



An Exploration of Teacher Roles in Blended EFL Contexts in Vietnam

Giang Hong Nguyen
Hanoi University

Elke Stracke
University of Canberra

This study investigates perceptions and practice of the roles of EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers at two Vietnamese universities in their blended English classes. Blended language learning (BLL) is often understood as a combination of face-to-face (F2F) learning and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Teachers play an essential role in technology implementation in language education. Understanding their reality is vital for sustainable change. The study builds on theoretical models of teacher roles and blended learning. It draws on qualitative data. The six teachers in this study successfully combined traditional roles with innovative ones in the new learning environment. They became independent and creative designers, thus facilitating the blend of F2F and online learning. Nevertheless, they experienced challenges in designing activities for the successful complementarity of the blend. This study underlines the need for a high(er) level of teacher autonomy and professional learning opportunities for effective pedagogical practice in BLL in the Vietnamese context, other Confucian heritage culture countries such as China, Singapore, Korea, and Japan, and beyond. Such changes will pave the way for the success in improving English language capability and EFL teacher professional growth.

Nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu về vai trò của giáo viên trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ tại hai trường đại học Việt Nam trong các lớp học tiếng Anh kết hợp. Học ngôn ngữ kết hợp (BLL) được hiểu là việc kết hợp giữa học trực tiếp và hỗ trợ của máy tính (CALL). Giáo viên đóng một vai trò thiết yếu trong việc triển khai công nghệ trong giáo dục ngôn ngữ. Việc tìm hiểu về thực tế giảng dạy của giáo viên đóng vai trò quan trọng cho sự thay đổi bền vững về phương pháp giảng dạy. Nghiên cứu được xây dựng trên cơ sở lý luận về vai trò của giáo viên và học tập kết hợp. Nghiên cứu dựa trên dữ liệu định tính. Sáu giáo viên trong nghiên cứu này đã kết hợp thành công vai trò truyền thống với vai trò đổi mới trong môi trường học tập kết hợp. Họ trở thành những nhà thiết kế độc lập và sáng tạo, từ đó tạo điều kiện thuận lợi trong việc kết hợp giữa việc học trực tiếp và máy tính. Tuy nhiên, họ gặp phải những thách thức trong việc nỗ lực tạo ra các hoạt động dạy học kết hợp thành công. Nghiên cứu này nhấn mạnh sự cần thiết phải có hoặc có nhiều hơn mức độ tự chủ của giáo viên và cơ hội phát triển nghề nghiệp nhằm giúp việc học kết hợp hiệu quả trong bối cảnh các quốc gia có di sản văn hóa Nho giáo như Việt Nam, Trung Quốc, Singapore, Hàn Quốc và Nhật Bản, v.v. Những thay đổi này có thể tạo sự thành công trong việc nâng cao năng lực tiếng Anh và phát triển chuyên môn của giáo viên giảng dạy tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ.

Keywords: blended language learning, Confucian heritage culture, teacher professional development, teacher roles, Vietnam



Introduction

The English language has long been seen as a lingua franca among ASEAN countries. Like many ASEAN members, Vietnam does not have a history of using English as a community language. The belief that English is an efficient and effective tool in the process of global integration and development has led to national educational reforms, of which Vietnam's National Foreign Languages (NFL) Project (Government of Vietnam, 2008, 2017) is the most ambitious attempt in Vietnam's history to reform its education system. It aims to "develop national policy and practice in foreign language education, with a strong focus on the English language" (Moore et al., 2023, p. 463). The project has emphasised and encouraged the use of technology to support innovation in foreign language teaching and learning and help transform English language education from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach in Vietnam while enhancing teaching effectiveness.

In Vietnam, English has been a compulsory subject in the general education curriculum from grades 3 to 12 since 2008 (V.-T. Nguyen, 2018), an introductory subject in kindergarten (Government of Vietnam, 2017), and an optional subject in grades 1 and 2 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018) since 2018. Despite English now being taught at all levels of education, the English language competence of Vietnamese learners is far from satisfactory (V.-T. Nguyen, 2018). Vietnam's Confucian heritage has deeply influenced its education. Students are often expected to be passive listeners and successful imitators of their teachers (V. Hoang, 2010). Previous studies have shown that Vietnamese EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers embrace communicative language teaching to some extent, using both traditional and learner-centred approaches in their teaching (Lewis & McCook, 2002), but traditional teaching methods – with teachers dominating the classroom and steering students' learning and behaviours – continue to govern Vietnamese English language classrooms (T. Dang, 2010), also in a blended learning context (Bui, 2015).

