COMBINING FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION AND ONLINE LEARNING IN A YOUNG LEARNER EFL SPEAKING CLASSROOMS

Elfiondri[1*], Faisal Mustafa[2], Siti Sarah Fitriani[2], Wiwiek Pratiwi[2], Puspawati[3]
Affiliation: Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang, Indonesia[1]
Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia[2]
Program Studi Sastra Indonesia, Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang, Indonesia[3]
Email: elfiondri@bunghatta.ac.id, faisal.mustafa@unsyiah.ac.id, ssfitriani@unsyiah.ac.id,
wpratiwhi@gmail.com, puspawati@bunghatta.ac.id
*Corresponding Author Email: elfiondri@bunghatta.ac.id

Abstract

This study was aimed at finding out whether the implementation of blended learning by combining face-to-face interaction and online learning simultaneously in a young learner EFL speaking classroom could significantly improve their speaking proficiency. The data were collected by administering a monologue speaking test before and after the treatment by using this type of blended learning. The pretest and post-test scores were compared statistically using Wilcoxon's Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test, which is a non-parametric significance test, because the data were not normally distributed based on the Shapiro Wilk test, even after data transformation attempts. In addition, the effect sizes were calculated by using a statistic analogous to the r used in the Mann–Whitney Test. The analysis results showed that the overall speaking proficiency significantly improved (p-value = 0.000). When speaking skills were analyzed individually, the p-value for all speaking skills showed significant evidence of improvement. The effect sizes were large except for the vocabulary component. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the implementation of blended learning by combining face-to-face interaction and online learning simultaneously in a young learner EFL speaking classroom could significantly improve the students' speaking proficiency. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers apply this blended learning model to promote speaking skill practice in an EFL language classroom.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Hybrid Learning, Online Learning, EFL Speaking

1 Introduction

Speaking is an interactive process for resulting meaning that covers the production or reception and processing of information in the context. Learning to speak English is not easy, especially for young students in Indonesia, considering they have limited English exposure. In that case, there are certain elements the learners need to consider, such as grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation.

Based on a preliminary observation in one of the high schools in Indonesia, English was taught twice a week (200 minutes), which is actually very minimum for language exposure (Muthalib, Bahri Ys, & Mustafa, 2019, p. 167). Most students still found difficulty to speak English (Elfiondri, 2018, p.1). They commonly did not talk or say anything during the English teaching and learning process. When the teacher asked them to work and discuss in pairs or in a group, they ended up chatting in their L1. The students often repeated the same sentences and sometimes rephrased the sentences that has been uttered. It was also difficult to express ideas grammatically. The lack of vocabulary made it more difficult for them to express ideas. It is important for the listener to

understand the ideas since comprehension is the power of understanding a language (spoken and written). Sometimes they used Indonesian words or suddenly stopped in the middle of a conversation. Moreover, the students' pronunciation was so poor that it absolutely affected their speaking fluency. The writers spotted a potential problem that demotivates students in learning. The media presented by the teachers were old-fashioned. For better students' motivation, leading to better achievement, the learning process should provide ample opportunity for innovation, creativity, and independence of the students according to their interests, talents, and physical and psychological development of learners. One of such methods is blended learning.

Previous studies showed that blended learning could contribute to learning effectiveness and student satisfaction (Djiwandono, 2013; Shih, 2010, pp. 105–106; Tosun, 2015). However, in such previous studies, online learning was performed by each student outside the classroom without teachers' guidance. This can be less effective because the teacher cannot effectively control the students' learning process, which opens the possibility of cheating. In addition, those studies were intended for adult learners, which may not be applicable to young learners. Combining face-to-face interaction and online learning all in the classroom would increase their progress because it would be easy for teachers to monitor the process, such as their interaction with others. However, there has been no research that investigated the effect of combining face-to-face interaction and online learning simultaneously in the classroom. Therefore, the current research is intended to find out whether blended learning by combining face-to-face interaction and online learning simultaneously in the classroom is effective to promote speaking ability among young EFL learners.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Blended Learning

Blended learning is an effective learning strategy that combines online and face-to-face instruction with a variety of teaching methods (So & Brush, 2008, p. 3). Online learning, in addition to face-to-face interaction in a classroom, takes place outside the classroom, which enables students to interact with each other by sending information or discussing it from various sources (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, pp. 96–98). Shih (2010, p. 896) found that blended learning gives many advantages to students because they can benefit from self-autonomous and collaborative learning, peer feedback, the teacher's feedback, and self-reflection.

