

The Implementation of Blended Learning for English Courses at Higher Education in Vietnam: Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract

Advancements in technology and the Internet characterize the current English teaching and learning scenario. In this trend, the issue of blending face-to-face and online learning into English learning and teaching has drawn significant attention from teachers, researchers, and educators worldwide, including Vietnam, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this mode has been applied widely and shown its noticeable benefits, there have been relatively few studies regarding the perceptions of English lecturers at the tertiary level in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Therefore, the objectives of this research are to (1) critically review knowledge of blended learning (BL); (2) investigate the tertiary level English lecturers' perceptions of the BL model implementation in a college in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; (3) provide some practical recommendations for future research and implementations. Online questionnaires and interviews with 14 English lecturers in the Summer 2023 semester were used to collect qualitative and quantitative data. At the end of the paper, EFL lecturers' perceptions were revealed. Several educational implications and practical recommendations were suggested as well. The research findings are expected to contribute to a complete picture of BL in higher education in Vietnam.

Keywords: Blended Learning, CALL, Moodle, higher education, online learning

Introduction

In the last few decades, Vietnam's educational system has seen and experienced a visible and huge change with the assistance of the developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dao et al., 2021; Hanh, 2022;). There was a transition from learning in traditional classrooms to learning in online classrooms and even the combination of both traditional and online learning, namely blended learning (BL), to cope with the situation and solve the problems of school closures (Tran & Nguyen, 2023; Lien, 2022; Pham et al., 2021).

The notion of combining face-to-face classrooms with online classrooms in English courses in higher education has been applied in quite a lot of institutions in Vietnam and worldwide (Dao et al., 2021; Phuong et al., 2022; Hanh, 2022). The benefits and opportunities that BL has

provided teachers and learners cannot be denied. In the EFL context, there have been studies on the characteristics and effectiveness of BL on university students (Hung et al., 2023; Vu et al., 2022), students' perceptions towards the implementation of BL in English classrooms (Anh et al., 2022; Tran & Nguyen, 2023; Thao et al., 2021). However, the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL instructors about the implications of BL have been the subject of comparatively few investigations (Thao et al., 2021).

Therefore, this current study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of tertiary-level English teachers toward the implementation of the BL model in a college in Ho Chi Minh City. In particular, 14 English teachers in the Art and Science Department took part in the study as well as completed the online survey. Then, five out of 14 English teachers also joined in the semi-structured interviews. The study also revealed some practical recommendations for future research and implementations.

Literature review

Definition of blended learning

According to Lewis (2017), Dao et al. (2021), and Hanh (2022), BL is considered to be a broad term with a variety of approaches. Lewis (2017) emphasizes the flexibility and adaptability of BL, highlighting its capacity to combine traditional face-to-face instruction with online elements. Dao et al. (2021) delve into the pedagogical implications of BL, suggesting that a well-designed BL environment can enhance student engagement and provide a more personalized learning experience. Additionally, Hanh (2022) explores the cultural aspects of BL, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural contexts in the implementation of BL models.

Moreover, as defined by Allan (2007), the notion of BL was the involvement of technology in teaching and learning, which could also occasionally include a blend of technology-based and traditional classroom learning. BL was defined by MacDonald and Creanor (2010) as learning that takes place in both in-person and online settings. Reinders (2012), Bates (2015), and Hockly and Dudeney (2018) also agreed with this definition by stating that BL is the "combination of face-to-face and online teaching". It means the teaching and learning process can take place both inside and outside the classroom (Harmer, 2015). Additionally, Huy et al. (2020) defined BL as a program that includes "traditional lectures, virtual or online lessons, multimedia contents especially videos and audios, email systems, discussion forums, and a chat system."

Furthermore, this is also the synchronization of learning in conventional onsite learning and online learning, which can be presented on a continuum in Figure 1 below, with BL between the two ends, namely onsite and online learning (Allan, 2007; Phuong et al., 2022; Reinders, 2012; Stein & Graham, 2014; Vu et al., 2022). A course in the blended mode could fall anywhere in this spectrum in that the rate of onsite and online meetings is arbitrary (Stein & Graham, 2014).