This study¹ investigates perceptions and practice of the roles of EFL teachers at two Vietnamese universities in their technology-mediated classes (G. H. Nguyen, 2017). These classes are blended language learning (BLL) classes. We refer to BLL broadly as a mix of face-to-face (F2F) learning, and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) both online and offline (Neumeier, 2005; Stracke, 2007).

There are several reasons for conducting the study. First, BLL has continued to enjoy great popularity in language learning practice and research (Mizza & Rubio, 2020). BLL can lead to effective teaching and learning environments due to its potential for reflection and out-of-classroom learning (Moskal et al., 2013; V. Nguyen & Stracke, 2020), thus significantly improving the student learning experience when implemented appropriately (Bueno-Alastuey & Pérez, 2014; Kantisa & Sitthitikul, 2020; Kim, 2020). If not, it can potentially lead to student drop-out (Stracke et al., 2023). Second, previous research has investigated teachers' and students' perceptions of their experiences of BLL in EFL contexts. This study, however, adds to the growing body of literature by not only investigating teachers' views but also their practice when performing their roles in their particular BLL EFL contexts. In addition, while Neumeier (2005) considered teacher roles as an important parameter in BLL contexts, they were not explored in her study. This study aims to address this gap and provides empirical evidence for the teacher roles in the BLL context. Third, teachers play an essential role in technology implementation in language education and are regarded as the most influential factor in educational innovation (Fishman & Davis, 2006). Understanding the perceptions and practice of teacher roles in teachers' lived reality is vital for sustainable change.

¹ This article is a part of a larger project of the first author's PhD work.

Literature Review

Teacher Roles in (Blended) Language Classes

Grasha (1996) suggested five typical roles of teachers in the teaching and learning process, namely expert (possessing knowledge and expertise that students need), formal authority (possessing status among students because of knowledge), personal model (teaching by personal example and establish a prototype for how to think and behave), facilitator (emphasising the personal nature of teacher-student interactions), and delegator (developing students' capacity to function autonomously). Previous research (Choudhury, 2011) has indicated that teachers have switched from traditional to more innovative roles in collaborative learning or technology-mediated settings. Teachers adopting a social constructivist approach are likely to take on the role of a facilitator and/or delegator and are less likely to adopt the role of an expert, authority, or model (Zhu et al., 2010). The role of the teacher as a facilitator is central in the blended teaching and learning context, empowering learners by giving them more initiative, responsibility, and control over their learning (Choudhury, 2011). In such contexts, learners are no longer only receivers of knowledge but become participants in class activities and generators of knowledge.

Earlier research in BLL has shown that teachers adapt their roles to the new blended environment in various ways (Grgurović, 2011; N. Hoang, 2015). In the study by Grgurović (2011) ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers at a large public university in the US opted for the facilitator, monitor, and technician roles, thus assisting students during laboratory time through more individualised instruction than in the traditional classroom. In contrast, Nissen and Tea (2012) showed that the teachers of English and German at Stendhal University in France perceived the F2F modality as equally central as in a traditional course. Indeed, the teachers struggled with managing the course via different modalities and rarely played the role of an online tutor. In a cross-cultural study of Chinese and Flemish teachers of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses at universities in China and Belgium, Zhu et al. (2010) investigated teachers' perspectives of their roles in online collaborative BLL. Teachers adopted different roles depending on the course objectives, student capabilities, class size, and cultural context. For instance, authority, expert, and friend roles were more important roles for the Chinese teachers than for the Flemish teachers because the former assumed that the first and second year students were not capable of independent thinking. In a study of the teacher roles between the two learning modes in a BLL course at a university in China, Huang (2019) found that from the student perspective, teachers were more influential in F2F learning than in online learning. Their managerial roles were more powerful in online learning whereas the cognitive roles in F2F learning were more impactful. Also, according to Aguilar (2012) and N. Hoang (2015), teachers had to manage the language learning environment to create favourable conditions for language learning. They also helped students develop learning strategies and become autonomous.

