

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

**CHALLENGES OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY
STUDENTS TOWARDS ONLINE LEARNING COMPONENT
IN BLENDED LEARNING CLASSES
AT HANOI UNIVERSITY OF INDUSTRY
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ABSTRACT: Blended learning environment has been designed in the form of face-to-face activities and online materials practicing with the aim of providing students with materials, knowledge, and skills that they need for classroom activities. The objective of this paper is to investigate learners' challenges towards online learning component in blended learning classes which are laid out on the basis of features of online and face-to-face environments. Questionnaires are used as a main tool of data collection with 420 non-majored students who attended Hanoi University of Industry and took English for Tourism and Hospitality Courses. The findings revealed that students encounter some difficulties originating from students and online delivery. From these difficulties, possible proposals are suggested for students' learning improvement and teaching in online learning environment of blended learning classes.

KEY WORDS: blended learning; online learning component; difficulties; tourism and hospitality students; study.

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1. Introduction

Blended learning approach is popularly known as the integration of face-to-face activities and online learning. In fact, it is a new instructional strategy, based on the non-linear and interactive features of the digital learning and instruction through the web. Blended learning is considered as an effective way, and learners often realize the benefits of using a blended learning approach. Nevertheless, students address several matters when dealing with online learning.

It is indicated that blended learning approach has been used to design courses differently in different countries, schools, and even different majors. Thus, the efficiency level will be different in different contexts. The effectiveness of implementation of blended learning programs in teaching and learning depends on various factors including the course design, teachers, and students as well. Several studies pointed out blended learning's advantages and disadvantages and offered possible solutions to improve the efficiency level of blended learning. However, there are not many studies considering this issue in Vietnamese higher education, which is the reason why this study was conducted to address this gap. There are differences in online learning and classroom activities, so problems students face will be various. This paper raises serious concern of online learning component in blended learning programs with the aim of finding out difficulties in learning online from the perspectives of tourism and hospitality students at Hanoi University of Industry. This study not only figures out difficulties, but also analyzes the problems that learners encounter when learning online and suggests solutions for this issue.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of blended learning

Blended learning is defined differently by various researchers and educators basing on different criteria. Most of them suppose that blended learning refers to a mixing of different learning models.

In the midst of a growing and dynamic digital environment, blended learning has emerged as a promising way to foster engaging, interactive learning experiences (Brad Garner & Lorne Oke, 2011). The real test of blended learning is the effective integration of the two main components (face-

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to-face and Internet technology) such that we are not just adding on to the existing dominant approach or method.” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p.96). According to Garrison and Kanuka, blended learning is defined as “the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (2004). The main point in blended approach is to cover the various learning needs of the students who have diverse learning styles and preferences. It was emphasized in several studies that blended approach had a positive effect on students’ learning (Chak & Fung, 2015).

Sharing the similar conception of blended learning, Garrison and Vaughn (2008) stated that blended learning is the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences. The basic principle is that face-to-face oral communication and online written communication are optimally integrated such that the strengths of each are blended into a unique learning experience congruent with the context and intended educational purpose.

Thomas and Seely-Brown (2011) conceptualized the emerging developments of blended learning as a “new culture of learning” where engagement with information happens everywhere, not just in the classroom.

The term “blended learning” has become one of the hottest buzzwords in higher education. There are some confusions surrounding this term that partially stems from the varied terms that are being used to describe this delivery modality including hybrid instruction, mediated learning, technology enhanced instruction, web enhanced instruction, and web assisted instruction (Delialigoglu, 2012).

Blended learning, in Vietnam, is a new concept which has been used in some academic courses or several foreign affiliations such as Aptech, Intel, World Bank, and AusAID. At the university, these are called English courses; however, they are seen in different contexts.

In this paper, blended learning is commonly used to refer to the combination of face-to-face oral communication and online written communication, which are optimally integrated so that the strengths of each are blended into a unique learning experience congruent with the context and intended educational purpose.

