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Students' Perceptions on Blended Synchronous Learning in the Postcrisis Era

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON BLENDED SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING IN THE POSTCRISIS ERA

I. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on a wide range of societal, economic, and social systems, as well as on the healthcare system. Education is no exception, thereby to respond to the catastrophic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the education system must be reformed and evolved. Accordingly, online classes have gradually displaced traditional classes. Additionally, information and communication technology (ICT) greatly affects learning and teaching in tertiary education. Likewise, Hediansah & Surjono (2019) postulated the emergence of technology has greatly affected the exchange of information, in particular education. In agreement with these feelings, Surahman (2019) affirmed that everyone can learn from anywhere and they do not need to spend time in the classroom. As a result, it opens a variety of new opportunities to apply in course delivery formats, with blended learning being one of the most common. (Hill, 2012; Irvine, 2009). Moreover, although the majority of students fall into face-to-face (F2F) engagement and interaction with their lecturers and mates, many are unable to attend weekly on-campus class schedules. Therefore, there have been requests for educational institutions to offer students more choices and greater degrees of flexibility that go beyond online/conventional classrooms (Hill, 2012).

The lines between conventional and online education (such as MOOCs) have faded because of the strong penetration of synchronous communication tools, paving the door for new synchronous hybrid or blended approaches (Alexander et al., 2014; Roseth et al., 2013). Blended synchronous learning not only has the potential to decrease some of the problems of blended asynchronous learning but also combines the benefits of synchronous learning (such as quick feedback and increased motivation) with blended learning (such as flexibility and convenience). On the one hand, applying a blended synchronous learning mode brings out significant benefits to the educational system. The limits and variations in distance, time, and location between students and teachers can be dealt with through blended synchronous learning (BSL). According to Zainuddin & Keumala (2018), the development of technology and the internet have made way for institutional education to enhance hybrid-based learning media. In other words, the teaching and learning process can take place wherever the students and teachers are, rather than only in a conventional classroom setting. Another advantage of BSL stated by White et al. (2010) was that it was beneficial for those who may be prevented from going to school for days because of poor health conditions. Simply, in the new normal in-post the crisis era, when students' health conditions are easily affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, a blended synchronous learning environment (BSLE) becomes an appropriate learning environment for both students and teachers. On the other hand, BSL has had some drawbacks like interaction with their peers and instructors (Brown 2017; Hutt, 2017), technology as well as the instructor's capacity to devote the same amount of time to both in-person and online students (Szeto & Cheng, 2014).

Vietnam was one of the top ten nations in the Asian region for self-paced e-

learning development rates between 2013 and 2018, which is confirmed by the forecast of Ambient Insight (2014). In addition, several policies have been implemented since 2000 to foster the growth of e-learning in the country (Anh, 2012). Besides, as Pham and Ho (2020) suggest the Vietnamese education system needs to encourage the integration of both 'distance learning' and 'class' modes of delivery for most higher education courses. However, we discovered that there is scarce research related to students' perceptions of blended synchronous learning in Vietnam. Hence, there is a need for further in-depth research on students' perceptions of BSL conducted in the Vietnam context. In the research site, blended synchronous learning is allowed in case students get infected during and after the pandemic, yet it is questionable whether or not the blended synchronous learning (BSL) approach is beneficial or detrimental for learners. Therefore, the research aim of the study is to investigate what students think about the blended synchronous learning environment. Besides, the purpose of the current research is also to identify the advantages and pitfalls of the mode, which is expected to open a holistic perspective for students, teachers, and higher education faculty.

To fill the research gap mentioned above, the current study is aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does BSLE contribute to students' perceived development of English skills and knowledge?

