

The Effect of Blended Learning on Omani Post-basic students' English

Listening Skills

Abstract

Aim: The researchers aimed to investigate the effect of blended learning on developing EFL listening skills for Omani post-basic education students, and to improve their EFL listening skills through a variety of methods, such as audiovisual devices, or computer-based activities that can be done at home or in the English language lab via specific materials.

Study Design: This was a pre-posttest quasi-experimental research.

Place and Duration of Study: An 8-week study was conducted at the Falaj AL Mashaikh School in Sharqiyah South Governorate, Jalan Bani Bu Hassan in Oman at the Basic Education level for the academic year 2020-2021.

Methodology: The researchers conducted a pre-posttest quasi-experimental design through which participants were distributed into an experimental and a control group of 60 students. To collect data, the instruments used in the study were an EFL Listening Sub - Skills Checklist and an EFL Listening Skill Pre-Post Test.

Results: The results revealed that the experimental group members, who were exposed to the blended learning based instructional course, were effective in developing their own listening skills that considerably changed their attitudes towards learning English listening skills and removed sensations of fear and anxiety with regard to learning.

Conclusion: It became evident that the blended learning was effective in developing the EFL listening skills of post basic students.

1. Introduction

Kurita indicated that EFL listening is a basic language skill that develops naturally before EFL speaking and thus influences the development of both EFL reading and writing skills [12]. Not only in daily communication, but also in the educational process, listening comprehension plays a significant role. Despite its importance, developing EFL listening skill comprehension has received less attention in EFL classrooms.

Blended learning is one of the newest techniques to integrate the technology in a face-to-face classroom component. In other words, blended learning is also an instrument to create bonds between traditional usual ways used in teaching EFL listening skills inside educational environment and technological tools and styles to achieve learning goals [18]. Because of the inequitable use of the conventional approach of English language education, blended learning is a breakthrough in EFL teaching and learning. He also emphasized the importance of student-centered learning in most institutions [16].

Moreover, many studies conducted in the Omani environments shed a light on students' weak level in EFL listening skills and their urgent need to be tackled using modern teaching methods like the blended learning in the studies as followed: [6]; [5]; [3]; [2]; [4].

To ascertain of the students' level in EFL listening skills, the researcher conducted a preliminary study. The researcher administered a test out of 30 marks in English listening skill for the Grade 11 students (N: 20) at Falaj Al Mashaikh School, Jalan Bani Bu Hassan province.

Furthermore, many research findings asserted the weakness of English listening amongst EFL learners [11]; [12]; [13]; [17]; [20], and recommended necessity of keeping pace with the age innovations and developing the English language skills generally and English listening skill specifically among post basic stage students.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Information technology can be seen as an important aspect of foreign language education, as it has contributed to significant improvements in ESL/EFL students' teaching and learning. Learning is no longer limited to the four walls and whiteboard of a classroom, according to Djiwandono [8]. Also, based on Rahim, language teaching and learning methods have changed as a result of the significant learning platforms that have attracted teachers and learners, such as distance learning, virtual education, blended learning, and other resources [16].

In the present study, the researcher decided to use the theory of constructivism by Dewey (1929), Bruner (1961), Jean Piaget (1960) and George Kelly (1955), Jerome Bruner (1960) and Ernst Von Glasersfeld (1974). Constructivism has emerged as a dominant ideology in the field of education in recent years, and it has had a significant intellectual impact on the growth of pedagogy. Piaget's cognitive developmental theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory are deeply based in it. In addition, constructivist concepts and principles have had a far greater and more important influence on the construction and execution of technologically enhanced micro worlds, as well as linguistic study into literacy and story development. Constructivist learning has firmly established itself as a key teaching method [14].

