

# Evaluating a Blended Learning Course of Business English at A University in Hanoi

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**Abstract:** The study focused on evaluating a blended learning course on Business English at Hanoi University of Industry. The purpose was to assess the course's effectiveness from three perspectives: meeting student requirements, achieving learning outcomes, and refining the course. Quantitative analysis was conducted on students' Grade Point Average (GPA) and course evaluation survey data, while qualitative analysis was performed on students' learning reflections. The findings indicated that the course helped students achieve their learning outcomes, and overall, students expressed satisfaction with various aspects of the course, particularly the learning materials and content, learning assessment, tasks and activities, learning support, and learning mode. Furthermore, course modifications should concentrate on incorporating communication functions into online learning to facilitate interaction between students and teachers. Additionally, teachers should exhibit greater flexibility in utilizing both the native language and the target language during instruction. This study provides a systematic framework for evaluating an ESP blended course and offers implications for evaluating blended courses in other language curricula.

**Keywords:** Blended learning; evaluation; evaluating a blended learning course.

**Subject classification:** Linguistics.

## 1. Introduction

Blended learning has emerged as a contemporary trend in education, and many educational institutions worldwide have gradually implemented this model. The same situation can be observed in the context of teaching and learning in Vietnam, especially in tertiary education. Several universities in Vietnam have also adopted blended learning in higher education; however, few investigations have been conducted to assess this current practice.

Numerous empirical studies have evaluated blended courses in various disciplines. Halverson et al. (2014) assessed blended courses in the medical field and found that

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students highly value the course organization and learning materials, as they activate their motivation and engagement. Zampirolli et al. (2018) implemented a blended course in engineering education and evaluated it through formative and summative assessments. The findings revealed that fewer students fail in the blended course compared to the traditional face-to-face class, but the number of students achieving grades “A” or “B” is lower in the blended course compared to face-to-face learning. However, the study does not identify the intended factors influencing students’ blended learning performance. Klimova (2017) evaluated a blended course in Business English. The results of the questionnaire survey and online course report indicated the prevalence of the blended learning mode and students’ satisfaction with the online learning content. However, the end-term test did not show significant effectiveness or improvement in business vocabulary. Klimova also suggested that although many other studies confirm the prevalence of blended learning, its effectiveness remains inconclusive. Therefore, more studies on the effectiveness of the blended learning approach are needed to develop successful strategies that enhance learning outcomes.

Based on the aforementioned reasons, the authors aim to conduct research to evaluate the blended learning course of Business English currently being implemented at Hanoi University of Industry. The research aims to answer two questions: Are students’ learning objectives satisfactorily met after the course? To what extent are the students satisfied with the blended learning course of Business English at Hanoi University of Industry? The results of this research are expected to serve as a useful reference for individuals concerned about this subject.

## **2. Literature review**

### Overview of traditional classroom learning and online learning

Hutt (2017, p.58) defined classroom learning as traditional learning that requires a certain number of participants or students to be actively engaged and physically present in the classroom. Sheahan (2018) highlighted several advantages of classroom teaching for students. Firstly, traditional classroom settings promote and facilitate collaborative learning and communication skills, while also fostering the development of important skills such as conflict resolution, teamwork, and presentation skills. Additionally, teaching in a classroom environment allows teachers to expand their lesson plans and tailor them to different types of learners. It also helps students develop organizational skills and encourages them to take greater responsibility for their studies.

Online learning can be defined in various ways by different authors, reflecting the diversity of practices and associated technologies. Some describe online learning as “wholly” online learning (Oblinger, 2005), while others simply refer to the technology medium or context in which it is used (Lowenthal, Wilson, and Parrish, 2009). Online learning has been shown to have significant effects on education in general and foreign

language learning in particular. Agarwal and Pandey (2013) stated that online learning is beneficial for both learners and education providers. Learners can save both time and money on travel and the cost of renting accommodation, while education providers can reduce expenses related to campus infrastructure, printed materials, and other facilities required for face-to-face learning. Furthermore, online learning offers learners flexibility and relieves them from the pressures of time. Learners can access online lessons anywhere and anytime, allowing them to choose their own suitable learning pace without conflicting with their personal plans and schedules.