Figure 1. Overview of blended learning

In addition, according to Stein and Graham (2014), the types of synchronous and asynchronous interactions should also be considered in blended courses. The interactions that happen simultaneously are synchronous interactions, which implement web conferencing, chat, and instant messaging. Asynchronous interactions are interactions that do not happen in real-time but at any time, such as emails or discussion forums. However, these two kinds of interactions can be incorporated into a blended course since each of them has its own strengths and weaknesses.

In blended courses, apart from the classroom learning environment, there is a requirement for an online learning environment that offers the features of organizing and supplementing the course. Institutions can use simple websites or a toolset called a Learning Management System (LMS), which provides some features of class management, communication and interaction, organization and resources, and practice and assessment. There are some LMSs used commonly, such as Moodle, Canvas, Schoology, or Blackboard.

Types of blended learning

As Roblyer (2016) considered, any educational module involves a mix of online and in-person activities in the blended mode, so there are a variety of blended course models in practice. Thus, there are three models categorized such as (1) traditional classroom with online activities model, (2) online classroom with in-person events model, and (3) flipped classroom model. Graham (2006) classified BL into three types: Enabling Blends, Enhancing Blends, and Transforming Blends based on the primary purpose of BL.

Meanwhile, the four models presented by Staker and Horn (2012), which they considered to categorize most BL programs across the K-12 sector, are the most common BL models. The first type is the Rotation Model, wherein, in a course, students alternate between learning modes according to a predetermined schedule. This model is subdivided into four common implementations: the station-rotation model, the lab-rotation model, the flipped-classroom model, and the individual-rotation model. The second type is the Flex Model, where, in a course, students have control over their learning in that they can choose the learning modes according to their needs. In this model, while most of the content and instructions are offered online, sessions with teachers are also offered on-site as needed in some activities, such as small-group instructions, group projects, and individual training. The third type is the Self-Blended Model, where, within a program, students can enroll in one or more online courses apart from the traditional courses. The last type is the Enriched-Virtual Model, where, within a program, students divide their time between taking classes on-site and learning online.

Blended learning in the EFL contexts

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Hockly and Clandfield (2010) assert that compared to learners in purely face-to-face learning environments, those situated in classrooms that offer a blend of online and face-to-face learning experiences demonstrate enhanced

learning outcomes. BL is recognized as a common and successful option in this context. The authors highlight the multifaceted benefits of blending traditional classroom instruction with online elements, emphasizing its positive impact on student learning.

Furthermore, Hockly and Clandfield (2010) delve into the pedagogical considerations of BL in EFL settings. They underscore the importance of facilitating peer interactions and stimulating learner autonomy, even in the online component of the blended format. This acknowledgment of the need for active peer engagement and the encouragement of learner autonomy reflects a thoughtful approach to designing blended learning experiences that cater to the unique challenges and opportunities in EFL contexts.

According to Reinders (2012), BL is the mode that mixes the advantages and strengths of face-to-face and online learning. Its flexibility in lesson delivery offers learners flexible learning opportunities and environments and helps enhance learners' autonomy and motivation. In addition, there are some specific challenges in online and BL for both learners and teachers related to the manner in which they learn and teach online.

In a recent study, Ibrahim and Ismail (2021) investigated university ESL instructors' reflections on BL in their classrooms. They found that the teachers with more experience with technology and positive attitudes toward technology were more likely to implement BL effectively. Meanwhile, workload and technological infrastructure were the two major challenges.

In the Vietnamese EFL context, several higher education institutions have offered courses in the BL mode. It is suggested by Tang and Tien (2020) that BL should be employed to keep abreast of the current digital technology scenario and modify and improve education quality. In the article, these authors discussed how to choose forms and levels of BL and noted some important factors when implementing BL.

Another study conducted among English-majored students by Vu et al. (2022), which employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods, concluded that the students in the experimental group (N=20) performed better than those in the control group (N=20) after the experiment and that the experimented students had positive perceptions about blended online EFL writing activities. The authors also suggested several strategies for successful BL employment, including designing interesting tasks and discussion topics and establishing a collaborative and interactive learning environment.

