

BLENDED LEARNING IN ENGLISH READING LESSONS: VIETNAMESE HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS' VOICES

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Abstract: Blended learning is a popular term for a method that combines the benefits of both face-to-face and online learning. This mode of learning has noticeable benefits, but it has also raised concerns. The purpose of this paper is to elicit the benefits and challenges of blended learning in English reading lessons through students' perceptions at a Mekong Delta high school in Vietnam. The study was conducted as a descriptive study and the data were collected through two focus-group interviews with ten high-school students. The findings showed that the students perceived they gained nine benefits of blended learning in English reading lessons in terms of vocabulary, technological competence, accessibility, self-regulation, reading strategies, reading comprehension, interaction, interest, and emotion. They perceived or experienced more benefits than challenges when learning reading in blended mode. Therefore, blended learning will be their first choice for English reading lessons in the future. Finally, implications and recommendations are drawn to help EFL high school teachers and students have better implementation of blended learning, especially in reading lessons.

Keywords: EFL high school students; blended learning; reading lessons; Mekong Delta

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1. Introduction

Reading is one of the four language skills, and it is one of the two receptive skills. Reading has played an important role in learning a language and especially in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). In some countries in Asia like in Indonesia or in China, reading in EFL classrooms is considered challenging and complex (Lu, 1989; Syahabuddin et al., 2019; Xu, 1999).

In Vietnam, according to the test matrix on the national graduation exam on English subject, there are seventeen out of fifty questions with three different texts belonging to reading skills, which means the results of reading comprehension will affect the students' overall score on this important exam. Moreover, Vietnamese high school students had 63,13% below the average mark based on the English national test's point spectrum (MOET, 2020). It could be inferred that many EFL high school students do not know how to handle the process of reading and they have problems in comprehending the texts, which causes a lack of interest in reading and thus creates quite a problem for the system of education. It is time for Vietnamese language teachers to find out a new way to teach reading lessons effectively.

One of the solutions to help high school students improve their reading comprehension refers to the use of technologies in EFL classrooms, and blended learning seems to be appropriate based on previous studies in the field such as Behjat and colleagues (2012), Tsai and Talley (2014), and Alaidarous and Madini (2016). In Vietnam, according to Circular 32/2020/TT- BGDĐT and article 37, students can use cell phones and other devices in class if they are related to studying purposes and with the teachers' permission. Moreover, Resolution 29-NQ/TW and Decision 404/ QĐ-TTg emphasized that teachers should diversify the teaching forms and vigorously promote applying information technology in teaching and

learning. These policies have provided opportunities for teachers and students to approach technology in their teaching and learning. Therefore, blended learning in reading lessons can be implemented in EFL classrooms.

Though research on the combination of blended learning and reading has received many approvals, it still needs more evidence from learners from different contexts. Furthermore, EFL high school students' perceptions of blended learning in reading lessons are a relatively new field to high school students. Therefore, investigating EFL high school students' perceptions in this field is important, marking the first step of implementing blended learning in reading lessons in the high school context. For these reasons, the present study aimed to explore EFL high school students' experiences of blended learning in reading lessons in two aspects: benefits and challenges.

2. Literature Review

First of all, blended learning can refer to systems that combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction (Graham, 2006). Other authors stated that *blended learning* involves combining two fields of concern: education and educational technology (Chew et al., 2008). Sharing a similar view with an expanded version, Horn and Staker (2017) referred blended learning as a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home. In this study, *blended learning* combines face-to-face and online learning activities that students can control over time, place, path, and/or pace within a course or subject connected to provide an integrated learning experience.