2.2. Online learning component of blended learning

Online learning has grown tremendously over the past several years as technology has been integrated into education and training. Online learning is defined as instruction delivered electronically via the Internet, Intranets, or multimedia platforms such as CD-ROM or DVD (O’Neil, Singh & O’Donoghue, 2004).

This paper considers online learning component of blended learning. Online learning can become a very effective part of blended learning where a part of the course content is delivered online. Olejarczuk (2014) indicated that properly deigned materials and resources used for incorporating the online learning component into traditional classes can bring satisfactory results using less effort at the same time.

2.3. Difficulties of online learning component

Recent research on the implementation of blended learning in general and online learning in particular indicates that online learning presents numerous difficulties in relation to students and online delivery.

2.3.1. Difficulties originating from students

Learning online, student-related difficulties include students’ lack of knowledge and skills for independent learning, and their technical problems with using computer and Internet-based resources.

(1) Students’ lack of knowledge and skills for independent learning

It is clearly seen that students play an active role in learning is a fundamental requirement for the success of blended learning and online learning. That means students should be aware of their learning objectives and are motivated to achieve these objectives (Hoang, 2015). More importantly, they need to know their learning needs so that they can choose suitable learning steps.

Specially, a large number of students do not perceive clearly about the importance and benefits of their self-study online materials. Online learning is considered to be an optional and less important

part in their course. Students spend not enough time doing online tasks; as a result, they lack knowledge and skills in self-regulated learning.

Learners' *readiness* to attend online courses is one of the major issues. It is clearly seen that not all students can successfully engage in online courses. Students' readiness to participate in online courses may consist of learners' technical skills related to use of computers and the Internet (Peng, Tsai, & Wu, 2006). As a result, lack of some skills for self-study such as technical skills to use computers and Internet and time-management skills can challenge students' engagement in online courses.

(2) Students' technical problems with using computer and Internet-based resources

Technology quality is utilized as a criterion to measure learning effectiveness in blended learning. Pituch and Lee (2006) indicated that learner success in blended learning may substantially be affected by system functionality. In 2011, Tselios, Daskalakis, and Papadopoulou investigated learner perceptions after a learning management system use and found out that the actual system use determines the usefulness among users.

Some students may face isolation or feeling lost and struggling with technology while undertaking online learning (Taylor & Newton, 2013). Because of students' previous learning environment is much different from their current learning environment at higher education, the use of technology maybe unfamiliar to many students. Although synchronous communication tools have become increasingly popular these days, not all EFL students can use these tools such as voice-chat, video conference or Skype to support their language learning. Therefore, students' lack of ability to work in technology-enhanced learning environment can be regarded as a challenge to the implementation of EFL blended learning (Hoang, 2015).

2.3.2. Difficulties originating from online delivery

Online delivery is seen as a problem of online learning. These include content-related issues, the lack of self-regulation, immediate feedback, and technical support in online learning (Huang & Quiang, 2016).

(1) Content-related issues

The content-related issues concerned the inclusion of simulations in the learning units. Several users are not interested in exercises because they took too much time. Some other students also stated that the online units did not contain enough new information or were not exciting.

Multimedia including learning games, videos, and simulations should be incorporated into the sign of online course to enhance the learning experience. Multimedia options offer students a chance for multiple attempts at mastering content in a lesson without the demand of the instructor repeating the same material (Miller, 2014). In addition, learner engagement is integrated with the use of different kinds of material rather than plain text.

Assessment is also important in an online course. Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis (2011) stated that although formative assessment has historically been less emphasized in online courses, it is not only a way to support learning, but a strategy to keep students engaged in the online environment. Consequently, lack of assessment or suitable types of assessment can lead in students' difficulties in online learning.

(2) The lack of self-regulation

Given that online learning environments require learners to be greater responsible for their learning than face-to-face courses, learners in online course environment find that they must more effectively learn how to monitor their own learning process to accomplish their learning goals (Dettori and Giuliana, 2010).

However, the research showed that students often lack the necessary self-regulated learning skills to be successful in reaching their goals in an online learning environment (Dettori and Giuliana, 2010). According to Lee and Choi (2011), lack of ability to self-regulate is a significant reason for dropout rates in online courses. As a result, lack of regulation in online courses also cause difficulties for students' learning.