Marsh (2012) and Nicolson et al. (2011) have emphasised the need for a variety of teacher roles in the BLL context. Comas-Quinn (2011) claimed that the success of a blended course greatly depends on how well teachers transition from their traditional F2F roles to a wider complex of roles that the blended learning context requires. Marsh (2012) has identified five essential teacher roles in the BLL environment, namely promoting learner-centred learning in the classroom, facilitating the blend, encouraging autonomous and collaborative learning, creating a supportive online community, and managing and facilitating online interaction. Since there is a diversity of teaching modes in the mixed BLL environment, teachers can employ a combination of roles to facilitate the blend, encourage student collaborative and independent learning, engage learners in communicative language practice, and manage student learning both in F2F and online activities (Marsh, 2012). To sum up, teachers adapt their roles to the new blended environment in different ways. This study sets out to explore how EFL university teachers in Vietnam adapt their roles.

Blended Language Learning

Previous research into BLL contexts in Vietnam has focused primarily on students' and/or teachers' perceptions of blended learning (N. Hoang, 2015; Le et al., 2022; Phuong et al., 2019; Vu, 2014). BLL was reported to help increase student motivation in learning English (Phuong et al., 2019), enhance student independence and collaborative learning (Bui, 2015), flexibility and convenience, and usefulness (Vu, 2014). A recent study by Le et al. (2022) found that teachers faced numerous barriers and drawbacks, such as "lack of infrastructure and technology, institutional policies and support; lack of knowledge, experience and investment in using BL; lack of technological competence and information technology (IT) skills and lack of teaching time to employ web-based technologies and online resources in classrooms" while "the most crucial drawbacks were: lecturers' workload, ineffective use of BL, time consumption and demotivation" (p. 225).

We applied a combination of two theoretical frameworks to investigate the blended EFL contexts investigated in this study. Specifically, Neumeier's (2005) framework of BLL design and implementation relating to mode, model of integration, and distribution of learning content was employed since the integration of F2F and CALL modes is an important component of theory building for effective BLL course design. These parameters help to describe and conceptualise a BL environment for language learning and teaching purposes. In addition, we used Lai et al.'s (2016) two blended models (Consolidation and Extension Models) to describe and analyse the two blended contexts at the two Vietnamese universities where this study was conducted. We describe these models in more detail in the methodology section and show how they appropriately reflect the nature of BLL as practised in the contexts of this study.

Findings and discussion will focus on relevant roles (knowledge provider, facilitator, model, advisor, designer, creator, and manager) in the Vietnamese contexts investigated, which we adapted from H. Dang (2006), Grasha (1996) and Marsh (2012). This study, then, aims to understand the teachers' views and practice of roles in the new blended context and asks:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of their roles in their implementation of BLL?
2. How do the teachers perform their roles in their BLL classes?

Method

Context and Participants

Context

Teacher participants in the study worked at two tertiary institutions in a major city in Vietnam. University A is one of the oldest institutions of higher education in Vietnam where English is taught as a major and is the medium of instruction for various courses such as Information Technology, International Studies, and Accounting. University B is one of the first non-state early established higher education institutions in Vietnam. This university runs a wide range of programs such as Business, Finance and Banking, Languages, and Computer Sciences.

Participants

A total of six teachers participated in this study, three at University A, and three at University B. The University A teachers' age was between 30 and 42. The three teachers at University B were of similar age, between 28 and 39. Table 1 provides an overview of the six participants (pseudonyms).

