The Effectiveness of a Sociolinguistics Theory- Based Blended Learning Program in Enhancing EFL Speaking Skills of University Students

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Abstract

The research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using sociolinguistics theory -based blended program to enhance EFL speaking skills of university students. The instruments of the study were a speaking checklist, speaking test and scoring rubric. The study adopted the quasi-experimental design using two groups; the first was experimental and the second was the control group constituting the sample of the study (n=60). The results showed that the experimental group students exceeded their counterparts of the control group students on the speaking skills post- test. It was concluded that using sociolinguistics theory in EFL classrooms developed students' speaking skills.

Key words: Sociolinguistics competence, language variation, blended learning.

Introduction

Language is a center to social interaction in every society, regardless of location and time period. Teaching, learning language, sociocultural contexts and variations of language should be considered because it is influenced by the success of the learning a language.

Speaking is one of the four macro skills required for efficient communication in any language, especially when speaking a foreign language. Because the English language is used as a medium of communication, particularly on the internet, speaking abilities should be enhanced with other skills in order to improve communication achievement. Speaking has several definitions; Boonkit (2009) identified speaking as one of the four fundamental abilities required for active communication in every language. English speaking abilities must be exercised using these devices in order to increase language learning.

Soureshjani (2013) asserts that: "In this age of communication, speaking seems to be playing a major role, and the purpose of teaching the language has shifted from the mastery of structure to the ability to use the language for communicative purposes" (p. 167).Therefore, teaching speaking in the classroom is really important even to master other

productive language skills such as writing because it makes the teaching-learning process more effective and dynamic.

Sociolinguistics is a fascinating and significant field of study for teachers since it focuses on how language is used and perceived in the real world. Because sociolinguistics encompasses such a wide range of approaches, educators need have a broad understanding of the subject in order to effectively implement the teaching and learning of language processes. Nationhood is a key issue in sociolinguistics approaches to language. The concept of the nation, which serves as the defining framework for much discussion of language and culture in both popular and academic arenas, has had a significant impact on how languages and cultures are defined (Nancy & Sandra, 2010).

Students' attitudes towards the foreign language taught will either facilitate or complicate their language learning. Study of the relationship between attitudes and learning will contribute to the development of foreign language teaching methods and materials appropriate for specific student groups exhibiting specific attitudes. At present, there are many studies of students' attitudes towards the foreign language they are learning (Devrim and Bayyurt, 2010) .

Sociolinguists, on the other hand, take a more dynamic approach: culture is constantly recreated based on information and experiences gained via interactions in various situations (Baker, 2009).

The teacher frequently ignored sociolinguistic factors when teaching language. They are more focused on teaching language skills such as second or foreign language words, grammar, and pronunciation (speaking). Learning language through sociolinguistics can help speakers discern where, who, and when they talk. As a result, the teacher should relate the materials to social situations. According to Spolsky (2010), sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society, language variety, and attitudes toward language.

Blended learning can thus be described in terms of a continuum along which a series of variations in practice and thinking can be arranged. Bates (2016) argues that blended learning can be placed between fully online and fully face-to- face courses. Below is an example of a common image of blended learning, which clearly shows the merge, of the brick and mortar model (classroom based), and the online learning model (computer based). It shows explicit how learning is more and more blurred in the variety of learning spaces.

Because blended learning is very context dependent, it has been interpreted and defined in a variety of ways throughout history and across cultures. The phrases blended learning, hybrid learning, technology-mediated education, technology-enabled (enhanced) learning, web augmented instruction, and mixed-mode instruction are frequently used interchangeably in the research literature (Bates, 2016, 2017; Daniel, 2016; Commonwealth of Learning, 2015).

Blended Learning refers to the technique of delivering teaching and learning goals using a combination of face-to-face and technology-based learning. Students are not required to be physically present in a single location for the technology-based components of these learning goals, but can be connected through online communities (Martha and Dan, 2018).

BL enables teachers to foster a flexible and active learning environment that may positively influence learners' experiences and outcomes, and to spend more time with learners, both individually and in small groups (Tayebinik and Puteh, 2012). Indeed, blended instruction offers "*improved pedagogy, easy access to knowledge, more interaction among learners, personal presence, cost effectiveness, and ease of revision of learning content*" (Tayebinik & Puteh, 2012, p. 28).

In this research blended learning was operationally defined as the combination of face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning within a course or program ,in addition, blended learning is not merely the addition of some technological element to an existing course but rather is an integrated plan utilizing the best of what both face-to-face and online learning have to offer.

