Motivation and Barriers for University Teachers to Apply Blended Learning in Language Classes

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Abstract

The study examined university teachers who make choices to apply blended learning to language teaching. The samples were 15 teachers of English at the University of Foreign Languages, Hue University in Vietnam. The research instrument was interviews with semi-structured questions. Data were then analysed using inductive approach, as explained by Thomas (2006), with raw data being condensed and coded into categories. The results revealed that two of the main findings regarding the motivation for university language teachers to apply blended learning in their classes were the need to increase professional development and to keep teachers updated with new technology; whereas class size, students' self-awareness, and students' low economic background were found to be the main barriers preventing teachers from applying blended learning approach. Besides, findings also support the existing body of knowledge regarding the reasons why and why not teachers apply blended learning in their teaching practice.

Keywords: barriers, blended learning, language teaching, motivation

Problem statement

Recent technological advances in connection with developments in teaching and learning methodologies are assumed to bring new opportunities for more effective learning (Hubackova, 2015; López-Pérez, Pérez-López & Rodríguez-

Ariza, 2011; Mendieta Aguilar, 2012). Particularly, these developments have led to more consistent learning environments using blended learning as a starting point (Hubackova, 2015; King & Arnold, 2012). Research has shown that the significant increase in popularity of blended learning has been shown to promote effective learning (Al-Huneidi & Schreurs, 2013; Graham, Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013; Ocak, 2011)

When implemented in language classes, however, in addition to its positive benefits that motivate teachers and students, studies also indicated several problems that occurred when applying blended learning approaches that resulted in teachers choosing not to "teach" blended courses (Ocak, 2011). The present study, therefore, focused on examining the motivation as well as the barriers teachers experience when applying a blended learning approach to their classes.

Literature review

Although blended learning has become popular in education, its definition is still ambiguous (Graham, 2006; Ocak, 2011). According to Rossett and Frazee (2006, p. 2): "Blended learning (BL) integrates seemingly opposite approaches, such as formal and informal learning, face-to-face and online experiences, directed paths and reliance on self-direction, and digital references and collegial connections, in order to achieve individual and organizational goals".

This broad definition is often used to describe corporate settings (Rossett & Frazee, 2006). In the field of education, however, blended learning is often described as a combination of the physical environment with the virtual one (Al-Huneidi & Schreurs, 2013). The most typical features of blended learning are the combination of the following: (1) instructional modalities (or delivery media); (2) instructional methods; and (3) online and face-to-face instruction. Among these features, online and face-to-face instruction most accurately reflects the current state of blended learning (Bonk & Graham, 2006). It also encompasses the first and second feature because it combines two separate historical models of teaching and learning: traditional face-to-face learning system and the distributed learning system, while also emphasizing the role of computer-based technology in blended learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Graham, 2006).

Many educators believe that blended learning can give learners and teachers opportunities for more effective learning and teaching (Graham, Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013; Heinze & Procter, 2004; Ocak, 2011; Šafranj, 2013). More specifically, Graham (2006) categorizes the pros of blended learning into three groups: 1) pedagogic richness, 2) flexibility, and 3) increased cost-effectiveness. First, pedagogic richness refers to the role of blended learning in increasing interactive, peer-assisted and student-centered strategies that teachers can use in their class to develop knowledge sharing and collaboration among students. The virtual learning environment can help

teachers to overcome difficulties faced during their lectures, such as limited lecture time, a large student groups and passive attitudes in the face-to-face learning environment (Tuncay & Uzunboylu, 2012). Second, flexibility refers to the combination between e-learning and traditional face-to-face instruction to create the balance between flexibility and students' interaction experience. In blended learning, students can explore and learn about the asynchronous content at their own pace and time (Kasraie & Alahmed, 2014). Third, the combination of blended learning and traditional face-to-face learning has potential to make it more cost effective in terms of infrastructures as well as maintenance of classroom buildings (Maulan & Ibrahim, 2012). Besides, blended learning is believed to be able to bring teacher closer to their students and develop the interaction between them (Jusoff & Khodabandelou, 2009). It can create both a community of inquiry and a platform of free and interactive dialogue, which helps to encourage the exchange of information, especially for introverted students (Okaz, 2015). More importantly, Heinze and Procter (2004) argue that blended learning is a valuable tool to support student differentiation since there is a wide range of features that can serve various types of learners.

