

## Blended Learning in EFL Classrooms at a Vietnamese University from Students' Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

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The utilization of blended learning in the field of English language instruction has shown a notable rise in recent times. Blended learning has the ability to provide an optimal setting for language education, enabling a transition from conventional instructional approaches to more progressive ways through the integration of technology. Nevertheless, several unresolved issues remain in relation to this methodology. This paper examines the perceptions of students regarding the potential benefits and obstacles associated with the implementation of blended learning in English language courses at a university in Vietnam. Additionally, the study proposes many solutions with the objective of enhancing the current situation and establishing a solid foundation for the future growth of blended learning. The study involved a sample of 165 first-year students, with online surveys and interviews being utilized as the primary methods of data collection. The results of the study indicate that contemporary students can be classified as digital natives. While they demonstrate proficiency in various technical skills, have easy access to technology, and exhibit a propensity for self-directed learning, their inclination towards traditional classroom environments is evident when it comes to their attitudes regarding online engagement with instructors and peers in English courses.

### Introduction

Within the realm of education, technology has become an essential element on a global scale. Consequently, educational institutions and families alike have been compelled to invest significant resources in acquiring computers, mobile phones, and internet connectivity, among other technological tools, in order to remain current and competitive.

According to Okaz's study conducted in 2015, it has been shown that face-to-face interaction, when carried out in isolation, might impede students' capacity to engage in higher-order thinking abilities. Additionally, this kind of interaction may deprive students of the opportunity to actively participate in collaborative learning. Teh (2021) states that more empirical studies would further supplement the field of communicative teaching in the virtual atmosphere. As classrooms are moving towards an online presence, blended learning is on the rise. Blended learning is a pedagogical approach that integrates technology in order to effectively blend traditional classroom instruction with online learning, aiming to actively include students in the learning process. The combination of face-to-face and online learning in this modality offers a flexible approach for both instructors and learners (Garrison, 2004; Vaughan et al., 2013). It is postulated that the integration of face-to-face and online learning facilitates communication between learners and instructors in both synchronous and asynchronous modes. This amalgamation allows learners to allocate time for contemplation of the learning material and enables them to articulate their comprehension along the learning journey.

While the integration of face-to-face and online learning has promise as a widely adopted approach for information dissemination in the current day, it is noteworthy that higher education institutions have only recently embraced the concept of blended learning as a means to offer educational opportunities to students globally, during the past decade. Blended learning has been recognized as a valuable strategy in the realm of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL), since it addresses the issue of limited English language exposure among students (Hoang, 2015). Blended learning has been more popular in EFL courses in recent years due to its ability to combine the advantages of both traditional face-to-face instruction and online learning. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the preparation of students while evaluating the benefits and efficacy of blended learning.

The forthcoming academic year at an esteemed business university in Vietnam is poised to witness the implementation of blended learning methodologies inside the EFL curriculum. The university has implemented a Learning Management System (LMS) in order to offer students a user-friendly, valuable, and organized platform for their online learning experience. Additionally, video initiatives have been undertaken, leading to a substantial collection of video lectures that have been put onto the site. Thorough preparations have been undertaken to ensure readiness for the deployment of blended learning in English language education, encompassing technological infrastructure, classroom facilities, and instructor resources. The only thing that has not been revealed is students' eagerness and attitudes towards this kind of learning method. Hence, the objective of this study is to assess the preparedness of students for EFL courses prior to the introduction of blended learning. It provides background information on the implementation of blended learning methodologies within the EFL curriculum at a business university in Vietnam, highlights the significance of preparing students for the transition to blended learning, and identifies the research gap concerning students' enthusiasm and dispositions towards this pedagogical approach.

## Literature Review

### *Definition of Blended Learning*

Despite its frequent usage in educational contexts, there is a lack of consensus over the precise meaning of blended learning. Blended learning has several interpretations, owing to its extensive usage over about three decades. Blended learning gained popularity in the area of education as a result of increased computer accessibility, more educational options, and dissatisfaction with online learning that lacked some essential features commonly seen in traditional classroom settings (McDonald, 2008).

According to Graham et al. (2013), blended learning is a pedagogical approach that integrates several instructional modalities, methodologies, and both online and face-to-face training. Singh (2003) states that blended learning integrates many technological resources, such as live chats, instant messaging, social networking, blogs and forums, and webinars. These technologies are utilized to enhance the learning experience by fostering motivation and creating meaningful interactions.

Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) points out that blended learning integrates face-to-face and distance delivery systems. They add that it is more than simply displaying a website page in the classroom. Those who use integrated learning environments attempt to leverage the advantages of both face-to-face and online methods, utilizing the Internet for what it does best and class time for what it does best. Blended learning appears to be the combination of instruction from two distinct modalities of teaching and learning, namely face-to-face learning systems and online distance learning systems which is also the definition applied in this research.

Blended learning has the following characteristics: (1) lecturers are able to conduct the learning process in two modes, lecture directly in the classroom and provide additional explanations through online learning; (2) instruction can be conducted face-to-face learning and online learning; (3) students are offered two forms of learning (offline and online); and (4) lecturers are already proficient in two different modes of the learning process.

These characteristics highlight that blended learning cannot be carried out holistically at all levels of education. In other words, blended learning has several requirements in its implementation, such as the ability of lecturers to apply two learning models; the motivation of lecturers to adapt to advances in digital technology, the availability of ICT equipment owned by universities, lecturers and students; the willingness of students to accept the burden of the two models; as well as a flexible schedule of learning activities (Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019).

### *Learner Perceptions of Blended Learning*

Students' perceptions of their own experiences are one of the key components of learning and teaching (Ginns & Ellis, 2009; Ayres, 2002; Yanguas, 2010; Chao & Lo, 2011), and others have studied learners' perceptions of the use of some ICT for the development of the four skills in various languages, reporting positive perceptions about their usefulness, especially in assisting students in the areas of spelling and grammar, communicative skills development, listening, and writing. The perceptions of EFL students toward blended learning settings, however, are seldom discussed in prior research (Aysel, 2014), and little work has been done to analyze

students' perceptions over a lengthy period of time.

Therefore, it is crucial to longitudinally examine how learners perceive their blended learning experience. In the current study, five elements that influence blended learning of Vietnamese EFL learners' perspectives are surveyed using the mix method. Learner motivation is a crucial element in determining student performance and learning outcomes, particularly the effectiveness of online learning (Cole et al., 2004). Interest in the course content and activities and perceptions of the relevance of online learning to the course are two of the most crucial factors that affect learners' motivation (Zimmerman, 2008; Huang & Chou, 2015). Wang et al. (2019) investigate the students' perceptions of the success of their blended learning, engagement, learning autonomy, and overall satisfaction level in addition to the motivation stated by EFL learners.

### *English as Foreign Language (EFL) Teaching in Vietnam*

In order to promote English teaching in Vietnam, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) launched a new initiative in 2008 called the National Foreign Language Project 2020. It was anticipated that this initiative would significantly alter language instruction in Vietnam. The administration emphasized how crucial it was for the country's social and economic growth as well as political integration to encourage foreign languages, especially English. The project's aim was "to thoroughly renovate the tasks of teaching and learning foreign languages within the national educational system" (Toan, 2013).

Among the foreign languages taught and learned in Vietnamese universities, English is the most popular. In order to prepare for its upcoming growth, MOET has piloted the teaching of mathematics, physics, and chemistry in English at a number of institutions in the nation's major cities. English is employed as the primary language of teaching in the MOET's Foreign Education Programs (MOET, 2014), which were introduced in 2014.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has been used to assess the success of Project 2020. According to the Project 2020 guidelines, the CEFR would be used as a national reference framework to assess language proficiency, design curriculum, develop course materials and syllabus, and create teaching and learning plans in order to ensure that the various stages of foreign language teaching and learning in the educational system are compatible (MOET, 2008, 2013). The initiative attempts to solve the problems of teacher development and high-quality language instruction across the nation.

Given its growing significance in the economy and in global communication, English language instruction has taken center stage in Vietnam's educational reforms. One may argue that the increase of English education is a reflection of how the Vietnamese economy and society have expanded in reaction to the global marketplace, as has occurred everywhere. However, the fast increase in English's popularity has raised questions regarding the effectiveness of the educational system's teaching and learning processes.

Blended learning has been implemented in various educational settings in Vietnam, with a focus on English language development in middle schools. The potential for digital transformation in higher education through blended learning has been highlighted, with a call for investment in online learning activities (Tang, 2020). The effectiveness of blended learning in higher

education has been further emphasized, with the development of assessment criteria for its application. However, there is a need to consider students' expectations and experiences in the implementation of blended learning, as highlighted in a case study at Hanoi Open University (Vu, 2014).