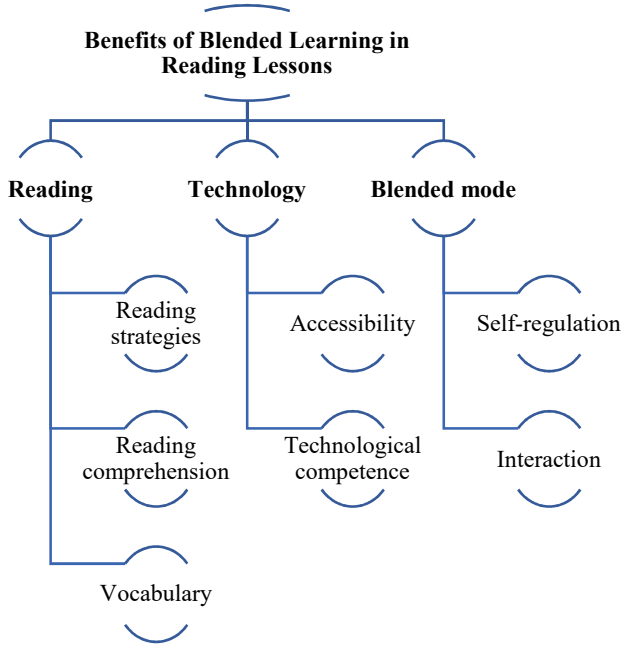
Regarding the models of blended learning, Twigg (2003) suggested a new typology with four types: supplemental, replacement,

emporium, and buffet for higher education. A common typology for corporate training, which covers three types: anchor blend, bookend blend, and field blend, was discovered by Rossett and Frazee (2006). Horn and Staker (2017) claimed an influential blended learning model for K-12 education with four types: rotation (station rotation, lab rotation, flipped classroom, and individual rotation), flex, self-blend, and enriched virtual. Although Twigg's model was designed for higher education, it matches perfectly in this study. Particularly, Twigg (2003) stated that the supplemental model is based on traditional learning and uses online learning to supplement traditional courses. Though technology is used, the supplemental model keeps the standard course's core framework, including the number of class sessions. Some of the additional redesigns merely incorporate technology-based, out-of-class activities to encourage students to engage more with course content. Others alter the content of class meetings and incorporate out-of-class activities.

2.1. Benefits of Blended Learning

There have been a number of studies on benefits of blended learning, e.g. Azmi and colleagues (2020), Behjat and colleagues (2012), Buran and Evseeva, 2015, Shea and Bidjero (2010), Vasbieva and colleagues (2016). The benefits of blended learning can be summarized in one model as presented in Figure 1. The model focused on three main benefits: reading, technology and blended mode based on the foundations of those studies. The aspects that belonged to reading are (1) *reading strategies*, (2) *reading comprehension* and (3) *vocabulary*. (4) *Accessibility* and (5) *technological competence* belong to the second cluster: Technology. The last cluster is the blended mode including (6) *self-regulation* and (7) *interaction*.

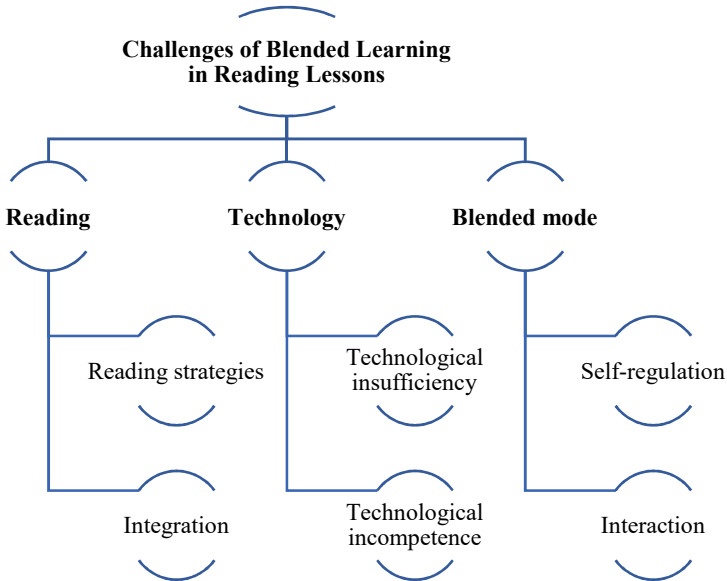
Figure 1: Benefits of Blended Learning in Reading Lessons



