

EFL Learners' Acceptance of the UNIPUS Learning Management System: A Case Study

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Abstract. Despite the growing use of the UNIPUS Learning Management System (LMS) in College English education, significant gaps remain in understanding how students perceive, accept, and engage with the platform. These gaps are critical as they may directly influence the LMS's effectiveness in enhancing student learning outcomes. This study aims to address these gaps through a case study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six EFL college students, utilizing open-ended questions designed based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The collected data underwent thematic analysis, with member checking to ensure reliability. The findings revealed that while the platform partially met performance expectations, it required significant effort to use. Facilitating conditions positively influenced users, and social influence played a crucial role in shaping student behaviors, impacting learning performance. Additionally, UNIPUS had already become a habitual tool for students. The results were analyzed within the frameworks of the pedagogical integration of technology, and the growing trend of blended learning in foreign language education.

Keywords: EFL learners; UNIPUS; Learning Management System; acceptance; case study.

1. Introduction

In China, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has prioritized digitalization as a primary approach to enhancing education [1]. Moreover, the rapid digitalization of education has led to the widespread adoption of Learning Management Systems (LMS) in higher education. A learning management system is considered appropriate and become popular in English instruction in higher education [2, 3]. However, whether and to what extent it facilitates English teaching and learning still calls for further probing. Understanding students' acceptance and engagement is crucial, as it directly impacts their learning experience and academic performance [4]

This study employs the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) [4, 5] as a theoretical lens to explore EFL learners' acceptance of the UNIPUS LMS. The interview protocol is designed theoretically according to the UTAUT constructs. Some example questions are as following: How do you feel UNIPUS LMS has impacted your learning of English? How easy or difficult do you find using the UNIPUS LMS? How do your peers or instructors influence your use of the UNIPUS LMS? In what ways do you think using UNIPUS LMS has changed your approach to studying English? By conducting semi-structured interviews with six college students, this research examines their behavioral intentions, perceived effort, facilitating conditions, and the role of social influence in shaping their interaction with the platform.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learning Management Systems in EFL Education

Learning Management Systems (LMS) have become integral to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, providing learners with structured, flexible, and interactive learning environments [6]. These platforms offer various features such as multimedia content, discussion forums,

automated assessments, and personalized learning pathways that support both synchronous and asynchronous learning [7].

In the case of second or foreign language acquisition, a learning management system exhibits its advantages [8, 9]. In addition to tailored individualized learning, students can also collaborate among peers through features like discussion forums, group projects, and peer feedback mechanisms. What is more, language instructors can use this digital learning management system to deliver instructional content, communicate with learners, monitor progress, and provide guidance and support throughout the learning process. Hence the ubiquitous language learning emerges [10].

2.2 The Application of UNIPUS Learning Management System in EFL Education

UNIPUS is an LMS supplied by the textbook producer (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press) that can run through any Internet-based devices. According to the data posted on the website [11], there are more than 8 million learners, around 40 thousand educators scattering in more than 1700 educational institutions getting access to this application for foreign language education, primarily English. Both students and teachers can log onto the platform anytime and anywhere via digital tools, such as smartphones, computers or laptops. All the participants are able to either conduct learning collaboratively via online interaction, or study by individuals based on one's own schedule.

As a platform providing blended learning solutions for foreign language teaching in universities, UNIPUS LMS is supposed to enable all the participants to experience a one-stop interactive foreign language learning, practicing, testing and evaluating. With such a wide application, UNIPUS LMS is expected to be effective in student learning performance. Additionally, the incorporation of interactive features, such as discussion boards and real-time feedback mechanisms, increases student motivation and participation in EFL learning [9]. However, despite these benefits, LMS adoption and effectiveness depend largely on students' willingness to accept and use the technology effectively [12]. Factors such as perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and prior digital literacy significantly influence LMS acceptance among EFL learners [13].

2.3 Blended Learning in EFL Contexts

Numerous studies have explored the impact of blended learning on various aspects of foreign language acquisition, such as vocabulary [14], listening [15], reading [16] and speaking [17]. The majority of these studies indicate that blended learning positively influences EFL teaching and learning. Additional research highlights its broader benefits, such as enhancing the human learning experience [18], improving students' global literacy [19], fostering learning achievement and communication skills [20], and increasing learning motivation [21].

Blended learning provides significant flexibility in structuring teaching and learning formats [22]. However, it is more than merely shifting instruction online; its pedagogical impact on EFL learners must also be considered. Li [23] emphasizes that the goal of blended learning is to create a well-integrated mix of online and classroom instruction to enhance both the learning process and student outcomes.

2.4 The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) is a widely applied model that explains user adoption of new technologies [4, 5]. UTAUT incorporates key factors influencing technology acceptance, including performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value, and habit. These factors have been found to significantly impact students' acceptance and use of LMS in educational settings [24].

