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Vietnamese EFL Lecturers' Blended Learning Practices and Concerns: A Call for Institutional Support and Professional Development

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Abstract

Blended learning has been widely embraced in higher education as a potential game-changer for classroom learning. Despite its growing popularity, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the perspectives of lecturers on the adoption of blended learning, particularly in language teaching contexts. To address this gap, this study conducted an embedded case study involving seven English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers from a Vietnamese university. The study utilized semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to gather insights into the lecturers' blended learning practices and concerns. The findings revealed that the lecturers were early adopters of blended learning with intense personal and informational concerns, possessed a limited understanding of the concept, and were not proactive in designing online instruction. Perceiving online teaching as an add-on to in-person teaching, lecturers played a minimal role in providing support and management for student online learning. To enhance the standardization of blended learning that EFL lecturers apply in their early adoption, the study offers several recommendations such as creating a supportive educational environment, offering appropriate professional development, and implementing transparent policies related to blended learning.

Keywords: EFL lecturers, blended learning, adoption, concerns, practices

Introduction

Blended learning has been increasingly popular as a global trend in higher education, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One crucial question remains unanswered despite blended learning's broad use around the globe: Has it been applied as intended? It is important to hear lecturers' voices to comprehend this issue fully. Ignoring their opinions could put the core principles of our educational endeavours at risk (Bruggeman et al., 2021). Upon reviewing the literature, we found a significant void in the discourse concerning the viewpoints of lecturers concerning blended learning's execution. In the context of our research at a Vietnamese university, no apparent efforts have been made to look into lecturers' opinions on the adoption, despite the university's reputation for incorporating technology, the launch of a Learning Management System (LMS) in 2016, and the formal initiation of a blended learning project in 2020.

This case study looked at the attitudes and thoughts of seven lecturers about adopting blended learning in the context of EFL instruction. The study provided the basis for a professional development course designed to improve blended learning implementation skills among them. Examining the participants' initial adoption patterns and levels before they participated in the professional development project was the primary goal of the study. Using the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) framework as a guide, we utilised the Stages of

Concern questionnaire to obtain such insights. Furthermore, we employed content analysis to scrutinise the interviews conducted with the seven EFL lecturers, delving into their perspectives, anxieties, and self-assessments concerning the implementation of blended learning. In light of this, this paper emphasizes the findings and discussions regarding the participants' stages of concern and current practices in implementing this instructional approach.

Literature review

What Blended Learning is and why it needs to be institutionally defined

In the context of education, blended learning is often referred to as hybrid, mixed-mode, integrated, or flexible learning (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). Semantically speaking, blended learning generally means combining two or more different components, which can lead to a variety of interpretations (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005). Blended learning is more than just a concept because it incorporates many other approaches (Bozkurt, 2022; Hrastinski, 2019; Smith & Hill, 2019).

According to Hrastinski (2019), there are three primary definitions of blended learning, which have produced three distinct conceptualizations of this instructional approach. The first, the inclusive conceptualization, as defined by Graham (2006), views it as combining face-to-face and computer-mediated instruction. This conceptualization takes into account a wide spectrum of instruction.

Even despite its possible purpose, such a broad definition of blended learning raises questions and confuses (Smith & Hill, 2019). For example, Hrastinski (2019) raised the question of whether an institution may claim to have integrated blended learning into its operations only by using an LMS. The second conceptualization, the quality perspective, according to Garrison and Kanuka (2004), focuses on enhancing education by purposefully combining in-person and virtual learning experiences. Yet, this approach often lacks specific criteria for defining the enhancements, particularly in terms of merging and optimizing the benefits offered by both components. The third conceptualization, referred to as the quantity viewpoint, is founded on the proportion of online to in-person teaching (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Diep et al., 2017; Porter et al., 2014; Zacharis, 2015). Recommendations for the percentage of required online instruction vary, for instance, some suggest 50% (Porter et al., 2014) and others propose a range of 30% to 79% (Allen & Seaman, 2010). This approach offers a precise quantitative criterion, but it can miss the blend's qualitative educational value (Hrastinski, 2019).

While the precise definition of blended learning remains debated (Hrastinski, 2019; Moskal et al., 2013; Rasheed et al., 2020; Smith & Hill, 2019), there is a common agreement that blended learning should be maintained flexible (Huang et al., 2021). This flexibility fosters creativity in course design (Garrison & Vaughan, 2013), allows for adaptation to local contexts (Sharpe et al., 2006), and facilitates institutionalization (Moskal et al., 2013). To ensure effective implementation, a clear definition within each educational context is recommended. This could involve establishing a shared understanding or developing specific blended learning definitions at the local and institutional levels. Localized definitions empower institutions to enhance teaching, re-evaluate course design, and tailor blended approaches to their unique needs (Smith & Hill, 2019).