In conclusion, the main differences between traditional learning and online learning can be identified in terms of teacher-student interaction and learning space. Saykili (2018) distinguishes these two types of learning based on key features. Classroom learning is characterized by face-to-face interactions between teachers and learners in a physical classroom setting. On the other hand, online learning takes place in a virtual environment, without regular face-to-face interactions. In online learning, learners and teachers can be physically separated but connected through various media channels (Saykili, 2018).

#### Overview of blended learning

Blended learning, also known as “hybrid learning” or the “flipped classroom”, is a combination of online and face-to-face learning. Sharma and Barrett (2007) identified blended learning as a mixture of traditional in-class meetings and the effective use of innovative technology to facilitate language learning. Blended learning can thus be defined as the combination of online learning and classroom learning, utilizing various learning resources and communication options available to students and lecturers.

Based on the characteristics of blended learning, Marsh (2012) stated some of its strengths. Firstly, blended learning provides learners with a more individualized learning experience and personalized support. Therefore, it supports and encourages independent and collaborative learning, thereby increasing students’ engagement in the learning process. Additionally, it accommodates a variety of learning styles and helps students practice the target language outside the classroom. Blended learning also meets learners’ needs by offering flexibility and equips students with valuable and necessary learning skills, preparing them better for the future. Voci and Young (2001) also found similar results. In their study, the researchers argued that blended learning considers the variation in students’ learning styles and allows them to learn at their pace. Blended learning enables learners to learn independently and take control of their learning process.

The introduction of blended learning is also argued to improve course outcomes, including higher student retention and increased pass rates. Studies by López-Pérez et al. (2011) and Boyle et al. (2003) demonstrated that implementing blended learning in higher education courses improved retention and correlated with improvements in students’ achievement. Additionally, Stockwell, Cennamo, and Jiang (2015) claimed that blended learning courses led to improved attendance at face-to-face classes, higher student satisfaction levels based on self-report measures, and better performance in examinations.

#### Overview of blended course evaluation

In an educational context, “evaluation is a purposeful activity that includes the collection of relevant information, interpretation of that information, and making decisions about teaching and learning” (Genesee and Upshur, 1996). Similarly, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also emphasized that course evaluation plays a useful social role by demonstrating to the various parties involved (teachers, learners, sponsors, etc.) that their views are important. According to Neary (2000), the information from course evaluations can serve as a focal point for students and aid in the management of current courses as well as the development of future ones.

Bowyer (2017) argued that the evaluation criteria for a blended program should encompass a combination of data on course outcomes and measures of student satisfaction and engagement. Several measures can be employed to assess course outcomes, including attendance, retention, and students’ grades. However, relying solely on outcome measures may not yield sufficient information, as statistical measures fail to capture students’ attitudes toward learning and the role of the blended learning system in facilitating this. Therefore, it is important to consider the impact of motivation when evaluating the effectiveness of the course.

#### Learner satisfaction

Learner satisfaction is a crucial factor for the success of educational programs. It allows educational institutions to identify their strengths and areas for improvement (Eom et al., 2006).

Huang (2002) argues that six factors influence learning satisfaction, including the teacher's teaching, class materials, learning outcomes, interpersonal relationships, learning environment, and administration. Similarly, Wei et al. (2013) identifies four sets of factors that explain the learning satisfaction of adult learners: teacher and teaching, course content, learning environment, and administrative services. Cheng et al. (1997) assert that the teacher's teaching, class materials, learning outcomes, student-teacher interaction, peer relationships, and support are major factors affecting learner satisfaction. It can be concluded that various factors can influence learners' satisfaction with the educational process. Among all these factors, the teaching quality of the instructor (instructor quality), course content, technology used (system quality), support services (service quality), and perceived usefulness can be considered the most influential factors.

#### Business English

In their book “Teaching Business English” (1994, 7-13), Ellis and Johnson provide a definition of the characteristics of Business English from five perspectives:

- 1) “Much of the language needed by business people (apart from social language) will be transactional.”
- 2) “Social contacts are often highly ritualized.”
- 3) Clear information must be conveyed within a short time.

