, Zuhriyah and Fajarina (2022) found that while blending modalities enhanced comprehension and engagement, students with lower digital skills or less confidence required more support to navigate these modes' demands.

As mature online teaching continues to evolve beyond emergency contexts, further research is needed to better understand how synchronous, asynchronous, and bichronous online formats impact students' second language learning and the pedagogical strategies that effectively support language development (Alqahtani, 2022). This study, therefore, investigates students' perspectives and experiences with a bichronous online teaching model to identify both the challenges and benefits associated with both modalities for online second language teaching.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Bichronous Online Learning in Martin et al., (2020)



Method

Participants

The study involved ten students learning SSL at a Swedish adult formal education institution offering Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) courses. These courses are designed to support the integration of newcomers in Sweden by developing their language skills. The students participated in a bichronous online learning format, which combined both

synchronous and asynchronous sessions. For synchronous interactions, Microsoft Teams was used as the collaborative platform to facilitate real-time teaching sessions. It enabled features such as live video, chat, file sharing, and breakout rooms to support interaction and feedback. For asynchronous learning, students used Lunis, a digital textbook developed for SSL learners, which allowed for self-paced study and practice. Participants were recruited through school administrators and class teachers. The researcher made several visits to the school to inform students about the study, distribute informed consent forms, and explain the voluntary nature of participation. The study's goals and procedures were communicated in English, Arabic, and Swedish to ensure clarity and inclusivity. In total, ten students from diverse backgrounds agreed to participate, forming three interview groups with 3, 3, and 4 participants respectively. (See Table 1 with participants profile below.)

Instruments

The primary instrument used for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore students' experiences with bichronous language learning (A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A). The protocol consisted of open-ended questions aimed at exploring students' perceptions, motivations, participation, and attitudes toward bichronous online sessions. The questions also addressed the role of digital platforms, teachers, and communication modes in facilitating SSL learning. The interview questions were directed at all participants to ensure equal participation and to gather comprehensive insights. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in responses and enabled deeper exploration of the topics under discussion.

Data Collection

A qualitative research design using semi-structured group interviews was employed to provide an in-depth understanding of students' experiences with bichronous online learning. Group interviews were chosen as the main method of data collection due to their ability to foster interaction and generate rich insights through group dynamics (Cohen et al., 2007). Furthermore, these methods provided a natural platform for participants to engage in dialogue, exchange ideas, and build upon each other's responses (Frey & Fontana, 1991). Further, group interviews prompted participants to share experiences, opinions, and reflections that they might not express in an individual interview setting. They took advantage of the presence of peers to create a supportive atmosphere, encouraging participants to express themselves openly and candidly, ultimately enriching the depth and breadth of the data collected (Taber, 2013).

Yet group interviews can impose specific difficulties impacting the dynamic of interaction between members, thus affecting responses of participants. Group characteristics such as size can lead to a situation where only certain individuals' viewpoints are expressed (Cohen et al., 2007). In order to address these issues, group interviews were structured to reduce group size into small groups. The groups were kept small (3–4 students) and carefully composed to reflect diversity in gender, proficiency level, and experience. Small group interviews are more manageable for the researcher allowing for control over the ongoing discussions (Denscombe, 1995). This also enabled deeper discussions and more detailed responses compared to larger groups, where time constraints may limit individual contributions (Denscombe, 1995). Each group interview took place in a private room at the students' school, providing a familiar and comfortable setting. Interviews lasted between 1 to 2 hours, were audio-recorded, and supplemented with field notes. All recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Table 1*Student Participant Profile*

Group number	Participant code within each group	Age	Sex	Level of schooling	Online experience	Language level	Duration of group interview
Group 1	G1P1	20	Female	High school	Low	C	1 hour 50 min
	G1P2	20	Female	High school	Low	C	
	G1P3	37	Female	Middle school	Low	C	
	G1P4	38	Male	High school	Middle	C	
Group 2	G2P1	42	Male	High school	Middle	C	1 hour 30 min
	G2P2	22	Male	University	High	D	
	G2P3	27	Female	University	High	D	
Group 3	G3P1	34	Female	University	Low	B	1 hour 20 min
	G3P2	55	Female	University	Low	B	
	G3P3	39	Female	University	Low	C	

Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in identifying patterns, themes, and meaning across the dataset. The process began with translating the interview transcripts from their original languages into English to ensure clarity and consistency during analysis. The transcripts were then read several times to become familiar with the content and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' responses. Then, the analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach, involving transcribing; coding; collating codes into potential themes; reviewing themes; defining themes; and producing a scholarly report. Thus, data were coded systematically, highlighting recurring ideas, expressions, or concerns. Initial codes included topics such as the use of multimedia resources, structured opportunities for language practice, comfortable spaces for speaking, and challenges encountered by beginners. These codes were then carefully examined and grouped into broader themes that captured more abstract and meaningful patterns across the data. Examples of these themes include *enhanced listening skills*, *encouraging speaking*, and *challenges in real-time understanding*. As the themes were

refined, they were reviewed against the entire dataset to ensure coherence and relevance. This iterative process helped clarify the focus of each theme and its relationship to the research question. Throughout the analysis, illustrative quotes from participants were selected and incorporated to provide evidence and to convey the authenticity of the students' voices. A table summarising the themes and their associated codes is provided below in Table 2 to outline the structure and logic of the analytical process.

Table 2

Summary of Codes and Themes from Participants Interviews

Recurring initial codes from participants interviews	Collating codes into potential themes	Defined themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of multimedia resources (e.g., short films) ● Focus on understanding teacher ● Comfortable space for practice ● Confidence building ● Difficulties for beginners ● Obstacles in practicing speaking during synchronous sessions 	Enhanced Listening Skills Encouraging Speaking Practice Challenges in Real-Time Understanding	Language Practice and Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One-on-one sessions on Teams ● Detailed evaluation and progress discussion ● Individual support sessions ● Addressing learning difficulties 	Direct Feedback from Teachers Real-Time Clarification and Assistance Digital Skills and Platform Functionality	Individualised Feedback and Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individual attention from teachers ● Structured participation systems ● Reduced interaction with peers ● Differences in classroom and remote session dynamics ● Camera and microphone issues ● Distractions affecting concentration 	Increased Teacher-Student Interaction Peer Interaction Challenges Technical Disruptions	Structure and Active Participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Convenience of remote sessions ● Ability to search for information during sessions ● Use of digital platforms for autonomous learning 	Flexible Learning Environment Self-Paced Learning Challenges of Self-Responsibility	Flexibility, Convenience, and Autonomy

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Independent study outside school hours ● Need for individual effort and focus ● Influence of teacher guidance on student engagement 		
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Results

Through thematic analysis, four overarching themes emerged. Participants names are fictitious, giving two letters (G =group and P=participant) for each participant with their group and participant numbers. The themes are language practice and training; feedback and support; structure and active participation; and flexibility, convenience, and autonomy.

Language Practice and Training

Under this theme, the results showed that both synchronous and asynchronous online sessions offered meaningful but varied opportunities for language practice. Students highlighted a range of benefits and limitations based on their experiences, levels, and preferences. Synchronous sessions via Microsoft Teams were particularly valued for improving listening skills due to the quiet and focused digital environment. Unlike traditional classrooms where distractions may occur, remote settings offered a calm space for concentrated listening. Teachers' use of multimedia materials in Teams sessions further supported listening skills development, as repeated exposure to varied audio-visual resources enhanced students' comprehension. As some students reported: "We focus more to understand what the teacher is saying" (G1P2); "I felt that it helped me to improve my listening over time," (G3P2).

Speaking practice during synchronous sessions also emerged as a valuable component. Students, such as G3P2, appreciated the chance to interact and receive immediate feedback: "I feel there is a space to speak during Teams sessions, even if we pronounce wrong words, but we speak anyway."

However, not all students found synchronous sessions equally supportive, especially those at beginner levels. Some experienced hesitation and anxiety about speaking in real-time. G1P1 reflected, "Because I will not dare to talk during Teams sessions," suggesting that the online format made it harder to overcome the fear of making mistakes.

In contrast, asynchronous learning through the Lunis platform was often seen as more manageable and supportive for grammar and writing development. Students appreciated the self-paced nature and structured exercises. G2P1 offered this thought: "The language information I receive from this platform is much better than the information I receive from other methods."

Several students praised Lunis for offering detailed grammar instruction and step-by-step writing guidance. "Lunis is very good at improving our grammatical skills, how to build a sentence, linking words, and writing texts," said G3P2.

Others noted the value of asynchronous platforms like “Lunis” allowing for translation and comparison of words, enhancing students’ understanding of a new vocabulary as mentioned by G3P1 and G3P3.

