

فاعلية التعلم المدمج فى تنمية مهارات الاتصال الشفهى باللغة الإنجليزية لدى
طلاب المرحلة الثانوية الأزهرية التجريبية

**The Effectiveness of Blended Learning in Developing
English Oral Communication Skills of Al-Azhar
Experimental Secondary Institute Students**

By:

Nashwa Mahmoud Mahmoud Shabana

Master's Candidate, Faculty of Education, Port said University

Supervised by:

Dr. Adel Abd AlHaliem ALSheikh
Associate Professor of Curriculum &
Instruction (EFL), Faculty of Education,
Mansoura University

Dr. Jehan Mahmoud El-Bassuony
Associate Professor of Curriculum &
Instruction (EFL), Faculty of Education ,
Port-Said University

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate the effectiveness of blended learning in developing English language oral communication skills of Al-Azhar Experimental Secondary Institute Students. The problem of the study was identified in first year secondary stage students' poor level in English language oral communication skills. The subjects of the study were (42) female participants who were selected at random from Al-Zohor experimental secondary institute for girls at Port-Said. They were divided into two groups (control and experimental). To determine the most required sub-skills for each language skill to be developed, a questionnaire containing lists of listening and speaking skills were designed for TEFL specialists. Based on the selected skills, the researcher designed a pre-post English language oral communication skills test approved by jury, website (www.NashwaMaster.com), teacher's guide and exercise book. The results of administrating the pre-post English language oral communication skills test showed that there is statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on the post-test in favor of the experimental in overall skills as well as in each sub-skill. The findings of the present study revealed that a blended learning approach has a positive effect on developing English language oral communication skills of Al-Azhar Experimental Secondary Institute Students.

Keywords: Blended Learning, English Language Skills, E-Learning, Virtual schools, M.learning, Integrated Skills Approach

1. Introduction

English is the only valid language that can be understood by many people all over the world. So, it can be said that English has become an ideal language for expression of feelings and using the technology. Students learn faster and easier than before because of the use of technology in educational institutions. The English curriculum develops the students' ability to communicate. Learning English through the web and using new trends in education in schools make students willing to learn the language. It is quite clear that English has become a necessity today (Sarica and Cavus, 2009).

Motsching and Holzinger (2002, p.164) indicate that technology presents chances to support modern educational environment. Internet and information technology suit the modern attitudes in education which develop students self-education. In addition to these tools, it provides students with the ability to search for educational topics freely and with the help of their teachers. The internet now is considered the most important educational tool and the cheapest teaching aid in distance-learning. With the beginning of using technology in education, there were two forms of educational environment, face-to-face learning or traditional learning and online learning or electronic learning (e-learning). There was a gap between the two environments as each one uses a different methodology (Caner, 2009, p.3).

Salama (2005, p.43) argues that despite of the development of technology but we cannot avoid the traditional methods in learning. Therefore, the need to a new kind of education appeared. Education combines between e-learning and traditional learning that is called blended learning which is trying to overcome the problems of the two educational forms and mix their advantages. Khamis (2003, p.53) defines the blended learning as a complete system that aims to help the student in every educational grade. It is based on the blending between traditional learning and electronic learning with its different forms inside the classrooms.

The interest of blended learning has increased recently. Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) (2005, p.5) delimits the following reasons for this interest:

1. The debate around the importance of class and traditional education and the distance and on-line education has decreased.
2. The students of today are more knowledgeable and comfortable in dealing with electronic communications.
3. We are all in a great need to save time and want more flexibility to schedule our works and this type of advancement provides us with this.

Sharma and Barret (2010) show that there is an attitude recently towards teaching language using mobile learning as blended learning because there are applications now designed to explain and exercise language. There are also electronic dictionaries with special applications for mobiles and smart phones. For example; Longman Dictionary and Oxford Dictionary. There are also special versions of Grammar books such as English Grammar in Use.

Bailey (2005) indicate that listening and speaking are twinned. The “active” speaker becomes the “passive’ listener. In order to become effective speaker you need to become an effective listener. Kutlu and Aslanoglu (2009, p.3) find out that students spend nearly half of their time listening, almost one-third of it speaking and less than one- third of it reading and writing.

