Information Technology Freshmen' Attitudes towards English Language Learning with Blended Learning Course at FPT Polytechnic College

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Abstract— Driven by evidence of its ad vantages over either online or classroom teaching alone, blended learning has increased rapidly in many educational contexts around the world, including Vietnam. With the holistic purpose of improving the language teaching and learning quality for polytechnic students, the paper focused on the students' attitudes towards the current English blended learning course. The survey study was conducted at FPT Polytechnic College (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) with the participation of 139 Information Technology freshmen. The data were garnered through the 45-item-questionnaire, and were statistically analyzed by SPSS version 20.0. The findings show that the majority of the students exhibited their much positive attitudes towards four aspects: the overall quality of this course, the quality of the instructors, the course content, and the supportive services. Yet, some students were dissatisfied with the other aspect–technology system– as they often faced technological problems during online learning outside the class.

Index Terms— Information Technology, Freshmen, Attitudes, Blended Learning Program, FPT Polytechnic Collge

INTRODUCTION

With development in information technology, educators need to find appropriate teaching methods to meet the current educational situations, especially in language teaching contexts. Therefore, online learning teaching environments have rapidly developed worldwide. However, online learning environments lack benefits that face-to-face learning environment have as Sikora and Carroll (2002) state that when compared with face-to-face learning environments, students who are learning online tend to be less satisfied with totally online courses. Hence, this leads to the notion of blended learning.

The concept of blending various teaching methods to obtain an effective learning outcome has become a subject of past and present exploration by academic researchers. Ayala (2009) describes that blended learning is the purposeful integration of face-to-face and online learning. Blended learning is confronted to maximize advantages of traditional and online learning. In blended learning environment, learners are capable of accessing learning materials by using web technologies outside classroom while attending traditional education (Graham, Allen, & Ure, 2003). Furthermore, online learning gives times and location flexibly while traditional learning provides further social interaction, which is not possible within online learning environment. In this way, advantageous aspects of face-to-face and online learning complete each other.

In addition, blended learning allows students and teachers to break free of the isolation of the classroom. William (2002) indicates that with a mixture of the different pedagogical methods and teaching strategies, lectures are not centered; whereas, teaching comprises more interaction, group work, case studies, presentations, simulations and other types of learning activities. Therefore, most current studies have been conducted and from their results, the researchers have encouraged faculties and learners to use blended courses. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) reported that blended learning furnishes a vision and roadmap for high education faulty to recognize the possibilities of blending traditional and online learning for engagement and meaningful learning experiences. Based on previous studies, it is considered as a good choice for students and faculty. Thus, many colleges and universities have applied this mode in language teaching and in other subject training (Sloan, 2008; Duckworth, 2010).

The blended learning mode has been implemented in FPT Polytechnic in Ho Chi Minh City since 2011 as it is viewed as a better approach to enhance learners' language competence. The FPT Polytechnic administrators have chosen this mode to teach English language for students since they desire all students be able to apply the studied knowledge to produce language; a dynamic educational environment or student-centered learning instead of teacher-centered learning. And passive learners become more active in their learning. In general, many learners are able to use English to communicate in their classes since they have learnt online new words and structures outside class. With this approach, students have to learn online with lessons designed intensively with videos, and pictures via the LMS channel (Learning Management System). They have opportunities to interact with each other and be flexible in language learning (Sloan, 2008). When entering their class, their teacher provides activities to push students produce the target language as well as create a dynamic language learning environment to create learners' interests, and check whether they have learnt lesson online or not instead of teaching lesson again in class. He/she plays an important role to support and facilitate learners learning English language, and make the blended learning environment successful. Chew (2011) describes that the blended learning

might enhance through increasing learners' self-motivation and developing instructors' professional. However, blended learning is a new model. It causes a challenging for teachers and learners (So & Bonk, 2010). Similarly, Garrison and Vaughan (2008) also found that beside assumption of its benefits, blended learning brings significant difficulties and risks for faculties and students related to technology uses in learning and teaching, insufficient support, and lack of time and resources for course development. Other academics faced difficulties in finding the most effective ways to enact blended learning solutions. For instance, Lionarakis and Parademitrou (2003) found the time and complexity of designing and developing a blended program was vital challenges in the

implementation of blended learning. And, they also considered that technologies, instructors, and technological support were factors that affected to blended effectiveness. Although there were many researches about blended learning, few of them focused on students' attitudes towards this mode. So, it is necessary to examine this construct.

