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## A Workshop-Based Blended Program to Improve EFL Reading Skills

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## **A Workshop-Based Blended Program to Improve EFL Reading Skills**

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### **Abstract**

The research aimed at investigating the effect of a Workshop-Based Blended Program (WBBP) on improving the EFL reading skills of Secondary School Students. The participants of the study were Forty (47) First Year General Secondary School Students from Belkas Secondary School, Dakahliya, Egypt. The study adopted the quasi-experimental research design. So, there were two groups: an experimental group (n= 24) and a control one (n= 23). To collect data, the researcher used multiple instruments: an EFL reading skills test (pre-post), an and a workshop based blended program designed and implemented on 1st year secondary stage students. The researcher taught both groups: the experimental group was taught through the WBBP while the control group was taught through the regular way of teaching. The results of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the experimental group and the control group on the post administration of the reading skills test in favor of the experimental group. The effect size of the program was found to be high. The study recommends using the WBBP as a technique in teaching EFL skills and as a training approach in professional development programs of EFL teachers.

**Key Words:** Blended Learning, Reading, Workshop Model

### **Introduction**

Reading is considered one of the important skills that can expand students' knowledge. It is a process involving the activation of relevant knowledge and related language skills to achieve an exchange of information from one person to another through a text. Sookchotirat (2005) believed that reading makes the reader more knowledgeable, have wider perspectives and vision. Reading helps the reader get new ideas leading to cognitive development. When the readers transfer what they read to apply with their own idea a new perspective or idea is created. Hence, Hagtvedt (2009) asserted that reading skills ought to be in focus in teaching. The students are to acquire technical aspects of reading and spelling, gain experience, and relate to the content and semantics of the language: comprehending vocabulary, syntax and text.

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The workshop model is an incredibly efficient method of teaching reading. It represents a way of organizing meaningful instruction with balanced literacy that can meet a variety of student needs (Frey & Fisher, 2006). The Workshop model provides time to read and respond to texts. It traditionally includes minilessons, independent reading and reader response tasks. The Workshop process scaffolds students to deeper levels of thinking and engagement while providing students with greater input into and ownership of their learning (Meyer, 2010). Activities and strategies presented in Workshop model are based on the assumption that students have varying abilities and teachers design instruction suited to individual learners. Teachers invite, nurture and support students which helps move them toward independence (Atwell, 2009). Creating lifelong, reflective and responsive readers is a goal of the Workshop approach. (Calkins and Tolan, 2010).

Advancements in technology and developments in teaching and learning procedures have presented new circumstances for more efficient and effective implementation of learning environments, which “make it simple for students and teachers to communicate in non-traditional methods” (Hickman, 2007) and which “are characterized by the introduction of flexible and innovative teaching and learning technology into teaching (Vogel & Klassen, 2001, p. 105). For this reason, it seems important to incorporate technology into instruction and plan models and/or strategies to allow students to acquire and enhance digital competencies more easily. Blended learning is one of the most preferable approaches to instruction that incorporate technology inside classrooms, it combines face-to-face instruction with online learning. Blended learning makes extensive use of learning technologies through the "blend" of physical (e.g. lectures, labs, handouts and books) and virtual environments (e.g. chatting, discussions forums, e-mails, etc.) in order to supplement traditional face-to-face learning (Precel et al, 2009).

In this context, the current research is attempting to investigate using workshop-based blended program to improve the reading skills of EFL secondary stage students. This research will incorporate technology into instruction to observe how it will affect students' motivation and skills while reading. Teachers need to be educated on the advantages technology may have on student motivation and ability within reading as well as how to best implement technology into literacy instruction.

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## Related Studies

### Studies Related to Blended Learning and Reading

Several studies were conducted to investigate the effect of blended learning on developing reading comprehension such as Kheirzadeh & Birgani (2018); Karkour (2016) ; Al Zumer , Razaai Bader Eddin & Al-Rahman (2013); Behjat, Yamini and Bajeri (2011).

*Kheirzadeh & Birgani (2018)* conducted a study in an attempt to reveal the effectiveness of blended learning platform in improving the reading comprehension performance of Iranian EFL students. The participants of this study were 60 EFL students at Islamic Azad University. The first step was to administer pretests of reading and the second step was to implement the treatments. They were also required to use the website nicenet.com at home. After post testing both groups, the findings showed that blended learning had a positive effect on reading comprehension.

*Karkour (2016)* aimed at describing a blended model used in Egyptian schools when teaching EFL reading classes. The researcher concluded that every context could have its unique design according to the challenges, the settings and students' needs. He suggested a model for the Egyptian context that combine the following:(1)Reading a text in the class, (2) Doing TM at home about the same topic (3) Posting on a forum and using chat and finally (4)Coming back to the class to complete a discussion about the text and the tasks they done at home.