(3) The lack of immediate feedback

Feedback plays an important part in teaching and learning for both face-to-face and online environment. It can be seen as a motivation for learners' performance and improvement. Feedback serves as a useful learning tool with which to interact and communicate. In many cases, feedback may be the only learning communication between students and teacher in distance education courses.

Learner interaction causes failures and eventual drop-out in online courses (Willging & Johnson, 2009), and the lack of learner connectedness was regarded as an internal factor leading to learner drop-out in online courses. One of the biggest disadvantages of e-learning is that students feel isolated during online courses, so they may not continue in e-learning if they are unable to make friends.

Nevertheless, in distance education, students have fewer chances to get immediate responses from their teachers (Rongbin, 2014). Many students say that they did not receive adequate feedback either from their friends or their teacher in the online portion of the course. Moreover, teachers admitted that they did not provide much feedback in students' online learning due to time constraints.

(4) The lack of technical support

Technical support is indispensable for both students and teachers. Technical support assists teachers in preparing the resources and skills which are necessary for technology-integration into class practices. For students, technical support helps in the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill their unique curriculum requirements (Allah & Khan, 2012).

Considering higher education context, technical support should include the technical-infrastructure manned with technical talent such as network manager, web administrators, security specialists, etc. However, universities are facing challenges in preparing IT-workers for new digital environments (Allah & Khan, 2012). It is clearly seen that learners often feel isolated and frustrated when undertaking online courses. It is also shown that students tend to become frustrated when technology does not function well and lose confidence in their work when they do not receive instructor feedback in the online environment. Consequently, the lack of technical support results in students' difficulties in learning online.

In conclusion, online learning brings both advantages and disadvantages for teaching and learning. From the results from different above studies, this paper divides benefits and drawbacks into different criteria that I will put into my survey. All of the items I mentioned will be put on statements in the survey to measure students' perceptions of online learning component of blended learning.

3. Research findings

3.1. Students' difficulties with online learning component

Table 3.1. Students' difficulties with online learning component

	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Sum
1. Some common technological mistakes happen regularly, especially when they do the tests.	3.97	4	.940	1	5	1559
2. Students have fewer chances to get immediate responses from their teachers and peers.	3.75	4	1.020	1	5	1474
3. Online learning is						

self-study, so students sometimes do not understand thoroughly.	3.73	4	.980	1	5	1464
4. Students lack sufficient technical tools to undertake online courses.	3.67	4	.986	1	5	1441
5. Students face difficulties in managing time and motivating, controlling and directing independent learning.	3.62	4	1.036	1	5	1423
6. Online unit information was not sufficiently “new”, and interesting, require more memorization.	3.60	4	1.016	1	5	1415
7. There’s not enough technical support, students do not know how to do online tasks effectively.	3.60	4	1.046	1	5	1413
8. Online learning is not effective and successful because it is homework.	3.56	4	1.043	1	5	1401
9. Students feel isolated and frustrated when doing online tasks.	3.48	4	1.107	1	5	1367
10. Students cannot carry out the self-regulated learning practices required in online learning environment.	3.38	4	1.046	1	5	1323

Table 3.1 demonstrates students’ difficulties when doing online course. The table data clearly shows that, most students agree with challenges of online learning mentioned in the questionnaire. They express their positive agreement with challenges that they face during English online course.

As is presented in this table, most students face difficulties related to technology when learning online. They agreed that “*some common technological mistakes happen regularly, especially when they do the tests*” (mean = 3.97). The second difficulty concerns online learning environment that “*students have fewer chances to get immediate responses from their teachers and peers*” (mean =

3.75). Furthermore, difficulties related to students themselves were agreed with a high rate; for example, “online learning is self-study, so students sometimes do not understand thoroughly” (mean = 3.73), “students face difficulties in managing time and motivating, controlling and directing independent learning” (mean = 3.62), “students cannot carry out the self-regulated learning practices required in online learning environment” (mean = 3.38).