The aim of the current paper was to investigate the freshmen's attitudes towards learning language with the aid of blended learning at FPT Polytechnic College, Vietnam. This paper, accordingly, formulated the following question: *What are the Information Technology freshmen' attitudes towards English blended learning course at FPT Polytechnic College?*

METHOD

A. Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted in the Fall semester of 2019-2020 at the faculty of Information Technology of FPT Polytechnic College in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It is a practical college of FPT University, which was established in July 2010, employing a project-based training method and blended learning mode to help students learn by working on realistic projects and gain outcome. Regarding to the Faculty of Information Technology, there were four departments including Web Design, Software Application, Computer Program, and Graphic Design that the faculty was responsible

for management. In the Fall semester of 2019-2020, there were 20 English classes of Information Technology with nearly 800 students including four levels (i.e. 1A, 1B, 2A and 2B) in which those who studied General English at level 1B were 139 and were divided in 5 classes. These 139 1B-level students became the target sample of this study, three-quarters of whom were males, and four-fifths of whom aged from 18 to 20.

B. Description of the English Blended Learning Program at FPT Polytechnic College

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM AT FPT POLYTECHNIC COLLEGE

Components	Description
Material	*Topnotch 1* (2nd edition) published by Longman Pearson with 10 units. The students at level 1B would learn 5 units from U6-U10 based on the syllabus lasting 10 weeks (4 hours per week) in face-to-face learning.
Blended learning process	The students learnt English lessons online at home before entering the class, while the instructor was responsible for creating a dynamic environment of discussion with them based on course materials. In this way, the students could join activities and discuss issues they had not been understood with their classmates and instructor when they were in class. The instructor also examined what the students had learnt at home and had them practice it when they were in the classroom.
Online learning environment	In order to help the students to learn lessons online, a supportive tool adopted is the Learning Management System (LMS) which used a web-based server software platform. It helped the students in learning online, downloading resources and submitting assignments. In the level 1B, the students had to practice language skills (listening, reading, and writing) and language knowledge (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) for each unit.
Learning assessment	The students' learning results were assessed through three factors: class attendance, learning process, and topic assignment. 1. In terms of class attendance, the students present in class 20 sessions equivalent to 40 hours (2 hours per session) during the English course. If their absence was over 04 sessions (over 25% of class time), they were skipped class. 2. In terms of learning process, students were evaluated based on sub factors as follows: ▪ Online learning (10%, equivalent to 1.0 point): The students must learn online lessons and accumulate points over 0.75. If their point accumulation was under 0.75, they could not protect their final topic assignment. ▪ In-class participation (10%, equivalent to 1.0 point). ▪ Progress tests (20%, equivalent to 2.0 points): The students must complete two progress tests during the courses. 3. In terms of topic assignment for presentation at the end of the course, the students chose one of five topics in the first day of the school and did it through four stages. ▪ Assessment of the first stage (10%, equivalent to 1.0 point). ▪ Assessment of the second stage (10%, equivalent to 1.0 point). ▪ Assessment of the final document (10%, equivalent to 1.0 point). ▪ Presentation for the document (30%, equivalent to 3.0 point).
Teaching assessment	Assessment for the blended course and the instructors was from students. The FPT Polytechnic gathered student feedback data through online survey involving five criteria: *1) Faculty's punctuality; 2) Communication skills; 3) Subject coverage; 4) Support; 5) Faculty's response.* The students would give feedback through 4 scales from strong dissatisfaction to strong satisfaction, and they could express opinion relating to instructions at the Comment column. If grade point average (GPA) of each instructor was over 3.4, no troubles were found in teaching.