This research outlined the effect of using sociolinguistics-based blended learning program in language teaching because it consists of the study of the link between language and society, and language variation

Review of Literature and Related Studies
Speaking Skill

Speaking is seen as the most crucial of the four skills in this regard. In fact, one common complaint from learners is that they have spent years studying English but still cannot speak it. This is due to the fact that speaking is the most difficult skill because it demands L1 speakers to employ certain techniques to facilitate their communication. These techniques are not too basic for L2 speakers and consist of reducing the language by creating simple structures: they frequently omit portions of a sentence, use idiomatic terms to enhance oral fluency and fillers, and frequently employ hesitation devices. To compensate for their challenges,

L1 speakers may self-correct, reformulate, or rework sentences, which is a common kind of modification approved by the community of speakers (Nopiyanti, 2012). Speaking is a productive ability that can be immediately and scientifically examined, according to Ulva (2018).

Because communication is a two-way street that involves getting information and responding in the form of delivering information, the received information covered listening and reading abilities, but speaking and writing skills are productive skills. When a learner speaks fluently and writes effectively, she or he is deemed to have completed language acquisition. (Sharma. 2015).

Oral interaction is considered recently as a basic factor in forming learner's developing language (Gass, 2014). Moreover, learning speaking was proved to help the development of reading competence (Hilferty, 2011), and the development of writing (Severino, 2012) in addition to the development of listening skills (Reg, 2013).

According to Zuliati (2013), speaking is an important language skill in which communication plays a critical role in information; speaking is a spoken language taught in globalization. Students can communicate with other students in our country or from other countries to share ideas and thoughts.

English is becoming increasingly popular. English can help learners converse with strangers around the world. English is also useful when traveling overseas because it is recognized as an international language. In Indonesia, many schools are transforming into international schools based on criteria that require English as the primary instructional language in all courses. As a result, speaking is an essential ability for pursuing a career and furthering education. (Ridyani, 2009).

Speaking sub- skills

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the process by which people acquire more natural language when speaking. It involves segmental articulation, rhythm, intonation, phrasing, laterally gesture, body language, and eye contact, all of which contribute to a clear speech flow (Cahyaningrat, 2019).

Grammar

Grammar is defined as a systematic means of obtaining and determining a speaker's or listener's language competency, as well as the scope of an individual's linguistic abilities. As a result, it accounts for a collection of laws that allow us to construct sentences (Delfino, 2022).

Vocabulary

Diaz (2015) defined vocabulary as a spoken and written comprehension of the meanings of words. As a result, vocabulary is the appropriate diction or a critical feature of a language, particularly while speaking; having a broad vocabulary makes it easier to transmit ideas, feelings, and thoughts both verbally and in writing.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to talk accurately and effectively. Typically, it refers to speaking freely and uninterrupted. If the teacher wants to assess the students' proficiency in the teaching and learning process, they must talk freely and without interruption or excessive reluctance. The goal is to allow pupils to communicate more easily and clearly. However, the teacher should not correct students' errors as they occur. This is because excessive correction interferes with the natural flow of debate (Savitri, 2013).

Comprehension

Comprehension refers to how well listeners understand the nature of communication, particularly when methods are complex and difficult (Rahmanis, 2019). Thus, comprehension in speaking refers to the speakers' knowledge of what they say to the listeners in order to avoid miscommunication; it also serves to quickly digest information from the speech.

Teaching Speaking

The following are some of the fundamental speaking activities outlined by Suban (2021) that have made teaching quite enjoyable:

Dialogue: is a fundamental type of oral communication that involves practicing language skills such as greetings and querying for information. Students receive a text screenplay for classroom rehearsal. Students then study and practice it in pairs or small groups (Nation 2014).

Surveys and questionnaires are excellent ways to get students talking. According to Malisa (2021), classroom surveys can be used to stimulate student participation, construct question formats, and collect and analyze actual data. This strategy works well when students develop their own surveys.

Picture Description: According to Ur (2012), this activity divides the class into groups. Each group describes many images in sequence. When describing something, all members see a visual representation. They have two minutes to describe the image in as many sentences as possible, and a secretary checks off a paper for each correct description. After two minutes, the group counts the ticks.

Information gap: According to Li (2015) an information gap can be used to solve a puzzle, describe and draw a picture, and put things in the right order. It can also be used to compare pictures and retell a story.

Story completion: is an interesting speaking practice in which students sit in a circle and listen to the teacher narrate a story. After a few phrases, the teacher concludes the story. The students then describe the story in four to ten sentences. Students can build a story by include characters, events, and descriptions. Story completion increases students' confidence, interest, and speaking abilities (Hamsia, 2018).

