# Utilizing a Blended Strategy based on Task-Based Language Learning to Develop Primary Stage Pupils' EFL Oral Communication Skills

Shaimaa Hassan Metwalli El-Boraie
Faculty of Education, Zagazig University, Egypt.

Email: Shaymaah.87@gmail.com

**Supervisors**

**Prof. Dr. Ahmed Hassan M. saif Ibraheem**

Professor of Curricula
Teaching Methods of TEFL
Faculty of Education,
Menofia University

**Dr. Hamada Ahmed**

Doctor of Curricula
Teaching Methods of French
Faculty of Education,
Zagazig University

## Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the effect of blended Task-Based Language Learning to develop primary stage pupils' EFL oral communication Skills. To achieve the study aim, the author adopted the quasi-design of two groups; experimental and control (60) pupils at Dakados Language School, Mit Ghamr, Dakahlia. The members were divided into two corresponding groups. Both groups were pretested to assure that they corresponded in oral communication skills. The experimental group was taught using blended strategy while the control one was taught by the regular method in the first term of the year 2021-2022. The experiment lasted for six weeks in which the author implemented the study academic instruments: a questionnaire, a checklist, a test and a rubric of Oral Communication skills. The results were statistically analyzed by The author used three instruments to collect data: 1) A questionnaire for teachers to determine the most important oral communication skills. 2) A pre/post oral communication skills test.3) An Oral Communication Skills rubric. The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.01$) between the mean scores of the control group and that of the experimental one on the oral communication skills posttest in favor of the experimental group. This positive result was attributed to the effect of bending Task-based learning and Situational Approach . According to the findings, it was recommended that the EFL teachers need to activate TBL and SA in order to develop primary stage pupils' EFl oral communication skills.

*Keywords:* task-based language learning, blended strategy, oral communication skills.

## 1. Introduction

Language is considered the most important means of expressing facts, knowledge, attitudes, and culture. By language, people can communicate. While reading and listening are considered the receptive skills, speaking and writing are the other two productive skills necessary to be integrated in the development of effective communication. Learners in an EFL context don't use the language in authentic situations. So they can't produce language outside the classroom. This leads to learners' lack of self-confidence and mistakes when communicating using the target language. Therefore, English speaking skills are considered the most difficult skill to acquire.

Scrivener (2005) defined English speaking skills as an international means of communication that are necessary for effective interactions amongst people across the world. These are highly demanding, complicated and multifaceted skills, as one cannot communicate effectively unless he/she is equipped with sufficient knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, culture, genre, speech acts, register, discourse, and phonology.

Oral communication skills are of paramount importance both within the classroom and society (Henderson, n.d).  Listening and speaking skills are therefore essential in the educational sector. Students need to listen to their educators, as well as peers in order to create meaning of texts. In this way they can give intelligent answers and demonstrate critical thought. Speaking is also essential because students need to be able to associate with others and develop effective strategies for communication.  There are certain issues that educators face when it comes to listening and speaking skills. There are some factors that often hinder learners' acquisition of proper listening and speaking skills as well as strategies that teachers can employ that could assist them in addressing/ preventing the existence of such factors.

Boredom can serve as major factor that can often hinder a student's acquisition of proper listening skills (Bester, Evans, Joubert & Meyer, 2013). Some students already have extensive knowledge of subject content and as a result become bored very quickly. This causes them to disturb other students or they choose to day-dream and not listen to the teacher. When the teacher continuously reads from the textbook and does not do practical activities to make the lesson interesting, this makes students bored and they choose not to listen.

Barras (2006, p. 16) claims that the development of oral communication skills, supported by sincerity and politeness is important in study. It means how the student participates when in a discussion session in order to be able to enhance. She should be aware to motivate and appreciate herself to use English naturally in classroom activities. As Richards (2008. p. 120) says that ability to express themselves through speech would therefore seem important. It is necessary for both speaker and listener when communicating in classroom activities.

## Task-based Language Learning (TBLL)

Branden (2011) explained that TBLL requires learners to be active and have the main roles in learning English language. They have to play important roles and responsibilities in terms of material content, language patterns and expressions during the accomplishment of tasks. They also have representative roles to discuss application aspects and the evaluation of task based language teaching. In this case, the teacher's main role is to motivate and to support their students naturally in the process of task based implementation.

