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## **HỌC KẾT HỢP: NHỮNG MONG ĐỢI VÀ ĐỀ XUẤT TỪ SINH VIÊN CHƯƠNG TRÌNH TIỀN TIẾN FTU**

**Nguyễn Thị Minh Thảo<sup>1</sup>, Nguyễn Ngọc Mai, Nguyễn Mai Khuê**

Sinh viên K60 CTTT Kinh tế đối ngoại – Viện Kinh tế và Kinh doanh quốc tế  
*Trường Đại học Ngoại thương, Hà Nội, Việt Nam*

**Phạm Thu Hương**

Giảng viên Viện Kinh tế và Kinh doanh quốc tế  
*Trường Đại học Ngoại thương, Hà Nội, Việt Nam*

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### **Tóm tắt**

Nghiên cứu về Học kết hợp quan trọng khi đặt dưới 2 bối cảnh. Đầu tiên là, hậu quả nặng nề của dịch COVID-19 lên xã hội nói chung và ngành giáo dục nói riêng đã đặt ra một nhu cầu cấp bách: cải thiện chất lượng học trực tuyến ở mọi cơ sở đào tạo giáo dục. Thêm vào đó, phương pháp học kết hợp – một phương thức kết hợp những tinh túy của 2 phương thức học trực tuyến và trực tiếp – đang là một xu hướng được nhiều trường đại học áp dụng để cải thiện chất lượng dạy và học ở bình thường mới. Bài viết này muốn cung cấp quan điểm của sinh viên về ưu thế, bất lợi của 2 hình thức học trực tuyến và trực tiếp và tổng hợp những mong đợi của sinh viên về mô hình học kết hợp.

**Từ khóa:** học kết hợp, học trực tuyến, học trực tiếp, góc nhìn sinh viên, FTU

### **BLENDED LEARNING: EXPECTATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM FTU ADVANCED PROGRAMS STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE**

#### **Abstract**

Research in Blended Learning is crucial considering 2 contexts. Firstly, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on society in general and on education in particular poses an urgent need to improve online learning quality at all educational institutions. Additionally, the blended learning teaching method, which combines the best of both worlds, is a global trend for universities to apply and improve the quality of teaching and learning in 'the new normal' life. This research aims to provide insight into students' viewpoint of the pros and cons of virtual and face-to-face learning models and collect their expectations of future blended learning models.

**Keywords:** blended learning, online learning, offline learning, students' perspective, FTU

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<sup>1</sup> Tác giả liên hệ, Email: k60.2112140097@ftu.edu.vn

## **1. Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had serious effects on education. In the context of social distancing, lecturers and students cannot be physically present at classrooms and have to adapt to various online teaching tools to ensure the progress and quality of teaching. Beside the difficulties and challenges when adapting to new teaching and learning methods, online learning also opens up many potential opportunities and advantages compared to traditional learning methods such as flexibility, convenience, interaction with peers and teachers, independence and balancing work commitments. However, face-to-face learning at universities still has outstanding advantages that online teaching tools cannot completely replace. Hence, the blended learning teaching method, which combines both face-to-face and online forms, is and will become a global trend for universities to apply and improve the quality of teaching and learning in ‘the new normal’ life.

Even though there has been a relatively large number of research papers on Blended Learning, the majority of them have been conducted by professors instead of students - the subjects of blended learning, their voices and opinions need to be heard and analyzed carefully if the ultimate goal of higher education practitioners is to design an effective blended learning model. Also, there has not been a research paper to date Blended Learning at Foreign Trade University. Due to the individual characteristic of a blended learning environment, the data from international as well as domestic papers is, to a large extent, unable to reflect the situation at Foreign Trade University. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global trend of blended learning and the research gap, “Blended Learning: Expectations and suggestions from FTU Advanced Programs students’ perspective” will be of great value.

## **2. Literature review**

Different papers define Blended Learning differently.

Bonk & Graham (2006): “Blended learning systems combine face-to-face instructions with computer-mediated instructions”. The authors also noted that this definition “reflects the idea that BL is the combination of instruction from two historically separate models of teaching and learning...It also emphasizes the central roles of computer-based technologies in Blended Learning”. Valiathan (2002) defined Blended Learning as “a learning that mixes various event-based activities, including face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning, and self-paced learning”. Hayden & Russell (2018) used a different description for this term: they stated that Blended Learning was a learning experience that “combines offline and online forms of learning where the online learning usually means “over the Internet” and offline learning happens in a more traditional classroom setting.” However, these definitions only mentioned the method of blend, excluding its ultimate purpose.