Storytelling: Jansem (2019) devised four instructional techniques that required students to utilize English to communicate with others. These methods included beginning sessions with small conversation, using lead-in and presenting strategies, reacting positively to linguistic blunders, and deliberately enhancing learners' attention to the significance of communication.

Discussion is a key part of speaking skill lesson. Learners are allocated to discuss a certain topic in a group and must use prior knowledge to support their ideas. To succeed, teachers should provide students with subject knowledge and language forms, allow them to choose a topic, establish objectives before to discussion, employ small groups instead of full class discussions, allow students to discuss for 8-10 minutes, and provide feedback when the discussion is completed. This method is vital for sharing information and expertise with one another as well as regulating interaction (Azizah, 2018).

Role play is a technique for improving speaking abilities and sociolinguistic competence. It is critical to introduce the situation and ensure that students understand their own character, set objectives before discussion, provide a card that explains the person or role, have students brainstorm in their group for planning, use small group instead of whole class discussion, allow students to work at their own ability level, and provide feedback after the discussion. Role play is crucial in teaching speaking because it allows students to practice talking in a variety of social circumstances and roles (Fadilah, 2018).

According to what is mentioned above, the previous abilities are essential for language learners in order to be autonomous learners. This would help them learn and practice speaking outside and inside the classroom since language cannot be learnt only inside the classroom and as a result, the goal of getting students communicate in English can be achieved.

Speaking Difficulties in Foreign Language Learning

Some other problems faced by learners including psychological, linguistic and social obstacles were highlighted by Scarcella & Florez (2013) as follows:

The contradiction between fluency and accuracy: Students may be confident in speaking a new language when they are not reprimanded, but their language remains erroneous and inaccurate.

Lack of confidence: Some students may feel uncomfortable speaking in the second language for the first time. When pupils realize their speaking partners don't understand them, they experience this psychological reaction. As a result, they remain silent since they lack confidence in their abilities.

Lack of Motivation: Motivation is the most crucial factor in students' performance in language acquisition, particularly while developing language skills (Jin 2014). Lack of motivation will have a bad impact on students' speaking performance, as well as their self-confidence.

Limited Vocabulary: According to Dewi and Jimmi (2018), limited vocabulary or deficits occur when language learners are unable to construct whole sentences due to a lack of suitable words.

Pronunciation: According to Al-Ruhaily (2011), the majority of students prefer to listen to the teacher than talk. They are accustomed to learning through hearing rather than doing or participating. Due to a lack of speech training, individuals may be unclear of what to say or how to start a conversation. As a result, even when they have unique ideas, they fail to express them in the target language.

To conclude, helping our students to master speaking skill requires preparing a suitable environment as well as creating proper strategies for interaction to encourage students to speak and participate. This can be achieved through providing students with more speaking activities and establishing real life situations.

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics examines the interplay of language and society, with language as the starting point. Variation is the key concept, applied to language itself and to its use. The basic premise of sociolinguistics is that language is variable and changing.

Sociolinguistics can be defined from a variety of viewpoints. Yasemin (2013) defined sociolinguistics as the science of studying the goals and purposes of language in society. It tries to explain how language varies across geographical boundaries and how people in one situation connect

with people in other contexts. Learners are more likely to learn language based on sociocultural contexts, namely how to communicate in one context with others. Sali (2012) defines sociolinguistics as the interaction of language, culture, and society. Depending on the subject, almost any study of language involves a social relationship because language would not exist without the human component. Language is associated with the interaction of language and culture, as well as with social phenomena.

According to Spolsky (2010) sociolinguistic is the study of the link between language and society, of language variation, and attitudes about language. The study of stylistic and social variation of language (Wardhaugh, 2010).The study of language in relation to its social-cultural context (Van Dijk, 2009).

Importance of Sociolinguistic

Broadly speaking, sociolinguistics plays an essential role for the average language learner, as there are subtle nuances that can cause discomfort. For instance, in Italy, it is considered indecent to point a finger at an object or another person. In contrast, in the United States, it is acceptable as long as the finger is not pointing at any other person. David Broersma (2016) states that this type of attitude or mistake can lead to the perception that one is ill-disciplined, unserious and dishonest.

Sociolinguistics is particularly important for the average language learner because there are small things that can cause embarrassment. For example, pointing to an object or another person is deemed an obscene behavior in Italy. In America, it is permissible unless someone is pointing to another individual. According to David Broersma, this type of attitude or faults can give the impression that you are ill-mannered, unprofessional, and dishonest.

Sociolinguistics mainly studies the linguistic variation produced by various social factors and tries to study the influence of social factors on language and its results (Leeman and Serafini, 2016). There are numerous factors which affect the way a language is spoken in a country or a city. These factors can be ethnic (racial or national), social (gender, age, class, education and economic class) and regional (geographical). The factors are interlinked with each other which means they have an impact on each other to some extent (Savignon, 2018).