1.2 Conceptual Framework

Blended learning refers to a modern educational approach that is gradually replacing e-learning in the majority of educational institutions. Salama claims that blended learning is a practical and scientifically based alternative to e-learning, with higher yields, lower costs, and more advanced learning modes [19]. According to Garrison and Kanuka, blended learning is a term that explains multiple attempts by teachers to incorporate technology into the traditional classroom setting due to the increased efficiency this arrangement offers [9]. Moreover, Blended

learning combines or merges the functions of a teacher in a traditional classroom and those in a virtual classroom to facilitate immersive learning. Blended learning technology is often used to assist students in achieving their goals. According to Graham, blended systems are designed to aid learning by encouraging the use of visual prompts and instructional concepts [10]. Digital worlds are used to draw the audience's attention while also enhancing connections between the subject parties. Blended learning combines direct and indirect online learning, and usually involves the internet with indirect learning occurring concurrently in traditional classrooms.

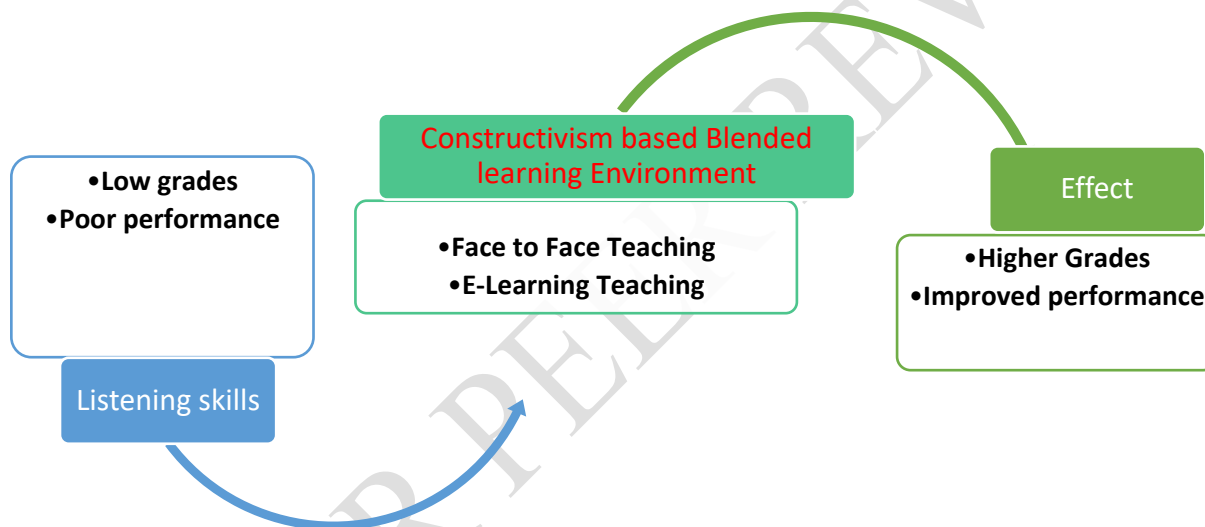


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework

1.3 Research Questions

The researcher aimed to use the blended learning to develop the students' listening performance on Listening exams. It targets Grade 11 students in Jalan schools in Oman. Thus, through motivating and supporting students to practise and answer listening questions to reach expected levels of answering listening exams, the researcher could help students do better in their final exams and reach noticeable levels of language listening skills.

To fulfill the aim of the aforementioned study, the researcher has reached two primary research objectives (RO).

RO1: To identify the effect of using blended learning on teaching EFL listening skills for Grade 11 students.

RO2: To identify the EFL listening skills that can be developed in the Grade 11 students by using the blended learning approach.

The problem of research could be explicitly summed up in the following two research questions:

RQ1: What is the effect of using blended learning approach on teaching EFL listening skills for Grade 11 students?

RQ2: What are the EFL listening skills that can be developed in the Grade 11 students by using the blended learning approach?

The study helped the researcher examine the effect of blended learning on developing students' performances in listening examinations and; therefore, showed the ways that lead to such a problem. The study indicated the reasons that led most of students to such results due to lack performance in listening questions. Therefore, the significance of the study led the researcher to the point of achieving blending between (traditional-electronic learning) which led to improving the outputs of educational process with developing teacher performance inside study classrooms. Thus, this improved language skills of students generally and EFL listening skills in particular.

