EXPERIENCES OF THE E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG - UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES

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Abstract - E-learning is being widely deployed and gradually becoming a popular form of teaching in universities today. To achieve the quality of e-learning teaching requires the impact of many factors, in which the e-learning environment of students is important. This paper explored experiences on e-learning environment of students of The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies (UD-UFLS) to improve e-learning environment of the university's students. The study refered to most students' awareness of the importance of e-learning at university. The advantages and disadvantages of e-learning at the university (UD-UFLS) have also been identified. Through the results of the student survey, the content of the teacher's skills, the content of policies and management of e-learning activities, facilities and funding for e-learning implementation, class size, and student e-learning culture in e-learning are rated. The results of a questionnaire survey of 407 students of the UD-UFLS show a picture of students' e-learning environment and are the basis for proposing some measures to improve e-learning environment of the university's students.

Key words - e-learning; environment; IT tools; student; The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies

1. Introduction

E-learning environment has been widely applied in the implementation of curriculum of education in higher education around the world. Many universities and institutions develop their own e-learning system or software to help students enhance their learning beyond the boundaries of traditional classrooms. According to Azhari and Ming [1] and Thang, et al. [2], e-learning in learning English as Second Language (ESL) is not a new trend of teaching and learning method in the Malaysian education system and already been implemented in some of the universities in Malaysia. Also, Livingstone found that the students at the University of Guyana are generally ready for e-learning and are prepared for this new educational initiative [3]. In Taiwan, Chiu claims that Taiwanese college students hold positive attitudes towards e-learning by using computers to learn English [4]. Particularly, Kao and Windeatt state that the e-learning environment helps students engaged, relaxed, fun and effective on students' learning processes, and have a positive impact on learners' intrinsic motivation and learning attitudes [5]. Also, students find the websites of courses to be helpful resources that enhance the understanding of course content, and that these websites will continue to have an impact on higher education in the future [6]. Thang, et al. conduct a survey to students in four universities and confirm that technology is useful for learning English as a second language [2].

However, the implementations of e-learning environment in the teaching and learning in higher education are not actually as effective as it expects. Different lecturers in different environments made use of e-learning in different ways. Saata et al. found that the e-learning system at a university in Malaysia was commonly used by lecturers and students just for uploading and downloading lecture notes [7]. Furthermore, Souleles argues that e-learning can contribute little or nothing to teaching and learning [8]. The author adds there is a noticeable misalignment between perceptions and practices of e-learning and the associated rhetoric and literature of e-learning and innovative teaching and learning practices. In terms of lecturers, Xing claims that most of the lecturers at a university in China lacked a clear understanding of what e-learning is and what e-learning can do [9]. In addition, the professional development in e-learning for college English lecturers is insufficient both in terms of techniques and pedagogy in technology.

The quality of e-learning teaching requiring the impact of many factors is a major concern of universities in Viet Nam in general. UFFLS-UD is one of universities which have conducted e-learning teaching in recent years, especially in the statis of the pandemic COVID-19. UD-UFLS identified that the e-learning environment of students is important and has paid attention to implementing e-learning for students and creating a favorable e-learning environment for students.

However, to date, there have not been many studies on the e-learning environment of Vietnamese students in general and students of the UD-UFLS in particular. Because the limitation of time and human resources, with the hope to focus on students experiences in the e-learning enviroment, we conducted the study of experience of the e-learning environment of UD-UFLS students. The results of surveying the students' opinions with questionnaires will help the university have an objective information channel to assess the current status of the e-learning environment from which to apply necessary measures to improve the quality of the e-learning environment, contributing to improving the quality of training at UD-UFLS.

2. Review of related literature

2.1. Theoretical Background

There are many concepts of e-learning, e-learning environment which are clarified by a lot of authors. We considered the following definitions for our research's theoretical basement.

2.1.1. E-learning

"E-learning refers to the use of computer network technology, primarily over or through the internet, to deliver information and instructions to individuals" [10].

According to Tittasiri, "E-learning covers a wide set of applications and processes, including multimedia online activities such as the web, Internet video SD-ROM, TV and radio. Students can use these materials to teach themselves" [11].

E-learning is "the learning supported by digital electronic tools and media" [12].

2.1.2. E-learning environment

In the study of Thornes, the author stated that "an online learning environment has the capacity to support the needs of students with varied levels of IL skills" [13].