2. What are students' perceptions of the benefits and difficulties of adopting BSLE?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Blended Synchronous Learning

The definition of blended synchronous learning in the classroom is diverse according to several authors. First, in Hastie et al.'s study (2010), blended synchronous learning is defined as "the integration of physical classroom and cyber classroom settings using synchronous learning to enable unlimited connectivity for teachers and students from any part of the world" (p. 10). In the same vein, Bower, Dalgarno, Kennedy, Lee, and Kenny (2015) also defined the blended synchronous approach as "learning and teaching where remote students participate in face-to-face classes through rich-media synchronous technologies such as video conferencing, web conferencing, or virtual worlds" (p. 11). As an adaption of the definition provided by Bower et al. (2015), Wang et al. (2017) defined BSL as a learning method that engages students' involvement in virtual classroom learning activities concurrently via computer-mediated communication technologies. Moreover, the classroom setting can also be known as The Hybrid Virtual Classroom which offers remote students the flexibility in choosing their learning location as long as they are connected with other face-to-face students and teachers via video conferencing, web conferencing or chat room; therefore, it leads to the increase in remote students' involvement in learning activities (Wang et al., 2017; Butz et al., 2016; Hastie et al., 2010). In the current paper, we define blended synchronous learning as *a learning and teaching environment where students infected with the virus (Covid-19) can participate in conventional classes by utilizing synchronous technologies namely Google Meet.*

B. Students' benefits of adopting blended synchronous learning

Plenty of studies reveal a variety of benefits of blended synchronous learning. The first is flexibility. Students can freely choose whether or not to follow the lecture

in class or online (Steward et al., 2011). Also, according to a previous study by Oyarzun and Martion (2013), students appreciated having the option to choose whether to attend in person or digitally, which is based on their proximity and health condition. This is in line with White et al. (2010) who also state that BSL can offer an alternative approach to ensure the continuity of students' course learning in a pandemic, especially a widespread one such as COVID-19. Second, the sort of convenience during the COVID-19 outbreak results in certain economic benefits as well. This is because it can reduce the physical infrastructure required when the number of in-class students is few. Consequently, it potentially increases enrollment, and the student-teacher ratio and hence lowers the price for institutions. Furthermore, it can also increase the cost efficiency related to travel and time (Chen et al., 2005; Kear et al., 2015). Third, BSL is beneficial in terms of social development (Garrison et al., 2000; Szeto, 2015). According to White et al. (2010), by adopting BSL, remote students are enabled to experience an online classroom environment which ensures real-time interactions with others as if they attended a physical one. Hence, it promotes a sense of connectedness between online students and others in the classroom. Additionally, in a previous study by Cunningham (2014), in BSLEs, online students acquire a lot more possibility to get to know other students compared to asynchronous online courses. In addition, BSLE is positively related to the social benefits of students during the COVID-19 Pandemic as it provides equal learning opportunities to infected students during COVID-19 (Liu et al., 2018). Furthermore, Anastasiades et al. (2010) also state that BSLE can strengthen the social relations between students and teachers of physical and virtual classes, which can positively engage students to make new contacts in a globalized and technology-rich world. Fourth, BSLE can enhance students' overall expertise and also their perspectives during and after the COVID-19 outbreak. By providing students with more opportunities to learn and acquire knowledge outside the institution, BSL can create diverse learning experiences (Bell et al., 2014; Bower et al., 2015). Also, students' retention toward learning can be promoted as the continuity of instruction is guaranteed via BSL (Lakhal et al., 2017; Ramsey et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017; Wiles & Ball, 2013). In addition, enhanced instruction and real-time interactions in BSLE can offer different learner characteristics greater support which is developed in the combination of traditional and cyberlearning methods (Szeto, 2014; Wiles & Ball, 2013). Such advantages are a better sense of control over the learning process (Abdelmalak & Parra, 2016), self-motivated learning (Wiles et al., 2013), better learning outcomes (Bower et al., 2015), and enriching students' technology ability (Butz & Askim-Lovseth, 2015; Ørngreen et al., 2015).