2.2. Challenges of Blended Learning

There have been a number of studies on challenges of blended learning, e.g. Akçayır and Akçayır (2018), Ja’ashan (2015), Safford and Stinton (2016), Yang (2012). The challenges of blended learning can be summarized in the model as presented in Figure 2. This model was also created with three main clusters: reading, technology and blended mode based on the foundations of previous studies. Overall, it is evident that there are also three main clusters: reading, technology and blended mode. The first central *cluster* regarding *Reading* includes (1) *reading strategies* and (2) *integration*; (3) *technological insufficiency* and (4) *technological incompetence* belong to the second cluster -*Technology*. The final cluster of challenges of blended learning in reading lessons consists of (5) *self-regulation* and (6) *interaction*.

Figure 2: Challenges of blended learning in reading lessons



Though research on blended learning and reading has been conducted widely, few have been done on EFL high school students' perceptions. Most studies mainly measured the effect of blended learning on reading comprehension under teacher's control. The current study gives students a chance to raise their voices. Moreover, almost no research aims to focus on benefits and challenges of blended learning in reading lessons. Thus, this current study fills the gaps by studying EFL high school students' experiences of blended learning in reading lessons under two aspects: benefits and challenges.

3. Research Questions

The research questions which guided the study are as follows:

- *What are EFL high school students' perceptions of benefits of blended learning in reading lessons?*
- *What are EFL high school students' perceptions of challenges of blended learning in reading lessons?*

4. Methodology

The original study was conducted as a descriptive study under a mixed-methods design. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews in order to explore the benefits and challenges encountered by high-school students when they studied reading lessons in blended mode. However, this paper only reports the qualitative findings of the original study, which presents the data collected via interviews. In the study, focus group interviews were employed because Gay and colleagues (2011) explained that focus groups are instrumental when the interaction between individuals leads to a shared understanding of the questions posed by a teacher-researcher.

4.1. Participants

The focus-group interviews were conducted with the participation of 10 EFL high-school students. These participants were chosen purposefully. Specifically, they were chosen based on the mean scores (from the questionnaire) of their perceptions of blended learning in reading lessons into two aspects: benefits and challenges. They were divided into two groups. First, students with high mean scores respond to *benefits* (including S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5). Second, students with high mean scores respond to *challenges* (named S6, S7, S8, S9, and S10). Table 1 shows the information of these students.

Table 1: Participants for Interviews (N = 10)

Group	Participants	Gender	Hours accessing online reading lessons	Device(s) used to access online reading lessons	Mean score
ONE	S1	Male	From one to two hours	Mobile phone	4.95

Group	Participants	Gender	Hours accessing online reading lessons	Device(s) used to access online reading lessons	Mean score
	S2	Female	From one to two hours	Mobile phone	4.55
	S3	Male	From one to two hours	Mobile phone	4.60
	S4	Female	Less than one hour	Computer/Laptop	4.70
	S5	Female	Less than one hour	Mobile phone	4.75
TWO	S6	Male	Less than one hour	Mobile phone	2.67
	S7	Female	Less than one hour	Mobile phone	2.87
	S8	Female	From one to two hours	Computer/Laptop	3.13
	S9	Female	Less than one hour	Mobile phone	3.20
	S10	Male	From one to two hours	Mobile phone	4.33

Before collecting data from the participants in this study about their perceptions of benefits and challenges of blended learning in reading lessons, they had a chance to experience blended reading lessons on Google classroom based on the new English 10 curriculum.

4.2. The Coursebook

The research was conducted using the course book (*Tieng Anh 10*) for the new English curriculum, designed under the National

Foreign Languages Project 2020. In terms of material analysis, this study focused on reading lessons in the course book for grade 10. Concerning the number of components, there are five units for each term in the school year. The first term's units include *Family Life*, *Your Body and You*, *Music*, *For a Better Community*, and *Inventions*. This study was conducted with five reading lessons (from Unit 1 to Unit 5) in the first term. Table 2 shows the summary of reading topics for the research.