2.1.3. Online instruction

Online instruction refers to the virtual teaching modes which have been employed by many universities in Vietnam. Some universities made use of the Microsoft TEAM, some use Zoom, others implement Google Meet for their online instruction.

We used the above concepts for discussing this research aiming to clarify e-learning environment of the university's students

2.2. Previous Related Studies

Relating to the issues of e-learning implementing around the world, Azhari and Ming have reviewed the current practices of e-learning at the tertiary education level in Malaysia from a database search of PubMed, Science Direct, and Google scholar for e-learning, web-based learning, online learning, virtual learning, and mobile learning and catergorize e-learning as six categories as follows: (1) Offline computer-based e-learning; (2) Online and local area network-based e-learning; (3) Psychomotor skills trainer; (4) Virtual reality environment; (5) Digital game based learning; and (6) M-learning (mobile learning) [1]. This indicates that the language learners have approached and used different modes of e-learning nowadays in order to do self- learning to enhance their language studies whether or not the universities have implemented in their training curriculum. Pang, Wah, Keong, & Mohamed state that e-learning helped to supplement the quality of teaching and learning [14]. According to Azhari and Ming, as educators, we need to understand the students' perception on e-learning as it has become one of the popular practices for language learning and teaching among students and lecturers [1].

In order to investigate students' attitudes and practices of e-learning in their daily life, Saata, et al. conduct a survey to explore lecturers and students' knowledge and perception on the usage of e-learning at University Kebangsan Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur with the hope to improve lecturers and students' uses of e-learning at school [7]. 14 lecturers and 30 students responded to the questionnaire survey. The study found positive attitudes of both lecturers and students toward the use of e-learning system. Also, the study reveals that difference of opinion between lecturers and students regarding the usage of e-learning can improve their

knowledge on technology. In terms of specific use of technology, the lecturers simply use it for uploading notes and making announcements whereas the students use it for downloading lecture notes and receiving announcement from the teachers and school. The results of this study seem that the lecturers and students haven't made full use of technology for their e-learning.

In order to see if e-learning contributes its roles as motivators for the classrooms, Kao and Windeatt conduct a case study with 12 students in a university in Taiwan [5]. The goal of the study is to explore the potential benefits of e-learning, the problems the students encounter. Data collection in this study was from interviews, learning diaries, observation, and questionnaire. The study reveals that the students consider e-learning environment as engaging, relaxing, fun and effective, and these features had a positive impact on learners' intrinsic motivation and learning attitude. Also the presence of their peers increased their extrinsic motivation or gave them power or provided constraints that helped them persist with their learning.

Similar to Kao and Windeatt [5] study, Pang et al. [14] conducted a survey to 324 undergraduate students across all levels of study in the School of Education and Social Development, Malaysia Sabah. The study reveals that e-learning was not only helpful, but also enjoyable and exciting. In addition, e-learning was perceived to be a better learning experience compared to face-to-face learning. It also helped students to take more initiative in their learning and development compared to the conventional classes. This result was inconsistent with that of Akkoyunlu and Soylu's who that students preferred face-to-face interaction to e-learning's [15].

Going further to investigate students' learning styles and strategies on e-learning, Keller and Cernerud explore students' attitudes towards e-learning and to see if there is any relation between students' attitudes and background factors to e-learning and learning style. 106 students from two schools (School of Health Sciences and School of Engineering) at Jönköping University in Sweden responded to the questionnaires [16]. The study found that the strategy of implementing e-learning may play a crucial role for students' perception of the new technology. Also, the study found that students did not consider e-learning on campus as a benefit. Students experienced with computers did not have as positive attitudes to e-learning as other students. The study fails to investigate some kind of e-learning the students employed by themselves other than that of the e-learning system provided by the university.

Ibrahim, Prain and Collet conducted a survey to investigate Malaysian university students' perception on social network ESL learning [17]. 400 students from eight public universities in Malaysia responded to the questionnaire. The study found that the majority of the Malaysian university students (ESL learners) use learning strategies with social network for their English formal learning. Students seek helps from their peers using social network to practice their communication skills in English outside the classrooms in a more relaxed atmosphere. The study indicates that the social network enabled students to

adopt new learning behaviours, cooperative practice, mutual engagement and responsibilities.