Task-based language teaching has a number of purposes, Ellis (2000,35) identified some of them such as;
-   giving learners confidence in trying out whatever language they know,
-   assisting then with experience of spontaneous interaction,

- sustaining them with the chance to benefit from noticing how others express similar meanings,
- presenting negotiation turns for speaking,
- involving them in using language purposefully and cooperatively,
- participating in a complete interaction, not just one-off sentences,
- giving chances for learners to try out communication strategies and developing their confidence that they can achieve communicative goals.

Some research findings had completed understanding of the TBLL for example Jeon & Hann (2006) who focused on the perception about TBLL of students and teachers where they are learning general English in Korea in which the findings of their research show that learners have positive perception about TBLL implementation.

Since a lot of research findings had supported positively the implementation of TBLL so Dailey (2009) developed a curriculum of skill courses at the secondary schools with Task Based Language Teaching and Learning in Korea. Many other interesting researches on TBLL had focused more on specific skills of English such as Rahman (2010) who had developed TBLL at the junior high school in India.

## 2. Context of the problem:

The problem of the current research is emphasized in the following ways:

a- During the academic (2020 – 2021), the researcher conducted some interviews with EFL teachers who assured that primary stage students had problems in oral communication skills.

b- During the academic (2020 – 2021), the researcher also conducted an exploratory study based on an EFL oral

communication test administered to (60) sixth primary stage students. It addressed some skills: understanding and clearly stating the purpose of speech, making impressions upon others, *showing oral comprehension of what was said, and ending speech judiciously.*

- **Results of the exploratory study revealed that:**

- Students showed an evident weakness in EFL oral communication skills.
- While answering the test, students tended to stumble while talking , make pauses and mispronounce words. This makes it very difficult for them to continue speaking.
- Students, more than once, asked for translations of some words in order to complete their speech.
- Students showed very low oral communication to complete the test, as they were not sure of their ability to answer the test. They expressed that they never passed such an experience.

The previously mentioned points emphasize the weakness in oral communication skills among language primary stage students. Thus, hinders their performance of these skills effectively. Hence, the researcher suggests blended TBLL and SA to Develop Primary Stage Pupils' EFL Oral Communication Skills

## 3. Questions of the Study

More specifically, the study will address the following main question:

**1-"What is the effect of blended task-based language learning and situational approach to develop the primary stage pupils EFL Oral Communication skills?"**

Many sub questions stemmed from this question:

1-What are the Oral Communication skills needed for the primary stage pupils?

2-What is the current level of the primary stage pupils in Oral Communication  skills?

3-What are the features of blended task-based language learning and situational approach?

4- How far can blended task-based language learning and situational approach develop the primary stage pupils' EFL Oral Communication skills?

## 4. Procedures of the study :

For answering questions of the study, the following procedures will be carried out;

1- Reviewing the literature and related studies related to variables of the study.

2- Setting up instruments of the study such as; a checklist of Oral Communication skills, then presenting it to a group of jurors to justify them.

3- Designing the test and the rubric of the study, then delivering them to a group of jurors for validation and suitability.

4-Stating participants of the study and splitting them into two groups, experimental and control.

5- Pre-administration of the test to the study instruments to both groups.

6- Determining the specified materials through the suggested strategy to be used in carrying out the purpose of the study.

7- Accomplishing the teacher's guide.

8- Administration of the teaching materials to the experimental group, while the control is taught by the regular method.

9- Post-administration of  the study instruments to both groups.

10- Comparing the yields of the two groups and analyzing its data statistically.

11-  Discussing the study results and interpreting them.

12- Presenting conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further studies.

## 5. Instruments of the study

To achieve the purposes of the study, the following instruments were developed and implemented:
1-An Oral Communication skills test.
2-An assessment rubric of Oral Communication skills.

## 6. Hypotheses of the study:

The following hypotheses will be tested in this study:

- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental study group in the pre and post administration of the Oral Communication skills test, favoring the post administration.
- There would be an effect for the blended strategy on developing Oral Communication skills in the treatment group.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post administrations of the reading comprehension test, in favor of the post one.

## 7. Purpose of the study:

The present study aims at:
a. Blended Task-based Language Learning and Situational Approach.
b. Developing the sixth grade primary students' English language oral communication skills.

## 8. Significance of the study:

It is hoped that the findings of this research would be beneficial to the following categories:

The study will be significant as:

1. Administering the suggested strategy may benefit primary stage pupils in developing Oral Communication skills.

2. Sustaining effective information that will be appreciated for teaching EFL Oral Communication skills.

3. This study will benefit language pupils and develop their Oral Communication skills.

4. This study will be useful for teachers who will determine the level of the Oral Communication skills.

5. Providing teachers with a rubric to determine the Oral Communication skills skills.

6. This study will be beneficial for supervisors and curriculum designers who will ask teachers to apply this strategy in classrooms.