Ertmer et al. (2012) describe two types of barriers impacting the use of technology by teachers in their classroom. The first type is the external barrier including inadequate resources, lack of training and support. Teachers continue to report that they do not have enough time, resources, and training to use technology for classroom instruction. They often see technology as a burden because it interrupts instruction, takes time to plan online activities; and it requires additional training because they are not technology experts (Hubackova, 2015; King & Arnold, 2012; Kopcha, 2012; Watson & McIntyre, 2012). There is a growing concern that blended learning may cause teachers to spend more time on learning a new technology than to improve the student motivation and learning (Klein, Spector, Grabowski, & Teja, 2004). The second type discussed by Ertmer et al. (2012) is the internal barrier such as teachers' confidence, beliefs about teaching and learning, or the recognition of technological value in teaching and learning activities. As a result, giving access to online facilities does not always work in helping teachers and students use them effectively (Mendieta Aguilar, 2012). Additionally, when changing to a new method involving the combination of new technologies to the traditional familiar face-to-face instruction, the role of the teacher changes (Mendieta Aguilar, 2012; Ocak, 2011). Technology integrating into the classroom also requires teachers to believe in its professional and pedagogical value (Van Praag & Sanchez, 2015). However, it is clear that there is a gap between the amount of technology available in today's classrooms and teachers' use of that technology for instructional purposes (Kopcha, 2012). Therefore, many teachers are still not enthusiastic and unwilling to take a risk outside their comfort zone, which consequently can lead to the lower success of blended learning (Okaz, 2015).

Purpose of the study

The present study was carried out to examine the specific reasons for why university teachers apply blended learning in their language classes. It is imperative to know teachers' motivation as well as the barriers they experience in teaching blended courses since these can direct teachers or program designers to reflect on or take into consideration these elements when developing new or optimize existing blended learning courses.

Methodology

Participants were recruited from the Department of English, University of Foreign Languages, Hue University in Vietnam, where blended learning has been introduced through workshops and seminars for a few years. To carry out the examination, 15 out of 50 teachers of the Department were selected for an in-depth interview. Each of the teachers has at least three or more years of English teaching experience. Also, to have an unbiased view on the reasons for using or not using blended learning, teachers were chosen randomly without knowing in advance if they apply the approach or not. Details about participants' demographic information, their experience with blended learning approach and their time teaching English are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
An overview of interviewees

Teacher (T)	Age	Gender	Apply BL or not	Teaching experience
T1	27	Female	Yes	5 years
T2	28	Female	Yes	6 years
T3	26	Female	Yes	3 years
T4	45	Female	Yes	20 years
T5	49	Female	Yes	24 years
T6	33	Female	Yes	7 years
T7	56	Male	Yes	33 years
T8	55	Female	Yes	32 years
T9	53	Female	No	30 years
T10	29	Female	No	7 years
T11	29	Female	Yes	6 years
T12	29	Female	Yes	6 years
T13	26	Female	Yes	4 years
T14	28	Female	Yes	6 years
T15	30	Female	Yes	7 years

To examine the teachers' perspective, a semi-structured interview with pre-set 15 questions was used. The interview scheme was constructed based on the discussions in the literature review that were related to the topic of motivation and barriers for applying blended learning. The questions were open-ended so that interviews could be more flexible to explore teachers' reflections and their perceptions about their motivations as well as barriers to the application of blended learning in their teaching processes. To heighten the validity of the data, questions were derived from previous research on this topic; and two teachers (different from 15 selected) were interviewed in the pilot study before the actual interviews to check if the participants could appropriately answer the questions.

In December 2016, emails with the topic and purpose of the research were sent to teachers to ask for their acceptance to an interview. Two pilot interviews were then carried out to check the validity of the questions. Most of the interviews then took place in February 2017, in Vietnam; and four of which were done online in March because those teachers could not arrange time for a meeting in the period when the researcher went to Vietnam to collect data. The interviews started with the interviewees signing the consent form which stated the introduction, the purpose, and the rules of the session. Finally, the different topical questions related to the research questions were posed. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The length of each interview was a maximum of one hour.

Regarding data analysis, a general inductive approach for the analysis of qualitative data as described by Thomas (2006) was applied. Accordingly, extensive and varied raw text data from the interviews were condensed, summarized, and coded based on the ideas from interview questions. The codes then were sorted and put in themes and categories that were linked to the research objectives. In order to do this, once the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the researcher read each transcript and made notes of words, theories or short phrases that sum up what was being said. In the second stage, the researcher collected all of the words and phrases from all of the interviews and all duplications were crossed out. After this, a shorter list of categories was compiled, further refined and grouped into a list of more general categories that showed the motivation as well as barriers for the implementation of blended learning in language teaching.

