Enhancing EFL Listening Comprehension Skills via a Blended Learning Based Program for Prep Stage Students

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of a blended learning program on developing the prep language school students' listening comprehension skills. The present study adopted a quasi-experimental method of two-group (Pretest – Posttest design).The participants of the present study consisted of sixty students' second year prep stag (2017-2018) from Nasser Expe-rimental School, Menia El-Kamh directorate. They were randomly assigned into two groups, Treatment group (N=30) students and Non-treatment group (N=30) students. The instruments of the present study included: The Pre-Post EFL listening comprehension test. A pre-post listening comprehension test was designed to measure second year prep school students' listening comprehension skills before and after implementing the blended learning program. t-test was used to statistically analyze the obtained data. Findings of the study revealed that the treatment group students' EFL listening comprehension skills were developed as a result of being subjected to the blended learning program. Therefore, it could be concluded that the blended learning program proved to be effective in deve-loping the submitted EFL listening comprehension skills for the 2nd year prep school students.

Keywords: Listening, EFL listening comprehension skills, The Blended learning.

Introduction

English is the fourth most widely spoken native language in the world, and in terms of sheer number of speakers, it is the most spoken official language in the world. English has become the preferred language in a number of fields like international business. It is also the language chosen for academic discussion as most scholars face the need to read and publish in English for international diffusion.

According to Hedge (2000), listening has important role in everyday life and when people are engaged in communication nine percent is spent to writing, 16 percent to reading, 30 percent is speaking and 45 percent to listening which shows the significance of listening in the communication process. Hogan, Adolf and Alonzo (2014) Showed that listening comprehension becomes the dominating influence on reading comprehension starting even in the elementary grades.

Al Bahbuh (2014) referred that teachers are recommended to develop positive attitude towards the importance of listening comprehension in teaching English as a foreign language. They also need to develop their abilities to facilitate any difficulties that may be faced by their students. Further, they have to vary and modify their listening activities so that they suit the students' level and interest.

Sarani, Behatsh and Arabi (2014) investigated the effect of video-based-tasks in listening comprehension of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. After determining the level of learners an experimental and control group, each of 20 participants, were nominated to contribute to the study. From the time, the pre-test was administered to each group, the experimental group was taught by a course of instruction based on video tasks for teaching listening comprehension. The control group was directed by a course of instruction only based on audio materials results show that teaching listening comprehension in realizing and understanding the authentic language more effectively.

Medouk (2015) examined the impact of blending the use of youtube videos within the process of EFL teaching and learning. The study also focuses on what correlates youtube to listening, the way it

helps developing the listening, and the way it helps developing the listening comprehension. It is conducted a questionnaire for EFL learners at Mohamed Kheider university of Biskra, another questionnaire is handed to teachers who have an experience with the oral expression module from the English department. The findings show that both learners and teachers have a positive attitude towards the internet in general and the use of youtube videos as a means to develop listening Comprehension.

El-Refaai (2008) conducted a study that is devoted to deal with listening comprehension as a very important topic for teachers and learns of English as a foreign language. It highlights the importance of listening status in both academic and practical aspects for EFL students it address the extent of students lack of proficiency and inability demonstrating the status of listening.

Andapong (2011) investigated English listening problems and listening proficiencies. The result of the study revealed that the main reason that caused listening problems for the students is the listening text. However, the factors that mostly caused listening problems were lack of practicing listening skill and lack of exposure to different kinds of listening materials.

Hamouda (2013) showed that the problems in listening comprehension represented in many reasons such as accent, pronunciation, speed of speech insufficient vocabulary, different accent of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety, and bad quality of recording were the major listening comprehension problems encountered by EFL Saudi learners

Gilakjan and Sabowri (2016) referred that listening is one of the most important skills in English language learning. When students listen to English, they face a lot of listening difficulties. Students have critical difficulties in listening comprehension because universities and school pay more attention to writing, reading and vocabulary.