According to Bello, Rachael, Oni-Buraimoh, and Olawunmi (2017), it is common for communities to spontaneously stratify their language use based on sociolinguistic characteristics such as sex, age, religion, career, and so on. Thus, in-groups typically seek common identities and promote

them, occasionally developing them into codes. This sociolinguistic activity reinforces the utopian notion of a global language. Language serves more than just communication purposes. It is also used to express ideas, initiate and maintain phatic interactions, and document and transmit user activities. Speech communities' experiences are shaped by their environs and the people with whom they engage.

Basic Concepts of Sociolinguistics

Language plays a dominant role in the way we interact with social factors. It enables us to communicate and express our point of view for a particular purpose, such as discussing politics, discussing economic conditions in a particular country, or suggesting ways to improve the educational system.

a. Language Variation

Language variation is essential for both language and sociolinguistics. English, a global language, is used in many fields, including education, research, sports, and commerce (Holmes and Hazen, 2014). However, it should not be considered superior to other languages because they differ on an individual or national level. Idiolects are language variations that reflect our identities and can be influenced by social media, life events, and experiences (Light and McNaughton, 2014).

Language variety is an important part of sociolinguistic study, and cognitive linguistics seeks to understand the meaning behind these variances. These variances are strongly linked to nonlinguistic characteristics such as social rank, age, gender, occupation, and ethnic group. In a real speech community, communicative competence must understand language homogeneity as well as cognitive ability variants (Biber and Conrad, 2014).

b. Dialect

Dialects are distinct variations of a language that differ significantly from one another. When speakers of two or more languages are unable to communicate with one another, dialects form as separate languages. However, varieties of the same language are commonly shared and can blend into one another. When analyzing dialects as distinct languages, demographic characteristics based on geographic location are taken into account (Bolton and Kwok, 2014).

Dialect is a term used to describe any variety of a language and its accent. In the world of Sociolinguistics, dialects are all considered to be correct, logical, and systematic. One of the most common misunderstandings among language speakers is the idea that there are two

varieties of a language: the nonstandard variety and the standard variety. This latter variety is commonly referred to as Dialect. Those who do not speak the standard variety are either considered to be of a lower social class or to have no standard, as they are unable to speak fluent English. In short, dialects are understood and respected by people when they are studying Sociolinguistics. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider the standard variety to be the "correct" one. Each language has its own dialects and accents which make it distinct from the others (Grabe and Kaplan, 2014).

   c.Sociolinguistics Competence

Sociolinguistics Competence allows speakers to make a clear and appropriate difference between the possibilities. For example, lexical variants like"sir", "excuse me" or "hey". Using "hey" for elderly people is quite considered as inappropriate attitude or using "sir" for an 11-year boy can be unsuitable (Drummond &Schleef, 2016).

Sociolinguistics' theory states that when two or more varieties of a single language are used concurrently in a linguistic community the phenomenon is referred to as diglossia. This phenomenon is further divided into High-Variety and Low Variety (Block, 2015). The High-Variety variants are used for formal occasions and are the official languages of a country, such as in diplomacy, literature, and education. Low-level variants are used for everyday vocabulary used for daily communication.

Sociolinguistics in Language Teaching

Language is a center for social interaction in all societies, regardless of place or time period. Language and social contact have a mutual influence: language shapes social interactions, and social interactions shape language. Learning a language entails going through the teaching-learning process, whether indoors or outdoors, in formal or informal schooling. Teaching, learning language, sociocultural circumstances, and linguistic differences should all be studied since they influence language learning success.

The terms of sociocultural contexts and variations of language may be covered in sociolinguistics study. In order to understand the phenomenon, broad knowledge of the process of language acquisition, second or foreign language education, sociolinguistics, linguistics, psycholinguistics, and specific knowledge of foreign language teaching techniques and methods of measurement and evaluation have become especially important. Sociolinguistics has become a very important role

recent, and we have become aware the role of language not just as a means of communication, but also a creator of social identity (Dunkley, 2013).

According to M. Rasel Howlader (2010), there are several social factors that correlate to language teaching in sociolinguistics perspective as follows:

- **a.Ethnicity**: Ethnicity can result in significant language variations. Many ethnic minorities' main languages include second-language phrases and grammatical structures. Studies on colonial language variation have led to universal acceptance of the hypothesis that when two languages merge to generate pidgin, the dominant group's language is most visible in the vocabulary and the subjugated group's language in the grammar.

