

Blended EFL Listening: Effects on Performance and Strategy Use

Zola Chi-Chin Lai

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8620-4929>

Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of a blended teaching approach versus traditional instruction on listening comprehension and strategy use among EFL students in a Taiwanese university. Using a quasi-experimental design, 103 low-intermediate students were divided into experimental (n=52) and control (n=51) groups over 18 weeks. The experimental group engaged in pre-class activities (audio, quizzes, videos) and collaborative in-class tasks, while the control group received traditional instruction. Results showed the experimental group had significantly greater listening improvement (mean increase: 10.26 vs. 5.00 points) and higher metacognitive and social/affective strategy use. Additionally, 84% reported increased listening confidence. Findings highlight the effectiveness of blended learning in enhancing EFL listening skills.

KEYWORDS

Blended Teaching, EFL Listening Comprehension, Listening Strategies, Collaborative Learning, Pre-Class Preparation, Lower-Intermediate EFL Learners

INTRODUCTION

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, developing effective listening skills remains a significant challenge for many learners. Traditional approaches to teaching listening comprehension have often relied on in-class activities such as audio playback, exercises, explanations, and pair speaking practice. However, with the advent of technology and the growing emphasis on active learning, there is an increasing interest in blended teaching methods that combine pre-class preparation with interactive in-class activities.

This study aims to investigate the efficacy of a blended teaching approach in improving EFL students' listening performance and strategy use. While previous research has examined various aspects of blended learning in language education (e.g., Moradimokhles & Hwang, 2022; Wang & Zhang, 2022), there is limited empirical evidence on its specific impact on listening skills and strategy development.

The present study compares two instructional approaches: a traditional method and a blended method. The traditional method follows a conventional sequence of in-class listening exercises, comprehension questions, teacher explanations, repetition drills, and pair speaking practice. In contrast, the blended method incorporates pre-class listening tasks, Zuvio quizzes, and related video materials. Class time is then utilized to review students' pre-class Zuvio quiz responses and audio file exercises, as well as to engage in collaborative activities related to the audio content, such as debates, World Café discussions, and role-playing exercises. This research addresses two primary questions:

DOI: 10.4018/IJAET.368247

1. To what extent does a blended teaching approach affect EFL students' listening performance compared to a traditional approach over the course of one semester?
2. How does the use of listening strategies differ between students taught using the blended approach and those taught using the traditional approach?

By examining these questions, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on effective pedagogical practices in EFL listening instruction. The findings may have important implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and the integration of technology in language classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening Comprehension in EFL Education

Listening comprehension is a critical skill in EFL education, accounting for 40–50% of communication time (Azmi Bingol et al., 2014). Despite its importance, learners encounter numerous linguistic, physical, and psychological challenges that impede progress. On the linguistic level, speech speed, accent variation, and vocabulary limitations are predominant barriers. Ramadhianti and Somba (2021) reported that 98.8% of students struggle with accent variations, consistent with Azmi Bingol et al.'s (2014) findings. Similarly, Jyoti (2020) noted that 69% of learners find accent differences challenging. Vocabulary gaps further exacerbate comprehension difficulties, particularly among lower-proficiency learners (Hardiyanto et al., 2021). Graham's (2006) study demonstrated how limited vocabulary and poor grammar compound comprehension challenges, often leading to stress and disengagement (Tran & Duong, 2020).

Text length and complexity amplify these issues. Longer texts increase the cognitive load, reducing comprehension, especially for lower-level learners (Azmi Bingol et al., 2014; Ramadhianti & Somba, 2021). Ramadhianti and Somba (2021) found that 56% of students struggle with lengthy descriptions, highlighting the interplay between linguistic and cognitive challenges.

Physical and psychological factors further complicate listening. Poor recording quality and environmental noise undermine comprehension (Flowerdew & Miller, 1992; Syadiah, 2017; Yagang, 1994). Psychologically anxiety is also a significant barrier. Avci and Doghonadze (2017) revealed that learners feel heightened nervousness when listening to native speakers, intensifying linguistic and environmental difficulties.

To address these multifaceted challenges, two key approaches have emerged: strategy development and technology integration. Kassem (2015) emphasized the importance of listening strategies, noting that frequent strategy use improves comprehension. Namaziandost et al. (2019) highlighted the role of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies in enhancing listening skills. Recently, technology has gained attention as a tool for listening comprehension improvement. Masykuri (2022) found that learning management systems and YouTube videos significantly enhance students' skills, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings suggest that combining strategic skill development with technological tools offers a comprehensive solution to the interconnected challenges of EFL listening comprehension.

Listening Comprehension and Strategy use in Language Learning

Listening comprehension remains a challenging skill for many language learners (Bao & Guan, 2019). Oxford (1990) identified six key language learning strategies—memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social—while recent studies focus on cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies for listening (Bao & Guan, 2019; Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020). Cognitive strategies, like inferencing and summarizing, help learners actively process input (Bao & Guan, 2019), while metacognitive strategies, such as planning and evaluating, are used more

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