Supporting and managing EFL students' online learning in Vietnamese blended learning environments

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It is well-known that blended learning (BL) makes use of the advantages of both face-to-face learning and online learning and can take many different forms. However, for English as a foreign language (EFL) lecturers in Vietnamese universities, BL is still in its early stages of implementation on which this article is focused. This study examined Vietnamese university lecturers' perspectives of supporting and managing EFL students' online learning in BL environments, using semi-structured interviews with 20 EFL lecturers from 10 different Vietnamese universities. The results reveal EFL lecturers implemented five combinations of online and face-to-face learning, of which two were widely used. Due to different university-based policies and varied teaching experience, EFL lecturers in these Vietnamese universities applied three sets of strategies to support and manage students' online learning in BL environments. Some implications for consideration are proposed for improving EFL lecturers' implementations of online learning and BL in Vietnamese universities.

Introduction

Considering technological advances and the Internet, web-based technology integration has been a focus in very many educational institutions (Hamutoglu & Basarmak, 2020). The use of web-based technology is believed to bring many benefits to tertiary students (Ulla et al., 2020). Thus, university lecturers are required to innovate their traditional pedagogies and adopt technology-enhanced approaches (Ivanova et al., 2020).

Online learning has emerged from those technological advances, but it cannot completely replace traditional learning in language education (Haryanto, 2020). As a result, blended learning (BL), a combination of face-to-face learning and online learning, is considered one of the most advanced approaches because it combines the advantages of both face-to-face and online learning (Al-Alwani, 2014; Lalima & Dangwal, 2017; Mulyono et al., 2021). BL has been realised to be more effective than face-to-face learning (Akbarov et al., 2018; Simbolon, 2021) and online learning (Islam et al., 2021). BL not only brings many benefits for teachers but also for students (Hoang, 2015; Idris et al., 2019; Tran, 2020). BL enables the learning process to take place continuously not only within but also beyond the confines of the classroom (Musdalifah et al., 2021). It is claimed the most important benefit is that BL enriches students' learning experiences (Hains-Wesson & Tytler, 2015); thus, it enables students to achieve their satisfaction and learning outcomes (Badaruddin et al., 2019; Tawil 2018).

To keep up with advanced education in developed countries, Vietnam has also innovated delivery modes in tertiary institutions. In addition, globalisation has consolidated the

importance of English language in all aspects of life in Vietnam. Thus, the Vietnamese government has made many innovations in education and training, mainly focusing on teaching and learning methods, aiming to improve English proficiency for tertiary students. However, at present, Vietnam is facing difficulties and shortcomings in achieving their expectations (Hoang, 2015; Le at al., 2021; Tran, 2020). Hoang (2015) emphasised an integration of online learning into face-to-face English classrooms, named as BL, as the most effective pedagogical solution to help Vietnamese universities solve these difficulties and shortcomings. Therefore, many Vietnamese universities have been applying BL in teaching English to students. However, Vietnamese EFL lecturers are very comfortable and empowered with face-to-face learning in physical classrooms as they have been doing so for a long time (Hoang, 2015; Tran, 2020). In contrast, they are currently unsure about how to manage the online learning aspect of BL environments. Moreover, little research has done on obtaining a deep understanding of EFL lecturers' perspectives of online learning in BL environments, especially in Vietnamese higher education. Thus, this paper focused on investigating EFL lecturers' perspectives on two distinct aspects: (i) how online learning is being combined with face-to-face learning in EFL education in Vietnamese universities, and (ii) how lecturers are supporting and managing online learning in BL environments in those universities. The aim of this paper is to identify possible improvements for supporting and managing online learning in BL environments in Vietnamese EFL higher education, answering the research question, 'How do Vietnamese university lecturers support and manage EFL students' online learning in BL environments?'

Literature review

Blended learning

Many previous studies have examined BL and its two components, face-to-face and online; however, there is a wide range of definitions of BL (Eshreteh & Siaj, 2017; Zaim & Mudra, 2019). In EFL education contexts, BL has been defined as a combination of face-to-face learning and online learning (Bakeer, 2018; Wang et al., 2019; Wichadee, 2018). For example, Wichadee (2018) stated BL is a combination of face-to-face learning and online learning, consisting of "one week of orientation lecture, six weeks in online, six weeks in class, and one week for the online test" (p. 30). Likewise, Wang et al. (2019) considered BL as "both online synchronous – asynchronous learning and offline face-to-face language learning" (p. 4).

