

Benefits and challenges of using LMS in blended learning: Views from EFL teachers and students at a Vietnamese public university

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Learning Management System (LMS), EFL teachers, EFL students, blended learning

Blended learning combines conventional classroom activities and online learning using a variety of educational technology tools, Learning Management System (LMS) included. The purpose of this paper is to examine the perceptions of EFL teachers and students about the use of LMS in blended courses. A mixed research method was adopted to collect data from 14 EFL teachers and 130 EFL students at a public university in central Vietnam through a web-based questionnaire and follow-up semi-structured interviews. The findings show that LMS offers EFL teachers and students a variety of benefits, including effective course organization and management, diverse teaching methods, flexible learning and teaching activities, and enhanced engagement and autonomy among students. However, the use of LMS in blended learning is perceived to be challenging because of technical issues such as unstable Internet connection and lack of needed devices, limited technical experience and skills, and a lack of e-learning pedagogy. Therefore, some recommendations were also proposed to improve the effectiveness of using LMS in blended learning.

Introduction

Blended learning, which is defined as the combination of traditional classrooms and virtual learning environments, has become a popular trend in recent years thanks to the advent of educational technology. A wide range of tools will be required to create an online learning platform that can support conventional lessons. Among the necessary tools for online learning activities, Dawley (2007) stated that a learning management system, often known as LMS, is a versatile tool that integrates all the functions teachers and students need to carry out effective teaching and learning activities. LMS is now a popular tool used widely in many institutions, especially at the tertiary level around the world in general (Aldiab et al., 2019; Lewis, 2016; Mtebe & Kissaka, 2015) and in Vietnam in particular (Khoa et al., 2020). In fact, LMS is

becoming an indispensable part of the teaching and learning process, especially in the digital era. In the context of blended learning, the role of LMS is even more important because it is seen as a link to connect virtual and physical classroom activities as well as a means to promote the interaction between teachers and students.

In response to the common trend that has taken place at many universities in the world and in Vietnam, the University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Hue University (HUFLIS), has implemented a Moodle-based LMS for nearly 10 years to innovate the teaching and learning methods. However, it was not until 2020 that the use of a newly-built LMS, which can be accessed at <http://lms.huflis.edu.vn/>, was systematically and thoroughly implemented across the entire institution to meet the need for blended learning as well as online learning as an emergent response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In this study context, the LMS is used as a common platform where teachers from all faculties of the institution can create online learning activities as well as share learning materials so that students can easily and conveniently access them. Learning activities organized on the LMS are used as a supplementary part of the curriculum, supporting face-to-face classroom activities. Although LMS is a universal and familiar concept in education, the use of LMS in teaching and learning has still been a novel experience with the majority of teachers and students at this institution in general and EFL teachers and students in particular. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a study to investigate the EFL teachers' and students' perspectives on the use of LMS as part of the blended learning paradigm. This paper aims to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers and students in this institution of using LMS in blended learning. Specifically, the study objectives are twofold: 1) discovering how EFL teachers and students perceive the advantages and disadvantages of integrating LMS in EFL blended classrooms, and 2) collecting some suggestions that they think should be considered to improve the effectiveness of using LMS in the future.

Literature Review

Learning Management System

Learning Management System, shortly called LMS, has also been known by some other names such as Virtual Learning Environment - VLE or Course Management System - CMS (Kasim & Khalid, 2016; Piña, 2013). According to Rhode et al. (2017) and Kasim and Khalid (2016), LMS is defined as software that helps to manage and keep track of teaching and learning activities by allowing teachers and students to share learning materials and facilitate testing and assessment as well as enhance mutual communication between teachers and students via an online platform. Susanto et al. (2018) defined LMS as application software that allows students, content creators, lecturers, and administrators to access online learning content.

LMS can vary in its design and interface depending on whether it is a commercial product like Blackboard and Canvas or whether it is built upon a free open domain such as Moodle and Sakai and can be used in many different ways based on the needs of users. However, according to Dawley (2007), all LMSs are similar in that they provide users with tools to implement four main basic functions: 1) design and share learning content, 2) promote interaction between teachers and students, 3) assess students' progress, and 4) manage course content and students'

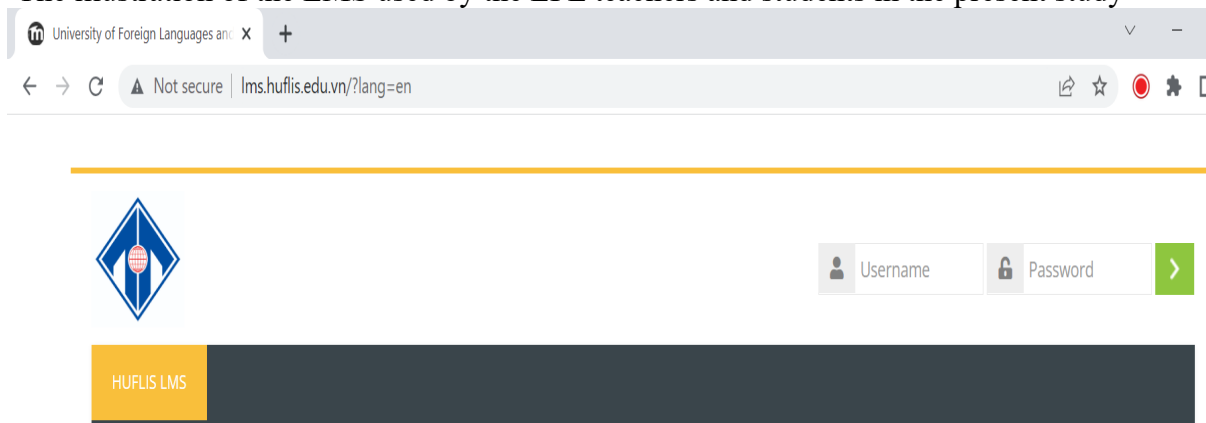
learning activities.

