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## THE IMPACT OF BLENDED LEARNING APPROACHES ON THE QUALITY OF ENGLISH TRAINING AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN VIETNAM

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of blended learning approaches on the quality of English training at Vietnamese universities, addressing a significant gap in understanding how blended learning is implemented in Vietnam's higher education context. The research aimed to explore implementation practices, identify challenges and opportunities, and develop recommendations for improving English language education through blended approaches. Using a qualitative case study methodology, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews with 20 English lecturers from eight universities in Hanoi, supplemented by 10 classroom observations and document analysis of course syllabi, learning materials, and institutional policies. The findings revealed that while blended learning shows promise in enhancing English language education, its implementation faces significant challenges including inadequate technological infrastructure, limited professional development opportunities, and inconsistent institutional support. Successful practices were identified in areas of assessment integration and online content development. These findings have important implications for educational policy and practice in Vietnam, suggesting the need for systematic improvements in technological infrastructure, professional development programs, and institutional support systems. The research provides valuable guidance for universities seeking to enhance their blended learning programs and contributes to the broader understanding of implementing blended learning in developing country contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** Blended learning, training quality, Vietnam

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Vietnam has experienced rapid economic growth and increased integration into the global economy. This shift has led to a surge in the demand for English language proficiency, particularly in higher education and the professional sphere (Nguyen, 2018). English has become a crucial skill for Vietnamese students and professionals, serving as a gateway to international education, career advancement, and participation in the global marketplace (Tran & Marginson, 2018).

The Vietnamese government has recognized the importance of English language education, implementing policies such as the National Foreign Languages Project 2020 (now extended to 2025)

to enhance English proficiency across all educational levels (Le, 2020). This initiative aims to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning, with a particular focus on communicative competence and practical language skills (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019).

Blended learning, which combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning components, has gained significant traction in higher education globally (Graham, 2013). This approach offers flexibility, personalization, and increased access to resources, making it particularly attractive for language learning (Sharma & Barrett, 2018). In the context of English language education, blended learning has shown potential to address various challenges, including limited classroom time and the need for more individualized instruction (Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019).

The adoption of blended learning in higher education has been accelerated by technological advancements and the increasing digital literacy of students (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). This approach allows for the integration of various multimedia resources, interactive activities, and collaborative tools that can enhance the language learning experience (Chapelle, 2019).

Despite the recognized importance of English proficiency, English language education in Vietnamese universities faces several challenges. Traditional teaching methods, often characterized by teacher-centered approaches and a focus on grammar-translation, remain prevalent in many institutions (Nguyen et al., 2017). This approach has been criticized for its limited effectiveness in developing students' communicative competence and practical language skills (Le, 2019).

Moreover, Vietnamese universities often struggle with large class sizes and limited contact hours for English language courses (Tran, 2018). These factors can hinder the provision of individualized feedback and reduce opportunities for active language practice (Phuong & Nguyen, 2019). Additionally, there is often a mismatch between the English language skills taught in universities and those required in the job market, leading to concerns about graduate employability (Tran & Marginson, 2018).

Large class sizes, often exceeding 50 students, make it difficult for instructors to provide individualized attention and feedback, crucial elements in language learning (Phuong & Nguyen, 2019). Limited contact hours further exacerbate this issue, reducing opportunities for students to practice and receive guidance (Tran, 2018). The predominance of grammar-translation methods, while useful for certain aspects of language learning, often fails to develop students' practical language skills and communicative abilities (Le, 2019).

Blended learning approaches have shown promise in addressing similar challenges in other contexts. Studies have demonstrated the potential of blended learning to increase student engagement, provide more personalized learning experiences, and improve language proficiency outcomes (Sharma & Barrett, 2018; Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019). However, the impact of blended learning on the quality of English training in Vietnam remains understudied.

While some Vietnamese universities have begun to implement blended learning in their English language programs, there is a lack of comprehensive research examining its effectiveness in this specific context (Dang & Nguyen, 2021). The unique cultural, technological, and educational factors in Vietnam may influence the implementation and outcomes of blended learning approaches, necessitating focused research in this area.

Furthermore, the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders, such as students and instructors, regarding blended learning in English language education have not been thoroughly explored in the Vietnamese context. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for successful implementation and continuous improvement of blended learning approaches (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

In response to these challenges, some Vietnamese universities have begun to explore innovative approaches to English language education, including the integration of technology and the adoption of blended learning models (Dang & Nguyen, 2021). However, the implementation of these approaches is still in its early stages, and their impact on the quality of English training remains to be fully understood.