Most previous studies on blended learning found that the greatest increase in language proficiency was in the vocabulary aspect. Based on a research study by Djiwandono (2013, pp. 217–218), blended learning gave a significant impact on the learners' vocabulary mastery. A less recent study relevant to the present study was conducted by Laufer and Shmueli (1997, pp. 105–106), and they reported that this learning model made better vocabulary learning.

Many benefits of blended learning have been identified. According to Thorne (2003, p. 132) using online learning in blended learning, learning materials are very accessible to students, learning can be more targeted and focused, and students can interact both with teachers and peers. To maximize these benefits, students should be encouraged to share and support each other (Thorne, 2003, p. 133).

There are different opinions from experts who determine the percentage for each way, whether it is face-to-face or online. Boelens, Voet, and De Wever (2018) implemented blended learning, with 25% of the learning that happened online. According to Allen and Seman (2003, p. 6), a course can be considered to implement blended learning if at least 30% of the course content is delivered online.

2.2   The Teaching of Speaking Skills

In the foreign language learning process, Celik and Yavuz (2015, p. 2138) that speaking proficiency is very significant because it is considered a parameter used to judge whether a language learner is successful in learning the language. They also added that among students and teachers speaking has become the ultimate purpose of learning the language (Kim, 2004, p. 18).

There are five skills in speaking, and thus the teaching and learning process needs to address those skills. In order to address them, teachers should consider some principles as listed by Brown (2004, pp. 275–276) in the following.

  a) The teaching technique selected should be based on what the students need.
  b) Use teaching techniques which are motivating students intrinsically.
  c) Use contextual authentic language

The language skills which need to be addressed include grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation.

2.3 Grammar

According to Patel and Jain (2008, p. 17) grammar means an attempt to develop concepts, principles, and rules relating to usage and language structure. Hadfield and Hadfield (2008, p. 18) noted that grammar is a description of the language system which shows us how we order the words into sentences, how we combine them, and how we change the form of words to change their meaning. Heaton (1990, p. 5) suggested that students need to have the ability to use grammatical features correctly and appropriately and distinguish the incorrect use of grammar in contexts.

2.4 Vocabulary

Claimed as the core of a language, the teaching, and learning of vocabulary have been extensively explored through research studies. Aziz, Kasim, Mustafa, and Putra (2019) found that vocabulary was the most difficult sub-skill even for advanced EFL learners, and it correlates to difficulties in other sub-skills. To understand most authentic texts, one needs at least the vocabulary size in the levels at least 8,000 most frequently used words (Nation, 2006). However, EFL learners do not usually have that size of vocabulary based on research by Mustafa (2019, pp. 366–367), who also found that students picked up some vocabulary from every level, which is a result of unplanned vocabulary instruction.

2.5 Comprehension

Comprehension is the purpose of listening and reading, and what contributes most to comprehension is vocabulary (Laufer, 1989, pp. 316–317). In speaking, comprehension involves such complex processes as memory process, information process, and language process including word recognition (Rost, 2011, p. 54). In reading, the components include basic levels such as "working memory and decoding, to high-level reading skills, such as inference-making skills and metacognition" (Tarchi, 2015, p. 80). However, Megawati, Mustafa, and Bahri Ys (2016, p. 352) found that most undergraduate students majoring in EFL experienced serious problems in comprehending language produced by native speakers of English.

2.6 Fluency

According to Brown (2004, p. 269), fluency should be the learning goal starting from the elementary level, and it should still be the target for the next level of language acquisition. Segalowitz (2016, p. 80) stated that better fluency occurs when a speaker is able to internalize pronunciation and intonation and control grammatical accuracy, which makes them able to focus on meaning. In previous studies, fluency was measured based on three dimensions, i.e. speech rates, a different aspect of pausing, and correction and repetition (Skehan, 2009, p. 510).