- **b. Gender**: There are documented differences in how men and women utilize language. These disparities are discernible across a wide variety of language characteristics. According to Peter Trudgill (2000), "languages vary significantly in the extent to which sex differences are lexicalized.

- **c. Geography**: Every language has geographic variance. Regional differences can be pronounced or minor. In industrialized civilizations with high geographic mobility, the situation becomes even more problematic. Some languages experience significant regional variance. It is critical to distinguish between regional variation known as "dialect," which refers to lexical and grammatical differences from standard English, and "accent," which pertains to pronunciation patterns. In practice, these two elements frequently combine to create what most people recognize as a distinct regional difference.

- **d. Social Class:** Language disparities can be observed across class barriers in a community. Just as higher social groupings use language to identify themselves, certain groups intentionally utilize lower forms to distance themselves from mainstream society. Professional classes utilize "correct" language, which is promoted as the "standard" form by government, education, and the media. In contrast, other variants of the language are labeled as "incorrect" and regarded subpar. Nonetheless, stigmatized variations frequently survive despite significant pressure because groups remain loyal to their shape as a way of differentiating themselves. Historically, one form of English accent has been associated with respectability and a

high level of education. Daniel Jones, a phonetician, created the term Received Pronunciation in1918.

    e. Occupation and Role: Of all the alterations in language that occur on a daily basis, it is thought that changes in language produced by the writer's or speaker's work or relationship with others are the most commonly missed. Thousands of people change their language to suit their roles as clerics, advertisers, newscasters, journalists, doctors, politicians, and taxi drivers. Contrary to regional, gender, and class differences, they are frequently "put on" when we arrive at work in the morning and "taken off" at the end of the day. In the English language teaching sector, ESP (English for special purpose) is associated with a variety of professions such as doctors, engineers, and bankers. It has been found that there are obvious variations in the use of language used by people belonging to varieties of occupations.

Previous Studies Related to Improving Speaking through Sociolinguistics

Agustine, Asi, and Luardini (2021) conducted a study to describe the language use in EFL classroom interactions. This research was descriptive in nature and used the qualitative method. The subject was one of the English teachers and eleventh-grade pupils at MAN Katingan. The data was collected via administering a questionnaire to students via a Google form, as well as interviewing the English teacher. The findings revealed that the use of language in EFL classroom interactions at MAN Katingan was sufficiently diverse.

Mujiono, Herawati (2019) investigated the effectiveness of e-learning based on self-directed learning on Sociolinguistics competence of EFL university students. The participants of this study was university students of English Education Department of Universitas Kanjuruhan Malang who were taking Sociolinguistics, two classes of 76 students. The experimental group received e-learning based on self-directed learning on Sociolinguistics. While participants in the control group attending the same course received a textbook. The instrument used in this study was the sociolinguistics essay test. It could be concluded that giving e-learning based on self-directed learning was effective to develop sociolinguistic competence of EFL university students.

Mede and Dikilitaş (2015) examined English instructors' perspectives of the development of sociolinguistic competence in language classrooms. A questionnaire was distributed to both native (n=35) and non-native (n=35) English instructors, who were then requested to provide

written reports outlining their perceptions of the knowledge and practice of sociolinguistic competence as part of communicative competence. The findings demonstrated that the formation of sociolinguistic principles can help learners select acceptable forms, which should be tightly integrated into language teaching and learning curriculum.

Onovughe (2012) investigated the function of sociolinguistic inputs in language acquisition and the use of English as a second language in the classroom. All participants were secondary school students from Akure Local Government in Ondo State, Nigeria. A total of two hundred forty (240) senior high school students were chosen from six secondary schools, and data was collected using a fourteen-item questionnaire. The findings showed that parental occupation had a significant impact on secondary school pupils' English language use. Gender, age, and religion had little influence on secondary school students' English language use.

Blended program

Sharma (2010) also discusses several definitions and stances. The term blend has been used to describe the mixture of technology (email, internet, phone, etc.), techniques (TBLT, for example), teaching modes (FTF and CALL), and real and virtual worlds (Second Life). Claypole (2010) sees little new in BL, claiming that it is simply a logical response to the evolution of past pedagogical approaches incorporating a variety of teaching methodologies. Westbrook (2008) confirms this, suggesting that the phrase may become redundant and eventually disappear in the future due to the sheer amount of definitions associated with it.

Blended learning can thus be described in terms of a continuum along which a series of variations in practice and thinking can be arranged. Bates (2016) argues that blended learning can be placed between fully online and fully face-to- face courses. Below is an example of a common image of blended learning, which clearly shows the merge, of the brick and mortar model (classroom based), and the online learning model (computer based). It shows explicit how learning is more and more blurred in the variety of learning spaces.

