

**Using Blended Learning Strategies in EFL
Classes: The Effect of an On-Line Course on
the College Students' Speaking.**

By:

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Introduction

Computer technology is nowadays becoming more and more prevalent in many aspects of people's lives. The development of computer technology and the Internet has become the trend in language learning and teaching. In this light, e-learning & distance education system has been introduced to some Saudi universities few years ago to ensure good international standards in all higher institutions and in all programs offered in Saudi Arabia.

Without a doubt, today's world is knowledge-based and depends on the rapid exchange of information. Countries that are equipped with the technology and knowledge to participate in the new electronic world are major players in its socio-cultural and economic developments. Education is changing, too. With the advent of multimedia technologies and the Internet, it is now possible to reach people who would otherwise have no access to certain courses or educational opportunities.

English as Second Language (ESL) educators have been constantly searching for effective teaching strategies to motivate students to learn for achieving better academic performances. This fact implies that each ESL educator has

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to gain a practical knowledge of how to apply technologies to facilitate their students' learning (Chaung 2004: p.2047).

Blended learning, or (BL) as it has come to be known, makes use of the Internet and digital technologies to deliver instruction synchronously or asynchronously to anyone who has access to a computer and an Internet connection. Although it is too early, and the research too little, to explore the strengths and weaknesses compared to e-Learning, it nevertheless appears that its advantages are many (Dracopoulos, 2003).

Context of the Problem:

Among the four language skills, speaking is increasingly important in second/foreign language settings. However, in Saudi Arabia, it is very difficult for students to communicate with other people in English effectively. English is learned as a foreign language (EFL) in Saudi universities and Saudi EFL students rarely speak English in their daily lives. Nevertheless, in order to, for example, take part in international seminars, or present research papers at international conferences, situations which students may eventually encounter in their academic and/or working lives, they do need to be able to give oral presentations and discuss with other people in English or even communicate with native speakers of English inside and outside Saudi Arabia. Therefore, being able to speak English efficiently has a particular importance to Saudi university students and thus also to the foreign language learning and teaching processes. Today, when students finish their study programs, they are faced with a highly competitive work

force that currently calls for professionals with a high proficiency in English, especially in speaking. Continual attention must therefore be given to the processes of learning and teaching speaking for EFL university students in Saudi Arabia.

In order to develop college English learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia, computer assisted language learning (CALL) has been suggested to be one effective way to improve the situation.

This study was designed to conform to the requirements set forth by the college English teaching syllabus. Blended EFL strategies are used where students can engage in self-study activities. Moreover, they can also be incorporated into a traditional classroom setting to assist EFL instruction and learning as the existing speaking course does not function properly in achieving the goals of English teaching in Saudi colleges. Also, it does not develop the learner's speaking because of the traditional classroom methods and activities that depend in imitating and retelling which require students to repeat the speaking materials over and over again. Students lose interest in doing these activities and pay less attention to practicing their speaking. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and implement new kind of methods and activities in the speaking classes. Hence, using an online course via blended leaning strategies could play a role to improve college students' speaking.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is represented in the weakness of EFL 3rd level students of English Department in speaking skill.

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Research Questions:

The problem of this study can be stated in the following main question:

Are there significant differences in the EFL students' mean scores of the English language speaking post- test due to the method of teaching (Blended learning strategies and traditional method of teaching)?

Hypotheses of the study:

1. There are no statistical significant differences between the mean scores of the control group and the experimental group in pre-post test before the treatment.
2. There are statistical significant differences between the mean scores of the control group and the experimental group in pre-post test in favor of the post test scores.

Theoretical Background:

Blended Learning

E-learning has become the main trend in CALL because of its technicality, practicality, diversity, and interactive nature. Learners can access the Web to go through sequences of instruction to complete the learning activities, and to achieve learning outcomes and objectives.

(Ally 2004: p.3).

Paralleling the emergence of the Web as a learning environment, CALL, which is traditionally defined as language learning in a computer laboratory or a classroom aided by various media and methods, is now oriented towards BL--a blend of both face-to-face (FTF) experiences and online interactive activities outside the classroom-- in

order to increase the level of active learning strategies and access to learning (Graham 2006; Whitelock & Jelf 2003).

