

# The Application of Blended Learning Approach in EFL Teaching

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**Abstract:** Blended learning(BL) has been recognized as one of the most promising directions in education development in the modern world as it combines the strengths of traditional educational methods and benefits of online learning technologies. This paper starts with an exploration of BL as a concept, models and its application in language teaching and then probe into the effectiveness of BL approach in English as Foreign Language (EFL) Teaching especially to boost students speaking and listening competence, via a comparative study. With 50 in control group taught through traditional face-to-face instructions and 58 in experiment group through BL method, 108 students are involved to find out that BL is conducive to promote students' motivation, self-study as well as activity and also to enhance their speaking and listening skills.

**Keywords:** Blended Learning; EFL Teaching; Pedagogical Experiment; English Communication Competence

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## 1 Introduction

Alongside with the global processes of information and communication technologies, blended learning(BL) has also penetrated in the sphere of education as language teaching. BL makes more learning opportunities possible to motivate students to participate in and outside of the class settings, without being limited to groups or partners. BL takes many forms in the flexibility of providing learning resources, the support of learning diversity, and the enrichment of e-learning experience on campus. It overcomes the disadvantages

of traditional learning and obviate the failure of e-learning by providing a combination of various strategies or models. Despite of the popularity, however, there is still a lack of empirical research.

Thus the purpose of this paper is to explore BL and its application in language teaching, and to establish the necessity of using BL technology in foreign language communicative competence by a comparative experiment between traditional face-to-face (FtF) classes and blended courses among 108 first-year students from China Academy of Art (CAA).

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Definition

Before the term blended learning became widely used, hybrid learning was used to describe as the marriage of face-to-face education with online learning tools. And now the two terms are used interchangeably, but refer to the same.

Blended learning, first coined in the late 1990s, has long been put under the debate over its definition and ways of conducting research and practice, with some influential statements listed as follows. Graham (2006) defines it as the combination of FtF instruction with computer-mediated instruction. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) present BL as the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary FtF and online approaches and technologies. Bersin (2004) affirms that BL is the combination of different training media (technologies, activities, and types of events) to create an optimum training program for a specific audience.<sup>[4]</sup> Singh & Reed (2001) do in a more macro way as “optimizing achievement of learning objectives by applying the “right” learning technologies to match

the “right” personal learning style to transfer the “right” skills to the “right” person at the “right” time”.

In light of the general agreement from above, BL thus can be understood as the integration of FtF instruction and learning online individually or in collaborative teams.

## 2.2 Models

Many models and approaches to BL have been identified by examining implemented programs and published reports. These differed based on the nature of the blend and on the extent to which technology was integrated into existing courses. BL models have commonly centered on physical or surface-level features.

Twigg (2003), for instance, identified four models: the Replacement Model, the Supplemental Model, the Emporium Model and the Buffet Model. FtF course(s) can be put online to cater for the needs of geographically scattered students in a Replacement Model. The Supplemental Model helps strengthen course input and motivate students who may be falling behind. The Buffet Model allows freedom and flexibility for the learner. The Emporium Model may represent for the learner an opportunity to receive additional personalized set of materials.<sup>[11]</sup> Similarly, Horn and Staker (2015) identified four other models: the rotation, flex, à la carte and the enriched virtual model, representing respectively the rotation between learning modalities of online learning and full-class instruction, the individually customized schedule of online content, supplementary online courses taken and learning time divided between attending a campus and online remote learning. Graham (2006) detailed a model to find desirable blends, as opposed to undesirable blends, that absorb the merits and avoid the demerits of FtF learning and online learning.

## 2.3 BL in Language Teaching

Research on BL is normally linked with such educational fields as English teaching methodology, educational technology and distance education.

Grgurovic (2011) investigated the use of blended learning in a speaking and listening class in an ESL context. The findings indicated that both teachers and students showed positive perceptions and attitude toward integrating BL in English teaching. The researcher concluded that BL can be used effectively to teach English in foreign/second language programs. Adas and Bakir (2013) examined BL in developing

the writing competency of EFL learners and it was found that the group that was taught using BL strategy performed better in writing than the other group, indicating the enhancement of the writing competencies of the participating EFL learners.

Banditvilai (2016) conducted a study that examined the use of BL to enhance English learners’ language skills and learning autonomy in an Asian university, demonstrating that the use of an online approach aligned with classroom instruction enhances the language skills of language learners. Also, it was found that BL can be used effectively to increase autonomous learning and learners’ motivation.

Akbarov et al (2018) investigated students’ attitudes toward BL in the EFL context, showing that most of the EFL students prefer BL over the traditional approach of English teaching because it enhances their motivation to learn and therefore improve the learning process.

In summary, research shows that BL can be used to develop the language competencies and skills of English language learners, to increase students’ motivation and engagement and to enhance the learning environment and outcomes of language learners.

## 3 Research Methodology

To achieve this goal a set of research methods has been used, including: empirical questioning, testing. This method is used to determine the current state of foreign language communicative skills formation, and to verify the effectiveness of the e-learning course introduced in the educational process; Comparative pedagogical experiment. Traditional FtF approach is conducted among control group with 50 students and BL mode among the experiment group of 58 students for a semester respectively. The experiment is conducted in College English Speaking and Listening Course with 108 first-year students of CAA involved. Methods of mathematical statistics. This uses statistical data processing; graph-analytical methods for displaying information (diagrams) and for processing pedagogical experiment data and visual demonstration of experimental results.

