



Exploring challenges of online learning in the context of Ba Ria – Vung Tau University by English Major students

Nguyen Xuan Hong, Ph.D.¹, Nguyen Thi Phuong²

¹ Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

² Ba Ria – Vung Tau University, Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: This study aims to find out challenges of English major students in conducting online learning at Ba Ria – Vung Tau University (BVU). The research results were found by analyzing quantitative data by introducing survey to 160 English major students; the qualitative data was summarized by 15 English major students and 10 teachers from the interview. The results revealed many difficulties by the evaluation and perception of both students and teachers. The aspect of support is the highest while the lowest belonged to the challenges in aspect of the environment. Meanwhile, the challenges in aspect of collaboration were at the second position and the third position is about students' attitude towards online learning. About challenges relating to equipment, the result was at the fourth position. Additionally, further discussions and recommendations on challenges that English major students encountered during online learning were also proposed.

KEYWORDS: Ba Ria – Vung Tau University, Challenges, Difficulties, English major students, Online learning.

INTRODUCTION

Online learning in current is not only a channel for teaching and learning but also can be integrated into official curriculum at the higher education. Online learning can be signified as instruction conducted on a digital and technology device to support learning (Clark & Mayer, 2016). Online learning enables more flexible and easier learning using a variety of innovative approaches that support learning wherever students are, but what is needed are research-based principles of how to best take advantage of these new features. Actually, to the context of BVU, English major students are currently facing various difficulties when learning English via online learning environment, which is an urgent issue to figure out to enhance the quality of learners. In addition, the research results revealed the perception of both English students and teachers to those difficulties. On that aim to explore the challenges English major students face during online learning at BVU. To achieve the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the challenges English major students at BVU face during online learning?
2. How do English major students at BVU perceive these challenges during online learning?
3. How do teachers at BVU perceive these challenges during online learning/teaching?

In theoretically, this study contributes to the theory of challenges that students had to face to in online learning process. Getting results from the findings of online learning challenges contributed to solve difficulties and enhance learners' perception in online learning. The research also discovered the awareness of teachers and learners on these difficulties which is the key to figure out backlog issues in BVU that helps the educators to increase English teaching and develop English skills for learners. In practically, this research result can be applied for teaching and learning English major or even to develop online learning in unspecialized English faculties. Furthermore, this search results are expected to contribute to other schools in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province.

LITERATURE

Definition of online learning

Online learning is understood as accessing learning through the use of technology, (Moore et al., 2011). There are the common between the name calling as distance learning, e-learning or digital learning and online learning. The origin of the term e-learning was coined in the 1980s as a term for the use of web-based, web-delivered or web-hosted technology tools. E-learning not only covers content and instructional methods delivered via CD-ROM, the internet but also includes audio, video and interactive TV. While distance learning is used to describe the providing access to learning for those who are geographically distant. As computers



became involved in the delivery of education, distance learning was defined the delivery of instructional materials which using both print and electric media. According to Kumar et al. (2018), digital learning can facilitate new strategies and formats for online learning environment. The similarity among these different naming is the internet-based. Online learning can be described as wholly online learning whereas others simply reference the technology medium or context with which it is used. Currently, online learning is considered an updated version of distance learning that improves access to educational opportunities for learners who are not eligible for traditional schooling. All these learning methods are digitized and used in the education environment. Instructional materials are the text, image, video, lecture currently can be delivered via digital technology such as internet media.

Types of online learning

There are theoretical models and implementation models of online education proposed by scientists around the world in different approaches. Some typical models can be mentioned as synchronous, asynchronous, blended, and massive online open courses (MOOC).

Synchronous works like F2F course, classes are scheduled for a specific day and time. In synchronous approach, students must commit to being able to attend online classes follow schedules. However, both teachers and students have the flexibility to log into classroom from any location in case of internet covering (Benshoff & Gibbons, 2011).

In asynchronous approach is known that teachers and students do not have regular classes. This approach allow students are able to access to the course through the internet at any convenient time. Teachers' instruction and communication are almost conducted by email, school's website and task or assignment via many kinds of digital applications

The approach of blended learning is the combination between two above mentioned approach as well as F2F classroom and online learning experiences integrated. This model combines F2F and online learning, students can both experience online learning and participate in direct classes that taking advantage of both learning methods while minimizing the disadvantages of both.

