

Benefits and Challenges of Blended Learning Implementation: Perspectives from Vietnamese EFL Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of blended learning in English language education at Hanoi Open University, Vietnam, focusing on student perceptions, benefits, and challenges. Blended learning, which integrates traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning components, has gained increasing relevance in higher education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language instruction. However, its effectiveness in the Vietnamese context remains underexplored. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from 495 second-year English majors who had completed a 315-hour foundational English programme through blended learning. The research employed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to gather comprehensive insights into their experiences. Findings revealed that 83.2% of participants valued the flexibility of blended learning, while 78.6% appreciated enhanced access to online resources. However, significant challenges emerged, including technical issues (31.9%) such as unstable internet connections and platform navigation difficulties, and time management difficulties (28.1%), particularly among students unfamiliar with learning structures that require autonomy. Analysis of skills development showed varied improvements across language competencies, with reading showing the highest improvement (52.1%), followed by grammar and writing. Speaking and pronunciation remained the most challenging areas due to limited real-time interaction and feedback. The study found strong correlation between self-regulated learning and overall satisfaction ($r = 0.72, p < .01$), suggesting that students with higher autonomy and digital proficiency tend to perform better in blended environments. These findings provide valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers in optimising blended learning approaches in Vietnamese higher education, with particular emphasis on the need for enhanced technical support, structured speaking activities, and faculty training to improve instructional effectiveness. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts and innovative pedagogical strategies to further enhance blended learning in English as a Foreign Language contexts.

Keywords: blended learning, digital transformation, English as a Foreign Language instruction, English language teaching, learning effectiveness, student perception, Vietnamese higher education.

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology and digital transformation in education has led to significant changes in teaching and learning methodologies worldwide. Blended learning, which combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning components, has emerged as a prominent educational approach, particularly in language education (Graham, 2006). This innovative teaching method has gained

considerable attention in Vietnam's higher education system, especially in English language teaching, as it offers flexibility and potentially enhanced learning outcomes (Nguyen, 2021). However, the transition to blended learning in Vietnam is shaped by unique institutional and socio-cultural factors, including infrastructure limitations, teacher readiness, and students' digital literacy levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of blended learning approaches across educational institutions, including in Vietnam. As one of Vietnam's leading distance learning institutions, Hanoi Open University (HOU) has implemented blended learning in its English language programmes to meet students' evolving needs and adapt to contemporary educational challenges. As one of the few universities in Vietnam with a well-established online learning infrastructure, HOU serves as a valuable case study for examining the effectiveness of blended learning in the country. However, while the implementation of blended learning has shown promise, understanding student perceptions and experiences with this approach is crucial to ensure its effective implementation and continuous improvement.

Previous research has extensively documented the potential benefits of blended learning in language education, including increased student engagement, improved learning outcomes, and enhanced digital literacy skills (Wang et al., 2015). Nevertheless, studies have also highlighted various challenges students face when adapting to this learning mode, such as technical difficulties, time management issues, and the need for self-discipline (Lee, 2017). In the Vietnamese context, where traditional teacher-centred approaches have historically dominated, the transition to blended learning presents unique challenges and opportunities that warrant investigation.

While several studies have examined blended learning in various educational contexts, research explicitly focusing on Vietnamese university students' experiences with blended learning in English language education remains limited. Most existing studies on blended learning in Vietnam have focused on general education or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, with limited emphasis on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Furthermore, while previous research has explored the general benefits and challenges of blended learning, few studies have specifically analysed how different aspects of blended learning—such as course design, instructor support, and student engagement—impact EFL learners' overall satisfaction and academic performance. Understanding their perception is vital as students are the primary stakeholders in the educational process, and their experiences can provide valuable insights for improving instructional design and implementation strategies.

This study aims to investigate student perceptions of blended learning in English language education at HOU, focusing on both the benefits they experience and the challenges they encounter. The research seeks to provide practical insights for educators and administrators to enhance the effectiveness of blended learning programmes in English language teaching within the context of Vietnamese higher education.