C. Students' challenges of adopting blended synchronous learning

In addition to the above-mentioned benefits, blended synchronous learning poses several challenges. The challenges often refer to comparable learning experiences among students (Cain et al., 2016), or can also be known as co-presence (Bower et al., 2014). From the students' perspectives, the feeling of isolation or exclusion from the class can be manifested among online students due to the physical distance between them and other classmates (Cunningham, 2014; Huang et al., 2017). Additionally, remote students also face difficulties in communicating and collaborating with their classmates or other online students (Szeto & Cheng, 2016). Likewise, in the study of Wiles et al., (2013), remote students indicated that there are difficulties in making the teacher notice their intention in answering questions during the lecture, which may

cause frustration and unwillingness to participate in the lesson of students. The reason is problems related to technology occur during the class. Therefore, they require both students and teachers to acquire computer self-efficacy; otherwise, these technical problems can be barriers to the learning of students and result in dissatisfaction among learners toward BSLE. For instance, when online students experience technical issues at a different site without a close specialist to provide immediate support, they could become dissatisfied (Capdeferro & Romero, 2012; Huang et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, offline students may feel neglected as the instructor may spend a lot of time addressing the queries raised or technological issues faced by online students (Szeto, 2015). Also, both face-to-face students and the teacher are required to pay more attention to the camera and microphones during the lesson in class to ensure that online students can grasp the in-class discussion via their audio and visual channels (Cunningham, 2014). To illustrate, during a classroom adopting BSL at Can Tho FPT University via Google Meet, the participants are recommended to check their microphones and camera as well as others as there may exist some unexpected technical issues during the lesson. In addition, some classroom students also found it difficult to focus on the instructors' lectures when they are paired with online students. Also, both online and in-class students find that the collaboration and communication between the two groups are not natural or easy (Szeto & Cheng, 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

In Vietnam, e-learning has been emphasized during and post-COVID-19 Pandemic. For instance, 110/240 higher education institutions (HEIs) adopted remote teaching and learning from traditional classrooms due to the necessity of maintaining the community's health against the COVID-19 Pandemic. Of these 110 HEIs, 70% are private HEIs, including Can Tho FPT University (MOET, 2020b). Nevertheless, this type of model also caused several troubles. In a study on learners' perspectives on online learning methods in Vietnam during the COVID-19 Pandemic by Bui et al. (2020), it has been found that: 64% of online students indicated that they have no private places for studying; 79,1% of online students reported that they suffer from surrounding noise; 71% of students stressed that their family members frequently disturb their learning; 73,7% of online students feel uncomfortable with being quarantined. The BSLE is a new learning environment in Vietnam and a few educational institutions are adopting it. To promote the convenience and choice of attending face-to-face classes locally or from a distance, the mode has been adopted with the condition that infected students will be allowed to learn remotely from their homes via Google Meet while other students will continuously attend the physical classroom as usual at Can Tho FPT University.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Context and participants of the study

The present study was carried out at Can Tho FPT university where BSL was allowed due to the re-emerging outbreak of the pandemic. In other words, during their 8-week course, if students got infected, they could stay at home and simultaneously participate in the class with their peers and lecturer via Google Meet, which is mandatory for both instructors and students. Additionally, students can turn on their cameras or turn them off, which depends on each instructor's request. These students can certainly back to physical classrooms as usual when they recover from their illnesses. The purposeful sampling technique was used to select the participants

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The technique means that researchers purposefully choose people who have firsthand knowledge of the fundamental phenomenon or important notion under investigation. In particular, 163 students who were chosen for the survey were required to experience BSL in English Preparation Courses or ENT classes. These courses consist of six levels from Fundamental to Summit 2; Each level includes 105 hours. Like other English textbooks, the book series is designed with tasks and activities with the purpose to reinforce students' skills and knowledge like speaking, listening, writing, reading, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and so on. Moreover, in order to take the final test, students are required to attend at least 80% of the total hours at their level.

B. Research design

The mixed method design is adopted in the present study because it is an efficient way to gain a broad understanding and consolidate the conclusion (More, 2016). While the quantitative method helps researchers get rid of the biases in their study, and gain more accuracy for the findings, the qualitative method is highly appreciated in gaining insight into the participants' perceptions of the issue. Moreover, getting the participants involved in the process can yield positive results and large amounts of rich data (Creswell, 2015; Maxwell, 2013).