Singh (2003) was more specific about the purpose of blending, saying that Blended Learning “combines multiple delivery media that are designed to complement each other and promote learning and application-learned behavior”. Blended Learning based on these definitions was not just a method of combining several learning elements but a model designed with a purpose, in which the advantage of each component was utilized to increase the quality of students’ learning process. This paper inherited the definition of Blended Learning by Harvey Singh as it best reflects the model of Blended Learning this paper is building towards.

Benefits of Blended Learning is a widely discussed topic in many papers.

The main advantages of blended learning are flexibility, convenience, interaction with peers and teachers, independence and balancing work commitments (Wahaa & Davis, 2014). Blended Learning method is also effective in increasing the students' learning rate, students' knowledge, satisfaction and attention. (Sadeghi *et al.*, 2014). Students with high levels of self-directed learning readiness significantly improved their academic performance when an intervention of Internet-based tutorials coupled with traditional lectures was introduced (Gagnon *et al.*, 2013).

However, face-to-face learning at universities still has outstanding advantages that online teaching tools cannot completely replace.

Four key challenges are incorporating flexibility, stimulating interaction, facilitating students' learning processes, and fostering an effective learning climate (Boelens *et al.*, 2017). Other obstacles include looking at how to teach, not what to teach, ensuring all the elements of the blend are coordinated, resisting the urge to use technology simply because it is available (Hoffman, 2011).

### **3. Methodology**

There are four main steps that we will apply to analyze the collected data. The first one is Descriptive analysis, which identifies what has already happened (these questions will be about the experience of students when studying online and offline) and we will also consider the age of students in this step to see how it affects the results. The second step is Diagnostic analysis, which focuses on understanding why something has happened. We will look into students' background to understand their perspective in all three methods of studying (online, offline, and blended learning). The background consists of students' major and the academic year they are in (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors and alumni). The next one is Prescriptive analysis which allows us to make recommendations for the future. After that, we will show the data and our interpretation in the form of written records and graphs with the support of Excel. The survey was conducted online, receiving 112 responses of all expected academic years after a month.

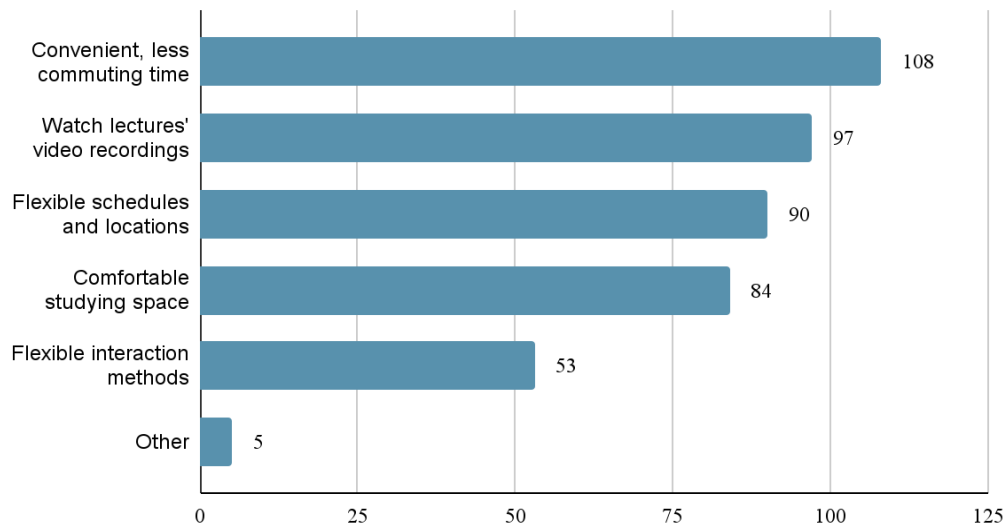
### **4. Findings**

#### ***4.1. Makeup of Respondents***

In general modules, it can be seen that second-year students took up a large percentage of students doing the survey (38.4%). There are two reasons behind this. Firstly, sophomores have experienced both online and offline learning at FTU, so they have a more well-rounded view of these learning methods and how different subjects should be delivered than freshmen'. Secondly, second-year students are going to spend 2 more years at FTU; therefore, they will have more expectations for Blended Learning than third-year, final-year students and alumni.

