

THE ROLE OF THE BLENDED LEARNING MODEL IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN VIETNAM TODAY

*Tran Thi Mai Hanh**

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***Abstract:** Digital transformation in society in general and in higher education, in particular, is inevitable in the current era of information technology development as well as in response to the global Covid-19 pandemic. The trend of using information technology to transform the organizational model of operation in traditional higher education brings practical effects for managers as well as higher education institutions. The combination of face-to-face instruction in the classroom and the application of the digital environment creates a learning experience tailored to each individual for better effectiveness. Blended Learning refers to the integration of traditional face-to-face instruction and online learning giving participants the best of both worlds.*

The purpose of the study is to point out the role and importance of the Blended Learning model in higher education institutions to improve the quality of education and training, creating high-quality human resources for society.

***Keywords:** Blended Learning, e-learning, quality, university education.*

I. Introduction

Nowadays, science and technology are continuously and rapidly developing, which significantly impacts the education industry; thus, the innovation of flexible training methods which can adapt to practical conditions has become essential to improve the quality of training in higher education institutions. Otherwise, we will be left behind, and our students will not be able to cope with an ever-changing environment that requires capability and self-instruction under the guidance of

the faculty. To achieve a good quality of learning in higher education institutions, we need to develop a new educational strategy, an innovative educational program that can combine both the traditional face-to-face system and the new online learning system. Therefore, higher education institutions need to train teachers, students, and administrators to use online documents scientifically and effectively. With good training, instructors can guide students to accurately utilize these materials and create an effective study plan to improve the learning

* Faculty of Distance Education – Hanoi Open University

process. In this way, by using a Blended Learning program, universities will improve the quality of training, provide better educational services to students, and create better human resources.

The organization of teaching in a combination of two forms will contribute to expanding access to higher education for everyone, allowing students to study anywhere, anytime, as well as meeting the requirements of pandemic prevention and control. Online and face-to-face teaching has been applied in higher education institutions in Vietnam for many years. However, stemming from the practical situation, higher education institutions have identified this as a long-term solution; online teaching can supplement face-to-face teaching and directly replace it in specific cases, and vice versa, direct teaching, as a necessity, is an opportunity to complement the knowledge and practical skills for learners through experiments, practice, internships, and reality.

II. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1. The “Blended Learning” Model

The Blended Learning model inherited the development of the e-learning model. There are many approaches to the concept of “Blended Learning”. According to the English Dictionary, Blended Learning is a learning model which combines online learning and traditional learning. This method was first studied by Cambridge University in teaching foreign languages, then widely applied in other training organizations [5]. The term Blended Learning is generalized as the use of traditional classroom teaching methods along with the use of online

learning methods for the same student to learn the same content in the same course. It is “a thoughtful blend of face-to-face and online learning experiences” [6]. In addition, there are hybrid programs in which students take some courses in a face-to-face classroom and others online. Blended Learning is described as a mode of instruction that removes the barriers of learning time and location.

The Blended Learning model combines online and in-person activities for classroom instruction or other teaching methods to help students develop new knowledge and skills that can be applied to the workplace. Blended Learning is a rapidly growing trend in traditional educational institutions and other institutions. An online learning survey shows Blended Learning is expanding globally at 46% or higher per year. As organizational facilitators, university and college instructors become comfortable with Blended Learning applications; they are often highly motivated to explore new and more innovative ways of using Blended Learning for teaching services or training management activities. Besides, a few limitations have also been pointed out regarding physical conditions such as connection network infrastructure, the service of the server installed with the learning management system, limited bandwidth, difficulty accessing the network, failed network, as well as the difficulty of students when owning a network access device,... and they have a negative impact on the use of the Blended Learning model.

In addition, the fact that students have not actively managed their self-study

time well or spent much time on part-time jobs or other recreational activities also affects their learning efficiency. Other explanations are due to the inertia of learners when they are too familiar with the traditional way of learning with three essential characteristics: lack of initiative, lack of self-discipline, and lack of effective time management skills. This is also a limitation of Vietnamese trained in the domestic environment, used to passive learning in high school, so they find it challenging to adapt to the university environment. This limitation, partly resulting from that the teaching method in universities in Vietnam is still slow to innovate, has not kept up with the trend of exploiting high technology in the world.