4) The language used in business “will be neither as rich in vocabulary and expression nor as culture-bound as that used by native speakers but will be based on a core of the most useful and basic structures and vocabulary.”

5) Business English courses differ significantly in aspects such as needs analysis, assessment of level, syllabus, course objectives, and more.

In summary, Business English refers to the type of English used in business contexts, including international trade, commerce, finance, insurance, banking, and various office settings. It requires clarity, specific vocabulary, and grammatical structures.

### 3. Research methods

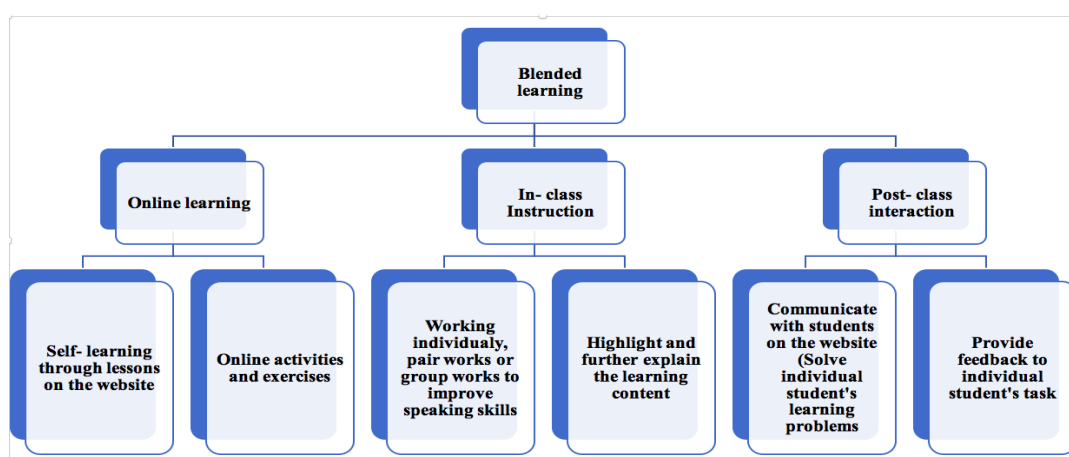
#### 3.1. Research setting

This study was conducted at Hanoi University of Industry, where English is a mandatory subject. Students are required to study English for three years, which is equivalent to six English courses. Since 2015, the university has implemented blended learning in teaching English to non-English major students.

Economics students at the university are enrolled in an English blended learning program that spans three years. The program consists of six courses, which are completed over six terms. Each term has a duration of 10 weeks, with both online and face-to-face (offline) classes. Online components cover vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, and writing, while speaking lessons are conducted in the classroom. Throughout each term, students attend 40 offline classes and 35 online classes.

Based on the aforementioned information, the blended learning model is depicted in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Blended Learning Model



In this course, the lessons are designed to assist students in developing proficiency in Business English and effectively using English in various business contexts. By the end of the course, students are expected to achieve a GPA level of D, which corresponds to a letter grade equivalent of four points out of 10 in the numerical grading system.

### *3.2. Participants*

The study included a total of 246 third-year students majoring in business who had successfully completed the blended learning Business English course at Hanoi University of Industry.

### *3.3. Data collection instruments*

**Summative Assessment:** The summative evaluation aims to assess the effectiveness of the program. In this study, the students' GPA for the course in the school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 was utilized as a means of data collection.

**Course evaluation survey:** The survey was employed as the primary method of data collection in this study to gather learners' opinions on the blended learning course. The survey utilized a Likert scale, which allowed participants to express their responses on a scale of agreement or disagreement.

**Students' learning reflection:** In this study, 17 students agreed to write their learning reflections in the form of paragraph writing, following the guidelines provided via email. The students expressed their opinions regarding the implementation of the course and their engagement with it. The purpose was to gather comprehensive information about the effectiveness of the course. The reflection questions were adapted from a research study on blended learning courses conducted by Zhang (2020). Students were instructed to write their reflections in Vietnamese, as it is their native language. Writing in Vietnamese allowed the students to freely express all their thoughts about the course and provide precise evaluations.

