

## APPLYING A BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' TOEIC LISTENING PERFORMANCE IN A TOEIC CLASS

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### SUMMARY

This paper investigates the use of blended learning in an on-ground traditional face-to-face TOEIC course and seeks to determine the extent to which the blended TOEIC listening course significantly affects the improvement in students' TOEIC listening performance. The purpose is to explore how to prepare English teachers to create a productive blended learning environment for their students. To carry out this study both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through continuous evaluation, questionnaires at the end of the course, and the pretest and posttest at the beginning and the end of the course respectively. The results from the data revealed that the Blended TOEIC listening course significantly affected the improvement in students' TOEIC listening performance. In addition, Most of the students involved in the study are generally happy about the program and they recognize the benefits of the curriculum in enhancing interaction between them and their classmates as well as their teacher. Although the results of the present research indicated that Blended TOEIC listening course was perceived positively by learners, further research is still necessary to examine if the similar results and findings might be achieved in other courses in different educational environments.

**Keywords:** *blended learning; TOEIC; listening; blended TOEIC listening course; action research.*

### INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of online technology, the modern classroom is changing, nobody can deny the effectiveness of applying information communication and technology and the internet in foreign language teaching; therefore, living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a lot of new technologies coming into beings, teachers of English need to make use of these new technologies to apply in their English language teaching. The computer with the internet is the one among the achievements of the new technologies and computers have had a great marvelous impact in English language teaching, so merging these two fields – computers and English language is inevitable in a world where many things are being automated and implemented into computer programs.

#### Statement of the problem

Listening ability is one of the important skills in foreign language learning and it remains one of the least understood processes in language learning. Hardly has anyone doubted nowadays that listening skills must be trained

and practised regularly and continuously. The contemporary application of high – technology in language teaching and learning is listening online which can also be consolidated in traditional classroom listening with the audio from cassettes or CDs. Researchers and language practitioners have also perpetuated that listening skills could be chosen by the learners for a long period of time and the present advantages of high technology allow the use of a combination of learning techniques in which the method blended learning of listening skills in English classrooms is employed and applied effectively. From my own experience as an English teacher in teaching English in general and listening skill in specific, I have found that students encounter many difficulties when studying listening and since having a big gap in listening comprehension, when converging on the TOEIC syllabus they tend to be disheartened. Therefore, my study attempts to examine the practice of blended learning in the sense of its classic definition and present some evidence of its positive contribution to the students' TOEIC listening performance.

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### Aims of the study

This study seeks to accomplish two goals. The first goal is to discover to what extent the blended TOEIC listening course affect the improvement in students' TOEIC listening performance and the other one is to discover the attitudes of students about the blended learning environment during their TOEIC listening course.

### Scope of the study

The study is idiosyncratic to a TOEIC listening class (TOEIC 450) in an English Center in Thai Nguyen, Viet Nam and restricted to the exposure of a limited number (N:16) of students as participants. The course is titled "TOEIC Listening Skills" and it aims at improving the listening comprehension of the learners. In addition, all the participants certified that they have a sufficient amount of background on the information technologies and most of the participants were students at colleges or universities in Thai Nguyen.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Definition of bended learning

In general blended learning is defined as a combination of online and face -to-face education, but the definition somewhat varies according to different scholars. According to Sharma (2010) [1], there are three definitions of "blended learning" that are pertinent in the world of education. The prototypical interpretation of the term is defined by Oliver and Trigwel (2005) [2] and from their view, blended learning is "the integrated combination of traditional learning with web based online approaches". "Traditional learning" is understood as classroom face-to-face language classes. Two other definitions refer to either a combination of technologies or a combination of methodologies [1] and the educational effect of blended learning. Considering the features and educational effects, blended learning has become an issue of great interest lying in the apparent fact that there is no single way to meet the needs of various learners and to achieve an optimal level of learning.

### Learning outcomes in blended learning

According to Mugenyi Justice Kintu and Chang Zhu (2016) [3], there are four factors that make up the learning outcomes of a blended learning course: they are intrinsic motivation, satisfaction, knowledge construction and learning performance.

The first factor is **intrinsic motivation** which is used to measure the learners' experiences with regard to the experimental tasks set in the blended learning intervention; it is also considered as a learning outcome. The learners' intrinsic motivation can be negatively influenced by emotional feelings of anxiety, nervousness and tension among learners taking part in blended learning environments.

The second factor and another learning outcome is **satisfaction**. According to Naaj, Nachouki and Ankit (2012) [4], the satisfaction of learners under blended learning environments is the baseline requirement in order for a successful implementation plan. Debourgh (1999) [5] noted a high connection between learner satisfaction and the teachers' work especially in terms of availability and feedback time to students. According to Bower and Kamata (2000) [6], technology with reliable and accessible equipment is essential for learner satisfaction.

In addition, research shows that the learning process from others as a way of **knowledge construction** in online learning has resulted from learners exchanging ideas as well as sharing information.