2.7 Pronunciation

In the EFL context, the teaching pronunciation is often neglected probably due to incompetent or unconfident teachers (Çimenli, 2015, p. 635; León Meis, 2000). As a result, pronunciation is mostly problematic for EFL learners (Şimon, Kilyeni, & Suciu, 2015, p. 2158), and L1 interference is much observable in pronunciation level. It is also one of the essential parts of language teaching (Akyol, 2013, p. 1456). Therefore, the teaching of pronunciation has become an innovation in

language teaching. Cerezo, Calderón, and Romero (2019) used state-of-the-art computer games showing a hologram of pronunciation to facilitate students practicing pronunciation. A study by Atli and Bergil (2012) has found that pronunciation instruction facilitates improvement in overall speaking performance.

2.8   Blended Learning in Teaching Speaking

In blended learning, there are different kinds of application procedures proposed in previous studies (Klentien & Wannasawade, 2016, p. 709; Soekartawi, 2006, p. 98; Tosun, 2015, pp. 643–644). Blended learning procedures have also been applied in teaching speaking skills, such as by Kırkgöz (2011, pp. 4–6) with the following complete procedure.

The procedure starts with the need assessment to investigate the students' problems in speaking. The problem is decided by comparing the students' speaking skill level to the intended level. With that information in hand, the appropriate tasks are designed or selected from books or other teaching materials. In delivery, the tasks are presented in a sequence of pre-task, task cycles, and reports. In pre-task, students are introduced to the topic and they are prepared to deal with the next activities by reviewing vocabulary and grammatical rules. In the task cycle, students are given instructions and explanations about the task. After completing the task, students rehearse before reporting their work to the rest of the class. Finally, teachers provide feedback and justification.

In the reporting step, students recorded themselves reporting the task. The task can then be uploaded to the e-learning system or viewed directly in the classroom or after class. Students can be instructed to provide constructive feedback to themselves and their classmates. In Kırkgöz (2011, p. 6), the students were assigned to record another video of themselves speaking outside the class hour, to be accessed using a rating scale in the next class meeting.

2.9   Young EFL Learners

Although the concept of the critical period in language learning has been debated by many (Biaylstok, 1997; Lin, Hung, & Wang, 2016; White & Genesee, 1996), many are also in favor (Friedmann & Rusou, 2015; Hartshorne, Tenenbaum, & Pinker, 2018; Johnson & Newport, 1991). In addition, there is a consensus that children learn a language differently compared to adult learners (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015, p. 156; Copland & Ni, 2019, p. 149; Macaro & Lee, 2013). Therefore, efforts have been put to categorize language learners into young and adult learners. Roth and Wright (2000, p. 198) consider children between 6 and 16 as young learners. Gifted children who have advanced language skills will not benefit much from their giftedness if special instruction or exposure is not given at an early age (Baser & Kanar, 2014, p. 248). In addition, Stakanova and Tolstikhina (2014, pp. 456–457) provided many reasons for teaching a foreign language to children at an early age, among others, are the possibility to be more L1 proficient, and better improvement in "memory, thinking perception, and imagination."

Lack of motivation can be an inhibiting factor in teaching a foreign language to young learners. Motivation is significant for foreign language teaching and the learning process among young learners. Research has found that there is a correlation between motivation and language learning success (Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, & Milburn, 1995). Stakanova and Tolstikhina (2014, p. 458) suggest using technology to raise students' motivation in learning. Similarly, using computer games is another teaching technique to develop students' motivation (Turgut & Irgin, 2009, p. 763), as is using songs (Sariçoban & Kuç, 2010) or creative drama (Demircioğlu, 2010). In addition to a lack of motivation, anxiety has been found to be a problem in learning a foreign language among young learners. Therefore, the teaching and learning process should be designed in a way that they are unaware that they are learning a foreign language. In a research study conducted by Ekin and Damar (2013, p. 604), when young learners were asked how they would teach English if they had been a teacher, they voiced the need to use technology as a way to make a better learning experience.   Therefore, using videos that are accessed online is an alternative technique of minimizing language learning anxiety.

3 Methodology

This study was a quantitative study with a pre-experimental design, involving only the experimental group because the objective of this experiment was to find out whether the students could improve their speaking skills after the instruction, without any intention to compare the students' improvement using other methods or media. For that purpose, a speaking test was given as a pretest prior to the intervention, and another speaking test following the treatment.