Other researchers have defined BL as the use of technology to support face-to-face teaching and learning (Al Bataineh et al., 2019; Eldeeb, 2019). For example, Eldeeb (2019) described BL as a combination of traditional classrooms with the Internet and some digital technologies. Willis et al. (2018) defined BL as a pedagogical approach combining traditional instructional strategies and online technology to make students more engaged in their learning. Moreover, Rahim (2019) described BL as "a combination of traditional approaches of face-to-face education with technological-integrated approaches" (p. 1165). In the context of this study, BL is defined as a combination of face-to-face learning in

classrooms with online learning beyond the confines of classrooms to improve the quality of EFL education.

Combinations of online with face-to-face in blended learning environments

Many previous studies have examined various ways in which online learning has been combined with face-to-face learning in EFL education (Bryan & Volchenkova, 2016; Staker, 2011; Marsh, 2012). A literature review of these combinations contributes to EFL lecturers' understanding of how these two modes of delivery are blended differently in BL environments. For example, six models of BL where online learning and face-to-face learning are mutually combined include *face-to-face driver, flex, rotation, online laboratory, self-blend,* and *online driver* (Bryan & Volchenkova, 2016; Staker, 2011). First, the face-to-face driver model refers to courses mostly delivered in physical classrooms through interactions between teachers and learners while online resources are used to partially support the curriculum. Second, the flex model refers to courses mostly delivered through online materials. In this model, teachers give guidance to help a learner, or a group of learners deal with complicated materials when necessary. Third, the rotation model refers to learners' moving between face-to-face interaction in physical classrooms and online interaction through technologies. Fourth, the online laboratory model refers to online courses mostly delivered in a computer laboratory under the supervision of a laboratory assistant. Fifth, the self-blend model refers to learners' selection of some additional online courses to support face-to-face courses. Finally, the online driver model refers to learners' working mainly online with the support of online and face-to-face guidance. This model is appropriate to learners who want to study flexibly and independently in their own schedules.

While dated, Marsh's (2012) three-segment combination of online learning with face-to-face learning is relevant to this study. This BL model enables students to use classroom time effectively and efficiently as well as maximise opportunities to use the target language outside classrooms. This combination comprises: an online segment during which students are required to prepare activities about new vocabulary and concepts before class; an in-class segment during which students can develop their language speaking and listening skills through communicative and interactive activities in classrooms; and a closing online segment during which students use online tools and resources to review knowledge and interact with each other in the target language after class.

Learning management strategies in blended learning environments

Previous studies have examined different strategies used to support and manage students' learning in BL environments. The literature helps to develop an insight into how teachers supported and managed BL components, especially online learning, to guarantee an improved learning quality. This section reports on previously published research about learning management strategies in BL environments.

Learning management strategies are defined as "actions taken by the teacher to facilitate learning among the students" (Korpershoek et al., 2014, p. 11). They comprise activities to

improve relationships between teachers and students as well as rules to regulate students' behaviours. Moreover, Abbott (2014) considered learning management strategies as "skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students organized, orderly, focused, attentive, on task, and academically productive during a class" (p. 72). Learning management strategies are also described as "efforts to regulate learning activities" to achieve educational goals (Hadriana et al., 2021, p. 354). In BL environments, the term *learning management* is more suitable when it refers to the management of both face-to-face learning and online learning, and it has been documented that assessing and observing students' performance in BL environments is a potential challenge (Al Bataineh et al., 2019). Therefore, many studies have examined management strategies used to support and manage students' learning, especially their online learning in BL environments, as explained further below.

First, one of the embedded features in any learning management system (LMS) is progression tracking, which enables both students and teachers to keep track of each student's learning progress (Kuran et al., 2018). An LMS can typically provide teachers with separate reports on students' attained levels based on the grades for online tasks. Similarly, Tumskiy (2019) asserted one of the most important features of the LMS is "the automatic check of tasks" (p. 3531) which enables both lecturers and students to receive information about online achievements.

Second, Darrow et al. (2013) indicated university students should be supported to conduct online learning more effectively in BL environments. Teachers can support students in different ways depending on their teaching aims. For example, Jeffrey et al. (2014) stated teachers can re-engage students in learning by providing help and support such as giving timely and detailed feedback on their work, and detailed feedback on online tasks or assignments can increase students' autonomy in their online learning (Tumskiy, 2019).