C. Research instruments

To begin with, the questionnaire was designed by adapting the questionnaires in the studies by Rahman et al. (2015), López-Pérez et al. (2011), and Wu et al. (2010) which explored students' experiences of the BSL environment. The questionnaire consists of three sections with 27 items. The first section asks for students' demographic information and a filter question; In the second section, students are asked to choose the best option for the 10 items which are about their evaluation of the contribution of the BSLE to their development of English skills and knowledge. The last section with 17 items asks for students' perceptions of the BSL environment (6 items) as well as the benefits (5 items) and difficulties (6 items). Additionally, a five-point Likert scale with number 1 meaning "completely disagree" and number 5 meaning "completely agree" was employed in the questionnaire. Next, a semi-structured interview with 11 students individually was used to provide participants an opportunity to express their specific experiences related to the research issue. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

To test the reliability coefficient, the questionnaire was piloted with 40 students from the sample population. The appropriate level for alpha value is over 0.7, according to Pallant (2007). The questionnaire was reliable with a significantly high Cronbach Alpha's coefficient of perceived development of English skills and knowledge was 0.978, the overall perception of BSLE was 0.973, perception of BSLE benefits and perception of BSLE challenges was 0.961 and 0.978 respectively.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Quantitative analysis

1) Students' perceived development of English skills and knowledge

The data in Table 1 revealed positive responses for all items related to students' development of English skills and knowledge by 163 participants in the study. Specifically, the range of means from 3.46 to 3.69 shows that students have positive perceptions of their development of English skills and knowledge on BSLE.

TABLE 1. STUDENT PERCEIVED DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

N = 163, Likert Scale 1= Completely Disagree, 5 = Completely Agree

	Mean	***Std. Deviation***	***Agree (%) Likert 4/5***	***Neutral (%) Likert 3***	***Disagree (%) Likert 1/2***
1. Grammar knowledge learned in BSLE helps me write accurately in my ENT assignments	3.63	1.007	60.7	24.5	14.7
2. Vocabulary learned in BSLE helps me understand lessons, do assignments, and exchange ideas in ENT courses	3.69	1.034	58.9	27.6	13.5
3. The reading skills learned in BSLE help me to read course materials in my major easily	3.56	1.048	55.2	28.8	16
4. Grammar knowledge learned in BSLE helps me speak accurately when discussing in my ENT classes	3.59	1.004	55.2	31.3	13.5
5. The speaking skills learned in BSLE help me to communicate with teachers and classmates in my ENT classes	3.69	1.002	55.2	34.8	9.8
6. Pronunciation knowledge learned in BSLE helps me figure out what my lecturers and classmates discuss in my ENT classes.	3.57	1.045	54.6	28.2	17.2
7. The writing skills learned in BSLE help me to complete writing essays in my ENT classes concisely and smoothly	3.58	0.999	52.7	33.1	14.1
8. The listening skills learned in BSLE help me to understand my ENT lessons easily	3.48	1.079	50.92	32.5	16.6
9. The BSLE improve my English competence significantly.	3.46	1.079	48.47	31.3	20.3
10. The listening skills learned in BSLE help me to understand my friends' discussion	3.47	1.038	46.01	35.6	18.4

The ten items of this section of the questionnaire have been put in order according to the percentages of the agreement of the participants. The item that received the largest amount of agreement (60.7%) is the effect of BSL on grammar knowledge. Students perceived that the grammar knowledge learned in BSL classes helped them write accurately in their ENT assignment. The second largest agreement (58.9%) from the study participants is "*vocabulary learned in BSLE helps me understand lessons, do assignments, and exchange ideas in ENT courses".* The next three items received 55.2%

of students' agreement with the helpfulness of BSL in their reading skills, grammar knowledge, and speaking skills. Over two-thirds of participants agreed that other factors including pronunciation knowledge, writing skills, listening skills, and English competence are all boosted thanks to BSL.

Table 1 shows that approximately 30% of the participants ticked the neutral option in the 5-Point Likert scale for these 10 items in the questionnaire. This implies that the BSL is slightly hard to use or not interesting enough to stimulate students' engagement, hence students find it less effective in helping them gain English development.