In order to get deeper information from the students who had experiences the blended-learning courses, Ja'ashan attempted to identify students' perceptions and attitudes towards e-learning and to investigate negative impressions in blended English courses from the learners' perception [18]. 130 students from 8 different levels of undergraduate students at the Department of English, College of Science and Arts in University of Bisha responded to the survey questionnaire. The results of this study reveal that the students obtained high satisfaction with e-learning as it enhanced their English language skills and helped them to make English learning collaborative, interactive and interesting. Moreover, e-learning helped students to take responsibility for their own learning process and learners can decide when and how to use the resources provided. Also, e-learning gives shy students chance to participate and share their opinions with their classmates on forum or other different way in blackboard. However, the results also show that e-learning was more time-consuming than traditional courses because of using communication via email or discussion board need more time than conducting face to face class.

Akkoyunlu and Soylu examined the students' learning styles via Kolb's Learning Style Inventory and students' views on e-learning via a questionnaire survey [15]. Thirty-four students at Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey participated in the study. Results of the study showed that face to face interaction is still highly respected by the students and e-learning is not a substitution, but a supplementation for learning activities; but the views of students differ according to their learning styles. The study indicates that that human support is very important for learners and it introduces a personal touch to help with problems, sustain interest or motivate learners. Besides, the study showed that most of the student found e-learning is easy to use and helps enhanced their learning opportunities.

In Vietnam, several researchers have investigated the issues of e-learning during the Covid-19. Pham and Vo asserted that the employments of e-learning in Vietnam has some limitations about the Internet connection, technological devices, economic conditions, and students' un-willingness perceptions. In addition, the authors provided a practical model for e-learning teaching for those who wish to implement their e-learning classes effectively [19].

Vu et al. investigated the effectiveness of the Second Life Virtual Learning Environment for language training in hospitality and tourism. 81 students at Hoa Sen University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam participated in the study. The study found that e-learning environments a great effect on the students' language proficiency progress. Also, the students express positive attitudes towards the e-learning environment [20].

The findings of those studies confirmed that (1) e-learning environment helped students engaged, relaxed and enjoyable and it had positive impacts on learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and learning attitude; (2) e-learning was perceived to be a better learning experience compared to face-to-face learning; (3) e-learning and its effects on appealing students' participation on online lectures, workshop and conferences; (4) e-learning provides environment for students seeking helps from their peers to practice their communication skills in English outside the classrooms in a more relaxing atmosphere; and (5) e-learning gives shy students chances to participate and share their opinions with their classmates online. However, autonomous learning that technology creates to the students is still vacant. Few research studies have investigated what actual activities the students have conducted when they accessed online beyond the classrooms, and what social network that have been most employed by the students for their autonomous learning.

3. Methodology

At UD-UFLS, the faculties train and provide competent resources competent language-majors to meet the need of researching, learning and using foreign languages in the local regions and others. To conduct the survey for this study, we invited the students in the faculties who have passed the 15 weeks - semesters of e-learning of an academic school year. The questionnaire items were constructed based on the needs for applying e-learning to UD-UFLS and by the researcher's observations. The questionnaire was designed based on the Google forms. The link of the questionnaire was sent to students of 7 faculties via either emails or Zalo through their mobile phones, their lecturers'ones and these seven faculties' administration. Zalo has been popular in Vietnam nowadays and most of the students, lecturers and staff owned an account for it. This was to make sure that most of the students from their faculties had equal chance to respond to the questionnaire. Data collection was closed a month after the questionnaire-link was administered to the students.

The study was collected 407 students of the UD-UFLS who responded to the questionnaires. All students from the Faculty of English (n = 53; 13.02%), Faculty of English for Specific Purposes (n = 190; 46.48%), Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher's Education (n = 53; 13,02%), Faculty of French (n = 10; 2.46%), Faculty of Chinese (n = 18; 4.42%); Faculty of Japanese-Korean-Thai (n = 14; 3.44%) and Faculty of International Studies (n = 69; 16.95%).

The questionnaire was constructed with the Google forms and sent to all students from these 7 faculties to seek for answers. 407 students, 36 males (8.85%) and 371 females (91.15%), from these 7 faculties responded to the questionnaires. Out of 407 students, 266 students (65.36%) were sophomores, 41 (10.07%) were juniors and 100 of them (24.57%) were seniors.