Learners were also found to be poorly prepared for e-learning and academic-style competencies. The quality of courses needs to be continuously improved, and lessons must be designed to be creative, interactive, relevant, student-centered, and integrated with instruction. Teachers must spend a lot of time investing in lectures to create effective online learning tutorials, enabling learners to respond, ask questions, and expand the scope of knowledge. Instructors must focus on collaborative learning pedagogy, case learning, and project-based learning through online tutorials. However, the outstanding advantages of online learning methods cannot deny the positive aspects of traditional teaching methods (face-to-face teaching). Therefore, the Blended Learning model between online and face-to-face methods has also been applied in many universities in Vietnam to innovate teaching and learning methods

and improve human resources training efficiency.

2.2. Different levels of the Blended Learning model

The Blended Learning model is a combination of a traditional teaching model and an online teaching model with a specific ratio, this ratio can increase or decrease depending on the level of application, and currently, there are three levels to apply the Blended Learning teaching model, including:

- Level 1: The teacher mainly uses traditional learning when teaching but provides additional online materials for learners to look up via the Internet.

- Level 2: The instructor alternates online lectures with traditional lectures to accustom learners to online learning. The exchange, discussion, and support of learners will be extended through supporting tools such as Email, Forum,... in addition to face-to-face meetings.

- Level 3: Besides the design of alternating online lectures for students like level 2, learners will be tested and evaluated using an online form.

Based on the three applicable levels of the Blended Learning model above, there are currently 6 Blended Learning models in the world being applied to teach at the university level, including:

- + **Face-to-Face Drive model:** This is the closest model to traditional classroom training. This approach often means that not everyone in the class will participate in additional online training, as it is mainly aimed at the individual needs of learners who are struggling or want

further education. Using the traditional teaching model is the primary; however, information technology is applied in providing learning materials and conducting assessments. Accordingly, learners will spend time participating in learning, exchanging, and discussing directly in class while reading documents or performing exercises on the Internet. This model gives teachers more time to support learners, suitable for classes with segmentation or knowledge gap between class members.

+ **Rotation model:** Learners will alternate between two traditional learning models and online learning according to a published schedule. This model creates flexibility in teaching and learning, and teachers can support learners with the content of online lessons in traditional lessons based on learners' needs.

+ **Flex model:** Teachers orientate and guide learners to actively study using the online learning model while face-to-face lessons will be devoted to exchanging, discussing, and answering questions. This model promotes self-study ability in learners, and they can actively arrange study time, study space, and study duration to suit themselves.

+ **Online Lab model:** During the duration of the course, learners participate in online learning at specialized computer labs and, at the same time, are under the management and supervision of course supervisors. This model helps to reduce pressure on face-to-face classrooms, reducing the number of teaching participants but increasing the number of supervisors.

+ **Self-blended model:** This model allows learners to register for online courses outside the curriculum. It is suitable for university education and encouraging learners to improve their knowledge, expand their expertise, and learn more subjects according to their personal interests.

+ **Online Driver model:** The models use the online learning model in teaching and learning entirely. Learners rely on instructions, lectures, exercises,... provided by the teacher via the Internet to study. Questions that need support and exchange are conducted online. This model is suitable for learners who need flexibility in terms of study time class schedule, and it can be applied to undergraduate, graduate, undergraduate, work-study,...).

III. Research methodology

3.1. Purposes of the research

The study aims to research the theoretical basis of the Blended Learning model and the levels of the Blended Learning model. Seeing the role and importance of the Blended Learning model in higher education institutions, universities will improve the quality of training and education, provide better educational services for students to improve the quality of education and training, and create high-quality human resources for society.