#### *Advantages of Blended Learning in ESL/ EFL Class*

Multiple benefits of blended learning contribute to language acquisition and affective values among students. Sheerah (2020) argues the result of blended learning in EFL classes as 1) it helps improve the digital literacy skills of lecturers and students; 2) students have two knowledge transformation spaces (offline and online); 3) it promotes increased student affective values (learning motivation, responsibility, discipline, and autonomy); 4) it provides current teaching materials; and 5) students can practice communicating in English with native English speakers from different countries. Pham (2023) states that teachers also benefit from online assessments and reports since they can monitor students' learning progress regularly and conveniently with more thorough information about each individual. As a result, they can provide necessary support and scaffold students' learning.

Kenney and Newcombe (2011) discover in their study that, in terms of grades, students who had undergone blended learning scored slightly higher than those who had not been taught through blended learning mode. This leads researchers to hypothesize that blended learning will become one of the competitive advantages that higher education institutions offer students. (Yang et al., 2013) Numerous other studies have demonstrated that integrated learning can indeed contribute some positive effects to the instruction of reading skills, vocabulary, grammar, speaking skills, and listening skills. In addition, Moussa-Inaty (2017) states that blended learning is believed to have a positive effect and, as a result, it reduces the likelihood of cognitive overload among students. Blended learning can also increase students' motivation because they have greater autonomy in their learning voyage in addition to the face-to-face mode, which enables them to discuss further or obtain better clarification from instructors.

#### *Factors Affecting the Implementation of Blended Learning in ESL/ EFL Classes*

Despite the numerous benefits of integrated learning, it is essential to recognize that its effectiveness depends on a number of factors. The preparedness of students is an essential factor. Difficulty in accessing online classroom material due to differing socioeconomic circumstances or a lack of IT knowledge (Holley & Oliver, 2010) and a lack of initiative to engage in self-learning (Tang & Chaw, 2013) are potential barriers that may hinder students' readiness.

According to Hung et al. (2010), blended learning includes elements like computer self-efficacy, internet self-efficacy, online communication self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, and motivation. Computer, internet, and online communication self-efficacy are related to computer and internet access proficiency. Self-directed learning and learner control, on the other hand, include students' learning strategies, self-assessment, access to resources, resource management, and time management. Consequently, the aptitude of students for blended learning may be evaluated based on a variety of factors. In a similar vein, Rasouli et al. (2016) have outlined five crucial factors for evaluating students' preparedness for blended learning. Following a discussion of the learning factors that may influence students' preparedness for

integrated learning, this study attempts to replicate his research model. The model shows how the variables such as technical abilities, technological accessibility, self-directed learning, attitude towards traditional classroom setting, and attitude towards blended classroom setting interact to produce readiness for blended learning. According to Cao (2023), it can be understood that teachers' and students' perceptions of the ease of using the LMS can also influence the way they employ this tool as part of blended learning.

### Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of students' readiness for blended learning in EFL classes?
2. What are students' opinions on factors affecting blended learning in EFL classes?

## Methods

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The research was conducted at a prestigious Vietnamese public university. The university is renowned for its business school, where students can receive systematic and high-quality occupational training. In addition to receiving professional knowledge, students can also acquire the necessary skills for future employment, including English language abilities.

The university has developed its own LMS for the 2023-2024 academic year in order to implement blended learning in some EFL classes. Selected lecturers and students have been officially informed of the project's plans, and thorough training on the platform's use has also been conducted. Throughout the past semester, video lectures have been created and uploaded to the platform, making them accessible to students in all EFL courses. The adoption of LMS for teaching and learning will occur during the next academic year.

This study's participants are first-year undergraduates from a variety of academic disciplines. The questionnaire will be completed by 165 students from three EFL courses at that university, and ten of them will be invited to participate in online interviews. All participants in this study will engage in integrated learning-based General English 1 classes.

### *Design of the Study*

This investigation is predominantly quantitative, with a minor qualitative component. Two instruments, a survey questionnaire and interviews are utilized. This study aims to investigate the perspectives of students and the factors that influence the use of integrated learning in a university EFL setting.

The study aims at investigating the students' perceptions and some factors affecting English language blended learning by using two data collection instruments. Participants were asked to respond to an online questionnaire containing items related to perceptions and five aspects for measuring students' preparedness for English language blended learning, including technical abilities, technological accessibility, self-directed learning, attitudes toward traditional classroom settings, and attitudes toward blended classroom settings. The questionnaire items

were adapted from Alaidarous (2016) and Rasouli et al. (2016) to better suit the study participants and to enable the researchers to address their research questions.