Therefore, there is a pressing need for research that investigates the impact of blended learning approaches on the quality of English training at the university level in Vietnam. This study aims to address this gap by providing insights into the implementation, challenges, and potential benefits of blended learning in improving English language education in Vietnamese universities.

These research objectives are designed to provide a holistic understanding of the impact of blended learning on English language education in Vietnamese universities. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform policy-making, curriculum design, and pedagogical practices in English language education in Vietnam and potentially in similar contexts.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Blended Learning in Language Education**

#### *Definition and Conceptualization*

Blended learning in language education is characterized by the integration of face-to-face and online instructional approaches (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). Graham (2006) defines blended learning as systems that "combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction" (p. 5). In the context of language education, this integration aims to enhance language acquisition by leveraging the strengths of both modalities (Neumeier, 2005).

The conceptualization of blended learning has evolved over time. Initially viewed as a simple combination of face-to-face and online elements, it is now recognized as a complex, multifaceted approach that requires careful design and implementation (Hinkelman & Gruba, 2012). Garrison & Kanuka (2004) emphasize that effective blended learning is not just about adding online elements to

traditional courses but involves "the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences" (p. 96).

### *Theoretical Foundations*

Blended learning in language education is underpinned by several theoretical frameworks. Socio-constructivist theories, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, support the collaborative and interactive aspects of blended learning (Wang & Tian, 2013). The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, proposed by Garrison et al. (2000), has been widely applied to blended language learning, emphasizing the importance of cognitive, social, and teaching presence in creating meaningful educational experiences.

Additionally, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories inform the design of blended language learning environments. Chapelle (2009) argues that Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), a key component of many blended approaches, should be grounded in SLA theories to effectively support language development. The interactionist approach to SLA, which emphasizes the role of input, interaction, and output in language acquisition, aligns well with the affordances of blended learning environments (Blake, 2011).

### *Implementation Models*

Various models for implementing blended learning in language education have been proposed and studied. Neumeier (2005) presents a framework for designing blended language learning courses, considering factors such as the mode (face-to-face or CALL), sequencing of modes, and distribution of learning content and objectives. Sharma & Barrett (2007) describe different blended learning models, including the supplementary model, where online components support traditional classroom instruction, and the replacement model, where online activities partially replace face-to-face sessions.

More recently, the flipped classroom model has gained attention in language education. In this approach, students engage with instructional content online before class, allowing for more interactive and communicative activities during face-to-face sessions (Mehring, 2016). Hung (2015) found that the flipped classroom approach in English language teaching led to improved academic performance and increased learner engagement.

### *Empirical Findings*

Numerous studies have investigated the effectiveness of blended learning in language education. A meta-analysis by Grgurović et al. (2013) found a small but positive effect for blended language instruction compared to traditional face-to-face instruction. The study highlighted the potential of blended approaches to enhance language learning outcomes.

Research has also explored specific aspects of blended language learning. For instance, Zhang & Zhu (2018) examined the impact of blended learning on English writing skills, finding significant improvements in students' writing performance and motivation. Similarly, Yang (2012) reported positive effects of blended learning on students' English-speaking proficiency and learning attitudes.

The role of technology in blended language learning has been a focus of several studies. Stockwell (2012) investigated the use of mobile technologies in blended language learning, noting their potential to extend learning beyond the classroom and provide more personalized learning experiences. However, he also highlighted challenges related to technology integration and learner readiness.

### *Challenges and Considerations*

While the potential benefits of blended learning in language education are well-documented, research has also identified challenges and considerations. These include issues related to technology integration, instructor training, and student readiness for online learning (Bijeikienė et al., 2019). Ensuring the quality of online materials and maintaining student engagement in the online components of blended courses have also been identified as key challenges (Bueno-Alastuey & López Pérez, 2014).

Furthermore, cultural factors can influence the effectiveness of blended learning approaches in different contexts. Hamdan et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of considering local educational cultures and practices when implementing blended learning models.

The literature on blended learning in language education reveals a complex and evolving field. While research generally supports the potential of blended approaches to enhance language learning outcomes, it also highlights the need for careful design, implementation, and ongoing evaluation. As technology continues to advance and educational practices evolve, further research is needed to understand how blended learning can best support language acquisition in diverse contexts.

## **2.2. English education in Vietnam**

English education in Vietnam has undergone significant changes over the past few decades, reflecting the country's evolving socio-economic landscape and its increasing integration into the global community.

### *Historical background*

The history of English education in Vietnam is closely tied to the country's political and economic transformations. Do (2006) tracks the development of English language teaching in Vietnam through three main stages:

**Before 1986:** During this period, Russian and Chinese were the main foreign languages taught in Vietnamese schools, reflecting the country's close ties with the Soviet Union and China. English is taught on a limited scale, mainly in the South of Vietnam.