*Al Zumer, Razaai, Bader Eddin & AL-Rahman (2013)* examined EFL students' perception of a Blended Learning Environment. The participants included 160 male students from the department of English Faculty of Languages and Translation at King Khaled University in Saudi Arabia. Results showed the positive influence on students' reading skills and vocabulary. In addition, students developed their computer and internet skills.

*Behjat, Yamini and Bajeri (2011)* investigated the effect of Blended Learning on reading comprehension. The control group students were requested to read printed texts outside the class whereas the experimental group students were asked to visit a weblog after class to find their reading assignments. The researchers reported that reading materials on e-tool like wikis encouraged reading as they had links and were editable, and learners could access them by just clicking on the underlined term or phrase to enter a new webpage, thus they had access to more reading resources. They

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concluded that blended learning encouraged learners' autonomy to read more materials independent of what presented in the classroom.

### **Studies Related to The Reading Workshop Model**

*De Wild (2017)* investigated the effects of a Reading Workshop model in a high school English classroom in a private school in the Midwest. The participants were sixty six juniors in a general education classroom. Students in the study took a pre-survey at the beginning of the year and a post-survey at the end of February to determine any changes in independent reading habits. The results of this study suggested that incorporating a Reading Workshop model in a high school English classroom increases independent reading, and improves student attitudes towards reading, and students' perceptions of themselves as readers.

*Timlick (2016)* determined the impact of Reading Workshop model on the reading achievement scores and attitudes about reading of fourth and fifth-grade students. The results of the study revealed a statistically significant difference existed between the fall and spring mean NCE STAR scores for the below grade-level students who experienced the Reading Workshop model indicating the model was effective for struggling readers. Moreover, a statistically significant difference existed between the fall and spring ERAS scores for both the Reader's Workshop and basal-centered groups, though the scores went down indicating a regression in attitudes about reading.

*Crane (2014)* conducted study to gauge the effectiveness of the workshop model that has been implemented by a Midwest suburban school district. Based on information gathered from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website communication arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the district are rising despite the increase in students living in poverty. Thus, the switch to the workshop model of teaching reading and writing has had a positive effect on test scores.

*Wilson (2013)* investigated the effects of implementing *Reading Workshop* framework in a self-contained primary elementary classroom for students with EBD. The study focused on the effects of the intervention on students' reading comprehension in the primary elementary classroom at Renton Academy (1st – 3rd grade). The study reveals that several students made positive gains in reading comprehension. Students who were not performing at standard prior to the intervention made substantial gains in

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reading comprehension to place them either in the proficient or advanced range for their grade level standard.

*Thomas (2012)* conducted a study to investigate the effects of implementing a reading workshop to improve the middle school language arts students' reading instruction and ultimately their students' learning. The two teachers implemented Reading Workshop as their new methodology for teaching reading to all six of their 7th and 8th grade classes. Interviews and classroom observations, over the course of eight months, showed that implementing Reading Workshop has some positive effects including increased motivation, comprehension and learning experiences.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Based on the literature review, it is evident that students are not doing well in reading skills tests and teachers seem not use reading strategies sufficiently and/ or appropriately.

In view of the many challenges facing the secondary school EFL students in learning English in general and reading in particular, the current research investigated the effectiveness of using the workshop based blended program to develop EFL secondary stage students' reading skills.

### **Questions**

**This research attempted to answer the following questions:**

- 1- What are the components of the proposed workshop-based blended program used for developing the secondary stage students' reading skills?
- 2- Does the workshop-based blended program affect the development of EFL secondary stage students' reading skills?

### **Hypotheses**

**The following hypotheses were tested:**

- 1- There is a statistically significant difference ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the mean ranks of the control group and the experimental group students on the post administration of the EFL reading skills test in favor of the experimental group
- 2- There is a statistically significant difference at the .05 level between the mean ranks of the experimental group students on the pre-post administration of the EFL reading skills test in favor of the post one

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## **Purpose**

### **This research aimed to:**

- (1) Design and implement a workshop-based blended program for developing secondary stage students' reading skills.
- (2) Measure the effectiveness of the program in developing EFL secondary stage students' reading skills.

## **Design**

The research adopted the quasi experimental design. Participants of the research were (47) first year secondary school students, selected from two classes in Belqas secondary school, Dakahlia governorate, in the academic year (2020-2021). The participants were divided into two groups: The participants were divided into two groups : (23) students serving as control group and (24) students serving as experimental group. The experimental group was trained according to the Blended workshop-Based Blended Program. The control group was trained according to the regular way of teaching reading skills. The two groups received the pre and post applications of the study instruments.

## **Instruments**

To fulfill the purpose of the research, four instruments were designed and used by the researcher:

1. An EFL reading skills test (pre-post) to assess 1<sup>st</sup> grade secondary stage students' EFL reading skills.
2. A workshop based blended program designed and implemented on 1st year secondary stage students.