A blended learning approach combines face to face classroom methods with computer-mediated activities to form an integrated instructional approach. In the past, digital materials have served in a supplementary role, helping to support face to face instruction. For example, a blended approach to a traditional, face to face course might mean that the class meets once per week instead of the usual three-session format. Learning activities that otherwise would have taken place during classroom time can be moved online.

Blended learning is a powerful way to differentiate and personalize instruction, as well as to help move away from time-based models of achievement towards competency-based ones. Blending is a strategy for helping teachers achieve what they strive to do every day—deeply understand and enable each student they work with to reach the very highest levels of educational mastery (Kennedy 2014).

Grgurovic (2011) defined technology-enhanced blended learning as face-to-face teaching and learning supplemented by an online CALL component delivered through a learning management system (LMS).

Learning Management Systems LMS:

An LMS system acts like a bridge between the instructors and learners.

Instructors “configure” the LMS system by loading it with the course material and by enabling students to have access to it. The cognitive benefits of using an LMS system

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is that it enables students and instructors to meet in virtual classrooms.

Further, an LMS system enables the instructor to keep close observation of the learning abilities and success rates of students. In return, students can benefit from an LMS system since they can study the course notes at their own places of study, meet their instructors and classmates in virtual classrooms, and also prepare themselves for the examinations by solving self-test quiz questions whenever they feel like (Cauvs2007: p. 302).

The National Center of E-Learning and Distance Learning (NCEL) in Saudi Arabia offers a range of Learning Management Systems, which is the portal that combines the teacher or trainer with student, and allows each of them to interact with the other – at anytime and anywhere - according to his role in the educational process taking advantage of the educational technical tools offered by them system .

The teacher manages student data, and schedules course and develops a teaching plan. The teacher also makes content available for students, and follows their performance, he/she can also carry out e-exams, saves and process grades, etc.

The student receives the elements of the subject interactively and delivers his/her research and duties through the portal, can communicate with colleagues about the subject and share files with them, in addition to many other services.

JUSUR - LMS is a web-based system providing a learning management system to help students and instructors in Saudi universities to join and use the new learning system. This system adopted from the National Center of E-Learning and Distance Learning (NCEL) in Saudi Arabia to shift from the traditional way of teaching face-to-face (FTF) to the hybrid teaching method because the number of Saudi students increased and became more than 600,000 students in Saudi universities in the academic year 2009-2010. This system is called JUSUR (Jusur an Arabic word means bridges). NCEL created from the Ministry of Higher Education several years ago, when the Ministry of Higher Education wanted to manage and coordinates all the distance educations' branches opened in Saudi Arabia (A-Najdi2011: p.1906).

The advantages of Jusur LMS as listed by Al-Khalifa (2010) consist of Jusur LMS being user friendly, very easy to learn how to operate, containing various instructional and administrative functions, helping the students to complete the task quickly, uploading various types of files into its environment, allowing students who have made a mistake when using the system to recover easily and quickly, supporting error messages which suggest how to fix the problems, enabling user's access to information and activities at anytime and anywhere, and allowing users to communicate with other students in the course and the tutor electronically (Al-Khalifa as cited in Asiri& et al .2012: p.127).

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Virtual Classrooms provide the setting for learning and combine both synchronous and asynchronous systems. The virtual classroom should include the following:

- a community area where group members can interact on a personal level, apart from course material;
- course content areas, organized according to the way the syllabus was constructed;
- an area devoted to reflections on learning through electronic means;
- an area devoted to evaluation of the class, which can be posted initially or added to the course site as the course progresses;
- a separate area for assignments and exams or for posting assignments as discussion items, depending on the course structure (Palloff 1999: p.34).

According to Feyten and Nutta (1999: p. 26), a virtual learning community:

- collectively creates knowledge, using computer-mediated communications and global resources;
- enables individuals, regardless of their race, gender, or class, to produce, access and interact with information in ways that are compatible with their needs;
- embraces the characteristics of each culture represented and includes them in the new cultural fabric;
- respects different perspectives and promotes diversity of thought;
- seeks and develops commonalities in experience and purpose.