Current Investigation into Blended Learning Adoption from Lecturers' Perspectives

Lecturers have a crucial role in any process of educational transformation and are frequently seen as the main change agents (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2002). This is also true for blended learning adoption, which depends on instructors' acceptance and embrace (Apandi & Raman, 2020; Jiang, 2022). Surprisingly, while student perspectives are well-researched, lecturers', especially in higher education, are surprisingly under-researched (Anthony et al., 2020; Halverson et al., 2014; Smith & Hill, 2019; Stephen & Makoji-Stephen, 2023).

A dominant theme in existing research focuses on factors influencing lecturers' adoption of blended learning (Anthony et al., 2020). Numerous research, such as those by Akcayir and Akcayir (2018), Alvarez (2020), Brown (2016), and Porter et al. (2014), have looked into the challenges faced by lecturers. Technological challenges (Akcayir & Akcayir, 2018; Alvarez, 2020; Brown, 2016), workload concerns (Brown, 2016; Porter et al., 2014), educational philosophies (Porter et al., 2014), professional development standards (Brown, 2016; Rasheed et al., 2020), and student isolation (Rasheed et al., 2020) are among the most prominent challenges. The acceptance of blended learning by lecturers is also influenced by many other characteristics, including experience, commitment, motivation, adaptability, and system quality (Anthony et al., 2020).

Successful implementation of blended learning also requires a comprehensive understanding of where the lecturers are in the adoption process and how they are deploying this instructional approach in practice. Tshabalala et al. (2014) revealed limited faculty understanding of the concept within a small South African university. Similarly, Ashraf et al., (2021) identified lecturer confusion about how to effectively blend their teaching, despite their interest in the approach. Jeffrey et al. (2014) further highlighted areas requiring improvement in current blended teaching practices, such as lecturers' online teaching skills, strategies for fostering student online learning, and social presence in a virtual environment.

All in all, there is a critical need for research that delves into lecturers' adoption levels, practical implementation strategies, and competencies in blended learning. Gaining these insights from lecturers' perspectives offers a foundational understanding from which effective solutions can be developed to enhance current blended learning practices.

Blended Learning in the EFL Context: Insights from International and Vietnamese EFL Lecturers

In EFL contexts, studies reveal that EFL instructors recognize the potential of blended learning, appreciating its flexibility and ability to cater to diverse student needs (Amiruddin et al., 2022; Vereshchahina et al., 2018). Positive attitudes towards technology and strong technical skills are linked to successful blended learning adoption (Ibrahim & Ismail, 2021). Instructors often report valuing technology's ability to enhance the learning environment (Abbasi et al., 2022).

However, challenges also emerge. In contexts where blended learning is a new approach, instructors may lack a clear understanding of the concept (Gayatri et al., 2022). Insufficient technological knowledge, limited access to digital equipment, and cultural resistance can further hinder adoption (Vereshchahina et al., 2018). The implementation process itself presents additional complexities, such as student collaboration difficulties, managing student self-regulation, establishing clear work expectations, effective curriculum orchestration, scheduling out-of-class activities, and navigating technology glitches (Riel et al., 2016).

To address these challenges and unlock the full potential of blended learning, a supportive ecosystem is crucial. Robust infrastructure and institutional policies are essential. Institutions must invest in technology and provide clear guidelines to facilitate blended learning

adoption (Ibrahim & Ismail, 2021). Pedagogical training plays an equally important role. Equipping lecturers with the skills to leverage technology effectively (Al-Maashani & Mudhsh, 2023) and integrating appropriate pedagogical methods (Kofar, 2016) is essential for successful implementation.

When it comes to research on blended learning in the Vietnamese EFL tertiary settings, our analysis of the literature reflects a worldwide trend in which most studies have concentrated on the viewpoints of students (Nguyen & Stracke, 2021; Truong & Wang, 2019) and the voices of EFL lecturers have received relatively less attention. Optimistically, there has been a recent increase in the interest among researchers in capturing the viewpoints of EFL lecturers on the use of blended learning. This has resulted in important studies, such as those conducted by Cao (2022), Hoang (2015), Le et al. (2022) and Nguyen (2019).

While the majority of current research focuses on examining the benefits and challenges faced by Vietnamese EFL lecturers in implementing blended learning (Le et al., 2022; Phuong et al., 2022; Tran, 2020), a preliminary scenario of their blended learning adoption can be depicted as follows: Vietnamese EFL lecturers have a positive attitude toward the impact of blended learning on their students' learning (Phuong et al., 2022) but their embrace of this teaching approach is hindered by prominent challenges including lack of infrastructure and technology, insufficient institutional policies and support, poor technological competence, the heavy workload, and large classes (Le et al., 2022). In terms of their current status as adopters, Vietnamese EFL lecturers are just beginning to use blended learning in their English courses. They show a limited comprehension of blended learning principles (Cao, 2022; Hoang, 2015; Le & Johnson, 2022), poor experience in teaching blended English courses, and low motivation in changing their pedagogy (Cao, 2022). In their blended teaching practices, Vietnamese EFL lecturers do not provide students with enough direction on how to apply a blended learning strategy (Le & Johnson, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021). The online component is used to mostly supplement face-to-face teaching by providing learning materials and extra practice. That leads to almost no significant changes in the EFL lecturers' pedagogy (Cao, 2022; Le & Johnson, 2022). As for online learning management, the lecturers primarily rely on the LMS's automated grading system instead of offering personalized feedback. They also link the completion of online learning to the required exams' achievements or rewards (bonus marks) (Le & Johnson, 2022). Furthermore, active learning and collaborative learning are absent from the existing blended learning implementation (Nguyen et al., 2021). As a result, the conclusions drawn from all of these studies encourage extensive institutional support as well as a greater emphasis on professional development for EFL lecturers.