C. Questionnaire: Rationale, Description, Collection and Analysis

The researchers decided to utilize a questionnaire which is known to be one of the easiest methods to manage, even with a large number of subjects (Dörnyei, 2010) and one of the most useful tools to exploit the subjects' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions (Koshy, 2005). The 45-item questionnaire

consisted of five distinct sections. The first section was associated with the participants' overall attitudes towards the blended learning course (Items 1-16), followed by the second section which addressed the sample's attitudes towards the quality of instructors participating on blended learning course (Items 17-27), and the third section which focused on the participants' attitudes towards technology system and interface design (Items 28-35). The fourth section was

pertinent to the respondents' attitudes towards course information or content used in blended learning (Items 36-42), followed by the last section which assessed the students' attitudes towards assistance of staff or administrators relating to the blended course (Items 43-45). These items were rated on a five-point Likert-scale, including *1=totally disagree, 2=disagree, 3=uncertain, 4=agree, and 5=totally agree*. The questionnaire scale was reliable as proven by its internal consistency indexes. More specifically, the Cronbach's Alpha values of all five sub-scales were greater than .700 (Pallant, 2005). Besides, such high reliability of the questionnaire

stemmed from the fact that the researchers adapted from different resources such as Garrison and Vaugh (2008), Ozkan and Koseler (2009), and Larsen (2012).

On the chosen dates, the questionnaire copies which had been translated into Vietnamese beforehand were delivered to 540 participants. On the receipt of questionnaires from the respondents, the researchers found that all 540 copies (100%) were valid and accepted. Finally, the researchers employed Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 to analyze the descriptive statistics of the collected questionnaires in terms of percentage (%).

RESULTS

D. Overall Attitudes towards the Blended Learning Course

TABLE 2. OVERALL ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE BLENDED LEARNING COURSE

Item	Statement	SD*	D*	U*	A*	SA*
1	I am more likely to ask questions in a blended course.	2.9%	7.2%	18.0%	23.7%	48.2%
2	Generally, I am more engaged in my blended courses.	0.7%	9.4%	12.2%	32.4%	45.3%
3	I am motivated to succeed.	1.4 %	8.6%	11.5%	28.1%	50.4%
4	I access the course content whenever I need.	0.7%	6.5%	20.9%	56.1%	15.8%
5	Given the opportunity I would take another blended course in the future.	2.9%	5.0%	7.9%	30.2%	54.0%
6	There are more opportunities to interact with others in a blended course.	5.0%	15.1%	13.7%	36.0%	30.2%
7	My blended course experience increases my opportunity to access, use information.	1.4 %	8.6%	11.5%	28.1%	50.4%
8	Blended learning helps me better understand course material.	0.7%	5.0%	20.9%	54.7%	18.7%
9	Generally, I understand course requirements better in an blended course.	1.4%	6.5%	12.9%	29.5%	49.6%
10	Blended learning improves my vocabulary.	1.4%	9.4%	12.2%	27.3%	49.6%
11	Blended learning improves my grammar structures.	5.0%	15.1%	13.7%	36.0%	30.2%
12	Blended learning improves my pronunciation.	1.4%	4.3%	15.8%	33.1%	45.3%
13	Blended learning enhances my reading skill.	0.7%	5.8%	13.7%	33.8%	46.0%
14	Blended learning enhances my speaking skill.	0.0%	5.8%	10.1%	40.3%	43.9%
15	Blended learning enhances my listening skill.	0.7%	8.6%	9.4%	28.8%	52.5%
16	Blended learning enhances my writing skill.	0.7%	7.2%	15.1%	54.0%	23.0%

(*): **SD:** Strongly disagree; **D:** Disagree; **U:** Uncertain; **A:** Agree; **SA:** Strongly agree