## 9. Delimitations of the study

The study will be delimited to:

a.     A group of sixth year primary language school students because they have an evident weakness in EFL oral communication skills , they also expressed low efficacy towards these skills and that hinders their performance of oral communication skills effectively.

b.     Oral Communication skills that will be approved by the jury members.

c.     The implementation of the Strategy during the academic year 2021-2022 at Dakados Language school.

d.     Oral communication checklist that will be approved by the jury members.

## 10. Definitions of terms

**A task** is a pedagogical piece of classroom work, which is a communicative act with clear beginning, middle and end. It involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in

the target language. The intention of a task is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form (Nunan, 2006: 4).

**Task-Based Language Learning** refers to teaching a second/foreign language that seeks to engage learners in interactional authentic language use by having them perform a series of tasks. It aims to both enable learners to acquire new linguistic knowledge and to procedurize their existing knowledge (Ellis, 2003).

**Operational definition of the blended strategy** based on task based language teaching is a specific proposed technique blended of performing a series of tasks and presenting structures in situations.

**Oral Communication skills** can be defined as speech activities that are determined by fluency, accuracy and pronunciation. Fluency means the amount of the language produced during the task, and not necessarily the accuracy. Accuracy refers to the linguistic features such as grammar, pronunciation or the discourse (Folse, 2006).

## Blended Learning

Blended learning is an education strategy that features multiple teaching methods to help students learn more effectively than one method on its own. In most cases blended learning combines a mix of traditional classroom instruction and digital learning.

In a blended approach, traditional instruction is used to introduce or reinforce concepts, provide hands-on skills practice, and give students opportunities for collaborative work.

## 11. Design of the Study:

A quasi-experimental design was used to conduct the study. Sixty students were randomly assigned to two groups, experimental and control,(30) students each. The control group received instruction through the regular classroom sessions and the experimental group was taught by implementing the blended strategy.

Oral communication skills pre-post test was administered to the two groups before and after the experiment. Both groups were taught a number of conversations from (Jump Aboard) for sixth year primary language school.

The design included the following variables: an independent variable which was blended task-based language learning and the dependent variables which was the oral communication skills.

## 12.Participants

Participants of the study were sixty students from the sixth primary language school students at Dakados language school in Mit Ghamr, Dakahlia governorate, enrolled in the 1st term of the school year (2021/2022). Participants were divided into two groups: the controlled group (n=30) and experimental group (n=30).

The participants were supposed to be a homogeneous group.

As a result, they were anticipated to have a lot in common and not differ greatly in terms of experience or age. The researcher attempted to control some variables  to ensure that the improvement of some of the students' oral communication skills could be attributed only to the effect of blended TBLL and SA , also to ensure that both the experimental and control groups were equivalent.

These variables were:

Age: The students were all between the ages of 11 and 13.

Grade: all of the students were in primary six at a language school.

Both control and experimental groups were pre-tested to ensure they were at the same level of EFL Oral Communication Skills before starting the experiment. The researcher used the Independent sample t-test.

**Table (1):**

Pre-test for the control and the experimental groups in the EFL Oral Communication Skills.

| Skill | Group | N | M | S.D | df | t-value | Sig |
|-------|-------|---|---|-----|----|---------|-----|
| Overall EFL Oral Communication Skills (Pre-test) | Control | 30 | 14.47 | 4.70 | 58 | 0.221 | 0.826 * |
| | Experimental | 30 | 14.70 | 5.54 | | | |

Pre-testing results in table ( 1 ) shows that t-value (0.221) is not significant at the level of 0.01. So, there was no significant difference between the control and the experimental groups in Overall EFL Oral Communication Skills in the pre-test.
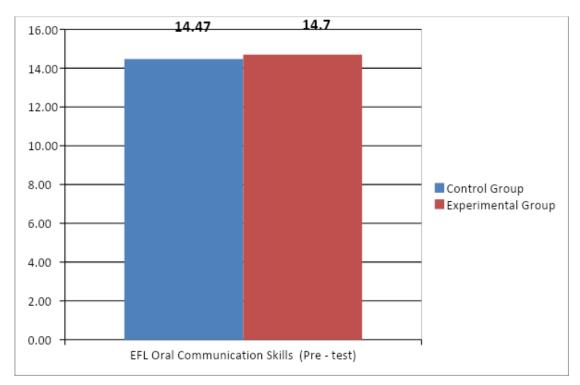
Figure (1)