TABLE 1
Teacher Participants

Teacher	University	Gender	Age	BLL teaching experience
Chien	A	Male	42	7
Phuong	A	Female	30	5
Quang	A	Male	37	7
Duong	B	Female	35	1.5
Linh	B	Female	28	1.5
Mai	B	Female	39	1.5

BLL models: Both universities used *EDO (English Discoveries Online)* software. F2F and CALL modes in each of the two models of BLL at the two universities were distributed based on Neumeier's (2005) framework and Lai et al.'s (2016) principles. The consolidation principle emphasises the combination of different components so that the students can consolidate their knowledge by engaging in different types of activities, whereas the extension principle focuses on the extension of learning from one space to another. Based on these principles, University A followed the Extension Model, whereas University B followed the Consolidation Model. Table 2 shows that in the Extension Model, F2F and CALL modes were delivered at the same time and in one place. There were three components of the blend (students' self-study using *EDO* under the teachers' supervision; F2F teaching; and online activities, which were undertaken in the computer lab). On the other hand, in the Consolidation model, the offline activities took place in a physical classroom, while the online component (*EDO* self-study) happened anywhere outside the F2F offline class (at home or in the university self-study room).

TABLE 2
EDO Class at the Two Universities

	University A	University B
Class name	EDO class	EDO class
Location	Computer lab	F2F offline class
Components of the blend	<i>Call mode: EDO</i> in computer lab Other online activities	<i>Call mode: EDO</i> self-study at home or in university self-study room
	<i>F2F mode: F2F</i> teaching	<i>F2F mode: F2F</i> teaching
Duration	12 weeks/90 minutes per lesson	9 weeks/150 minutes per lesson

Data Collection and Analysis

We conducted three semi-structured interviews (a total of approximately 135 minutes in length) and four classroom observations (a total of 8 hours) with each teacher participant at the two universities. The aim was to explore how the teachers viewed and performed their roles in the blended classes. The interview data allowed us to answer the first research question with its focus on teachers' perceptions of their roles in their implementation of BLL, whereas the classroom observations were used to answer the second research question about these teachers' practice of their roles in the blended class. The two sources of data were analysed thematically and subsequently triangulated. The analysis followed five steps (Flick, 2018) including getting familiar with the data, generating initial codes, generating initial categories, developing initial themes, and refining themes. The lead researcher transcribed all data, while both researchers conducted the data analysis that included repeated peer checking of the emerging themes. A system of initial themes was developed based on the roles suggested in the previous literature (H. Dang, 2006; Grasha, 1994; Marsh, 2012), followed by an inductive analysis that allowed us to refine the themes. We analysed the data sets for University A and B separately, before we compared and contrasted the two cases to better understand how the teachers in two different blended contexts viewed and practised their roles. The research was conducted according to strict ethical guidelines.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Reconciling the Roles of Knowledge Provider and Facilitator

Both groups of teachers took on both roles of knowledge provider and facilitator but with different weighting. The teachers in the Extension Model perceived and acted more in the role of facilitator, while the teachers in the Consolidation Model viewed themselves and utilised more the role of knowledge providers.

Two of the three Extension Model teachers acted in the role of knowledge provider. Chien saw himself firmly as a background knowledge provider. In some cases, after he had asked the students to search online for information about specific topics, he provided them with additional information about these topics, frequently translating the information into Vietnamese, or explaining key vocabulary. Likewise, Phuong believed that teachers should provide further information and explanation: *“Students must receive more explanations from me. There are many differences in English grammar rules, so in EDO classes, I want to check their understanding and explain further.”* Quang, however, did not see himself as a knowledge expert. All Consolidation Model teachers embraced the role of knowledge provider. For instance, Mai said: *“I indirectly explained things and consolidated their understanding. I need to give, consolidate, and explain knowledge of language to the students since they could not always understand the knowledge they obtained on the EDO software.”* In the F2F offline classes, Mai always explained the grammar rules to help her students consolidate their grammar knowledge.

The Extension Model teachers claimed that the use of computers made them facilitate the students' learning more. They believed that their roles were quite similar in both traditional and blended contexts, but the difference was the amount of time spent on each role, e.g., *“My instruction was more dominant in the traditional classes and more frequent in the blended classes”* (Quang). Quang created flexibility for his students by allowing them to decide what, when, and how to choose the exercises that he had prepared. Similarly, Chien wandered around the class to see if there were students who had difficulties in doing tasks so that he *“could provide them support when needed”*. In the Consolidation Model classes, the teachers employed the role of facilitators of communication, which was the main focus of the F2F class. For example, Linh said: *“Modern teachers don't necessarily explain everything to the students, but just need to facilitate the students to consolidate things that they are not clear about”*.