A MOOC integrates the connectivity of social networking, the facilitation of an expert in the specific field and the collection of accessible online resources for free, McAuley et al. (2010). The most important of MOOC is building up the active engagement number of hundred to thousand participants.

Context of the research

This study focuses on the synchronous approach as well as the platform is mostly popular used by many organizations, public and private schools at the current situation with the impact of Corona epidemic. BVU in particularly, both teachers and students communicate and work through synchronous approach to delivery learning material, give instruction, make presentation, and create group discussion. Asynchronously mode is opened based on task or assignment. The other issues of material are exported by digital application by online environment.

Challenges of English major students during learning online

Although online learning is widely known, the applying of online learning into teaching and learning is still a new field. It also showed the difficulties about technical environment and the available support in this environment. By Betts & Heaston (2014), they stated that the university has not placed instructors and learners on training for online curriculum previously. Educational facilities may not have enough resources including recording platforms at schools and at home as well as lack of instruction to record and present in a way that is accessible to learners. The issue is not only mentioned to the ability of educational facilities to deliver online learning, but also concerned to the need of learners to access to the internet, such as a computer, a laptop or a smartphone what not all learners have.

Biswas (2020) argued that demonstration based on student reaction to social media they experienced challenges related to a lack of appropriate attitude in learning, discipline and convenient environment for online learning. Shlossberg & Cunningham (2016) noticed that one of the obstacles in online learning was to improve the awareness of community. In order to explore good learning environment, Shlossberg & Cunningham (2016) declared findings showed the importance of enhancing perception to digital engagement and collaboration.

According to Kizilcec et al. (2015), the challenge of collaboration should not be only about shaping the form of classes digitally, but students have to equip right attitude and find effective methods to provide themselves with information suitable to the chances.



Many students around the world are facing difficulties with technical support, especially in poor and developing countries. This support included network services, the provision of appropriate technology devices and the train of technology skills, Skulmowski & Rey (2020).

Additionally, environment or space of learners may cause difficulties for students in their learning. As Dung et al. (2021) revealed when studying at home. So, these students demand to interact via texting. According to the issue of the environment and space, there was the problem of mental (Dong & Li, 2020) and physical (Laar et al., 2021) to students such as risk of eye diseases, headache, scoliosis or neck and shoulders pain due to wrong learning posture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research setting and participants

The samples of study were limited at 160 students as the choose from researcher depend on the use of convenience sampling. Ending up with 4 chosen classes, there were totally 160 samples for the questionnaires (including 52% of females and 48% of males). The final quantity of 4 classes was 153 questionnaires misused 7 people because of student absence and invalid responses. The participants of this semi-structured interview were 15 chosen students and 10 teachers, they were in this online learning/ teaching program also.

Research instruments

The study would be examined in term of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as research instruments. The questionnaires helped to get the information answering research question about the challenges of English major students in online learning and question about the perception of these students toward challenges. The semi-structured interviews were expected to contribute comments to reply for question in deeply discovering difficulties of English teaching via online learning program. Moreover, these interviews supported to confirm what were the main factors causing challenges for English major students and propose solutions for these challenges. That were 2 main instruments were employed in this research for data collection.

Data collection and analysis procedures

Quantitative data was considered as the data built on the questionnaires from the survey. The result would be analyzed by SPSS software version 29.0. The mean scores as well as the standard deviation were analyzed and calculated for each variable or question to have an overview of the results. Qualitative data was established from semi-structured interview. These qualitative data were gathered by 15 English major students and 10 English teachers. The records were settled as valuable evidence to analyze quantitative data.

Reliability and validity of the study

The research was processed in three parts by the questions review, pilot stage for testing and the official survey and interview. 30 questions in the survey and 3 questions in each interview were checked by one teacher and supervisor then it was conducted pilot stage by 15 students and 3 teachers. Finally, the official survey and semi-structured interview were implemented. The researcher also calculated Cronbach's Alpha index.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha of the survey

Survey	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
1 st part of questionnaires	0.670	20
2 nd part of questionnaires	0.603	10

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Challenges in online learning of English major students

In the context of Ba Ria – Vung Tau university, English major students confirm their obstacles in five aspects. The overall mean score of challenges in online learning is 4.14 out of 5.