To summarize, although the literature provides insightful information about how Vietnamese EFL lecturers are using blended learning, it is important to recognize that there is still much to learn about the topic, particularly when it comes to blended learning practices. We argue that a thorough understanding of blended learning implementation in EFL contexts requires research taking into account both lecturers' inner concerns and their real-world experiences.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model

This section delves into the CBAM chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. Before exploring CBAM, it is pertinent to acknowledge the dominance of certain frameworks in the current literature regarding teacher technology adoption, including the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework. While DOI explores the stages individuals navigate when adopting an innovation (Chen, 2024; Smith et al., 2018), TAM focuses on factors influencing an individual's decision to use a specific technology (Osman et

al., 2024; Sulaiman et al., 2022) and TPACK sheds light on the knowledge and skills required for technology integration (Nguyen et al., 2023; Sofwan et al., 2024). Even though these frameworks offer valuable insights into teacher technology adoption, their primary focus lies on the initial decision-making process, neglecting the ongoing concerns that surface during implementation.

This study aims to address this gap by focusing on the evolving experiences of Vietnamese EFL lecturers with blended learning. We prioritize understanding their anxieties, uncertainties, and persistent concerns that emerge during the implementation process. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) was selected by the authors as the theoretical framework to investigate how EFL lecturers addressed the requirement to include blended learning in their teaching.

Proposed by Hall and Dossett (1973), the CBAM has its roots in the field of change research and emphasizes that change is a developmental process rather than an isolated event (Hall & Hord, 2006). Concerns are a key notion used by the CBAM to diagnose the changes that users go through when they accept an innovation. Concerns are a wide range of feelings, ideas, attitudes, and motivations that together determine an individual's place in the innovation adoption process. These concerns have the potential to help or hinder the implementation (Dunn & Rakes, 2011; George et al., 2006). In light of this, the CBAM divides concerns into four main groups: unrelated concerns, which are categorized in Stage 0 (Awareness); self-concerns, which are categorized in Stages 1 (Informational) and 2 (Personal); task concerns, which are categorized in Stage 3 (Management); and impact concerns, which are categorized in Stage 4 (Consequence), Stage 5 (Collaboration) and Stage 6 (Refocusing). Users advance from lower-level concerns, where they may be unconcerned or self-concerned, to immediate concerns, where they may be task concerned, and eventually to higher-level concerns, where they may be impact concerned (George et al., 2006; Hall & Hord, 2006). However, some prior research indicates that users typically experience many stages of concern that may overlap and vary in severity, and that concerns frequently do not follow a linear trajectory and are not mutually exclusive (Ashrafzadeh & Sayadian, 2015; Dele-Ajayi et al., 2021).

In educational settings, the CBAM has gained widespread recognition as a valuable tool for measuring educational innovation adoption. It is widely acknowledged for its effectiveness in diagnosing teachers' concerns during the implementation of innovations (Haines, 2018) and informing, assessing, and supporting professional development efforts (Saunders, 2012). Notably, the CBAM has been extensively utilized to investigate teachers' stages of concern when adopting technology-related innovations (Al-Furaih & Al-Awidi, 2020; Ashrafzadeh & Sayadian, 2015; Eutsler & Long, 2021; Haines, 2018; Hao & Lee, 2015). Regarding blended learning adoption, Jong (2019) also used the CBAM to investigate the stages of concern among 152 Social Science faculty members when introducing the flipped classroom, a form of blended learning, into their teaching practice. This quantitative study showed that teachers had intense informational and management concerns when delivering flipped classes. Based on these findings, targeted interventions to address the teachers' lack of information and logistic concerns were recommended.

While most research on blended learning adoption takes a positivist approach (Bozkurt, 2022), this study adopted a qualitative approach. We used the CBAM questionnaire to understand participants' concern profiles and complemented this with interviews to gain deeper insights into their blended learning practices and self-assessment. This mixed-methods approach could provide a richer and more nuanced perspective.

Table 1

Stages of Concerns (Adapted from George et al., (2006, p.6))

Unrelated concerns	*Stage 0: Awareness* The individual at this stage has little knowledge or shows little interest and engagement with the proposed innovation.
Self concerns	*Stage 1: Informational* The individual at this stage has a general awareness of and interest in learning more about the innovation. They would like to discover impersonal and substantive details of the innovation.
	Stage 2: Personal The individual at this stage is uncertain about the demands of the innovation, wondering if their skills and ability meet the requirements and how the innovation rewards and affects them.
Task concerns	*Stage 3: Management* The individual at this stage has concerns about logistics, administration, organisation, and resources available for the innovation.
Impact concerns	*Stage 4: Consequence* The individual at this stage concentrates on the influence of the innovation on students and thinks about whether changes need to be made to improve students' outcomes.
	Stage 5: Collaboration The individual at this stage focuses on actively working with others to implement the innovation and make it workable.
	Stage 6: Refocusing The individual at this stage indicates interest in making significant changes of modifying, developing enhancing, or even replacing the innovation.