The previous figure indicates that both groups were homogeneous as far as EFL Oral Communication Skills is concerned and that they were at the same level before implementing Blended Task-Based Learning.
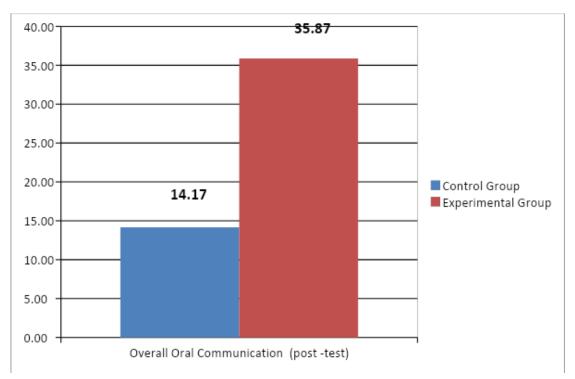
**Table ( 2 ):**

Post t-test results of the control and the experimental groups in Overall EFL Oral Communication Skills.

| Skill | Group | N | M | S.D | df | t-value | Sig |
|-------|-------|---|---|-----|----|---------|-----|
| Overall EFL Oral Communication Skills (post -test) | Control | 30 | 14.17 | 4.371 | 58 | 12.85 | 0.000* |
| | Experimental | 30 | 35.87 | 8.144 | | | |

*Significant at (0.01)

The table above indicates that the mean scores of the experimental group pupils  are higher than those of the control group in overall EFL Oral Communication Skills and its sub skills, where t-value is, (12.85) for Overall EFL Oral Communication Skills, which is significant at 0, 01 level of significance.

Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed. These differences can be attributed to Blended Task-Based Learning.

**Figure ( 2 ):**

The mean scores of the control and the experimental groups in Overall EFL Oral Communication Skills in the post-test.

The previous figure shows that the mean scores of experimental group pupils are higher than those of the control one in the post-test in Overall EFL Oral Communication Skills.

**Table ( 3 ):**

Post t-test results of the experimental group in Overall EFL Oral Communication Skills.

| Skill | Test | N | M | S.D | df | t-value | Sig |
|-------|------|---|---|-----|----|---------|-----|
| Overall EFL Oral Communication Skills (post -test) | Pre | 30 | 14.70 | 3.385 | | | 0.000* |
| | Post | 30 | 35.87 | 8.144 | 29 | 14.58 | |

*Significant at (0.01)

Table (3) indicates that the mean scores of the experimental group pupils  in the post test are higher than those of the pre-scores in the overall EFL Oral Communication Skills and its sub skills, where t-value is (14.58) for overall EFL Oral Communication Skills, which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed. These differences can be attributed to the effect of Blended Task-Based Learning.

# 13. The Task-based Language Learning Strategy

To achieve the objective of the present study, the researcher used Task-Based Language Learning to develop the sixth year primary students' EFL Oral Communication Skills at Dakados Language School in Mit Ghamr.

**General Objectives of blended Task-based Language Learning:**

By the end of the implementation of the strategy, students will be able to:

1. know the definition of blended Task-Based Language Learning.
2. know the program's significance in the teaching and learning process.
3. know the program's application in English Language Learning environment.
4. use the strategy to apply more EFL Language Skills activities.
5.  participate in real-life social interactions in a motivating setting.

## 14. Specific Objective of the blended strategy:

The blended strategy aimed at developing some sixth year primary students' EFL Oral Communication Skills. So, by the end of the sessions of blended task-based learning strategy, the students should be able to:

1. define the different oral communication skills (feeling confident, making impressions, pronouncing sounds accurately, speaking at an appropriate speed, participating in discussions and arguments.) successfully.

2. use the Task-based language learning strategy to be efficient.

3. define accurately task-based language learning.

4. justify task-based language learning importance.

5. define Oral communication skills.

6. mention the significance of oral communication skills.

7. mention the meaning of blended learning.

8. justify the significance of blended learning.

## 15.Characteristics of task-based language learning

Although there is a divergence of views among the advocates of task-based language learning in relation to the core principles of TBLL, Swan (2005) emphasizes that there is a general agreement among them on the characteristics listed below:

❖ Instructed language learning should mainly contain natural or naturalistic language use, and the activities are related to meaning rather than language.
❖ Instruction should support learner-centeredness rather than teacher-centeredness.