## 4.2. Findings

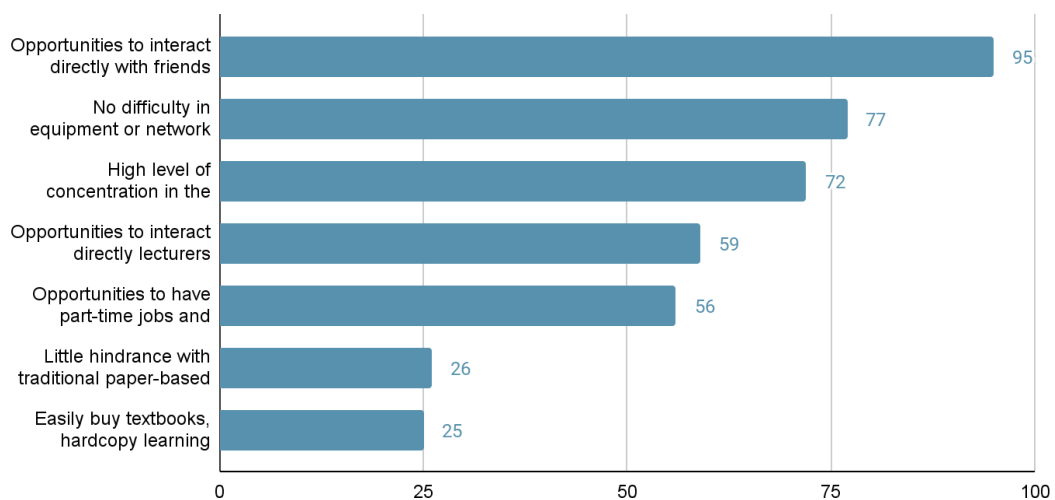
### 4.2.1. Students' experience with online and offline learning



**Figure 1.** Online learning advantages

**Source:** Research group's survey

According to the responses of Advance program students, many advantages can be gained when it comes to online learning. Up to 108 out of 112 students surveyed find the convenient and less commuting time the most important benefit of online learning. The other three advantages considered of equal importance, with not much difference in the record are comfortable studying space, flexible schedules and locations, and lectures' recordings availability. The chart also shows that students do not find that interaction methods online are of equal importance to the previous mentioned advantages.

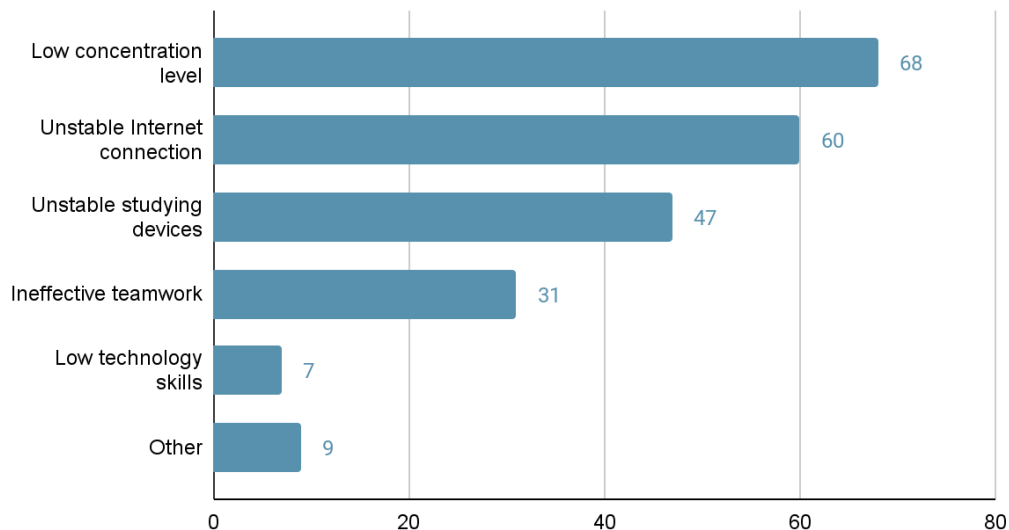


**Figure 2.** Offline learning advantages

**Source:** Research group's survey

The bar chart shows that there are many advantages accompanying the in-person traditional. The most important advantage suggested by students is the opportunities to interact directly with