## **Delimitations**

### **This research was delimited to:**

1. A sample of secondary stage students at Belkas Secondary School for girls in Dakahlia governorate.
2. The workshop-based blended program.
3. Some reading skills necessary for 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary stage students.

## **Results of the research**

Results of the research are reported in terms of its hypotheses.

### **Testing the First Hypothesis:**

The first hypothesis stated that: "There is a statistically significant difference ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the mean ranks of the control group and the

experimental group students on the post administration of the EFL reading skills test in favor of the experimental group”.

a Mann-Whitney U Test for independent samples was used to compare the difference between the mean ranks of the experimental and control group students in the EFL reading skills test after administering the workshop based blended learning program.

**Table (1) Results of the control and Experimental Groups on the post Administration of the EFL Reading Skills Test**

Reading Skills	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Sig. (2 Tailed)
Skimming	Control	23	16.78	386.00	110.50	Significant <math>\leq 0.05</math>
	Experimental	24	30.92	742.00		
Scanning	Control	23	17.80	499.50	133.50	
	Experimental	24	29.94	718.50		
Making predictions	Control	23	18.50	425.50	149.50	
	Experimental	24	29.27	702.50		
Summarizing	Control	23	19.24	442.50	166.50	
	Experimental	24	28.56	685.50		
Making Inferences	Control	23	21.43	493.00	217.00	
	Experimental	24	26.46	635.00		
Total	Control	23	17.91	412.00	136.00	
	Experimental	24	29.83	716.00		

Mann-Whitney U-values for the target EFL reading sub-skills are (110.50, 133.50, 149.50, 166.50, 217.00 respectively) and they all are significant. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean ranks of the control and experimental groups students on the post administration of the EFL reading skills test in favor of the experimental group. These differences are due to using the workshop-based blended program. In other words, the experimental group students outperformed the control group students in their EFL reading comprehension level. Hence, the first hypothesis is verified and accepted.

The improvement of the reading skills in the experimental group can be attributed to the students' motivation and enthusiasm in participating in online activities and learning through the blended workshop using educational sites such as Zunal webquest, Popplet, and Zoom Cloud Meeting. These technological tools increase students' interest in learning and attract their attention. On the other hand, students in the control group learned through the regular way which focused primarily on the teacher-centered teaching with limited student-interaction. Students in the



experimental group therefore were more active in learning through the proposed program.

**Testing the Second Hypothesis:**

The second hypothesis stated that:“There is a statistically significant difference at the.05 level between the mean ranks of the experimental group students on the pre-post administration of the EFL reading skills test in favor of the post one”.

To examine this hypothesis, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks for dependent samples was used to compare the differences between the mean rank of the experimental group students in the EFL reading skills test before and after the administration of the workshop based blended learning program.

**Table (2) Results of the Experimental Group on the Pre-post Administration of the EFL Reading Skills Test**

Reading Skills	Ranks	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Sig. (2 Tailed)
Skimming	Negative Ranks	0	0	0.00	4.09	Significant at 0.05
	Positive Ranks	21	11	231		
	Ties	3				
	Total	24				
Scanning	Negative Ranks	0	0	0.00	4.29	
	Positive Ranks	20	12	276		
	Ties	4				
	Total	24				
Making Predictions	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0	4.03	
	Positive Ranks	24	10.50	210		
	Ties	0				
	Total	24				
Summarizing	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0	4.20	
	Positive Ranks	22	11.50	253		
	Ties	2				
	Total	24				
Making Inferences	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0	3.46	
	Positive Ranks	15	8.00	120		
	Ties	9				
	Total	24				
Total	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0	4.30	
	Positive Ranks	24	12.50	300		
	Ties	0				
	Total	24				

Wilcoxon Z-values for the target EFL reading sub-skills are (4.09, 4.03, 4.03, 4.20, 3.46 respectively) and they all are significant at the level

0.05. Comparing the mean ranks in the pre-post administration of the EFL reading skills test reveals that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre-post administration of the EFL reading skills test in the total score. These significant differences are in favor of the post-administration.

The mean ranks of the experimental group students' post-test implies that the experimental group students' level in the overall EFL reading skills test improved due to the workshop based blended program which provides meaningful instruction using different technological tools that can meet a variety of student needs. Accordingly, the second hypothesis of the present research is proved and verified.

To ensure the effectiveness of the workshop based blended program on improving the 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary stage students' reading skills, the effect size was calculated using the formula  $r=z/\sqrt{N}$  (Cohen, 1988). The following table (3) illustrates the effect size of the program on the students' reading skills.