A recent Hanh (2022) study also claimed that BL benefits from onsite and online learning. The study also concluded from the survey that BL positively impacted higher education. This study also employed both quantitative and qualitative methods; however, the collected data was gathered from books, studies in Vietnam and outside Vietnam, etc., and surveyed teacher participants.

Additionally, research conducted at a university in Vietnam to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions towards the implication of BL, by Phuong et al. (2022) brought a conclusion that when using BL in their classrooms, EFL teachers benefited a lot from BL and also faced different challenges in terms of appropriate devices, cheating issue, internet connection, technical problems and time constraints.

Based on Cao's (2022) study trying to explore how language teachers in a university in Vietnam perceived and adopted BL to adapt to the new normal, the teachers had positive perceptions of BL in terms of its usefulness, ease of use, necessity, feasibility, and their confidence in implementing BL lead to their active employment and intentional continuation. However, the teacher encountered some challenges related to their increased work burden and the students' lack of facilities.

TAM Model

It cannot be denied that teachers play an integral part in the implementation and use of BL, and their acceptance and use of technology should be adequately considered. The technology acceptance model (TAM), which has been developed by Davis et al. (1989), is seen as one of the most used models to predict and explore an individual's acceptance and use of technology. This model considers four factors: perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, behavioral intention, and attitude toward use. Accordingly, the 'actual system use' is the endpoint of the model. The users' behavioral intention, which is influenced by their attitude, leads to this use. In turn, the users' attitude is affected by how they perceive the technology's usefulness and ease of use. The Extended-TAM was suggested by some other scholars in that the factor of external variables is also considered to be a factor that affects users' acceptance and use of technology.

Sulistiyo et al. (2022) conducted research adopting TAM to investigate the TAM's determining factors toward the use of ICT tools for English learning. In this quantitative study, the TAM variables, namely Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and Attitude, were entailed and expanded by three external factors, including Equipment, Motivation, and ICT Skills, to explore the pre-service teachers' attitudes toward ICT use for English learning. The findings showed that the determinants of TAM influenced the ICT application in English learning. Moreover, the TAM's three main variables assisted the effect of the extended factors toward the use of ICT, and the actual use was only influenced by the attitudes, motivation, and ICT skills factors, not the equipment factor.

In the context of the implementation of BL, if the end-users believe that BL is useful for teaching and learning and it is easy for them to use technology during their implementation of BL, they will tend to be willing to adopt it. Hence, this study employed the TAM as its theoretical framework to explore teachers' perceptions of using BL.

Research Questions

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

1. What are English teachers' perceptions regarding their acceptance of blended learning implementation for English courses?
2. How do English teachers perceive the challenges of the use of blended teaching?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Saigon College in Ho Chi Minh City was the site of this study, and 14 English teachers in the Art and Science Department participated in it. Among these teachers (N=14), five teachers were willing to participate in the semi-structured interviews after the online survey.

English teachers and students in Saigon College have been provided with opportunities to approach new trends of teaching and learning thanks to the advancement of technology and the internet. Since 2023, Saigon College has offered courses in the rotational BL mode. The blended mode's onsite and synchronous online percentages are 80% and 20%, respectively. In addition, the number of online sessions for each course is not the same due to the courses' credits and the length of the courses. Moodle is used as the learning management system during the courses, where teachers upload learning materials, assign homework, create quizzes, tests, forum discussions, and so on. Apart from the onsite sessions, the online sessions take place on Google Meet.

The participants' demographic information is in the table below:

Table 1.

Participants' demographic information

Information		No.
Years of Teaching Experience	6-10 years	8
	11-20 years	6
Degree of familiarity with blended learning	Very familiar	7
	Somewhat familiar	7
Frequency of teaching in blended learning mode	Frequently	9
	Occasionally	5

As presented in Table 1, the study gathered vital demographic data from a sample of teachers, which provided insights into the diverse teacher landscape. Among the participants, 8 teachers had 6-10 years of teaching experience, while 6 teachers had a more extensive teaching background of 11-20 years. When it came to their degree of familiarity with BL, 7 teachers expressed being very familiar with the concept, while an additional 7 teachers reported being somewhat familiar. In terms of the frequency of incorporating BL into their teaching methods, 9 teachers were actively engaged, teaching in this mode frequently, while 5 teachers adopted it more sporadically, teaching in BL mode occasionally. These findings provide a comprehensive snapshot of the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the teachers involved in our study, shedding light on the varied perspectives they bring to the integration of BL in their classrooms.