### *3.4. Data analysis*

The researchers employed the "quantitative analysis strategies" method to analyze the collected data. This method facilitated the exploration of descriptive statistics such as means, frequency, and percentages, to summarize the participants' responses to the questionnaires. Additionally, the researchers conducted an analysis of the students' reflections to gain a more profound understanding of their opinions regarding the course.

#### 4. Research results

##### Students' GPA

Students' GPA comprises 40% of their scores in class and 60% of their scores in the final test. Within the class, there are three tests: progress test one (10%), mid-term test (20%), and progress test two (10%). Progress test one assesses vocabulary and grammar, the mid-term test evaluates listening, reading, and writing skills, and progress test two focuses on speaking skills.

After 10 weeks of taking the blended learning course, students underwent a final exam consisting of two tests: a written test and an oral test. The total score for these tasks is ten points, with a maximum of six points for the written test and four points for the oral test. The written test had a duration of 50 minutes and included two listening tasks, two reading tasks, and one email writing task. The oral test lasted 8 minutes and comprised three parts: (1) answering questions about personal information and general topics, (2) engaging in a conversation with a friend based on a real business situation using a provided card, and (3) delivering a short talk on a given topic for approximately two minutes.

Table 1 presents a summary of students' GPA for the school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

Table 1: Students' GPA in school year 2019-2020 and 2020-2021

School year	GPA					Total number of students
	A (8.5 - 10)	B(7.0 - 8.4)	C(5.5 - 6.9)	D (4 - 5.4)	F (<4)	
<i>2019-2020</i>						
Number of students	83	394	407	925	305	2,114
Percentage	3.93 %	18.63 %	19.25 %	43.76 %	9.96 %	
<i>2020-2021</i>						
Number of students	81	402	509	753	193	1,938
Percentage	4.18 %	20.75 %	26.26 %	38.85 %	9.96 %	

The table demonstrates that in both the school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, over 85% of students attained a GPA of grade D or higher in the course. This suggests that a significant number of students successfully achieved the desired learning outcomes after completing the course. However, there remained a small portion (less than 15%) of students who did not reach the accepted learning outcomes and received a grade of F.

In the school year 2019-2020, more than 85% of students obtained a grade of D or higher, while in the school year 2020-2021, this figure increased to over 90%. Nonetheless,

the number of students who earned a very high GPA (grade A) was not substantial. The majority of students received acceptable grades (D, C, B), with grade D being the most common grade in both school years, accounting for 43.76% and 38.85% respectively. The percentage of students achieving an excellent grade (grade A) was relatively low, at approximately 4% in both school years. These results indicate that the course was effective for the majority of students, helping them meet the accepted learning outcomes. However, there were still students who struggled with the course content, and the number of students demonstrating exceptional performance was limited.

It is important to note that students' GPA is only one aspect considered when evaluating their learning outcomes. Further exploration of these achievements can be carried out through course evaluation surveys and analyzing their written evaluations.

#### *Course evaluation survey*

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze students' evaluations towards the dimensions of course objectives, materials and contents, learning assessment, tasks and activities, learner support, learning mode, learning platform.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Course Evaluation

Course dimensions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
	Number of students (%)	Number of students (%)	Number of students (%)	Number of students (%)	Number of students (%)	Number of students (%)
Course objectives	41 (16.67 %)	199 (80.89 %)	6 (2.44 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	246 (100%)
Materials & content	45 (18.29 %)	198 (80.49%)	3 (1.22 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	246 (100%)
Learning assessment	32 (13.01 %)	203 (82.52 %)	11 (4.47 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	246 (100%)
Task and activities	43 (17.48 %)	201 (81.71 %)	2 (0.81 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	246 (100%)
Learner support	19 (7.72 %)	223 (90.65 %)	4 (1.63 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	246 (100%)
Learning mode	24 (9.76 %)	219 (89.02 %)	3 (1.22 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	246 (100%)
Learning platform	38 (15.45 %)	203 (82.52 %)	5 (2.03 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	246 (100%)