Despite the benefits of asynchronous learning, some students still expressed a need for teacher support, especially when facing difficulties independently. This pointed out the limitations of self-directed study for some students and stressed the importance of teacher presence for deeper comprehension. G1P1 said, “It’s difficult because the language level on Lunis is high”; G3P2 offered “It’s hard to understand complex grammar without immediate teacher assistance.”

In summary, students’ experiences reflected a balance of benefits and obstacles across both remote learning modes. Synchronous sessions enabled interaction and immediate feedback but could inhibit participation for less confident students. Asynchronous platforms offered flexible, autonomous learning but lacked the responsive support of a teacher.

Feedback and Support

Under this theme, the results showed that students appreciated receiving timely and personalised feedback during synchronous sessions. Many students reported that teachers supported them through one-on-one calls on Microsoft Teams, which allowed for specific feedback on individual progress. These real-time sessions also played a role in helping students with learning difficulties or clarification needs. Teachers’ availability for individual check-ins increased students’ sense of support and guidance during remote learning. “It is a good way to evaluate and give feedback on our work. She calls me on Teams and explains everything in detail. I feel satisfied with her comments.” (G2P1)

Students also recognised the importance of teacher support for developing digital literacy to navigate both synchronous and asynchronous sessions. They expressed concern over the lack of sufficient use of digital platforms, especially in terms of privacy and navigation. G3P1 suggested, “We need to improve our digital skills for school platforms. We need to know how to use Teams and keep our personal information private.”

Other students emphasised the challenges of accessing learning materials independently in asynchronous settings. They called for greater help with navigating online tools such as digital textbooks and audio resources. G3P2 said, “If I improve my digital skills, my learning pace will increase. Then I can use other resources to learn a language on my own.”

Despite some challenges, most students valued features available in asynchronous platforms like Lunis, particularly automatic feedback and interactive exercises that enabled independent learning. G3P2 reported, “I improved my skills when getting good automatic feedback on my answers to reading texts.”

Students appreciated how these features allowed them to assess their understanding and progress before completing chapters. Lunis also helped develop core language skills by enabling students to send recordings for feedback from teachers. G2P3 shared, “It was fun while I am developing my grammatical skills.”

Participants noted that these tools encouraged more self-assessment, which made asynchronous learning more engaging. Regular tests, automatic corrections, and the ability to

track their own development helped students stay motivated. G3P3 reflected this sentiment: “I felt more confident when I got results after each exercise. It helps me know what I should work more on.”

In summary, students found value in both synchronous and asynchronous feedback mechanisms. Direct interaction with teachers supported personalised learning, while platform-based feedback enhanced independent study. At the same time, the findings revealed a need for more structured support in digital literacy, particularly in helping students navigate tools for successful online learning.

Structure and Active Participation

Under this theme, the results showed that students experienced increased engagement during remote real-time sessions, primarily due to the structured participation implemented by teachers. This included encouraging respectful turn-taking and using digital tools that ensured everyone had a chance to contribute, which made communication more effective. “When the teacher or the student talks,” said G3P1, “we listen to each other carefully without interrupting.” (G3P1) Digital features such as the hand-raising button supported orderly interactions during synchronous sessions. “If I have a question, I click that hand button and ask,” said G2P3.

However, students also noted a decline in peer interaction during remote sessions. They compared the level of engagement to in-person classes, where collaboration and discussions were more frequent and natural. G2P3 said, “Our interaction with students is greater in class, but on Teams we look like strangers.” Some students highlighted the absence of teacher-initiated group activities or peer discussions during online classes. G1P4 noted “There are no group discussions in the Teams sessions.” G1P2 similarly observed “We don't work in pairs or groups.”

Students also raised concerns about technical and environmental disruptions, such as background distractions from unmuted microphones or cameras being on. While some believed that cameras helped maintain engagement, they also caused visual distractions. G1P2 admitted, “I get distracted by the backgrounds of students' cameras.”

Students expressed a desire for remote classes to better replicate the structure and order of in-person sessions. Another challenge was related to large group sizes and limited session time, which made it harder for some students to engage with the teacher or get the most from the session. G1P1 complained, “We do not have enough time to gain knowledge in Teams sessions.”

Students also observed that those with higher language proficiency tended to dominate the conversation, limiting opportunities for others to participate. “Those who speak well always take the time,” said G1P1.

In summary, students acknowledged both the advantages and limitations of structured remote sessions. On one hand, the teacher-led participation and organised environment were appreciated. On the other hand, the lack of peer interaction, session time constraints, and varying student abilities affected overall engagement.