Review of Previous Studies:

Some studies showed the importance of using e-learning in the Arab world especially the Gulf region countries and Saudi Arabia as one of them :

Weber(2009) concluded that the future of E-learning throughout the Gulf region is bright because of the centralization of ICT resources, recent large-scale and direct government investment, partnerships with ASEAN e-vendors and virtual universities.

Abouzaid (2010) proposed an e-collaboration tool which allows collaboration between teachers and librarians to link e-resources with the curriculum and to support the educational process in the e-learning environment. The study methodology uses mixed methods. This study was carried out at Al-Bayan Model Girls' School, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The study findings showed that 98.3% of students were using the tool in the classroom, 96.6% of them were using the tool independently, and 16.4% of the students were proposing an additional 2.7% of e-resources. This indicated that there was good usage of the tool to provide opportunities to fulfill students' needs with less time and effort.

Electronic -Learning in Teaching EFL Some studies examined the important relation between **EFL and e - learning:**

Akinyemi (2002) stated that language is an important aspect of communication which is the only means of interactions in learning. Electronic-learning (E-learning), being a form of a virtual teacher, pseudo-teacher or

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complementary teacher is characterized with students' interactions. The study of language reveals its importance, whether as first, second or tenth and these are crucial in the conduct of e-learning especially in the Arab world. Language has significant roles in the way in which learning occurs and consequently, the success or failure of e-learning in higher education systems where English is not the first language. The Arab world is conscious of its importance and steps are being taken to face the challenge.

Al-Jarf (2005) concluded that for online collaborative instruction to be effective, an instructor teaching freshman student in a gender-based environment should proceed gradually. First, freshman students in the same class may be exposed to online instruction. Second, students of different college levels at the same college enrolled in courses focusing on the same skill such as reading or writing may connect to the Internet from home and share the same online course together with their instructors. When the students are more confident using online courses, have more experience with college courses, they may be connected with students at other universities within Saudi Arabia or abroad.

Al-Jarf (2006) conducted a study where Saudi sophomore students (in the fourth semester of college) shared an online writing course with Ukrainian and Russian students using Nicenet. At first, they were inhibited and wanted to conceal their identity, but later they could overcome their hesitation and found online learning with

Ukrainian and Russian students fun and effective in enhancing their writing skills and cultural awareness.

Al-shammari (2008) aimed at investigating the perceptions of Arab Open University students and instructors towards various aspects pertaining to the teaching/learning process such as the usefulness of e-learning in delivering language courses, feedback, independence in learning and the future of distance education.

The issue of feedback proved to be highly significant in the context of distance education as. Regarding independence in learning 89% of tutors believed that e-learning increases students' ability to learn independently. In the same line, 86% of students reported that their independence in learning has increased since joining the University.

Al-Dawood (2009) investigated the current use of email in Saudi Arabia. The study used qualitative methods in order to (a) explore the current utilization of email by female English teachers and secondary level students in Saudi Arabia; (b) identify the attitudes and perceptions of the Saudi female teachers and students towards email; (c) investigate the expected benefits of email to EFL skills; (d) shed light on the factors that might affect integration of email in EFL programs. The findings of the study showed that the majority of Saudi teachers and students are already acquainted with email technology. Moreover, participants have shown a positive attitude towards email due to the

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many benefits they believed it would offer such as motivation, practice, enjoyment, and L2 improvement.

Al-Abaad (2011) investigated the impact of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and software design on both the achievement of the learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) and their attitudes toward learning EFL on upper-elementary level students. It examined both variables (performance and attitudes) before and after the implementation of computers and learning at home via the Internet. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group by 25%. As to the experimental attitudes toward using computers and audiovisual technology students attitudes were remarkable positive.

Blended Learning Strategies and Speaking Skill

Kirkogz (2011) investigated designing and implementing a speaking course in which face-to-face instruction informed by the principles of Task-Based Learning is blended with the use of technology, the video, for the first-year student teachers of English in Turkish higher education. The study consisted of three hours of task based classroom instruction, complemented with one hour of additional class time, which was devoted to viewing and evaluating students' video recorded speaking tasks, assigned as homework. A mixed research method was used to collect data from multiple sources: recordings of a pre- and post-course speaking task, analysis of the video-recordings of students' speaking tasks, informal interviews with the students, and a written end-of-year course

evaluation survey. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data revealed that students made noticeable improvement in their oral communication skills.