1.1 Background and Statement of Problem

The problem of the present study is supported by reviewing previous studies handling the students’ weakness in English language oral communication skills such as (Kumar , 2008; Kim, Teng, Cheng & Bonk, 2012; Zi-gang, 2010; Garrison, 2004; Graham and Bonk, 2006; William, 2002; Ragan, 2007; Grgurovic, 2010). These studies indicated also the importance of blended learning as up to date approach and that approach is not used properly in our classrooms and that the students face problems in English language oral communication skills. These studies provide suggestions for improving the English language oral communication skills and using the blended learning. However, the researcher of the present study noticed that little research has been conducted on using blended learning at the secondary stage especially measuring the effectiveness of blended learning in developing English language oral communication skills of Al-Azhar experimental secondary institute students. Thus, the lack of research in this field justifies the need for further approaches in order to develop English language oral communication skills. Therefore, the present study is examining the effectiveness of blended learning in developing English language oral communication skills of Al-Azhar experimental secondary institute students.

The researcher observed during her work as an English teacher the students’ weakness in English language oral communication skills through monthly tests, observation in the classroom and also the oral assignments. The students also depend on storing and recalling the information during the exams. They consider English not as language of communication and search for information but only as a school subject, to study it to pass the exam. They seldom use it as a foreign language to communicate and

interact with each other inside the classroom. The students only concentrate on studying the skills that are evaluated in the exams.

The teachers also use the traditional learning because of the limited number of the sessions on one hand and on the other hand, the huge amount of the curriculum they have to teach to the students. The increase of the students' number in the classroom forces the teachers to neglect some parts in the course because there are no suitable teaching aids, no enough time or the parts which are not important enough to be included in the exams.

To come to a closer identification of the problem, the researcher conducted a pilot study based on pre-test. The results of the test revealed the students' weakness in English language oral communication skills. In addition the researcher conducted a pilot study based on an open-ended questionnaire administrated to teachers and inspectors in Al-Azhar institutes of English. The results of the questionnaire revealed that the teachers use the traditional learning approach and they seldom use electronic learning approach.

Accordingly, the present study tried to investigate the effectiveness of blended learning in developing English language oral communication skills of Al-Azhar experimental secondary institute students.

1.2 Literature Review

Today, information is no longer the primary goal of education. The use of technology has been so successful and beneficial for teachers to reach some particular goals especially in education and for those who are learning a foreign language. Communication was never so easy. The barrier of location for people in different parts of the world has been reduced by some of the latest technologies such as the web, internet, mobile devices such as Personal Digital Assistant (PDA's), i-Phone (Sarica and Cavus, 2008).

Dzakiria, Che Su and Abu Bakar (2006) indicate that globalization and technology are altering our views on education and educational offerings. Technology has given birth to many new avenues for learning. To name a few, online learning, teleconferencing, the Internet, computer assisted learning (CAL), web-based distance learning (WBDL) and other technologies currently exist. Ellis (2006, p.1) declares that there were also new idioms which appeared in education such as cyber school, virtual schools and virtual classes which are educational operations that allow the individuals to study courses completely or partly to get certificates and scientific degrees through on-line learning. Furthermore, virtual learning environments (VLEs) are claimed to offer schools a number of benefits, such as anytime, anywhere (Berry, 2005).

With the continuing advancement of digital technology, Blended Learning (BL) takes on new dimensions merging the best features of conventional face-to-face instruction and online education. BL is generally agreed to involve a mixture of instructional modalities, delivery media, instructional methods, and web-based technologies (Dziuban, Hartman, and Moskal, 2004). BL combines the respective strengths of teachers and technology to provide an unparalleled solution for language-learning needs.

When used with an integrated curriculum, computer- and classroom-based instruction provides the flexibility, efficiency and effectiveness to ensure language-learning success (Sider, 2012, p.1). BL is defined as the integration of thoughtfully selected complementary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies (Arabasz, Boggs and Baker, 2003, p.148).