The 48-items questionnaire which covered the necessary information of the study was constructed by the researchers of the current study as a preliminary study for a bigger project. The questionnaire was designed with open-ended questions so that the students could present their personal perceptions beyond the boundaries of the constructed questions. The questionnaire was constructed in Vietnamese so that all the respondents of all faculties could feel at ease to provide their answers. Then it was translated into English

for this paper. All efforts were made to assure that the two versions (Vietnamese and English) were similar in terms of contents and meanings. Questions 1 - 4 were relating to students' perceptions on e-learning, problems and their expectations. Questions 5 -10 were relating to students' uses of technology and learning with technologies by themselves. Questions 11 - 14 were relating to obtain the students' information, including name of faculty, years of studies, gender, and learning result.

In terms of quantitative data, we used the software SPSS vs. 22 to conduct descriptive analysis. The qualitative data (open-question items) was analysed selectively based on the answers which directly responded to research questions.

4. The survey result of students of UD-UFLS about the experience of e-learning enviroment

4.1. The necessity of e-learning at UD-UFLS

Table 1. The necessity of e-learning at UD-UFLS

Rating level	Quantity (n=407)	Percent
Very necessary	177	43.49%
Necessary	186	45.70%
Relatively necessary	40	9.83%
Unnecessary	3	0.74%
Fully unnecessary	1	0.25%

Table 1 reveals that of 407 students of UD-UFLS responded to the questionnaires, most of them appreciate the importance of e-learning at university. 177 of them (43.49%) evaluated e-learning at university as very necessary; 186 of them (45.70%) evaluated e-learning at university as necessary and 40 of them (9.83%) evaluated e-learning at university as relatively necessary. However, 3 of them (0.74%) evaluated e-learning at university as unnecessary and 1 of them (0.25%) evaluated e-learning at university as fully unnecessary. This situation requires university to raise awareness for students about the necessity of e-learning at university.

4.2. The advantages and disadvantages of e-learning at UD-UFLS

As displayed in Figure 1, the advantages of e-learning that are rated from high to low by students are: (1) Training anytime anywhere (n = 227; 61.67%); (2) Lecturers and students are active and flexible in teaching (n = 223; 59.21%); (3) Rich use of images, audio and video in the teaching process (n = 185; 50.37%); (4) Save time in learning (n = 146; 38.57%); (5) Save on costs of study (n = 138; 38.33%); (6) Optimizing teaching content (n = 93; 25.55%).

As displayed in Figure 2, the disadvantages of e-learning that are rated from high to low by students are: (1) Quality of e-teaching depends a lot on facilities (machines, software, Internet system) (n = 348; 85.50%); (2) Requires students to be self-disciplined and active in learning (n = 197; 48.40%); (3) Requires lecturers and students to be proficient in using e-teaching tools (n = 189; 46.44%); (4) Difficulty in exchanging information between

students (n = 188; 46.19%); (5) The learning environment does not stimulate students' initiative and creativity (n = 131; 32.19%).
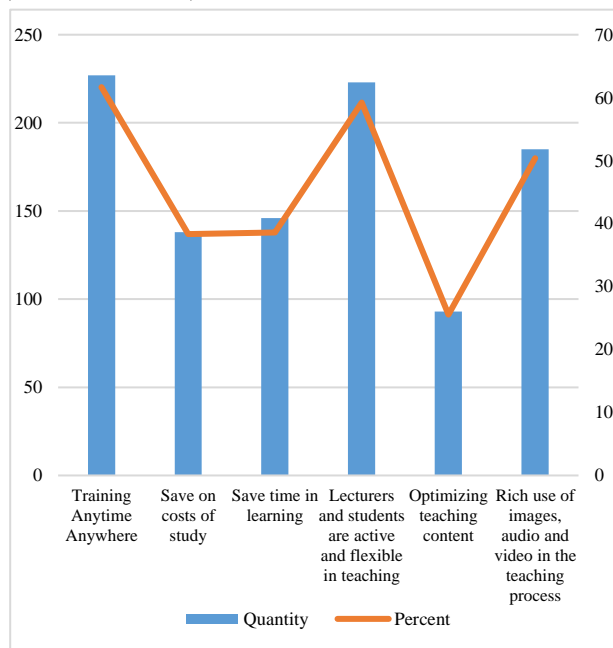