Table 2. The overall results of challenges in online learning of English major students

No.	Challenges in online learning of English major students	N = 153	
		M	SD
1	The equipment	4.11	.74
2	Attitudes	4.12	.58
3	Collaboration	4.13	.73
4	Support	4.29	.55
5	Learning environment	4.06	.64
Average		4.14	.65

Also, based on the mean scores in the students' responses to each aspect of online learning were a little different. Particularly, the mean score of challenges in aspect of support is the highest while the lowest mean score belonged to the challenges in aspect of the environment. Compared with the five components mentioned above, the challenges in aspect of collaboration were at the second position in the table with its result and the third position is about students' attitude towards online. About challenges relating to equipment, the result was at a rather high rate. It can be indicated that the results of obstacles mentioned in table 2 which English major students at BVU had in online learning were quite close to each other.

Challenges in equipment

Table 3 showed the results of difficulties in aspects of equipment which English major students encountered while studying online.

Table 3. Challenges in aspect of equipment

Challenges in aspect of equipment	N = 153	
	M	SD
B1. I do not have any equipment like smart phone, laptop, computer, tablet.	3.97	1.16
B2. I do not have good computer skills to solve problems while learning online.	3.61	.83
B3. I do not have a strong internet connection all the time.	4.19	.51
B4. I find it difficult to fix errors from online applications immediately.	4.70	.46
Average	4.11	.74

These results seemed concordant with the qualitative data which showed that although students are applying information technology to approach the teachers' lectures quite actively, in the reality, the circumstances and physical conditions of the students' families will greatly influence their online learning because not all parents are willing to equip networks, computers, and smartphones for their students to study, especially in countryside areas. Online learning also requires a certain understanding of technology. Technical difficulties may include unstable internet connection, faulty laptop or computer, poor audio quality, complexity of online teaching software, etc.

Challenges in aspect of attitude

As can be seen from Table 4, four sub-variables were put into research in order to find out the students' attitudes toward online learning in English learning. The results in table 4 confirmed that difficulties related to attitudes toward online learning made a dramatic impact on the students during online learning.



Table 4. Challenges in aspect of attitude

Challenges in aspect of attitude	N = 153	
	M	SD
B5. I do not have strict personal discipline in online learning.	3.82	.48
B6. I do not have self-motivated in interaction between teachers and students.	4.67	.52
B7. I am not familiar with online learning because I have not been trained before.	4.74	.44
B8. I am not oriented about the effectiveness of online learning in English learning	3.22	.89
Average	4.12	.58

Students had different attitudes towards the challenges of their online learning in the interview results.

“The lack of interaction between teachers and students is the most challenges in my online learning because communication is limited, and I do not have self-motivated to interact with teachers.”

“I am a shy person, so I rarely have self-motivated in interaction with my teachers”

“I do not have self-discipline and self-motivation when learning online. It is easy to be distracted.”

Challenges in term of collaboration during online lessons

The results in Table 5 focused on the students’ difficulties in accordance with collaboration during online lessons. The series of setbacks range from lack of interaction, information exchange, discussion or groupwork and lack of preparation as well as instant explanation from teachers.

Table 5. Challenges in term of collaboration during online lessons

Challenges in term of collaboration during online lessons	N = 153	
	M	SD
B9. I find it difficult to interact with teachers and classmates because of our misunderstanding of the lessons.	4.17	.70
B10. I find it difficult to exchange information in English through online applications.	4.28	.51
B11. I find it difficult to work in groups or discuss the lesson with my classmates.	4.78	.41
B12. I find the lack of preparation and explanations from the teachers, or teachers do not teach	3.48	1.29
Average	4.13	.73

Additionally, interview participants admitted the barriers that learners encountered when learning online that are insufficient communication environments because learning eye to eye on the screen, learners are lack of interaction between learners and teachers, and even among learners together. Besides, lack of supervision by teachers when learning online causes students not to concentrate while studying. Interviewees admitted:

“When learning English speaking skills online, I have insufficient teamwork building, collaboration, working in groups, so it is hard to improve my English-speaking skills.”

“Online groupwork sometimes restricts all member’ opinions. Not everyone can have opportunity to speak up. Members with shy, reserved personalities tend to stay silent. At this point, if other members actively raise their opinion, they will easily withdraw and hide what they want to say.”

Challenges in term of supports during online lessons

Table 6 showed the results of challenges in aspects of supports which English major students faced up to while studying online. A series of setback were namely mentioned from lack of technology training, error-fixing support, lack of guidelines and technical equipment for poor students.