Simernova (2013) made a case study of teaching academic presentation skills using a blended learning format. It took a closer look at the existing web-based presentation skills pedagogy, discussing the challenges, perspectives of development, and methods of improving online academic presentation teaching through students' reflective learning practices. It was suggested that reflective learning stages applied to an online course design and proper face-to-face instruction mode foster students' academic oral proficiency and made online learning highly effective.

Speaking Problems in EFL Classrooms:

English speaking classrooms in many countries have many problems which lessen the chance of promoting speaking accuracy and fluency such as limited time, crowded classrooms, lacking the opportunity to practice outside the class and inefficient multimedia systems in classes, etc. Therefore, some studies referred to the speaking difficulties that are faced by EFL learners as; Xian-Long (2009p.27) sought answers to the question "What do you think is the weakest among your language skills?", and 76% of the participants stated that their weakest skill was speaking.

Nyguen (2010) concluded that EFL learners' reluctance to speak English in the classroom is a problem commonly found in EFL contexts. Consequently, students have fewer

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opportunities to learn from speaking than the more oral student.

Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal (2011) aimed at describing difficulties that may be encountered at an EFL setting. The sample was stratified random as drawn from six Jordanian public universities. Survey questionnaires as well as semi-structured interviews were constructed. 64 students were interviewed out of 566 students who responded to a survey questionnaire. The findings of the study exposed a perceived failure of EFL students' speaking skill in English was reported together with reasons that explain such perceived difficulty. The results of the study showed a 'low' speaking proficiency level among EFL undergraduates along with negligible instruction of the speaking skill at university courses' level. More highlighted difficulties by this study were as these of: communication in L1, large classes, and lack of time.

Baniabdelrahman (2013: p.79) aimed to examine the effect of using shared online oral diaries on the EFL Saudi First year university students' speaking proficiency. It used one male and one female EFL Saudi First year university student's classroom sections to represent the experimental group and one male and one female classroom sections to represent the control group. An equivalent speaking proficiency test, developed by the researcher, was applied on the control and the experimental groups before the study started to ensure their equivalence; and was also used as a post-test. The results of the post-test revealed significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental

group and the mean scores of the control group in favor of the experimental group.

Nazara (2011) stated that it is very important to find and use the best instructional methods, materials, activities, media, and other requirements that will help the learners master speaking skill. However, although a great number of studies aimed to help learners master speaking skill has been conducted, many EFL learners still find speaking it very difficult to master.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of thirty five, 3rd level -English major female students. They enrolled in speaking classes at College of Education-Majmaah University in the academic year of 1433/1434 A.H. Participants were divided into an experimental group of 15 students and a control group of 20 students. They had experience and were familiar with using the internet. In addition, all of them had undergone speaking skill trainings from their previous college English courses. None of the students had any prior experience in using Jusur LMS.

Instruments

JUSUR Learning Management System- LMS

The study used JUSUR LMS which has been developed by National Centre for e-learning and Distance Learning according to universal standards (Appendix 1). It has 17 tools namely Courseware Controls tool, Course Description tool, Announcements tool, Learning Content Management System tool, Glossary tool, Forum tool, General Chat tool,

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File Sharing tool, Assignments tool, Tests and Assessment tool, virtual classroom tool, Lecturer Information tool, User Administration tool, Survey Manager tool, Questions Bank tool, Grad Book tool, and Tracking Forum Participation tool (Appendices 2-9).

Jusur LMS has six main functions which can be achieved through the Jusur LMS environment which are as follows:

- Log in: registering students at a portal.
- Scheduling: planning courses and determining teaching methods.
- Delivery: making the course available for users.
- Tracking: following up student progress and issuing performance reports.
- Communication: students share and exchange information through forums, emails and file sharing.
- Evaluation: testing students through quizzes and examinations and grading them.