### *Data collection & analysis*

In the online survey questionnaire, the participants were required to respond on each item based on a 5-point Likert scale. The data gathering process was divided into four phases: questionnaire design, pilot, delivery, and data encoding. The researcher created the questionnaires and strategies for data collection in the first phase. The questionnaire was distributed to roughly 5-7 pertinent respondents to get comments and determine the usability, then Cronbach's alpha is used to determine the reliability coefficient. After the corrections and changes, it was delivered to each respondent with a consent form that explains the study aim and purpose. Finally, it is crucial to encode the data to explore the pertinent content to the subject which was determined by synthesizing and analyzing. The incomplete forms were discarded while the completed ones were entered in the statistical analysis software SPSS 25, then analyzed by the mean of descriptive analysis.

In gaining more insight on the quantitative findings, ten students were then selected to be involved in semi-structured individual interviews. Interview investigation consists of thematizing, planning, conducting the interview, transcribing, analyzing, confirming, and reporting. Prior to the interviews, the researcher created the study's objectives and outlined the topic. The study design was then established with a focus on gaining the desired information. The interviews were conducted based on an interview guide, and the transcript was converted from oral speech to written text in the next stage. After that, the interview data was examined in order to assess the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings. Finally, all the data needed to transfer into a readable product. The information was interpreted by highlighting small chunks and classifying them into categories that were related to blended learning. Students were notified with their rights to withdraw and pseudonyms were assigned to them to ensure the privacy.

## **Findings**

### *Students' Readiness towards Blended Learning in EFL Classes*

The data obtained from the survey provides insights into the attitudes of students about the use of blended learning in future EFL courses at a Vietnamese university. Participants are asked about their readiness in terms of technical abilities, technological accessibility, self-directed learning and their attitudes towards traditional classroom settings and blended learning settings. The participants' viewpoints are assessed using a Likert scale consisting of five levels, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The results of the analysis are displayed in the table provided.



Table 1

Students' technical abilities towards blended learning in EFL classes

<b>Statements</b>	<b>1</b> <b>%</b>	<b>2</b> <b>%</b>	<b>3</b> <b>%</b>	<b>4</b> <b>%</b>	<b>5</b> <b>%</b>
1. I can sit at the computer/ laptop for long hours.	3.8	7.7	42.3	42.3	3.8
2. I can confidently use the Internet to search for English learning materials.	3.8	19.2	46.2	30.8	3.8
3. I can confidently word-processing software (MS Word, MS PowerPoint, ...).	7.7	19.2	38.5	30.8	3.8
4. I am well trained with my school's learning management system (LMS).	7.7	3.8	23.1	61.5	3.8
5. I can confidently use all applications on my school's LMS.	7.7	23.1	38.5	30.8	0.0

The survey findings unveiled the extent of students' preparedness for blended learning in the English language. Upon examination of the table, it becomes evident that the majority of students have a neutral perspective about the impact of their technical skills on their inclination towards blended learning. Roughly 50% of the student population expressed a lack of confidence in their information technology (IT) aptitude, encompassing proficiency in utilizing the Internet for educational resource retrieval and employing processing programs. Regarding the educational institution's LMS, students expressed that while they received adequate training on its functionality, they were uncertain about their ability to utilize it proficiently. It underscores the importance of providing adequate support and training to enhance students' technical competencies in utilizing online educational resources and platforms.

Table 2

Students' technological accessibility towards blended learning in EFL classes

<b>Statements</b>	<b>1</b> <b>%</b>	<b>2</b> <b>%</b>	<b>3</b> <b>%</b>	<b>4</b> <b>%</b>	<b>5</b> <b>%</b>
1. I frequently use a computer/ laptop to access the Internet.	0.0	3.8	50	50.0	38.5
2. I have easy access to Internet-based activities (emails, websites, social media).	0.0	3.8	30.8	57.7	7.7
3. I can easily access different online learning platforms.	0.0	3.8	46.2	46.2	3.8
4. I can easily access my school's LMS for e-learning.	7.7	7.7	50.0	26.9	7.7
5. I can spend a lot of time watching English video lectures on my school's LMS platform.	3.8	0.0	42.3	38.5	7.7
6. Applications on the school's LMS are useful and user-friendly.	7.7	3.8	34.6	50.0	3.8

The findings indicated that the level of technology accessibility does not appear to hinder students' preparedness for blended learning. A significant proportion of student participants indicated that they possessed convenient access to educational resources online. Nevertheless,



a significant majority of students, namely two-thirds, expressed their disagreement over the adequacy of the school's LMS in terms of accessibility. This highlights the need for improvements in the usability and accessibility of the LMS to better support students' online learning experiences.