**1986-2000:** The promulgation of the innovation policy in 1986 marked a significant shift to a market-oriented economy and enhanced international integration. This period saw a rapid increase in demand for English language skills, leading to the expansion of English language programs in schools and universities.

**Post-2000 period:** English is increasingly recognized as an important skill for national development and international competitiveness. This period was characterized by significant government initiatives

to improve English language education at all levels of the education system. For instance, in the early 1990s, many universities in Vietnam began offering English-taught programs in areas such as business and technology to meet the growing demand for English fluent graduates in emerging market economies (Nguyen, 2011).

#### *Current policies and initiatives*

The Government of Viet Nam has implemented a number of policies and initiatives to improve English education. The most important of these is the National Foreign Language Project 2020 (currently extended to 2025), which was implemented in 2008 (Le, 2020). This project aims to:

Implement a new English curriculum from primary school to university level.

Improve the quality of English teachers through training and certification.

Increase the use of information technology in teaching and learning English.

Promote English as a medium of instruction for certain subjects at all levels of higher education.

Under this scheme, English has been included as a compulsory subject since Grade 3 in primary schools, starting from the 2010-2011 school year (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). This early introduction of English aims to provide students with a stronger foundation in the language.

Another notable initiative is the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a benchmark for English proficiency in Vietnam. For example, university graduates are now expected to achieve level B1 on the CEFR scale, while English teachers are required to reach level C1.

#### *Challenges in English education*

Despite these initiatives, English education in Vietnam still faces a number of challenges. The evaluation results of the implementation of the Foreign Language Scheme up to 2016 show that the Scheme has achieved important initial results. However, compared to the 4 goals set out, they are low in both quantity and quality. Because many goals have not been achieved, in 2017 the Ministry of Education and Training submitted to the Government for supplementation to the next phase of the project and was approved by the Government to revise and issue new decisions for the project for the period 2017-2025.

**Quality and teacher training:** Many studies have shown a shortage of qualified English teachers, especially at the primary and secondary levels. For example, a study by Le (2020) found that only 20% of primary English teachers in one central province of Vietnam achieved the required competency level (B2 on the CEFR scale).

**Large class sizes:** Overcrowded classrooms are a common problem in Vietnamese schools. Nguyen (2015) reported that an average of 40-50 students per English class in many urban secondary schools, making it difficult for teachers to effectively implement communicative language teaching methods.

**Traditional teaching methods:** Although the policy emphasizes communication methods, the grammatical-translational method is still popular in many English classes. For example, Pham (2018) observed that in a sample of high school English classes in Hanoi, more than 70% of the class time was spent on grammar interpretation and translation.

**Limited exposure to English:** Outside the classroom, students often have little opportunity to use English. A study by Tran (2013) showed that university students in Ho Chi Minh City on average spend only 2-3 hours per week using English outside of formal classes.

**Urban-rural gap:** There is a significant disparity in the quality of English education between urban and rural areas. For example, Nguyen & Nguyen (2019) reported that while 85% of urban primary schools implemented English from Grade 3, only 50% of rural schools did so due to resource constraints.

#### *Ongoing reforms and innovations*

In response to these challenges, many reforms and innovations are being implemented:

**Technology integration:** There is an increasing emphasis on using technology to enhance English language learning. For example, the iEnglish program, piloted in some provinces, uses interactive software and multimedia resources to complement traditional classroom instruction (Dang, 2019).

**Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL):** Several universities have begun to implement CLIL approaches. For example, Hanoi University of Science and Technology offers technical courses taught in English, which aim to improve students' language skills along with their professional knowledge (Vu & Pham, 2014).

**Public-Private Partnerships:** Government-private sector collaboration is on the rise. A notable example is the project "English for the Future", a partnership between the Ministry of Education and Training and the British Council, which provides teacher training and resources to improve English education in disadvantaged areas (British Council, 2021).

**Curriculum Reform:** The new national English curriculum, introduced in 2018, emphasizes communication competence and 21st century skills. For example, this program incorporates project-based learning and encourages the use of authentic materials in English classes (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018).

**International cooperation:** Vietnam has actively sought international cooperation to improve English education. One example is the Vietnam-US Teacher Training Project, which brought US English language fellows to Vietnam to work with local teachers and students (US Embassy in Vietnam, 2020).

It can be seen that English education in Vietnam has made significant progress in the past few decades, driven by national policies and economic requirements. However, there are still many challenges in terms of teacher quality, teaching methods and resource allocation. Ongoing reforms and innovations show promise in addressing these issues, but their long-term impact is yet to be seen.