1.4 Delimitation

In accordance with the research objectives and research question, the research investigated the effect of the blended learning on developing EFL listening skills among Grade 11 students. Consequently, the study was delimited to EFL listening skills, and the researcher did not investigate other EFL skills (speaking or reading or writing skills).

2. Experimental Details

The study employed a pre- test post-test quasi-experimental design. Participants were selected based on the computer literacy and they were formed into two groups: an experimental group and a control group comprised of (60 students). First, the experimental and control group members were pre-tested. Then, the experimental group members were taught using the blended learning combining learning face to face with technology learning through the activities developed by the researcher in the form of lesson plan, presentations, audios and video clips. The control group members were taught using the regular teaching method. Finally, the post-test was attempted for the experimental and control group members and the results were calculated.

2.1 Sampling

This study was carried out in a post-primary public school where the researcher is working (Falaj Al Mashaikh School, Jalan Bani Bu Hassan province). The use of this sampling method aided in selecting the students who participated in this study. Sample of the study was comprised of Grade 11 students. Their group age ranges between 16 – 17 years old. Most of them were born in 2004. They are currently enrolled in post basic stage of education. It is worth mentioning that they have studied English language since Grade 1 in Cycle One (Basic Education Stage).

The students were tested on EFL listening skills during the final exams. There are listening materials available in the course book; however, such listening skills are not assessed during the formative assessments, which are called the Continuous Assessment. The EFL listening skills of grade 11 students are regularly assessed in the final exam (summative assessment) out of "15" marks.

2.2 Instrument

To collect data, the researcher develops and use the following instruments and materials:

1. **An EFL Listening Sub - Skills Checklist.**
2. **An EFL Listening Skill Pre-Post Test.**

2.3 Procedures

The researcher followed some steps during the study which were as follows: he constructed the blended learning based instructional course to develop the EFL listening skills. It consisted of eight lessons on the student's book: Engage with English for Grade 11 students. The instruction was intended to identify the effect of using blended learning to develop EFL listening skills of post basic education students.

The students were to be given comprehensive details about the blended learning environment used for the experimentation (Google Classroom Platform). They were to be oriented to use the tutorial available on Google Classroom website. After the instructor becomes sure that the students begin to enjoy the experience, He moved to introduce them to EFL listening Sub - Skills and how they could apply them while doing EFL listening activities and exercises. The students started to feel authentic enjoyment while developing these EFL listening Sub - Skills.

2.3 Data Collection

The researcher investigated the effect of blended learning on developing EFL listening skills of post basic education students. Consequently, he constructed the following instruments for the purpose of data collection: an EFL listening skill checklist and an EFL listening pre-posttest. He developed an EFL listening skill checklist that seems appropriate for Grade 11 students in Omani environment with regard to their developmental stage.

Based on the EFL listening skill checklist, the researcher developed a pre-post EFL listening test for Grade 11 students and referred it to the expert expert viewers for adding or removing any questions they find appropriate. Third, the researcher developed a blended learning based instructional course to develop EFL listening skills of Grade 11 students, where he regarded their developmental stage with regard to the listening skills and their individual differences with regard to use of speaking activities and drills either synchronously or asynchronously.

2.4 Data Analysis

The statistical software program SPSS was used to analyze the data collected by the research instruments. The researcher used an independent sample t-test to indicate the effect of blended learning on developing EFL listening skills of Grade 11 students.

First and foremost, the researcher compared the EFL listening pre-test scores of the two groups (the experimental group and the control group) before experimentation; in order to be aware of real level of experimental group members and control group members before experimentation. Then an independent sample t-test was used to compare the EFL listening pre-

posttest scores of the experimental group members who used the blended learning in developing the EFL listening skills to show the difference either before or after experimentation.