Methodology

This study employed an embedded case design, utilizing semi-structured interviews and the Stages of Concern Questionnaire to examine the experiences of seven Vietnamese EFL lecturers as they implemented blended learning.

Approach

The study followed an embedded case study approach (Yin, 2014), with the whole group of seven participating EFL lecturers considered as a single case and each of them as a sub-unit of analysis. We opted for this approach as an embedded case design allowed us to examine the lecturers' shared experiences as a whole and delve deeper into individual perspectives through the lens of the CBAM. This multi-level analysis facilitated a richer understanding of the lecturers' adoption process and the potential variations within the group.

Sampling

The study involved seven participants who had committed to active engagement in the professional development project. All participants were EFL lecturers from the same Vietnamese university with their demographic information presented in Table 2. The sampling method employed was convenience sampling, selected for its practicality and accessibility.

Table 2

Lecturer Participants' Demographics

Lecturer (Gender)	Age	Highest degree	Teaching experience (years)
Rosie (F)	53	MA in TESOL	31
Uri (F)	52	MA in TESOL	30
Daisy (F)	51	MA in TESOL	29
Tessa (F)	46	PhD in Applied Linguistics	25
Thomas (M)	38	PhD in Education	16
Natalie (F)	33	MA in TESOL	12
Linda (F)	29	MA in TESOL	7

Note:

- M: Female
- F: Female
- TESOL: Teaching English to speakers of other languages
- MA: Master of Arts
- PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

Data Collection

As previously indicated, the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) and semi-structured interviews were the two parallel methods of data collection.

First, the SoCQ was used to collect data on the participants' seven stages of concern. The questionnaire had a mixed-order format with 35 items (five per stage) measured on an 8-point Likert scale ranging from "irrelevant" to "very true of me now" (See Table 3 for Stage 1 sample items). The SoCQ's validity and reliability have been well-established in previous research (Al Masarweh, 2019; American Institutes for Research, 2015; George et al., 2006; Olson et al., 2020) For instance, its initial validation in 1979 demonstrated reliability with Cronbach alpha coefficients between .64 and .83 (Hall, 1979). The SoCQ used here mirrored the original English version with "blended learning" replacing "innovation." The questionnaire was uploaded to Qualtrics and emailed to the lecturers.

Secondly, semi-structured interviews were carried out to obtain an understanding of the participants' present blended learning practices, including how they understand and implement this teaching strategy. Participants were asked to define blended learning and give a thorough description of their typical course which included both online and in-person components. For the convenience of the participants, these interviews were conducted online, and each lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Six of the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, while one was conducted in English, based on the participants' language preferences. It is acknowledged that conducting interviews in two languages presents potential challenges. Language proficiency can impact the expression of ideas, and translation may not always capture the nuances of the original language. To address these challenges, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. Interviews conducted in Vietnamese were meticulously translated into English by a bilingual researcher well-versed in educational research nuances. Furthermore, to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of participant responses, translated transcripts were shared with the participants, who are all EFL lecturers, for review and verification.

Table 3

Items Exploring Stage 1 Concerns ((George et al., 2006, p. 27)

Item number	Item
6	I have very limited knowledge of the innovation
14	I would like to discuss the possibility of using the innovation
15	I would like to know what resources are available if we decide to adopt this innovation
26	I would like to know what the use of the innovation will require in the immediate future
35	I would like to know how this innovation is better than what we have now

Data Analysis

In analyzing the SoCQ data, we adhered closely to the instructions outlined in the manual titled "Measuring Implementation in Schools: The Stages of Concern Questionnaire" (George et al., 2006), which will be referred to as the SoCQ manual (George et al., 2006) henceforth. The first step in this procedure was to calculate the raw scores of each participant for every stage by summing the scores of the five items included. These raw scores were then converted into percentiles using the conversion table in the SoCQ manual (George et al., 2006). Using these percentiles, we created visual graphs for individual profiles. For the group profile, we determined the raw score for each stage by averaging the raw scores of all participants. Then, using the same procedure as for individual profiles, the group's total raw scores for all phases were transformed into percentile scores and graphed. The interpretations of both individual and group profiles were guided by the SoCQ manual (George et al., 2006).

For the interview data, we adopted a qualitative content analysis approach, following an iterative, cyclical, and inductive process (Duff, 2008). This method involved a multi-step coding process using *NVivo 12* software. Initially, we employed open coding to identify initial codes representing meaningful segments of text related to the lecturers' experiences with blended learning. Through constant comparison, these codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories that captured recurring patterns across the interviews. This iterative process ensured the themes and categories emerged directly from the participants' voices. Finally, we conducted a comparative analysis, systematically contrasting these identified themes and categories across all the transcripts to expose patterns and variations in the lecturers' perspectives.