In both groups, teachers believed that it was their responsibility to help the students understand the content and knowledge of the lessons. Expert teachers were also found in the study by Lam and Lawrence (2002), who reported that such teachers impart knowledge of the target language (English) and the learning process to the students. Imparting knowledge to students is a dominant role in Vietnamese EFL classes (Bui, 2015; Phuong et al., 2019), and Chinese classes (Zhu et al., 2010). In our study the teachers regarded the understanding of content as vital, leading to their explanations of grammar, background knowledge, and translations into Vietnamese. The teachers in this study equipped students with knowledge by confirming and consolidating what the students harvested themselves from computer software and on the Internet. In other words, teachers could intervene when students needed clarification in instruction, or when the teacher thought that students had not understood them (Pham, 2007). The teachers in this study believed that such knowledge provision remained an essential part of their teaching practice also in their blended EFL teaching.

At the same time, our study indicates that the role of the facilitator has gained momentum in the EFL BLL classes. Numerous previous studies have found that the teacher's facilitating role plays an essential part in BLL classes where the teacher needs to create a favourable learning environment, thus empowering the learners to be more autonomous in their learning (Aguilar, 2012; Choudhury, 2011; Grgurović 2011; N. Hoang, 2015). In this study, the teachers' facilitating role is strongly related to how the teachers personally view teaching and learning in the given context. In the Extension Model, the role of the facilitator also included providing the students with more choices and access to various learning resources, creating a convenient learning environment for the students, and giving them more space and freedom to explore and learn by themselves. This role is essential in a BLL class (Marsh, 2012). However, Quang self-critically

reported that he did not always provide enough hands-on support for the students to be able to work on their own, which might be related to the perceived lack of training in supporting their learners' autonomy. Since teachers in the Consolidation Model focused on developing the students' communicative skills, they generally adopted the role of a communicative facilitator, by creating diverse communicative activities in their F2F classes, especially involving collaborative activities so that learners could develop their communicative skills and stay motivated. These teachers are similar to the teacher facilitators in Phan's (2004) study who "encouraged students to have free and stimulating discussions or to take part in many language activities to learn English better" (p. 55).

Theme 2: Modelling, Advising, and Moral Guidance Remain Important

Several teachers across the two models showed a strong preference for modelling and advising. This might indicate that a preference for these roles is mainly a personal choice, and less dependent on the BLL model in which the teaching takes place. Of the teachers in the Extension Model, Chien showed himself as a model to his students by providing examples from his personal experience. He believed his students would pay attention to his advice and thus get more involved in the activities. In practice, he showed his students techniques for speaking effectively and how to pronounce words correctly. He also displayed how to use computers and how to search for information effectively. Linh, a teacher working in the Consolidation Model, also preferred and frequently practised the roles of model and advisor. Linh believed that "*students can learn a lot when I do samples*". She often used examples to teach her students. In one of her classes, Linh sat with the students and shared her opinion on an issue. Linh claimed that teachers should be the students' "*friends in order to motivate the students to learn better*". In her opinion, "*being a friend means teachers support their students in both academic and living matters so teachers should be educators, telling them what they should do or shouldn't do*".

The findings suggest that the roles of personal model and advisor have a place in the BLL classes under investigation. Chien and Linh perceived their behaviours to be influential on student development, which is in line with the thinking of Grasha (1996). Phuong et al. (2019), in their study of a blended English course in Vietnam, also emphasised that students prefer the teacher leading their learning experience. They conclude that the teacher must be active in guiding students in blended learning environments. Chien and Linh seem to support this view.

Teachers are also expected to set good examples for the students (H. Dang, 2006). The teachers in the current study acted as moral educators, teaching the students moral lessons about what they should or should not do. For instance, Linh said, "*I always tell my students that study English in the classroom is never enough and if they don't practise they can't use English*". Other typical statements in this context were "*you shouldn't be lazy*" (Linh), "*you need to work harder*" (Chien), or "*students should be more motivated and autonomous in their learning, to take part in the discussion forum*" (Duong). Phan (2004) stated that Vietnamese teachers not only teach students knowledge but also need "to perform their duty as behaviour educators and/or moral guides" (p. 55), and this statement still holds in the blended context. In the traditional Vietnamese education realm, students are supposed to obey and respect teachers (Pham, 2007), while teachers need to satisfy learners not only in the search for knowledge but also in the virtues of life (P. Nguyen et al., 2006). Due to the deep influence of the traditional philosophy of learning and teaching from Confucianism, the teacher roles of a personal and moral model and advisor continue to hold a central place in blended classes.