Moreover, it is worth noticing that challenges originating from students get a higher approval rate of students than challenges originating from online delivery.

3.2. Difficulties originating from students

Table 3.2. Online learning difficulties originating from students

Difficulties	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
11. Some common technological mistakes happen regularly, especially when they do the tests.	2.3%	5.1%	16.8%	45.3%	30.5%
12. Students lack sufficient technical tools to undertake online courses.	2.8%	10.4%	22.6%	45.5%	18.6%
13. Students face difficulties in managing time and motivating, controlling and directing independent learning.	4.3%	10.4%	22.4%	44.5%	18.3%
14. Students cannot carry out the self-regulated learning practices required in online learning environment.	5.3%	14.0%	31.0%	36.6%	12.7%

Table 3.2 represents students' perceptions of online learning challenges. Considering challenges originating from students, about three-quarters of the total of students show their strong point that the biggest problem when doing online tasks is about technological mistakes. They indicate that common mistakes related to technology happen regularly, especially when they do online tests. The second biggest problem is also related to students themselves and technology as well. Nearly 65% of students agree that they don't have necessary technical tools such as laptop, computer, or smart phone to do online tasks. The number of students getting troubles with managing time, motivating, controlling, and directing independent learning accounts for approximately 63%.

However, less than 50% of students agree or strongly agree that they cannot carry out the self-regulated learning practices required in online learning environment. Meanwhile, around 20% of students disagree or highly disagree with this viewpoint, and 31% of them feel neutral with this. This point of view is also the difficulty that the least students express their agreement with among all of the above difficulties.

3.3. Difficulties originating from online delivery

Table 3.3. Online learning difficulties originating from online delivery

Difficulties	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
15. Students have fewer chances to get immediate responses from their teachers and peers.	3.8%	8.4%	19.3%	45.8%	22.6%
16. Online learning is self-study, so students sometimes do not understand thoroughly.	4.3%	4.6%	25.7%	45.0%	20.4%
17. Online unit information was					

<i>not sufficiently “new”, and interesting, require more memorization.</i>	3.1%	11.5%	26.7%	39.9%	18.8%
18. <i>There’s not enough technical support, students do not know how to do online tasks effectively.</i>	5.1%	9.2%	24.9%	42.7%	18.1%
19. <i>Online learning is not effective and successful because it is homework.</i>	4.1%	11.5%	26.7%	39.4%	18.3%
20. <i>Students feel isolated and frustrated when doing online tasks.</i>	4.6%	15.3%	27.5%	33.1%	19.6%

Taking difficulties from online delivery, the highest percentage of students (68.4%) agree or strongly agree that they have fewer opportunity to interact and get immediate response from their teachers and peers when doing online tasks. They also feel that they do not receive enough technical support, so they cannot do the tasks effectively (60.8%). Also, some students feel isolated and frustrated when doing online tasks, but the percentage of these students only accounts for 52.7%. All of these above difficulties are related to online environment.

In terms of online learning content and materials, 65.4% of student state that they do not actually understand online learning given that it is required as homework or self-study activity. Moreover, because it is homework, students feel that online learning is not effective and successful (60.8%). In addition, 58.7% of participants consider that online unit information is not really new and interesting, and it requires more memorization. Thus, these are students’ difficulties when doing online course.

4. Conclusion

This part discusses challenges of online learning to students, which includes challenges originating from students and from online delivery.

Firstly, regarding challenges originating from online delivery, the findings emphasize the role of technical support for students’ online learning. The research results strongly support the idea that universities are facing challenges in preparing IT-workers for new digital environments (Allah and Zubair Khan, 2012). That is the reason why students face common technological mistakes regularly, especially when they do the test. Moreover, online learning lacks technical support, so students do not know how to finish the tasks and do online tasks effectively.