Flexibility, Convenience and Autonomy

Under this theme, the results showed that students clearly recognised the benefits of flexibility, convenience, and autonomy when learning Swedish remotely. Many valued being able to study from home, which allowed them to accommodate other commitments such as work, family, or weather conditions. One student (G1P4) explained that the remote format allowed them to engage in real-time learning while seeking clarification online when needed: “I am able to search online for any information that I did not understand while my teacher was presenting the lessons on Teams.”

Several participants also described their remote learning environment as more focused on learning than traditional classrooms. “The lack of noise and conversations in the classroom allows for better focus.” (G1P4) However, this increased flexibility also led to reduced engagement for some. Students admitted that being at home made it easier to get distracted or engage in unrelated activities during class. “Engaging in activities such as drinking coffee, muting the microphone, and moving around at home contributed to a lack of focus.” (G3P1)

On the other hand, the asynchronous digital platform Lunis supported student autonomy by allowing them to manage their own learning. They appreciated being able to complete exercises without time pressure and explore materials at their own pace. “Via the platform outside school time. Whenever I have time, I access the platform and study on my own,” said G2P1.

The Lunis platform also provided tools that supported independent learning, such as multilingual dictionaries and repeatable tests, which helped students monitor their progress and deepen their understanding. “In Lunis, we have tests, and we have to do a test regularly after every chapter. If I am not satisfied with the results, I repeat the exercise and the test again until I feel more satisfied” (G3P3).

Still, some participants found the self-regulation process for learning is challenging. They expressed the pressure of having to plan and manage their learning independently, especially without direct teacher prompts. “We need to know how to deal with this type of learning,” remarked G3P2.

One student explained that they did not engage with writing tasks simply because the teacher did not explicitly assign them, showing the importance of ongoing teacher direction even in autonomous learning settings. “I did not practice writing via Lunis for a long time because the teacher did not ask us to write,” confessed G1P1.

In summary, students experienced both advantages and difficulties with the flexible and autonomous nature of remote learning. While it empowered them to take control of their own progress and study at convenient times, it also demanded focus, discipline, and digital knowledge to deal with the tension between freedom and responsibility.

Discussion

The rapid development of digital technologies for integration into pedagogical practices has put high demands on students’ competencies in using technology in their learning processes. This is particularly evident in the context of remote and bichronous learning, where students are expected not only to access and navigate multiple digital

platforms, but also to manage their own learning independently, troubleshoot technical issues, and engage in meaningful interaction without the immediate physical presence of a teacher. For adult immigrant students, these demands are often intensified by varying levels of digital literacy, Swedish language proficiency, prior educational experience, and responsibilities related to work, family, and social integration. Research has shown that many immigrants and refugees struggle with digital literacy, which affects their ability to benefit from online platforms for language learning (Bradley et al., 2025; Reichenberg & Berhanu, 2019). Both synchronous and asynchronous sessions are attributed to improving students' listening, writing, speaking, reading, and grammar skills. In synchronous sessions, students valued direct interaction with their teacher and the opportunity for real-time feedback, which supported the development of speaking and listening skills. Zhang and Du (2023), indicated that students feel less apprehensive about making mistakes and feel more confident to speak in synchronous remote sessions, exceeding social norms that occur when meeting face-to-face meetings. Video conferencing tools that incorporate features like "raise hand" were seen as effective in managing participation and enhancing communication (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). Yet, immigrant students, especially beginners, struggled to speak or follow spoken language during live sessions, often due to limited prior exposure to the language, lack of confidence, or fear of making mistakes.

In line with Perveen (2016), the results showed that students with lower language proficiency were less likely to participate because they lack confidence in speaking and understanding the spoken language in remote sessions. Our study indicated difficulties for beginners to speak remotely while students who possess higher language level report higher participation in discussion and tend to speak with less anxiety about making mistakes. Similarly, Tusino et al. (2022) observed that students with limited experience in the target language often felt embarrassed speaking during synchronous English classes, tending to adopt a more passive role as listeners. These barriers were especially prominent among immigrant students with lower Swedish language proficiency, who struggled to navigate live communication and lacked confidence to engage in real-time interaction. This complements the findings by Fujii et al. (2022) that language proficiency level influenced students' perceptions about bichronous teaching sessions as it influenced their preferred teaching mode. In contrast, asynchronous platforms offered an alternative environment that many students found more adaptable to their individual learning pace, particularly in allowing them to manage their time and access materials at their own pace. Platforms like Lunis enabled students to engage in self-study, and access materials outside school hours, repeat exercises, and track progress autonomously. This flexibility allowed students to build confidence, without the pressure of live interaction. They appreciated features such as native-language dictionary and automatic feedback which contributed to improved comprehension, self-assessment and self-regulated learning. This was explicit in their independent efforts to understand learning materials, managing their time, using appropriate learning tools such as translation apps and dictionaries, or seeking additional resources to improve their language skills. Additionally, the access to custom-tailored materials for language learning enriched their learning experience and fostered students' sense of autonomy and engagement.