Results

The similarly coded data were identified and then linked together to form sub-themes and themes regarding the motivation and barriers for teachers to apply blended learning. The results are demonstrated as follows:

First of all, a brief overview of the use of blended learning among the interviewees is displayed in Table 1. Accordingly, only two out of 15 teachers do not use blended learning, though they clearly know the approach. However,

among those applying blended learning in their teaching, four out of 13 teacjers think that their online activities are not real blended learning examples since they think they do not really spend much time interacting with students online.

Regarding the motivation for teachers to use blended learning, data analysis revealed 17 reasons.

Positive change in students' learning habit and attitude

All of the teachers including those two who did not use the approach assured that students in blended learning courses were "more active in learning, be more dynamic, take more responsibilities in their learning" (T2). Also, two teachers mentioned that blended learning was good for less active students because, via online platform, they feel more confident or safer to ask questions and discuss a problem without facing the teacher*:* "when I post something online, and they, if they don't understand they will say, Ms. Trang I don't know how to do this, I don't know how to do that, or sometimes, they just send me private message" (T3).

More opportunities to enhance students' learning

Four of the teachers claimed the increasing in learning time for their students beside merely two periods each week for classroom meeting. As T15 explained:

> Normally we only have 2 periods for one class a week, a 2 periods with 50 students inside the classroom is not much. So with the online activities and online platform, I have more opportunities to understand the students' level and students have more opportunities to be understood by the teacher.

Then, by participating in online activities, students were required to give feedback to their peers, receive feedback, or to keep journal and write reflection on their learning; this in turn helped them make progress in their learning (T1, T2, T4, T7, T8, T12, & T15).

More flexibility for students

As explained by some teachers, "students are more flexible with blended learning because they can decide when and where to do their study" (T9); "Students have more options to choose which one is the most suitable or the best learning strategies" (T13). Also, "it's up to the students to decide how much time" to take part in online learning (T7); and they could learn "at their own pace" because the time was "more flexible with blended learning" (T9).

Good channel to increase interaction

Eight out of 15 teachers claimed the convenience of online interaction. As said by T2, "blended learning is good for interaction". Because in face-to-face class, the time for discussion was fixed and limited to only two periods, there was not enough time for further discussion after the lessons (T1, T2, T7, & T15). Being more detailed, T4 said:

> Sometimes I cannot interact directly with each student in our class, but with blended learning, it means that they can send me individual their comment or their feedback and I can give them the explanation, my feedback to students, each student, so individually, it's very useful.

Closer teacher-students relationship

Nine out of 15 teachers mentioned that "using blended learning is a way to build the relationship between teacher and students" (T15). Thanks to online channels for interaction, "the relationship between the teacher and the students is enhanced in blended learning" (T13). Instead of being a lecturer, teachers became "a friend or, or a participant in the classroom only, not as a teacher", or "a coordinator" "a facilitator" for online activities (T2, T7, T6, & T9).

Great source of materials

Six teachers admitted the benefit of blended learning regarding the source of materials. Online materials were said to be more "resourceful" according to T14:

> One student contributes one source of material, another student contributes to another source of material and so they have like a library of tests and like materials for their practice… for me I also accumulate the sources of materials, portfolio and text.

Importantly, blended learning was believed to be bring more "authentic material" and useful for students because "some textbooks we use at school is somehow outdated, you know, the world is changing every single moment, and when students they study online and they read newspaper online, they get updated with the information" (T3).

More helpful for teaching activities

Blended learning was reported to assist teachers very much in their teaching. T2, who has used blended learning for a long time, confirmed that blended learning has helped her to make "classroom management" easier and "do a better job of assessing my students' needs and level"; since:

I can just look at the grades and I could just see who has done their homework, who's not, just overall I sometimes just go through the grades of each student and see if it's too high or too low and see like what's the range so I can kind of the idea of where the students are.

Four teachers said it was easier for them to keep track of students online, and to manage their participating: "more or less I can control whether my students learn or not by looking at the updated time" (T3). Remarkably, in blended learning, one of them confirmed that teachers "may take advantages of other forms of assessment, not only summative like wait for the final examination but also formative, they can assess on the whole process of learning of the students" (T13).