Ethics

This study adhered to ethical research principles throughout the research process. We obtained informed consent from all participants, ensuring they fully understood the study's purpose, data collection procedures, and their right to withdraw at any point. All interviews were conducted confidentially, and participants' identities were anonymized in the research report.

Furthermore, we acquired a license to utilize the SoCQ from the American Institute for Research, the owner of the material. Additionally, the study received ethical approval from the ethics review board of the investigated university and the University of Nottingham Malaysia where the authors work or study.

Findings

The EFL Lecturers' Stages of Concern Profiles in Blended Learning Adoption

Our study thoroughly examined the SoCQ profiles of individual participants and the overall group (Figure 1), graphed from the SoC percentile scores (Table 4). This analysis provided insights into the intensity of specific stages of concerns experienced by both individual EFL lecturers and the entire group. Subsequently, the levels of adoption of blended learning among EFL lecturers were drawn.

Table 4

The stages of concern percentile scores

Participant	Stage 0	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Rosie	97	75	85	65	54	16	77
Uri	55	96	92	98	90	16	99
Daisy	48	90	72	52	66	19	84
Tessa	31	98	94	52	90	93	99
Thomas	55	84	78	65	71	64	73
Natalie	55	96	94	95	63	91	97
Linda	69	88	92	90	66	72	81
Group	**61**	**91**	**87**	**80**	**71**	**52**	**90**

Figure 1

The EFL lecturers' individual and group stages of concern profiles

Note: S (Stage)

Regarding individual stages of concern profiles, variations in intensity among the participants' stages of concern were evident. These profiles can be categorized into four tendencies as per the SoCQ manual (George et al., 2006)

(1) User of potential resistance: Rosie displayed high scores in Stage 0 (Awareness), suggesting concerns beyond blended learning itself. Her "negative one-two split" (George et al., 2006) with high Stage 2 (Personal) and low Stage 1 (Informational) scores implies potential resistance. Personal anxieties, such as job stability, seemed to outweigh her openness to blended learning
(2) User of high adoption anxiety: Uri, Tessa, and Natalie scored lower in Stage 0, indicating greater interest in blended learning. However, they exhibited high concerns across most stages except for one: Stage 5 (Collaboration) for Uri, Stage 3 (Management) for Tessa, and Stage 4 (Consequence) for Natalie. This "extreme response tendency" (George et al., 2006) suggests significant adoption anxiety. While excited about blended learning, their concerns significantly hindered their adoption progress.
(3) Transitioning User: Thomas and Linda's profiles were more balanced. While concerns remained higher in Stage 1 (Informational) and Stage 2 (Personal), the distinction between these and later stages (Stage 3-6) was less clear. This suggests they might be transitioning from non-user profiles as they gain experience with blended learning.
(4) User of openness to learning: Daisy's profile differed slightly. While her high Stage 1 score indicated an initial non-user stance, her Stage 2 score was significantly lower, suggesting less intense personal concerns and a greater openness to learning about and adopting blended learning.

Despite individual variations, the group profile displayed a high overall interest in blended learning (low Stage 0 scores). However, a clear pattern emerged with high scores in Stage 1, followed by a progressive decrease through Stage 5 before a slight rebound in Stage 6. High Stage 1 and 2 scores are typical of non-users and highlight the need for information and support in addressing personal concerns hindering adoption. Interestingly, the high Stage 6 scores alongside Stage 1 and 2 scores suggest the lecturers had strong ideas about alternative approaches. This, coupled with the potential resistance identified in some individuals (Rosie), underscores the importance of implementing appropriate interventions to guide successful blended learning adoption.

EFL lecturers' Self-Reported Blended Learning Adoption

Level of Understanding

Lecturers displayed a lack of confidence and a shallow understanding of blended learning. Four out of seven struggled to define it. Responses like *"I don't understand fully about blended learning"* (Daisy, Transcript 3) and *"I'm not sure my teaching strategy is blended learning"* (Natalie, Transcript 6) highlighted their uncertainty (See Table 5 for inconsistent definitions). Some participants equated blended learning with simply utilizing online communication tools like Skype, Teams, or Meet for teaching purposes. Others perceived it as assigning online homework to complement traditional classroom learning, while a few considered it as incorporating non-traditional methods such as YouTube videos. Although some mentioned the integration of online and in-class learning, they struggled to articulate how to achieve this seamlessly.