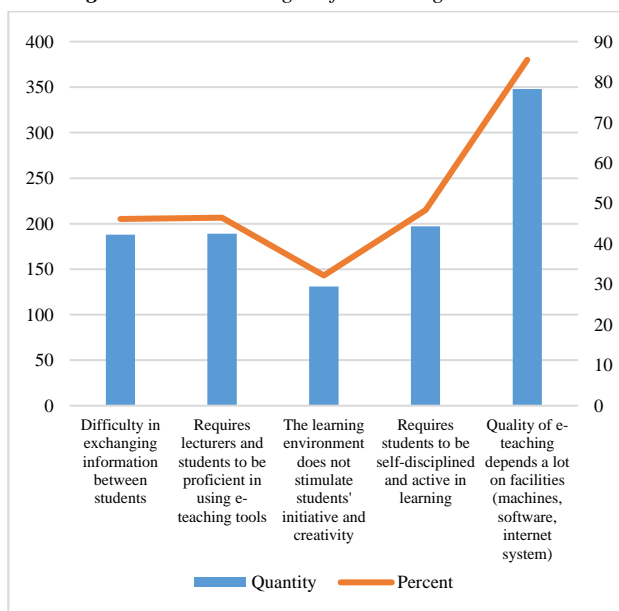*Figure 1. The advantages of e-learning at UD-UFLS*

Figure 2. The disadvantages of e-learning at UD-UFLS

The survey result of 407 students of UD-UFLS about the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning at university is the basis for the university to focus on the application of e-learning.

4.3. Evaluating the current status of e-learning at UD-UFLS

As can be seen from Figure 3, instructor skills (technological capabilities, pedagogy in e-teaching) are the well-reviewed content with a mean score of 3.84. This indicates that the lecture at the university have been well prepared to use technological skills to employed into the classrooms to train the students. The contents are rated at a fairly good level are Training management activities of the

university (mean = 3.63); Specific content and nature of the appropriate module e-teaching (mean =3.58); Class size (mean = 3.56); In other words, the lecturers know how to have good classroom managed skills to incorporate the content and activities with the media to train the students. Student's learning culture (level of cooperation of learners, habit of using technology in learning,...) (mean = 3.46); Policy on e-learning (supported and encouraged by the university and The University of Danang) (mean = 3.33); Funding (purchase of equipment, development of online lecture content) (mean = 3.30); Facilities (machines, software, internet systems) (mean = 3.29). All of this contributes to the success of the students' learning activities.
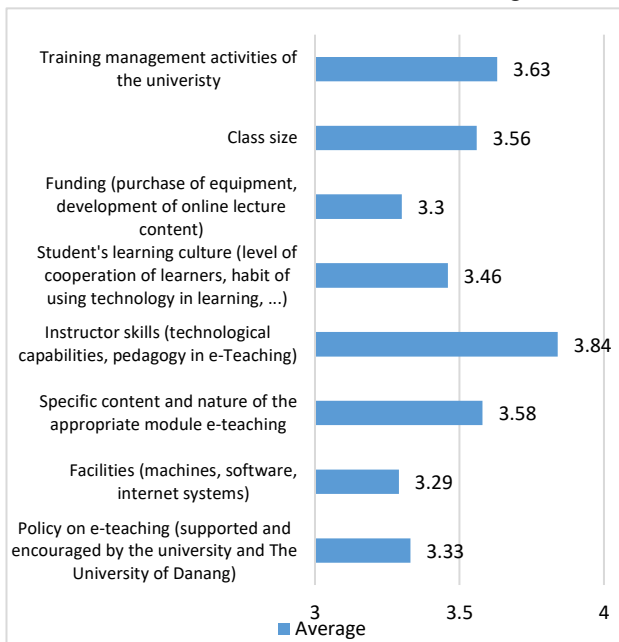

Figure 3. The evaluation of current status of e-learning at UD-UFLS

The survey result of 407 students of UD-UFLS about the current status of e-learning at university sets requirements and is the basis for the university to apply measures to improve the effectiveness of e-learning in the near future.