### ***2.3. Quality Indicators in English Language Training***

The assessment of quality in English language training encompasses multiple dimensions and indicators that collectively determine the effectiveness of language programs. This comprehensive review examines key quality indicators identified in the literature, supported by specific examples and evidence from research studies.

At the foundation of quality English language training lies curriculum design and content. Richards (2001) emphasizes that a high-quality curriculum must demonstrate clear learning objectives, systematic skills development, and the incorporation of authentic materials. For instance, rather than setting vague goals like "improve speaking skills," an effective curriculum specifies measurable objectives such as "students will be able to conduct a 10-minute business presentation in English using appropriate vocabulary and transitions, maintaining eye contact, and responding to questions effectively." Furthermore, Brown (2007) highlights the importance of integrated skills development, where quality programs combine various language activities such as reading business case studies, taking notes during lectures, participating in group discussions, writing summary reports, and presenting findings orally.

In addition to curriculum design, teaching methodology and delivery serve as crucial quality indicators. Nunan (2015) advocates for student-centered learning approaches, where quality programs typically allocate significant class time to small group discussions, student-led presentations, and peer feedback sessions. Moreover, effective assessment practices should be both valid and reliable, incorporating both formative and summative evaluations aligned with learning objectives. For example, a comprehensive assessment system might include weekly vocabulary quizzes, monthly speaking tasks, writing portfolios, and final project presentations, providing a balanced evaluation of students' language development.

Another essential aspect of quality language training relates to teacher qualifications and professional development. According to Richards & Farrell (2005), high-quality programs maintain strict standards for teaching staff, requiring minimum academic qualifications such as a bachelor's degree in TESOL or related fields, relevant teaching certifications, and substantial teaching experience. Additionally, quality programs emphasize ongoing professional development through regular in-house training sessions, conference attendance, action research participation, and peer observation programs.

The learning environment and resources also play a vital role in determining program quality. Harmer (2015) suggests that quality indicators for physical facilities include appropriate class sizes, flexible seating arrangements, adequate acoustic treatment, and access to technology. Furthermore, successful



programs typically provide comprehensive learning resources, including updated textbooks, digital learning platforms, language laboratory facilities, and self-access learning centers. For instance, prestigious institutions like the British Council often maintain well-equipped facilities featuring multimedia language labs, self-study areas, and extensive library resources.

With regard to student support and services, quality programs offer comprehensive academic support systems. These typically include individual tutoring services, writing centers, speaking clubs, and online help desks. Additionally, learning advisory services such as regular academic counseling, study skills workshops, and career guidance contribute to the overall quality of the program.

In the modern educational landscape, technology integration has become an increasingly important quality indicator. High-quality programs effectively utilize digital learning platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), virtual classroom tools, and language learning applications. These technological resources are complemented by digital tools like online grammar checkers, pronunciation software, and digital portfolios, enhancing the learning experience and providing students with additional opportunities for language practice.

Program outcomes and impact serve as critical measures of quality. Successful programs demonstrate consistent language proficiency gains through standardized tests, internal assessments, and performance tasks. For instance, quality programs might aim for specific improvements in IELTS scores or maintain high pass rates in internal assessments. Furthermore, student satisfaction, measured through course evaluations, feedback surveys, and alumni interviews, provides valuable insights into program effectiveness.

Quality assurance systems represent another crucial indicator of program excellence. Effective programs implement regular review processes, including annual curriculum evaluations, external examiner reports, and stakeholder feedback analysis. These reviews contribute to continuous improvement through regular staff meetings, action research projects, and professional learning communities.

Finally, external recognition and accreditation serve as important validators of program quality. Accreditation by recognized bodies such as EQUIS, the British Council, or CEA demonstrates adherence to international standards. Additionally, industry recognition through partnerships with international universities and employer endorsements further validates program quality.

Through these interconnected quality indicators, English language training programs can establish and maintain high standards of educational excellence. The systematic implementation and regular evaluation of these indicators contribute to continuous program improvement and enhanced learning outcomes for students.

#### ***2.4. Challenges in Implementing Blended Learning in Developing Countries***

The implementation of blended learning in developing countries presents unique challenges that significantly impact its effectiveness and sustainability. While blended learning offers promising opportunities for educational advancement, various obstacles must be addressed to ensure successful implementation.

One of the primary challenges in developing countries is the digital divide and infrastructure limitations. According to Khan et al. (2012), many regions struggle with unreliable internet connectivity, inadequate computer facilities, and inconsistent power supply. For instance, in rural areas of Vietnam, Nguyen & Nguyen (2019) reported that only 45% of students had reliable internet access at home, while many schools lacked basic computer laboratories. Additionally, bandwidth limitations often prevent students from accessing multimedia content or participating in synchronous online activities effectively.