Theme 3: Multi-faceted Designing is of Vital Importance

All six teachers perceived the value of the role of designer of F2F and online activities and utilised it frequently in the blended classes. In both models, the teachers used computers as an effective tool for searching for materials and teaching and designing class activities. However, each teacher had their way to search for and present their teaching materials. Quang and Chien, teachers in the Extension Model,

frequently used computers to search for materials that they then posted online for their students, whereas in designing class activities Phuong tended to search for the materials on the Internet and subsequently design paper-based exercises for her students. The two different habits of designing the activities were related to the teachers' technological competence and preferences: Quang and Chien were more technology-oriented, while Phuong preferred F2F human interaction and shared a wide range of printed supplementary exercises and materials with her students.

All teachers in the Consolidation Model designed exercises to develop students' language skills and organise activities to help the students to consolidate and extend the content of the *EDO* exercises. The teachers believed that creating new and various activities in every lesson would help the students engage in the learning process actively. For example, Mai employed various computer software to modify the content of the *EDO* exercises in a way that suited the students' learning. She used snapshots to modify texts or images of the PDF files, cut out unnecessary parts, or add some more parts. She also employed YouTube to search for video files, Gold Wave to modify the audio files, Windows Filmmaker to modify the video files and make video clips, and collected pictures in Google Image. Linh, on the other hand, believed that creating different activities with the help of the computer gave her students opportunities to practise English so she designed a variety of exercises and activities based on the content of the *EDO* lessons. For example, if the activities were comprehension, true-false, matching, and gap-fill exercises, Linh created "*follow-up speaking activities reporting what the students had heard, role-playing the various situations*".

All teachers, across the two models, shared one common issue, namely that designing materials was challenging and time consuming, doing it in their own time with no support from their institutions. This finding is in line with Le et al. (2022), who found that Vietnamese teachers faced numerous challenges in designing blended activities due to a lack of knowledge and experience. In the current study, the teachers challenged themselves to find ways to cope with this issue. For example, Quang said BLL was not an official policy in his department, so he had to do "*some experiments*" when he had time in his *EDO* classes. Thus, it was difficult for him to "*design proper activities or exercise for students*". Similarly, Phuong admitted that "*it's easier to be a 'creator' in the traditional classroom because books and materials are there*". Additionally, Linh claimed that she decided "*what and how to teach*" and wished that there were reference books or ready-made materials. Mai emphasised that this "*is really time-consuming and misleading sometimes*".

Bañados (2006), Kaleta et al. (2007), N. Hoang (2015), and Phuong et al. (2019) emphasised the role of teachers as material designers in blended contexts. In our study, while designing the materials, the teachers found it challenging to successfully join the thread between the two components of their blended English class. They had to prepare the lessons by examining the CALL component so that they could develop suitable F2F and online activities. There were no books relating to the CALL component, or printed materials to instruct them on how and what to teach in the blended classes. It is noteworthy that all the teachers managed to match what the students practised with the CALL materials with the extra activities they created. The teachers in the Extension Model used extra F2F or online activities during the sessions in the computer laboratory to support the knowledge that the students had gained from the *EDO* exercises, helped them research materials online for learning and developing their background knowledge, or created additional online exercises in the four English skills so that students could practise online in their own time and when needed. The teachers in the Consolidation Model, by comparison, developed additional activities in their F2F classroom to help the students consolidate the knowledge obtained from the *EDO* materials, with a focus on speaking and/or writing tasks. Our findings stress the importance of the role of the teachers as material designers in the blended classes and indicate the importance of developing a strong, complementary link between the activities of the blend so that the teachers "do not end up teaching two parallel but unconnected courses" (Kaleta et al., 2007, p. 128), and offering support mechanisms for teachers. Our study underlines the need for material design knowledge and skills for Vietnam's and similar countries' efforts to future-proof the instruction of English and other foreign languages.