Source for professional development

Four of the teachers who used blended learning shared that "when you are using blended learning, you are learning too" (T3). As T4 clarified, while searching for online materials for the students, "I read a lot, and I access to get more information on internet… I feel very interesting because I learn a lot of new things myself". Besides, T7 revealed that "we can learn from the students, a lot", because for students' work, "some presentation are very good, you don't need to, to do anything more, and you can use that presentation for your lecture, for the, for the other class".

Cost saving

One out of 13 teachers applying the approach and one out of the two who did not apply mentioned the cost saving as a benefit of blended learning. As for their explanation, when using online materials, teachers "don't have to collect the material, I mean hard copy, because they are on the web" (T9); or "another important thing is that actually students will save money in receiving photocopying, receive materials in paper (T3)".

Keep updated with latest teaching approach

As mentioned by three teachers, one of the reasons motivating them to use blended learning was that it helped them keep up with the innovation in teaching methodology. T14 said:

I think the benefit is that I am keeping up with the trends in ELT method, because like using blended learning is an innovation in current teaching in the world and if I am so technology ahh... lag back… I will be out of date.

One even said she felt "more professional" to use technology in her teaching practice and "it is more suitable for our life today" (T12).Apart from the motivation, the following themes also emerged from the data analysis as the barriers that prevent teachers from using the blended learning approach in their teaching practice.

Technology issues

The interviews revealed three aspects to technology issues, namely, limited knowledge and skills of using technology, technical problems, and fast changing technology.

Many teachers, especially the ones with over 10 years of teaching experience, admitted that they were not good at technology and using technology. This makes it more difficult for teachers to organize and manage the online learning part, as explained by T11: "because I'm not good at using technology as well, so it's quite, you know it's quite hard for me to control all my students". Seriously, not only the teacher but also, as mentioned by T2, "some students are very very poor in technology", especially those who were "from rural area" so "I have to create every single account for students" when organizing a new online platform

Most teachers revealed that technical problems happened quite often: "While I'm preparing, sometimes I'm going to finish and just a click, everything disappear, I feel like crazy... and another point, we have to download or install some of the software and the computer works like very slowly" (T5). Another one said "my computer was with full of virus because I downloaded some kinds of software to create the slideshows and post that online for my classes" (T15). These technical problems were really a big challenge for the teachers. As teacher 13 stated "sometimes the technological difficulties may demotivate the teachers".

The fast changing technology was also a barrier to other teachers. Teachers found it troublesome when "technology changes very quickly"; and "I have to learn about the, I mean update the knowledge about the technology every week, every month…and I feel really tired" (T6). Moreover, some online platforms or software "update every 6 months" and, as T4 said, they had "to buy the new version".

Time consuming

The biggest barrier mentioned by all of the teachers, especially for one of the two who did not use this approach was that "it's much, much more time consuming" than the traditional face to face method, as T2 said: "it's very time consuming to get the website up and running… It's very time consuming to, like, do an online kind of homework... It's very time consuming to go over each student writing and write comment".

Large number of students

Four teachers mentioned the large number of students they were in charge per semester as one of the biggest barriers for their use of blended learning. As stated by T8, "the teachers try to use blended learning, but because of the number of students…large class size…most of classes are from 50 to 55 students…I think 30 students is ideal". T15 also added:

> If I can teach like 5 classes per week, then I can have 5 online platforms for those classes, but if I need to teach like 13 like during the last semester…I think it would be impossible for me to do blended teaching.

Lack of human interaction for language skills practice

Three out of the 13 teachers who applied blended learning said that in some situations, face to face learning was better, and they spent more time on face to face interaction because online interaction was not suitable for language skills practice. As T12 said, "face-to-face activities have the emotional interaction"; and she "can see the motivation from students". T15 also explained:

> We can understand students more, we can know their difficulty, especially practical skills… for face to face…they can improve their communication skills… they can learn how to read the behavior or the expression from the other, so this is more human and this is more interesting.

Lack of support from the institution

The teachers in the study indicated that lack of support from the institution was in five forms: Lack of policy and guideline; lack of facilities; lack of technical support; lack of training; lack of financial support; and lack of collaboration.