Another difficulty is connected with feedback; this paper completely agrees with the statement that the lack of learner connectedness was regarded as an internal factor leading to learner drop-out in online courses (Willging & Johnson, 2009). This is because when learning online, students can choose the most suitable time and place to study, and they tend to do it alone. Moreover, online learning in blended classes is given to do at home to prepare for classroom activities. Thus, students do it themselves with no interactions with teachers and peers, so their study sometimes fails if they get troubles with difficult or confusing tasks. It is more remarkable that in distance education, students have fewer chances to get immediate responses from their teachers (Rongbin, 2014). Students cannot get immediate feedback from online system or teachers when they do online tasks, especially online unit tests. It is clearly seen from the results that students feel isolated and frustrated during online courses (Willging & Johnson, 2009), but approximately 20 percent of students disagree with that. The minority of students who do not feel isolated doing online is because they can exchange and share their online learning via some social media.

Also, learning assessment is associated with students’ difficulties with online learning. It is concluded that online learning is not effective and successful because it is homework; online learning is self-study, so students sometimes do not understand thoroughly. The institution puts online

learning as a part of blended learning into student homework. Teachers only control learners' studying by checking whether they complete online tasks or not. Online tests are used with the aim of deciding that if students have enough requirement to do the final test. As a result, students do not seem to do online tasks carefully, which causes ineffectiveness and unsuccessfulness of online learning.

Secondly, the study found out some challenges originating from students including students' ability, and the support of technical devices. Dettori and Giuliana (2010) believed that students often lack the necessary self-regulated learning skills to be successful in reaching their goals in an online learning environment. The research results show that students cannot carry out the self-regulated learning practices required in online learning environment and students face difficulties in managing time and motivating, controlling and directing independent learning. Students are trained how to do online course in the first semester at university with some basic information. Online learning also requires students to have time-management skills and self-regulated skills that students need to self-prepare for them. Consequently, the lack of these skills will badly effect on their online learning.

The results point out that less than 40 percent of students agree or strongly agree that students lack sufficient technical tools to undertake online courses while nearly 20 percent of them show their disagreement with this point. As far as we know, these days, smartphones are something familiar to students. They do not require a laptop or computer but a smartphone can assist them in learning online.

5. Suggestions and recommendations

From the research findings about difficulties of online learning, the author proposes some suggestions and recommendations for students, teachers, and institution.

As revealed from the research findings, students lack necessary skills for online learning such as self-regulated skills, time-management skills, and self-controlled skills, so they are advised to practice more to prepare well for their study. More importantly, students should understand the nature and objectives of online learning and English learning. They need to better understand the specifics of online learning, learning objectives, and methods to study effectively. In addition, they also need to be trained to develop self-study ability including self-study planning, self-time management and self-assessment of their own learning so that they can realize their own progress or limitations to be able to self-regulate their learning to achieve higher efficiency. In terms of technical tools, students can overcome by providing themselves necessary technical devices.

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**Một số khó khăn của sinh viên du lịch-khách sạn đối với cấu phần học trực tuyến
trong các lớp học kết hợp tại Trường Đại học Công nghiệp Hà Nội**

Tóm tắt: Học kết hợp bao gồm các hoạt động học trực tiếp và trực tuyến, trong đó các bài học trực tuyến được thiết kế với mục đích cung cấp tài liệu, kiến thức, kỹ năng cần thiết cho các hoạt động trực tiếp trên lớp học. Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu những khó khăn của sinh viên đối với cấu phần học trực tuyến trong các lớp học kết hợp. Bảng câu hỏi được sử dụng như một công cụ thu thập dữ liệu chính với sự tham gia của 420 sinh viên Du lịch-khách sạn đã theo học tại Trường Đại học Công nghiệp Hà Nội. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên gặp một số khó khăn bắt nguồn từ bản thân sinh viên và từ chương trình học trực tuyến. Từ những khó khăn đó, nhóm tác giả đưa ra những đề xuất để cải thiện việc học tập của sinh viên và giảng dạy trong môi trường học tập trực tuyến của các lớp học kết hợp.

Từ khóa: học kết hợp; học trực tuyến; khó khăn; sinh viên Du lịch-khách sạn; nghiên cứu.