Third, Matukhin and Zhitkova (2015) put an emphasis on learner motivation during online learning in BL environments because "the presence of an incentive is a prerequisite for effective education" (p. 187). Therefore, incentive strategies can be used to encourage and motivate students to be more engaged and autonomous in their learning.

Finally, Hofmann (2011) affirmed the success of BL implementation is reliant on whether students can use online technology successfully. Therefore, teachers need to provide students with "strategies for ongoing technical support" (Medina, 2018, p. 47).

In summary, while BL is a combination of online learning and face-to-face learning, there are various ways it has been understood and implemented in previous research. The literature also presents various strategies used to manage BL environments; however, little research has been done on supporting and managing online learning in EFL education in Vietnamese universities as part of the overall provision of BL. This study focuses on EFL lecturers' perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of their experience and strategies when deploying online aspects of BL. The next section presents the methodology and instruments used to collect and analyse the data to identify how online learning was

combined with face-to-face learning, and how the EFL lecturers supported and managed online learning in BL environments in Vietnamese universities.

Method

This paper is part of a larger qualitative study examining Vietnamese EFL lecturers' perspectives of understanding and practising BL in their universities (Le et al., 2021). This paper focuses on how online learning and face-to-face learning were combined as part of the expectation that BL was adopted in these institutions. It also explores how EFL lecturers used different strategies to support and manage students' online learning in BL environments. It aims to explore the ways which EFL lecturers could possibly improve the management of online learning in BL environments.

The theoretical perspective guiding this research is interpretivism which enables an investigation of "meaning behind the understanding of human behaviour, interactions and society" (Pulla & Carter, 2018, p. 9). Moreover, an interpretivist approach allows a researcher to investigate and probe an interviewee's thoughts, views, values and perspectives (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). Interpretivism guides this research because the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and its complexity in its unique context (Creswell, 2009). The study does not try to generalise the base of understanding for the whole population.

The study was conducted in 10 metropolitan universities in two large cities in Vietnam where the Internet and web-based technologies are widely used to support English teaching and learning. Moreover, English courses were delivered using BL at these universities. The participants were 20 EFL lecturers who worked full-time for the faculties/departments of English Language at these 10 Vietnamese universities. They consisted of five males and 15 females, and their ages ranged from 25 to 55. Thirteen participants had achieved a Masters degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) or applied linguistics; six participants had achieved a doctoral degree in education or applied linguistics; and one had a bachelor degree in TESOL. Their experience of using BL in their EFL teaching ranged from two years to over 10 years.

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with those 20 EFL lecturers from February to April 2019. According to Trainor (2013), semi-structured, in-depth interviews can help to gain rich, fine-grained personal perspectives of the participants' voices. After obtaining approval from the Deans of the faculties/departments of English Language in the selected Vietnamese universities, information letters and consent forms along with guiding questions were emailed to the participants who had agreed to participate in the interviews. The face-to-face interviews occurred at the time and place at the participant lecturer's convenience. The participants' responses were recorded with a digital pen named *Livescribe Smartpen*, and each interview was transcribed in Vietnamese language. Then the transcripts were sent back to the participants for verifying the content. These transcripts were translated into English and used for coding purposes. After that, the raw data were analysed with the use of *NVivo 12*

in line with three phases: (i) the data were condensed into levels of codes; (ii) the findings were displayed in a bar chart and a table; and (iii) conclusions were drawn (Miles et al., 2014).

All nodes used in this study were pre-determined ones formed from a focus on and relevance to the research question. There were two parent nodes: (i) combinations of online learning and face-to-face learning, and (ii) strategies of supporting and managing online learning. For example, from the parent node 'strategies of managing online learning', four child nodes were generated; they were: checking students' online learning; supporting, guiding and motivating students to learn online; dealing with students' problems; and not using strategies to manage online learning. From the child node 'checking students' online learning', six child nodes were generated, namely: using reporting tools and monitoring features of the LMS; checking students' online preparation and activities in the next class meetings; checking students' online learning progress and quality regularly; checking students' completed assignments randomly in classrooms; designing examination questions including online content; and checking students' completion of homework submitted via email.