Speaking Check-list

Aim of the Speaking Check-list

The speaking check-list was designed for identifying speaking skills required for participants of the study and building the pre post test in the light of it.

Sources of the Speaking Check-list

The researcher designed the speaking check-list depending on available literature on speaking skills, views of some EFL specialists and professionals, and experience of the researcher.

Description of the Speaking Check –list

The speaking check-list was composed of four domains, involving nineteen items. The researcher designed the check-list taking in account experts' opinions and review of literature.

Validity of the Speaking Check-list

The checklist was validated by a referee validity. It was distributed to some specialists and professionals. They added and omitted some items. In the light of their suggestions, the check-list was modified to its final form comprising nineteen items.

a. Grammar

1. Form simple sentences in the correct word order.
2. Use a variety of verb tenses where appropriate.
3. Use a variety of sentence structures
4. Connect ideas with and, but, so, etc. (coordinating conjunctions).
5. Connect ideas using adverb clauses.
6. Connect ideas using relative pronouns.
7. Use transition words and phrases so others can follow your sequence of ideas.

b. Pronunciation

1. Is understandable and can be followed by the other speaker.
2. Use some variety in your voice.
3. Use stress and intonation.
4. Emphasize key words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs).

c. Vocabulary

1. Use some advanced words.

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2. Use a variety of words.
3. Use some idioms/phrasal verbs where appropriate.

d. Fluency

1. Use pauses effectively.
2. Don't say "um" and "ah" too much.
3. Use very few long pauses.
4. Use clear general meaning.
5. Speak loud enough so the other person can hear.

The Pre-Post test

The researcher developed a speaking test which was used twice: one before the study started and one at the end of the study with a rubric to be used as a rating scale. The purpose of the pre-test was to ensure the equivalence of the experimental and control groups before the study started while the purpose of the post-test was to assess the students' abilities in speaking after the experiment and to compare the results of the experimental group with the results of the control group. The test consisted of two parts.

Part one. It is worth 20 points. It lasts between 55 to 60 minutes. It is composed of four questions. Each one of the students is awarded one full mark. There are no half marks.

Students are scored on a scale, from 1 to 5. Then the total score is converted to be out of 40. Each question is based on one topic students are familiar with from their previous levels or experiences. Interactions not a feature of the rubric. Comparison is not made between students to decide on their mark; instead, students were scored against the criteria set out in the rubric (Appendix 10). A student of

lower ability may still score a full mark, like a higher ability student. The exam is conducted by an assessor and an Interlocutor. The interlocutor guides the student through the tasks.

The interlocutor does not verbally interfere with the student's answers in any way.

Part two:

It is worth 20 points. It lasts between 25 to 30 minutes. The Interlocutor asks questions from one topic group for student who selects from odd or even numbered sets to answer. When the Interlocutor has finished asking the questions, she follows the same procedure for another student but with a different topic group. The number of questions that the Interlocutor asks depends on the length or brevity of the students' answers; short answers generate more questions, a student who answers at greater length is asked fewer questions. The Interlocutor ensures that each student has an equal amount of time to speak.

Test validity

The test was prepared and given to some professional specialists to judge its validity. The jury members were required to give their comments in terms of clarity of instruction and suitability to students' level. Some suggestions were given. In the light of these suggestions, the test was modified and proved to be a valid tool for measuring EFL students' speaking as a pre –posttest (Appendix 11).

Reliability of the Test

For each student, the total score was recorded along with the sum of the scores for the even questions and the sum of the scores for the odd question. The test was determined to be reliable by using the split-half methodology. Correlation Coefficient = 0.301. To get a better estimate of the reliability of the full test, Spearman-Brown correction, was applied namely:

$$p = \frac{2r}{1+r}$$

r=correlation
=0.903

According to that, the test was proved to be reliable.

Procedures

Students were classified into three groups in terms of language proficiency level – high, medium, and low – based on the scores from their previous 2nd level final examinations. After the pretest, students whose scores fell in more than one proficiency level were excluded. 35 participants were randomly assigned into an experimental group of 15 students and a control group of 20 students.