Lack of policy and guideline pertaining to blended learning became evident from the interviews with the teachers. Eight out of 15 teachers mentioned there was only the oral encouragement from the president of the university and dean of the faculty to use blended learning to "enhance…teaching and learning", but it was "not formal encouragement". As emphasized by T12: "they encourage us to do but they don't have any specific guideline". T2 also confirmed that she did research on this issue at the university and the results showed "there are no clear policies and guideline".

Four teachers mentioned they were not satisfied with the facilities provided at the university. As summarized by T2, the facilities provided at the university was "nothing close to what I want"; although "every room has computers which they got, have internet nowadays, sometimes it doesn't run

but… more often than not, it works". T1 also said "especially with the lack of facilities, sometimes students said they cannot access the course because the internet connection is so weak, or they didn't have, they don't have any devices".

The teachers also experienced lack of technical support for problems related to blended learning. Most of the teachers said they had little support to solve the technical problems. As T1 said, "most of the time I try to solve out everything myself". T12 emphasized, when she needed help from the technician, they would not be there immediately: "sometimes I have a technical problem but 1 week, two weeks, they solve the problem; that is too late". Most importantly, regarding the quality of technician staff at the university, according to T2, there are not "any sort of person that they can come with expertise in technology, but at least understand … simple ideas about teaching and language teaching".

The teachers also reported that they lacked training to apply blended learning. Nine teachers reported training workshop or seminar for teachers' professional development regarding the applying of blended learning was not very often. "There has been nothing so far… I remember once, 3 or 4 years ago, there was a workshop to train how to use Moodle… and since that workshop was held, nothing more" (T1); "I don't know if I miss it or not, but I haven't attended any workshop on blended learning" (T9).

The lack of funding was mentioned by seven teachers to be great barrier for them to use blended learning, because "you can't do so much with so little money" (T2). Four of them said they needed the money to buy the "license" and get access to some online sources that required payment: "we have to pay money and the school sometimes they do not give us enough right to access some websites that I think it's good for my teaching activities" (T6).

There was also lack of collaboration among teachers, making it challenging to manage students' learning activities in the blended mode. Twelve out of 13 teachers who applied this approach confirmed that there was little cooperation. It just happened in small groups "of colleagues that you are kind of close to"; and it was "just kind of informal" meetings at coffee shops (T3).

More challenging to manage students' learning activities

While some teachers said that blended learning could help them to manage their students' learning better, one of the two teachers who did not use blended learning believed that one of the barriers was their inability to control how students performed online tasks. T9 said "we can't control the time they work online". T4 clarified that students can be distracted with other online activities, "for example they play game, or they chat with their friends, or they use Facebook … or personal work".

Two other teachers reported the dishonest action of students when they did the tasks online. T15 further explained: "I need to trust the students but the reality has showed me a number of cases where the students do something for their friends".

Low economic background of students

Four teachers mentioned the low economic background of the students as a barrier for blended learning to be applied successfully. As mentioned by T6, "some of the students in our school, they do not have the condition... to follow all of our online activities, so traditional method should be good for them". T2 even emphasized this as the very big challenge to implement blended learning, since "most of the students in our university are from poor area, who don't have access to computer or never seen it, so it's really hard to chase foreign standard, international standard".

Discussion

Motivation for university language teachers to apply blended learning

The results of our study regarding the motivation indicate that blended learning has a high potential to create the favorable environment to improve effective teaching and learning, as discussed in Graham, Woodfield, and Harrison (2013); Heinze and Procter (2004); Ocak (2011), and Šafranj (2013). Evidently, there is a positive change in students' learning habits and attitudes; they become more active, dynamic and independent, as well as more autonomous and responsible for their own learning. Also, blended learning, with the online component, does provide students more time to learn beyond class activities. Teachers can also give more tasks to their students to increase their learning time than in traditional face-to-face methods. Moreover, online materials for teaching and learning are also more diverse and authentic, which means they bring many choices for the learners as well as teachers. Importantly, the factor emphasized the most is the convenience of online interaction. Online channels are said to be much easier and help to bring teacher and students closer to each other, and develop the interaction between them (Jusoff & Khodabandelou, 2009). Via these online channels, teacher and all students are brought together; and this consequently helps to increase the opportunities for students to learn, not only from the teacher, but also from their peers. Connection with others will also create the sense of community, which is claimed to be able to contribute to the development of students' levels of thinking (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Besides, effective teaching is explained when blended learning can help teachers to organize and manage the classes better, because it cannot happen in a poorly managed class (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). Teachers can also keep track of and see the progress their students make during the semester via online

assessment, which happens continuously for the whole learning process. Also, the findings show that the pedagogy of the teachers who apply blended learning becomes more diverse. It goes from classroom lectures by the teacher to more group-oriented work for students via presentation or online discussion, to peer-assisted learning via peer evaluation and feedback, and finally self-regulated learning for the students via different online activities outside class. This is in line with Graham (2006) who addressed the pedagogy richness as a benefit of blended learning.