Table 6. Challenges in term of supports during online lessons.

Challenges in term of supports during online lessons	N = 153	
	M	SD
B13. I find a lack of training for student how to apply technology into learning English online.	4.12	.56
B14. I find a lack of support to fix typical errors about computer and internet.	4.37	.49
B15. I find a lack of guideline for various technological situations occur during online learning.	4.62	.49
B16. I find a lack of technical equipment for poor students.	4.08	.67
Average	4.29	.55

Students found it not easy to deal with sudden various situations and did not how to fix computer or internet problem at once to continue the lessons. Quite a great students agreed that they were worried to tackle with technological applications and not enough equipment for online learning. To sum up, the challenges relating to supports during online lessons assumed a quite rate compared to the results of other difficulties of the study.

Challenges in term of environment during online lessons

Table 7 showed the results of challenges in aspects of environment which English major students faced up to while studying online. Besides challenges in term of supports, environment aspect is also learners’ limitation during online lessons. Surroundings, quality of facilities and equipment condition are not only impact on psychology of learners but also a premise leading to learners’ outcomes.

Table 7. Challenges in term of the learning environment during online lessons

Challenges in term of the learning environment during online lessons	N = 153	
	M	SD
B17. I am bothered by ambient noise in the neighborhood.	4.40	.49
B18. I am not allowed to use a computer or a laptop for a long time.	3.82	.50
B19. I am hurt when I study in the wrong posture because of lacking standard table and chair.	3.64	1.03
B20. I have eye problems and headaches because of studying in low light and long screen time.	4.37	.54
Average	4.06	.64

Using computer or laptop lasts too long that is not good to eyes and leads to psychological fatigue of most students. Besides, lacking standard table and chair when studying online at home also leads to inappropriate working posture and easy fatigue. Therefore, it is entirely possible for students to feel bored and lose concentration. Actually, the environment is one of the deciding factors to students being able to concentrate on online learning or not. Generally, the results in Table 7 showed that students are currently coping with many factors that affect their online learning.

Perception of English major students toward challenges during learning English online

The findings of the present study revealed that English students had interests in online learning because online learning saves time and money. Students do not have to pay for books or required demand. Therefore, online learning allows students to have flexible learning ways to go for classes with reduced need for travel. It allows students to learn at their place and own schedules.

According to the interview results on online learning beliefs and evaluation, most English students said that online learning is necessary, accounting for a high percentage (89%). Besides, a small percentage of students considered online learning is non-essential and less important, accounting for 11%. Otherwise, in the semi-structured interview showed that the majority of students enjoyed learning online (53.3%). Students will have a positive attitude toward online classes if they have a steady internet connection



and been trained before regardless of their location, and this will also facilitate them in attending lectures from any location at any time. Students will be able to access lessons from rural places while still receiving a high-quality education.

It is highlighted that most of the students confirm that online learning helps to improve and update technical skills and motivates learners confidently in electronic communicating. Collaborative learning utilizing technology has helped the exchange of electronic communicating skills. It is easy for them to collect information from all over the world with just clicks on the software. This positive aspect helps students to gradually get used to expressing their individual opinions, which help students integrate and be confident when participating in offline classes. Moreover, students who are shy and afraid of communicating feel more confident when expressing their personal views in online classes because there are not people around.

Finally, the results from this research provided that the students tended to online learning gets learners a strict self-discipline. If they study online, they will not have a teacher next to them to remind. Thus, when studying online, students manage their own learning process and results. To get superior results, they are forced to build their self-discipline in learning. Self-study skills develop when they are empowered to choose how they learn and how to get there.

To sum up, the findings during the online learning survey showed that students' beliefs show that they have a positive attitude towards online learning, which can be persuaded by students' feedback. They also agreed to continue using the online learning platform in their English classes in the future as long as they overcome obstacles and difficulties which are counted in the questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. Students also commented that all the experiences they gained during their online studies could help them develop their ability to plan their own studies in creative and innovative ways. The interviews also aimed to assess challenges in online learning. Regarding the technology aspect, students completely agree that they are proficient in using computers and searching online during online learning, which will improve their computer skills. Additionally, this online learning will give them the opportunity to self-reflect and become active learners. To learn effectively online, students also expect instructors to clearly communicate course goals, meet student needs, and promote a supportive online learning environment.