As shown in Table 2, the majority of the students showed their positive affection on the overall blended learning course; for example, nearly four-fifths of the participants (50.4% strongly agree, 28.1% agree) were motivated to succeed (Item 3), and more than three-quarters of them (45.3% strongly agree, 32.4% agree) were more engaged in the blended course because they had opportunities to gain knowledge due to online learning before going to school (Item 2). Besides, nearly three-quarters of the participants (48.2% strongly agree, 23.7% agree) were more likely to ask questions during the course to construct their knowledge because of learning beforehand (Item 1). In addition, the respondents' behavioral attitudes of the students towards the overall blended learning were proven positive. In specific, 84.2% (54.0% strongly agree, 30.2% agree) united that they desired to take another blended course in the future (Item 4); and, 71.9% (15.8% strongly agree, 56.1% agree) of the students disclosed that they accessed the course content whenever they needed to (Item 5). Moreover, the majority of the respondents also expressed their cognitive attitudes towards the overall quality of the blended learning. First of all, nearly two-thirds of the sample (50.4% strongly agree, 28.1% agree) believed that there were more opportunities to interact with others in the

blended course (Item 6). Secondly, just about four-fifths of the response community (50.4% strongly agree, 28.1% agree) considered that their blended course experience increased their opportunity to access and use information (Item 7). Thirdly, approximately three-quarters of the informants (18.7% strongly agree, 54.7% agree) asserted that the blended learning helped them better understand course material (Item 8). Fourthly, nearly four-fifths of the respondents (49.6% strongly agree, 29.5% agree) asserted that they understood the course requirements better in the blended course in general (Item 9). Fifthly, the majority of the total sample approved that the blended learning course enhanced their English language knowledge: vocabulary (Item 10, 49.6% strongly agree, 27.3% agree), grammar (Item 11, 30.2% strongly agree, 36.0% agree), and pronunciation (Item 12, 45.3% strongly agree, 33.1% agree). Sixthly, the big proportion of the target sample also recognized the contribution of the blended learning course to their development of language skills: reading (Item 13, 46.0% strongly agree, 33.8% agree), speaking (Item 14, 43.9% strongly agree, 40.3% agree), listening (Item 15, 52.5% strongly agree, 28.8% agree), and writing (Item 16, 23.0% strongly agree, 54.0% agree).

E. Attitudes towards the Quality of Instructors Participating on Blended Learning Course

TABLE 3. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTORS PARTICIPATING ON BLENDED LEARNING COURSE

Item	Statement	SD*	D*	U*	A*	SA*
17	The instructor helps to keep students engaged in productive discussion.	2.2%	2.9%	10.8%	21.6%	62.6%
18	The instructor helps keep students on tasks in a way that helped me to learn.	2.2%	2.9%	10.8%	21.6%	62.6%
19	The instructor encourages students to explore new concepts in the course.	2.2%	2.9%	10.8%	21.6%	62.6%
20	The instructor helps to focus discussion on relevant issues to facilitate my learning.	2.2%	2.9%	10.8%	21.6%	62.6%
21	The instructor communicates important course topics.	2.2%	6.5%	8.6%	21.6%	61.2%
22	The instructor communicates expected learning outcomes.	2.9%	4.3%	11.5%	53.2%	28.1%
23	The instructor provides clear instructions on how to participate in the activities.	2.2%	6.5%	18.0%	18.7%	54.7%
24	The instructor clearly communicates important due time frame for the activities.	6.5%	20.1%	18.7%	25.2%	29.5%
25	The instructor is helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics.	2.2%	2.9%	11.5%	55.4%	28.1%
26	The instructor provides feedback to help me understand my strengths, weaknesses about the course objectives.	2.2%	5.8%	11.5%	51.8%	28.8%
27	The instructor provides feedback in a timely fashion.	5.0%	19.4%	15.1%	25.2%	35.3%

(*): **SD:** Strongly disagree; **D:** Disagree; **U:** Uncertain; **A:** Agree; **SA:** Strongly agree