Theme 4: Creating and Managing Opportunities for Online Interaction and Communication Remains a Challenge

All teachers recognized that it was essential to create and monitor online discussions and interaction among students; however, not everyone created a virtual interactive environment. Their choice was governed by their personal beliefs as well as by the model that they were teaching in.

Quang and Chien, both teaching in the Extension Model, believed that it is essential to create a friendly social online environment for free and open communication: *“social activities were the basis for speaking and sharing things. If we could set up a good social network, students would be able to talk freely and express their ideas and share them with others. They could learn language in a natural way”* (Chien). Quang and Chien created forums so that students had online space to ask questions, make comments, or post essays if they wanted. To manage the online discussion, Quang developed topics and posted them on the forum. He wanted his students to *“share ideas by asking what they thought about the issues or asked questions”*. Quang acknowledged that, although he created and encouraged his students to post their comments and questions online, students preferred *“face to face communication”*; they did not *“post anything related to studying online”*. Chien employed Facebook as an online forum and seemed to manage the students’ discussions in this communication channel well. Chien said that he used Facebook as a backup for F2F speaking activities in the classroom. He chose suitable topics for the students and posted them to the forum so that they typed and shared their comments. In the EDO classroom in the computer laboratory, he encouraged them to discuss these topics in groups. At first, the forum was only used inside the classroom, but then the students could also *“join outside the classroom whenever they had free time at home”*. Chien felt very excited because they created *“a really busy forum”*. On the other hand, Phuong believed that creating an online forum was not necessary because she wanted her students away from computers. *“Instead of having something virtually the students can have F2F interaction or discuss with me instantly”* in the computer lab classroom. She also admitted that *“to be honest I am not an expert to create a forum”*.

Mai and Linh, both teachers in the Consolidation Model, created a discussion channel in the EDO software for the students to *“share their ideas of the topics”*. Linh believed that *“social interaction is very important so creating a forum provides them a channel to communicate, and to use the language they learn”*. Both teachers were the ones who also initiated topics based on the content of the EDO exercises. Both Linh and Mai struggled in managing the forums to work well. Mai let her students *“feel free to join in the forum”*. However, Mai reported that her students did not welcome the forum. Mai admitted that it was very hard to motivate students to ‘talk’ in the forum since they might have had *“difficulties in expressing their ideas”* and *“their language and background knowledge was not good enough”*. Linh experienced the same issue. She shared that *“the students seem not confident enough to express their ideas there. I think maybe they were not interested in such kind of activity”*. Duong, the third teacher working in the Consolidation Model, thought she might create a forum for her students in the future. In Duong’s view, *“a forum is a new way for students to get more involved in online discussion, but it is something new they haven’t done before”*.

All six teachers in the current study agreed that the roles of creator and manager of online interaction played an important role in the blended classes. This finding is in accordance with Huang (2019) who emphasises the importance of teachers being creators and managers of online interaction in the blended environment. However, the teachers in the current study applied these roles to varying extents, with the teachers in the Consolidation Model applying them less than their colleagues in the Extension Model. The former claimed that their students were not familiar with online discussion, and thus did not actively engage in the online discussion forum. It seems reasonable to assume that the F2F classroom as the main mode in the Consolidation Model influenced student and teacher preferences and behaviours. This finding is inconsistent with Huang (2019). He found that the managerial roles (including creators and managers of online interaction) are the most noticeable in the online learning component of a blended course, compared to affective and cognitive roles. More research is needed to better understand these inconclusive findings, possibly due to the different contexts in which the studies were conducted.

Marsh (2012) stresses the important role of teachers in encouraging autonomous and collaborative online contributions and providing a supportive online community. Although the teachers in this study saw the benefits of online communication, they did not often employ successful online monitoring strategies. In this study, despite efforts by the teachers in both models, an online discussion was not highly valued by the students. For the teachers who employed the roles of creator and manager of online interaction (Quang, Chien, Linh, Mai), their practice of the roles was challenging. These teachers created an online forum to increase the interaction between them and their students and among students, helping the students express their ideas freely, practising the language, and sharing comments and opinions on academic and non-academic matters. The teachers were the ones who initiated the online discussion and also the ones who were responsible for contributions to this community. While the teachers may have understood the value of online interaction in the blended context, they did not always employ the necessary skills to develop and manage the online interaction successfully.