Design of the Study

The mixed-method research design was defined as the method in which the researcher collects and analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). Hence, to answer the research questions, this research employed the mixed-method design, which is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods, to study the perceptions of tertiary-level English teachers towards the BL model implementation and the challenges they encountered.

Furthermore, the data collected for this study came from two sources, including online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which are going to be described in more detail in the next part.

Data Collection & Analysis

This study used online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as the data collection instruments. The questionnaire was piloted before the official administration in order to identify and clarify ambiguities in the instructions and the items.

According to Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009), questionnaires help the researcher to measure the factual, behavioral, and attitudinal data about the respondents. Mackey and Gass (2015) also advocated the benefits of using questionnaires in that it is convenient for the researcher to deliver in various forms. As a result, a set of questionnaires was put to use to answer the research questions.

The aims of the Likert questionnaire were to gather some demographic information about the teachers, their perceptions regarding their acceptance and attitude toward the use of BL, and the difficulties they encountered during the teaching process in the blended mode. The questionnaire items regarding teachers' acceptance of BL were adapted from Cao (2022), while those addressing challenges during the implementation of BL were sourced from the work of Phuong et al. (2022) and Ibrahim and Ismail (2021). The questionnaire items of this current study were modified to accommodate the study better.

The aim of the questionnaire in Cao's (2022) "Language teachers' perception and practice of adopting BL to adapt to the new normal" was to gather data about how language teachers in a university in Vietnam perceived BL and how they employed BL in practice. After considering 14 items from the original version, 10 items were adapted so as to suit the aim of the study's research question 1 about the teachers' perceptions regarding their acceptance of implementing BL.

Additionally, in "Teachers' Perceptions Toward Blended Teaching Applied in EFL Classroom," Phuong et al. (2022) used the questionnaire to explore EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the challenges of BL in a Vietnamese university. The purpose of Ibrahim and Ismail's (2021) questionnaire was to identify factors and challenges in implementing BL in ELT in a university in Malaysia. After taking the original versions into account, seven items on the aspects of instructional and tech-related challenges were adapted and modified to answer the second research question of this study.

This research questionnaire consisted of three parts with a total of 20 items. The three items in the first part of the questionnaire were to collect data on participants' demographics in terms of teaching experience, degree of familiarity with BL, and frequency of teaching in BL mode. The question items in section two and section three were designed based on the Likert five-point scale, which ranged from 1 to 5, specifically, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The second part of the questionnaire, comprising ten items, aligns with the four original factors of the TAM: perceived usefulness (PU1, PU2, PU3, PU4), perceived ease of use (PEOU1, PEOU2, PEOU3), attitude toward use (A1, A2), and behavioral intention (BI). In the third section, seven items were used to investigate the difficulties the

teachers had during their practice of implementing BL in regard to instructional challenges (items I1, I2, I3, and I4) and tech-related challenges (items T1, T2, and T3).

Moreover, to explore issues that are not noticeable in the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with five EFL teachers were conducted to collect qualitative data. The data from the interviews support the findings and conclusion of the questionnaire in that it provided a more in-depth understanding of teachers' teaching experiences during the course in the mode of BL, their attitudes, and further recommendations for future application.

The study was carried out at Saigon College, and the data was collected in the Summer 2023 semester, which is the second semester the institution implemented the BL mode in several courses. While the online survey was conducted via Google Forms for convenience, the semi-structured interviews were conducted offline and online at the respondents' convenience. In addition, the interviewees were given the names T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5 when being mentioned to protect their identities.

The quantitative data of the research, which was from the survey's close-ended items, was gathered, computed using the SPSS program (version 26.0), and then statistically presented. The Cronbach's Alpha was computed to check the reliability of the questionnaire. Table 2 below shows that all the values are over 0.5, which means that the questionnaire is reliable as a data collection instrument.

Table 2.