From Table 2, it can be observed that the majority of students were satisfied with all dimensions of the course. Over 95% of students expressed high satisfaction with the course. Tasks and activities received the highest evaluation from students, with 99% expressing satisfaction. These survey results clearly indicate that both online and offline tasks and activities were effectively designed and tailored to students' needs. The variety of tasks and activities, including games, exercises, group work, and pair work, contributed to more effective and productive studying. Materials and content, as well as the learning mode, were highly satisfactory for a similar number of students. Only slightly over 1% of students did not have any specific ideas about them. Learner support also received high satisfaction from over 98% of students, indicating that instructors and technical support provided substantial assistance throughout the course. Similarly, the learning platform and learning objectives were highly evaluated by students, with nearly 98% expressing great satisfaction with these aspects. Concerning learning assessment, about 95% of students provided a positive evaluation, while approximately 5% (equivalent to 11 students) expressed neutral opinions. This result indicates that students expected improvements in all types of learning assessment. Approximately 20% of students expressed strong satisfaction with all dimensions of the course. Among them, materials and content had the highest percentage of students expressing strong satisfaction (18.29%), while learning support had the lowest (7.72%).

#### Students' learning reflections

17 students completed their learning reflections, which were coded under the following themes: a) learning materials and content, b) instructor's teaching (teaching mode, pace, and activities), c) learning platform, and d) suggestions for the course.

Almost all students stated that the learning materials were helpful, and the content was useful for their studies. Students highly appreciated the topics taught in the course, finding them suitable for their major. They learned a great deal from the course, particularly in areas such as customer service, negotiation, banking, investment, and job interviews. Here are some students' opinions:

Student No.1 expressed that the content was useful for their English learning and future job. They gained valuable knowledge on how to handle customer feedback, engage in negotiations, and prepare for job interviews. These topics were considered helpful and necessary.

Student 5 also appreciated the course content, mentioning its significant contribution to their English learning and overall benefit. They acquired knowledge relevant to their major and future career, specifically expanding their technical English vocabulary. They particularly enjoyed lessons on banking and investment.

The majority of students were satisfied with the instructor's teaching method, including the pace of instruction and the tasks and activities provided. Their reflections indicated acceptance of the innovative blended learning mode, which combines online and face-to-face learning to stimulate interest and optimize the learning environment. Student 9 evaluated the teacher's teaching method positively, highlighting the effective combination

of face-to-face and online learning. The activities and tasks designed by the teacher facilitated improvement in all English skills. Students were able to learn new words and useful structures through the learning platform, allowing them to apply this knowledge during in-class speaking sessions. Student 9 initially had limited understanding of the English content, but after one semester, their listening ability significantly improved. They became more active in online discussions and classroom activities such as academic presentations. The student was able to keep up with the teacher's pace of instruction.

The students also highly approved of the learning platform, describing it as user-friendly and efficient for English learning. The platform greatly motivated their learning interests. Student 12 found the website convenient, accessible on various devices such as smartphones, iPads, laptops, and computers.

In terms of suggestions, most students emphasized the need for activities that encourage English speaking and interaction among classmates. They also recommended that the instructor use both Vietnamese and English for instruction, instead of mainly using English. Student 15 expressed a desire for more group work tasks to facilitate mutual learning, and suggested organizing English-speaking competitions between students to make learning more enjoyable. Student 16 mentioned their enjoyment of making presentations in English as a valuable opportunity to practice their language skills, and hoped for more opportunities in the classroom to express themselves in English.

## **5. Discussion and implications**

The blended course on Business English has received good evaluations from students. Several factors contribute to the effectiveness of the course.

Firstly, this blended learning course makes learning more convenient and easier. Learning takes place both on an online website and in face-to-face classrooms, allowing students to benefit from both types of learning. The greatest advantage of online learning is its accessibility and flexibility. Students can access the website and practice their English skills anytime, and anywhere they want, enabling them to choose a suitable learning pace that conflicts less with their plans and schedules. The learning platform provides tasks and activities for students to practice all their English skills, including listening, reading, and writing. They can also enrich and expand their vocabulary related to their business major. Students can make use of various lesson plans and multimedia tools to address reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a new language, rather than just learning new vocabulary. The lessons are designed in diverse forms, making them interesting and engaging for students. Since the course includes both online and face-to-face learning, students are required to complete all online activities at home and attend classroom lessons that mainly focus on strengthening their speaking skills. The online tasks and activities

provide students with input for their speaking performance in class, thus helping them strengthen all their English skills.