Table 5

Data on the EFL lecturers' comprehension of blended learning

Participant	Showing uncertainty about their understanding	Defining blended learning	Statement
Rosie	√	Conducting synchronous teaching in both online and offline modes.	*Blended learning? It's a term I've often heard but don't fully grasp. My understanding is that some lessons are taught online, and some are offline. It's like during the pandemic, offline classes weren't possible, so we had to teach via Google Meet.* (Rosie, transcript 1, translated from Vietnamese)
Uri		Conducting synchronous teaching in both online and offline modes.	*Blended Learning, I understand that we have to teach both online and offline… When I say online teaching, I mean we use conference platforms instead of going to physical classes. (*Uri, transcript 2, translated from Vietnamese)
Daisy	√	Using online activities to supplement in-person teaching	*Generally speaking, I do not understand fully about blended learning. But, it's like, after each lesson, giving students some homework that students have to go online to do to rehearse and reinforce what they've learned before. So that's what I understand, is it blended learning?* (Daisy, transcript 3, translated from Vietnamese)
Tessa	√	The integration between online (synchronous and asynchronous) and in-person teaching	*Speaking of blended learning, my current understanding is somewhat vague. I'm a bit confused between flipped classroom and blended learning. The flipped classroom model is the concept I'm more familiar with, which is that students watch videos, and study documentation before they arrive in class, and the class time is often used for more interactive activities. As for blended learning, I'm not very sure, but I think it's a way to design part of the lecture online. Students can learn some in class and some online.* (Tessa, transcript 4, translated from Vietnamese)
Thomas		The integration between online (synchronous and asynchronous) and in-person teaching	*In my view, blended learning is a combination of classroom teaching and online teaching synchronously and asynchronously.* (Thomas, transcript 5, translated from Vietnamese)
Natalie	√	The integration of technology	*I'm not quite sure my teaching strategy is blended learning … I think that blended learning is the way that teachers use different methods of teaching, often with the help of technology. Maybe, for example, we*

	into teaching	*can use YouTube videos or some websites offering online education games so that students would be more engaged.* (Natalie, transcript 6)
Linda	The integration between online (synchronous and asynchronous) and in-person teaching	*I understand that blended learning involves a combination of two modalities, in-person and online. In-person here means we (teachers and students) meet face-to-face at school. For online, we can have one of two options: synchronized or asynchronized classes*. (Linda, transcript 7, translated from Vietnamese)

Level of Implementation

Regarding the level of blended learning implementation among the EFL lecturers, three notable findings emerged: First, there was limited involvement in designing online instruction; Secondly, strategies for supporting and managing blended learning were primarily centered on a grading-based policy, incorporating the use of an automated LMS checking system; Thirdly, the online teaching played a supplementary rather than a central role and as a result, no major pedagogical changes were observed when the lecturers moved to blended teaching mode.

Given the mandate for blended learning, all participants incorporated the LMS into their teaching practices. They were provided with a standardized set of LMS materials tailored for specific courses, developed by one or two faculty members. These materials comprised the textbook PDF file, audio files, end-of-unit quizzes, and an online sample test. However, there was minimal initiative observed in customizing these pre-designed LMS materials (see Table 6). Among the participants, three lecturers (Rosie, Uri, and Tessa) made no modifications to these materials. Two lecturers (Natalie and Linda) utilized basic LMS functionalities, such as uploading files, assignments, and external resources. In contrast, Daisy and Thomas significantly enriched their LMS courses. Daisy developed quizzes using Scorm packages, while Thomas created interactive videos and quizzes using H5P. Notably, Thomas was the sole lecturer who utilized forums for online discussions, although the level of engagement did not meet his expectations. None of the participants explored advanced features such as polls, glossaries, or surveys.

In terms of their application of technology beyond the LMS, a distinct disparity was observed among the focal EFL lecturers. Limited proactive engagement was observed among senior EFL lecturers. Rosie rarely used online resources, while Uri and Daisy relied solely on existing materials, such as videos and quizzes, without creating or customizing their content. The prevalent sentiment among the interviewed lecturers was a preference for convenience and minimal effort, as Uri succinctly expressed: *"I think it's more convenient and less consuming."* (Uri, transcript 2, translated from Vietnamese). Concurrently, younger EFL lecturers actively used online educational applications. However, except Thomas, all of them emphasized integrating technology into their in-class teaching, rather than their online teaching.

As for strategies for supporting and managing students' online learning, five out of seven lecturers adopted a completion-based grading approach for online LMS tasks, incorporating completion percentages or LMS grades into final assessments. The remaining two lecturers used the LMS's automated grading. instead. However, lecturers themselves, like Daisy, acknowledged concerns that students might prioritize completion speed over comprehension or resort to online cheating.

> I use LMS assignment completion as one of my assessment criteria. It's pretty simple - if a student finishes all the assignments, they get a full 10 out of 10, no matter how good or not-so-good their answers are. I get it, this system isn't flawless because some students just breeze through the assignments without putting much thought into them. But here's the thing: if I switch to automated grading, I can't be sure my students won't take the cheating route. You see, the answer keys for the end-of-unit tests we use are floating around on the internet, and students might share answers when they're taking the tests online. On the other hand, if I don't consider completion, I'm positive that many students won't bother logging into the LMS at all.
>
> (Daisy, transcript 3, translated from Vietnamese)

When questioned why they did not provide timely and personalized feedback on students' online work, the EFL lecturers cited lack of time, heavy workloads, and the large class size as the factors constraining these practices.