Consequently, BL, the model that integrates online with traditional FTF learning, has become a favored strategy of many English university programs in attempting to meet the requirements of language learners, institutions, and local and national educational authorities.

Importance of Blended Learning

Blended learning (BL) is a rapidly expanding educational field with important implications for foreign and second language teaching and learning techniques around the world (Ishaq, MatZin, Rosdi, and Ali, 2020). Blended learning techniques use a variety of technology and learning environments to deliver meaningful learning by improving access to authentic resources, communication platforms, situational learning activities, and novel linguistic models, all in conjunction with learner-centered pedagogy. These blended learning tactics can help students practice their language skills both inside and outside of the classroom.

Using a blend of approaches, pedagogies, and technologies to learn languages has been an increasingly popular topic at language learning conferences, seminars, and scholarly publications (Ishaq, MatZin, Rosdi and Ali, 2020).

Blended learning allows students to experience both traditional face-to-face instruction and online learning platforms, as well as planned and self-directed class activities (Singh, 2017). Following the epidemic, teachers returned to employing traditional pedagogy, such as focusing on the lecture technique and teacher-centered methodology throughout lessons, which makes sense given the limited accessibility in engagement throughout the classroom period. Hybrid forms of education may become the new norm, allowing educators to reinvent and change subject matter, particularly in fields where trainers have failed to provide interesting and beneficial learning experiences for students in an online method of instruction (Rodriguez, 2020). Poon (2014) also stated that blended learning has reformed teaching and learning activities from being teacher-centered, to becoming student-centered, and thus positively impacts students" self-directed learning. Also, students and teachers have more opportunities to interact and communicate both in and out of the class.

Design of blended learning programs

Institutions are implementing a variety of measures, including reducing direct classroom teaching input and increasing the use of technology to combine classroom engagement with self-directed study. The role of technology is critical, as it allows institutions to ensure that programs remain high quality even when FTF instruction is reduced. As a result, this model, which aims to effectively utilize and combine FTF instruction with Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and web-mediated tools, is widely implemented in language programs in tertiary institutions to meet the

needs of contemporary higher education while also improving language learning/teaching processes (Grgurovic, 2010).

In blended learning environments where the teacher is physically absent for a significant portion of the time, two critical factors must be considered: First, materials and activities must be designed with clarity and purpose; second, the teacher's role is critical in encouraging and supporting learners' learning decisions and choices (Sriarunrasmee et al., 2015). According to (Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019), learners struggle to demonstrate autonomy without teacher assistance. Furthermore, it is widely assumed that learners who can make further efforts to improve their learning skills can only benefit from the positive consequences of self-directed learning. Using modern technology for learning can also encourage the notion of teamwork and learning with and from others.

Cobanoglu, Yucel, Uzunboylar, and Ceylan (2017) investigated blended mentoring practice (using an online questionnaire methodology) in the learning of English and discovered that pre-service ICT teachers saw their English mentors as colleagues (team-mates) who supported, helped, and guided them in their efforts while also serving as experts in their field. Both mentors and mentees praised the blended mentoring technique, and all participants in the study recommended that this approach be used in teacher school. When building blended learning courses, it is critical to consider learning outcomes. However, this must be viewed in light of factors such as student workload, evaluation, and teaching and learning methods (Bralic & Divjak, 2018). The most significant of these elements is assessment, which entails selecting proper evaluation tools to ensure that students have the best chance of fulfilling the set objectives (Hamad, 2017).

Studies related to using blended learning to enhance speaking skills

Pu Pu and Sheng Chang (2023) investigated the impact of online input options on learning outcomes and attitudes. They investigated the impact of bimodal and multimodal online input on blended speaking education at a Chinese institution. A bimodal group (BG, N = 30) used online text-and-audio materials, while a multimodal group (MG, N = 30) learned through online videos. The study included two speaking exams, a questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews to assess their learning achievement and attitudes. The findings showed that both bimodal and multimodal blended learning increased students' speaking skills and learning attitudes. Furthermore, students in both groups consistently showed a good attitude toward participating in blended learning to improve their overall speaking abilities.Ehsanifard, Ghapanchi &

Afsharrad (2020) investigated the effect of blended learning on student engagement and oral competency. The instruments comprised the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), the IELTS Speaking Exam, and the Student Course Engagement Questionnaire. The study included sixty intermediate-level boys and females with a mean age of 26.5. The experimental group received both online and face-to-face help from Nicenet, whereas the control group received solely traditional instruction. The results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both speaking and engagement after a 10-week intervention.