All the students were required to learn eight units of *Interactions 2* listening & speaking course for 3 hours each week. One hour for the computer lab and 2 hours for the traditional class. In the Tutorial class, all the students in the experimental and control groups studied the same textbook. The researcher implemented JUSUR LMS which has some online tools included in Admin Menu & Tools. Training was given to students in registering for the course and using

JUSUR tools .Technical support and written instructions were given to students who face difficulties.

JUSUR online activities were used with the experimental group (Appendices 3-8) instead of one hour lecture given weekly by the regular instructor at the lab. Jusurlms activities allowed students to practice speaking by interacting with their classmates actively e.g. using the tools of public conversation , chat and Forum rather than the traditional methods used with control group students which depend on retelling and imitating that let students to waste attention and interest. The online version of the course offers the perfect combination of e-book and automatically graded homework. Learners can access the entire book online, and the all-new exercises for each chapter help students' speaking.

After the 12-weeks of using blended learning based-instruction, students in the experimental group and the control group took the post-test to determine the effects of the on - line speaking course via JUSUR activities on their speaking performance.

Results and Discussion

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the performance of students on speaking skill in two groups. The test was applied for the two groups before the experiment as shown in tables (1,2). The Sig. (2-Tailed) value before the experiment is .352. This value is greater than .05. Because of this, we can conclude that there is not a statistically significant difference between the on-line and traditional groups before

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Table 1
Group Statistics-Pre Test

	speaking skill	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
test Grade	traditional course	20	11.8000	3.48833	.78001
	on-line course	15	13.2667	5.68792	1.46861

Table 2
Independent Samples Test-Pre Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T Test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig	T	Df	Sig (2tailed)	Mean differences	Std Error Differences	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Test Grade Equal variances assumed	3.700	.063	-.943	33	.352	-1.41667	1.55520	-	-
Equal variances not assumed			.832	21.738	.387	-1.41667	1.66290	4.63095	1.69742

After the experiment, the Sig (2-Tailed) value is .000 as shown in table(3) .If the Sig (2-Tailed)value is less than or equal to .05...We can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. We can conclude that the differences between group means are not likely due to change but are probably due to the blending learning strategies. The Sig. (2-Tailed) value in our experiment is .000. This value is less than .05. Because of this, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the on-line and traditional groups. Since our Group Statistics box revealed that the Mean for the on-

line condition was greater than the Mean for the traditional group, we can conclude that participants in the on-line group were able to speak significantly more than participants in the traditional group.

Table 3

Independent Samples Test-Post Test

Test Grade	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T Test for Equality of Means										
	F	Sig	t	Df	Sig (2tailed)	Mean differences	Std Error Differences	95% confidence Interval of the Difference					
								Lower	Upper				
Equal variances assumed	3.348	.076	-	33	.000	-24.41667	.96148	-	-				
Equal variances not assumed			25.395					27.172	.000	-24.41667	.86834	26.37280	2.2460E1
			28.119									26.19782	2.2635E1

A significant difference in the scores for online (M=36.26, SD=1.48) and traditional (M=11.85, SD=3.48) groups as shown in table (4). These results suggest that on-line course really does have an effect on speaking skill. Specifically, our results suggest that when we use blended learning strategies via online course, it develops the speaking skills of college EFL students. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean speaking score for the two groups $t=-25.39$, $p=.000$. In other words, the on-line course group has statistically significantly higher mean scores on speaking skill $m= 36.26$ than the traditional course group $m=11.85$.

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Table 4
Group Statistics-Post Test

	speaking skill	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
test Grade	traditional course	20	11.8500	3.48342	.77892
	on-line course	15	36.2667	1.48645	.38380

The study aimed at investigating the implementation of an online course via blended-learning strategies and its effect on Saudi EFL female learners' speaking in college English classes. To achieve this aim, the researcher used pre-post experimental design with two groups ;an experimental group and control group. In relation to the study's hypotheses, the findings can be summarized as follows:

There are statistical significant differences between mean scores of the control group and the experimental group in speaking skill after the treatment in favor of the experimental group.

Blended learning strategies and online course have an effect on students' speaking.