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethics approval from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Results

This section reports the two main findings regarding: (i) five combinations of online learning and face-to-face learning in EFL education in Vietnamese universities and (ii) three sets of strategies the Vietnamese EFL lecturers used to support and manage students' online learning in those environments.

EFL lecturers' perspectives of implementing online learning in BL environments

The findings revealed online learning was combined with face-to-face learning in five different ways. Of those five combinations, the first one was the most widely used (n = 16); the second one was stated by some participants (n = 6) while the other three were mentioned by very few participants.

In the first combination, stated by 16 participants, face-to-face learning was the main component, and online learning was a supportive component. Online resources were used to support face-to-face learning with the aim of improving students' English skills and enhancing learner autonomy. For example, Lecturer 1 stated she was only allowed to "*use online learning to support face-to-face learning*" because she was required to follow the course syllabus. In fact, EFL lecturers in her university still had to teach face-to-face in class and they could not remove that component. Lecturer 2 asserted both EFL lecturers and students in her university considered the face-to-face component more important than the online component. She also affirmed the online component was an additional or supportive component only. Online learning was implemented in agreement with her requests when necessary and to widen students' knowledge. Similarly, Lecturers 19 and 20

agreed the main component was face-to-face learning in classrooms, and they assigned students online homework on the LMS to consolidate what students had learnt face-to-face.

In the second combination, used by six participants, face-to-face learning stations and online learning stations were rotated with each other. However, the rotation was implemented differently in different universities. For example, Lecturer 4 stated that in her university, EFL lecturers had to teach in a computer laboratory with the use of the LMS (*Moodle*) during each English course and "*teaching in the computer laboratory accounts for about 15 to 20% of the total teaching time*". This meant her students mainly did practice exercises on Moodle, but English knowledge was primarily taught face-to-face. Lecturer 10 explained an English course at her university was often delivered within 75 periods (45 minutes per period) which included nine periods for delivering online learning in the computer laboratory using *Sanako* software (https://sanako.com/). Additionally, Lecturer 18 described her 75-period English course as consisting of 35 periods of online learning and 40 periods of face-to-face learning in classrooms.

Using various strategies to support online learning in BL environments

Participants admitted they employed three sets of strategies to support and manage students' online learning inside and outside classrooms (Table 1). Each set comprised various individual strategies that were used differently to suit their own purposes.

Table 1: Three sets of strategies stated by 20 EFL lecturers

Strategies for supporting and managing online learning	*NVivo* references
Supporting, guiding, and motivating students to learn online	19
Checking students' online learning	17
Dealing with students' problems	13

The first set, stated by 19 participants, consisted of four individual strategies: supporting and guiding students to implement their online learning more effectively; giving rewards or bonus marks to promote students' online learning; creating a cause-effect connection between online learning and end-of-course examinations (for example, the online components must be completed before the examinations can be undertaken); and supporting students to deal with technical problems during their online learning. Of those four, the first two strategies were used by 14 participants. These participants stated they supported and guided students to implement their online learning more effectively by: setting up deadlines for online tasks and assignments; creating a discussion forum, a *Facebook* page and an email to send announcements or conduct question-answer exchanges; and giving clear and detailed instructions for online assignments.

For example, Lecturers 16, 18, 19 and 20 indicated that their use of the LMS enabled them to establish the deadlines for online assignments and manage students' online learning more effectively. Moreover, 12 participants mentioned the strategy of giving rewards or bonus marks to promote students' online learning. Five of these 12

participants (Lecturers 2, 9, 13, 14 and 15) explained they gave bonus marks for students' satisfactory completion of online assignments. They thought bonus marks could motivate students to put more effort into their online learning.

The second set, stated by 17 participants, consisted of six individual strategies: using reporting tools and monitoring features of the LMS; checking students' online preparation and activities in the next class meetings; checking students' online learning progress and quality regularly; checking students' completed assignments randomly in classrooms; designing examination questions including content delivered online; and checking students' completion of homework. Of those six, only the first strategy was used by 17 participants while the other strategies were mentioned by very few participants. Regarding this first strategy, the participants stated they used reporting tools and monitoring features of the LMS to manage online learning.

For example, Lecturer 10 asserted the *Sanako* software used in her university could check and report students' performance; thus, it supported EFL lecturers in monitoring students' online learning progress. In addition to checking whether students' assignments have been done, Lecturer 19 used the embedded tools to "*set up the deadline for each assignment*". As a result, she was able to assess the details such as "*which students don't complete the online assignments, which students don't submit their assignments or which students have submitted their homework late*"; and she also could assess "*the learning attitude of each student*". Similarly, Lecturer 16 concurred the online reports enabled her to identify how much each student was getting correct in their homework tasks.