3.2. Methods of the research

Bài viết chủ yếu dung hai phương pháp nghiên cứu: Phương pháp phân tích định tính dựa trên các tài liệu và phương pháp phân tích định lượng dựa trên phiếu

khảo sát. Trong nghiên cứu này, nguồn tài liệu được thu thập lại qua sách, bài báo khoa học, công trình nghiên cứu trong và ngoài nước, ... để tiến hành phân tích, tổng hợp các tài liệu, công trình nghiên cứu có liên quan, ngoài ra tác giả còn sử dụng thống kê toán học để xử lý số liệu, kết quả điều tra; phân tích vấn đề nghiên cứu

IV. Results and discussion

4.1. The impact of the Blended Learning model on the quality of higher education

Today, learning - using the Internet - has changed the concept of education by deploying new learning models to improve the quality of education and facilitate the transmission of information to students, encouraging students to engage in learning. In fact, online learning is modeled to the needs of each student and allows students to be more reflective of their learning. However, there are some obstacles to utilizing online materials: faculty and students must know how to use them, and they all need to be trained to use online learning tools[8]. In fact, the advantages of learning using the Internet are the availability, flexibility, cultural exchange, and independence of students:

- The Internet can be found almost anywhere, and it provides students with all kinds of information, making them independent of themselves. However, students need the training to use online tools correctly and effectively. It should be noted that students' performance is influenced by the variety of learning materials and the quality of training they receive; in an education system, providing diverse information, making

knowledge transmission easier, and training more efficient can lead to better training quality.

Blended Learning focuses on students rather than on teachers; it helps students achieve higher academic results, and it also gives students more learning possibilities by allowing them to do many tasks in various places and have a flexible schedule. In this way, the classroom is no longer the only place where students can learn from the instructor; they can study on their own outside of the classroom.

- Blended Learning has four main advantages:

+ Firstly, the Blended Learning model is highly flexible and can manage both space and time;

+ Second, the Blended Learning model also improves the quality of the learning process by encouraging students to do learning activities outside the classroom such as finding more sources and references on the Internet and doing research, online quizzes, or tests;

+ Third, it is suitable for each student's need;

+ Fourth, it reduces the cost of learning while improving the quality of education and training.

- The Blended Learning model gives students access to diverse online resources, allowing students more opportunities to interact with other students and with their instructors and gain different perspectives. In this way, they can enhance their competence, become more engaged in learning, and be more adaptive to all learning contexts [14].

However, learning and using the internet face many challenges such as the need for a computer, internet connection, and online documents; moreover, many students do not know how to use specific programs on the Internet which are used as traditional learning, and most of the time students are not trained to communicate using new learning tools [11].

Furthermore, poor online materials are sometimes provided to students, and misuse of good online resources also causes students and faculty to have a negative opinion of their dependence on online resources and their impact on educational quality [10]. To benefit from Blended Learning, the course should be well structured, instructors and students should be trained in how to use Blended Learning software, and professionals using the technology should create Blended Learning hardware and software for each course.

Blended Learning increases the benefits of both traditional and online learning. However, to satisfy the students, the course needs to be well-designed so that students can easily access and use the online materials. Otherwise, students will feel dissatisfied and lose the motivation to learn [3].

To complete this study, the author surveyed 24 lecturers from several

Hanoi universities who used the Blended Learning model to teach students. The Likert scale is used to measure the impact of Blended Learning on the quality of education.

The survey questions are based on research by King, S. and Arnold, K. (2012) [8], which investigated faculties' opinions about the Blended Learning model. However, there have not been studies conducted before on the impact of Blended Learning on the quality of learning in universities in Hanoi. The study was formed from the following key questions:

Ø How do you understand the concept of Blended Learning?

Ø How do you think a Blended Learning system affects your work at university?

Ø How does the Blended Learning system in universities improve student learning?

Ø How do you think a Blended Learning course can bring more satisfaction to students?

Ø How should supporting technologies be used to aid face-to-face learning?

Ø What strategies do they consider necessary to improve the quality of higher education?