Table 2: Summary of reading topics for the research

Unit	Unit Topics	Reading Topics
Unit 1	Family life	Sharing housework
Unit 2	Your body and you	Acupuncture
Unit 3	Music	Idol: A global smash hit
Unit 4	For a better community	Why do people volunteer?
Unit 5	Inventions	Wonderful nature

4.3. Online Learning Platform

This study was conducted using Google Classroom, which is one of the online learning platforms developed by Google. Google Classroom was designed with the goal of spending less time on technology and more time on teaching. Therefore, this study employed two main tabs in the interactive layout. The first tab is the *class stream*, which is used to post announcements. This is an excellent approach to keep in touch with your students and provide them with up-to-date information. *Classwork* is the second tab where students get to work. Teachers can ask students to answer a graded (or ungraded) question, take a quiz, or complete an assignment.

Moreover, teachers can also attach materials that they want the students to see, or you can repurpose an older post.

The online session contents were presented in the online learning platform with five parts. Firstly, an online meeting and videos for learning online guidance are provided. Secondly, in-class lessons were uploaded in attached files. Next, application parts were displayed in various ways by discussing the questions, recording videos, and writing a short paragraph after reading the texts in five units. Then, students could consolidate vocabulary and content of the texts in the new English 10 course book by two websites. The first website is *Quizlet*, which is a vocabulary memorization tool, and *Quizizz* is the second one to give students some quizzes. Both websites were integrated with Google Classroom. Lastly, students had a further practice part with Google Form.

4.4. Process of Experiencing Blended Learning in Reading Lessons

Before the research, the researchers explained the process of experiencing blended learning in reading lessons. First, the researchers created a reading course on Google Classroom for the whole participants to join. Then, sixty participants were divided into two big classes of thirty and ten smaller groups of six in online sessions. The students could choose their groups. If some did not have any class or group, the researchers randomly put them into the existing groups.

In the first face-to-face meeting, participants got guidelines for using Google Classroom and some websites used in blended reading lessons, such as *Quizlet*, *Kahoot*, *Quizizz*, and *Flipgrid*.

Five reading lessons took place in blended mode: face-to-face mode and online mode in six weeks. The content of each reading lesson was divided into two sessions served for in-class sessions and online sessions under the template in Table 3.

Table 3: Template for Five Reading Lessons

Sessions	Stage	Rationale
Class sessions	Warm-up	This stage helps students identify specific problems/tasks to be solved in the reading lessons or clearly define how to solve problems/ perform tasks in subsequent activities of the reading lessons. Moreover, this stage engages students in the reading lessons.
	Presentation	This stage helps students perform a learning task to acquire new knowledge/ solve problems/ perform tasks set out from the first stage. In addition, it gives students a closer look into what they are going to read.
	Practice	This stage helps students practice knowledge learned in the previous stage and develop reading skills.
Online sessions	Application	This stage helps students to develop their competence through tasks/ requirements to apply knowledge and reading skills into real-life based on each reading lesson with appropriate content.
	Consolidation	This stage helps students review vocabulary, reading strategies and the content of each lesson.
	Further Practice	This stage helps students review, practice more and develop previous knowledge on each reading lesson.

According to Nguyen and colleagues (2020), a blended course has no calculation system, which is understood as a combination of online learning and face-to-face learning with inconsistent ratios (60-40, 50-50, 70-30). Additionally, no standard organizational model describes online learning support units (Moskal et al., 2013).