Teachers of English usually face difficulties while teaching the English language and the first reason for that is the nature of the language since it is foreign and learner are rarely exposed to it in real life. Some of the most common difficulties are problems caused by failure to concentrate and problems caused by the use of reduced forms.

Amin, Aly and Amin (2011) conducted a study to investigate the correlation between EFL students' strategic listening and their listening comprehension skills. Eighty secondary school students participated in this study. Participants' strategic listening was measured by a Strategic Listening Interview (SLI), a Strategic Listening Questionnaire (SLQ) and a Strategic Listening Check list (SLC) with think-aloud protocol. Their listening comprehension skills were measured by an EFL listening comprehension test. A Pearson correlation analysis was run to test the correlation between strategic listening and listening comprehension test scores. The findings revealed that the relationship between strategic listening and listening comprehension was positive and significant. The higher the level of strategic listening these students obtained the higher score they attained on the listening comprehension test and vice versa.

Moreover, Ferris (1998) maintained that we must abandon attitudes that see the language as purely abstract and an academic exercise. And we must integrate into our teaching meaningful content about the world around our students as well as linguistic forms. In other words, we must strive to give our students something to communicate with, a desire to communicate, and the conditions in which they can communicate.

Hamid (2001) investigated the effect of listening comprehension on eighth grade students' performance in writing . In an attempt to answer the research questions of this study , the researcher conducted a ten week experimental investigation with a sample of 112 eighth grade students belonging to four government schools in Qalqilia district KufurLaqif primary school . The results of this study showed that listening did improve the pupils' performance in writing.

Watson (2006) stated that blended learning combines online delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction and live instruction to personalize learning, allow thoughtful reflection, and differentiate instruction from student to student across a diverse group of learners. Watson also stated that blended learning combines online delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction and live instruction to personalize learning, allow though full reflection and differentiate instruction from student to student across a diverse group of learners.

Kaplanis (2013) referred to that blended learning means the use of laboratory equipment or computers to complete the teaching process through connecting practical and theoretical content in the class. Limottait (2014) believed that the concept of blended learning appeared because a lot of students have used technology and computers in everywhere, so the classrooms are beginning to integrate computers in how they teach students

There has been much written about blended learning in recent years. Blended learning has proven to among the most popular choices for students at many schools where they are offered. At the first glance, this popularity seems intuitive because blended learning allow students to take advantages of much of the flexibility and convenience of an online learning while retaining the benefits of the face to face classroom experience.

Moreover, Mohamed (2010) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of a suggested blended learning program in veterinary microbiology. The study sample was the third year students of veterinary medicine, Cairo University. The study compared the effectiveness of the blended learning approach evaluated by students' feedback questionnaire. In addition to comparing the students' results in both group; the experimental group (who studied the suggested blended learning program) and the control group (who studied traditionally). Then, the results showed a significant acceptance and motivation in addition to the high scores in the experimental group compared to the

control one. So, blended learning enhanced students' motivation to learn in addition to providing a reference guide to graduated veterinarians as a continuous medical education model.

Shivetts (2011) confirmed that e-Learning and blended learning are very important and useful for students. Adas (2012) explained that many attempts were made to use technology in teaching English for the sake of improving students' learning outcomes and increasing variability in teaching English language, yet few Arab researches have dug deep into modes of teaching.

Limottuit (2014) stated that it is extremely important to use technology in the classroom because it is important that students can easily navigate a computer. Arnett (2014) pointed out that blended learning can be a powerful for student-centered-instruction, but it needs providing some components to success such as computers, good students, good teachers. … etc.

Brooke (2010) stated that when blended learning incorporates adoptive technology, red-time progress monitoring and provides the recommended next steps to customize instruction for each student, teachers become more targeted, time efficient and effective in improving student's overall reading abilities. Educators will embrace blended learning when they are included in the decision - making process, understand the benefits of near initiative, and have the skills or the support to develop the skills to accomplish what is being asked of them compromised.