Table 3

Students' aptitude of self-directed learning in EFL classes

<b>Statements</b>	<b>1 %</b>	<b>2 %</b>	<b>3 %</b>	<b>4 %</b>	<b>5 %</b>
1. I feel comfortable working and learning on the Internet.	7.7	11.5	30.8	42.3	0.0
2. I feel comfortable working and learning independently.	3.8	3.8	42.3	50.0	0.0
3. I always strive to do well when working on my assignments.	0.0	0.0	30.8	61.5	7.7
4. I turn in my assignments on time.	0.0	0.0	26.9	61.5	11.5
5. I can solve problems with online learning on my own.	7.7	19.2	69.2	19.2	0.0
6. I persevere when confronted with challenges.	11.5	3.6	53.8	30.8	0.0

It is well acknowledged that online learning necessitates a significant degree of student autonomy. When queried about their aptitude for self-directed learning, the majority of students expressed a sense of ease in acquiring knowledge using online platforms and consistently endeavor to effectively regulate their online learning experiences. However, individuals express uncertainty over their capacity to effectively address issues that may develop in the context of online learning, as well as their ability to maintain a consistent approach when faced with hurdles in their e-learning endeavors. It emphasizes the importance of fostering a supportive learning environment that equips students with the necessary skills and strategies to navigate the complexities of online learning effectively.

Table 4

Students' attitude towards traditional and online classroom setting

Statements	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %
<b>Attitudes towards traditional classroom setting</b>					
1. I enjoy meeting and making friends in my English classes.	0.0	3.8	30.8	50.0	15.4
2. I enjoy receiving direct responses from my English teachers in class.	0.0	3.8	19.2	46.2	30.8
3. I find learning through face-to-face collaboration in English classes more effective.	0.0	3.8	34.6	30.8	30.8
4. I learn better through direct guidance from my English teachers in carrying out classroom activities.	0.0	3.8	42.3	23.1	30.8
5. I get more actively involved in English classes when I am physically in class.	6.6	19.2	23.1	26.9	30.8
6. I can get better results with offline learning.	0.0	3.8	61.5	15.4	19.2
<b>Attitudes towards online classroom setting</b>					
1. Learning English online is more effective and enjoyable than attending classes.	3.8	15.4	65.4	15.4	3.8
2. I find it easier to understand English lessons deeply through online platforms.	3.8	19.2	50.0	23.1	3.8
3. I find using technology in my study will help me get better results in my English subjects.	3.8	11.5	65.4	19.2	0.0
4. I feel more motivated to learn English via online platforms.	3.8	19.2	57.7	30.8	0.0
5. I can easily carry out online English activities with classmates and teachers on and off campus.	3.8	11.5	61.5	23.1	0.0
6. I can access a variety of learning resources.	3.8	7.7	57.7	26.9	3.8
7. I get more actively involved in English classes on online platforms.	3.8	7.7	73.1	15.4	0.0

When examining the attitudes of students towards online learning and traditional offline classrooms, it becomes evident that students exhibit a stronger inclination for in-person instruction in the context of EFL courses. Most students, namely 75%, preferred for in-person interactions with professors and classmates over virtual interactions facilitated by computer or laptop displays. In addition, attending courses allows students to get direct feedback and direction from instructors, therefore enhancing their comprehension of the subject matter. More than half of the surveyed participants concur that collaboration is an additional benefit of offline sessions. In contrast, 20% of the student population expressed disagreement, while 50% maintained a neutral stance about the efficacy of online learning. Regarding the active engagement in EFL programs, students expressed a preference for doing learning tasks inside physical classroom settings as opposed to online platforms. Regardless of whether the learning

modality is online or offline, a majority of students concur that there is no discernible disparity in their learning outcomes. This suggests the need for a balanced approach that integrates elements of both online and offline instruction to cater to diverse learning preferences and maximize student engagement and learning outcomes.