LMS provides teachers and students with a variety of functions that enable them to manage their teaching and learning activities flexibly, conveniently, and effectively on one single platform (Bradley, 2021). As it is an online application, LMS assists the teaching and learning process to take place with flexibility anywhere and at any time (Santiana et al., 2021). More than just a grade delivery service, Green and Chewing (2020) emphasizes that if appropriately used, LMS can be "a vehicle for critical pedagogy and praxis through technology" (p. 423). Kalinga (2010) said that LMS plays a significant role in online learning, while Kabassi et al. (2016) particularly emphasize the importance of LMS in blended learning. In the same vein, Reid and Reid (2019) believed that "learning management systems is a game-changer for traditional teaching and learning at adult and higher education institutions" (p.1).

LMS has been widely used in tertiary institutions worldwide because of its various benefits (Aldiab et al., 2019). Some of the most popularly used LMSs in universities around the world include Blackboard, Canvas, Sakai, eCollege, Moodle, etc. Among these LMSs, Moodle is a widely-chosen LMS that has been used in many institutions in Vietnam because of its user-friendliness, ease of use, and good technical support (Khoa et al., 2020). In this study, the term LMS is used to refer to a specific learning management system called <http://lms.huflis.edu.vn/> (see Figure 1), which is built on Moodle platform and is being used at the University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Hue University (HUFLIS), located in central Vietnam, where the research was conducted.

Figure 1

The illustration of the LMS used by the EFL teachers and students in the present study



Learning Management System and Technology Acceptance Model

This study focuses on exploring teachers' and students' perceptions of using LMS, which is often referred to as one of the state-of-the-art applications in education. As teachers and students are the primary users of this technological platform, it is believed that how they perceive it can greatly influence their adoption. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a widely recognized theoretical framework that explores users' acceptance and adoption of technology. It was developed by Davis (1989) and has since been widely used in various fields, including education. Therefore, this study employed the TAM as its theoretical framework to explore teachers' and students' perceptions of using LMS.

The TAM posits that two key factors influence users' acceptance of technology: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which individuals believe that using a particular technology will enhance their performance or productivity in achieving specific goals. When users perceive technology as useful, they are more likely to adopt and utilize it. The second factor of the TAM is perceived ease of use, which relates to the perception of how easy or effortless it is to use technology. When users perceive technology as easy to use, they are more likely to have a positive attitude toward it and be willing to adopt it.

In the context of blended learning, it can be inferred from the TAM that if teachers and students perceive the LMS as a useful tool for facilitating their teaching and learning experiences, they will tend to have a positive attitude and enthusiastic adoption of LMS in their practice. Likewise, it can be understood that teachers' and students' perceptions of the ease of using the LMS can also influence the way they employ this tool as part of blended learning. Regarding the study objectives, the perceived usefulness of LMS can broadly refer to its benefits, while the perceived ease of use can relate to its challenges. The following sections present the benefits and challenges of using LMS from the perspectives of different scholars.

Benefits of Using a Learning Management System

There are some noticeable benefits that LMS brings to teachers, students as well as administrators. First of all, Liu et al. (2019) believe that multifunctionality is one undeniable merit of using LMS as it provides teachers and students with all the tools they need for their teaching and learning activities just on one single platform. This convenience means that instead of combining different tools to design lessons, transmit the lessons to students, create tests, track students' learning activities, and interact with students, teachers now just need to access LMS to perform all the above tasks. Similarly, this all-in-one technical tool is everything that students need for their online learning.

Secondly, Kasim and Khalid (2016) said that most LMSs are designed to be user-friendly so that even people who have basic technical skills can learn to use LMS successfully with some initial guides. In addition, users can also manipulate LMS easily because of its simply-designed interface. LMS platforms often provide intuitive and visually appealing interfaces. The layout and organization of the platform are designed to be clear and straightforward, enabling users to locate and access the necessary tools and resources quickly. Icons, menus, and navigation paths are often designed to be intuitive, reducing the learning curve for users and allowing them to interact with the system seamlessly. Moreover, teachers can easily create and organize learning materials, such as documents, presentations, videos, and assessments, using simple and familiar editing tools on LMS. Uploading and sharing content is often as simple as drag-and-drop or a few clicks, allowing teachers to deliver their instructional materials to students efficiently.

Thirdly, authors like Cavus and Alhih (2014) and Choi (2019) mentioned interactivity as one of the advantages that LMS has over other teaching and learning tools because it enables interaction between teachers and students, students and students through communicative functions like Forums, Wiki and so on. As Garrison (2011) emphasized, online learning should not be just a one-way process in which learning materials are merely transmitted to students by

teachers, but it should be interactive. Therefore, the interaction-facilitating feature of LMS is very significant for both teachers and students.

Fourthly, according to Holmes and Prieto-Rodriguez (2018) and Santiana et al. (2021), flexibility is also an important benefit that LMS offers both teachers and students. LMS is especially useful for blended learning because teachers and students can have easy access to learning resources everywhere and at any time. Specifically, suppose on-campus learning activities are interrupted by natural disasters or sudden disease outbreaks such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In that case, students can still maintain their learning process by accessing designed learning materials and participating in learning activities on LMS. Besides, students can choose to revise the lessons shared on LMS as many times as they wish at their convenience, regardless of time and space, which is very useful for their learning pace and autonomy. Pham (2023) indicated that the combination of face-to-face and LMS learning activities enables students to become more autonomous as they have more chances to choose their time and place of learning as well as access a variety of learning materials at their own pace.

Fifthly, Aldiab et al. (2019) and Snoussi (2019) mentioned that another important benefit of using LMS is accessibility. Users can easily access LMS on a wide range of technological devices, such as laptops, desktops, and smartphones or tablets, through different web browsers or mobile applications. This makes LMS accessible to most users. Finally, as Piña (2013) and Khan et al. (2019) commented, LMS features contribute to the security of the courses. In fact, LMS allows administrators to assign roles to users, so it is effective and easy to manage the users' activities on LMS. Accordingly, only assigned teachers and enrolled students can have access to courses on LMS. Moreover, teachers can ensure the security of their courses by providing students with course ID or enrolment codes, which helps them avoid undesirable course participants. In fact, these aforementioned merits of using LMS make it a top educational tool for modern classrooms.