Al Salamah (2009) identified the effectiveness of blended learning training in improving the trainee's ultrasound skills. The study sample was 182 students, participated each with different ultrasound experience. A blended learning environment of ultrasound training that include adequate lectures , web-based learning materials and hands-on sessions that utilized ultrasound machine and model of scanning. Results indicated that the individuals' skills were significantly improved. The skill assessment results reported that the individuals' performance highly improved after training comparison to the same skills before training.

Shehap (2007) investigated the undergraduate learners' perceptions and interaction in blended learning program at the Arab Open university-Bahrain Branch. The study focused on factors that influence learners' perceptions and examined the relationships between learners' perceptions and their particular demographic characteristics (age, gender, educational level and experience with internet). The data analysis and the findings indicated that the overall learners' perception. In addition, learners' educational level was found to be a significant factor for learner-learner interaction and course interface interaction. Also, the interface and instructional quality were found to be the most important determinations of satisfaction with blended learning. The study concluded that the more Internet experience the learner had, the more autonomy and interaction the learner could practice in a blended environment.

Al-Maghrabi (2013) introduced a study that aimed at promoting technical report writing skills of the students at the faculty of Engineering, Zagazig University. The experimental design included two groups: one experimental, the other control. The experimental group was enrolled in blended learning instructional writing sessions, the control received face-to-face questionnaire, a pre/post technical report writing skills. The findings of the study supported its hypotheses and reflected a promotion in the experimental group's technical report writing skills.

But about the student's role in the blend, Stracke (2007) said that "The pedagogical rationale behind BLL (blended language learning) is the desire to allow for a higher degree of learner independence in the teaching and learning of second foreign languages." P. (57-78

Clark (2002) highlighted that the elements of blended learning include five important ingredients. The first consists of live events that include synchronized and teacher-led learning events where all learners take part in class activity at the same time, like live virtual classroom. The second element is online content, which involves learning competencies that the learner should achieve individually, at his own speed and on his own time, like interactive, web-based

or CD-ROM training. The third element is collaboration as learners communicate with others through the provided settings such as e-mails, progressive discussions and online chats. The fourth element is assessment when the teacher measures learners' understanding. Prior-assessments can take place before live or self-paced activities, to decide prior learning requirements, and post-assessments can take place after planned or online learning activities, to measure learning transference. The fifth and last element suggested by Clark is reference materials which includes on-the job reference materials that boost learning retention and transfer.

Graham (2006) focused on the challenges that encounter blended learning strategy. Of these challenges appear the role of live collaboration, the role of learner selection and self-organization, the need for models for sustenance and training, the need to create balance between novelty and production, the need for cultural adaptation, and the skill to handle the digital world .

The use of technology has become one of the fundamental in teaching and learning the foreign language. Al Aodinin (2012) attempted to clarify the role of authentic materials in teaching listening skills and that what the researcher tried to do in this study by using blended learning based program.

Context of the problem:-

Despite the importance of listening comprehension skills, El-Toukhy (1999) mentioned that Listening comprehension is considered one of the most neglected skills in English in Egypt. He assured that listening compr-ehension faces many problems. One of them is that students cannot understand the connected speech

Also, Ghaly (2002) indicated that students have many problems among Egyptian students. He found that fourth year primary students lacked listening skills. In addition Al-Hariree (2004) reached to results that indicated to many problems that Egyptian students have and assured that they need to pay attention on this skill. They found that students

finish education stage without acquiring the skills for listening comprehension in English. They cannot listen and comprehend the auditory materials.

Abo-Essa (2005) ,in the same context, stated that the Egyptian learners lack listening skills in general and also indicated that it needs a lot of importance. Abd El-Karim (1995) pointed that Egyptain students have many problems and asserted that we should treat these problems and develop this skill. So, the result of the previous studies emphasized that listening comprehension skill can be a problem for learners.