### *Students' Opinions on Factors Affecting Blended Learning in EFL Classes*

Student participants are also surveyed about factors affecting their blended learning. Responses are shown in the following table.

Table 5

Students' opinions on factors affecting blended learning in EFL classes

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
1. Technical abilities	7.7	11.5	69.2	19.2	0.0
2. Technological accessibility	0.0	0.0	61.5	38.5	0.0
3. Self-directed learning	0.0	0.0	61.5	38.5	0.0
4. Teachers' abilities	0.0	0.0	30.8	57.7	15.4
5. Usefulness of the school's LMS	3.8	15.4	38.5	30.8	11.5
6. Class time flexibility	0.0	7.7	50.0	30.8	11.5
7. Class size	0.0	0.0	69.2	26.9	3.8
8. Other factors (learning space/ noise/ ...)	0.0	7.7	42.4	38.5	11.5

The table reveals that the primary determinant seen by students as impacting on their English language classes with blended learning is teachers' proficiency. Approximately 60% of respondents agreed, while over 15% strongly agreed with this notion. The efficacy of this learning strategy is significantly influenced by the perceived use of the school's LMS. Similar replies were obtained from the majority of students on issues such as technology accessibility, self-directed learning, class schedule flexibility, and class size, with a neutral perspective being expressed. A significant proportion of students, namely one fifth, expressed disagreement over the potential for their technical abilities to provide challenges to their online learning. Conversely, a majority of students, above fifty percent, acknowledged that factors such as learning environment and noise levels can significantly impede their learning experience.

During the interview process, students are requested to provide clarifications and explanations about their questionnaire responses. Initially, when prompted to assess their technological competencies, 80% of the students said that they possessed a high level of confidence in their ability to navigate the Internet and utilize various programs. The individual mentioned that they currently reside in an era characterized by technological advancements, which results in regular exposure to electronic devices and online activities as part of their daily routine. Furthermore, throughout their time in secondary education, students received comprehensive instruction in computer literacy, which included the acquisition of online learning competencies necessitated by the global pandemic caused by the breakout of the coronavirus. In contrast, the remaining two students acknowledged their limited proficiency in technology, attributing it to their

inclination towards conventional and quiet lifestyles, which deterred them from extensively engaging with cellphones and computers. Furthermore, high schools lacked sufficient instruction in IT abilities. Nevertheless, each participant said that the necessity of conducting online research across several disciplines has significantly enhanced their technological proficiency since their enrollment in the university.

In the field of technological accessibility, students have expressed satisfaction with their access to the Internet and educational resources inside the university setting. Students have the ability to utilize the educational materials available in the electronic library offered by the school. Regarding the school's LMS, students have expressed that the platform is highly intuitive and valuable, with appropriately categorized video lessons. However, it was communicated that access to the platform is only feasible outside of class hours due to the system's limited functionality when faced with a high volume of concurrent student users.

In relation to the benefits of blended learning, students have stressed that the most notable aspects are its flexibility and diversity. The provision of a conducive atmosphere facilitates unrestricted access to educational resources, allowing individuals to engage in academic pursuits at their convenience, irrespective of geographical constraints, provided a stable Internet connection is available. Online learning, when supplemented with the careful direction of professors, may provide students with a diverse range of learning experiences that align with those found in traditional offline classrooms.

The platform makes communication between teachers and students more convenient because some students are too shy to ask questions in class. (Student 5)

First, I felt a little strange when I use the LMS, but later found it helpful for us to download the learning materials and to communicate with the teacher, because some of us are too shy to communicate in class. (Student 8)

This learning methodology is characterized by its time-intensive nature and cost-effectiveness, as studying at home eliminates the need for expenditures related to transportation and meals. Only a single student expressed that watching online video lectures helps her to learn independently. She expressed

It pushes me to form my self-discipline in the learning process.... It is a good chance for me to practice my English abilities. (Student 3)

They said that the primary merit of the school's LMS is its accessibility across many devices, such as mobile phones, iPads, and laptops, without any specific model requirements. Students possess the ability to readily locate the learning materials, identify the appropriate channels for assignment submission, and determine the appropriate avenues for posing inquiries. They really value the ability to engage in private communication with their instructors, such as through various social media platforms.