Challenges of Using a Learning Management System

Despite the undeniable advantages of using Learning Management Systems (LMS), it is also important to acknowledge and thoroughly examine the challenges that LMS users often face. Research conducted by Sayfour (2016) and Bhalalusesa et al. (2013) highlights one of the most common drawbacks reported by LMS users, which is related to internet connectivity. The reliance on a slow or unstable internet connection can disrupt the use of LMS and significantly impact the teaching and learning process. As Uong, Nguyen, and Nguyen (2022) claimed, the Internet connection is often one of the most popular challenges that teachers encounter when carrying out online learning activities.

In addition to connectivity issues, studies by Al-Handhali et al. (2020) and Darvin et al. (2021) shed light on another challenge associated with LMS usage, namely the simply-designed interface of most LMS platforms. This simplistic design often leads to a monotonous and unattractive user experience, which can result in boredom among users. Consequently, maintaining user engagement becomes more challenging when utilizing LMS.

Furthermore, Bhalalusesa et al. (2013) point out that teachers and students often feel that they lack adequate guidance and instructions on how to effectively navigate and utilize LMS. This

absence of comprehensive guidance creates difficulties for users during their LMS application, hindering their ability to leverage the full potential of the system. Moreover, it is worth noting that using technological advancements, particularly LMS, requires users to possess a certain level of knowledge and skills (Al-Handhali et al., 2020). Many teachers and students admit that technology is not their forte, making it challenging for them to navigate and troubleshoot technical issues that may arise due to their limited technical knowledge and skills. Insufficient technical literacy and a lack of robust technical support, as highlighted by Sackstein et al. (2019), are common barriers that impede the effective utilization of LMS.

Lastly, Al-Handhali et al. (2020) emphasize the need for teachers to make proper adjustments in transitioning from a traditional learning environment to a virtual one. However, several teachers find it challenging to design and implement teaching activities on LMS in a manner that effectively supports students in achieving their desired learning outcomes. Consequently, teachers must strive to harmoniously combine technological and pedagogical elements to optimize the learning experience within the virtual context.

To fully grasp the challenges associated with LMS usage, it is crucial to consider these aforementioned factors, including internet connectivity, interface design, guidance and support, technological knowledge and skills, technical literacy, and pedagogical adaptation. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, educators and learners can work towards maximizing the benefits offered by LMS while mitigating the potential obstacles that may arise.

Previous studies

Recently, a wide range of research has been conducted to acquire insight into the benefits and challenges of using LMS of different kinds from the viewpoints of both teachers and students in higher education in global contexts. For example, Zakaria et al. (2020) investigated the perspectives of undergraduates about the merits and demerits of using Google Classroom, a free access LMS offered by Google. The data were collected from a survey and semi-structured interviews with the participation of 103 students (60 females and 43 males) from a public university in Malaysia. The findings revealed that students perceived four major benefits that Google Classroom offered, including paperless communication, ease of access, interactions within a web-based community, and systematic class management. These students, however, also admitted that they met a range of challenges when using this type of LMS, such as difficulties in comprehending the lessons, late teachers' feedback, unreliable Internet connections, lack of interpersonal interaction, and lack of support. In addition, Biney (2020) and Michael and Yaa (2020) also investigated learners' perspectives on the use of Sakai LMS in Ghana. The findings from Michael and Yaa (2020) suggest that the use of Sakai LMS, especially its collaboration and communication tools, can enhance interaction between students and content, teachers and students, and among students and their overall learning. Meanwhile, Biney (2020) found from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 50 adult learners that the majority of the learners faced such difficulties as lack of computer access, poor network, as well as power fluctuations when they started learning with the Sakai LMS.

In terms of teachers' and students' perceptions of LMS from the TAM perspectives, a number of studies have been reported in the literature. For instance, Alharbi and Drew (2014) adopted

the TAM to investigate the factors affecting teachers' attitudes toward the use of LMS in a public university in Saudi Arabia. A Likert-scale survey was used to collect data from 59 faculty members from different university colleges and departments to test whether teachers' perceived usefulness and ease of use of LMS affect their attitudes and intention to use LMS. The study findings validate the relationship between perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude towards usage, and overall impact on behavioral intention to use LMS in the study context. Also using TAM as a theoretical framework, Essel and Wilson (2017) investigated students' perceived usefulness as well as the perceived ease of use of Moodle in a specific university in Ghana. Data collected from 229 students through a questionnaire revealed that students' perceived usefulness of Moodle and perceived challenges in using Moodle had a significant contribution to their rate of Moodle use. Another study conducted in Brunie by Hamid, Salleh, and Laxman (2020) explored and explained the factors influencing students' acceptance of Learning Management Systems (LMS) as well as explained the effectiveness of using LMS in teaching and learning in a business school. This study used means of a survey questionnaire to collect responses from 98 students. It is revealed that the Subjective Norm and System Design significantly influence the students' LMS acceptance. The findings also show that content delivery on LMS helped to engage students and established viable interaction, which facilitated their understanding and better knowledge of their study.

In the EFL field, a number of studies have been conducted to investigate how teachers and students perceive the integration of LMS in English language education. For example, a study by Prasetya (2021) aimed at finding out the perceptions of EFL Indonesian teachers about the benefits and challenges when they integrated their lessons on Moodle LMS during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results from a survey with the participation of 54 English lecturers indicated that most lecturers had a positive perception of LMS. These participants mentioned a variety of benefits that they received when using LMS, including improving their quality of teaching and enhancing students' language abilities and self-learning competence. However, the study also showed that lecturers encountered many obstacles in terms of learning style and culture, e-learning pedagogy, technological problems, and time management when LMS is integrated into their teaching practice. Meanwhile, Elsayed (2022) conducted a qualitative study to explore the benefits and challenges of using Blackboard Collaborate as a learning tool from the perspectives of EFL students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia. The data were collected from focus group interviews with 15 students. The findings showed that using Blackboard Collaborate helps the students enhance online cooperative learning, flexible learning, access to a wide range of information for academic purposes, and the ability to use technology effectively. However, the findings showed that the challenges faced by these students include insufficient technical knowledge and training, limited and poor internet connection, inability to upload and download large-size files, and problems with logging in passwords.