Osguthorpe and Charles (2003, p.227) suggest that the reasons for using blended learning include:

- Pedagogical richness
- Access to knowledge
- Social interaction
- Cost effectiveness

Steve (2001,p. 2) identifies the importance of the BL as follows:

1. The increase of the efficiency of education.
2. The reduction of the cost and time which are necessary for education.
3. Not restricted with place and time.
4. Better flexibility and speed of education.

Fotos and Browne (2004) assure that the developments in multimedia and Web technologies offer a range of opportunities to develop speaking, writing, reading, and listening proficiency in the target language. Currently, a typical multimedia language program might allow students to do a reading assignment in the target language, use a dictionary, study grammar and pronunciation related to the reading, and take a comprehension test on the reading content, and receive immediate feedback, all within the same program. Bijeikienė, Rašinskienė and Zutkienė's study (2011, p.125) research showed that the English language teachers display a generally positive attitude towards BL. Moreover, the teachers are appreciative with regard to different forms of blending ICT into language classes as for instance classes in the multimedia language teaching laboratory, the introduction of interactive tests and the element of distance learning.

Seferoglu and Uzakgöre (2004, p.223) assure that whether the students realize or not, they have spent listening almost every time of the day. If they are not talking or reading, they are probably listening to something or someone. On the other hand, Davies and Pearse (2000, p. 99) confirm the

importance of communicative activities and say that the real success in English teaching and learning is when the learners can actually communicate in English inside and outside the classroom”.

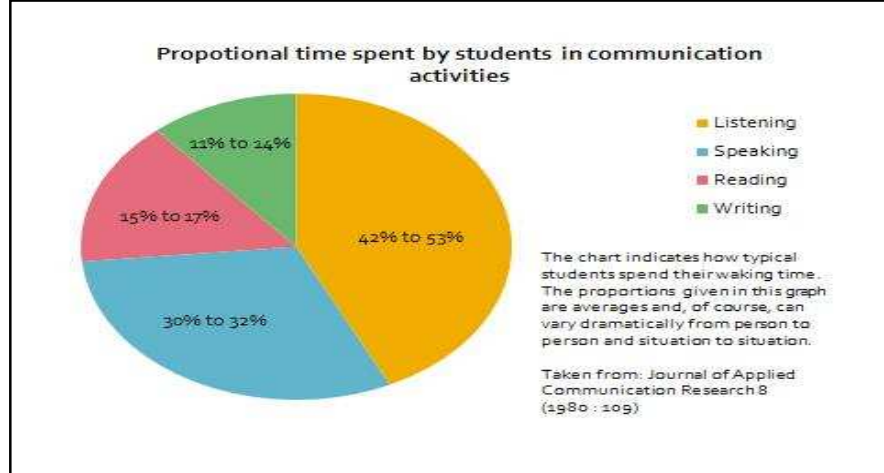


Figure (1)
Communicative Activities Source: Seferoglu and Uzakgöre
(2004, p.223)

Khallaf's study (2013) tried to investigate the effectiveness of a blended learning program based on genre discourse analysis in developing English majors' critical listening and critical reading skills. Whereas Tedick (2006, p.6) claims that skill integration is a key factor in contextualized, authentic language learning experiences that help students use the target language successfully outside the classroom.

One of the challenges that teachers meet in the classroom is motivating the students to speak in the target language. Active and confident students always participate, but the others who are less confident are not willing to speak. As Lightbown and Spada (2006, p.39) suggest "speaking in the target language requires more than one mental task at one time like choosing words, pronouncing them, and stringing them together with the appropriate grammatical markers."

1.3 Questions of the Study

The present study sought to answer the following question:

How effective is a blended learning in developing English oral communication skills of first grade secondary stage students?

More especially, the study tried to answer the following sub-questions:

- What are the English oral communication skills required by the first grade secondary students?
- What is the level of English oral communication skills of the first grade secondary stage students?

c. How far is the effectiveness of using blended learning in developing some English oral communication skills of first grade secondary stage students?