Furthermore, technological literacy poses a significant barrier for both educators and students. A comprehensive study by Rahman et al. (2020) across five Southeast Asian countries revealed that approximately 60% of teachers lacked the necessary digital skills to effectively implement blended learning. Similarly, many students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, struggle with basic computer operations and digital learning platforms. This digital competency gap often results in reduced engagement and learning outcomes.

Resource constraints present another substantial challenge in developing nations. Limited funding for educational technology, software licenses, and technical support often hampers the implementation of blended learning programs. For example, Pham & Nguyen (2021) documented how several Vietnamese universities struggled to maintain their learning management systems due to financial constraints. Moreover, the cost of devices and internet access for students creates additional barriers to participation, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities.

Cultural and pedagogical resistance also significantly impacts blended learning implementation. Traditional educational systems in many developing countries emphasize teacher-centered approaches, making the transition to more student-centered blended learning models challenging. Le (2018) observed that in many Asian contexts, both teachers and students often prefer face-to-face instruction and may view online components as supplementary rather than integral to the learning process. Additionally, cultural expectations about the role of teachers and the nature of education can conflict with the independent learning requirements of blended approaches.

In terms of institutional challenges, many educational institutions in developing countries lack comprehensive policies and support systems for blended learning. A study by Santos & Ibrahim (2019) highlighted how the absence of clear institutional guidelines, quality assurance mechanisms, and technical support infrastructure often leads to inconsistent implementation and varying levels of

success. Moreover, insufficient professional development opportunities for faculty members limit their ability to effectively design and deliver blended courses.

Language barriers present an additional layer of complexity in implementing blended learning systems. Many online learning platforms and digital resources are primarily available in English, creating challenges for non-English speaking students and teachers. For instance, Tran & Le (2020) found that Vietnamese students often struggled with English-language learning management systems, leading to reduced engagement and increased frustration.

Administrative and management issues also pose significant challenges. The lack of experienced personnel in educational technology management, insufficient technical support staff, and inadequate training programs for administrative staff can hinder the effective implementation of blended learning. Furthermore, institutions often struggle with managing the transition from traditional to blended learning systems, particularly in terms of scheduling, resource allocation, and assessment procedures.

Time management and workload concerns represent another significant challenge. Teachers in developing countries often face heavy teaching loads and administrative duties, leaving limited time for developing online materials and managing blended learning components. Similarly, students may struggle to balance their online and face-to-face learning commitments, particularly if they have work or family responsibilities.

Finally, assessment and quality assurance in blended learning environments present unique challenges in developing countries. Traditional assessment methods may not align well with blended learning approaches, while implementing online assessments raises concerns about academic integrity and technical reliability. Moreover, developing appropriate quality assurance mechanisms for blended learning programs requires expertise and resources that many institutions lack.

To address these challenges, researchers suggest various strategies and solutions. For instance, Malik & Butt (2022) propose a phased implementation approach that allows institutions to gradually build capacity and infrastructure. Additionally, forming partnerships with international organizations and experienced institutions can provide valuable support and resources. Furthermore, developing locally relevant content and platforms that consider cultural and linguistic needs can enhance the effectiveness of blended learning implementations.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

The study focused on 8 universities in Hanoi, selected through a deliberate sampling method to represent diverse organizational characteristics in terms of program size, location and structure. This sampling method allows to get a broad perspective on the implementation of blended learning in different educational contexts in the capital. The selected institutions include 5 public universities (National Economics University; University of Social Sciences and Humanities; University of Commerce; Hanoi University of Science and Technology; Hanoi University of Industry) and 3 private universities (University of Vietnam; Phenika University; Thang Long University).

Collect data using a variety of methods to ensure comprehensive coverage. The main data source consists of semi-structured interviews with 20 English lecturers from 8 selected universities. Interviews lasting 30 to 45 minutes are conducted in person or by phone to explore the experiences, challenges, and perspectives of English language instructors on the implementation of blended learning. In addition, 10 classroom observations were conducted to examine the practical teaching activities and the integration of blended learning methods into the practical educational contexts conducted between June 2024 and September 2024. The study also included extensive material analysis, examination of course syllabus, learning materials and policies of universities regarding the implementation of blended learning.

The data analysis process uses a systematic approach using NVivo software for thematic analysis. This method involves encoding the collected data to identify recurring themes and patterns across different data sources. A continuous method of comparison is used to develop and refine topics, ensuring that the analysis captures both common models and unique aspects of blended learning implementations across different organizational contexts. This analytical method allows identifying key topics related to implementation practices, challenges and potential improvements in blended English instruction.