In Vietnam, many researchers have also studied the use of LMS from both teachers' and students' views, especially during emergent distance teaching and learning because of the Covid-19 impacts. Studies by Nguyen (2021), Cao (2021), and Le and Tran (2022) showed that both teachers and students at tertiary institutions across the country appreciated the benefits that LMS offers and showed a high level of satisfaction in using LMS. For example, Nguyen (2021) explored the influential factors on students' satisfaction with learning management systems,

especially Blackboard and Edusoft. The study employed a quantitative questionnaire to collect data from 300 students at a public university in South Vietnam. The findings revealed that several factors of LMS could decide students' satisfaction, including announcement system, instruction information, interaction, and technology quality. The study also implied that these factors were also areas that need to be taken into consideration for improvements to make students more satisfied with LMS use. Meanwhile, in Le and Tran's study (2022), the use of Zalo, a popular social networking site in Vietnam, as an LMS in a Business Analysis course conducted at a practical college was examined. The findings from data collected from 111 students through an online survey show that students are generally satisfied with the use of Zalo as an LMS. However, loads of distractions from many Zalo groups and a low level of interaction among students in Zalo are reported to be some of the limitations which can affect the effectiveness of using this social platform as an LMS. In her study, Cao (2021) found that Moodle LMS is one of the most popular technological tools that language teachers at public university use in blended learning.

The aforementioned studies in both global and national contexts imply that the integration of LMS in education in general and in English language education, in particular, brings both advantages and disadvantages to the teaching and learning process.

However, the above previous studies pay more attention to the perceptions of teachers and students of other disciplines about the use of LMS, so little is known about the perspectives of those who are involved in the EFL field in the higher education context. Moreover, it can be seen that these previous studies only reported the perspectives of either teachers or students about the pros and cons of using LMS, and none of those studies attempted to investigate what teachers and students recommend to improve the quality of LMS adoption, especially in the EFL context in Vietnamese higher education.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the answers to the following research questions are sought:

1. What benefits and challenges do EFL teachers and students at HUFLIS have when using LMS in blended learning?
2. What do EFL teachers and students at HUFLIS recommend to improve the use of LMS in blended learning?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This study was conducted at the Faculty of English, University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Hue University, where the researcher is working.

Participants in the study included 14 EFL teachers and 130 EFL students, who were chosen using a convenient sampling technique. Among these participants, five teachers and 12 students were willing to participate in semi-structured interviews after the survey to discuss their responses to the survey items further. The teachers and students all have experienced using

LMS in their teaching and learning practice, especially during online learning due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The demographic information of these participants is summarized below:

Table 1

Demographics of the participants

Teachers (N=14)				
Gender	Male		Female	
	2		12	
Teaching experience	Under 5 years	5-10 years	10-15 years	Over 15 years
	3	2	2	7
Teaching expertise	Language skills	Linguistics	Translation - Interpretation	Teaching methodology
	5	3	4	2
Students (N=130)				
Gender	Male		Female	
	14		116	
Years of study	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
	0	54	56	20
Majors	English language teaching Linguistics		English language	
	09		121	

Design of the Study

This study was conducted by adopting the mixed research method to collect data; as Dornyei (2007) stated, the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches can help yield “an enriched understanding by illustrating, clarifying, or elaborating on certain aspects” (p.164). Accordingly, the data of this study were collected through a survey which was then followed by semi-structured interviews.

The instruments employed to collect data from the participants are two questionnaires, one for teachers and another for students, and a set of interview questions. The questionnaires include two parts: Part 1 aims at collecting general information about the surveyees, such as gender, years of teaching, and years of study, as summarized in Table 1 above; Part 2 consists of both close-ended and open-ended questions to investigate teachers and students' perceptions of LMS's advantages and disadvantages as well as their suggestions to improve the use of LMS. Initially, the first versions of the questionnaires were drafted based on the literature review and the research objectives and then piloted with the participation of three colleagues of the researcher and five students in her own classes. Meanwhile, the interview questions were closely designed in relevance to the questionnaire content so that the interviewees could share more information about their responses.

Data Collection & Analysis

The data collection procedure was carried out at the end of the Academic year 2020-2021, when the institution's LMS had been put into use in the previous semester as an immediate response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey was conducted both offline with printed questionnaires and online via web-based questionnaires at the participants' convenience. Meanwhile, follow-up semi-structured interviews were organized both offline around the campus and online via Zoom to get more insightful sharings from the teachers and students who had agreed to participate in the interviews. The participants' identities were assured to be kept confidential and anonymous.

The quantitative data collected from close-ended items in the questionnaires were calculated and presented in charts, whereas qualitative data collected from open-ended items and interview answers were synthesized and grouped using the thematic analysis technique to provide more in-depth support for quantitative findings. The thematic analysis was chosen to analyze the qualitative data as it is believed to be the most popular analysis method used in social science research (Dornyei, 2007)