**Learning performance** is the last learning outcome. When comparing the learner performance while doing traditional face-to-face instruction with blended learning, it shows that blended learning instruction yields better performance [7] although the contrary has also been found out in other studies [8]. According to Kwak, Menezes and Sherwood (2013) [9], there is no effect of blended learning on the performance of students in a statistics course. Or even in some studies, performance in blended courses has been the same as in traditional face-to-face as noted by

Delialioglu and Yildirim (2009) [10], superior or better [11] or even worse [8].

In this study, not all factors mentioned above was dealt with, only satisfaction and learning performance were considered to be the main criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the blended TOEIC listening course.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research questions

The research is conducted to address the following two research questions:

(1) *To what extent does the blended TOEIC listening course affect the improvement in students' TOEIC listening performance?*

(2) *What are the students' attitudes towards the blended learning environment during their TOEIC listening course?*

### Research approach

Action research was adopted as the research approach to answer the two research questions and achieve the aim and objectives of the study and it was considered the best approach to do this study for three main reasons. First, the aim of action research is "to intervene in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes and, even better, improvements in practice" [12]. Second, action research is a problem-solving approach for a particular teaching or learning situation. Finally, Beatty (2003) [13] states that action research is very useful for teachers and researchers trying to find out how and for that purposes Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be used to assist learning.

### Participants of the study

Since the study was designed to assess the effectiveness of applying a blended learning program to improve students' TOEIC listening performance, students' role was put into great consideration. 16 learners in a TOEIC class were chosen as the subjects of the study. They are at elementary level and enrolled in TOEIC 450 course. These learners were selected because they all studied in one class to whom the researcher was in charge of teaching listening.

### Data collection methods

The data to be analyzed principally came from three main sources, namely students 'continuous evaluation, listening comprehension tests and student questionnaire.

### The blended TOEIC listening course

The blended TOEIC listening course was planned and designed by the researcher in order to provide an alternative instructional environment for the on-ground TOEIC listening course. The class meets face-to-face every week for two hours in the classroom and the rest of the activity was carried out online. In class, teacher would instruct the learner to discuss the previous online assignments, and learn different kinds of questions in the different listening parts. The learners would have chances to take part in pair works or group work to practice listening, discuss some topics or questions related to the lesson. Teacher also gave the learners feedback as well as tips for the listening task, some of which are also provided on the course web page as power point presentation.

The learners enrolled in a 12 - week TOEIC course and were asked to complete a variety of assignments both online and offline. Since the course is a mixture of face to face and online classes, the materials used were a combination of handouts with CDs and videos prepared by the teacher as well as various e-learning resources uploaded through the Moodle system. All assignments are submitted electronically by being uploaded to the course homepage. The previous handouts and audios are also uploaded on the page to the equivalent weeks in addition to other added resources. The learners are capable of uploading their homework and opinions; therefore, the teacher can leave comments or feedbacks for homework.

### Data analysis procedures

The data for the research results came from the information collected throughout three main phases, namely pre-intervention, while intervention and post-intervention. With each

stage, different data collection instruments were utilized in order to gain the most valid and reliable information.

**Students’ continuous assessment**

Before and after each listening part, students would be given a mini listening test as it could shed some lights on students’ performance. To analyze the students’ performance across the sessions, the average of the students’ marks before and after studying each listening part was calculated and compared by excels.

**Listening Comprehension tests**

To diagnose students’ listening proficiency and to compare test scores within the groups, two certified TOEIC test scores were submitted before the course started and later after it was completed. The pre- and the post-tests were the same form of the questions. The time allowed was 45 minutes with 100 multiple choices items and 4 different listening parts.

In order to comprehensively analyze and clearly illustrate the improvement of the students, a software named Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) , more specifically the paired sample t-tests was utilized to show whether the blended listening course did have a significant effect (if any) on students’ listening performance or not. The mean of the students’ scores of both tests was calculated and compared to see whether the blended listening course had impact on the students’ listening performance in the tests.

**Survey questionnaires**

To get the students’ opinions and value of the online listening sessions as a whole, a questionnaire was done after the listening sessions were completed. Two types of questions were included: rating scales and open questions. The Likert scales - strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree - were used with statements about the listening sessions, their effect so that the answers could be quantified and analysed easily [14]. Only eight statements were used to avoid a lengthy questionnaire [15]. Two open questions were also included to get a more informative and probably more insightful response [14]: one asks for my students’ overall impression of the listening blended course and the other for ways to improve them.

The student survey questionnaire was administered using the online Survey Google tool which allows for online construction and administration of surveys.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**The level of the blended TOEIC listening course in the improvement of students’ listening performance**

The comparison of the average marks of the pre and post-tests shows that there has been a significant improvement in the student’s performance in the post-test.

Table 1 reveals that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the studied samples in TOEIC listening performance on the pre-test and the post-test of the TOEIC listening test in favor of the post assessment.