Performance expectancy, which refers to students' perceptions of how well LMS enhances their learning, is one of the strongest predictors of acceptance [25]. Effort expectancy, or the perceived ease of use, also plays a crucial role. Social influence, including peer and instructor encouragement, has been shown to impact students' willingness to use LMS [26]. Facilitating conditions, such as

access to technical support and digital infrastructure, further determine the level of LMS adoption. Additionally, hedonic motivation, or the enjoyment derived from using LMS features, has been recognized as a key factor influencing student engagement.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine EFL learners' acceptance of the UNIPUS Learning Management System (LMS). This method allows for an in-depth understanding of learners' perceptions and experiences [27]. A case study design is well-suited for investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, allowing for a rich, in-depth exploration of students' experiences and perceptions [28]. Given that LMS adoption is shaped by complex sociocultural, technological, and pedagogical factors, qualitative methods enable the researcher to capture nuanced perspectives that quantitative approaches might overlook [29]. This study is informed by the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework [4, 5], which provides a structured lens for analyzing students' behavioral intentions and actual system use.

3.2 Participants

This study recruited six EFL undergraduate students from a university in China using purposive sampling [30]. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure the selection of participants with varying levels of experience with the UNIPUS LMS, thereby incorporating diverse perspectives [27]. Participants were required to have engaged with UNIPUS for at least one academic semester to ensure familiarity with the platform's features and functionalities. The sample included students with different levels of technological proficiency and learning engagement, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of acceptance factors. Before data collection, all participants provided informed consent, and ethical approval was obtained from the university's institutional review board, ensuring compliance with research ethics protocols [31]. For clarity, these participants were under the pseudonyms of S1, S2, ..., and S6 in this study.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provide flexibility to probe participants' experiences while maintaining consistency across responses [32]. The interview questions were designed based on UTAUT constructs — performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value, and habit [4, 5]—to systematically examine factors influencing LMS adoption. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was conducted via online audio conferencing to accommodate participants' schedules. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to ensure participant confidentiality [33].

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis and thematic coding, following Braun and Clarke's [32] six-step thematic analysis framework: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial code generation, (3) theme searching, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition, and (6) final reporting. To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, member checking was conducted, allowing participants to review preliminary findings and clarify any misinterpretations [34]. Additionally, researcher triangulation was applied, involving cross-validation of themes by multiple researchers, ensuring analytic rigor and reducing potential bias [35]. This methodological approach ensures reliability and depth in understanding EFL learners' acceptance of UNIPUS, contributing to broader discussions on technology adoption in digital language learning environments.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Behavioral Intentions and Performance Expectancy

Students exhibited varying levels of acceptance toward the UNIPUS Learning Management System (LMS). Performance expectancy, defined as the perceived usefulness of a system in enhancing learning outcomes [5], significantly influenced students' behavioral intentions to adopt the platform. Several participants acknowledged that UNIPUS LMS provided structured access to learning resources, including digital textbooks, recorded lectures, and automated assessments. S2 remarked, "UNIPUS makes it easier to keep track of course materials in one place, which helps me study more efficiently." S5 noted, "The automated assessments give immediate feedback, which allows me to understand my mistakes right away."

However, some students expressed dissatisfaction with the platform's limited interactive components, which they felt impeded engagement and real-time communication with instructors and peers. As S1 stated, "It feels like a one-way system; I can access the content, but I rarely get real-time responses from instructors or classmates." This concern is consistent with a previous research [36], which highlights that the absence of interactive learning elements can diminish students' motivation and learning effectiveness. Additionally, Zanjani [37] observed that students were more likely to engage with LMS platforms that incorporated gamification, discussion forums, and real-time collaboration tools. Consequently, while UNIPUS was generally perceived as beneficial for content delivery, its limited interactivity may have contributed to mixed perceptions of its overall utility.

4.2 Effort Expectancy and Usability Challenges

Effort expectancy, or the perceived ease of use of an LMS, plays a pivotal role in user adoption [38]. Although UNIPUS provides structured and well-organized learning materials, participants reported usability challenges that affected their engagement.

S6 stated, "The interface is not intuitive; sometimes I spend more time trying to find materials than actually studying." Besides, S4 shared, "I often struggle to navigate between different sections, especially when accessing older lecture recordings." This aligns with the findings of Qi and Binti [9], who noted that LMS platforms with complex navigation structures often lead to cognitive overload, reducing students' willingness to use the system regularly.

Furthermore, participants highlighted difficulties in accessing course content on mobile devices. "When I try to use UNIPUS on my phone, some pages don't load properly, and I have to switch to my laptop," S2 reported. This echoes the concerns raised by Raza, Qazi, Khan, and Salam [6], who emphasized that mobile responsiveness significantly impacts students' LMS acceptance. While some students were able to overcome these barriers through repeated use, others expressed frustration, which negatively influenced their overall perception of UNIPUS. These findings suggest that improving platform usability and providing step-by-step onboarding tutorials could enhance user experience and promote more widespread adoption among students.