## 4 Results and Discussion

College English Speaking and Listening Course has long been taken as compulsory in CAA and in higher education at large, to boost students’ basic English communicative competence. Traditionally, courses are carried out in multi-media classroom with given

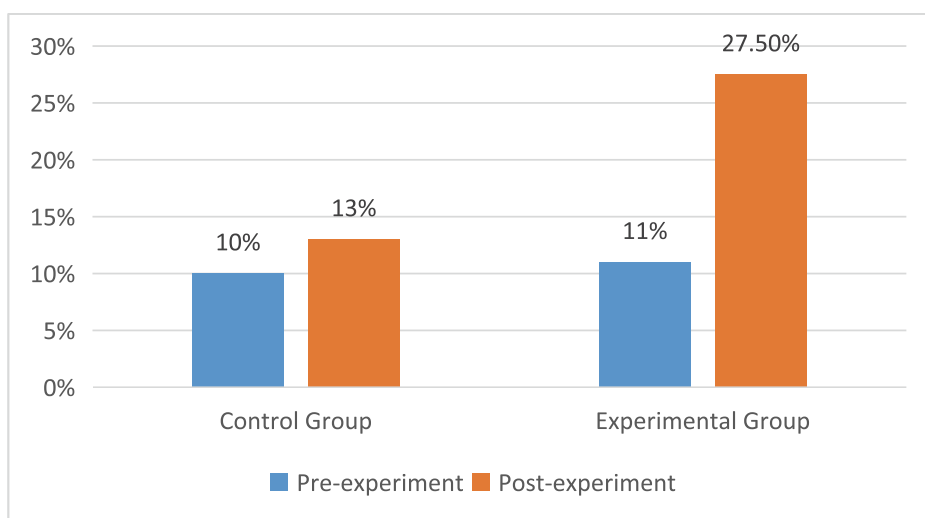
textbook among around 50 students, to guide learners in listening practice and arrange the class to talk on certain topics. However, in this sense, only few students can be engaged directly in the learning process and individuals vary in time needed and way of knowledge acquisition.

To verify the necessity and effectiveness of BL in English Speaking and Listening Course, a questionnaire was conducted to identify the significance of foreign language learning for students in institution of higher education and the readiness of learners to accept new way of learning. Analyzing the responses of students, we came to the conclusion that they are motivated to learn foreign language intensively, because they understand clearly that it is necessary for employment and it will be useful in further professional practices (80% of respondents), as well as they are more inclined to use computer-mediated methods together with FtF classes. And before the experimental study started and in order to determine students' abilities in the English language, a testing was conducted with each question corresponded to a certain type of activity – listening and speaking. According to the obtained results, students from two groups have revealed relatively similar results. The pre-experimental test on English showed the foreign language communicative competence formation among first-year students was mostly on the medium and low levels. Therefore, the results of the questioning and testing gave us confidence in the need for BL implementation in the process of foreign language communicative competence formation.

In order to provide objective and reliable information, we have formed an experimental (58 persons) and a control groups (50 persons) for a semester. It should be noted that the greater reliability of the results of the

study ensures the relative homogeneity of students in groups by quantitative and qualitative indicators. Thus, when forming groups, two indicators were taken into account as the average score for students' progress for the first semester of study and their gender. In the control group, the training and extracurricular activities took place according to the traditional scheme. In the experiment group, pronunciation, oral dialogue and listening dictation are uploaded on resource center as in supplemental model and students are allowed to study according to their own plan as in buffet model, as well as Tiktok video, live stream, wechat group daily practice guidance and discussion are introduced as in Emporium model. For the experiment implementation, all participants of the educational process have been under the same learning conditions. All core components of the e-learning course are available online. This creates a positive atmosphere of confidence and trust and stimulates students' learning motivation. Course materials take into account training needs and features of the current audience, promote the communication skills development in the remote mode, stimulate the students' motivation and initiatives, and focused on achieving learning goals.

The discipline teaching material has been considered structurally, consistently, and logically. During the semester it has been traced: (1) the teacher – student interactive system and interaction among students; (2) control system for all types of learning activities; (3) assessment of the practical material mastering; (4) an opportunity to assess the students' retained knowledge at any time. At the end of semester two groups had the same Speaking and Listening Test in English as they had before the experiment.



**Figure 1.** Outcome of Test in Control and Experimental Groups in Pre-experiment and Post-experiment Stages

The diagram shows that the experimental group students has increased by 16.5% in foreign language communicative competence formation, whilst the control group after the pedagogical experiment has showed the increase by 3%. Thus we may conclude that experimental group has witnessed significant positive changes while control group minor changes. In this sense, the experimental study has confirmed the scientific hypothesis about the expediency of English communicative competence formation in higher education institution by means of BL approach.

## 5 Conclusion

Studies on BL reviewed above make it clear that BL application is more effective than using traditional forms of studying and claim that BL implementation can improve students' activity, increase motivation, and promote self-study. And the comparative experiment conducted in this paper demonstrates that student in BL approach group score higher in the same test, indicating better speaking and listening competence after the pedagogical experiment. However, the problem of forming foreign language communicative competence is complex and multifaceted; therefore, the study does not exhaust all aspects of this process. Prospects for further scientific researches are advisable to direct teachers of institutions of higher education to the use of educational dialogue, to improve the methodical tools of pedagogical diagnostics of communicative culture, to study thoroughly the issue of improving the foreign language communicative competence in self-study as well as personal development.

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