Thus, the result of the previous studies showed that Egyptian learners lack many problems in listening comprehension skills. Previous studies in listening comprehension in Egyptian schools assured that there are many problems in listening skills in general. So, the main findings of the analysis of pupils' listening comprehension skills, lack of continuing in understanding connected speech in English.

The best way for determining these problems, the researcher conducted a pilot study on a group of students (n=30) at Nasser Experimental language school, Menia El-Kamah directorate, Sharkia governorate. A listening test was administered to the pilot sample during the first term of (2016-2017) academic year. Results of the pilot study revealed that the most of the students had low scores in the listening test. The percentage of the mean scores of all (30) students was 35%. The results indicated the weakness of students' listening skill.

After the pilot test, it is found that there many problems that students face such as, they cannot understand the auditory script, they are trying to understand every word, they yet left behind trying to work out what a previous word meant, they don't recognize the words that they know and they have problems with different accents.

Statement of the Problem:

The Problem under investigation in this study is that the second year prep stage students are inefficient in listening comprehension skills according to the results of the pilot study and the related studies.

So the problem learning this study could be formulated in the following main question.

What is the effectiveness of blended learning program in developing some EFL listening comprehension skills of the second grade of the preparatory stage students?

The main question could be sub-divided into the following sub–questions:-

1- What are the necessary listening comprehension skills required for the second year EFL students at Experimental Nasser Prep School?

2- How can a blended learning program be designed to develop some EFL listening comprehension skills of the second grade of the preparatory stage students?

3- What is the effectiveness of this program in developing some EFL listening comprehension skills of the second grade of the preparatory stage students?

Purpose of the study:-

The overall purpose of this study is to develop second year EFL students' listening comprehension skills through the blended learning based program.

Sample of the study:-

The sample of the study included sixty second year Prep stage students (2017-2018) from Experimental Nasser School. They were randomly assigned into two groups treatment (N=30) students and non-treatment (N=30) students.

Instrument of the study:-

To develop this test, the researcher designed a questionnaire, addressed to the jury members and expertises.

The researcher developed and administrated the following instrument:

a- A listening comprehension test.

Hypotheses of the study:-

Based on the theoretical background and the results of the relevant studies to the problem investigated, it is hypothesized that:-

1- There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the post listening comprehension skills test, in favor of the experimental group.

2- There would be a statistically different between the mean scores of the experimental group in the (pre-post) listening comprehension skills test, in favor of the post administration of the test.

3- The blended learning on-line based program would have a positive effect on enhancing listening Comprehension skills.

The study Procedures:-

Included these steps:

1- Reviewing relevant literature and previous studies related to listening skills to determine the skills required for the sample of the study and the blended learning based program.

2- Analyzing the content of the English language textbook taught to second year preparatory school pupils to detect the target skills.

3- Preparing lists of listening comprehension skills to be submitted to EFL experts.

4- Identifying the listening comprehension skills appropriate to the sample.

5- Designing a listening skills test and submit it to the jury members.

6- Choosing the study sample from the second year general preparatory school pupils and determining the experimental and the control groups.

7- Designing the blended program to develop the listening skills.

8- Pre administrating the listening test to both the treatment and the non-treatment groups.

9- Implementing the program to the treatment group.

10- Post administering the listening test.

11- Drawing and statistically treating the data obtained.

12- Drawing the conclusion, recommendations and suggestions.

Findings of the study:

1.Hypothesis One:-

1- It was hypothesized that "There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group and the non-treatment group in the post listening comprehension skills test, in favor of the treatment group".

2- To verify this hypothesis, t-test for paired samples was used to find out if there were any statistical significant differences between the two groups (the treatment and the non-treatment one) in the post administration of the EFL listening comprehension test.

2. Hypothesis Two:-

It was hypothesized that "There would be a statistically difference between the mean scores of the treatment group in the (pre-post) listening comprehension skills test, in favor of the post administration of the test".

3. Hypothesis Three:-

It was hypothesized that "The blended learning on-line based program will have a positive effect on enhancing listening Comprehension skills."