Taskiran et al. (2024), conducted a study to examine automatic feedback contribution in distance writing skill development courses. The results showed that automatic feedback stimulated students' performances and motivation. This was evident in our study, as platforms like Lunis were perceived as particularly valuable by immigrant students. These tools enabled students to bridge gaps in their language learning and progress at their own pace, particularly when facing external challenges such as work obligations or family

responsibilities, factors that are common among adult immigrant students. Nevertheless, self-motivation and self-directed learning emerged as key factors affecting success in bichronous environments. Students with stronger self-directed learning skills were more likely to persist and succeed (Viriya, 2022; Lock et al., 2017). While some students become active participants in the learning process and demonstrate initiative in navigating both synchronous and asynchronous tasks, others struggle to maintain self-regulation and self-motivation to handle their learning independently. Ji et al. (2022) highlighted that during remote teaching, students often feel disconnected from the learning process, leading to decreased motivation and a sense of disengagement. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2022) argued that low self-motivation can hinder the effectiveness of bichronous teaching, as students may lack the discipline needed to regulate their learning across different formats. These challenges are particularly evident among immigrant students with lower language proficiency, lower schooling level, and lower digital skills who often rely more heavily on teacher-guided instruction. These students may find it difficult to manage asynchronous tasks independently or benefit fully from the flexibility offered by remote platforms (Witthaus, 2023).

In a study by Perveen (2016), the results showed that 82% of students preferred synchronous sessions to learn English over asynchronous sessions because they miss the direct interaction between peers and the teacher. When students learned individually, they needed strategies to maintain their independent learning through digital platforms and navigate teacher physical absence more effectively (Fröjd & Ström, 2021). This research highlighted the importance of empowering students to take ownership of their language learning and the role of teacher awareness encouraging students to acknowledge their language learning potential and develop self-regulatory skills. This empowerment also entailed developing students' digital competence, enabling them to navigate diverse online learning resources effectively and improve their asynchronous language learning. In the same context, teachers play a crucial role in fostering students' self-motivation and self-regulation skills by incorporating strategies that promote autonomy, self-reflection, and scaffolding into their online teaching practices (Lock et al., 2017). In addition to that, peer interaction, while crucial for second language development, was reported as minimal during their synchronous and asynchronous sessions. The students highlighted the absence of group activities that foster peer interaction. Yet surprisingly, they expressed a stronger need for teacher-led interaction rather than peer collaboration for learning. The limited peer interaction and preference for teacher-led learning could be attributed to cultural norms, limited experience with digital collaborative tools, or the absence of structured group activities. Teachers need to foster meaningful interaction that is crucial for language learning. Additionally, teachers need to consider lesson design in terms of duration, class size, and students' language proficiency.

The challenges were not primarily technical, such as poor internet connection but rather from classroom-related distractions, including large class sizes and background noise when students unmuted their microphones. Moreover, students expressed discomfort with using cameras, and concerns about appearance and concentration, which further complicates engagement during synchronous sessions. These challenges and students' concerns point to the need for a more adaptable approach to remote lesson planning, one that prioritises student concentration, motivation, and engagement to create bichronous online teaching sessions that promote learning of a second language for immigrant students.

Conclusion

The study suggests that bichronous online teaching, which combines synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods, can enhance second language acquisition and enrich learning experiences for students. The students generally perceived this format as beneficial, particularly for developing listening, writing, and grammatical skills. The flexibility and convenience of asynchronous tools complemented the structure and interactivity of synchronous sessions and created a supportive context for language learning. However, the findings also highlight that the effectiveness of bichronous learning depends heavily on learners' self-regulation abilities, including self-management, self-motivation, and digital competence. Students who were able to organize their time, navigate digital platforms, and stay motivated reported higher engagement and greater progress. At the same time, some students faced challenges related to limited peer interaction, difficulties in maintaining focus, and insufficient digital skills particularly among beginners or those with less formal education. While bichronous learning holds considerable promise, it also presents structural and pedagogical challenges that teachers must carefully consider. Teaching strategies should be adaptive, inclusive, and responsive to students' needs. The study highlights the importance of structured teacher guidance, meaningful feedback, and creating opportunities for interaction to maintain motivation and foster autonomous learning. One limitation of the study is its relatively small sample drawn from a single institutional setting, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the study relies on self-reported perceptions rather than objective measures of language proficiency. Future research should explore the long-term impact of bichronous teaching formats using broader samples and mixed-method approaches to improve pedagogical practices and ensure the quality of online language-learning experiences.