Second, Graham (2006) also mentions two other factors that motivate teachers to use blended learning, namely, flexibility and cost-saving. These factors are also confirmed to be true based on the data of our study. Flexibility is shown via the fact that the learning time becomes more flexible, and students can learn at their own pace. Besides, students can also have different learning strategies for themselves with online activities. This can also be referred to the argument made by Heinze and Procter (2004) who suggest that blended learning supports students' differentiation and serves different types of learners. Remarkably, blended learning is also shown by the data to be cost-effective, but unlike in Maulan and Ibrahim (2012), who refer to infrastructures as well as the maintenance of classroom buildings, the teachers in this study explain it by stating that it is money-saving not to buy hard copy materials.

Our findings also provide that the most interesting results, however, fall into two other categories that have not been discussed in the literature. The first one is that the online component of blended learning approaches is seen by teachers as a good source for their professional development. Actually, blended learning is argued by Owston, Sinclair, and Wideman (2008) to have potential as a means for professional development in the field of Mathematics and Sciences, but not yet in any study on language teaching. According to the evidence from this research, teachers can develop themselves professionally by preparing for online activities, since they are required to do much more research or reading on a topic to select the most suitable materials, which, in turn, helps them to widen their knowledge. Also, the sharing of materials, students' work or experience via online platforms also helps teachers to learn from their students in the sense that there can be good sources of materials, new experience or ideas among many students that teacher can use for their future lectures. The other new factor emerging is that language teachers are also motivated to use blended learning because they feel the need to keep them updated with innovative teaching approaches, or keep them updated with the fast changes in the era of technology. Especially in a developing country like Vietnam, where technology integration in education happens more slowly than in developed countries, some teachers see the need to normalize the use of technology as a tool, not as the center of attention, but as a means to support teaching and learning.

Barriers for university language teachers to applying blended learning approach

The barriers when moving to a newer teaching approach are probably inevitable, and they can even outweigh the motivation. Basically, the results of this study reveal both external barriers and internal barriers as mentioned by Ertmer et al. (2012). However, the more considerable ones seem to fall into the former.

First of all, regarding the external barriers, the two primary factors that prevent the use of blended learning are time and technology. Since in most cases, language teachers are not expert in information and communication technology (ICT) (Hubackova, 2015), ICT literacy becomes one of the weaknesses for many of them, especially for the older generation who were born before technology was brought into education. Limited knowledge and skills about technology also lead to the fact that teachers find it much more complicated to solve technical problems, while the fast development in this field also requires them to continue learning and stay updated. Moreover, there is the concern that teachers may spend more time on learning a new technology than on improving student learning experience (Klein, Spector, Grabowski, & Teja, 2004). This is evident by the results indicating that teachers need a lot of time to learn to use the technology, and to learn how to solve technical problems themselves. Another big obstacle, therefore, is that teaching online can be time-consuming. In addition to the time needed to learn about new technology, teachers also need much more time for other work such as preparing for both types of activities, setting up and running an online platform, researching to select the most suitable materials for their students, and giving continuous feedback on students' work, particularly when the teachers have to deal with so many students. Significantly, while blended learning is believed to have the ability to meet the needs of a greater number of students (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; King & Arnold, 2012), the findings from this study are the opposite. Specifically, a large number of students here means more challenges for teachers, and becomes a great barrier for the use of blended learning approach. Especially at the selected university, where teachers still have many classes in a semester, and each class has from 40 to 60 students; it definitely takes them a lot of time to answer students' questions, to take part in online discussion with different groups, and to give feedback to the work of hundreds, or even thousands of students. In brief, since it is so time-consuming, blended learning is limited to the full use, or even denied by the teachers.

Another important external barrier is that while institutional support are important for the implementation of blended learning (Ocak, 2011), the results shows a shortage of support from the university in terms of facilities, policy, training sessions, financial and technical support. Although there are necessary facilities such as internet, computer, CD player, projector, and speakers provided, as reflected by many teachers, they are not always helpful.

