

ESCALATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ENGLISH TEACHING PROGRAM THROUGH BLENDED LEARNING: A CASE STUDY AT A SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract: *Since first mentioned in the EPIC learning workshop in 1999, Blended learning (BL) has become increasingly popular in the education industry, especially during Covid 2019. BL researchers how that when combining in-person classroom instruction with online and virtual components, the method can maximize the benefits of both and result in an enhancement of personalized teaching with the ease, flexibility, and accessibility of technology in many language teaching programs across the world (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Grgurovic, 2011; Ghazizadeh & Fatemipour, 2017). This research was carried out with 20 ESL teachers and 1000 students at a secondary school where there has been a solid shift to BL in the last two years. This paper introduces and discusses the process of building blended ELT courses at the school and how blended learning has benefitted the quality of the English teaching program. It points out that a blended learning ELT program was proved effective when: (i)The LMS lelessons; accordingly, ocused; (ii)Teachers were thoroughly trained about the BL model and knew how to plan the lessons accordingly; (iii) Teachers and program managers made use of LMS Quiz for formative and summative assessment, based on which teaching decisions were made and (iv) Teachers and students utilized coaching and tutoring practice and offered opportunities for feedback and reflection. The research will be of interest to schools and ELT departments looking for a measure to apply BL to improve the effectiveness of their programs and teachers wishing to better their teaching experience.*

Keywords: *Blended learning, teacher training, English teaching and learning, Learning management system, professional development.*

I. Introduction

Blended learning (BL), the teaching and learning approach where face-to-face and online instruction are integrated (Graham, 2013), has been widely adopted in education, especially after the pandemic struck the whole world in 2019.

Some scholars even refer to it as the “new traditional model” (Ross & Gage, 2006, p. 167) or the “new normal” in course delivery (Norberg et al., 2011, p. 207). BL researchers how that when combining in-person classroom instruction with online and virtual components, the method can

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maximize the benefits of both and result in an enhancement of personalized teaching with the ease, flexibility, and accessibility of technology in many language teaching programs across the world (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Grgurovic, 2011; Ghazizadeh & Fatemipour, 2017).

Since the outburst of COVID-19, online learning has developed significantly in Vietnam. Domestic and international organizations evaluate Vietnam's online teaching results very positively. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) PISA report published on September 29, 2020, commented: "Vietnam's online learning to prevent COVID-19 has many positive points compared to other countries and territories". Specifically, in Vietnam, 79.7% of students study online. This rate is higher than the general average of OECD countries (67.5%). At the university level, over 50% of educational institutions also teach remotely, many of which apply entirely online, and some combine online and face-to-face training. It is apparent to schools and institutes that when the pandemic has gone and traditional schools are back, the way to keep the benefits of both online learning and traditional classrooms is to utilize blended learning.

A secondary school is not an exception. As a private school that intended to use digital transformation as a foundation for development, the school quickly switched to online learning just a few days after the pandemic struck. Now, with 1000 students back in class, the school sees the importance of integrating face-to-face with online teaching and learning to yield better teaching and learning results. This study noted the process from Preparation for BL-to-BL implementation and evaluation to recommend ways to apply BL to improve the effectiveness of the English

program in A school in particular. This will be of great importance to schools in search of a way to apply BL in similar circumstances.

II. Theoretical background

According to the Oxford Dictionary, Blended learning is a style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media as well as traditional face-to-face teaching. Many other names, such as hybrid learning, technology-mediated instruction, web-enhanced instruction, or mixed-mode instruction, can be known as blended learning. Whatever its name is, it has two main characteristics: The physical presence of both teacher and student and some elements of student control over time, place, path, or pace.

Blended learning has six typical types, known as:

- **Face-to-face:** This driver is closest to a typical school structure where learning takes place in class, and only certain students in the class can participate in some form of blended learning. In this driver approach, students who are struggling or working above their grade level can progress at their own pace using technology in the classroom.

- **Rotation:** This driver allows students to rotate between different stations on a fixed schedule - either working online or spending face-to-face time with the teacher. The rotational model is more widely used in elementary schools where young kids need to be constantly taken care of by teachers.

- **Flex:** With this approach, the material is primarily delivered online, and learning is primarily self-guided. Teachers are present to provide on-site support as needed, but students independently learn and practice new concepts in a digital environment.