This approach provides a deeper understanding of the current blended learning situation at Vietnamese universities, while providing insight into potential areas for improvement and development. The combination of interviews, observations, and literature analysis has provided a comprehensive view of blended learning implementation from multiple perspectives, improving the reliability and validity of research findings.

#### **4. RESEARCH RESULTS**

##### ***4.1. On the implementation of blended learning at Vietnamese universities***

The analysis of semi-structured interviews with 20 English lecturers, combined with classroom observations and document analysis, revealed several key findings regarding the implementation of blended learning in Vietnamese universities. These findings can be categorized into several interconnected themes that provide insight into the current state of blended learning in English language education.

##### *Current Implementation Models and Practices*

The study found that universities in Hanoi predominantly employ a supplementary model of blended learning, where traditional face-to-face instruction remains the primary mode of delivery, supplemented by online components. Analysis of course syllabi revealed that most programs allocate 70-80% of instruction time to classroom teaching, while online activities account for 20-30%. Interestingly, 15 out of 20 lecturers reported using learning management systems (LMS) primarily for homework assignments and supplementary materials rather than interactive learning activities. For instance, one lecturer explained, *"I use Google Classroom to share additional reading materials and assign homework, but most of my actual teaching happens in the physical classroom."* Classroom

observations confirmed this pattern, showing limited integration of digital tools during face-to-face sessions.

#### *Technological Infrastructure and Resources*

The investigation of institutional infrastructure revealed varying levels of technological readiness among the eight universities. While all institutions had basic internet connectivity and computer laboratories, the quality and accessibility of these resources differed significantly. Six universities used commercial LMS platforms such as Moodle or Google Classroom, while two relied on in-house systems. However, document analysis showed that only three universities had comprehensive policies regarding blended learning implementation and technical support. A recurring theme in the interviews was the inconsistent availability of technical support, with one lecturer noting, *"When we encounter technical problems, it often takes days to get assistance, which disrupts our teaching schedule."*

#### *Pedagogical Approaches and Teaching Practices*

Classroom observations revealed that most lecturers struggled to effectively integrate online and face-to-face components in their teaching. While 16 out of 20 lecturers expressed positive attitudes toward blended learning, their actual implementation often lacked pedagogical sophistication. Traditional teacher-centered approaches dominated classroom sessions, with limited use of collaborative or student-centered activities. For example, during the ten classroom observations, only three sessions incorporated interactive online activities, while the majority used technology merely for presentation purposes. As one lecturer admitted, *"I know I should make my online activities more interactive, but I'm not sure how to design them effectively."*

#### *Student Engagement and Participation*

Lecturers reported mixed levels of student engagement in blended learning activities. According to the interviews, students showed higher engagement with multimedia content and interactive online exercises but were less enthusiastic about asynchronous discussions or collaborative online projects. Several lecturers noted a significant disparity in participation between urban and rural students, primarily due to differences in internet access and digital literacy. One lecturer observed, *"Students from rural areas often struggle with online activities because of poor internet connectivity at home, which affects their participation and performance."*

#### *Professional Development and Support*

The study revealed significant gaps in professional development opportunities for lecturers. While all eight universities offered basic technical training, comprehensive pedagogical training for blended learning was notably absent. Only 7 out of 20 lecturers had received formal training in blended learning pedagogy, with most relying on self-directed learning and peer support. Document analysis showed that institutional policies rarely addressed professional development needs specifically for blended learning. As one lecturer stated, *"We need more than just technical training; we need to understand how to design effective blended learning experiences."*

### *Assessment Practices and Quality Assurance*

The examination of course syllabi and assessment policies revealed traditional assessment methods predominating, with limited integration of online assessment tools. Most lecturers (18 out of 20) continued to rely heavily on paper-based tests and face-to-face evaluations, expressing concerns about academic integrity in online assessments. The study found that only two universities had developed specific quality assurance guidelines for blended learning courses. One lecturer explained, *"We're unsure about how to fairly assess students in a blended environment while maintaining academic standards."*

### *Institutional Support and Leadership*

Analysis of institutional policies and interview data indicated varying levels of administrative support for blended learning initiatives. While all eight universities officially endorsed blended learning, only three had allocated significant resources for its implementation. Lecturers frequently mentioned the need for stronger institutional leadership and clearer guidelines. As one participant noted, *"Without clear institutional direction and support, each lecturer implements blended learning differently, leading to inconsistent experiences for students."*

This in-depth analysis reveals that while blended learning is being implemented across universities in Hanoi, its execution faces various challenges and limitations. The findings suggest a need for more systematic approaches to implementation, enhanced professional development opportunities, and stronger institutional support to realize the full potential of blended learning in English language education at Vietnamese universities.