In terms of drawbacks, it is disconcerting to observe that students have identified blended learning as a contributing factor to their difficulties in comprehending their lessons. Additionally, students have expressed their lack of enthusiasm towards the notion of assuming personal accountability for their own learning, a fundamental principle inherent in the blended

learning approach. According to their statement, they expressed difficulty in independently engaging in learning activities without the guidance and oversight of a teacher. The act of repeatedly viewing video lectures is time-consuming, as it is necessary to revisit the information in order to comprehend the material being taught. Additionally, it should be noted that students have significant challenges while attempting to access the school's LMS during class hours. Consequently, they are compelled to resort to other platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet for their learning needs. Potentially, this factor may have had a detrimental impact on their perspectives towards blended learning.

A majority of the interview participants expressed a pessimistic outlook regarding blended learning, expressing concerns that online learning may lack stimulation and become repetitive.

Honestly, I'm not too optimistic about it. I worry that online classes might get boring. (Student 1)

Well, I have mixed feelings about it, to be honest. While I appreciate its flexibility, I do have concerns about the effectiveness of online classes compared to traditional in-person learning. (Student 7)

They expressed apprehension over the potential lack of interactivity within online educational settings, hence resulting in limited access to feedback and assistance from instructors and peers while encountering challenges throughout the period of remote learning.

It's tough to get help or feedback quickly when you're struggling with something during online learning. (Student 10)

They also expressed dissatisfaction with the abundance of distractions they must navigate when participating in an online class.

There are so many distractions at home, like pets, siblings, or just the temptation to check your phone. It can make it hard to focus. (Student 2)

The authors expanded upon their perspective, asserting a greater appreciation for conventional classroom environments due to the advantages of instant engagement with instructors and peers in instances of distraction.

Finally, the participants in the interview expressed their desires and provided ideas for enhancing the English language blended learning experience at the school. Consistent with the findings obtained from the questionnaire, the interviewed students concurred that educators assume a highly significant role in the context of online education.

I think teachers really need to step up in online classes. They have got to be good at teaching, not just tech-savvy. (Student 4)

It is frustrating when you're struggling with a concept, and the teacher cannot explain it well online. (Student 9)

The evaluation of instructors in an online learning environment encompasses not only their technical competence, but also their aptitude for information transmission and student inspiration. As previously said, the primary obstacle is in the accessibility of the school's LMS. Consequently, there is an expectation for the university to enhance the system's infrastructure

in order to optimize its operational efficiency. Regarding the learning materials available on the LMS, students have expressed the need for additional resources to facilitate supplementary practice. During the interviews, two students expressed their need for an increased availability of electronic books (e-books) to supplement their learning experience. They specifically emphasized the need for e-books that include reference materials and practice activities corresponding to each lesson.

I also feel like there should be more resources available on the LMS to help us practice and reinforce what we're learning. Like, having e-books with reference materials and practice activities would be super helpful. (Student 1)

Definitely. And you know, it's not just about the quantity of resources on the LMS, but the quality too. We need resources that really help us understand the material better. (Student 3)

Another suggestion is the reduction of class size. The enrollment of around 60 students per online class is considered excessive, which might provide challenges for instructors in effectively managing and facilitating interactions within the learning environment.

The class sizes are way too big for online learning. With around 60 students per class, it's hard for instructors to give everyone the attention they need and for us to interact effectively. (Student 4)

With smaller classes, you can actually have meaningful discussions and get personalized feedback from the teacher. (Student 6)

The suggestions for improvement include enhancing instructor evaluation criteria, increasing the availability of electronic resources such as e-books, and reducing class sizes to facilitate more personalized interactions and support.

The findings highlight the complex interplay between technological infrastructure, instructional strategies, and student perceptions in implementing of blended learning for English language education at a Vietnamese university. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging the opportunities highlighted by students, educators and administrators can work towards enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of blended learning initiatives to better meet the diverse needs and preferences of learners.

## Discussion

The study reflects a considerable level of readiness among students for engaging in blended EFL learning, and it demonstrates the alignment with Graham et al. (2013) of blended learning as an integrative approach that combines different modalities and methodologies. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) established a distinction between online and face-to-face instruction, confirming that students feel equally at ease with both online learning activities and traditional classroom environments. This duality of readiness highlights the need for a pedagogical balance that caters to the intrinsic benefits of both online and offline learning, as the literature suggests. It also further underscores the pivotal role of learner motivation and interest in course content, resonating with the insights of Zimmerman (2008) and Huang & Chou (2015), and corroborates

Wang et al. (2019)'s findings on the correlation between blended learning success and learner engagement, autonomy, and satisfaction.