- **Online lab:** In this approach, students learn entirely online with online teachers, but they have to be present at a dedicated computer lab to complete their coursework. This driver is suitable for schools with not enough teachers.

- **Self-blend:** The self-blend model of blended learning suits highly self-motivated students because it gives students the opportunity to take classes beyond what is already offered at their school while still attending a traditional school environment.

- **Online driver:** This driver is at the opposite end of the spectrum from face-to-face driver. In this form, students work remotely, and material is primarily delivered via an online platform; face-to-face check-ins are optional.

Blended learning, in whatever type it may have, has been proven to boost teaching and learning's effectiveness (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Picciano, 2009). Generally, when compared with face-to-face courses, research has pointed out that BL can help improve the chances of students' success and satisfaction (Dziuban and Moskal 2011; Dziuban et al. 2011; Means et al. 2013) as well as their sense of community (Rovai & Jordan, 2004). However, so as for Blended learning to be carried out successfully, schools and institutions need to provide support for course redesign and planning (Moskal et al. 2013; Dringus and Seagull 2015; Picciano 2009; Tynan et al. 2015).

III. Research methodology

3.1. Context

A secondary school is a 12-year-old private school in Hanoi with 1000 students in Secondary studying 12 courses of English, divided by levels and student's age and class types. Although each course has its typical characteristics and components, the overall aim of the English courses is to make

students proficient enough to pass the exam into gifted high- schools and to become effective communicators. Students study roughly 10 periods of English/per week and have monthly tests to check their progress.

There are 20 Vietnamese and 2 expat ESL teachers teaching the courses, and their average age is under 35. All Vietnamese teachers are technology-smart and are willing to try their best towards the overall aim of the English Department. However, since this is the first year of the BL project, only Vietnamese teachers were involved in the research (expat teachers would be involved in Year Two, according to the Project Plan). In the last few years, a secondary school's school board has decided to use technology and digital transformation to boost the effectiveness of the school programs in general and of the English programs in particular. Therefore, LMS Canvas was introduced to the school, and there has been a solid shift to BL in the last two years.

3.2. Procedure

The study took place in three phases, outlined as follows:

Phase 1: Preparation (Course building and piloting, Teacher training and Students training)

The school prepared for the implementation of BL by:

- Building a task force that included (1) IT to support LMS and infrastructure; (2) Members of school boards and Heads of Departments to carry out training to teachers of English and students about BL; (3) Representatives of homeroom teachers to communicate to parents and students about the process of carrying out BL in teaching and learning.

- Build sample courses on LMS and create guidelines for English teachers to build the same content.

- Pilot the courses with teachers and students to ensure the course structure and content suit them.

- Carrying out one initial training workshop to teachers on BL methodology.

- Encouraging teachers to train students on how to make use of LMS and how to BL effectively.

Phase 2: Implementation (Classroom observation, Students' survey, Teachers' survey, Managers' survey, and Department meeting observation)

Phase 2 witnessed the actual implementation of BL in A school. Blended lessons were carried out in every grade. Every student got access to the LMS system to find materials, do homework, and communicate with their teacher for online learning. In class, they had at least 1 blended lesson/ week with their teacher and were observed by school boards.

Data for the Implementation phase was gathered along the way. After a month of experiencing blended learning, 1000 students participated in a survey to express their opinions towards the content of the LMS and the teaching and learning activities that took place during class time. 20 Vietnamese teachers joined the research to recall the BL teaching experience and recommend ways to better apply BL in teaching and learning at A school. Schoolboards were also invited to the research to support the research, evaluate the program, and suggest implications from managerial standpoints.

Research tools include:

- Survey: Three sets of questionnaires were delivered to school boards, teachers, and students to evaluate the teaching and learning contents uploaded on LMS and the actual implementation of BL during class time.

- LMS observation and research: The researcher looked at the English courses uploaded on LMS Canvas in terms of structure and content to benchmark with the comments and expectations from students.

- Class observation: Observation was carried out in 25 classes to see blended learning in implementation. The observation checklist includes five areas, from lesson objectives to teaching and learning activities, modes of interactions, and lesson outcomes.

- Interviews: After questionnaires were analyzed, 6 open-ended interviews were conducted with selected students, teachers, and school managers to help the researcher understand more about the issues, the result of which would help the researcher to make better recommendations to suit their needs.