## **4.2. Effective activities and challenges in teaching English in combination**

### *Best Practices in Blended English Language Instruction*

Several effective practices emerged from the research data. The most successful implementations were found in cases where lecturers systematically integrated online and face-to-face components. For instance, three lecturers who received consistently positive student feedback had developed a structured approach combining pre-class online activities with in-class discussion and practice. One lecturer explained, *"I assign video lectures and interactive grammar exercises before class, which allows us to focus on speaking and practical application during face-to-face sessions."* Document analysis of their course materials showed careful alignment between online content and classroom activities, creating a coherent learning experience.

Technology integration emerged as another area of best practice, particularly among younger lecturers. Five participants demonstrated exceptional skill in utilizing digital tools to enhance student engagement. For example, one lecturer successfully incorporated interactive online quizzes through Kahoot and Quizlet, reporting increased student motivation and participation. Classroom observations confirmed that sessions incorporating such tools showed notably higher levels of student engagement and participation compared to traditional lecture-based classes.

Effective assessment practices were also identified among certain participants. Four lecturers had developed comprehensive assessment systems that balanced online and face-to-face evaluations. These systems included regular online quizzes, digital portfolios, and collaborative projects, complemented by traditional in-class assessments. As one lecturer noted, *"Using a mix of assessment methods helps me better understand students' progress and provides multiple opportunities for them to demonstrate their skills."*

#### *Challenges in Implementation*

Despite these positive examples, the research revealed several significant challenges facing blended English language instruction. Technical infrastructure emerged as a primary concern, with 15 out of 20 lecturers reporting frequent issues with internet connectivity and platform stability. During classroom observations, three sessions were disrupted by technical difficulties, highlighting the impact of infrastructure limitations on teaching effectiveness. One lecturer expressed frustration, saying, *"Unstable internet connections often force me to have backup traditional lesson plans ready."*

Student readiness and participation presented another significant challenge. Sixteen lecturers reported varying levels of student engagement with online components, particularly noting difficulties with independent learning skills. Analysis of course materials showed that many students struggled with self-directed learning activities, often requiring additional support and guidance. A lecturer observed, *"Many students are not accustomed to taking responsibility for their own learning, which is essential in blended courses."*

Workload management emerged as a substantial challenge for lecturers. The majority of participants (18 out of 20) reported spending significantly more time preparing and managing blended courses compared to traditional classes. Document analysis revealed that creating online content, managing digital platforms, and providing timely feedback required considerable additional effort. One lecturer stated, *"Developing quality online materials and maintaining regular interaction with students online has doubled my workload."*

Time allocation and scheduling posed additional challenges. Classroom observations showed that lecturers often struggled to balance online and face-to-face activities effectively within the prescribed curriculum time. Eight participants specifically mentioned difficulties in covering all required content while maintaining the quality of both online and in-person instruction. Analysis of course syllabi revealed frequent misalignment between allocated time and actual teaching requirements.

Assessment challenges were particularly prominent in the findings. Seventeen lecturers expressed concerns about maintaining academic integrity in online assessments while ensuring fair evaluation of student performance. Document analysis showed limited guidelines for online assessment practices, leading to inconsistent approaches across different courses and institutions. As one lecturer noted, *"We lack clear protocols for conducting online assessments and preventing academic dishonesty."*

Institutional support and resource allocation also emerged as significant challenges. While all eight universities had policies supporting blended learning, document analysis revealed that only three provided comprehensive implementation guidelines and adequate resources. Lecturers frequently mentioned the need for better technical support, more professional development opportunities, and clearer institutional direction.

These findings highlight the complex nature of implementing blended English language instruction in Vietnamese universities. While some lecturers have developed effective practices, significant challenges remain in areas such as infrastructure, student engagement, workload management, and assessment. The research suggests that addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort involving institutional support, professional development, and systematic approaches to implementation.

## **5. Recommendations for Improving the Quality of English Training Through Blended Learning Approaches**

### *Infrastructure and Technical Support Enhancement*

The study strongly suggests the need for improved technological infrastructure and support systems. Given that 15 out of 20 lecturers reported technical difficulties as a major barrier, institutions should prioritize investing in reliable internet connectivity and stable learning management systems. Specifically, the establishment of dedicated technical support teams is recommended, as only three universities currently provide such services. One lecturer emphasized, "*Having immediate technical support would significantly reduce class disruptions and increase our confidence in implementing online activities.*" The research suggests that universities should allocate at least 15-20% of their annual budget to technological infrastructure and support services to ensure smooth implementation of blended learning.