3.1 Population and Sample

The results of this research were intended to generalize to young learners, as the population, with similar characteristics to the selected research sample. The sample was selected using a cluster random sampling technique. One class in one of the second-grade junior high schools in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, was selected as the sample of the research to receive the intervention. There were 20 students in the class, consisting of 11 females and 9 males. There were between 14 and 15 years of age, the age considered young learners by Michel, Kormos, Brunfaut, and Ratajczak (2019, p. 34) and Roth and Wright (2000, p. 198).

3.2 Treatment Procedure

The teaching procedure in the treatment was based on the Indonesian high school curriculum, which recommends the use of the scientific approach (Mustafa, 2018, p. 51). The approach consists of five primary steps, i.e. observing, questioning, collecting data, associating, and communicating, and online learning was used in the two of the steps – observing and collecting data. The topic for the treatment was text organization, language features (syntax, phonetics, phonology, and morphology), and the purpose of a recount text.

In the observing step, the students were first divided into groups because the school lacked computers. The teachers taught the students how to access online learning materials on YouTube. After that, students were instructed to find a video related to the recount text before the teacher gave them one. The students were asked to compare the video they found and the one provided by the teacher based on the generic structures, language features, and social functions of the videos. In the second step, teachers asked students whether they have questions regarding the videos and the topic.

In the third step, the students were asked to find related videos on YouTube and collected information regarding the text organization, language feature, and purpose of the videos by individually filling out the provided worksheet. In the next step, the students compared and discussed their completed workshop in their groups. In the last step, they presented their answer in front of the class, and the teacher provided feedback.

3.3 Test and Scoring Procedure

For the test, the students were asked to speak about one topic which they can choose between "unforgettable moment" or "my holiday. The students were given 15 minutes to prepare before they were invited in turn to speak in monologue for up to three minutes, which was recorded for careful scoring by two writers. The same procedure was applied to the post-test. Inter-rater reliability level for the pretest was 0.867 and 0.871 for the post-test, calculated through the correlation between total scores given by rater 1 and those given by rater 2.

The students' speaking performance was scored by using a classic scoring rubric provided by Harris (1969, p. 84). The speaking performance was divided into five speaking components, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. The highest score for each component is 5, and 1 for the lowest score. The scores were later converted into percentages and used when necessary. The detailed rubric is provided in the appendix.

3.4 Data Analysis

Since the data in this research are numerical data, Parametric Paired Sample T-Test or non-parametric Wilcoxon's Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test was used, depending on the data

distribution. In this study, the data were found to be not normally distributed based on the Shapiro Wilk test ($p < 0.05$), and data transformations proposed by Mangiafico (2016, pp. 703–721) did not affect the distribution, Nayak and Hazra (2011) suggested using Wilcoxon's Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test for the analysis. The significance level used in this research was 0.05. This small significance level was used to avoid type 1 error, i.e. rejecting the null hypothesis when it is actually true. In addition, the effect size was also calculated by using a statistic analogous to the r used in the Mann–Whitney Test as suggested by Mangiafico (2016, p. 244), who also provide the interpretation. Calculating the effect size is significant because it is "a statistical measure of the size of an effect in a population, which allows researchers to describe how far scores shifted in the population, or the percent of variance that can be explained by a given variable" (Privitera, 2018, p. 259).

4   Results and Findings

To better visualize the scores that the students obtained in the pre-test and post-test, Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and Shapiro Wilk test for data distribution.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Pretest

Components	Min	Med	Max	Mean	sd	Shapiro Wilk Test	
						SW	p-value
Pretest							
Grammar	20	40	60	35	12.773	0.779	0.000
Vocabulary	20	40	60	38	8.944	0.611	0.000
Comprehension	20	20	40	23	7.327	0.433	0.000
Fluency	20	20	40	23	7.327	0.433	0.000
Pronunciation	20	20	60	31	13.727	0.739	0.000
Total	24	28	48	30	7.167	0.813	0.001
Post-test							
Grammar	40	40	80	48	11.965	0.671	0.000
Vocabulary	20	40	60	43	9.787	0.660	0.000
Comprehension	20	40	60	46	13.139	0.780	0.000
Fluency	20	40	60	46	13.139	0.780	0.000
Pronunciation	20	40	60	45	14.327	0.795	0.000
Total	28	44	60	45.6	9.394	0.956	0.471