1.4 Purposes of the Study

The present study is intended to:

- Determine the required English oral communication skills of grade secondary stage students.
- Develop English oral communication skills of first grade secondary stage students by using the blended learning.
- Make extra-exercise (traditional and electronic) through the website which the researcher will design.
- Assess the effectiveness of blended learning in developing English oral communication skills (listening and speaking) of first grade secondary stage students.

1.5 Delimitations of the Study

This study is confined to:

- The scope of the study is restricted to first grade students of Al-Azhar experimental secondary institute.
- A sample of (42) first year secondary grade students in Al-Zohor experimental secondary institute for girls at Port-Said.
- The treatment is limited to use blended learning in teaching English for first grade students of Al-Azhar experimental secondary institute to develop English language oral communication skills.
- The content of the curriculum included in the students' book (Hello, Move Ahead Plus, Novel "Oliver Twist", Islamic Selections, Spotlights on Islam).
- The time frame for this study is 8 weeks , 6 lessons per week, 30-45 minutes for each lesson (6 hours per week) in the second term of the academic school year (2012-2013)
- All the students participating in the study are female students.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample of the Study

The sample of this study were 42 female participants who were selected at random from first year secondary stage students of Al-Zohor experimental prep/secondary institute for girls at Port Said city of the academic year 2012/2013. They were randomly divided into an experimental group (n=21) and a control group (n=21). They had six English lessons per week. Each lesson's time was approximately (35-45 minutes).

2.2 Instruments of the Study

The present study included the following instruments:

- English oral communication skills questionnaire (prepared by the researcher)
- A pre-post English oral communication skills test (prepared by the researcher)

2.3 Learning and teaching materials

- Website (www.NashwaMaster.com) designed by the researcher consists of the English course for first grade Al-Azhar secondary experimental institute students with addition and modification to some parts and exercises to improve the students' English language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).
- Teacher's guide includes methodology of teaching English language course for first grade Al-Azhar secondary experimental institute using the blended learning approach.
- Exercise book for the students in two forms; paper and electronic one on the website for each unit and all content of the English language course for first grade Al-Azhar secondary experimental institute.

2.4 The Hypothesis of the Study

The researcher posited the following hypotheses:

- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-post English language oral communication skills test in favour of the post test scores.
- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the mean scores of the control group on the post English language oral communication skills test in favour of the experimental group.

3. Results

The results of the study will be analyzed in the light of the research hypotheses as illustrated below:

3.1 The First Hypothesis

There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-post English language oral communication skills test in favour of the post test scores.

In order to verify this hypothesis, paired samples Wilcoxon was conducted on both the pre and post tests scores of the experimental group to determine the relative extent of change achieved by the experimental group after implementing the treatment.

Table (1) Comparisons of the experimental group pre and post scores on English oral communication skills (listening and speaking)

English language skills Test	Experimental group	N	Mean Scores	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	S.D	D. F	Z	Significance	In favour of
Listening	Pre	21	10.24	11	231	2.49	20	4.033	Significant	Post
	Post		22.57			2.40				
Speaking	Pre	21	14.67	11	231	2.99	20	4.030	Significant	Post
	Post		20.48			4.90				

Results in table (1) shows that there is a significant statistical difference between the mean scores of the pre and post English oral communication skills (listening and speaking) of the experimental group in favour of the post-test scores. This indicates that the experimental group scored higher on the English oral communication skills (listening and speaking) , on the post- test, than the scores on the English oral communication skills (listening and speaking) on the pre- test. The Wilcoxon test results show that this difference is considered to be highly statistically significant at (0.01) level two tailed. The interpretation of this difference proves that the English oral communication skills (listening and speaking) of the students who participated in the treatment have been improved. This confirms the positive effect of the blended learning in developing English oral communication skills (listening and speaking). Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study is supported.