**Table (3) Effect Size of the Program on the Students' Reading Skills**

Independent Variable	Domains of the Dependent Variable	Z	N	Value of ( $\eta^2$ )	Level of the Effect Size
The Proposed Workshop- Based Blended Program	Skimming	4.021	24	0.87	High
	Scanning	4.21		0.84	
	Making Predictions	4.02		0.85	
	Summarizing	4.23		0.89	
	Making Inferences	3.44		0.92	
	Total	4.29		0.90	

Results in table (3) indicate that the effect size ( $\eta^2$ ) values for each reading sub-skill are ( respectively). It is obvious that the values exceeded (0.50) which reflects a high effect size for all the target EFL reading sub-skills. The effect size can be explained as follows:

The effect size ( $\eta^2$ ) values which ranged between (0.86 and 0.934) for the target EFL reading sub-skills points to high impact of the experimental treatment in this research. The proposed program developed the first grade secondary stage students' EFL reading skills significantly.

This illustrates that the use of the Workshop-based blended program enhanced the experimental group students' reading skills to a great extent. It

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is obvious that 88% of the total variance in overall reading skills can be ascribed to the implementation of the workshop based blended program since it raised the students' interactivity and participation as well as the motivation to learn. The high effect size is attributed to the extra practice and instruction that students had during the implementation of the proposed program.

The educational techniques included in the program besides the technological ones, such as minilesson, guided and independent practice, and conference exposed students to the material and gave them more opportunities to interact during the group discussion. Participation in the blended workshop also helped students to organize, manage, be responsible of their learning. They participated, elaborated, explained, and defended their ideas.

### **Discussion**

#### **The results of this research revealed that:**

- 1- The workshop-based blended program was effective in improving 1<sup>st</sup> grade secondary stage students' reading skills. This can be assured by these points:
  - The experimental group students excelled in comparison to their counterparts on the post reading skills test.
  - The experimental group students' performance on the post administration of the reading skills test was much better when comparing students' pre-mean scores to their post-mean scores.

These results consistent with several studies which revealed that blended learning has a positive effect on developing reading skills such as Kheirzadeh & Birgani (2018); Karkour (2016) ; Al Zumer , Rafeai Bader Eddin & Al-Rahman (2013); Bejat, Yamini and Bajeri (۲۰۱۱). Moreover, the current research appears to be a complementary for the findings of previous studies such as De Wild (2017), Timlick (2016), Crane (2014), Wilson (2013), and Thomas (2012), which showed that there is a strong relationship between using the workshop model and improving reading skills. Results of the current research add up to those of the previous studies and highlighted the importance of supporting learning models with technology.

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**The researcher has noticed the following points during the treatment:**

- By the end of the experiment, the experimental group achieved a high level of EFL reading skills. They enjoyed learning through the minilessons, chatting, conferencing, answering some reading assignments, and sharing their answers, so their motivation towards learning EFL reading skills was increased as well.
- The research showed that students were very interested and extremely motivated to learn, since they generally struggle with focus and motivation to follow through on assignments.
- The teacher was comfortable with teaching a workshop model lesson with technology. Students had multiple opportunities to engage with the ideas in whole-group, small-group, and individual contexts.
- Students can then work in small groups or independently on the key learning activity. This allows the teacher to confer with other students who require assistance, differentiate instruction, and reduce cognitive overload in struggling learners.
- It takes advantage of the Web-based and digital resources that allow for individualization and immediate and personalized feedback and to support our low-performing readers in the digital age.

### **Recommendations**

- **Based on the results and conclusions of the current research, the following recommendations are proposed:**
  - 1- It is necessary for EFL teachers to implement the blended programs in their classes.
  - 2- Well-equipped computer facilities, language labs and appropriate technical and administrative support should be provided. Teachers' decision to use Workshop-based blended program (WBBP) in the classroom can be influenced by the availability of resources, convenience of tools and their personal experiences.
  - 3-Teacher training is important for the successful implementation of (WBBP). Teachers should connect their knowledge and skills for (WBBP) with textbooks they use for their actual teaching, and evolve effective teaching and learning strategies for English language to develop students' motivation.

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- 4- The ministry of education should adopt and support the idea of designing Workshop-based blended programs and encourage teachers to apply and use Workshop-based blended programs.
  - 5- Ministry of Education should develop training program in order to foster and encourage the use of these types of Workshop-based blended programs and further improve the quality of language practices and exercises in their classes.
  - 6- The program could be beneficial to all language teachers who intend to facilitate and improve the processes of assessment, evaluation as well as language practice in general.

#### **Suggestions for further Research**

**The following ideas may be considered for further researches:**

1. Investigating the impact of workshop based program on other school levels and language skills.
2. Conducting similar studies that investigate the effect of using workshop-based blended program on the language skills (speaking, writing, reading and listening) in other educational stages.
3. Investigating the effectiveness of using workshop-based blended program in improving students' twenty first century skills.

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