Therefore, the template process followed the official dispatch No. 5512/ BGDDT- GDTTrH and was conducted to serve the following purposes. First, the application is the stage for students to create their products, so students have more time to discuss with the teacher and other students and complete the tasks in online sessions. Moreover, they can be more proactive in managing time. Second, students can consolidate the reading lessons by redoing and repeating activities at their own pace and learning styles. Providing more reading texts for students to practice what they learned is the last reason. Further practice stages are designed with one text for each reading lesson with the topic and same difficulty level. Each text in the further practice stage was checked for readability score by Flesch reading ease. Because of the three reasons above, application, consolidation and further practice are presented in online sessions and the rests on class sessions.

5. Data Collection & Analysis

5.1. Data Collection via Focus Group Interviews

The questions in focus-group interviews were based on research aims, research questions and the results of the questionnaire and the previous studies of Ja'ashan (2015), Yang (2012), Phuong and colleagues (2019), Rianto (2020) and Xu (2010). In particular, the interview included four main questions related to (1) the EFL high-school students' perceptions/experiences of benefits and (2) their perceptions/experiences of the challenges of blended learning in reading lessons, (3) their perceptions about the modes of upcoming reading lessons, and (4) their recommendations. For each main question, the researchers used some sub-questions when necessary to elicit participants' answers as well as to go deep into the discussion for more insights.

This research opted for online interviews to save time and avoid commuting. The interview was voice-recorded so that significant

information from the students' answers was not missing. To assure the validity of the collected data, the interview questions were translated into Vietnamese so that the participants could deepen the meaning of the questions and easily express their thoughts. The interview questions were also checked with the supervisor and interview pilots were conducted before the actual interviews.

5.2. Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

After conducting the interviews, the data were transcribed. Then they were analyzed based on the themes presented in the frameworks (see Figure 1 and Figure 2), which were synthesized from previous studies in the research area.

In terms of ethical considerations, the participants were high school students, so they were invited to participate in the study based on their voluntary desire. They joined in the blended reading classes which were not parts of their normal school hours. It was assured that the study purposes were communicated clearly to the participants, and they were willing to participate in the study.

6. Findings and Discussion

The research was conducted with two focused-group interviews to gain more insights into the students' perceptions of benefits of blended learning in reading lessons. The participants were recruited based on their mean score in the questionnaire's result (Tran & Le, 2021). Remarkably, the first group with five participants (S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5) had the highest mean score on perceived benefits in their learning process. In contrast, the other five participants (S6, S7, S8, S9, and S10) with the high score on perceived challenges in the blended reading course. Below were the findings from the interviews about specific areas of benefits, which students perceived.

6.1. Perceived Benefits in Blended Reading Lessons

6.1.1. Vocabulary

Both groups of students share similar views on this benefit. Six out of ten students expressed they perceived many benefits in terms of vocabulary in blended reading lessons. For example, Student 3 mentioned that he could expand vocabulary through blended learning in reading lessons, and Student 5 added that vocabulary was provided a lot and she could discuss them with her friends. Student 10, who perceived more challenges still, admitted that in blended reading lessons, vocabulary is easy to remember.

Seven students emphasized the combination face-to-face and online learning sessions helped them learn vocabulary better through reading lessons. For instance, Student 4 said, “I can know vocabulary during face-to-face learning sessions, but I can learn vocabulary better when integrating with online learning sessions”, and Student 8 also mentioned, “learning vocabulary through blended reading lessons is better and more understandable”.

This study showed that the students perceived the most benefit in vocabulary, which revealed that learning reading lessons through integrating in-class and online helped students review, expand and guess the meaning of vocabulary in the texts. It was similar to the findings of Altalhab (2016). It is obvious that the students had two chances to learn vocabulary. They learn vocabulary after reading the texts in class and then review the vocabulary on the website Quizlet at home. Therefore, they perceived vocabulary as their most benefit from blended mode.

6.1.2. Technological Competence

The second benefit identified in the questionnaire was technological competence, which was confirmed in the interviews. One student (Student 5) mentioned she could learn about using online apps through blended reading lessons. Moreover, seven out of ten

shared that they could explore more websites or apps such as VietKey app (Student 3) or Cambridge dictionary (Student 10) to complete reading online assignments. The students emphasized that they could study reading lessons via the applications and websites. Even blended reading lessons allowed them to experiment with new applications and websites. These findings were similar to Phuong and colleagues (2019) because students could approach the technological environment thanks to the online learning platform was a good learning condition to develop technological competence.