The varying opinions on technical skills and access to technology can be understood by considering the perspective presented by Albiladi and Alshareef (2019), which highlights the importance of infrastructure support and digital literacy among those involved. The fundamental assumption that blended learning requires a convergence of digital and traditional educational incentives and adaptations supports the perspectives presented in the research findings. The impact of blended learning on English language teaching in Vietnam is assessed within the context of the National Foreign Language Project 2020, which is led by the MOET in 2014. Blended learning significantly enhanced student performance and engagement, benefiting both students and educators (Toan, 2013). This improvement is attributed to increased digital literacy, knowledge transformation spaces, student affective values, and the opportunity for real-time communication with native speakers. The initiative represents a national focus on English language proficiency, thus confirming the significance of blended learning as a means of educational reform.

The effective implementation of blended learning goes beyond simply combining technology with traditional teaching methods; it is closely connected to a combination of factors, including proficiency in technology, easy access, and a student's ability to learn independently. Furthermore, the efficiency and ease of use of the LMS are crucial for guaranteeing a seamless educational process (Holley & Oliver, 2010; Tang & Chaw, 2013; Hung et al., 2010; Rasouli et al., 2016; Cao, 2023). The empirical evidence obtained from this study clearly demonstrates the importance of having a framework that supports individual learning paths, which is further enhanced by the crucial role played by educators. In addition to being technologically proficient, they must also possess the skill to cultivate an atmosphere that encourages student participation and facilitates the effective integration of blended learning approaches.

In synthesizing these observations, this research contributes to the broader discourse on blended learning in EFL contexts by offering valuable insights into the potential for digital transformation in language education. It highlights the necessity of aligning technological advancements with pedagogical objectives to foster an inclusive, engaging, and effective learning experience for students and navigate the complexities of language acquisition.

## Conclusion

The results obtained from the survey and interviews indicate that student respondents exhibit a preference for acquiring English language skills within a conventional classroom setting. This inclination is attributed to the belief that direct interaction with instructors facilitates enhanced retention of information and fosters a more comprehensive comprehension of the subject matter. Despite students' preparedness for English language blended learning in terms of technological proficiency and learner autonomy, they nonetheless exhibit a certain degree of reluctance towards engaging in blended learning methodologies. In other words, while technologies provide a modest obstacle, the preparedness of these technologies is not on par with what students indicated in the interview. They reported that repeated technical concerns, such as



malfunctioning gadgets and inadequate internet access, negatively influenced their perception of blended learning. Students tend to choose conventional classrooms as their preferred mode of learning. This preference is mostly attributed to the inaccessibility of the university's LMS and concerns over the pedagogical abilities of teachers during class sessions.

As highlighted in multiple studies, blended learning in EFL contexts offers significant benefits for both learners and instructors. For students in a Vietnamese university setting, blended learning can compensate for limited exposure to English, fostering interest, language skills development, personalized learning, and technological proficiency. Additionally, blended learning enhances teaching conditions, provides access to global resources, and improves student engagement, motivation, and reflective capacities. Therefore, implementing blended learning in English language teaching at Vietnamese universities can enhance students' language proficiency, technological skills, and overall learning experience while supporting instructors in creating effective and engaging learning environments.

In order to address the aforementioned challenges associated with blended learning in EFL classrooms in this university, many potential solutions are proposed as follows:

In this particular scenario, the educational institution should allocate additional resources towards the assessment and enhancement of the LMS employed by the university, as well as the improvement of the Wi-Fi connectivity infrastructure. Furthermore, the utmost importance should be placed on fostering a sense of connection among students in a blended learning environment. Pedagogical techniques necessitate the incorporation of interpersonal elements in online interactions to ensure that students can experience levels of engagement comparable to those in a traditional classroom setting. This might be achieved through the utilization of educational software and leveraging the expertise of teachers. Hence, it is recommended that the institution should provide instructors with concise training programs focused on pedagogical approaches for blended English learning.

Blended learning is expected to become increasingly prevalent in educational practices, necessitating further research to maximize its potential benefits. Future studies should focus on designing innovative software applications and instructional approaches tailored to students' specific needs and preferences of students in EFL classrooms. Additionally, ongoing assessment and evaluation of blended learning practices can inform continuous improvement and refinement of instructional strategies. In order to enhance the overall experience of blended learning classrooms, it is imperative to design software applications that facilitate real-time interactions and provide continuous feedback between professors and students.

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## Biodata

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