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of English majors at HOU regarding their experiences with blended learning in order to address this research gap and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on blended learning in the EFL context. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. How do students perceive different components of the blended learning programme in English language studies?
- ii. What benefits and challenges do students experience in the blended learning environment, and how do these factors correlate with their overall satisfaction?
- iii. To what extent does the blended learning approach contribute to students' language skills development and learning outcomes?

By exploring these questions, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of blended learning in EFL education from the learners' perspective. The findings may inform educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in Vietnam and similar EFL contexts, contributing to developing more effective and learner-centred blended learning approaches in English language education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual of Blended Learning

Blended learning has become increasingly prevalent in higher education, particularly in language teaching. Graham (2006) established a fundamental framework for blended learning, defining it as a combination of face-to-face and computer-mediated instruction. This definition emphasises the intentional integration of classroom-based and online learning experiences, which has become particularly relevant in modern educational contexts.

The conceptualisation of blended learning has evolved significantly through various scholarly works in educational research. While Bryan and Volchenkova's (2016) definition emphasises the purposeful integration of face-to-face and online learning, a comprehensive literature examination reveals multiple complementary perspectives.

Wang et al. (2015) expanded on previous definitions by adopting a complex adaptive systems framework, suggesting that blended learning is not merely a combination of delivery methods but rather a dynamic educational ecosystem that adapts to learners' needs and institutional contexts. Their perspective emphasises the adaptive and evolving nature of blended learning environments.

More recent research highlights the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI)-driven adaptive learning and virtual reality (VR), in enhancing blended learning effectiveness (Pham et al. 2020). In Vietnam, studies have begun to examine how mobile learning tools and localised digital platforms can facilitate engagement in blended language learning environments (Nguyen, 2021). These perspectives reinforce the need for continuously evolving blended learning models to reflect technological advancements and contextual variations.

2.2. Benefits and Challenges of Blended Learning

Recent studies have highlighted various effects of blended learning implementation in higher education. In their comprehensive review of 74 studies in Turkish higher education, Atmacasoy and Aksu (2018) identified several significant benefits of blended learning. They found that this approach consistently led to increased student engagement, improved academic achievement, and enhanced student digital literacy skills. However, their study also uncovered notable challenges in implementation, particularly regarding technical infrastructural problems and students struggling to self-regulate in the online learning environment.

Similarly, a study by Pham et al. (2020) in Vietnam revealed how blended learning can foster greater learner autonomy but require strong institutional support, particularly in under-resourced universities. While flexibility is often cited as a key benefit, Vietnamese students have reported difficulties in adapting to self-paced learning, often due to a lack of prior exposure to independent study methodologies (Tran, 2021). This highlights the need for structured guidance to ensure students can effectively navigate the challenges of blended learning.

2.3. Blended Learning in English Language Teaching

Research has demonstrated significant positive outcomes of blended learning in the context of English language education. Bryan and Volchenkova (2016) conducted an extensive study that found blended learning significantly enhanced students' language acquisition, with particular improvements in autonomous learning skills. Their research emphasised that successful implementation of blended instruction depends on three critical factors: careful course design, robust technological infrastructure, and comprehensive student support systems. These elements work together to create an effective learning environment that supports language acquisition.

A localised study by Nguyen (2021) that investigated Vietnamese EFL learners' engagement in blended learning environments found that speaking and pronunciation skills remain difficult to acquire due to

limited interactive elements in online modules. While the study reinforced the benefits of increased exposure to authentic materials, it also suggested that Vietnamese learners require more structured opportunities to practise oral communication in blended settings.