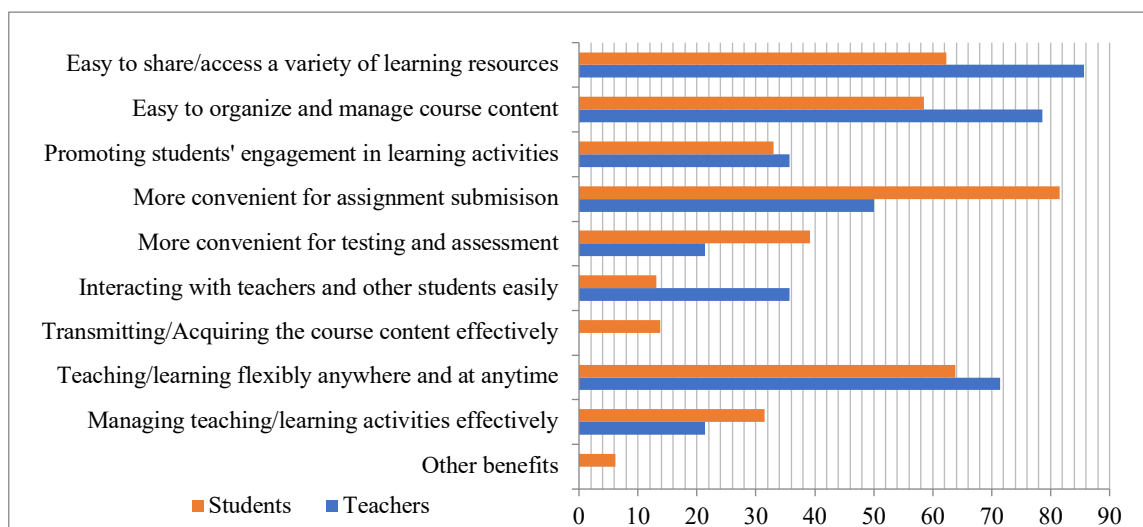
Results/Findings

Benefits that EFL teachers and students perceived from the use of LMS in blended learning

EFL teachers and students participating in the survey were asked to express their perspectives about the benefits that LMS brings them in blended learning. They were required to choose from the list of some suggested advantages of LMS, which have been collected and reported from the literature review as well as share their opinions on the other benefits of LMS that have not been included in the list. The statistics of teachers' and students' responses to the multiple-choice items are presented in the following figure.

Figure 3

Teachers' and students' perspectives on the benefits of using LMS



It can be seen from Figure 3 that the majority of survey participants highly appreciated the role

of LMS in blended learning because it is beneficial for them in certain ways. Particularly, the most widely-admitted benefits by both teachers and students are that LMS makes it easy to share or access learning materials (86% of teachers and 62% of students agree with this) and easy to organize and manage course content (78% of teachers and 58% students agree with this). Additionally, 71% of teachers and 64% of students agreed that teaching and learning on LMS is flexible compared to face-to-face classrooms. Besides, about 50% of teachers and over 80% of students said that using LMS is convenient for assignment submission. Although there is a slight difference in teachers' and students' preferences for each of these four advantages, it is noticeable that these features of LMS still outweigh other aspects mentioned in the list. Some other advantages of LMS, such as promoting students' engagement, better keeping track of students' learning activities, or convenience for testing and assessment, are also appreciated by teachers and students, but with much lower percentages.

In addition, some teachers and students in the survey also reported other advantages that they thought the integration of LMS brought to their teaching and learning process. Main themes were identified based on the semantic analysis of their answers, supported by some specific extracts from their responses in the survey. The summary of these responses is presented in the following table.

Table 2

Other benefits of using LMS shared by teachers and students in the survey

No.	Themes	Extracts from teachers' and students' responses
1	Various teaching activities	There are a wider variety of teaching activities in LMS than in a traditional classroom (T8).
2	Self-paced learning	I can revise the lessons many times (S19, S32). LMS helps me to save useful learning materials after each lesson so that I can revise them again later (S39, S44, SV87).
3	Better course management	I know when the deadlines are (S89). Course content can be organized more systematically (T6).
4	Time-saving	I can save time for traveling to the campus (S116, S32).
5	Learners' engagement	On LMS, students can be more flexible in presenting their viewpoints (S116).

As can be seen from Table 2, teachers and students mentioned some other benefits that using LMS support brought to their teaching and learning, including providing diverse teaching activities, supporting students' self-paced learning and engagement in learning, helping them manage course content effectively, and saving them time for traveling between their home and campus.

It can be seen from the above findings regarding the surveyed teachers' and students' perceptions of the benefits of LMS that both EFL teachers and students in the study highly appreciated the support of LMS towards their teaching and learning activities, especially in the organization and management of course content. In fact, one of the teachers revealed in the

follow-up interview that *'Since I used the LMS, I have organized my teaching materials in a clearer way, which helps me effectively manage my teaching content, especially when I have to be in charge of many courses at a time'* (T1). Similarly, a student said that *'My teacher shared many useful documents and links on LMS, so whenever I need to look at them, I only need to log in to my LMS account. It is very convenient for me'* (S8). This shows that LMS provides teachers and students a place where all the course content can be shared, organized, and accessed easily. Moreover, one teacher noted that *'there are a wider variety of teaching activities in LMS than in a traditional classroom'* (T8), which means that using LMS can change conventional teaching methods.

Based on teachers' and students' perceptions, flexibility is another merit of LMS in education. To specify, one teacher appreciated that *'Unlike traditional learning which has to take place at a certain classroom and on a fixed date and time, learning on LMS is much more flexible for me and my students because we can access the platform whenever and wherever we find it convenient'* (T3). Likewise, one of the students shared that *'I work part-time in a coffee shop, so my after-class schedule is quite busy. However, thanks to the LMS, I can still manage time to complete all of my assignments and revise the lessons when I have free time, even if it's at midnight'* (S2).