As Table 3 illustrates, the good quality of the instructors participating in the blended learning course was acknowledged by a large number of the students. Overall, more than four-fifths of the informants (62.6% strongly agree, 21.6% agree) were engaged in productive discussion thanks to the instructor's supports (Item 17). Based on the consensus of many students, the instructor helped keep them on tasks (Item 18, 62.6% strongly agree, 21.6% agree), encouraged them to explore new concepts in the course (Item 19, 62.6% strongly agree, 21.6% agree), and helped to focus discussion on relevant issues to facilitate my learning (Item 20, 62.6% strongly agree, 21.6% agree). What's more, the majority of the participants also were satisfied with their instructors because these instructors communicated important course topics (Item 21, 61.2% strongly agree, 21.6% agree), communicated target

learning outcomes (Item 22, 28.1% strongly agree, 53.2% agree) in the first days of the course, and communicated due time frame for the activities during the lessons (Item 24, 29.5% strongly agree, 25.2% agree). Likewise, the instructors also facilitated the students' language learning by providing instructions on how to participate in the activities (Item 23, 54.7% strongly agree, 18.7% agree) and by guiding the class towards understanding course topics (Item 25, 28.1% strongly agree, 55.4% agree). Besides, many students also recognized that their instructors provided feedback in a timely fashion (Item 26, 28.8% strongly agree, 51.8% agree) to help them understand their strengths and weaknesses about the course objectives (Item 27, 35.3% strongly agree, 25.2% agree).

F. Attitudes towards Technology System and Interface Design

TABLE 4. ATTITUDES TOWARDS TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM AND INTERFACE DESIGN

Item	Statement	SD*	D*	U*	A*	SA*
28	I can find required information easily on LMS.	0.7%	7.2%	17.3%	55.4%	19.4%
29	I am interested in learning on LMS.	2.9%	7.9%	24.5%	42.4%	22.3%
30	I access LMS every day to study lessons.	6.5%	18.7%	29.5%	27.3%	18.0%
31	LMS is a very efficient educational tool.	2.2%	5.8%	16.5%	41.0%	34.5%
32	I have not faced any system errors on LMS.	5.0%	17.3%	25.2%	38.1%	14.4%
33	LMS is easily accessible via Internet.	6.5%	21.6%	25.9%	37.4%	8.6%
34	LMS's graphical user interface is suitable for blended learning systems.	2.2%	7.2%	25.2%	39.6%	25.9%
35	LMS improves my learning.	1.4%	3.6%	18.7%	48.9%	27.3%

(*): **SD:** Strongly disagree; **D:** Disagree; **U:** Uncertain; **A:** Agree; **SA:** Strongly agree

As can be seen from Table 4, the participants showed their both their positive and negative attitudes about the LMS (Learning Management System) tool. To the former, nearly three-quarters of the students (19.4% strongly agree, 55.4% agree) opined that they found required information easily on LMS such as course material and assignment (Item 28); roughly two-thirds of the respondents (22.3% strongly agree, 42.4% agree) were interested in learning on LMS (Item 29); about three-quarters of the participants (34.5% strongly agree, 41.0% agree) reckoned that LMS was a very efficient educational tool (Item 31); under two-thirds of the respondents (25.9% strongly agree, 39.6% agree) applauded that LMS's graphical user interface was suitable for blended learning

systems (Item 34); and, more than three-quarters of the response community (27.3% strongly agree, 48.9% agree) stated that LMS improved their language learning (Item 35). To the latter, only 45.3% of the students (18.0% strongly agree, 27.3% agree) unraveled that they accessed LMS every day to study lessons (Item 30); half of the sample encountered various problems while learning like system errors (Item 32, 14.4% strongly agree, 38.1% agree) and accessibility via the Internet (Item 33, 8.6% strongly agree, 37.4% agree).

G. Attitudes towards Course Information or Content Used in Blended Learning

TABLE 5. ATTITUDES TOWARDS COURSE INFORMATION OR CONTENT USED IN BLENDED LEARNING

Item	Statement	SD*	D*	U*	A*	SA*
36	The course content is interesting.	0.7%	3.6%	7.2%	20.9%	67.6%
37	The presentation is interesting.	0.7%	2.2%	7.9%	23.7%	65.5%

38	My college provides resources necessary for me to succeed in the blended course.	0.0%	5.0%	5.8%	61.2%	28.1%
39	Compared to English 1A, the workload in this course was moderate.	0.7%	8.6%	5.0%	19.4%	66.2%
40	The content is up-to-date.	2.2%	7.2%	12.2%	25.9%	52.5%
41	I find it easy to understand and follow the content in lecture.	2.2%	12.2%	7.9%	13.7%	64.0%
42	Abstract concepts (principles, formulas, rules) are illustrated by concrete examples.	0.7%	0.0%	5.8%	23.7%	69.8%