2.4. Student Perceptions of Blended Learning

Research examining student perceptions of blended learning has yielded predominantly positive results. In a significant study in Saudi Arabia, Ja'ashan (2020) surveyed 110 undergraduate English language students and found that 73.5% held positive attitudes towards blended learning. The research revealed that students particularly valued the flexibility in accessing learning materials and the ability to review content as often as needed. This appreciation for the integration of technology in learning was consistent across different student groups, though some participants reported challenges with time management and technical issues that affected their learning experience. In the Vietnamese context, Lap et al. (2020) found that while students generally responded well to blended learning, rural learners faced greater obstacles due to inconsistent internet access and limited prior experience with digital learning platforms. This suggests a growing digital divide that must be addressed to ensure equitable access to blended learning opportunities and outcomes.

2.5. Blended Learning in the Vietnamese Context

Recent studies have provided valuable insights into the implementation of blended learning in the Vietnamese educational landscape. Lap et al. (2020) conducted research at a Vietnamese university that revealed complex patterns in student experiences. While their findings showed generally positive attitudes toward blended learning, students faced specific challenges related to unstable internet connectivity and the need to adapt to new learning methods. Building on this, Pham et al. (2020) investigated the emergency transition to blended learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Vietnamese universities. Their research highlighted the critical role students' technological readiness and self-directed learning skills play in ensuring successful blended learning experiences while also emphasising the importance of robust institutional support systems. A more recent study by Le and Tran (2023) explored how cultural expectations of passive learning in Vietnam influence student engagement in blended settings, noting that some learners struggle with the autonomy required for self-directed learning. This aligns with previous findings and underscores the need for instructional designs that gradually foster independence while accommodating their learning habits.

2.6. Research Gap

The review of existing literature reveals a significant need for more focused research on student perceptions of blended learning in specific institutional contexts, particularly in Vietnamese universities where the approach is relatively new. While current studies provide valuable insights into general trends and challenges, there remains limited research examining the specific blended learning experiences of those enrolled in English language studies at HOU. Additionally, past research has explored broad benefits and limitations of blended learning, but few studies have examined its long-term impact on language skills retention and academic performance among Vietnamese EFL learners. This gap in the literature suggests an opportunity for new research that could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of blended learning in this specific context and contribute to the broader understanding of blended learning implementation in Vietnamese higher education.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate student perceptions of blended learning in English language education. Following the established methodological frameworks in educational research (Creswell & Creswell,

2018), this design was chosen to provide comprehensive insights into students' experiences and perspectives.

3.2. Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at HOU, Vietnam where blended learning has been implemented in English language programmes. A total of 495 students participated in the research, representing a significant sample size for statistical analysis (Cohen et al., 2018). All participants had completed a 315-hour foundational English programme designed to elevate their English proficiency from A2 to B1 levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

3.3. Participant Selection

The selection of participants followed specific criteria to ensure data quality and research validity. Before enrolment in the foundational English programme, all students were required to pass a university-administered test confirming their A2-level English proficiency according to the CEFR. This prerequisite ensured a homogeneous baseline of language competency among participants.

3.4. Programme Structure

The 315-hour foundational English programme is structured to develop comprehensive language skills through a blended learning approach. The curriculum comprises the following hourly breakdown:

- 90 hours of listening and speaking instruction,
- 60 hours of reading instruction,
- 60 hours of writing instruction,
- 45 hours of grammar instruction,
- 30 hours of pronunciation practice, and
- 30 hours of presentation skills development.

All components, except presentation skills development, were delivered through a Blended Learning Environment (BLE), combining face-to-face instruction with online learning activities.

3.5. Data Collection Instruments

3.5.1. Questionnaire Design

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire developed based on previous studies in blended learning research (Atmacasoy & Aksu, 2018; Pham et al., 2020). The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, utilising a five-point Likert scale to yield quantitative responses. The instrument was validated through expert review and pilot testing with a small group of students not involved in the main study.

3.5.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

To gather in-depth qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 30 participants selected through purposive sampling. The interview protocol was designed to explore their experiences and perceptions in greater detail, mainly focusing on the benefits and challenges they encountered in the BLE.