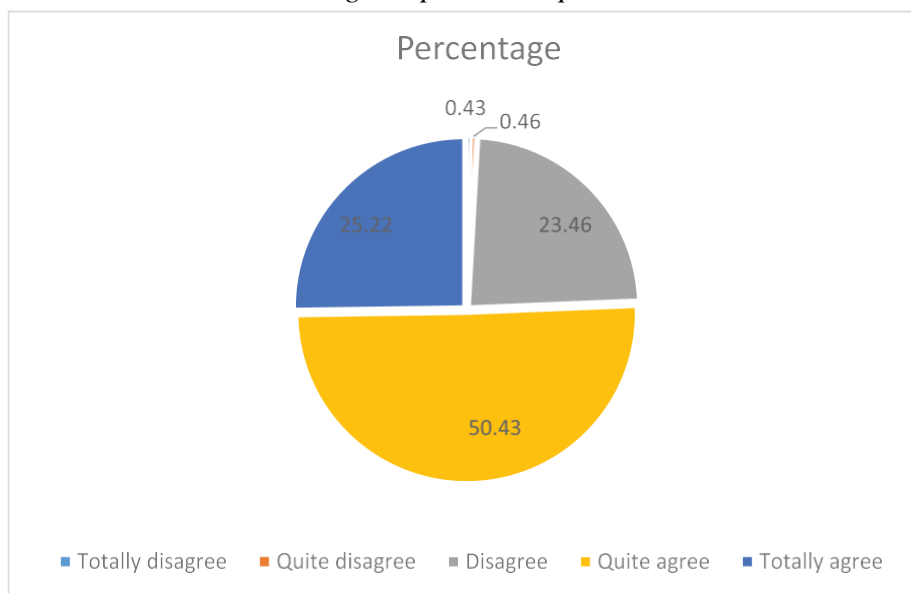
Table: Blended Learning has positive effects on education

Opinions	Percentage (%)
Totally disagree	0,43
Quite disagree	0,46
Disagree	23,46
Quite agree	50,43
Totally agree	25,22

The survey result shows that 78% of teachers believe that the Blended Learning model does not have a specific definition. However, all of its definitions contain key elements: online Learning (Learning using the Internet) and traditional learning. On the other hand, the result demonstrates that 79% of the faculty think that the Blended Learning model improves their work at university. It also reveals that 74% of faculty agree that Blended Learning systems at university improve the quality of learning. Furthermore, the result shows that 83% of faculty members think that a Blended Learning

course can bring more satisfaction to students, and 83% of lecturers think that supporting technologies should be used properly to assist students with direct learning. Finally, the result depicts that 67% of faculty members believe that the “structure” of the university should be changed and that IT professionals should play an important role in the design of the Blended Learning course and address any problems the lecturers face? Overall, 75.65% of lecturers agree that Blended Learning has a positive impact on the quality of higher education.

Blended Learning has positive impacts on education



4.2. Some suggestions to improve the quality of higher education

To use the Blended Learning model effectively and improve the quality of higher education, institutions need to:

- Have an incentive policy for the implementation of the Blended Learning model;
- Conduct research and general assessment of the understanding and

experience of the teaching staff about the Blended Learning model so that the school can have an appropriate implementation direction;

- Organize training to improve the knowledge and capacity of the teaching staff about technology background and teaching methods suitable to the Blended Learning model;
- Establish and maintain research

teams to design content, lectures, and courses; organize experimental teaching in the direction of the Blended Learning model; organize professional discussions in this direction;

- Send staff to participate in training courses using E-learning technology, Blended Learning to gain experience;

- Invest in facilities and technology infrastructure so that the connection and deployment of this model are convenient.

V. Conclusion

These days, Blended Learning is widely acknowledged and applied. However, the main question is whether it will work or not. The success of a Blended Learning program is related to how well it is planned considering the goals of the institution. Furthermore, creating a Blended Learning system should solve the problems facing educational institutions today. To plan a great Blended Learning program, the staff must be experienced and the instructors must be well-trained and must understand the needs of the students. Blended Learning methods are sometimes misused due to a lack of understanding of student needs and a lack of knowledge about the suitable model for an educational institution. To be successful, an Blended Learning model must consider the educational goals and strategy of the institution. To address these issues, Blended Learning designers can read books or take courses on the topic.

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Author address: Faculty of Distance Education – Hanoi Open University

Email: hanhhtm@hou.edu.vn