6.1.3. Accessibility

Accessibility was mentioned in terms of time and place, and five students felt convenient by accessing the online lessons in their schedule. The students shared their experiences as follows.

The advantage is that I can control my time. Then, I can access the online lessons easier. (Student 1)

[...] I can study whenever I want, without being restricted by time constraints, and I believe that self-learning on the platform is more engaging and it is simpler to understand. I am capable of learning both in class and at home (Student 2)

I can access many materials in blended reading lessons. (Student 10)

The finding was similar to that by Buran and Evseeva (2015). The students perceived benefits of blended learning in reading lessons positively because they had conveniences in arranging their learning schedule.

6.1.4. Self-regulation

For this highly perceived benefit on *self-regulation* from the questionnaire, the participants in the interview agreed on its advantage. Student 7 stated, “I could reach the target of reading lessons. Moreover, I could regulate my learning schedule appropriately”.

This finding was similar to some previous studies Zimmerman (2002), Shea and Bidjero (2010), and Tsai and Talley (2014). When students were provided enough guidance and information about the learning process, they could monitor their time as well as their cognitive methods. To maximize learning, they should regulate their study environment and exert control over their interaction with classmates.

6.1.5. Reading Strategies

For this benefit, the students shared that they could apply reading strategies in their learning process. Four students perceived that reading strategies helped them achieve the main and detailed ideas in the reading lessons through blended learning. For example, Student 4 said, “I can skim to get the main ideas of the text”, and Student 10 mentioned, “the benefit of blended learning in reading lessons is reading strategies”.

Moreover, all of the students stated that they could practice reading strategies in blended reading lessons. Student 1 said, “Reading strategies with the new texts in Google Classroom helps me practice easily”.

It was consistent with the findings of many previous studies (Tsai & Talley, 2014; Zahedi & Tabatabaei, 2015; Altalhab, 2016; Lamri & Hamzaoui, 2018). In blended reading lessons, it is believed that students had many opportunities to read the texts and discuss the text content or tasks with teachers and peers. That is why students perceive reading strategies as their benefits in blended reading lessons.

6.1.6. Reading Comprehension

In addition to the benefits on *Reading Strategies*, more than half of the interviewed students (6/10) thought that had many benefits in reading comprehension. Student 3 said, “for me, the most benefit is

reading comprehension”, or Student 9 and Student 6 shared a similar view that blended learning helps them enhance reading comprehension.

Students agreed that they perceived reading comprehension in reading lessons through blended learning positively. This finding was similar to Yagci (2015), which stated that students read more texts in actual classes and in virtual classes through social media and their reading comprehension skills improved.

6.1.7. Interaction

Three students confirmed interaction in terms of benefits of blended learning in reading lessons. Although Student 8 belongs to the group who perceived more challenges, she emphasized two times in the interview about the advantages of interaction using blended mode.

Interaction between teachers and students in online lessons that helps me interact with friends and makes learning comfortable.(Student 8)

My most benefit is interaction because it helps me communicate with teachers and students and makes lessons more interesting.(Student 8)

The interview findings were similar to the findings by Radia (2019), and Rovai and Jordan (2004), which showed that blended learning enhances the interaction between the students with the teacher and peers in reading lessons.

6.1.8. Interest & Emotion

Blended learning in reading lessons was mentioned as a catalyst that makes students engage in learning. Four students agreed that they felt more interested and fascinated when learning reading lessons through blended learning.

[...] I feel learning on a website is easier and more interesting
[...] (Student 2)

I feel that blended learning is more interesting because I can learn reading lessons through games on some websites such as Quizizz and Kahoot. [...] I feel comfortable when learning reading lessons online. (Student 10)

Moreover, eight out of ten participants confirmed that they are familiar with reading on technological devices, and they felt comfortable when learning reading lessons online.