The third set, stated by 13 participants, consisted of two individual strategies: dealing with students who did not accomplish online learning; and detecting dealing students' academic misconduct or plagiarism. For students who did not accomplish online learning, the participants stated they reminded students of their unsatisfactory work; reduced marks or giving zero to students who did not complete online assignments; banned students from taking end-of-course examinations; stored students' work online to deal with lazy students and monitor students' online learning progress; and continuously created online reminders.

For example, two participants (Lecturers 16, 18) agreed the LMS enabled lecturers to keep track of students' online learning through online reports and they used those online reports to remind their students of their learning progress. Similarly, two other participants (Lecturers 16, 17) used reminders when they identified any students who had not completed their online assignments before the deadline or before the next class session. Additionally, Lecturer 17 specified a three-reminder system as a compulsory regulation that placed pressure on students to accomplish their online assignments by the due date. The participants used various ways of detecting students' academic misconduct based on their online reports or submitted work, and some used online software to prevent students' plagiarism. For example, Lecturer 19 agreed she could identify students who copied the others' answers by checking the positions of those answers although they had changed the names of the others' original files. In addition, Lecturers 3 and 15

indicated they used the *Turnitin* software (https://turnitin.com/) to check students' plagiarism contained in online work.

While most of the participants applied various strategies to support and manage students' online learning, only one participant, Lecturer 8, alleged he did not put much effort into checking whether students had visited the LMS and had participated in online discussions. He thought doing so might increase workloads for both students and himself.

Discussion

Firstly, the findings of this paper reveal there were fewer combinations of BL used by EFL lecturers at Vietnamese universities than those identified in previous studies. The five combinations of BL used by 20 EFL lecturers at Vietnamese universities, share some similarities and differences with the six BL models mentioned in previous studies (Bryan & Volchenkova, 2016; Staker, 2011).

Of the five combinations stated by the EFL lecturers, only two were widely used in Vietnamese universities. For example, there are some similarities between the first combination (Combination 1) and the *face-to-face driver model* identified in the literature. That is, the main component, face-to-face learning, was delivered in classrooms while online learning was the supportive component. It is clear that online learning was significantly dependent on face-to-face teaching delivered in classrooms; EFL lecturers tended to use online learning simply to support face-to-face learning. This combination was reported as the most widely used by the EFL lecturers in this study. Next, the second combination (Combination 2) and the *rotation model* also have some similarities, that is, students moving between face-to-face learning in classrooms and online learning on the LMS in a computer laboratory or from home.

Vietnamese EFL lecturers provided online learning to support students' learning (Combination 1), and very importantly applied online components to better support their EFL teaching when blended learning was required by their universities. In addition, the use of computer laboratories to deliver online learning has also been utilised for a long time at Vietnamese universities. Rotations between face-to-face learning in classrooms and online learning in computer laboratories (Combination 2) were mandated in some Vietnamese universities. This also explains the lecturers' lack of wide adoption of the remaining combinations. For example, the lecturers were not familiar with the combination in which an additional online course was delivered concurrently to support a face-to-face course (which has some similarities with the *self-blend model* in previous studies). Only one participant mentioned a combination consisting of three segments: an online segment, an in-class segment, and a closing online segment, which was the type of BL proposed by Marsh (2012).

Secondly, the findings also reveal the participants used a wide range of strategies to support and manage students' online learning in EFL education at their Vietnamese universities. These findings support what has been found in the literature. For example, the first set of strategies regarding supporting, guiding and motivating students to

implement online learning more effectively, is consistent with the findings of many previous studies (Darrow et al., 2013; Jeffrey et al., 2014; Medina, 2018; Tumskiy, 2019). These authors agreed that EFL lecturers need to provide students with guidance and support such as clear instructions and timely feedback to support online learning. Furthermore, the strategy of giving rewards or bonus marks to promote students' online learning, is in line with the findings by Matukhin and Zhitkova (2015), who believed that incentives can encourage and motivate students to study online more autonomously. Moreover, a few lecturers did not highly appreciate learner autonomy during students' online self-learning; therefore, they put emphasis on creating a cause-effect connection between students' online learning and required examinations. This connection required students to complete online assignments to be eligible for end-of-course examinations.