Remarkably, there are no policies and clear guidelines about using blended learning at the institutional level. It is significant to have a formal approach to the development of policies to support blended learning (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). However, for teachers at the university in this study, it is all about personal choice. No official policy leads to the lack of training sessions since there will be no funding for it. Evidently, teachers either look for free platforms or pay money by themselves to gain access to online sources. Some teachers even pay money to take online course for their professional development regarding blended learning. Besides, technical problems happen very often but the technician team is not helpful because they are not well-trained; and they are not experts in teaching methodology.

Also, although blended learning is argued to help provide better and easier communication (Jusoff & Khodabandelou, 2009; Okaz, 2015), the results show that it is different in language teaching and learning. As responded by the teachers, since language learning needs a lot of practice, it is better for their students to have face-to-face direct interaction. Noticeably, there are two aspects arising from the results which have not been discussed in the literature and can be listed as external barriers. First, it is the low economic background of the students, particularly since Vietnam is still a developing country and many students come from regions where devices for online learning are not available. This, in turn, means students from these regions are not often equipped with knowledge of how to use technology. Second, some students are not well-disciplined or independent. Although it is a small number, there are still students who do not efficiently complete online assignments.

Regarding the internal barriers, such as teachers' confidence or belief about teaching and learning (Ertmer et al., 2012), the data also indicates a slight difference because this is just a minor reason and happens in a small number of teachers. It is also the minority who thinks that technology should only be an additional source and cannot replace the teacher. In short, it is mainly about the external barriers as discussed above that slow them down or demotivate them. Finally, Ocak (2011) and Yang (2014) both mentioned the changing role as a barrier for the teacher to move to blended learning, but the results of this study showed that it is not. Teachers are willing to accept the change from being a lecturer to being a facilitator, a friend of the students. They now accept to be told by students to adjust their method if it is not suitable; and they are even happy to see their learners becoming more centered and active in their learning process.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the motivation as well as the barriers for university language teachers to apply blended learning in their teaching practices. By using a qualitative approach, a case study was done at the University of Foreign Languages, Hue University in Vietnam. Data

analysis from the 15 semi-structured interviews has shown some remarkable results. Beside the factors that were confirmed in previous research as mentioned in the literature, this study also brings some additional ideas concerning the motivation and barriers for language teachers in applying the innovative approach of blended learning. First, it is confirmed that blended learning can help enhance effective learning and teaching practices by increasing the learning time for students, making them more active in their learning, offering more chances to increase interaction between teacher and students, offering more diverse and authentic sources of materials, and developing the formative assessment for students' progress. Along with the existing motivation, two additional elements found in this research are the chance for teachers to develop themselves professionally via online sources; and the need of teachers to keep updated with the development of technology. In terms of the barriers, this research shows blended learning is still a big challenge for teachers to use it fully. External factors such as technological issues, time consuming, institutional support, and environment for effective communication have been confirmed. Likewise, the large number of students, their self-awareness and low economic background are three additional barriers emerged from the findings to be the challenges for teachers.

There are some limitations of the study. Firstly, since the sample of the research is quite small (n =15) and the scope is only in one institution, it is unavoidable that the results may not be generalized to the wider population. Secondly, though the invitation was sent to more male participants, only one of them participated in the research. The author supposed there could be different motivation and barriers for different gender; but since the number is too small, it could not be discussed. This could be seen as an aspect that may be further explored in future research. Third, this study employed only one method of in-depth interview. To improve the validity of the findings, future studies can use the triangulation method, and combine interview data with other data types such as class observation, focus group and survey.

Despite the limitation, there are several pedagogical implications from the findings of this research. First, it is important to create more favorable conditions for the use of blended learning, i.e., to deal with the external barriers if we want blended learning to be better implemented. There must be a clear policy and guidelines from the policy maker at the institutional level so that blended learning can be applied more consistently. The facilities should be reinforced, the number of students in each class and the number of class for a teacher in each semester should be reduced, more training should be provided for both technicians and teachers, and more collaboration should be encouraged among the teachers. If these issues can be addressed, it is potential that blended learning can have bigger chances to develop. Second, it is actually not simple to make blended learning comprehensively applied in less developed countries; since it is difficult for them to meet the requirements that have just been raised in the first point. Therefore, although it can be positive, it may take much more time and effort to bring blended learning to a stage of

being more popular and perfectly adapted.

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