I read the texts on my laptop and I think it is fine. (Student 4)

I think reading on technological devices is easier. (Student 6)

In brief, the literature review mentioned seven benefits in the students' sharing, such as vocabulary, technological competence, accessibility, self-regulation, reading strategies, reading comprehension, and interaction. Moreover, interest and emotion were added as a benefit from the students' responses in the open-ended question in the questionnaire and especially the findings from the interviews. Firstly, the students explained that they could learn reading lessons through games on websites. Secondly, the emotion was mentioned in how much comfort students studied in the blended learning environment. It is interesting to note that the students stated that they were comfortable and the learning pressure was reduced in blended reading lessons.

6.2. Perceived Challenges in Blended Reading Lessons

Ten participants used to experience a blended reading course, and some remarkable challenges needed considering.

6.2.1. Self-regulation

Two out of ten participants figured out the challenge of self-regulation. They shared that they are easily distracted by other things. Student 10 shared, "My challenge is self-regulation. Sometimes I forget the timetable for studying because of other things."

In previous studies like Launer's (2010), the author stated that not many students could carry out the self-regulated learning practices required in a blended learning environment. Some students complained that they could not wholly control their learning plan in blended reading lessons from the interviews. Therefore, in blended mode, students felt free to decide their learning schedule, but they also faced the distraction of online learning sessions.

6.2.2. Interaction

Regarding interaction, some students responded that they found it difficult to interact with their friends. For example, Student 4 said, "My challenge is the interaction with my friends".

In the interviews, students explained that they had difficulties interacting with friends in their learning process, which was in contrast to Tsai and Talley' findings (2014) where blended mode provides students with easier interactions. Perhaps the students in this study did not feel comfortable in online exchanges, so the interaction with peers was limited and led to the challenge for them.

6.2.3. Technological Insufficiency

Technological insufficiency was mentioned only in terms of internet connection. A few students were concerned about weak and unstable internet connection as their minor challenge.

I find it difficult only in face-to-face learning. The class is crowded so the Wi-Fi is unstable. (Student 3)

I feel that blended learning helps me consolidate knowledge but weak internet connection makes me annoyed. (Student 2)

This finding was similar to Rianto's study (2020), which indicated that most students expressed their agreement that internet connection and online technical problems were the main difficulties they faced in their blended EFL courses. However, technology is developed every day. It is hoped that the internet connection will be

improved in Vietnam, especially in the remote areas. Also, with the information in the interviews, students revealed that technological insufficiency is not significant; technological insufficiency was not a major challenge for the students in blended reading lessons.

6.2.4. Reading Strategies

Three students found reading strategies difficult to use in blended reading lessons. Student 10 responded, “My challenge is reading strategies. I find it difficult to find the main ideas of the texts” and Student 7 also mentioned, “I have difficulty in reading strategies.”

In the questionnaire results, reading strategies were also considered as the minor challenge and the students perceived them at a medium level. It meant that reading strategies were also challenges for the students but they did not significantly affect. The results of the current research were congruent with Yang’s results (2012); he stated that through reflection, students identified their difficulties in employing the reading strategies, which might impede their reading comprehension.

6.2.5. Collaboration

Collaboration was mentioned as one of their challenges. There are some reasons to clarify challenges in the students’ collaboration.

Teamwork is still limited when I text my friends, they do not reply to our work. (Student 2)

We cannot agree on the same time to study, so it is difficult to discuss together in real time. (Student 5)

My challenge is to work with other classmates. (Student 9)

Collaboration was not mentioned in the quantitative data. From the focus-group interviews’ results, the students had challenges to work in groups with other peers. The students stated that they had challenges in collaboration when they could not arrange the same time to do assignments

Overall, findings from the interviews confirmed the results of the questionnaire. Most challenges of blended learning in reading lessons were perceived the same in the questionnaire such as *self-regulation*, *interaction*, *technological insufficiency*, and *reading strategies*. Instead of *integration*, and *technological incompetence* were the next challenges, collaboration was addressed by the interviewed students.