To test the validity of this hypothesis, Blake's formula was used to calculate the gain ratio to prove that the blended learning program is effective in developing the EFL listening comprehension skills.

The mean scores of the EFL listening test of the treatment group were used to measure the development that took place in the treatment group EFL listening comprehension skills and to prove the effectiveness of the blended program through the following formula:

Conclusions:-

Based on the results shown through the statistical analysis of data and discussion, it can be concluded that the blended learning program proved to be effective in developing the EFL listening comprehension skills for second year preparatory school students. The tremendous

possibilities of the blended learning proved to be effective in supplying the students with a positive self-estimation, self-reliance and more positive relationships which helped to develop their listening comprehension skills. Moreover, the use of online learning provided an opportunity for shy or inhibited students to overcome their shyness and participate effectively. The keyboard and screen proved to be less intimidating than humans, and shy students who refused to interact in the class seemed to have fingers flying across the keyboard in the online phase. An additional feature of the online learning is that you can use it anytime in groups or alone. Composing on a keyboard seemed to provide a certain motivation for students to listen and improve their listening comprehension skills, understanding what they listen. Students who are unwilling to understand what they listen were able to improve their listening comprehension skills and felt developing in listening to many different short video clips. This helped them to listen to more and more video clips.

The blended learning program connected the students with the real life situations through the online learning and thus made learning more realistic and interesting to them. Also, dealing with the technology really became a part of their daily life, the students could practice the skills without feeling the fear. Thus, the learners' worry and embarrassment were reduced. This helped the students correct their errors without the fear of internet confrontation.

Whereas, the non-treatment group learned the listening comprehension skills just in the classroom by the traditional way which made them feel anxious and boring. The non-treatment group faced many problems, i.e. hesitation in front of their classmates, misunderstanding of what they listen and being shy to ask.

To conclude, the researcher is convinced that blended learning could be a good solution to the crowded classes, language learning difficulties provided that it had been planned, designed, implemented and evaluated in the proper way. The researcher is also certain that the application of blended learning requires shared efforts on behalf of the Ministry of

Education decision makers, school head teachers, teachers, students and the local community.

Recommendations:

According to the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are offered.

● **EFL Curriculum designers and decision makers are recommended**

✄ To improve the Egyptian English language curriculum with different activities which enhance blended learning.
✄ To provide schools with the necessary equipment for employing blended learning such as computer labs, smart boards, internet access and multimedia resources.
✄ To integrate the blended learning program in the educational process in the Egyptian schools.

● **EFL Supervisors are recommended:**

✄ To compose and allocate instructional materials that increase teachers' awareness of blended learning significance.
✄ To carry out training courses that help teachers enhance their abilities of implementing blended learning.
✄ To manage workshops that aim at making teachers familiar with different techniques and strategies of blended learning.
✄ To illustrate on the fact that blended learning program is not time-wasting. Rather, it is a very important tool which is used in different aspects of the language.
✄ To actuate the role of blended learning in changing teachers' role from instructors who dominate the class into directors whose role is to facilitate, guide, support and direct students towards self-learning and student-centered class.

● **English language teachers are recommended**

✄ To transfer from the traditional teaching and learning methods to communicative approach that is based on the students' real involvement in the teaching learning process.
✄ To use blended learning to create an effective learning environment.

✠ To take into consideration students' individual differences and learning styles in selecting the blend.

✠ To adopt modern techniques that enhance students' participation and interaction.

✠ To help students use English language in "life-like" situations such as emails, chatting, and Google.

✠ To apply blended learning program in all English skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

✠ To change their role from instructors who dominate the class into educators whose role is to organize, guide and support the students to communicate and acquire language through fun and enjoyment by using the modern way of teaching not the traditional one.

Suggestions for further studies:

In order to extend the findings of this study, the researcher suggests the following titles for further studies:

1- Enhancing EFL reading skills via a blended learning program for prep school students.

2- The impact of blended learning on developing the students ' vocabulary.