Another factor that contributes to students' good performance in the course is the more strategic use of classroom time facilitated by blended learning. This allows teachers to spend more individualized time with students in class, focusing on areas of particular difficulty. It also enables classroom time to be dedicated to more active and meaningful activities. As students engage with the materials at home before attending class, blended learning particularly helps them utilize their university time more effectively.

However, since blended learning combines online and classroom learning, it can be challenging for teachers to manage students' online learning. The results of the final exam indicated that several students did not achieve the required score, indicating that not all students learned effectively in this blended learning course. Students may encounter problems with self-learning management or lack effective learning strategies for this kind of learning. Some students may not have access to enough devices or suitable learning conditions.

Here are some recommendations for course development and implementation.

**For course developers and web designers:**

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that students highly appreciated the topics chosen in the course, as well as the tasks and activities in both the online website and face-to-face learning. However, students expressed a desire for more activities that provide them with additional opportunities to communicate in English, both in online and offline learning environments. Therefore, it is recommended to include more communicative tasks and activities or modify existing tasks based on a communicative approach. This will enable students to enhance their English communication skills.

Furthermore, although the online website offers a variety of tasks and activities for students to practice their English skills, the current management of online learning is handled by the students themselves. This poses challenges for teachers in managing students' online learning and communicating with them on the website. Consequently, it is necessary for web developers and course developers to incorporate additional functions that can assist teachers in managing students' online learning.

One essential function that should be added is a warning or reminder system to notify students about required tasks or assignment submissions two days before the deadline. Additionally, more functions should be introduced to facilitate student-teacher interaction and allow students to raise questions on the website. These improvements will foster a stronger relationship between teachers and students, enabling teachers to provide necessary assistance when students encounter difficulties on the website.

It is worth noting that some students may be hesitant to communicate with their teachers during class due to shyness. By implementing a private communication function on the

website, these students will have the opportunity to discuss their learning problems with their teachers and receive help in a more comfortable manner.

Furthermore, to make learning on the website more engaging and enjoyable, certain tasks and activities should be redesigned using a communicative approach, incorporating games and multimedia elements. This approach will help to increase student engagement and foster a positive attitude towards learning on the website.

### **For teachers**

The teacher should be flexible in using English or Vietnamese during lessons. Using English in class will help students immerse themselves in the target language, thereby strengthening their listening skills. However, since this course focuses on Business English, there are technical terms that students need to deeply understand. In these situations, the teacher should use the native language to explain to the students. Additionally, not all students in the class are proficient in English, so sometimes giving instructions solely in English can be challenging for students, especially those who are weaker. Teachers need to use both English and Vietnamese to help students clearly understand the tasks they need to complete.

Each student has their learning style and habits. Blended learning requires students to be familiar with both online and offline learning. Consequently, some students may not have effective strategies for their learning. Therefore, teachers should take the time at the beginning of the course to introduce the curriculum and provide students with some learning tips to enhance their learning in both online and offline classes. This way, students can apply these strategies to their learning and develop effective learning techniques for themselves.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this study, the effectiveness of the blended learning course on Business English is viewed from the perspective of students. The course was evaluated in terms of its development, providing valuable information for ongoing refinement of the course. The following conclusions can be drawn: (1) The course was effectively designed and implemented, meeting students' needs as reflected in the learning outcomes. (2) Students gave high ratings on all aspects of the course, including course objectives, materials and content, learning assessment, tasks and activities, learner support, learning mode, and learning platform. (3) Some students, especially those who are weaker, may not have fully adapted to the English immersion learning environment. Therefore, it is important to consider using English as the instructional language for both online learning and face-to-face teaching to improve students' English listening ability. (4) The website still has some technical problems, which pose difficulties to students' learning.

However, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Firstly, a comprehensive evaluation of a course should consider different aspects and perspectives. In this study, the course was only evaluated from the perspective of students, which means it does not provide a holistic evaluation. Therefore, future studies should evaluate the course from other perspectives, such as instructors, course developers, or institutional administrators. By doing so, the course can be better designed and implemented.

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