(*): **SD:** Strongly disagree; **D:** Disagree; **U:** Uncertain; **A:** Agree; **SA:** Strongly agree

As Table 5 depicts, affectively, nearly ninety-percent of the students affectively approved that the course content (Item 36) and the instructor's presentation (Item 37) were interesting, holding 88.5% (67.6% strongly agree, 20.9% agree) and 89.2% (65.5% strongly agree, 23.7% agree), respectively. Moreover, most of the student informants showed their positive cognitive appraisals of the content of the English blended learning course. Statistically, 89.3% of them (28.1% strongly agree, 61.2% agree) admitted that their college provided resources necessary for them to succeed in the blended course (Item 38); 85.6% of the sample (66.2% strongly agree, 19.4% agree) considered that the workload in 1B level course was moderate like 1A level (Item 39); 78.4% of the target response community (52.5% strongly agree, 25.9% agree) asserted that the content is up-to-date (Item 40); 77.7% of the recruited members (64.0% strongly agree, 13.7% agree) acquiesced that they found it easy to understand and follow the content in lecture (Item 41); and, 93.5% of the students (69.8% strongly agree, 23.7% agree) contended that abstract concepts (e.g. principles, formulas, rules) were illustrated by concrete, specific examples (Item 42).

H. Attitudes towards Assistance of Staff or Administrators relating to the Blended Course

TABLE 6. ATTITUDES TOWARDS ASSISTANCE OF STAFF OR ADMINISTRATORS RELATING TO THE BLENDED COURSE

Item	Statement	SD*	D*	U*	A*	SA*
43	I get the technical support I need during this course.	1.4%	5.0%	25.2%	43.2%	25.2%
44	The service supported by the university is good enough.	0.7 %	5.8%	17.3%	56.8%	19.4%
45	When I counter an error in the system, I can get immediate feedback by e-mail and telephone.	1.4 %	2.9%	18.7%	56.1%	20.9%

(*): **SD:** Strongly disagree; **D:** Disagree; **U:** Uncertain; **A:** Agree; **SA:** Strongly agree

As Table 4.6 displays, the large quantity of the students exhibited their positive attitudes towards assistance of staff or administrator when they participated in the blended learning course. In details, more than three-quarters of the students (20.9% strongly agree, 56.1% agree) could get immediate feedback by email and telephone (Item 45); similarly, roughly three-quarters of the informants (19.4% strongly agree, 56.8% agree) confessed that service supported by this college was good enough (Item 44). Furthermore, more than two-thirds of the sample (25.2% strongly agree, 43.2% agree) admitted that they received the technical support they need to (Item 43).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the questionnaire results obtained from the sample of 139 Information Technology students at 1B level indicated that the majority of them showed their positive attitudes towards and preference on the English blended learning course offered by the FPT Polytechnic College of Vietnam. Based on their evaluative responses, most of them strongly favored the blended learning course in overall, highly approved of the quality of instructors participating on blended learning course, strongly applauded the course information or the content used in blended learning, and were highly valued the assistance of staff or administrators during the English blended learning course. Undoubtedly, this innovative mode brought several benefits to the college students, involving enhancing their autonomy and motivation degree, and nourishing their language knowledge and language skills. The students could reflect what they had learnt with self-space outside the class, and become self-confident to interact with others inside the class. Until their autonomy and motivation developed, language knowledge and skills, along with communicative competence were significantly improved. Yet, the questionnaire results also illustrate that one of five factors that made the students dissatisfied most is the technical system served in online learning. The surveyed students' positive attitudes diminished when the online learning process was often interrupted, and the system occurred many errors. For example, the students could not log into the LMS system when necessary, and could not move an item into its right location. Henceforth, the teachers, the institutional administrators, and technical assistants need to consider this problem carefully to maximize the students' learning outcomes and motivation.

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