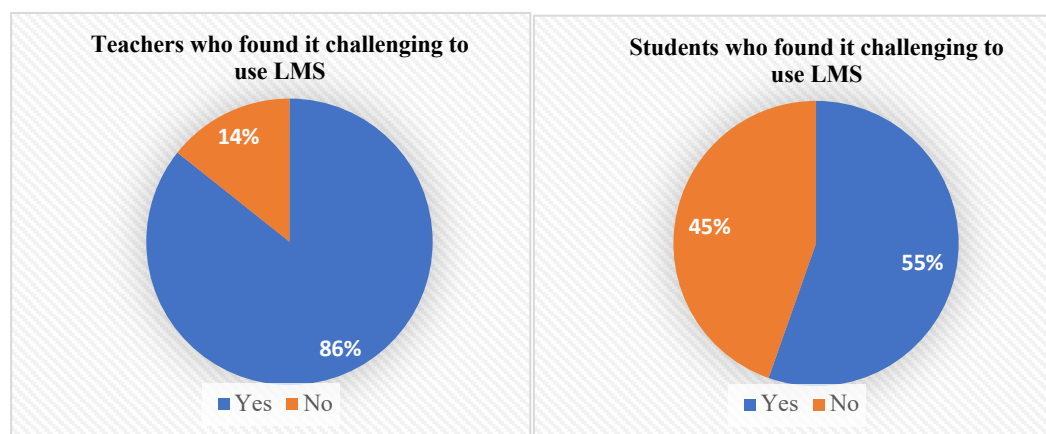
In addition, LMS is also appreciated by both teachers and students as it helps to boost students' engagement and autonomy in learning activities. As shared by students in the open-ended questions, LMS allows them to revise the lessons as many times as they wish, which facilitates their self-paced learning. Moreover, the anxiety-free learning environment and asynchronous communication on LMS enable many reserve students to be more confident in sharing their viewpoints and become more engaged in the learning process, which is quite challenging in traditional classrooms.

Challenges that teachers and students met when using LMS in online learning

Before finding out what specific problems teachers and students had in using LMS, the researcher would like to see how many teachers and students among the participants often found it challenging to use LMS. The finding to this question is shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4

The number of teachers and students who found it challenging to use LMS



As Figure 4 reveals, the majority of teachers (86%) and over half of the students (55%) who partook in the survey admitted that they had difficulties using LMS. To better understand the difficulties that teachers and students encountered in their reality of using LMS, they were asked to indicate what problems they met based on the list of disadvantages that have been shown in previous studies. Additionally, they had a chance to share more about other difficulties they had that were not available on the list.

Figure 5

Challenges that teachers and students often face when using LMS

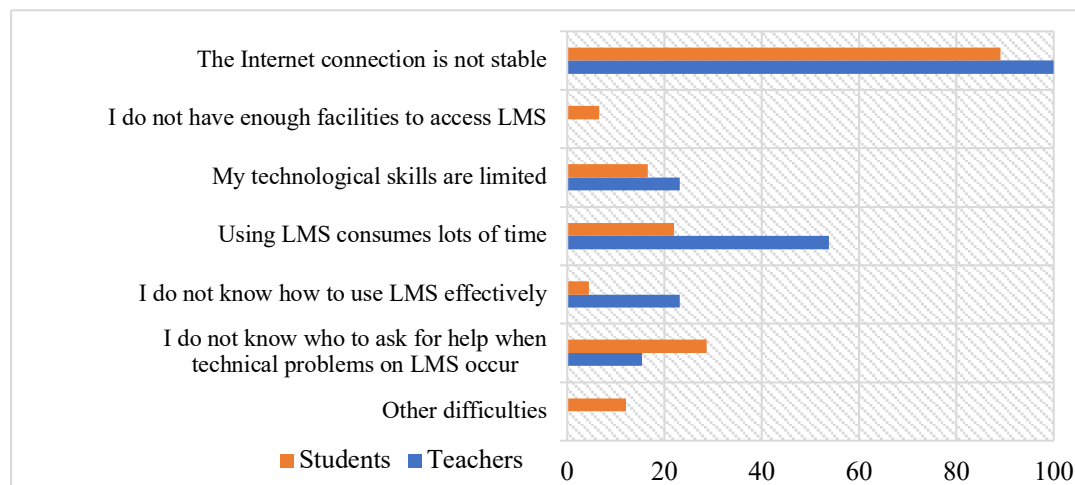


Figure 5 presents the summary of teachers' and students' responses about the popular problems that they had when using LMS. It can be easily seen that one of the most prevalent problems that both teachers and students faced and caused most of the inconvenience for them when using LMS is the unstable Internet connection because 100% of teachers and nearly 90% of students complained about this. Another big disadvantage that 54% of teachers were concerned about when using LMS is that it takes them a great amount of time to design and organize course content on LMS; therefore, they thought that the use of LMS is time-consuming. Moreover, there were about 20% of teachers admitted that their technical skills are limited and that they do not know all of the LMS functions; therefore, they found it challenging when using LMS.

From students' perspectives, besides the aforementioned common problems such as unstable Internet connection and time consumption, some other difficulties are more popularly met by students than teachers. Particularly, roughly 30% of students said that they lacked sufficient technical support when using LMS because they had no idea about whom to contact for help when they had problems. In addition, a small number of students (around 7%) shared that they lacked the necessary facilities, such as laptops, desktops, or smartphones, to access LMS in blended learning. Although this figure is humble, it reflects the fact that not every student has enough conditions for blended learning.

The table below also mentions some other challenges that teachers and students shared in the survey question. Again, based on their answers, some common themes were identified and exemplified by specific comments.

Table 3

Other challenges of using LMS shared by teachers and students in the survey

No.	Themes	Extracts from teachers' and students' responses
1	Unused functions	Many functions of LMS have not been discovered (T5).
2	Lack of effectiveness	It is more difficult to transmit the lesson content on LMS than in traditional classes (T13). Learning on LMS is difficult to understand the lesson content (S127).
3	LMS interface organization	I cannot find my courses on LMS (S117). There are too many courses on LMS, which makes me confused (S71). The interface of LMS is difficult to use (S102). The organization of courses on LMS is messy and easy to be mistaken (S88). The webpage format is messy, so it takes a lot of time to find the courses to enroll in (S90).
4	LMS unstable system	I have been kicked out of the courses regularly (S48). I do not know why I am unenrolled in the courses (S18). I am often kicked out of the system when taking tests (S31). I cannot access the course content (S94). The enrolled courses often disappear (S43). The webpage is out of work; I have lost all of my courses and have to wait for 2 days to submit my assignments (S100).
5	Cost of using LMS	Students who do not have wifi at home have to pay to use the Internet at the coffee shop (S127). It is costly to pay for Internet service on smartphones. (S80)
6	Effects on health	Looking at the screen for a long time makes my eyes hurt (S78).
7	Lack of interpersonal interaction	There is a lack of interaction because many teachers only upload lessons on LMS without any explanations. (S5).