6.2.6. Students' Learning Mode Preference

The participants were interviewed which learning mode they preferred, and all participants chose blended mode for their future reading lessons. The students explained the reasons why they chose blended mode for their future reading lessons as follows.

Blended mode provides many benefits while the challenge is few. The combination between face-to-face and online learning helps me to review previous knowledge and add new knowledge in my learning process. (Student 1)

Blended mode provides many benefits such as reading comprehension. I can acquire the knowledge better thanks to interacting with teachers in class. In addition, online learning can help me get in-depth knowledge. Therefore, blended mode helps me develop skills and knowledge better. (Student 5)

If learning only in class, we cannot review the lessons. On the other hand, if I learn only online, I am shy when making questions. Also, blended learning helps me reduce time pressure and access more types of materials. Therefore, I choose blended mode. (Student 8)

Blended mode is more convenient for me and easy to remember the lessons. If I forget knowledge in class, I can review the lessons at home. In fact, I concentrate on learning online more than face-to-face learning. (Student 7)

Additionally, the results from the interviews helped to gain more insights regarding EFL high school students' challenges of blended

learning in reading lessons. They found the same four challenges in the questionnaire: self-regulation, interaction, technological insufficiency and reading strategies. Moreover, they also reported a minor challenge was collaboration.

Furthermore, there were two new findings found. Firstly, the students perceived they gained more benefits than faced challenges when learning reading with blended learning. Secondly, 86,7% of students in the questionnaire and all participants in the focus-group interviews preferred the blended mode to only face-to-face or only online learning for their reading lessons in the future.

7. Conclusion and Implications

The findings showed that there are more benefits of blended learning in reading lessons in terms of vocabulary, technological competence, accessibility, self-regulation, reading strategies, reading comprehension, interaction, interest and emotion for EFL high school students. In addition, the blended model was dominant in the students' choices for their reading lessons in the future. Therefore, it should be recommended that EFL high school teachers implement blended learning in teaching reading. When implementing blended learning in reading lessons, teachers should pay attention to several issues. First, teachers should use online platforms with all-in-ones such as Google Classroom, Moodle, and Microsoft Teams, which are convenient for teachers and students. Second, teachers should provide detailed instructions at the beginning stages or organize training meetings for students who are not good at technology. Third, the lesson content should be designed to align with students' competence. Fourth, teachers should manage the class well and proactively ask weak students first because they are usually shy to ask teachers. Fifth, teachers can consider promoting benefits of this study and limit challenges in designing lesson plans. Last but not least, teachers should regularly send feedback to students to help them be more interested in learning and reduce difficulties in their learning process.

For EFL high school students, based on the benefits and challenges of blended learning in reading lessons, the recommendations will focus on two aspects. First, students should become active learners by asking questions and participating in discussions during a reading lesson. Students may ask questions during class or write them down, and then they can ask teachers or friends afterward. Moreover, discussion can help students be more active because they can correct mistakes by their friends' feedback or correct themselves by watching their friends' performance. Second, students should manage digital distractions. Digital tools and online resources have not only made learning more effective but also brought new distractions. Thus, students need to have the ability to manage distractions while utilizing digital tools for learning.

In conclusion, the study found that the students highly perceived benefits in blended reading lessons in terms of vocabulary, technological competence, accessibility, self-regulation, reading strategies, reading comprehension, interaction, interest, and emotion. However, the students also presented some challenges such as self-regulation, interaction, technological insufficiency, integration, technological incompetence, reading strategies, and collaboration although these challenges did not significantly impact their learning. The students expressed that they would love to study blended reading lessons in the future. Hopefully, the research will shed light on how to improve the quality of EFL reading teaching and learning at high schools in Vietnam's Mekong Delta and other similar teaching contexts.

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