After that, he compared the EFL listening post-test scores of the two groups (the experimental group and the control group) after experimentation, to identify how successful the blended learning was in developing EFL listening skills of the experimental group members in comparison with the regular teaching method used with the control group members.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 RQ1: What is the effect of using blended learning approach on teaching EFL listening skills for Grade 11 students?

The first research question was formulated in order to investigate the effects of using the blended learning approach on teaching EFL listening skills for Grade 11 students as there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students and control group students at 0.01 level on the EFL listening post - test in favor of the scores of the experimental group students.

In order to recognize the effect of blended learning on teaching EFL listening skills, the researcher compared the mean scores of the experimental group students and the control group students on the post measurement of the listening skills test. Also, the researcher used two tailed t-test for independent groups to find out the significant differences after conducting the instructional course. The results of the two tailed t-test proved to be statistically significant. Moreover, the results were based on the effect size which is deemed very small if d approximates 0.1, small if d approximates 0.2, medium if d approximates 0.5, large if d approximates 0.8, very large if d approximates 1.2, huge if d approximates 2.0 [21]. In addition, the effect size is

considered a statistical concept that measures the strength of the relationship between two variables on a numeric scale. Statistic effect size helps us in determining if the difference is real or if it is due to a change of factors. In statistics analysis, the effect size is usually measured in three ways: (1) standardized mean difference, (2) odd ratio, (3) correlation coefficient [22].

There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post administration of the listening skills test in each separate EFL listening skill and in the EFL listening skills as a whole in favor of experimental group students. The large effect size could be attributed to students' motivation and collaboration as well as types of the activities which aimed at developing listening skills. With calculation the t- values for EFL listening skills, there is an evident development of the experimental group students in EFL listening performance on the posttest in comparison with the control group students according to the percentages shown in the table. Consequently; the blended learning is effective in the experimental group students' performance in each separate EFL listening skill and in EFL listening skills as a whole.

The result is significant; due to the fact that the students were granted the ample opportunities to do each exercise and quiz numerous times, while they could do each end- of-unit test only for one time. Furthermore, it could assert that the repetitive practices and greater exposure to the exercises were of much assistance for the participants to learn more skills and to acquire a better understanding of the lessons and quizzes in comparison with what they performed in the regular tests. This result is consistent with the results in the studies by [15]; [23]; [1].

3.2 RQ2: What are the EFL listening skills that can be developed in the Grade 11 students by using the blended learning approach?

In order to recognize the EFL listening skills that can be achieved through blended learning, the researcher compared the mean scores of the experimental group students pre and post measurement of the listening skills test. Also, the researcher has used the two tailed t- test for independent groups to find out the significant differences after conducting the instructional course. The results of the two tailed t-test proved to be statistically significant. there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post EFL listening test of the experimental group in favor of the EFL post-test scores on each separate EFL listening skill and in EFL listening skills as a whole.

With calculation of the t-values for EFL listening skills, there is an evident development of the first-year secondary school students in EFL listening performance on the posttest according to the percentages shown in the table. Consequently; the blended learning effective in the experimental group participants' performance in each separate EFL listening skill and in EFL listening skills as a whole. This result is consistent with the results in the studies by [7], [11].

4. Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

The experimental group members were exposed to the blended learning based instructional course and this was substantially effective in developing their own listening skills. Not to mention, this considerably changed their attitude towards learning English listening skills and basically removed sensations of fear and anxiety with regard to learning thereof. Furthermore, they became much more courageous to form an English listening corner where they could listen to English listening materials, discuss what they found ambiguous with each other and ask the assistance of the researcher who was a facilitator for any problem they went through. Finally, the students, with the aid of the blended learning based instructional course, could reach the expected level of development in EFL listening skills.

The control group members were taught using the regular teaching method. Their development was considerably slow despite the fact that they took the same teaching time. Finally, it became evident that the blended learning was effective in developing the EFL listening skills of post basic students.