The second set of strategies, regarding checking students' online learning using the embedded features of the LMS, were commonly used by Vietnamese EFL lecturers. These strategies are consistent with those mentioned in previous studies (Kuran et al., 2018; Tumskiy, 2019).

The third set of strategies regarding dealing with students' problems was stated by many of the Vietnamese lecturers. For example, the strategy of dealing with students who neglected their online assignments has not been reported in previous studies, yet half of the participants mentioned these strategies in this study. In addition, some lecturers discussed their strategies of dealing with students' academic misconduct or alleged plagiarism during online learning, concurring with Tumskiy (2019). In addition, very few lecturers mentioned strategies of dealing with students' technical problems because they did not consider technical problems to be a big concern. This finding supports Wichadee (2018), who stated students were able to approach and use web-based technologies fast and easily, so they "seemed to have no problems with technology usage in the learning process" (p. 37). In contrast, some previous studies (Hofmann, 2011; Medina, 2018) emphasised that teachers should deal with students' technical problems or challenges to ensure successful learning in BL environments.

Figure 1 illustrates the strategies that the Vietnamese EFL lecturers said they used to support and manage online learning as part of the provision of BL.

In brief, although the Vietnamese EFL lecturers used a variety of strategies to support and manage online learning in BL environments, 16 of them admitted they could not implement and manage online learning in combination with face-to-face learning as effectively as they had expected. This resulted from their insufficient understanding about BL environments and their lack of experience with online learning. How the lecturers implemented and managed online learning in BL environments was strongly dependent on institutional factors such as policies, facilities, resources, personnel, and even leaders' perspectives. These factors affected the EFL lecturers' perspectives of supporting and managing online learning in BL environments, resulting in the lecturers' acts upon the implementation of online learning. For example, due to an unclear institutional policy of applying BL in EFL teaching and learning, one participant stated he did not apply any strategies to support and manage students' online learning. He considered the use of any

strategies a waste of time because he thought he needed to save time to organise other learning activities. He did not realise the value of learning and using learning management skills in BL environments.
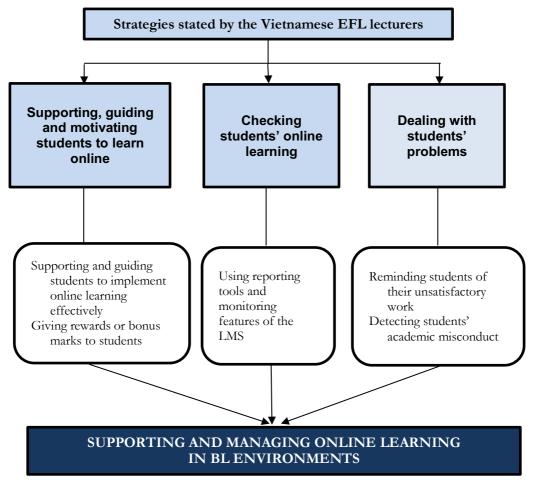

Figure 1: Visual representation of how EFL lecturers supported and managed online learning in Vietnamese BL environments

Conclusion

While face-to-face learning has long been familiar to Vietnamese EFL lecturers, online learning is still a newly emerging component requiring lecturers' efforts and time to implement and manage it effectively. This study revealed five combinations in which online learning as part of a BL approach was implemented. The two most dominant combinations were: using online learning to support face-to-face learning; and rotating face-to-face learning in classrooms and online learning in computer laboratories or from home. The lecturers applied three sets of strategies which aimed to support, monitor, and

promote students' online learning. Some implications for Vietnamese universities and their EFL lecturers to increase the quality of implementing as well as supporting and managing online learning in BL environments are stated below.

Implications

As a result of this study, it is evident that for BL or online learning components thereof to be effectively implemented, supported and managed in these Vietnamese universities, there is a need for significant professional development and technical support to be provided, as the lecturers admitted they lacked knowledge and 'know-how'. Professional and ongoing learning opportunities surrounding online learning, blended learning, learning management strategies, and virtual learning design would improve their knowledge and skills of implementing and managing online learning in BL environments, and subsequently, will better support students in their learning and achievements. Furthermore, allocation of time to these professional development activities as part of their workload as well as within the syllabus and teaching schedules will enable and support the implementation of online learning in BL environments.