**Table 1. Group’s performance in the pre-test and post-test**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	16	33.00	51.00	653.00	40.8125	1.36693
Posttest	16	47.00	65.00	876.00	54.7500	1.48183
Valid N (listwise)	16					

**Table 2. Results of the Paired-Sample T-tests**

	Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				Upper
Pretest - Posttest	-13.93750	3.25512	.81378	-15.67203	-12.20297	-17.127	15	.000

As can be seen from the table 2, the p – value or the sig. level was less than .05 ( $p \leq 0.0$ ). It means that the result from the pre-test and post-test was significantly different. Therefore, the TOEIC listening blended course did have positive effects on the studied students' listening performance.

In addition, through the results of the mini - tests before and after each listening part, it is found that results of the after tests are higher than those of the previous tests in most students.

In conclusion, the students' improvement was evidently shown, which demonstrated the necessity and effectiveness of blended listening course to enhance students' listening ability. In other words, blended learning is an effective teaching method to develop the students' listening skill.

#### **Learners' attitudes towards the blended learning environment during their TOEIC listening course**

The 16 students' response in the questionnaire was also constructive. All the students stated that they like the course, this blended course meet their learning needs. While 100% of the students agree that the course as a whole was beneficial for them, 37,5 % of them had encountered difficulty when using the web page and did not find the course convenient for using. The amount of listening assignment seemed to be appropriate for nearly 90% of students and more than 90% of the students thought that this blended course has improved their listening performance. All of them stated that they liked doing the assignments on the web page.

In the open questions, there were 12 responses and all of them answered that the listening course worth their time and effort because it helped them improve their listening skills, they learned a lot and they enjoyed the activities and assignments. 5 students stated that they were extremely satisfied with this course and the listening activities and assignments are already good. The learners also mentioned that the listening practice

helped them improve their listening ability and make them less afraid of the listening exam. They also agreed that using online resources offered great flexibility and effectiveness in listening as listening inside class is not sufficient. The learners also wanted to study more English courses in the same way.

However, while most of students felt confident about online learning and the online learning improved their computer and internet skills, 2 students stated that they lack computer skills and it takes time to learn.

In conclusion, apart from some exceptions, the results from the blended TOEIC listening course questionnaire reveal that almost all participants are generally satisfied with the blended learning course.

#### **CONCLUSION**

In general, the research could be helpful for teachers, educational administrators and researchers working on related issues. This study was a golden opportunity for the researcher to reflect her own teaching and at the same time investigate a new way to enhance students' listening comprehension. Besides, the study raises teachers' awareness of the application of applying technology in improving listening comprehension. Last but not least, this research could offer references about updated and reliable information about a context of the implementation of blended learning in teaching listening skills for second language learners to interested individuals to conduct further studies.

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## TÓM TẮT ÁP DỤNG CHƯƠNG TRÌNH HỌC KẾT HỢP CÔNG NGHỆ THÔNG TIN VÀO LỚP HỌC ĐỂ CẢI THIỆN KHẢ NĂNG NGHE TOEIC CỦA HỌC SINH

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Bài viết này giới thiệu một khóa học tích hợp công nghệ thông tin vào lớp học kỹ năng nghe TOEIC truyền thống và đánh giá khóa học này góp phần cải thiện kết quả điểm nghe của học sinh cũng như đánh giá mức độ hài lòng của học viên đối với mô hình tích hợp này. Nghiên cứu này góp phần định hướng cho giáo viên Tiếng Anh tạo ra một môi trường học tập kết hợp hiệu quả cho học sinh. Để thực hiện nghiên cứu này, cả hai phương pháp định lượng và định tính đều được sử dụng. Dữ liệu định tính và định lượng được thu thập thông qua bài kiểm tra nghe TOEIC đầu vào và bài kiểm tra nghe TOEIC cuối khóa, đánh giá liên tục qua các bài kiểm tra sau mỗi phần học và bảng câu hỏi khảo sát ở cuối khóa học. Các kết quả từ dữ liệu cho thấy rằng khóa học nghe TOEIC tích hợp đã ảnh hưởng đáng kể đến sự cải thiện hiệu năng nghe TOEIC của học sinh. Ngoài ra, hầu hết các học sinh tham gia đều hài lòng về chương trình trên các tiêu chí như cải thiện điểm nghe TOEIC, sự linh hoạt về thời gian và họ nhận ra những lợi ích của chương trình giảng dạy trong việc tăng cường sự tương tác giữa họ và bạn cùng lớp cũng như giáo viên của họ. Mặc dù kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy rằng khóa học nghe TOEIC đã nhận được những phản ứng tích cực từ phía học sinh, cần có thêm nhiều nghiên cứu tiếp theo để xem xét rằng các nghiên cứu khác có thể đạt được kết quả tương tự nếu được áp dụng trong một môi trường giáo dục khác với các khóa học khác và các ngữ cảnh khác nhau.

**Từ khóa:** học tích hợp; TOEIC; kỹ năng nghe; khóa học nghe TOEIC tích hợp; nghiên cứu cải tiến sư phạm.

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