3.5.3. Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS version 26.0, employing both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Qualitative data from the open-ended questions and interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis that follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step

framework. This combined analytical approach allowed for triangulation of findings and enhanced the reliability of the research results.

4. Findings

This section presents the analysis of data collected from 495 students at HOU who participated in the English language programme delivered via blended learning. The findings are organised into five main subsections: demographic profiles, perceptions of blended learning components, benefits and challenges, skills development, and correlation analysis.

4.1. Demographic Profiles of Participants

The study collected the participants’ demographic information to understand the sample population's composition and identify potential response patterns based on demographic characteristics. Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=495)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	198	40.0
	Female	297	60.0
Age Group	18-20	285	57.6
	21-23	165	33.3
	Above 23	45	9.1
Prior Experience with BLE	Yes	187	37.8
	No	308	62.2

The demographic data reveals a predominantly female participant population (60%), with the majority of students (57.6%) falling within the 18-20 age group. Notably, only 37.8% of participants had prior experience with BLEs, indicating that this was a new learning approach for the majority of the study participants.

4.2. Student Perceptions of Blended Learning Components

Students were asked to rate their satisfaction levels of each element to evaluate the effectiveness of different components within the blended learning programme. Their responses were analysed using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "Very Dissatisfied", and 5 represented "Very Satisfied." Table 2 presents these findings.

Table 2. Student Satisfaction with Blended Learning Components (N=495)

Component	Mean Score (1-5)	SD	High Satisfaction (%)	Moderate Satisfaction (%)	Low Satisfaction (%)
Listening and Speaking	4.2	0.68	78.5	15.8	5.7
Listening and Speaking	4.2	0.68	78.5	15.8	5.7
Reading	4.0	0.72	72.3	20.4	7.3
Writing	3.8	0.75	65.8	24.6	9.6
Grammar	4.1	0.70	75.2	18.3	6.5
Pronunciation	3.9	0.73	68.9	22.8	8.3

The analysis reveals exceptionally high satisfaction levels for the listening and speaking components (M = 4.2, SD = 0.68), suggesting that the blended learning approach was efficient to develop these skills. While

still receiving positive ratings, the writing component showed relatively lower satisfaction levels ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.75$), indicating potential areas for improvement.

4.3. Perceived Benefits and Challenges

Understanding the benefits and challenges students experience is crucial for improving the blended learning programme. Table 3 demonstrates the comprehensive analysis of the students' reported experiences with various aspects of the BLE.

Table 3. Benefits and Challenges of Blended Learning (N=495)

Category	Aspect	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Benefits	Flexibility in learning time	412	83.2
	Access to online resources	389	78.6
	Self-paced learning	376	76.0
	Interactive learning activities	345	69.7
	Enhanced digital literacy	334	67.5
Challenges	Technical issues	158	31.9
	Time management	139	28.1
	Self-motivation	104	21.0
	Online interaction	59	11.9
	Other challenges	35	7.1

The findings indicate that flexibility in learning time was the most widely acknowledged benefit (83.2% of participants), while technical issues emerged as the most significant challenge (31.9% of participants). These results suggest that while the flexible nature of blended learning is highly valued, technical infrastructure and support require attention.

4.4. Skills Development and Learning Outcomes

A key objective of this study was to assess the perceived effectiveness of blended learning in developing various English language skills. Table 4 presents students' self-reported improvement across different skill areas.

The data shows a particularly strong improvement in reading skills, with 52.1% of students reporting significant improvement. Conversely, pronunciation and speaking skills showed significantly lower improvement rates, suggesting these areas may require additional attention in the blended learning curriculum.