2) Students' overall perception of BSLE

In Table 2, the data of students' overall perceptions of BSL were revealed. As we can see, the range of means is from 3.31 to 3.53. This meant that the responders had a positive perception of BSLE.

TABLE 2. STUDENTS' OVERALL PERCEPTION OF BSLE

N = 163, Likert Scale 1= Completely Disagree, 5 = Completely Agree

	Mean	***Std. Deviation***	***Agree (%) Likert 4/5***	***Neutral (%) Likert 3***	***Disagree (%) Likert 1/2***
11. I feel comfortable BSLE with learning in BSLE	3.53	1.273	56.4	20.9	22.7
12. Learning in BSLE is the thing I like very much	3.45	1.402	51.5	20.9	27.6
13. Learning in BSLE is a good idea	3.5	1.307	50.3	26.9	22.7
14. I intend to learn in BSLE more frequently in the future	3.35	1.194	46.0	30.7	23.3
15. I intend to choose many courses that are taught in BSLE in the coming semesters	3.33	1.211	44.8	31.9	23.3
16. If other courses are taught in BSLE, I will participate	3.31	1.234	44.2	31.3	24.5

It can be seen that 56.4% of the participants experienced comfort in learning in BSLE. Approximately 50% of the students believed that BSL is their favorable learning approach, and its adoption in learning is a good idea as BSL is beneficial for their learning process in terms of flexibility, and convenience. Also, they enjoy the

independence in choosing learning locations, leading to more proactive learning habits. This is also in the same vein as Steward et al., 2011 and Oyarzun and Martion, 2013, From 44.2% to 46.0% stated their intention in attending further BSL lectures as they perceive the potential outcomes of BSLE in terms of learning promotion, including a wider range of learning experience whereas the cost efficiency remained (Chen et al., 2005; Kear et al., 2015; Bell et al., 2014; Bower et al., 2015). Moreover, as Covid-19 is still threatening the community, students can opt for learning in BLSE to proactively protect their health without jeopardizing their academic progress (Liu et al., 2018).

In Table 2, it is indicated that from 20.9% to 31.9% of the participants show a neutral attitude toward BSLE, choosing a 3 on the 5-point Likert scale for these 6 items of the questionnaire. This implies that BSLE perhaps does not provide significant factors that can influence some students' ideology of a suitable learning environment.

3) Students' perceptions of BSLE benefits

The data in Table 3 shows students' perceptions of BSLE's advantages. The range of the mean from 3.48 to 3.76 revealed that 163 research participants had a positive perception of the advantages of BSLE.

TABLE 3. STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BSLE BENEFITS

N = 163, Likert Scale 1= Completely Disagree, 5 = Completely Agree

	Mean	***Std. Deviation***	***Agree (%)***	***Neutral (%)***	***Disagree (%)***
17. Learning in BSLE helps me to reduce the workload in class	3.64	1.138	58.9	26.3	14.7
18. In general, I think learning in BSLE is very useful	3.55	1.198	57.1	23.3	19.6
19. Learning in BSLE helps me to enhance my in-class learning efficiency	3.48	1.151	55.8	24.5	19.6
20. Learning in BSLE helps me to complete my tasks fasters	3.76	3.381	55.2	27.6	17.1
21. By doing online assignments in BSLE, I can easily follow and learn the lessons in the course book	3.53	1.183	54.6	28.8	16.5

The 3.381 standard deviation (SD) in the item "Learning in BSLE helps me to complete my tasks faster" shows that there are different opinions between participants on the topic. The difference is perhaps due to the different learner characteristics, which is one of the predominant factors in the academic outcomes of students (Szeto, 2014; Wiles & Ball, 2013; Bower et al., 2015). Therefore, the BLSE approach may not be suitable for some learners, yet the outcome still advocates the advantage of BSLE in terms of reduction in task accomplishment time. 58.9% of the study participants agreed that BSL can reduce their workload in class (Q#17), which implies that these students feel that BSL can offer them opportunities to complete the exercise and check the

answers immediately. Responses to all 6 of these questions, with means from 54.6 % to 57.1%, perceived that BSL is useful because it helps them enhance their learning process in class, finish the task quickly, and easily follow the lesson in the book. This is in the line with (Lakhal et al., 2017; Ramsey et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017; Wiles & Ball, 2013)

Table 3 indicates that from 23.1% to 28.8% of the participants still ticked the neutral option (Q#3 in the 5-Point Likert scale) for these 5 items in the questionnaire. This implies that the BSL's benefits still haven't been visible to a quarter of the students or not interesting enough to stimulate students' engagement; therefore, students may not perceive the aforementioned advantages of BSLE in advocating their study process.