The interview data also revealed a disconnect between the online and in-class components of the EFL lecturers' current blended learning practices. The shared LMS course mentioned above primarily served as a file-sharing platform for learning materials except the quizzes reviewing partly the class contents and familiarizing students with the final test format. These quizzes, along with the sample test, as Rosie explained, are to check students' vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, and writing, but *"don't quite fit"* with *"the thing covered in class*" (Rosie, transcript 1, translated from Vietnamese)

While some lecturers did offer additional online materials, they primarily functioned as supplementary resources to reinforce classroom learning, as Natalie acknowledged:

> Honestly, there has been little change in my teaching approach. Perhaps, I feel more confident that my students will have additional opportunities to revise grammar and vocabulary after leaving my classes. In essence, I continue to employ the same methods as I did when teaching solely offline.
>
> (Natalie, transcript 6, translated from Vietnamese)

Furthermore, there was a lack of pre-class online activities or feedback on online work during in-person classes. The LMS progression tracking remained focused on final assessments, not formative assessments to guide ongoing learning.

Overall, the LMS served as an add-on for in-class activities, exerting minimal influence on in-person classes, and lecturers' pedagogical strategies remained largely unchanged from traditional practices.

Table 6

Data on EFL lecturers' current practices of blended learning

Participant		Rosie	Uri	Daisy	Tessa	Thomas	Natalie	Linda
Self ranking		Novice	Novice	Novice	Novice	Novice	Novice	Pre-intermediate
Duration of adoption		Can't say	2-3 years	5-6 years	Can't say	Less than 1 year	Can't say	2-3 years
	EoU Tests Quiz)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	Course materials	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Use of LMS features	Orientation information			√		√		
	Review quizzes			√		√		
	Assignments					√		√
	Links					√	√	√
	Forums					√		
Use of other online materials and activities	Online collaborative group work							√
	Available online resources		√	√	√	√	√	√
	Online quiz maker websites				√	√	√	√
Integration between online and in-class teaching	Using online activities as a supplementary source	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	Providing feedback on online tasks in class					√		√
Strategies to support and manage students' blended learning	Including students' LMS work completion in the assessment	√	√			√	√	√
	Including LMS automated grading in assessment			√	√			
	Giving bonus marks				√		√	√
	Providing ongoing technical support					√		√

Note:

- EoU: End-of-Unit
- Pre-designed and shared among the faculty

Discussion

Analysis of both interview and SoCQ data revealed a limited adoption of blended learning among EFL lecturers. Despite all participants making initial attempts to integrate it, they remained in the early stages of the process. The data highlighted substantial concerns regarding blended learning principles and personal reservations towards the approach. This was evident in their limited proactiveness, weak online learning support and management, and

minimal changes to their teaching pedagogy, despite varying levels of experience and exposure.

Firstly, the Vietnamese EFL lecturers' strong informational concerns and their interviews highlighted the confusion regarding the blended learning concept. The lecturers "acknowledged their lack of knowledge and 'know-how'" (Le & Johnson, 2022, p. 1012), showed "limited understanding" (Hoang, 2015, p. ii), or demonstrated "a wide spectrum of ideas about the nature of blended learning" (Pham & Nguyen, 2021, p. 41). This lack of clarity in the EFL lecturers' comprehension may result from the all-encompassing nature of the blended learning term, as discussed in the literature review section. Unclear institutional policies may further contribute to the problem (Hoang, 2015; Le & Johnson, 2022) as the university lacked a definition or specific guidelines for blended learning implementation, except for a document suggesting a proportion of 30% online teaching and 70% in-person teaching. In addition, insufficient professional development is another rationale. During the interviews, the EFL lecturers mentioned that the institution did offer training on blended learning. However, not all lecturers had the opportunity to attend these sessions, and even those who did attend still expressed uncertainty. That is the training sessions were conducted for lecturers of all disciplines in the university, making it challenging for EFL lecturers to visualize how to apply blended learning specifically in English teaching.

In addition, the EFL lecturers in our study held significant personal concerns about blended learning adoption, as indicated by the stages of concern profiles and clarified in interviews. These concerns, prominently related to time constraints, heavy workload, and poor technological competence, have been consistently identified in numerous prior studies worldwide (Akcayir & Akcayir, 2018; Alvarez, 2020; Anthony et al., 2020, 2021; Brown, 2016; Porter et al., 2014) and in Vietnam (Cao, 2022; Le et al., 2022). These findings illuminate that EFL lecturers were weighing the potential conflicts between their rewards and commitments when considering the adoption of blended learning. They also expressed a lack of confidence in meeting the requirements of this new instructional approach (George et al., 2006).

According to the CBAM, in order to integrate an educational innovation into an institution, the first step should be resolving self-concerns i.e., informational concerns and personal concerns among the individuals (Hall & Hord, 2006; Lochner et al., 2015). Failure to address these concerns may lead to resistance (Jong, 2019), as lecturers often experience frustration when their concerns, care, and opinions are disregarded during the initial institutional implementation of blended learning, especially when it is a top-down decision, as observed in this study (Huang et al., 2021).