3- The effectiveness of blended learning on developing students' critical thinking.

4- The impact of blended learning program on developing other listening skills.

5- The effects of a blended learning program on the achievement and attitudes of prospective teachers.

Summary of the study:

The study was an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of a blended learning program in developing some EFL listening comprehension skills for 2nd year prep school students. Previous studies showed that it is difficult for the foreign language learners to understand freely the target language. Hence, the current study aimed at developing the listening comprehension skills of EFL students. It also emphasized

the effectiveness of using blended learning in foreign language learning to enhance the listening comprehension skills of EFL students.

Delimitations of the study:

The present study is delimited to:

1- A sample of pupils from El Nasser Prep School (MeniaAlkamh, Educational Directorate , Sharqia Governorate)

2- Developing some EFL listening comprehension skills of a sample of pupils from El Nasser Prep School (MeniaAlkamh, Educational Directorate , Sharqia Governorate).

Sample of the study:-

The sample of the present study consisted of sixty one 2nd year preparatory stage students from Nasser Experimental School. They were randomly divided into two groups, experimental (30) students and control (30) students.

Results of the study:

1- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group and the non-treatment group in the post listening comprehension skills test, in favor of the treatment group.

2- There is a statistically different between the mean scores of the treatment group in the (pre-post) listening comprehension skills test, in favor of the post administration of the test.

3- The blended learning on-line based program has a positive effect on enhancing listening Comprehension skills.

It was concluded that the blended learning program proved to be effective in developing the submitted EFL listening comprehension skills for 2nd year preparatory school students.

Discussion of the results:

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of a blended learning program in developing some EFL listening comprehension skills for preparatory school students. The

results of the current study are discussed with reference to the research hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis one:

The result of the first hypothesis showed that there was a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the treatment group taught through the blended learning program and the non-treatment one receiving regular instruction in their performance of the post administration of the EFL listening comprehension test favouring the treatment group.

The significant differences between the non-treatment and the treatment groups can be attributed to the blended learning program administration. The treatment group outperformed the control one since the blended learning program provides the students with opportunity to learn at their own pace. The students in the treatment group developed their EFL listening comprehension skills through activities in the blended learning program. Also, they listened different phrases, sentences and situations in a meaningful way which gave the opportunity for the students to enhance the specified EFL listening comprehension skills. The students could practice the activities many times and that helped them be less anxious while learning.

The improvement can be attributed to the fact that each module included various activities which enabled the students to develop their listening comprehension skills due to the fact that the integration of both face-to-face learning and on-line learning supported students' learning. Thus, the face-to-face constituted the skeleton of the program where as the online learning was the flesh. Online learning encouraged the student to use the website in realistic situations so that they could develop there listening comprehension skills through meaningful listening to short video clips.

Hypothesis Two:

There was a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the pre-post EFL listening comprehension

test of the treatment group (taught through the blended learning program) in the post administration of the EFL listening comprehension test favouring the post administration.

This development can be attributed to the effect of teaching the treatment group through the blended learning program since all the variables of the study such as age were controlled. This result indicated that the blended learning program helped to develop the EFL listening comprehension skills of the treatment group students. This improvement can be due to the fact that the blended learning program could enable the students and encourage them to interact freely using the target language. The development can also be related to the fact that using blended learning offers a wide range of learning resources and experiences, together with appropriate technological and human support based on the learner's learning needs. The students' hesitation could be reduced which helped in enhancing the students' listening comprehension skills. The students could use language to repeat sentences or phrases but also to use it in meaningful situations though the use of the blended learning program.

Hypothesis Three:

The result of the third hypothesis indicated that the blended learning program was effective in developing the targeted EFL listening comprehension skills.

The gain ratio for the scores of the EFL listening comprehension skills made it clear that the calculated mean of Black's Gain Ratio is greater than the reference value (1.2). Thus, the treatment group students achieved more gains in their EFL listening comprehension skills. This improvement can be attributed to the effect of the blended learning.

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