5. Some suggestions to improve the e-learning enviroment of students of UD-UFLS

5.1. Raising students' awareness about the importance of e-learning

E-learning environment requires self-discipline and activeness of students. The full and correct awareness of students about the importance of e-learning will make them more self-disciplined and positive study, identifying the right e-learning goals. Moreover, students are not distracted from studying because in the process of e-learning, students are self-directed. Therefore, the university needs to send all the instructional documents on e-learning, the e-learning implementation plan and the e-learning regulatory document system to the students. In addition, the faculty informs and disseminates to students the university's regulations on e-learning as well as the university's e-learning implementation plan for students to understand. In addition, reinforcement learning advisors communicate to students the importance of e-learning to raise self-discipline and activeness of students.

5.2. Improving training programs suitable for e-learning

Current curricula of university are designed with subjects primarily for the online instruction. Lecturers are confused in the process of applying e-teaching. The university reviews the training program in the direction of adjusting and adding subjects suitable for e-teaching. On that basis, deploying for lecturers to determine appropriate teaching and assessment methods for e-learning.

5.3. Organizing training for students on e-learning skills and using IT tools in e-learning

Effective e-learning requires students to be proficient in applying e-learning skills as well as using IT tools. The university needs to organize training course for students on the necessary skills for effective e-learning such as: Self-study, team work, speed reading skills, association skills for effective memorization,... Besides, the university organizes to instruct students how to use e-learning software such as: Google Classroom, Microsoft Team, Zoom,... The university publishes the guideline and videos of e-learning with detailed instructions for students to follow on their own.

5.4. Improving pedagogical capacity for lecturers

The lecturer's pedagogical capacity is a decisive factor in the effectiveness of teaching in general and e-learning in particular. Although the lecturers have been trained in pedagogy, e-learning has many differences compared to face-to-face teaching. Lecturers communicate with students through information technology tools and take much time to communicate, so lecturers need to have pedagogical skills to enhance interaction with students and between students to encourage active learning. Besides, lecturers must be proficient in handling pedagogical situations to handle conflicts well if any. The university trains lecturers skills to handle pedagogical situations in e-learning as well as proficiently using e-learning management tools such as: LMS, Moodle, Blackboard,,…; e-learning learner assessment tools such as: Edulastic, Google Form-Test, Microsoft Forms,...; e-learning interactive support tools such as Kahoot, Mentimeter, Flipgrid, etc.

5.5. Promulgating documents system to manage e-learning

E-learning is carried out concurrently with face-to-face learning. Therefore, the document system managing the training process must be suitable between e-learning and direct teaching with the goal of ensuring the university's training quality. The university promulgates a document system for e-learning management from enrollment, teaching and learning management, testing and evaluation to quality assurance like direct teaching and learning. In addition, the university promulgates policies to encourage students to study online, such as reducing tuition fees, supporting information technology equipment for students with difficult circumstances, etc.

5.6. Ensuring facilities and IT equipment for e-learning

Facilities and IT equipment are indispensable factors for effective e-learning. The university equipped with a computer room with full equipment, copyrighted software,

firewall system and data security to deploy e-learning. Besides, the university is well equipped with internet connection with broadband, main servers and wifi system. The university regularly maintains and maintains the information technology system to ensure good operation for e-learning

5.7. Implementing information channels to support lecturers and students in e-learning in a timely manner

E-learning has just been implemented in universities recently. In the process of implementing e-learning, there will certainly be inevitable obstacles. The university publishes effective information channels to support lecturers and students if problems occur in e-learning such as: hotline, Zalo, Facebook,... In addition, the university supports e-learning devices for difficult students.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to explore experiences on e-learning environment of students of UD-UFLS for universities to improve e-learning environment of the university's students. The results of the study reveal that, firstly, most students are properly and fully aware of the importance of e-learning at university. However, there are still cases where students are not fully aware of the importance of e-learning at university. Secondly, the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning at the university which have been identified by students and are the basis for the university's attention in the process of e-learning implementation. Thirdly, through the results of the student survey, only the content of the teacher's skills in e-learning is rated as good. The content of policies and management of e-learning activities, facilities and funding for e-learning implementation, class size, and student e-learning culture were assessed at a fairy good level.

To improve the effectiveness of e-learning requires the university to synchronously implements measures to raise students' awareness of e-learning; Organize training on e-learning skills for students and lecturers; Fully promulgate e-learning management document system; Invest in facilities and IT tool for e-learning; Deploy effective information channels to support lecturers and students in e-learning.

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