Table 4. Self-Reported Skills Improvement (N=495)

Skill Area	Significant Improvement (%)	Moderate Improvement (%)	Little/No Improvement (%)
Listening	45.3	42.8	11.9
Speaking	38.6	47.2	14.2
Reading	52.1	39.4	8.5
Writing	43.2	44.5	12.3
Grammar	48.7	41.2	10.1
Pronunciation	35.8	49.3	14.9

4.5. Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to understand the relationships between various aspects of the blended learning experience. Table 5 presents the correlation coefficients between key variables.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix of Key Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Overall Satisfaction	1.00				
2. Technical Competence	0.68	1.00			
3. Self-Regulated Learning	0.72	0.55	1.00		
4. Learning Achievement	0.65	0.48	0.70	1.00	
5. Course Engagement	0.71	0.52	0.69	0.63	1.00

Note. indicates $p < .01$

The correlation analysis reveals strong positive relationships between several key variables. Notably, self-regulated learning showed the strongest correlation with overall satisfaction ($r = 0.72, p < .01$), suggesting that students' ability to manage their own learning plays a crucial role in their satisfaction with the blended learning approach.

Qualitative data from open-ended responses and interviews supplemented the quantitative findings. Students consistently highlighted the flexibility and autonomy provided by the BLE. For example, Student 127 noted: "The ability to review materials at my own pace and schedule my learning around other commitments was invaluable."

Technology integration received mixed responses, with Student 245 commenting: "The online platforms made learning more interactive and engaging, but sometimes technical issues disrupted my learning process."

These findings indicate that while students generally showed positive attitudes toward blended learning (overall satisfaction mean = 4.12, SD = 0.76), specific areas presented challenges. The strong correlations between technical competence, self-regulated learning, and overall satisfaction suggest that these factors play crucial roles in students' success in a BLE.

The analysis revealed that over 75% of students reported significant or moderate improvement across all skill areas, with reading showing the highest percentage of significant improvement (52.1%). However, speaking and pronunciation showed relatively lower percentages of substantial progress, suggesting these areas may require additional attention in the blended learning design.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the blended learning programme revealed varying levels of effectiveness across different components, with listening and speaking showing notably high satisfaction rates ($M = 4.2, SD = 0.68$). This aligns with Lee's (2017) findings on the effectiveness of blended environments for improving oral communication skills. However, the lower satisfaction rates reported for the writing component ($M = 3.8, SD = 0.75$) suggests areas needing improvement, particularly in how writing skills development is incorporated into the blended format. A key challenge in speaking and pronunciation development within BLEs is the limited opportunities for real-time interaction and corrective feedback. While students benefit from increased exposure to authentic listening materials, the lack of structured opportunities to practise speaking in an online learning environment may hinder progress of oral proficiency. Pronunciation difficulties, in particular, stem from the absence of real-time corrective mechanisms, which are typically available in traditional classroom settings where instructors can provide immediate feedback. Prior research (Nguyen, 2021) suggests that Vietnamese EFL learners often struggle with oral fluency due to minimal interactive engagement in virtual settings, reinforcing the need for blended programmes to incorporate more synchronous speaking activities, AI-driven pronunciation assessment tools, or peer

collaboration strategies to bridge this gap. Additionally, cultural learning preferences in Vietnam, where students are accustomed to passive learning models, may contribute to reluctance in engaging with interactive speaking tasks, further impacting oral skill development.

The responses showed that students strongly favoured learning flexibility (83.2%) and improved access to online resources (78.6%), confirming Pham et al.'s (2020) research on the potential benefits of blended learning in Vietnamese education. However, technical issues (31.9%) and time management challenges (28.1%) emerged as significant concerns, echoing Lap et al.'s (2020) findings about infrastructural barriers in Vietnamese universities. These challenges in implementation highlight the need for enhanced technical support and student guidance in the Vietnamese context. Without adequate training in digital pedagogy and technological integration, instructors may struggle to deliver well-structured lessons that effectively balance online and offline components. This is particularly relevant in Vietnam, where many educators are more familiar with traditional lecture-based teaching methods. Institutional efforts should focus on comprehensive faculty training programmes, investment in digital resources, and ongoing technical support to ensure sustainable blended learning adoption.