Reliability of the Questionnaire and Constructs

Constructs	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Teachers' perceptions regarding their acceptance of blended learning	10	0.94
Teachers' perceptions regarding the challenges of implementing blended learning	07	0.86

The qualitative data from the interviews was transcribed verbatim, categorized into themes, and presented in two main categories: (1) EFL teachers' acceptance of the implementation of BL and (2) EFL teachers' perceptions of challenges during the implementation of BL. After that, the data from the interviews were used to support the findings and assumptions from the survey to draw a conclusion.

Findings and discussion

EFL teachers' perceptions regarding their acceptance of blended learning

The participants were asked about their perceptions regarding their acceptance of BL implementation for English courses. The responses from some interviewees in the semi-structured interviews reinforce the data collected from the survey, which shows that the EFL teachers had positive perceptions towards the implementation of BL.

The ten items in the second section of the online questionnaires are associated with four factors that affect the teachers' acceptance of BL. Table 3 below presents a summary of those responses.

Table 3.

Teachers’ perceptions regarding their acceptance of blended learning

Code		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
		1	2	3	4	5	4.75
PU1	I think it is necessary to implement blended learning at my institution	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	50.0%	42.9%	4.35
PU2	I think it is feasible to implement blended learning at my institution.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
PU3	I think blended learning is useful for my teaching.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
PU4	I think blended learning is useful for my students’ learning	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	78.6%	4.78
PEOU1	I think it is easy for me to implement blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
PEOU2	I think there is enough equipment (both at home and at school) for me to apply blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	92.9%	4.92
PEOU3	I think I have enough technical knowledge and skills to apply blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	78.6%	4.78
A1	I find it interesting to apply blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	78.6%	4.78
A2	I think I have enough teaching experience to apply blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	78.6%	4.78
BI	I will support the implementation of blended learning in the future.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	92.9%	4.92

As can be seen from the table, the teachers’ choices ranged from ‘Neutral’ to ‘Strongly agree’. Besides, BL’s usefulness and ease of use factors are highly appreciated ($M > 4.0$). It seems that most of the teachers appreciated BL and have positive perceptions of the application of BL mode due to its benefits.

Regarding the teachers’ responses of the usefulness (PU1-PU4), many teachers (42.9% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 7.1% neutral, $M = 4.35$) claimed the implementation of BL at the institution is necessary ($M = 4.35$) and found it is feasible to implement BL at the institution (78.6% strongly agreed, 14.3% agreed, 7.1% neutral, $M = 4.71$). It is evident that more than 90% of the teachers (PU1 and PU2) agreed that it is not only necessary but also feasible to implement BL in their institutions. Besides, most of the teachers agreed that BL is useful for their teaching (78.6% strongly agreed, 14.3% agreed, 7.1% neutral, $M = 4.71$) and for their students’ learning (PU4) (78.6% strongly agreed, 21.4% agreed, $M = 4.78$). Unsurprisingly, the results in PU3 and PU4 revealed that BL brings benefits to both teachers’ teaching and students’ learning. To justify this, all the teachers shared the same point in the interview that it was useful for their teaching in that they had a chance to design the lessons and adapt various teaching methods and approaches appropriately in two different modes, online and offline, keep track of the student's

progress via Moodle easily, and motivate them to find out about the application of technology in their teaching. Four respondents (T2, T3, T4, and T5) stated that BL was very useful for their students' learning because they could experience different learning environments and teachers' teaching methods. Meanwhile, Participant T5 shared that this BL was relatively useful for their students' learning, particularly the online sessions, because the students may be distracted by other things when they studied online.

In responding to questions about the ease of use (PEOU1-PEO3), the total percentage of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" replies were strikingly high, indicating that the implementation of BL is easy (92.9%), and there is adequate equipment, both at home and at school for the teachers to employ BL effectively (100%). Also, all participants claimed that they had enough technical knowledge and skills to apply BL (PEOU3) (78.6% strongly agreed, 21.4% agreed, $M=4.78$). Indeed, all the interviewees shared that it was easy when teaching in the blended mode. A respondent commented that it was a little challenging in the beginning, then became familiar with teaching online and changing teaching modes between online and on-site. Moreover, before the implementation, they were briefed on how to use Moodle and Google Meet effectively. Respondent T3 also shared:

“Besides the training from the institution, I also actively search for other teaching tools, approaches, and activities to use in my on-site and online classrooms.”