4) Students' perceptions of BSLE challenges

TABLE 4. STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BSLE CHALLENGES

N = 163, Likert Scale 1= Completely Disagree, 5 = Completely Agree

	Mean	***Std. Deviation***	***Agree (%)***	***Neutral (%)***	***Disagree (%)***
22. Learning to learn with an online account in BSLE is easy for me	3.74	1.075	60.1	27.6	12.3
23. I can completely control my learning in BSLE	3.66	1.074	55.8	32.5	11.7
24. In general, it is easy for me to use BSLE	3.55	1.128	55.2	27.6	17.9
25. Learning how to use the tools in BSLE is easy for me	3.64	1.093	55.2	31.9	12.9
26. Interactions in BSLE are clear and easy to understand	3.56	1.139	53.9	31.3	14.7
27. I feel confident to learn the necessary skills to use my online account at BSLE	3.58	1.035	52.8	34.9	12.3

Table 4 describes the difficulties of the BSL from the viewpoint of students. For about 60% of the research participants learning online with an online account was easy. They just need an email address to join the available online class. Approximately 50% of the students agree that the tools (Q#25), interaction (Q#26), and confidence (Q#27) to learn the necessary computer skills to use their online account are easy for them, which implies that the rest of the participants could not make use of BSL, which in turn, decreases the positive impact of BSL on students' learning. In addition, Table 4 indicates that over half of the participants ticked the neutral option (Q#3 on the 5-Point Likert scale) for these 6 items in the questionnaire. Therefore, several students haven't been accustomed to BSLE yet, which may pose challenges for students in learning.

The findings in this part of the study are in line with previous studies by other researchers. (Capdeferro & Romero, 2012; Huang et al., 2017. (Szeto, 2015) found that students encounter technical problems when studying online. It can be inferred that technological challenges can prevent students from recognizing the benefits of BSL. Therefore, even though the majority of students agreed that BSL is useful for them to

develop their English skills and knowledge (mentioned in Table 1), the percentage of agreement is not very high, ranging from 46% to 60.7%. To deal with it, orientation sessions and a help desk should be held at the beginning or throughout the courses to remove the problems that BSL may create.

B. Qualitative analysis

Analyzing the interview data, we discovered that there are four benefits and three disadvantages of adopting BSL.

1) Benefits of adopting BSLE

Flexibility

The majority of participants (eight out of eleven) believed that BSLE was flexible and convenient as they could join the class wherever they were**.** Also, this is in line with Woodcock et al., 2015 and Steward et al., 2011.

"I can spare more time for myself because of the flexibility of the blended synchronous environment. Instead of constantly going to school, I may return to my hometown and still take classes." (s5)

"I can participate more actively in my education and simultaneously follow the subjects being taught in class." (s8)

Economic benefits

Three participants indicated the efficiency in cost and time related to travel is attainable in BSLE. The stated reason is that BSLE enables them to learn from home, reducing the amount of travel expense in terms of fuel consumption reduction. By spending less money on fuel, BSLE can reduce the financial burden of students, especially during the period of COVID-19. This is in the same vein as Chen et al., 2005 and Kear et al., 2015.

"I can spend less time traveling to school when I experience the BSLE." (s2)

"Because I don't have to travel to class every day, taking BSLE classes allows me to reduce some of my travel costs, mostly gas money" (S3)

Better support for different learner characteristics

One stated that students with glossophobia, or the fear of public speaking, can confidently express their opinion in BSL's online environment better compared to offline classes. In BSLE, students can adopt a different approach to communicating with their classmates and teachers, which perhaps provides them with greater comfort and hence leads to willingness in learning. The statement refers to the benefit of BLSE in terms of supporting learner characteristics, which is also stated in Szeto, 2014 and Wiles & Ball, 2013.