EFL lecturers could be better supported if universities consider decreasing the numbers of face-to-face teaching hours when online teaching has been added to course requirements. Moreover, it appears important to clearly allocate time and value to online teaching and learning in the syllabus. Payments for hours of delivering online learning can motivate EFL lecturers to willingly implement BL in their teaching. Without appropriate incentive and payment policies, requiring more online teaching and learning activities in addition to what is already offered face-to-face might become overwhelming and time-consuming. Providing technical support services is necessary in areas such as initial learning design and enabling effective LMS operations. Additional support for students will better enable their take-up of online learning; for example, assisting students to address both academic and technical problems; encouraging online interactions and communication and the benefits thereof; incorporating educative learning to mitigate possible plagiarism and dishonesty in the online space, and ensuring online homework tasks are part of assessable requirements to provide incentive for the completion of online activities.

Limitations and further research

This study is limited to 20 EFL lecturers in 10 Vietnamese universities, so its findings cannot be generalised to all Vietnamese university EFL lecturers. Additional quantitative research with a larger sample could be completed to ensure statistical significance of the findings and support the insights gathered by this study.

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Appendix 1: Information letter to EFL lecturers

Dear lecturers,

We are currently conducting a research study entitled *Supporting and managing EFL students' online learning in Vietnamese blended learning environments.* The study will aim to examine how Vietnamese university lecturers are supporting and managing EFL students' online learning in BL environments. Your participation in this study will significantly contribute to the success of our research. Thus, this letter is to sincerely invite you to participate in our study.

You will be asked to take part in a face-to-face interview which will take from 15 to 30 minutes. All interviews will be electronically recorded with a smartpen. Then, the interviews will be transcribed in Vietnamese and selected parts of the transcripts will be translated into English language for the research purposes. The interviews will be at a time and place at your convenience. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give any reasons.

Collected data will be treated confidentially, anonymised, and solely used for purposes of this study. The data will be stored safely on our personal laptops and the access to the data will be password-protected.

Your participation is hoped to benefit yourself with some knowledge about online learning and blended learning which may be useful for your current teaching job. Should you agree to participate in the interviews, please sign the attached consent form.

Further information:

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study with the research team, please contact:
Researcher 1
Dr Thi Nguyet Le
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If you agree to participate in this project, please complete the Consent Form and return it to Researcher 1. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Thi Nguyet LE

Appendix 2: Consent form

CONSENT FORM

- I have carefully read and understood the information regarding this research study.
- I have been given written information about the purposes of the study.
- I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be willing to answer the questions in the interviews with my true information.
- I understand that my information will be treated confidentially, anonymised and solely used for purposes of this study
- I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time, without giving any reasons.
- I understand that I can request a summary of findings once the research study has been completed.
- I agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: ………………………………………………………………….

Signature: ……………..…………………………………………………………………

Date: /   / 2019

Appendix 3: Interview schedule

Dear participants,

This study aims to examine how you are supporting and managing your students' online learning in EFL education at your universities. To make sure that you, the research participant, can know what you are going to be interviewed, we would like to provide you with some guiding questions related to the interview content in advance.

1. How do you combine online learning and face-to-face learning in EFL education at your university?

Possible questions in English	Extending/ probing questions
How do you integrate online learning into EFL classrooms at your university? How is online learning delivered in EFL education at your university? Where is online learning delivered? Which one is considered the main component in BL environments at your university, online learning or face-to-face learning? Is there a policy that clearly specifies the weighting of each component in BL environments?	What do you mean by……..? Why did you say ….........? How did you understand ……..? Could you tell more about……….? Would you mind explaining……..?

2. What strategies do you use to support and manage EFL students' online learning in BL environments?

Possible questions in English	Extending/ probing questions
How do you facilitate students' online learning in BL environments? How do you check students' online homework or assignments? How do you motivate students to study online? What do you do to promote online interactions and communication in BL environments? How do you support students to deal with technical problems during their online learning? How do you deal with students' academic misconduct?	What do you mean by……..? Why did you say ….? How did you understand ……..? Could you tell more about……….? Would you mind explaining……..?

Dr Thi Nguyet Le obtained her PhD in the School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Australia. She has been a lecturer in English language at University of People's Security, Vietnam for 19 years. Her research focuses on blended learning and TESOL methodology.
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