- Department meeting observation: During the research, the researcher also participated in the English Department meeting to see how teachers discussed ways to carry out BL lessons and supported each other in implementing BL lessons.

Phase 3: Evaluation and Recommendation (Data analysis, Guidelines made into effectiveness)

In phase 3, data from all five different sources in phase 2 was analyzed to provide insights on the implementation of BL at A school, based on which recommendations were made, and guidelines were built. School A put the recommendations into practice and updated the researcher with results to confirm the validity of the suggested guidelines.

IV. Finding and discussion

4.1. Findings and results

Different sources of data have been thoroughly analyzed, revealing the following findings:

- Rotation is the school's most preferred mode of BL, with 80% votes from students and teachers. This is aligned with the theories about BL at schools, where students can be taken more care of by teachers (Dziuban and Moskal 2011; Dziuban et al. 2011).

- Student survey data showed that LMS courses, despite their full content, needed to be content-based, more interesting, and engaging (90% of students thought so). As Moskal et al. (2013) suggest, the course should be redesigned to be more infographic and instructive to students.

- Class observations, teachers' surveys, and the English Department Meeting agreed that despite the training in the Preparation phase, BL in implementation revealed issues that need to be resolved immediately and frequently. The situation is confirmed by Dringus and Seagull (2015) so schools can apply BL effectively. Specific training in School A includes BL methodology, which is applicable in class, BL assessment, and a BL community of practice so teachers can offer daily support to each other.

- Interviews with schoolboards presented that although all school boards were excited about the data, including formative and summative assessment data that the LMS could export, they need to be trained on how to read and make the best use of data for decision-making (Halverson et al., 2007).

Considering these findings, A school's task force worked together to try to solve all the issues the data pointed out. Specifically:

- An upgraded version of LMS content was built by the Academic taskforce, ensuring the course focused more on content and the contents were presented to the expectations of teachers and students.

- A community of practices was formed in each grade level to create channels for teachers to discuss and support each other while implementing BL in their classes.

- A series of BL methodology training workshops were carried out for teachers, including such areas as Supporting students to utilize online materials to prepare ahead for the lessons, How to switch modes between online teaching and face-to-face teaching, and Making evidence-based teaching decisions via formative assessment data.

- A data analysis training workshop was carried out for school boards so they knew how to analyze data and see trends in reports, based on which they could make decisions at the managerial level.

When all these measures were implemented, the school and the English Department were delighted. English scores in each grade level experienced a rise of 0.3 - 0.6 on average, especially with Grade 9; their average score into high school was 9.37, while the target score was just 9.30. English teacher's satisfaction rate with professional development in English Department increased by 20% from 3 to 4 on a scale of 5, while students' satisfaction rate reached 78% and parents' satisfaction rate reached 85% in the semester survey about the English subject. Interestingly, although this had not been included in the original plan, 90% of all English teachers completed their Individual Professional Development. This is the result of wanting to learn more about BL to serve their work and get the chance to be trained about it.

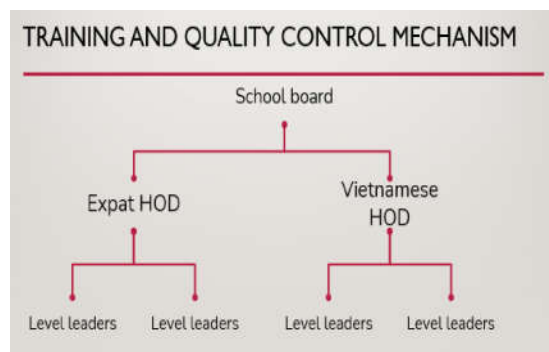
4.2. Discussion

Via the three phases from preparing to implementing and evaluating how Blended learning was used to increase the effectiveness of the English programs at A Secondary school, it was recommended

that a blended learning ELT program was proved effective when:

- The LMS lessons were content - focused, the contents need to be engaging and meaningful.

- There is a mechanism to coordinate and control the teaching and learning quality, as suggested in this diagram.



- A community of practices should be founded at the grade level to create a platform for teachers to support each other in the day-to-day implementation of BL teaching and learning.

- Teachers thoroughly trained about the BL model and knew how to plan the lessons accordingly

- Teachers and program managers made use of LMS Quiz for formative and summative assessment, based on which teaching decisions were made.