Purnomo (2019). This study aimed to investigate the use of blended learning based task (BLBT) impacted on students' speaking skill. The participants of the study was the second semester students majoring English at State Islamic University of Mataram (UIN Mataram), (N= 40) which were divided into experimental and control group, each group consisted of 20 students. The study has statistically evidenced that the employment of blended learning based-task significantly promoted students' speaking skill. It is concluded that the employment of BL based task significantly impacted on students' speaking skill.

Ali, et.al (2023) examined the impact of a blended learning approach on first-year Arab university male and female students' oral production using a mixed-methods' approach. The participants were 120 First-Year Arab university students from four Arab countries. Study participants from each country were then randomized into two groups: experimental and control groups. The instruments were The Oxford Online Placement Test, the pre-test and post-test, and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that the use of the blended learning approach in the EFL context had a positive impact on first-year Arab university students' oral production.

Reviewing literature indicated the importance of sociolinguistics in enhancing students speaking skills. It also revealed that university students have difficulties in expressing themselves orally. Blended learning program apparently can contribute in improve students speaking skills.

Pilot study

To provide evidence for the problem of the research, the researcher conducted a pilot study to determine students' EFL speaking level. Speaking skills tests were designed and administered to a sample of 60 students at Delta University for science and technology Dakahlia Governorate.

Table (1): results of the participants speaking skills pilot test

Some Speaking Skills	score	Mean	SD	percentage
Vocabulary	6	3.3	0.93	75%
Grammar	6	3.03	0.88	50.4%
Pronunciation	6	3.55	0.97	59.1%
Fluency	6	3.1	0.93	51.25%
comprehensibility	6	3.65	0.99	60.83
Total	**30**	**16.63**	**4.7**	**59.31%**

Statement of the problem

Based on the review of literature, results of the pilot study, and experience of the researcher as an EFL lecturer and trainer, the problem of this study emerged from students' low level in speaking sub skills such as (vocabulary, grammar, pronounciation, fluency and comprehensibility). This mediocre level have led to students' disengagement in speaking activities. Thus, the researcher suggested the sociolinguistic theory based blended program to enhance their speaking skills.

The Questions of the research

The study was set up to answer the following questions:

1. What are the speaking skills necessary for university students?
3. What are the features of sociolinguistic theory based blended program in enhancing speaking skills of university students?
4. What is the effectiveness of using sociolinguistic theory based blended program in enhancing university students' EFL speaking skills?

Purpose of the research

This research aimed to determine the effectiveness of using sociolinguistics theory based blended program on enhancing university students' EFL speaking skills.

Significance

This research derived its significance from the following considerations:

- Suggesting an alternative approach to the teaching of speaking skills through using sociolinguistics theory.
- When creating activities or assignments for students, curriculum designers can consider the findings of the research.
- Providing empirical evidence on the utility of sociolinguistic theory in teaching English.
- Helping curriculum designers and researchers to consider sociolinguistic theory in redesigning learning/ teaching materials.

Delimitations

The research was delimited to:

1. A sample of 60 students at Delta University for science and technology Dakahlia Governorate
3. Collaborative learning.
4. Small-group instruction.
5. Some speaking skills necessary for EFL university students.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis*:*

"There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the experimental group and the control group in the mean score of the speaking test in favor of the experimental group".

The second hypothesis:

"There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the pre- and post-administration of the speaking skills test on the experimental group in favor of the post administration".

Definition of terms

Speaking skill

Speaking can be defined operationally as the ability to produce fluent, coherent and accurate speech to convey information, feelings and thoughts in a meaningful context.

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is a discipline that makes a link between sociology and linguistics. It is a branch of sociology and as a concept, it is concerned with how language use is a determinant of a given society's linguistic requirements.

Design

Quasi experimental design was adopted in the current research. Two groups of university students each group consists of 30 students participated in the research. They were divided into a control group and an experimental group.

The experimental group was taught speaking through sociolinguistics theory based blended program. On the other hand, the control group received regular instruction of teaching these skills.

Instruments

For the purpose of the research, the following instruments were designed and used by the researcher:

1-An EFL speaking skills checklist.

2-An EFL Speaking Skills Test (Pre-Post) with an accompaying rubric for scoring it designed by the researcher.

Results and Statistical Analysis
Results of the research are reported in the light of the hypotheses:

Testing the First Hypothesis: The first hypothesis: post-speaking test (experimental, control)

The first hypothesis stated that: ***"There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the experimental group and the control group in the mean score of the speaking test in favor of the experimental group".***

In order to test this hypothesis, a t-test was used. The following table illustrates the results.