In addition, the teachers were asked about their interest in implementing BL as well as their ideas about their teaching experience in applying BL in the classroom (A1-A2). The 21.4% agreeing and 78.6% strongly agreeing showed that all the teachers found implementing BL interesting and had adequate teaching experience to employ BL. The follow-up interviews provided some insights into this tendency. Four out of five respondents claimed that they found it motivating when teaching in the BL mode. While respondents T1 and T5 shared the same opinion that it was very convenient for teachers and students because they did not need to go to school to work or study, T2, T3, and T5 agreed that BL mode gave them opportunities to teach in different teaching environments, employ different teaching methods and teaching tools in the on-site and online classrooms. As T3 said:

“This is an opportunity for me to employ online teaching activities that I know and have been trained in and change the teaching environments and atmosphere. I can also introduce my students to some other learning apps and websites and encourage them to self-study.”

Respondent T4 shared that teaching online was quite interesting and motivating. However, she preferred the offline teaching mode to the online one. She thought that the offline sessions were more effective than the online sessions. This was because when the students studied in the classroom, they engaged in teaching and learning more and interacted with others and the teacher more compared to when they studied online.

In terms of behavioral intention, the results in BL showed that most of the teachers are willing to support the implementation of BL in the future (92.9% strongly agreed, 7.1% agreed, $M=4.92$). All the teachers also claimed in the interviews that BL should be implemented in their institutions in the future.

Teacher T2 shared enthusiastically:

"Definitely! Information technology is developing and having a lot of impacts on education, specifically on English teaching and learning. So that, our school and other institutions should make use of technology advancement."

Teacher T3 also shared:

"Although in the beginning it might not be easy to teach in the blended mode and teachers might not be familiar with it, we should not let blended learning pass unnoticed. Besides, teachers and students should have adequate training to teach and study effectively during the blended learning courses."

The presented results are consistent with earlier studies, which have shown that BL is thought to have several benefits for both instructors and students. Firstly, it is in line with Hockly and Clandfield (2010), Reinders (2012), Vu et al. (2022), Hanh (2022), Cao (2022), and Phuong et al. (2022) in that BL is perceived by EFL teachers as applicable and necessary to be implemented and useful for both their teaching and students' learning in some extent. The EFL teachers confirmed that they had an opportunity to plan lessons and correctly adapt various teaching methods and approaches in two distinct modes, online and offline, easily monitor the students' progress via Moodle, and encourage them to learn about the use of technology in their instruction. Secondly, in terms of the teachers' positive attitude toward the implementation of BL, the present study agreed with Cao (2022), Hanh (2022), and previous studies. From the questionnaire's results, these teachers perceived BL as a mode of teaching that is easy to employ, convenient, and interesting, and believed that they could have adequate teaching experience to apply BL in their classroom, which is consistent with Phuong et al. (2022), Cao (2022) and Hanh (2022). Consequently, all the participants expressed their acceptance of using BL in the institution in that they acknowledged their enthusiasm and advocacy for the BL deployment in the future. The finding agreed with what Phuong et al. (2022) and Cao (2022) mentioned. The obstacles that EFL teachers perceived when implementing BL will be covered in more detail in the following section.

EFL teachers' perceptions of challenges during the implementation of blended learning

The participants were asked to give their perceptions in relation to the challenges they faced during the implementation of BL for the English courses. The ten items in the online questionnaires regarding two main factors, including instructional challenges (I1-I4) and tech-related challenges (T1-T3), were described statistically in Table 4 below.

Table 4.