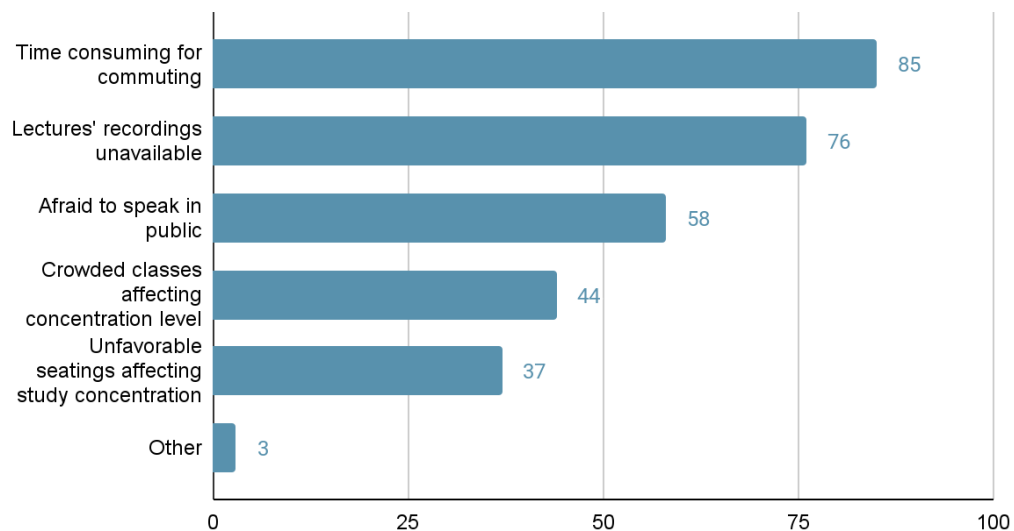
friends, along with the chance to talk directly and hang out with peers. The other two vital factors, which are of equal importance, are no difficulty in equipment or network connection when participating in online learning and exams, and high level of concentration in the lecture. Additionally, the opportunities to interact directly with lecturers and have part-time jobs are also considered as pros of the in-person learning method. The least two important advantages, according to the respondents of the survey, are little hindrance with traditional paper-based assessment and exam methods, and the availability of textbooks and hardcopy learning materials.



**Figure 3.** Online learning disadvantages

**Source:** Research group's survey

The chart above illustrates many disadvantages of the online learning method. The biggest problem that students encounter when studying online is lower concentration level, which is also further discussed in the concentration level bar chart. Besides, nearly 50% of students surveyed find that unstable Internet connection diminishes the quality of virtual studying. Some students found out that the disadvantages of this method of studying are unstable studying devices and ineffective teamwork. According to the chart, only 7 students surveyed have problems with low technology skills which can be assisted with training and the IT support team from the university.



**Figure 4.** Offline learning disadvantages

**Source:** Research group's survey

This chart illustrates the drawbacks of the traditional face-to-face learning method. The biggest disadvantage of this studying mode is the time students have to spend commuting to the university. 85 out of 112 students, which accounts for 75.9% of the total number of students surveyed. Another unfavorable feature of offline learning is the unavailability of lectures' recordings which are considered important to students who want to watch the lectures again whether for the reason that they want to revise for the courses, or they have missed the classes. There are also other cons of this studying mode, which should be taken into consideration are unfavorable seatings in classes, crowded classes, the anxiety for public speaking, or the situation of the global epidemic at the moment, COVID-19 disease.

Feedbacks on facilities and lecturers at FTU of both online and offline learning were positive. We also collected information about students' note taking strategies and concentration levels during online and offline classes. It is notable that students reported to concentrate better when they learnt in a traditional classroom setting.

#### 4.2.2. *Proposed learning methods for each module*

According to the survey, most students (50% to 75%) from different school years prefer to study basic core subjects online except for Math and French.