It appears as if these roles do not yet seem appropriate in the Vietnamese EFL context with its Confucian heritage culture, similar to countries such as China, Singapore, Korea, and Japan, since they require a high level of teacher and learner autonomy. The teachers and students are familiar with the traditional teaching and learning approach so the students do not know how to develop their autonomy, while the teachers do not know how to encourage the students to develop learner autonomy. Therefore, there is a need for teachers to develop their autonomy because the development of learner autonomy depends on the development of teacher autonomy (Benson, 2013).

Conclusion

This study contributes to knowledge relating to teacher roles in an EFL BLL environment by providing a picture of how Vietnamese tertiary teachers viewed and adopted BLL. We believe that the in-depth investigation of these particular six Vietnamese teachers' perceptions and practice of their roles in their teaching practice provided deep insight into how each of them adopted a variety of roles, namely knowledge provider and facilitator, personal model and advisor, designer, and creator and manager of online interaction. Personal preferences, socio-cultural context, as well as the two different models in which the teachers were working influenced the teachers' views and practice. Depending on the specific BLL model, the teachers adjusted their preferences and practical roles in different ways, providing empirical evidence to Bañados (2006), who found that teacher roles change considerably as a result of their participation in a blended program. The study shows that the effectiveness of BLL is "contingent and reliant to the context and how technology is applied" (Mahmud, 2018, p. 365).

The success of any model lies especially in the hands of teachers; they are the agents who make such a change sustainable. In the case of BL, this success depends on how well they can make the transition from their role in the F2F classroom to the complex roles that online learning demands (Comas-Quinn, 2011) and find an optimal balance between online and offline instructions (Kim, 2020). Impressively, the teachers in this study were creative designers of learning content in their efforts to sew a thread between the F2F and online learning components. Interestingly, the teachers in this study highly value the roles of creator and manager of online activities, but given the students' low level of learner autonomy, this potential is not utilised.

Our study suggests that teacher roles are an important parameter in BLL design and implementation. Teachers must – and, in this study, do – change their roles while adapting to the new teaching environment. We argue that the findings of the study emphasise that teacher autonomy is an important component of BLL design and implementation and underline the need to enhance teacher autonomy in any BLL implementation "in the sense of [the teacher becoming] free to organise learning in new ways, or in the sense of having experience in the demands of autonomous learning" (Lamb & Reinders, 2008, p. 270). Teacher professional development programs that guide and support teachers for effective pedagogy in BLL

will empower them to make autonomous decisions about what and how they teach their students in the BLL context.

Finally, we recognise that the use of the *EDO* software as the chief CALL component in the two cases is a limitation of this study. This software, though considered a representative main CALL mode in the BLL adoption, is not the only CALL mode at the tertiary level in Vietnam. We recommend that future research could explore different BLL contexts in Vietnam and similar EFL contexts in ASEAN member countries in which teachers use other CALL software in the ever-growing online learning and teaching environment.

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The Authors

Giang Hong Nguyen is a senior lecturer in applied linguistics and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in the English Department at Hanoi University, Vietnam. Dr. Nguyen's current research interests are ICT/blended language learning, interactional competence, and teacher professional development. Her recent works have been published in the *ReCALL* journal, and with Springer, and Routledge.

English Department
Hanoi University
Km9, Nguyen Trai Road, Nam Tu Liem, Hanoi, Vietnam
Email: giangnh@hanu.edu.vn

Elke Stracke is a professor in applied linguistics and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in the Faculty of Education at the University of Canberra. She is an experienced educator and researcher with international work and research experience. She is an applied linguist who brings her expertise to solving language-related problems in contexts such as language education, cross-cultural curriculum development, and postgraduate supervision and assessment practice. She is currently the President of the Australian Applied Linguistics Association (ALAA).

Faculty of Education
University of Canberra
11 Kirinari St, Bruce ACT 2617, Australia
Email: Elke.Stracke@canberra.edu.au

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