Teachers' perceptions of challenges during the implementation of blended learning

Code		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
		1	2	3	4	5	4.40
I1	I find maintaining meaningful interaction with students in a blended learning environment is challenging.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	50.0%	42.9%	4.35
I2	The workload associated with blended learning significantly burdens my teaching responsibilities.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
I3	I have difficulties in monitoring and controlling students' cheating in testing and assessment.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
I4	During the blended learning mode, my students are not highly aware of their learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	35.7%	64.3%	4.64
T1	Many of my students lack the necessary technology skills for successful participation in blended learning activities.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
T2	It takes me a lot of time to solve technical problems in the teaching and learning process.	0.0%	14.3%	28.6%	7.1%	50.0%	3.92
T3	The poor internet quality hinders my efforts in implementing blended learning.	0.0%	7.1%	7.1%	85.7%	0.0%	3.78

In terms of instructional challenges from code I1 to I4, as can be seen from Table 4, it's evident from these statistics that a significant percentage of EFL teachers find it challenging to maintain meaningful interaction with students in a BL environment. The combined percentage of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses is quite high (92.9%, M=4.35), indicating that this is a substantial concern among teachers. This challenge likely stems from the shift away from traditional face-to-face instruction, where direct interaction is more natural. In fact, respondents T1, T4, and T5 made the same point in the follow-up interviews: It was more difficult for them to give explanations and examples when teaching online than teaching on-site. When the teacher wanted to write or draw something to give detailed explanations or examples in the classroom, they just needed to write or draw on the board quickly, but when they wanted to do it during the online sessions, they had to move back and forth between Google Meet, the PowerPoint slides of the lesson and the whiteboard platform. Teachers T4 and T5 further justified that the teacher-student interactions during online sessions were weak and interrupted since there were few students whose internet connections were not strong enough to keep up with the lessons. This leads to the fact that interaction between teachers and students was not effective, and the quality of the instruction and the lessons' content was not adequate compared

to the on-site mode.

Besides, the statistics show that the workload associated with BL is perceived as a significant burden by the majority of EFL teachers. With 78.6% strongly agreeing and 14.3% agreeing, it's evident that many teachers feel overwhelmed by the demands of BL. This could be due to the need to create and manage online content, facilitate online discussions, and provide individualized support to students.

EFL teachers also faced difficulties in monitoring and controlling students' cheating during testing and assessment, as well as raising their learning awareness in a BL environment. A substantial 78.6% strongly agreed with these statements, indicating that academic integrity issues were a significant concern. Ensuring fair and honest assessment and increasing students' awareness of learning in an online context could be a complex task.

In addition, all the respondents (35.7% agreed, 64.3% strongly agree, $M=4.64$) assert that their students were not highly aware of their learning during the BL mode. In fact, teacher T4 acknowledged in the interview that:

"During the online sessions of the blended mode, some students did not concentrate on the lessons, and some others just showed up for the attendance check."

This could be because they did not receive adequate training in the BL mode, as well as being made aware of the attitudes towards learning. To address this issue, it might be beneficial to incorporate targeted training sessions for both teachers and students, emphasizing effective strategies for engagement and participation in the blended learning environment. Moreover, fostering a culture of communication and collaboration among educators and students could contribute to a more positive and interactive learning experience. Additionally, implementing regular assessments and feedback mechanisms may help in gauging the effectiveness of the blended learning approach, allowing for timely adjustments to improve overall learning outcomes.

In terms of tech-related challenges from code T1 to T3, a striking 78.6% of EFL teachers strongly agreed that many of their students lacked the necessary technology skills for successful participation in BL, highlighting a critical hurdle in the process. This issue could impede students' ability to navigate digital resources and platforms effectively. Consequently, from the interviews, the teachers supposed that the students should be instructed about BL and trained in technological skills and attitudes at the beginning of the semester. 85.7% of participants agreed that poor internet quality hinders their efforts in implementing BL, underlining the fundamental importance of reliable internet access for successful online education. The interviewees' responses were in line with this finding in that all of them claimed that they did not have any difficulties related to technology except for the poor quality of the internet connection. Therefore, the interviewees recommended that the internet connection quality at the school be improved before the beginning of the BL courses. Moreover, a majority of participants admitted that they spent a lot of time-solving technical problems in the teaching and learning process (7,1% agreed and 50 % strongly agreed, $M=3.92$), which could be detrimental to instructional continuity and efficiency. This complexity could create barriers to efficient course management

and content delivery. The challenges they encountered could be due to the weak internet connection and the teaching activities in which they used and moved between different online apps and platforms at the same time. The respondents in the interviews suggested that there should be more training sessions or workshops for teachers so that they could share the difficulties during the BL, learn from each other's experiences, and improve their teaching.