As reported earlier, the results of the Shapiro Wilk test did not provide any evidence that the data were normally distributed (p-value <0.05) except for the total score in the post-test (p-value > 0.05). Therefore, a non-parametric test, i.e. Wilcoxon's Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test, was used to calculate whether the scores in the pretest and those in the post-test were significantly different. The results of the calculation are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Results of Wilcoxon's Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test for Speaking Components

Component	Mean		V	p-value	Effect size
	Pretest	Post-test			
Grammar	35	48	66	0.002	0.738
Vocabulary	38	43	15	0.037	0.500
Comprehension	23	46	171	0.000	0.895
Fluency	23	46	171	0.000	0.895
Pronunciation	31	45	78	0.001	0.766
Total	30	45.6	210	0.000	0.881

Table 2 shows that all speaking components, including when the scores are combined, significantly improved after intervention with varying effect sizes. According to the interpretation proposed by Mangiafico (2016, p. 268), the effect sizes were large except for vocabulary. Better visualization of the improvements after the treatment with blended learning by combining face-to-face interaction and online learning simultaneously is presented in the following boxplots.
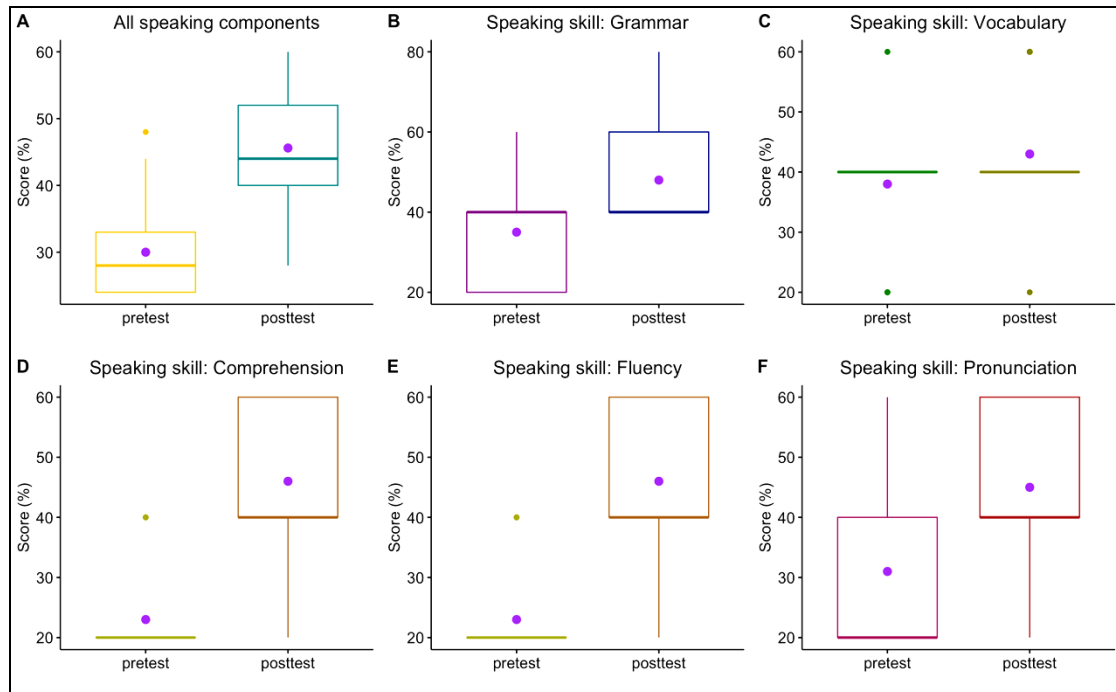

Figure 1. Combined Boxplots of Differences Between Pretest and Post-Test Scores

In Figure 1, the horizontal line inside each box represents the median of the scores, and the purple-filled small circles represent the mean of the scores. The most interesting finding is shown by plot C, speaking skill of vocabulary, where the median of the two tests are similar, while the difference is shown by the mean, which is validated by the significant test presented in Table 2 above.

Since this study aimed to find out whether combining face-to-face interaction and online learning simultaneously in teaching speaking was effective in terms of language achievement among young learners, the writers collected the data by administering a speaking test to the students before and after the treatments. The writer marked the students' speaking proficiency by evaluating grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. To test the hypotheses, the writer used Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test (nonparametric statistics) since the data were not normally distributed. The result showed that there was a significant difference in students' achievement between pre-test and post-test results for all speaking components.