The relationship between different learning variables provided valuable insights into programme effectiveness. The strong correlation between self-regulated learning and overall satisfaction ($r = 0.72$, $p < .01$) emphasises the crucial role of learner autonomy in ensuring success in a BLE. Similarly, the relationship between technical competence and course engagement ($r = 0.52$) demonstrates how technical proficiency influences learning effectiveness. These findings support Wang et al.'s (2015) framework on the interconnected nature of learning variables in blended environments.

Regarding skills development, the significant improvement in reading skills (52.1%) demonstrates the effectiveness of blended learning in developing receptive language abilities. However, lower improvement rates in speaking and pronunciation indicate areas requiring additional attention. This pattern aligns with Ja'ashan's (2020) research on variations in skills development through blended learning, suggesting the need for enhanced interactive components, particularly for productive language skills.

This study effectively addresses its research objectives by examining students' perceptions of blended learning components, identifying key benefits and challenges, and evaluating the model's impact on skills development. The findings indicate that students highly value flexibility (83.2%) and access to online resources (78.6%), which is consistent with research highlighting student-centred learning models (Pham et al., 2020). However, skills-specific challenges, particularly in speaking and pronunciation, suggest the need for curriculum modifications to incorporate interactive elements. While the majority of students found blended learning beneficial, technical challenges (31.9%) and time management difficulties (28.1%) emerged as significant barriers, emphasising the need to make institutional improvements in infrastructure and learner support mechanisms. Additionally, the study found strong correlations between self-regulated learning ($r = 0.72$) and overall satisfaction, reinforcing the role of learner autonomy in blended learning success. However, the lower improvement rates in pronunciation (35.8%) and speaking (38.6%) indicate that more structured interventions are needed to enhance oral language proficiency in blended environments.

These findings have important pedagogical implications for implementing blended learning in Vietnamese higher education. Institutions should focus on developing comprehensive technical support systems while enhancing opportunities for interactive language practice. Future implementations should emphasise strengthening weaker skills, particularly writing and speaking, while maintaining the successful elements that have shown positive student outcomes. The development of such support systems should consider the specific context of Vietnamese higher education and the unique needs of language learners in this setting.

6. Conclusion

This study examines the implementation of blended learning in English language education at HOU, revealing both significant achievements and areas for enhancement. The findings demonstrate the

effectiveness of blended learning in language acquisition, particularly in developing receptive skills, with high satisfaction rates in listening components ($M = 4.2$) and significant improvement in reading skills (52.1%). The strong correlation between self-regulated learning and overall satisfaction ($r = 0.72$) highlights the crucial role of learner autonomy for a successful blended learning experience. However, the research also identifies key challenges, including technical issues (31.9%) and time management difficulties (28.1%), suggesting the need to enhance infrastructure and student support systems. The lower satisfaction rate given to writing components ($M = 3.8$) indicates areas requiring improvement, particularly in developing productive language skills within the BLE. These findings suggest that institutions implementing blended learning should focus on three key areas: strengthening technical infrastructure and support systems, developing students' self-regulated learning strategies, and enhancing interactive components for productive language skills. While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to recognise the existing research gap in long-term evaluation of the impact of blended learning on language retention and fluency in the Vietnamese EFL context.

Future studies should explore the effectiveness of technology-enhanced interventions, such as AI-driven pronunciation tools or virtual conversation platforms, to address speaking and pronunciation challenges. Additionally, cross-institutional or nationwide studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of blended learning adoption in Vietnam's higher education system.

The broader implications of this study suggest that blended learning, when effectively implemented, has the potential to modernise language education in Vietnam, bridging traditional and digital pedagogies to foster learner autonomy and engagement. However, its success depends on continuous refinement, institutional investment, and responsiveness to student needs. By addressing existing challenges and integrating innovative solutions, blended learning can evolve into a sustainable and effective model for future EFL education in Vietnam and beyond.

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