### *Professional Development and Training*

A comprehensive professional development program is strongly recommended based on the research findings. With only 7 out of 20 lecturers having received formal training in blended learning pedagogy, there is a clear need for systematic training initiatives. The recommended program should include three key components: technical training for digital tools, pedagogical approaches for blended learning, and assessment strategies in mixed environments. As one participant noted, "*We need practical training that shows us how to effectively combine online and face-to-face teaching methods.*" Regular workshops, peer mentoring programs, and opportunities for sharing best practices should be institutionalized.

### *Curriculum Redesign and Content Development*

Analysis of course syllabi and classroom observations reveal the need for systematic curriculum redesign. The research suggests developing standardized templates for blended courses that clearly delineate online and face-to-face components while maintaining flexibility for individual teaching



styles. Based on successful practices observed in three courses, it is recommended that 30-40% of course content be delivered online, with clear integration between virtual and classroom activities. Additionally, institutions should invest in developing high-quality digital content and resources specifically designed for Vietnamese learners.

#### *Assessment System Reform*

The findings indicate a pressing need for reformed assessment practices. Given that 17 lecturers expressed concerns about assessment integrity, institutions should develop comprehensive assessment frameworks that combine traditional and digital evaluation methods. Recommended approaches include implementing continuous assessment through digital portfolios, incorporating automated assessment tools for objective components, and developing clear protocols for online examination security. As suggested by successful practices observed in four courses, a balanced assessment system might include 40% online assessments, 40% traditional evaluations, and 20% project-based assessments.

#### *Student Support and Engagement Strategies*

To address the varying levels of student engagement reported by 16 lecturers, institutions should implement comprehensive student support systems. Recommendations include developing orientation programs for blended learning, providing technical support tutorials, and establishing peer support networks. Additionally, the research suggests implementing a student readiness assessment tool to identify and address potential challenges before course commencement. Regular feedback mechanisms should be established to monitor student progress and satisfaction.

#### *Institutional Policy and Guidelines*

Based on document analysis revealing inconsistent institutional support, universities should develop clear policies and guidelines for blended learning implementation. These should include standard operating procedures, quality assurance frameworks, and clear expectations for both teachers and students. The research suggests that successful implementation requires dedicated institutional units responsible for overseeing blended learning initiatives, as demonstrated by the three universities with comprehensive support systems.

#### *Resource Allocation and Time Management*

To address workload concerns expressed by 18 lecturers, institutions should implement better resource allocation systems. Recommendations include reducing class sizes for blended courses to a maximum of 25 students, providing teaching assistants for large classes, and allocating additional preparation time for course development. The research suggests that lecturers should receive a 20-30% reduction in traditional teaching hours when developing new blended courses.

#### *Quality Assurance Mechanisms*

The study recommends establishing robust quality assurance mechanisms specifically for blended learning courses. These should include regular course evaluations, peer review systems, and external

audits. Based on successful practices observed, a three-tier quality assurance system is recommended: course-level monitoring, program-level review, and institutional-level assessment. Regular collection and analysis of student performance data should inform continuous improvement efforts.

#### *Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing*

Finally, the research suggests establishing networks for collaboration and knowledge sharing among institutions. Given the varied experiences across the eight universities studied, creating platforms for sharing best practices, resources, and solutions could accelerate improvement in blended learning implementation. Regular inter-institutional workshops, online forums, and collaborative research projects are recommended to build a community of practice around blended learning in English language education.

These recommendations are derived directly from the research findings and address the specific challenges and opportunities identified in the Vietnamese university context. Their implementation should be phased and contextualized to each institution's specific circumstances while maintaining focus on the ultimate goal of improving English language training quality through effective blended learning approaches.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study provides valuable insights into the implementation of blended learning approaches in English language programs at Vietnamese universities. Through the analysis of data collected from 20 English lecturers across eight universities in Hanoi, combined with classroom observations and document analysis, the research reveals both promising practices and significant challenges in the current implementation of blended learning. The findings highlight that while universities are making progress in integrating technology with traditional instruction, several key areas require attention for successful implementation. These include the need for improved technological infrastructure, enhanced professional development opportunities for lecturers, more systematic approaches to curriculum design, and stronger institutional support systems. The study also identifies successful practices that could serve as models for improvement, particularly in the areas of assessment integration and online content development. Additionally, the research emphasizes the importance of addressing student engagement and readiness for blended learning environments. The recommendations derived from this study offer practical guidelines for institutions seeking to enhance their blended learning programs in English language education. While the study was limited to universities in Hanoi, its findings and recommendations have broader implications for the implementation of blended learning in similar educational contexts throughout Vietnam and potentially other developing countries. Future research could expand upon these findings by examining implementation in other regions and investigating long-term outcomes of blended learning approaches in English language education.

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