Table (2):Comparing the control and the experimental groups speaking performance on the speaking skills Test

Skills	The group	N.of cases	Means	S.D	df	t.value	Sig.
Pronunciation	Control	30	2.033	0.629		9.551	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	30	3.450	0.514			
Vocabulary	Control	30	1.983	0.636		8.914	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	30	3.233	0.430			
Grammar	Control	30	2.050	0.592	58	9.827	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	30	3.383	0.449			
Fluency	Control	30	1.933	0.704		10.389	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	30	3.450	0.379			
Comprehensibility	Control	30	1.200	0.502		15.124	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	30	3.317	0.580			
Total score of Test	Control	30	9.200	2.369		15.520	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	30	16.833	1.282			

It is clear from the results of the table that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in individual skills of the speaking test and the total score of the test in favor of the experimental group. All t-values were statistically significant at (0.01) level. These results values the first hypothesis. The researcher attributes these differences to the use of the research blended learning program based on sociolinguistics theory.

The second hypothesis: pre-post speaking test (experimental)

The second hypothesis stated that ***"There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the pre-***

and post-administration of the speaking skills test on the experimental group in favor of the post administration".

In order to test this hypothesis, a t-test was used. The following table illustrates the results.

Table (3):Comparing the experimental group speaking performance on the pre and post administration of the speaking skills Test

Skills	Administration	N.of cases	Mean	S.D	df	t.value	Sig.
Pronunciation	pre – test	30	2.03	0.776		8.801	0.01 Sig.
	post – test	30	3.45	0.514			
Vocabulary	pre – test	30	1.97	0.681		8.839	0.01 Sig.
	post – test	30	3.23	0.430			
Grammar	pre – test	30	2.08	0.671		10.140	0.01 Sig.
	post – test	30	3.38	0.449	29		
Fluency	pre – test	30	2.03	0.571		11.151	0.01 Sig.
	post – test	30	3.45	0.379			
Comprehensibility	pre – test	30	1.25	0.504		14.034	0.01 Sig.
	post – test	30	3.32	0.580			
Total score of Test	pre – test	30	9.37	2.149		16.579	0.01 Sig.
	post – test	30	16.83	1.282			

It is clear from the results of the table that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students in the pre- and post-administration in speaking test skills in favor of the post-administration, where all t-values were statistically significant at the (0.01) level. These results verify the second hypothesis. The researcher attributes these differences to the research blended learning program based on sociolinguistics theory.

Discussion of Results

Results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups in the variables under investigation in favor of the experimental group. These results indicated the improvement in the experimental group students' speaking skills on the post administration of the tests. Such improvement could be attributed to the effect of the experimental treatment using the suggested program based on sociolinguistics.

Conclusions

Based on data analysis, discussion and results, it could be concluded that using blended learning program resulted in developing English speaking skills of university students. These encouraging results were not

attributed only to the designed program but also to the positive impact of the learning environment, the autonomous learning strategy and most importantly; the learning-centered approach. Moreover, the varieties of exercises, games and quizzes were so helpful and provided learners with enough practice to improve their speaking significantly.

Recommendations of the Research

Some recommendations for teachers, students, course designers and EFL researchers were suggested based on the results and the conclusion of the current study as follows:

For EFL Teachers:
- EFL teachers should be trained by Ministry of higher Education in terms of technological approaches especially blended programs in order to help students with their language skills specially speaking efficiently.
- EFL teachers should train their students to use the blended contents inside classrooms to practice English language and create an enjoyable environment for learning.
- New technology in teaching EFL skills such as online programs should be taken into consideration by teachers since they have positive attitudes on students towards learning.
- EFL teachers should encourage learners to effectively participate in interactive tasks and activities.
- It is recommended to train teachers on teaching speaking at the pre-service stage, and as part of ongoing professional development programs.
- Teachers should consider using technology inside classrooms a top priority to improve EFL skills.

For EFL Students:
- Students should pay more attention to the productive skills in order to be developed especially at their advanced stage.
- Learner centered approach and autonomous learning should be adopted in the learning process. Therefore, teaching materials, tasks, activities and games should be developed in terms of learners' needs.
- Students should receive enjoyable learning activities and be autonomous, and active inside the EFL class room.
- Students should use the available technology in their learning of productive skills.

- School stakeholders should equip their schools with the latest technological facilities in order to facilitate the teaching-learning cycle for students.

For EFL Course designers:
- Course designers should explore and exploit new techniques, methods and strategies for improving speaking skills.
- Course designers should consider using technology in line with face to face as it proved its significance in enhancing EFL.

For EFL Researchers:
- EFL researchers should use the insights of the current research to use blended programs in other areas of teaching English language and use them in improving different attitudes of students.
- EFL researchers should search different trends using technology and other innovative ways of teaching English language to improve productive skills for students.

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