Looking into their blended teaching practices, our study reconfirmed that our focal EFL lecturers were just in the early phase of blended learning adoption. In practice, these EFL lecturers made some recognizable efforts, mostly by combining traditional classroom instruction with the LMS and other online resources. However, these attempts remained merely surface-level and the proper online teaching was still a missing puzzle in their blended teaching scenario. The superficiality was evident in the lecturers' limited proactivity in designing online instruction, their poor strategies for supporting and managing students' online learning, and the lack of quality integration between online and in-person teaching. This led to online teaching being considered as an add-on component and no significant changes in the EFL lecturers' pedagogy. This scenario mirrors the current state of blended learning adoption in English teaching contexts in Vietnam, consistent with previous research (Cao, 2022; Hoang, 2015; Le et al., 2022; Le & Johnson, 2022; Thi Thao Nguyen et al., 2021) though our investigated university was considered one of the Vietnamese pioneering universities in adopting blended learning. It contradicts the expected target of blended learning entailing a comprehensive integration of online and in-person teaching and a substantial transformation in

teaching and learning (Adekola et al., 2017; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Garrison & Vaughan, 2013). Particularly in language blended teaching, a significant portion of language knowledge and receptive skills practice should shift online, providing students with more opportunities for collaborative learning, exposure to relevant language input, increased language use for communication, and the development of learning autonomy (Akbarov et al., 2018; Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019; Kocoglu et al., 2011; Sabiri, 2019). Those were not identified throughout our study.

Considering the limitations of the Vietnamese higher education system, the disparity between the idealized state of blended learning as envisioned and its actual implementation, where online activities primarily support in-person classroom activities, can be considered "acceptable and encouraging" (Cao, 2022, p. 42). Nevertheless, there is a need to provide EFL lecturers with a vision for advancing further in their blended learning practices. Following the CBAM, the immediate measure is to address the lecturers' self-concerns, particularly their existing knowledge gaps about blended learning and their personal reservations.

Implications of Study

The findings of our case study have limited generalizability due to its small sample size. Nonetheless, the approaches we suggest below for resolving personal and informational issues among EFL instructors can provide insightful information for comparable situations in the early phases of blended learning adoption.

Knowledge as a Crucial Component

Our research emphasises how crucial clear information is. Establishing a common institutional definition of blended learning should be the first step for universities. This will guarantee that administrators and faculty have the same understanding. Universities should provide thorough guidelines defining blended course requirements and evaluation criteria in order to better assist systematic implementation. Faculty should be armed with the information necessary to create and deliver blended courses with effectiveness thanks to these principles.

Specific Professional Growth

Initiatives for professional development are essential to the effective application of blended learning. Institutions ought to give priority to courses designed especially for EFL instructors. These courses need to be useful, providing instructors with direction, modelling, and continuous assistance. The emphasis should be on addressing the discipline-specific requirements of English language instruction while slickly incorporating technology into the classroom. Important domains encompass creating content for online English language learning, overseeing and facilitating online student learning, and accomplishing a smooth transition between virtual and face-to-face instruction.

A Helpful Setting

Universities should establish a welcoming climate where instructors feel comfortable experimenting with blended learning in order to allay their worries and promote the successful adoption of blended learning. Academic institutions must proactively interact with instructors and pinpoint the obstacles impeding their use of blended learning. Reducing workload, hiring teaching assistants, and creating technical support teams are some ways to allay worries and give certainty. Incentives or financial resources can encourage instructors to adopt blended learning even further.

Limitations and further studies

The current study design has a number of drawbacks. Although the main goal was to understand the EFL participants' early adoption levels and patterns prior to participating in a blended learning professional development project, convenience sampling was used, which led to a limited sample size drawn from a single university. The accessibility-based selection process may not fully represent the larger community of Vietnamese EFL instructors, which would limit the findings' applicability in different situations. Furthermore, the study only uses participant self-reported data, which can have biases of its own.

These restrictions highlight the need for bigger and more varied sample sizes in further studies. Furthermore, incorporating techniques that triangulate data collection—for example, combining interviews and observations—may improve the findings' robustness and generalizability.

Conclusion

This study looked into how EFL lecturers at a Vietnamese institution are currently implementing blended learning. The results showed a considerable discrepancy between planned and actual implementation. Although the lecturers used blended learning, their application was haphazard and ineffectual, which is indicative of a poor comprehension of the methodology. They viewed online instruction as an add-on, not an integrated component, and the strategy for promoting online learning proved inadequate. As a result, there was a lack of social presence, interaction, and collaboration in the online environment, as well as a lack of synergy between online and in-person learning.

Crucially, the EFL lecturers themselves brought forward important points. They showed concerns about the personal ramifications of blended learning and a significant desire for additional knowledge about it. These issues show that specific recommendations are required to close this knowledge gap and facilitate the successful adoption of blended learning.

Statements and declarations

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Conflict of Interest Statement

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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