Through blended learning using video, young learners were more interested to learn speaking because they can learn, discuss, and share their knowledge both in pairs and in a group. They also could freely choose their own interesting videos to practice their speaking. As one of the cooperative learning techniques, this activity was effective because it trained students to be more active in class. Swaffar and Vlatten (1997, pp. 181–183) also found that videos motivate students to participate in the learning process. All of these additional elements helped students grasp the meaning of the spoken language more easily between two or more speakers.

The most significant progress they made was in the fluency and comprehension aspects. After treatment, the average score increased for both aspects which was 28.75% with large effect sizes. Blended learning using video helped them improve their fluency by doing speaking practice in pairs. As previously found by Lackman (2010, p. 4), working in pairs increased students' fluency.

For example, the teacher asked them to work in pairs then reminded them to speak at length on the topic for a certain period of time and switched roles, and repeated the activity. Besides, the comprehension aspect was also improved by doing this activity. As proposed by Herron, York, Corrie, and Cole (2006, p. 295), videos are recommended media to convey information to the student to promote material understanding. It also helped them improve their comprehension because they practiced by asking and describing certain topics, as in this case by describing their childhood moment and their holiday experience.

Significant progress was also observed in pronunciation (17.5%) and grammar (16.25%), also with large effect sizes. These improvements were motivated by the use of videos in online learning. Herron et al. (2006, p. 285) have found that videos can support learning efforts by improving grammar and pronunciation proficiency. The fact that the students repeated paying the videos during speaking practice resulted in the acquisition of those speaking skills. The improvements, despite significance based on statistical analysis, were not as significant as the previous two skills because the students only replayed the video several times due to limited time during the learning process. In addition, it is less likely for the teacher to be able to check how students pronounce words and use grammatical utterances during classroom practice.

In the vocabulary aspect, the improvement was 6.25%. Although significant evidence of improvement was provided by statistical analysis, the effect size was medium, the lowest in this study. However, the use of video through conventional delivery in previous studies gave a very positive impact on the improvement of students' vocabulary competence (Rahayu, 2013, p. 50). This vocabulary aspect only slightly increased in the current study because the students only focused on the content of the video. They only tried to string up the story as the outline that the teacher had given to make it more interesting without thinking about the vocabulary choices. Therefore, they used the same vocabulary repeatedly. Some of them also imitated their friends, and they were reluctant to look into the dictionary or ask the teacher.

The results of this study are subject to some weaknesses. The first weakness concerns with infrastructure and facilities in the school. It would be less challenging if the learning activities were conducted in a special classroom such as a computer laboratory so that each student had easy access to what was presented in the learning process. In this study, the writers provided all tools required (such as laptops) with a limited number. Therefore, the students should be divided into groups during the learning process. The students could not freely access the materials provided because each group only had one laptop. Some of them just stayed silent because other students in the group were too active and dominated the group. Second, the teacher could not manage the learning process well. The teacher was overwhelmed by controlling students one by one. With this innovation in the teaching process, there should be some teacher assistants who help during the learning process, so they can overcome the problem when students need help. Thus, the teacher can focus on controlling how students practice skills significant for improvement in all speaking aspects.

5   Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether applying blended learning by combining face-to-face interaction and online learning simultaneously in the classroom using video can promote young learners' speaking ability. The data were collected by administering a speaking test before and after the treatment. The scores of both tests were compared by using a non-parametric statistical analysis, i.e. Wilcoxon's Matched Pairs Signed Rank Test. The analysis results show that the p-value for all speaking skills, be it analyzed separately or in combination, was lower than 0.05. Therefore, it could be concluded that the students' speaking proficiency improved significantly after they were taught by using the blended learning technique. In addition, based on the analysis of effect sizes using a statistic analogous to the r used in the Mann–Whitney test, only vocabulary showed medium effect size while the effect sizes for other speaking skills were large.

In conclusion, after this type of blended learning was applied in a young learners' speaking class, some improvements in the students speaking proficiency were obtained. Thus, this activity is recommended to be applied to achieve the target of learning and to promote better, more interesting speaking skill practices in an EFL young learner classroom.

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