4.1 Challenges and Limitations

There were some challenges and limitations to the research as follows:

1. Some students were unaware that EFL listening skills were to be strengthened. The researcher addressed this issue by arranging a session in which those students were taught the aforementioned EFL listening abilities. The students were then gradually taught how to use the aforementioned skills in a Google Classroom-based environment.
2. Some students did not have enough time to complete any of the EFL listening assignments uploaded on Google Classroom website. The researcher addressed this issue by asking them to visit the website on weekends and in their spare time.
3. Furthermore, some students who were low and intermediate performers were hesitant to post their contributions on the website; because they were concerned that their teacher and peers who were higher achievers would notice them. The researcher addressed this issue by providing students with motivations and rewards for their own efforts, regardless of their size.
4. Owing to the fact that the blended learning offers the opportunity for out-class learning, it still constitutes a barrier for teachers to control the students' participation in out-class activities. In addition, instructional paradigm changed in the educational settings from utilizing the traditional teaching method to integration of blended learning strategy and using it inside the EFL context demands further research.

4.2 Pedagogical Implications of the Research

The pedagogical implications of the research are as follows:

1. First and foremost, the results revealed that blended environment is of much effect in developing EFL listening skills of first secondary stage students.
2. The results revealed that blended learning environment was a promising opportunity to combine a wide range of effective instructional practices in one activity as well as integrating technology, scaffolding, collaborative learning, critical thinking, authentic assessment and constructivism all in one package.
3. The results showed that blended learning environment pushes the students' motivation to learn through the challenge of confronting authentic tasks, which require them to solve a problem, to make a comparison, or to construct a hypothesis in relation to a real-life situation using real sources.
4. In addition, the results demonstrated the urgent need on the one hand to transform the student from a passive component into an active component in the educational process, and on the other hand to assist the teacher to play the role of the facilitator, the supervisor and the evaluator.
5. The results indicated that the blended learning environment provided an opportunity for collaboration; due to students who need to work together to complete the given task.
6. The results revealed that collaborative tasks can reduce the feeling of isolation and shyness students may have when they go through problems for the first time.
7. Finally, the results revealed the importance of peer feedback to help students correct their mistakes.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on findings of the research, the researcher recommended educators and pedagogical researchers to:

1. They should utilize the blended learning in English language classroom as a foreign language; due to its effectiveness in motivating students to share and feel their independence in the learning process.
2. They should take the EFL listening skills into account while designing English language curricula; due to their role in motivating the students to get involved in the learning process and getting new ideas.
3. They should reconsider the in-service training programs and workshops so that more emphasis could be given to teaching EFL listening integratively.
4. Finally, they should give much more attention to developing skills of learning English language among students. They should provide students with enough opportunities to express their unique ideas and opinions freely.
5. Teachers should be supplied with intensive trainings; so as to explore the usefulness of the educational programs which are being carried in blended learning environment with regard to teaching and learning EFL listening.
6. Teachers must be supported in understanding and using the new methods of teaching; especially because they get used to the lecturing mode of instruction.
7. Finally, ministry of education should provide much more trainings for the English teachers on using blended learning environments at their EFL classes.

8. Teachers should apply the blended learning-based program activities to develop their learners' EFL listening skills.
9. Teachers should pay much attention to the use of modern technology of communication; to improve their students' skills.

4.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

The future research can focus on the following topics:

1. The effect of blended learning - based program on developing EFL learners' productive skills and their attitude towards learning English language.
2. The relationship between the use of blended learning environment and EFL learners' proficiency level.
3. The effectiveness of a blended learning - based environment in developing EFL learners' vocabulary repertoire and their motivation towards learning English language.
4. The effectiveness of using a blended learning - based program in developing EFL students' oral and written performance and their autonomy in learning English language.
5. The effect of a blended learning - based environment on developing critical reading of the secondary stage students.

The relationship between a blended learning – based environment and development of the EFL Receptive skills among prep stage learners and their attitude towards learning English language as a foreign language (EFL).

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist. The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of

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