The Pre-Post English Oral Communication Skills Test (listening and speaking)

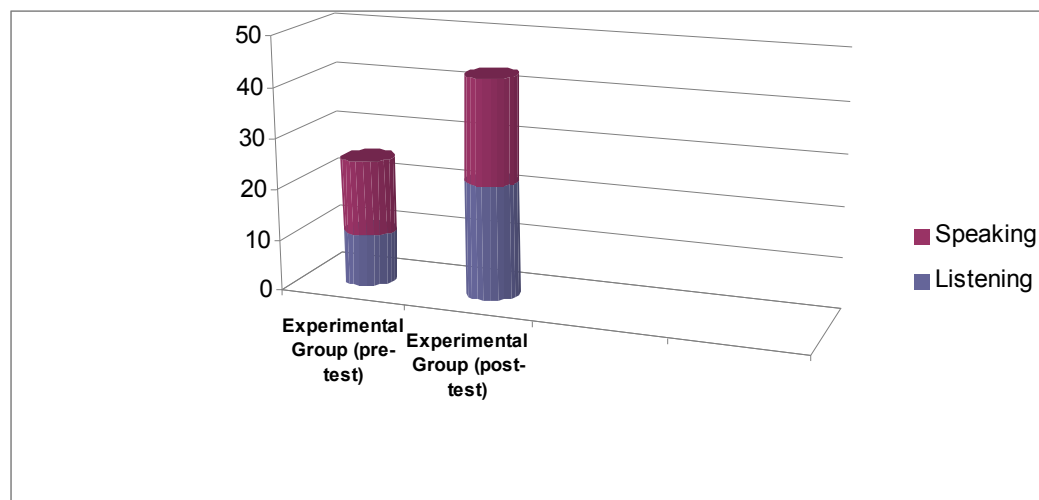


Figure (2) The Experimental group's mean scores on English Oral Communication Skills (listening and speaking) Pre-test and Post-test.

Also, the researcher made use of the following formula in order to calculate the effect size of the blended learning in developing the English oral communication skills of the experimental group.

$$r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}}$$

Table (2)

The effect size of the proposed treatment on the English oral communication skills of the experimental group.

EFL Skills	Z value	r	Effect size
Listening	4.033	0.879	Large
Speaking	4.030	0.879	Large

As shown in table (2), the effect size of the blended learning on developing the English oral communication skills of the experimental group is large {listening (0.879) and speaking (0.879)}. This proves that the blended learning has a large and positive effectiveness on developing English oral communication skills.

3.2 The Second Hypothesis

There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the mean scores of the control group on the post English Language Oral Communication skills test in favour of the experimental group.

In order to verify this hypothesis, independent groups Mann-Whitney Test, was conducted on both the experimental and control groups' scores on post English Language oral communication skills (listening and speaking) test to determine the relative extent of change achieved by the experimental group after implementing the treatment.

Table (3) Comparison of the experimental group and control groups' total scores on English oral communication skills (listening and speaking) post test

English language skills Test	Groups	N	Mean Scores	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	S.D	D.F	Z	U	Significance	In favour of
Listening	Experimental	21	22.57	29.83	626.50	2.40	40	4.428	45.500	Significant	Experimental
	Control		16.00	13.17	276.50	4.35					
Speaking	Experimental	21	20.71	30.02	630.50	4.46	40	4.541	41.500	Significant	Experimental
	Control		13.10	12.98	272.50	4.73					

Results in table (3) show that there is a significant statistical difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post English language oral communication skills (listening and speaking) test in favour of the scores of the experimental group. This indicates that the experimental group scored higher on post English

language oral communication skills (listening and speaking) test than the scores of the control group on the post-test. The Mann Whitney test results show that this difference is considered to be highly statistically significant at (0.01) level two-tailed. The interpretation of this difference proves that the English oral communication skills (listening and speaking) of the experimental group who implemented the program have been improved. This confirms the positive effect of blended learning on developing their English oral communication skills (listening and speaking). The lack of improvement in the control group scores on English language oral communication skills is proved to be due to the conventional instruction that was adopted in their classroom. Therefore, the second hypothesis of this study is supported.