Declarations

Competing Interest

There is no potential conflict of interest in this study.

Data Availability

The data can be obtained by sending an email request to the corresponding author.

Ethics Statement

The study was conducted in full compliance with relevant guidelines and regulations of the Swedish Research Council, and approval was received from the university's internal board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their privacy rights were rigorously upheld.

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Appendix

Full Interview Protocol

Theme	Mode	Question
Language skills	Listening Synchronous\Asynchronous	<p>How do you experience practicing listening skills during live online sessions?</p> <p>How are multimedia resources used in live sessions and how helped improve your listening skills?</p> <p>How does the absence of physical presence (e.g., body language) affect your ability to listen and understand spoken Swedish?</p>
	Speaking Synchronous\Asynchronous	<p>How comfortable do you feel to participate in speaking activities online compared to in-person classes?</p> <p>What challenges do you face when trying to speak during live online sessions?</p> <p>How does the lack of physical presence in live sessions affect your willingness to participate and speak?</p>
	Writing Synchronous\Asynchronous	<p>How do live sessions (e.g., Teams) help you improve Swedish writing?</p> <p>How does the Lunis platform support your Swedish grammar and writing practice?</p> <p>What challenges do you face when writing without immediate teacher feedback?</p>
	Reading Synchronous\Asynchronous	<p>How does reading aloud or analysing texts in live sessions aid your comprehension?</p> <p>How does the teacher's live guidance impact your reading skills?</p> <p>How do you manage to understand complex texts without teacher support?</p>

Online Interaction, participation and engagement	Synchronous	<p>How would you describe your interactions with teachers during live online sessions?</p> <p>How often do you interact with your classmates during synchronous sessions?</p> <p>What tools or features help or hinder interaction during live sessions?</p> <p>What challenges do you face when trying to engage with peers or teachers during synchronous sessions?</p> <p>What factors affect your willingness or ability to participate in discussions?</p> <p>What influences your decision to turn your camera on or off during live remote lessons? Can you explain your feelings about this?</p>
	Asynchronous	<p>How do you interact with your teacher and classmates in asynchronous learning activities?</p> <p>Do you feel connected to your peers when participating asynchronously? Why or why not?</p> <p>How does the lack of real-time interaction affect your learning experience?</p>
Online Feedback	Synchronous	<p>How helpful do you find the feedback you receive in real-time during online classes? Any influence on your confidence or participation in class?</p> <p>Have you ever received individual feedback during a live session? If yes, how did it affect your understanding or motivation?</p> <p>Do you feel you have enough time and opportunity to ask for feedback during live sessions? Why or why not?</p>
	Asynchronous	<p>What kind of feedback do you receive in asynchronous learning?</p> <p>Can you describe the type of feedback you receive from your</p>

		<p>teacher after completing asynchronous tasks? How helpful? Timing?</p> <p>In what ways has asynchronous feedback (automated feedback) helped you improve in reading, writing, grammar, or other language areas?</p> <p>Do you feel that feedback on asynchronous tasks is personalised to your learning needs? Why or why not?</p> <p>What difficulties do you face when studying independently? without immediate teacher assistance in asynchronous mode?</p> <p>What features help you the most?</p>
Individual differences		<p>Did you notice any differences between you and other students that might affect your language learning experience? How?</p> <p>What do you think grouping (divide the students into groups) as a solution to decrease the effect of these differences on your learning experience?</p>
Remote teacher	Synchronous	<p>Can you describe how your teacher supports you during online learning sessions?</p> <p>In what ways does your teacher help you stay focused and engaged during live sessions? Increase\decrease your participation?</p>
	Asynchronous	<p>How available is your teacher when you need help outside scheduled class times?</p> <p>Can you describe how your teacher guides you in using asynchronous materials or tools?</p> <p>How does your teacher follow up on your progress in independent learning tasks?</p>