These statistics collectively illustrate EFL teachers' significant instructional and tech-related challenges while adopting BL. The majority of teachers perceived the difficulties of maintaining interaction, monitoring, and controlling students' cheating in exams, as well as the overwhelming workload, as instructional challenges in employing BL. The findings are concurrent with Phuong et al.'s (2022) and Ibrahim and Ismail (2021) findings. However, the findings are inconsistent with Hockly and Clandfield (2010) in terms of teacher-student interactions and students' learning autonomy. The lack of technology skills among students, the quality of internet connectivity, and time-consuming problem-solving underscore the need for robust technological infrastructure systems. These findings align with Phuong et al. (2022) and Ibrahim and Ismail (2021) about the challenges EFL teachers perceive in BL classrooms. Thus, ensuring a smooth and effective BL experience for teachers and students is crucial. Efforts to bridge these technological gaps through training, support, and infrastructure improvements are vital for successful implementation. Nevertheless, regardless of the challenges, the EFL teachers have a positive attitude and are willing to teach and support the implementation of BL in the institution in the future.

Conclusion

The research showed ample positive perceptions among teachers about the implementation of BL and some challenges they had during their practice. The teachers' acceptance of the employment of BL was affected by the factors of their positive perceived ease of use and usefulness of BL, which led to their positive attitudes towards the implementation of the blended mode. Understandably, BL was perceived to be useful for the teachers and students and necessary and feasible to be implemented in the institution. Due to the fact that the teachers had adequate teaching equipment, teaching experience, technical knowledge, and skills, they found it easy when teaching in blended courses. Therefore, the teachers had positive perspectives about BL and were willing to advocate the implementation. The main challenges, which were perceived by most of the teachers, were the problem of weak internet connection, the time-consuming in solving technical problems, and the students' shortage of IT skills. Thus, it was recommended by the teachers in the interviews that there should be an improvement in internet connection and instructions and training provided to the students. Interaction between teachers and students and increasing students' learning awareness were also admitted to be a challenge to teachers in BL environments. As a result, for a recommendation, instructors should implement various strategies to enhance interaction between teachers and students and to increase student's awareness of their own learning in BL environments. These efforts may include incorporating technology-mediated communication tools, fostering collaborative learning opportunities, and providing regular feedback to students to support their engagement and comprehension.

This study presents valuable insights into how EFL teachers at Saigon College in Vietnam perceive BL. However, it still has some limitations which can be solved in further research. Firstly, the limited applicability of the findings to a broader context is constrained by the small sample size (N=14) because it may not represent all tertiary EFL teachers in Vietnam. Secondly, although the teachers' demographics were explored in the survey, this study has not shown whether the years of teaching experience factor impacted teachers' perceptions of using BL and the challenges they encountered.

Future research endeavors should investigate larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal studies to monitor perceptions over time, and comparative analyses across various institutions in order to address these limitations. Incorporating student perspectives and investigating best practices can provide a more comprehensive comprehension of the impact of integrated learning, whereas intervention studies can assist in addressing specific challenges identified in this study.

Based on the above limitations, some recommendations for further research are provided. Firstly, to enhance the generalizability of the findings, future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample of tertiary EFL teachers in Vietnam. A larger sample size should provide a more representative picture of the population and allow for more robust statistical analyses. Secondly, future research should conduct a more comprehensive analysis of teachers' demographics, specifically investigating whether the variable of years of teaching experience significantly impacts teachers' perceptions and the challenges they encounter. This should involve regression analyses or subgroup comparisons to identify potential correlations or differences. Thirdly, future researchers should consider conducting longitudinal studies to explore how teachers' perceptions and experiences with BL should evolve over time. This should provide insights into BL's sustainability and long-term impact in the context of EFL teaching in Vietnam. Last but not least, future studies should extend to include an analysis of student outcomes in BL classrooms. Moreover, these studies should examine whether teachers' characteristics and perceptions have an impact on students' achievement and engagement.

By addressing these recommendations in future research, a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities of BL in EFL teaching in Vietnam can be achieved, ultimately leading to more effective and context-specific strategies for implementation.

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