As can be seen from Table 3, some teachers and students also listed other difficulties that they often faced when using LMS during blended learning, such as the lack of interaction and effectiveness, the limitations of LMS in terms of its unorganized interface and instability as well as the negative effects of using the LMS on their budget and health.

In terms of the challenges faced by these EFL teachers and students when using LMS, it can be recognized that technical issues such as unstable Internet connectivity and limited Internet access are often the most frequently-met problem for LMS users. The inconvenience caused by the low Internet connection might prevent both teachers and students from effective use of LMS in their teaching and learning activities. For example, a student complained that '*I was often kicked out of my courses on LMS, and sometimes automatically logged out when the tests were in progress*' (S11). Meanwhile, one of the teachers participating in the interview shared that '*in*

addition to the great workload that I needed to do to create weekly lessons for several courses on LMS, the instability of the network and slow processing speed of the LMS server also took me a huge amount of time to wait for the complete manipulation each time' (T1).

Students' lack of facilities and Internet access is also a practical problem that must be considered. As shared by one student, *'My parents couldn't afford to buy me a laptop, so I have to depend on the available computer in our university library for accessing learning materials on LMS, which is quite inconvenient' (S6).* In addition, the lack of technical support and inadequate technical skills were also perceived as great obstacles that hinder teachers and students when they integrate LMS in their lessons. To exemplify, one student said that *'I had problems when accessing the LMS, but I didn't know whom to ask for help; I once asked my teacher, but she seemed to be confused as well' (S5).*

On top of these technical problems, teachers and students seemed more concerned about the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities on LMS. For example, a teacher shared that *'It is more difficult to transmit the lesson content on LMS than in traditional classes' (T13),* while a student also admitted that *'learning on LMS is difficult to understand the lesson content' (S127).* Actually, the mismatch between technological integration and e-learning pedagogy has always been of great concern that teachers encounter when they change from traditional teaching methods to online teaching activities. In the context of this study, most teachers at the institution were unprepared to use LMS, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, they were urged to use LMS to implement online teaching in addition to traditional lessons on the campus. Therefore, they had not had sufficient previous experience and skills in designing and implementing learning activities on LMS.

EFL teachers and students' recommendations to improve the quality of using LMS

In the survey, the EFL teachers and students were asked to share some suggestions that they think should be taken into account to improve the effectiveness of using LMS in blended learning. There were a total of 62 suggestions from the teachers and students through the survey's open-ended questions and follow-up interviews. These suggestions were synthesized and categorized into groups into themes and sub-themes based on their similarity in semantic meanings. Overall, the suggestions made by EFL teachers and students tend to be relevant to the difficulties that they often had, as discussed in the previous part. The summary of their suggestions is presented as follows:

Table 4

Teachers' and students' recommendations to improve the quality of using LMS

No.	Themes	Sub-themes	No. of responses
1	Technological infrastructure	Improve the Internet connection and server	19
2	LMS quality and functions	Improve the LMS stability	15
		Redesign and reorganize the LMS interface	9
		Add a notification feature on LMS	6
		Make use of the video-conferencing function on LMS	3
3	Teachers' responsibility	Improve the teachers' use of LMS	6
		Provide more teachers' support	4
4	Administrators and IT staff's responsibility	Provide more technical support	6
		Provide more training, workshops, and seminars	4

As can be noticed from Table 4, one of the top suggestions that most EFL teachers and students proposed is the improvement of technological infrastructure. Specifically, they mentioned the necessity to upgrade the Internet connection and server to avoid the interruption of LMS use, especially during the peak time in the university's planned schedules. As one teacher mentioned in the interview, *'the fact that LMS was overloaded and out of work not only affects the online teaching and learning process but also wastes a huge amount of time for both teachers and students (T5)*. As a result, the improvement in the Internet connection and LMS server is one of the greatest concerns of many EFL teachers and students to make sure that teaching and learning activities can be smoothly implemented.

The second aspect which needs improving is the quality of the LMS itself. There is a need to adjust the interface of the current LMS to make it more user-friendly and clearly organized so that both teachers and students can easily manipulate the LMS. More specifically, in terms of the interface design, it is suggested that *'the font size should be bigger and that each course should have a unique profile image for students to recognize it easily' (S7)*. Furthermore, *'there should be a function that allows students to change from this semester to another one so that we can better keep track of their current and previous courses' (S10)*. Another suggestion regarding the LMS features that some EFL teachers and students mentioned is that it should have a notification reminder so that students can quickly update the course announcement, especially the assignment deadlines, to avoid late submissions. As a student commented, *'LMS is a separate website that is not linked with other student management websites, so students often miss the announcements and deadlines because they do not receive any notifications. Therefore, it would be better to link LMS with popular communication tools such as email or social media like Facebook (S6)*. Adding a notification reminder on LMS is hoped to make it more instantly updated so that they can keep up with the latest news or announcement from teachers. Moreover, one teacher said that *'the current LMS lacks interaction, so I have to use other video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, or Cisco Webex to conduct*

synchronous lessons' (T4). In fact, Moodle LMS also embeds a video-conferencing function which is called BigBlueButton; however, not many teachers and students are informed and instructed to use this application. Therefore, it is necessary to make use of all available functions on LMS and provide more guidance for teachers and students so that they can have better experience teaching and learning on LMS.

Thirdly, in terms of the teachers' responsibility, students also recommended that teachers should invest more time and make more efforts to use LMS more effectively. It can be undeniable that because of a lack of guidance and enthusiasm, many teachers still have a reluctant attitude toward the use of LMS, so they do not really make effective use of this tool in their teaching practice. Some students thought that learning activities on LMS are not effective because *'some of their teachers only upload course content and create discussion forums on LMS without spending time replying to students' posts on forums'* (S9). Therefore, students expect that teachers should spend more time engaging in LMS activities with students, not only providing learning resources so that students will not feel a lack of social presence when learning on LMS. In addition, students also expected to receive more support from their teachers to help them overcome problems related to the use of LMS, such as late submissions due to Internet corruption.