4.3 Facilitating Conditions and Institutional Support

Facilitating conditions, including institutional support and technical assistance, significantly impact LMS adoption [4]. Participants in this study emphasized the crucial role of university support in shaping their engagement with UNIPUS.

"My teacher provided detailed guidance on how to use the system, which made a huge difference in my ability to navigate it," S3 noted. "Having access to tutorial materials helped me understand how to make the most of the platform," S5 stated. This observation aligns with the existing researches [39, 40], which suggests that well-structured instructor interventions can mitigate initial resistance to LMS use.

Additionally, students reported that prompt technical assistance played a vital role in resolving navigation issues and improving overall satisfaction with the system. "Whenever I had an issue, I

had to email support and wait, which sometimes delayed my coursework submissions," S1 expressed.

This finding is consistent with previous studies [41, 42], which indicated that institutions that provided dedicated LMS support teams experienced higher student retention rates within digital learning environments. However, some participants expressed concerns about the limited availability of real-time support, indicating a potential area for institutional improvement. Enhancing the availability of live chat support or LMS-driven assistance could further facilitate smoother interactions with the platform.

4.4 Social Influence and Learning Performance

Social influence, defined as the extent to which peers and instructors affect an individual's technology adoption decisions, was a significant factor in students' engagement with UNIPUS. Participants who observed positive feedback from their peers were more likely to actively use the platform.

S4 shared, "My classmates kept saying UNIPUS was useful for organizing study materials, so I decided to give it a serious try." S2 remarked, "Seeing my friends actively participating in discussion boards encouraged me to engage more." This supports previous findings [12, 36], which demonstrated that peer endorsement significantly enhances LMS adoption.

Moreover, collaborative activities, such as peer discussion boards and group assignments, played a vital role in encouraging students to integrate UNIPUS into their learning routines. "Group projects are easier to manage on the platform since we can share files and communicate within the system," S6 stated. This aligns with research by Gherghel, Yasuda, and Kita [43], which found that social interaction within LMS environments fosters greater academic performance and engagement.

However, some students reported that the lack of direct instructor engagement reduced the overall effectiveness of social influence.

"Without active participation from professors, the discussion forums feel like students just talking to themselves," S1 noted. It echoes the previous findings [44, 45], which stated that instructor presence is crucial in reinforcing positive peer interactions. These results suggest that while peer influence is a strong motivator for LMS adoption, the role of instructors in fostering a collaborative digital learning environment remains essential.

4.5 Habit Formation and Integration into Learning Routine

Habit formation, a key determinant of long-term technology use, emerged as a critical factor in students' engagement with UNIPUS. Many participants reported that using the platform had become an ingrained part of their learning process, demonstrating sustained engagement.

"I log in to UNIPUS every morning before class to check for new materials—it's become a routine," S5 shared. This finding aligns with the researches [46, 47], which stated that repeated exposure and regular LMS use lead to habitual learning behaviors. Students who consistently accessed UNIPUS for coursework, assignments, and assessments were more likely to develop positive perceptions of the platform's effectiveness. S2 noted, "Having everything in one place helps me stay organized and track my progress without feeling overwhelmed."

Furthermore, the integration of automated reminders and progress-tracking features within UNIPUS appeared to reinforce habitual usage. "The reminder notifications keep me accountable for deadlines, which really helps with time management," S1 explained, consistent with studies by Lai, Jong, Hsia, and Lin [48], which suggest that such features enhance student accountability and motivation.

However, some students indicated that external factors, such as inconsistent course integration or technical difficulties, disrupted their routine use of the platform, leading to sporadic engagement. "Sometimes, different professors use different platforms, so I don't always check UNIPUS regularly," S4 observed. These findings highlight the importance of seamless course integration and technical reliability in fostering long-term LMS adoption among students.

4.6 Implications and Future Research

The findings of this study offer several implications for higher education institutions seeking to optimize LMS adoption. First, improving interactivity and usability should be a priority to enhance engagement. Second, strengthening institutional support mechanisms can alleviate usability challenges and facilitate smoother adoption. Lastly, fostering social interaction and habit formation within the LMS can lead to sustained student engagement.

Future research could explore additional factors influencing LMS adoption, such as cultural differences in e-learning acceptance or the role of personalized learning pathways. Longitudinal studies tracking student engagement over multiple semesters could also provide deeper insights into habit formation and retention trends.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the multifaceted nature of EFL learners' acceptance of the UNIPUS LMS. While the platform offers structured access to educational resources, its usability challenges and limited interactivity present notable barriers to widespread adoption. Facilitating conditions, social influence, and habit formation all play significant roles in shaping student engagement with the system. Future research should explore targeted strategies for enhancing platform usability, incorporating interactive learning features, and strengthening institutional support mechanisms. By integrating insights from UTAUT educators and developers can optimize LMS implementation, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of blended learning environments and promoting long-term technology adoption among EFL learners.

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