- Teachers and students utilized coaching and tutoring practice and offered opportunities for feedback and reflection.

4.3. Limitations

The whole process of this research was taken because of the decision and dedication of A school managers, taking into consideration that BL needed to be implemented for quality control. The research would have been more valid if there had been a self-evaluation checklist and questionnaire to identify all stakeholders' readiness for blended

learning before phase 1. That would have enhanced communication among stakeholders when implementing BL in phase 2.

V. Conclusion

The blended learning approach has been on the rise, supporting many language teaching programs worldwide with the ease, flexibility, and accessibility of technology (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Grgurovic, 2011; Ghazizadeh & Fatemipour, 2017). The study shows that the approach has been playing a vital role in the digital transformation of A school in the English Department, provided that a content-based LMS was in place and all stakeholders, including school boards, teachers, and students, were well-trained about the BL approach, technology, and data-driven decision making.

Blended learning will be impactful in K12 education, so the whole learning process from Preparation to Implementation and Evaluation at A Secondary school is a case worth viewing for other schools searching for a method that can combine both online and face-to-face learning.

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TỐI ƯU HIỆU QUẢ CỦA CHƯƠNG TRÌNH GIẢNG DẠY TIẾNG ANH BẰNG HÌNH THỨC DẠY HỌC KẾT HỢP: NGHIÊN CỨU TÌNH HUỐNG TẠI TRƯỜNG TRUNG HỌC CƠ SỞ TRONG THÀNH PHỐ HÀ NỘI

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Tóm tắt: Kể từ khi được đề cập lần đầu tiên trong hội thảo EPIC năm 1999, thuật ngữ *Dạy học kết hợp (BL)* ngày càng trở nên phổ biến trong ngành giáo dục, đặc biệt trong thời kỳ Covid 2019. Các nhà nghiên cứu về *Dạy học kết hợp* đã chỉ ra rằng khi kết hợp dạy học trực tuyến với dạy học trực tiếp, hình thức giảng dạy kết hợp có thể tối ưu hiệu quả của cả hai phương pháp. Nhờ có sự hỗ trợ linh hoạt và tiện lợi của công nghệ thông tin, dạy học kết hợp đã khiến cho việc dạy học cá nhân hóa được nâng cấp hơn trong rất nhiều chương trình giảng dạy ngôn ngữ trên thế giới (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Grgurovic, 2011; Ghazizadeh & Fatemipour, 2017). Nghiên cứu này được tiến hành với 20 giáo viên dạy tiếng Anh và 1000 học sinh tại một trường Trung học cơ sở ở Hà Nội- nơi đã triển khai hình thức *Dạy học kết hợp* mạnh mẽ trong hai năm học qua. Bài báo này mô tả lại quá trình xây dựng chương trình tiếng Anh theo hình thức dạy học kết hợp trên nền tảng hỗ trợ giảng dạy LMS và những hiệu quả tích cực mà hình thức dạy học kết hợp mang lại cho chương trình giảng dạy Tiếng Anh của nhà trường. Nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng: một chương trình dạy tiếng Anh theo hình thức *Dạy học kết hợp* sẽ hiệu quả khi (i) các bài học trên LMS tập trung nhiều vào nội dung môn học; (ii) giáo viên được đào tạo kỹ càng về mô hình *Dạy học kết hợp* và biết cách soạn giáo án theo mô hình; (iii) giáo viên và các cán bộ quản lý trong trường biết cách sử dụng các dữ liệu kiểm tra trên hệ thống hỗ trợ học tập LMS để đưa ra các quyết định giáo dục trong nhà trường và (iv) có các hình thức hướng dẫn/ đào tạo giáo viên và học sinh biết cách đưa phản biện và tự rút kinh nghiệm trong quá trình dạy và học theo hình thức dạy học kết hợp. Nghiên cứu này sẽ mang lại giá trị cho các trường và các khoa Tiếng Anh đang tìm kiếm giải pháp về dạy học kết hợp để nâng cao hiệu quả chương trình giảng dạy Tiếng Anh tại cơ sở mình.

Từ khóa: *Dạy học kết hợp, đào tạo giáo viên, dạy và học tiếng Anh, hệ thống quản lý học tập (LMS), phát triển chuyên môn.*

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