Last but not least, university administrators should provide more technical training and seminars for EFL teachers to help them improve their use of LMS, especially in the context of blended learning. As a teacher shared, *'more seminars should be held so that we can have a chance to exchange experience in using LMS in particular and in blended learning in general. In addition, there should be more workshops on how to use LMS for teachers and students to explore its functions adequately and effectively'*(T3). Moreover, students also expected to receive more technical support from the IT staff. For example, a student suggested including a support chatbox on the LMS interface so that they can immediately ask technical staff for help when they need it.

Discussion

Generally, it can be seen from the findings that the majority of EFL teachers and students in the survey showed a positive attitude toward the use of LMS as a teaching and learning tool in the blended learning environment. The teachers' and students' perceptions of using Learning Management Systems (LMS) in blended learning indicate both benefits and challenges. The positive aspects of LMS usage were observed in terms of its support for organizing and managing course content, which both teachers and students highly appreciated. This finding aligns with the multifunctionality of LMS discussed by Liu et al. (2019) and Zakaria et al. (2020), as it allows for various teaching and learning activities to take place conveniently on a single platform, facilitating effective management of the teaching and learning process. Additionally, the flexibility of LMS, as perceived by teachers and students, resonates with the merits of LMS highlighted by Santiana et al. (2021). Holmes and Prieto-Rodriguez (2018) and Elsayed (2022) also emphasize the benefits of flexible learning enabled by LMS, which was acknowledged by the majority of students in the study. Students appreciated the opportunity to

revise lessons at their own pace, facilitating self-paced learning. Moreover, the anxiety-free learning environment and asynchronous communication on LMS allowed reserved students to gain confidence in sharing their viewpoints and become more engaged in the learning process, which can be challenging in traditional classrooms. Prasetya (2021) further supports the notion that LMS enhances students' autonomy, making it an effective educational tool.

On the other hand, the study also identified several challenges faced by EFL teachers and students when using LMS, predominantly related to technical issues. Unstable Internet connectivity and limited access were the most frequently encountered problems reported by LMS users, in line with the findings of Bhalalusesa et al. (2013), Sayfour (2016), Zakaria et al. (2020), and Biney (2020). These technical challenges hindered the effective use of LMS in teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, the lack of facilities and Internet access among students posed practical difficulties that need to be considered. Inadequate technical support and insufficient technical skills were also identified as significant obstacles for teachers and students integrating LMS into their lessons. The studies by Bhalalusesa et al. (2013), Suzanne et al. (2019), Al-Handhali et al. (2020), and Elsayed (2022) also highlight technical problems as commonly faced challenges in LMS usage. In addition to technical issues, teachers and students expressed concerns about the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities on LMS. The mismatch between technological integration and e-learning pedagogy has been a longstanding concern for teachers transitioning from traditional teaching methods to online teaching activities, as noted by Al-Handhali et al. (2020) and Prasetya (2021). In the context of this study, most teachers at the institution were unprepared to use LMS but were compelled to adopt it due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, they lacked sufficient previous experience and skills in designing and implementing learning activities on LMS, which further contributed to the challenges faced.

While the study highlights the benefits of LMS in terms of content organization, flexibility, student engagement, and autonomy, it also emphasizes the technical challenges faced by both teachers and students, as well as concerns about the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities. These findings align with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which suggests that user acceptance and adoption of technology are influenced by factors such as perceived usefulness and ease of use. In the case of LMS, the benefits identified in the study support the perceived usefulness, while the challenges and concerns highlight the importance of addressing usability issues and providing adequate technical support to enhance user acceptance and adoption of LMS in blended learning environments.

Conclusion

The findings of the study have shown that LMS is perceived to be necessary for blended learning by both EFL teachers and students because it facilitates their teaching and learning activities. Although this could be a novel experience for both EFL teachers and students, most of them share a common consensus that LMS offers them a variety of benefits, such as facilitating effective course organization and management, diversifying teaching methods, providing more flexibility for learning and teaching activities, and promoting students'

engagement and autonomy. However, it is also understandable that the use of LMS might be troublesome and challenging for many EFL teachers and students because of some popular technical issues, their limited technical experience and skills, and a lack of e-learning pedagogy. Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of using LMS in blended learning in the future, some measures should be taken into consideration to support both teachers and students. To be specific, it is necessary to have a frequent survey tool to collect EFL teachers' and students' feedback about the current LMS so that timely support and adjustment can be given. The university's administrative board should also consider upgrading the Internet connection and the LMS server to avoid system overload and errors. It is also recommended that some practical functions, such as notification reminders via email or video conferencing, be added to LMS and introduced to the users. There should also be more workshops, either organized online or on-site, to instruct students on how to use LMS effectively and how to deal with popular technical problems. To assist teachers, it is also recommended that more professional development seminars should be held frequently so that they can exchange experiences on how to use LMS, design online lessons, and share effective online teaching methods. These kinds of seminars will be useful in making teachers more confident with the use of LMS in online learning as well as blended learning.

The present study has some limitations that can affect the generalization of its findings. Firstly, in the study context, the number of EFL teachers and students who participated in the data collection was still humble. Besides, the data were collected from a specific educational setting; therefore, the results can be only applicable to the study context and are unable to represent the perspectives of the whole community of EFL teachers and students in Vietnam. Secondly, in addition to the research instruments, including surveys and interviews, more data could have been collected through the report of teachers' and students' use of LMS to have a more comprehensive foundation in understanding their actual adoption of LMS.

For further research on a similar topic, there can be comparisons between teachers' and students' levels of engagement with LMS and their satisfaction. Future studies can also investigate the effects of using LMS on particular aspects of EFL classrooms, such as English skill development or learner autonomy.

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