"When taking lessons online, reserved students can speak more freely and confidently about their thoughts and beliefs." (s10)

Enhancing technology skill

Finally, one participant said that BSLE provides students with opportunities to enrich their technical ability, which is in line with Butz & Askim-Lovseth, 2015. By attaining the necessary technology skills, students seem to acquire more occupation possibilities in the future. The more cutting-edge the technology is, the more literate its users are required to be.

"I've gained greater technological exposure and electronic device proficiency while studying with the BSLE technique." (s8)

2) Difficulties of adopting BSLE

Absence of social interaction

Eight out of eleven students complained of boredom during online classes due to a lack of social interaction resulting in ineffective teamwork and communication. The finding is consistent with the co-presence problem or the absence of a study environment by Bower et al., 2014; Cunningham, 2014; Huang et al., 2017.

"Studying in traditional classes is more fun. I can meet up with many friends, and contact face-to-face with the lecturers, and questions will be answered faster. The lectures won't be boring. Conversely, the online classes compared to the traditional ones are less interesting." (s3)

"My first class of the next semester will be an online class, which I believe is inefficient because the first class is crucial for students to meet and get to know their new teachers and classmates. However, because it is an online class, many shy students will not participate in the class, resulting in inadequate lessons and collaboration." (s7)

"When I study at home, there is no one to supervise or constantly monitor my progress, therefore I am easily sidetracked." (s4)

Technical Problems

The technological obstacles, which are also the subject most commonly stated by three participants, represent the second barrier. Both instructors and students suffer from the issue because it is difficult to maintain the strong networking connection required to assure the success of their online classes. As a result, students were uncomfortable, and they did not grasp the content effectively. This is in line with Capdeferro & Romero, 2012; Huang et al., 2017; Szeto, 2015; Cunningham, 2014.

"I encountered a problem with the lack of WiFi. Because I live in a boarding house and blackouts typically occur, I must relocate to another location, such as a coffee shop, to study." (s4)

"I believe that studying in a blended synchronous environment has many downsides, such as the difficulty in maintaining the network connection, which causes the study session to be frequently interrupted, therefore making me feel uneasy and creating a lack of study spirit. Because of the aforementioned difficulty, it is also more challenging to comprehend lessons." (s8)

Distraction

Seven of eleven students agreed that several distractions exist while attending a blended synchronous environment at home. Most are caused by phone notifications, ambient noise, and family members loitering in study areas. Some stated that since instructors do not always require their cameras to be on, they frequently sleep or engage in activities unrelated to the session. This is aligned with the study of Bui et al., 2020 on learners' perspectives on online learning methods in Vietnam during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

"Studying English at home has several drawbacks for me, such as household noise, which might cause me to lose concentration; sometimes I will let things drift and sleep through the class as well." (s5)

"As we study online, we are often distracted by various things, such as messages from friends and app notifications, which cause us to focus on our phones rather than the lesson at hand." (s9)

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current study was conducted to examine students' perceptions of BSL after they have experienced this environment. The findings of the study revealed that students perceive similar benefits and difficulties of BSL as those of other researchers. In particular, the proportions of the agreement (the responses of 4 and 5 on the Likert Scale) to most items in the questionnaire ranged around the average level from 50% to 60%, which may be because students were not supervised by the teachers or they lack social presence. As a result, further research can be implemented with other groups of students when they receive more guidance and support from teachers compared to the current study.

There are several limitations to the study. First, we propose that further research be undertaken at more campuses of FPT University, as well as public universities in Vietnam and perhaps even other countries to gain a multi-site view. Second, there is a shortage of time and resources for the investigation. Since we started the research when our school was on summer break, we are unable to declare for certain how many students will be able to partake in our study.

The study provided an opportunity for students to express their perceptions of their study environment, and its findings were an effort to provide institutional educators with a comprehensive understanding of students' BSLE experiences to adjust and design the appropriate curriculum for students in the future.

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