Results refer to the effectiveness of using blended learning strategies through Jusur LMS which had positive effect on students' performance in speaking skill. This is due to the features of blended learning strategies that were provided to students and could not be provided in traditional classrooms. This is in consistent of results ofKirkogz (2011)who concluded that students made noticeable improvement in their oral communication skills after using speaking course in which online and blended

learning strategies were used and results of Simernova (2013) who concluded that an online course design and proper face-to-face instruction mode foster students' academic oral proficiency and made learning highly effective.

One of these important features of blended learning is interaction. Students who interact become engaged, focused, curious, and primed to learn. Three crucial levels of interaction are student-to-student, student-to-instructor, and student-to-content/ materials. In our face to face EFL courses, this can be exemplified in pair work, the instructor involved in the lesson/ interested in the students' lives, and the students engrossed in learning activities that address their interests and needs. These three levels of interaction were all presented in the virtual environment and JUSUR LMS activities which made the on-line course more successful.

On-line course provided student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction through both live and recorded voice, through synchronous or non-synchronous speaking. Student-to-content interaction comes from having a variety of engaging activities. Here is a sample of some online EFL activities that were used and a few tech tools that helped in creating them. Most activities look familiar to face to face courses:

- Listen and discuss via voice or text. (Voice Thread).
- Learn vocabulary and grammar or complete a task using a content-rich website.
- Small group chat via voice or text.

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- Recorded or live presentations. (Voice Thread, narrated PowerPoint).
- Role play, listen and repeat, listen and create.
- Drill and practice.
- Cloze, fill-in, and multiple choice exercises with instant and meaningful feedback.
- Timed activities for speaking.

What cannot be replicated online can be approached in another way. The key is to look at the objective of the activity, hold that objective in mind, and think how else that objective could be accomplished with the tools of the online course.

Students were able to use information stored on a Web site which include *hypermedia* (such as clips, animation, sound effects, music, voiceovers, photographs, drawings, and documents), *hypertext* (documents and static graphics), and unlinked text or graphics. They could use Different tools and resources available on the website. Performance of students in experimental group were affected by some advantages of electronic environment of Jusur LMS as

- Interaction. The student transmits a message and receives one in return.
- Immediate feedback. There is immediate note that a mistake has been made.
- Self-correction. Clear error messages help most students to achieve the satisfaction of reaching the correct answer in the end.
- Reinforcement. Students are encouraged by congratulatory messages for correct answers.

- Individualized instruction. Students learn at their own pace.

These advantages created an active learning environment for students which cannot be created by traditional methods of face to face teaching.

This was supported by Cavus (2007) who referred to benefits of LMS system which are offered to instructors and students. It enables students and instructors to meet in virtual classrooms. Further, an LMS system enables the instructor to keep close observation of the learning abilities and success rates of students. Also, students can study at their own base and at their own places of study and Al-shammari (2008) who concluded that e-learning increases students' ability to learn independently and offers feedback that makes learning highly effective.

Conclusion

The use of computers and online learning in education requires a much larger shift in thinking than simply adding a few computers to classrooms. Truly blended learning requires that teachers approach their role differently, as guides and mentors instead of providers of information.

Once instructors have created a course, they really just need to make small or partial changes each semester; they will never have the huge initial time outlay again. Instead, they spend their work time interacting with students online, guiding them through the course, facilitating collaborations, taking part in their activities, commenting on their work, and providing individualized feedback and help.

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Classrooms must be redefined as flexible learning environments, in which students learn in a variety of ways, while communicating and collaborating with others who are outside their school—and perhaps outside their country.

Learning should go beyond the classroom walls and the confines of the academic day. For these changes to be successful they must be supported by professional development for existing teachers, and pre-service education for future teachers.

There are educational technology departments at Saudi universities, but their focus appears to be on media studies and production. Therefore a great deal of training for e-learning is needed.. In some ways, The (technology) infrastructure is relatively good but the use of the infrastructure is poor .

However, there is money, government commitment, and above all the subtle pressure for change. Also there is the leadership being provided by the excellent e-learning programs at ELC. It will be a promising future in the next few years for e-learning in Saudi Arabia.

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