Teachers' perceptions to the challenges of online learning in teaching English

The qualitative data collected from the interview was taken into consideration to attain thorough information teachers' challenges faces in teaching English online. As for the semi-structured interviews conducted by the teachers in BVU, the results appeared themes challenges in four areas: technology, instruction, assessment, and students.

From qualitative results in interview, teachers revealed that the challenges they faced in teaching English online in terms of technology use, instruction, assessment, and dealing with students, while challenges in assessing the students and students' collaboration were the highest level (up to 95%). Teachers confirmed that it is exceedingly difficult to keep up with grading students' assignments and assessments. In addition, students' lack of technological skills makes assessments more difficult. Technical issues experienced by students were one of the main challenges teachers faced while assessing students online. This assessment was unfair if teachers were not able to see students' reactions as clearly as in a F2F classroom to see if they can understand what teachers are saying.

Most teachers asserted students' English online learning are limited by internet access because of their geographical location or internet packages. Moreover, students experienced limited internet access is also crucial to the effectiveness of online learning. About 85% teachers' perspective thought that students lack support from infrastructure and physical facilities.

In teaching and learning process, the interaction between teachers and students is a particularly principal factor is challenging students in online learning. The interview data collection revealed that approximately 90% teachers teach one-way, students receive information through media, and interact through the system of questions and then practice, not directly. This will affect the quality of the courses.

The results of the semi-structured interviews about teachers' suggestions showed that teachers focused on students' attitude, collaboration, support, and environment in online learning to make the online lessons more effective with an emphasis in their attitude and collaboration. Besides, support and environment were also mentioned.

DISCUSSIONS

According to research questions, the findings were shown in two parts: students' challenges of online learning, students and teachers' perception of these challenges and the suggestions how to solve difficulties in online learning. Similarly, the study conducted by Rasmitadila et al. (2020) found the difficulties of distance education were technical barriers, student's conditioning, student's



participation in education and online education experience. There were variety of problems such as lack of opportunities in online learning applications, network and internet use, teacher's planning, implementation, evaluation, and collaboration also demonstrated in study of Fauzi et al. (2020).

For the first research question, the findings revealed that the highest challenges are support for students to learn online, the second one is collaboration, it means interaction between participants in online classrooms, and the last one is students' attitude. Other factors such as equipment and learning environment also contribute the successful online learning process. According to Berge and Muilenberg (2005), social interaction is strongly related to the online learning's enjoyment and effectiveness and the ability to take an online class. Feeling of lack of motivation when learning online, lack of confidence in one's own abilities and skills in technology are factors that hinder students' psychology when taking part in online learning programs (Berge & Muilenberg, 2005). For effective online learning, students also expect instructors to clearly communicate course goals, give feedback quickly to students, and have supportive online learning environment.

For the second research question, the findings showed that the online learning has limitations, but it is still advocated by students and teachers when they overcome challenges in learning and teaching process. Moreover, the findings from questionnaire and semi-structured interview also showed that students are aware of challenges they must face in online learning process. Gillett-Swan (2017) mentioned collaborative learning tasks in previous research because the aim of collaborative learning is the co-construction of knowledge through interaction. The students' wish for online learning is teachers should all be regularly present and active to give feedback and answer questions. Answering questions promptly is important because it does not happen when sending questions by e-mail, thus the precise and useful feedback are especially important.

For the third research question, teachers' perception toward the challenges of online learning in teaching English was significant like students' one. Therefore, teachers and learners were aware of such challenges and suggest the way to deal with them. Belong to Bacow et al. (2012), Bolliger & Wasilik (2009), Betts & Heaston (2014) also proposed schools should study technical reliability issue very well to implement online teaching process.

CONCLUSIONS

Online learning has many outstanding advantages that we cannot deny: time flexibility, low cost, diverse lectures, attractive websites, but most students use this form of learning. This has not yielded many positive results. Through the survey, our team found the following reasons leading to ineffective online learning.

The findings illustrate the current situation of English students towards online learning at BVU. The challenges encountered by English major student in their learning English via online program caused by equipment, attitude, collaboration, support and environment. With the aim to discover common factors caused to these challenges, this study was investigated in both internal and external aspects. The influences of online learning challenges into English learning for English major students were also analyzed and presented as the results above. Besides, the semi-structured interview results revealed other factors affecting online learning and causing difficulties for English major students.

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