Regarding the results of students from International Business Management, the majority of Professional Education Knowledge, Major core and specialized, and Specialized knowledge subjects are recommended to be taught in person, by surveyed students. However, subjects in special knowledge, optional modules are mostly chosen to be studied online.

Turning to International Business Economics, we categorized Basic core Knowledge into two methods of studying. One is for subjects that involve calculations (econometrics, statistics, etc.) and one is for others. The former one requires offline classes while the latter is more preferred to be taught online. In terms of major core and specialized subjects, they are distributed equally into offline learning and blended learning. Considering compulsory specialized knowledge subjects,

they are most favored to be learnt offline. Lastly, for optional specialized knowledge subjects, the majority of them are prone to be organized with the blended method.

#### *4.2.3. Some methods of applying Blended Learning at FTU*

We surveyed students on how Blended Learning should be applied at FTU, and several ideas were put forward.

Nearly half of respondents (50) wanted to join classes offline and take tests online. However, there were no reasons provided that explain this option. Common reasons given by those opting for Blended Learning method were “protection during the pandemic”, “flexibility”, “less time spent in front of the computer screen” and “combining the best of both worlds”, and these reasons apparently have no clear link with the aforementioned method. We suppose this was because online tests are easier to cheat while offline classes are more engaging.

Another model suggested was that during the school year, classes would take place on FTU’s campus while summer classes would be online. This is because during summer students often find part-time jobs, do an internship or participate in other extracurricular and educational activities. Online classes provide flexibility of time and place, enabling students to simultaneously carry out their summer plan and take extra credits during summer.

39 students expected assignments to be submitted 100% online regardless of classroom models. Digital homework stimulates creativity as students can present their ideas not just with text but also images, infographics, slides and videos. In addition, it familiarizes students with a wide range of tools which are helpful not only for their studies but their future career such as Word, PowerPoint, Excel, etc. and more advanced tools like photoshopping, video-editing, designing applications. Last but not least, it is more environmentally friendly to hand in a soft copy of the homework than printing pages containing the same information.

Besides responses to the questions how to blend, why blend is another question our survey asked FTU students.

The majority of students believed that Blended Learning can combine the best of both worlds; therefore, modules which consist of complex concepts as well as group presentations. should blend several learning methods to increase effectiveness of the learning process. It is observed that there are activities Other common reasons for applying Blended Learning were time-saving, flexibility and convenience.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper presented a survey designed to collect students’ expectations and suggestions for applying Blended Learning at FTU.

Regarding expectations, results showed that generally, feedback on facilities and teaching quality was positive; however, problems like commuting time for offline learning and lack of interaction, health issues for online learning needed further action from FTU.

Turning to suggestions on delivery methods for each module, all general modules of both programs were recommended to be taught online except for Math and French. For the Business Administration program, basic core modules, compulsory modules in major core knowledge and some compulsory modules in specialized knowledge were preferred to be delivered in person, while optional modules in specialized knowledge were suggested to be learnt online. For the

International Business Economics program, basic core modules were distributed equally into online and offline learning. Respondents voted for all classes of compulsory modules in major core knowledge to be on campus with the exception of International Economics I and II. Traditional classrooms were expected to be the setting for most compulsory modules in specialized knowledge, while Blended Learning was suggested to be applied for most optional modules.

With regards to suggestions on methods of applying Blended Learning, the most common 3 opinions were offline learning - online test, offline classes during school year and online classes in the summer, and all assignments being submitted online.

Due to human resources and finance restrictions, the paper only surveyed 2 Advanced programs' students, hence the results might not be representative of all students at FTU. The paper also made a mistake of not categorizing students by their status when asking them to choose the suitable learning method for each subject. Therefore, many freshmen may arbitrarily make a choice for the sake of answering the question as they have not learnt many of the subjects included in the survey. Lastly, associations between students' note-taking methods, study space and concentration have not been examined.

Further research could be done on students of other programs to see whether students' opinions and expectations are consistent. Detailed implementation of blended learning would be another helpful topic to discuss, such as a recommendation of the detailed percentage of online and offline lessons for each subject and elaboration on how lecturers can effectively utilize both learning methods in their class once Blended Learning is applied. Finally, links between FTU students' learning methods, learning autonomy and academic performance should also be researched as it helps with the designation of a suitable Blended Learning model for students at FTU.

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