The Post English Language Oral Communication Skills (listening and speaking) Test

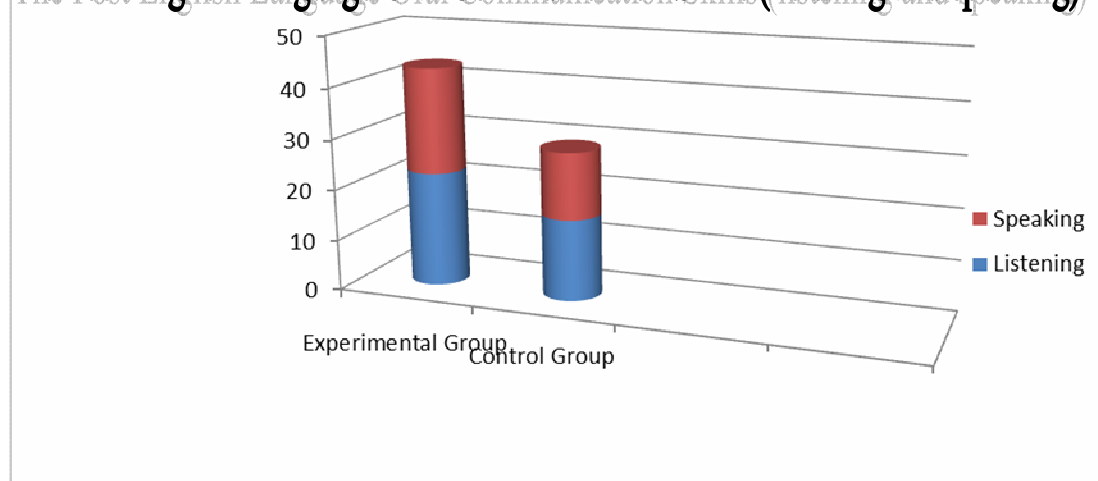


Figure (3) The experimental and control groups' mean scores on Post English Oral Communication Skills (listening and speaking) test.

Also, the researcher made use of the following formula in order to calculate the effect size of the blended learning on developing the English oral communication skills of the experimental group comparing to the English skills of the control group.

$$r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}}$$

Table (4)

The effect size of the blended learning on developing the English oral communication skills (listening and speaking) of the experimental group comparing to the English oral communication skills (listening and speaking) of the control group.

EFL Skills	Z value	r	Effect size
Listening	4.428	0.683	Large
Speaking	4.541	0.701	Large

As shown in table (4), the effect size of blended learning on developing English language oral communication skills is large {listening (0.683) and speaking (0.701)}. This proves that the blended learning has large effect on developing the English oral communication skills of the experimental group comparing to the English oral communication skills of the control group who was exposed to only the conventional instruction.

4. Discussion of Results

The Analysis of the results of the present study revealed the following main findings:

1. There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group trained by blended learning and the control group who trained by traditional instruction in the English language oral communication skills in favour of the experimental group. This indicates that the experimental group achieved higher proficiency in terms of English language oral communication skills than the control group. Similarly, the differences between the pre and post test were significant in English oral communication skills for the experimental group students.
2. In the light of data analysis, the relation between the English language oral communication skills and the use of blended learning was positive. It was proved that the use of blended learning in teaching leads to improve English language oral communication skills (listening and speaking).

Based upon the results of the present study, the researcher recommends the following:

- Blended learning is recommended as a teaching learning approach in order to improve some English language oral communication skills of Al-Azhar experimental secondary institute students.
- The study draws the teachers' attention to use new methods and strategies in teaching English such as blended learning to develop their students' EFL skills.
- The presented study draws the attention of the specialists who are responsible for the educational system to encourage teachers using new approaches and strategies in teaching such as blended learning.

- There must be co-operation between faculties of education and schools in order to provide integration between theory and practice to get the fruits of implementing the research programs on students.
- The EFL teachers should be trained to provide them with modern teaching methods.
- By using blended learning, the students' motivation will be increased. Consequently, the students become active participants not passive receivers in classroom.
- The study provides a website prepared by the researcher, which can be used by the teachers to help them in teaching the EFL curriculum for first grade secondary students, using blended learning to develop English oral communication skills.
- The study provides a teacher's guide book to help the teachers in teaching EFL using the blended learning.
- The study provides a website prepared by the researcher, which can be used by the students to subscribe and log in the web site to develop and improve their EFL skills through explanation and exercises.
- Further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of blended learning in developing English language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) of other samples in different educational levels (primary, preparatory, and college).

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