❖ Because totally naturalistic learning does not normally give rise to target-like accuracy, engagement is essential to promote the internalization of formal linguistic elements while keeping the perceived benefits of a natural approach.

❖ This can be realized best by offering opportunities for focus on the form, which will attract students' attention to linguistic components as they emerge incidentally in lessons whose main focus is on meaning or communication.

❖ Communicative tasks are especially suitable devices for such an approach.

❖ More formal pre- or post-task language study may be beneficial. This may make contribution to internalization by leading or maximizing familiarity with formal characteristics during communication.

❖ Traditional approaches are unproductive and unsuitable, particularly where they require passive formal instruction and practice isolated from communicative work.

## 16.Benefits and challenges of task-based language learning

Task-based language teaching provides many benefits to aid foreign language learning. as follows:

- TBLL provides the opportunity for 'natural' learning within the classroom context.
- It stresses meaning over form; however, it can also emphasize learning form.
- It offers learners a fertile input of target language.
- It is intrinsically motivating.

- It is consistent with a learner-focused educational philosophy but also gives permission for teacher input and guidance.
- It contributes to the improvement of communicative fluency while not disregarding accuracy.
- It can be deployed together with a more traditional approach.

# 17. Teacher and learner roles in task-based language learning.

The language teacher aiming at implementing task-based language teaching in the foreign language classroom should perform three main roles:

(1) selector and sequencer of tasks;

(2) preparing learners for tasks; and

(3) consciousness-raising.

Relevant to the first teacher role, it can be stressed that the language teacher has an active role in choosing adapting and designing tasks and then building these tasks in keeping with learner needs, expectations, interests and language skill levels. Related to the second teacher role, it can be stated that some training for pre-task is prominent for language learners. These training activities may include topic introduction, specifying task instructions, assisting students in learning or recalling beneficial words and phrases to make the task accomplishment easy, and offering partial display of task process. As for the third teacher role, it can be emphasized that the teacher deploys an amalgamation of form-focusing techniques, covering

attention-focusing pre-task activities, examining the given text, guided exposure to similar tasks, and employment of highlighted material (Richards and Rogers, 2001).

The language learner who is exposed to the implementation of task-based language teaching in the foreign language classroom should carry out three major roles:

(1) group participant;

(2) monitor;

and (3) risk-taker and innovator.

Regarding the first learner role, it can be indicated that the learners perform a number of tasks either in pairs or small groups. Pair or group work may involve some adaptation for those learners who are more used to whole-class activities and/or individual work.

Related to the second learner role, it can be stressed that tasks are employed as a tool for facilitating the learning process in task-based learning. Classroom activities should be organized so that learners can have the opportunity to observe how language is utilized in communication.

Learners themselves should "attend" both to the message in task work and to the form where such messages typically come packed. Relevant to the third learner role, it can be stated that many tasks will push learners to generate and expound messages for which they do not have full linguistic resources and prior experience. In reality, this is said to be the point of such

tasks. The skills of making guesses from linguistic and contextual clues, asking for explanation, and consulting with other learners may need to be enhanced (Richards and Rogers, 2001).

# 18. Factors affecting Oral Communication:

In order to help students overcome problems in learning speaking, it is necessary for the teachers to figure out factors that affect their speaking performance. Students 'speaking performance can be affected by the factors that come from performance conditions (time pressure, planning, standard of performance and amount of support), affective factors (such as motivation, confidence and anxiety), listening ability and feedback during speaking activities.

- **Performance conditions**

Students perform a speaking task under a variety of conditions. Nation & Newton (2009) believe that performance conditions can affect speaking performance. The four types of performance conditions that Nation & Newton (2009) suggest include time pressure, planning, the standard of performance and the amount of support.

- **Affective factors**

One of the most important influences on language learning success or failure is probably the affective side of the learner (Oxford, 1990). Krashen (1982) states that a variety of affective variables has been confirmed to be related to success in second language acquisition in research over the last decade but most of those studies examined the three categories: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety.

- **Listening ability**

Speaking skills cannot be developed unless we develop listening skills (Doff, 1998). Students must understand what is said to them to have a successful conversation. Shumin (1997) shares the ideas of Doff (1998) by stating that when one person speaks, the other responds through attending by means of the listening process.

In fact, every speaker plays the role of both a listener and a speaker. Therefore, one is certainly unable to respond if he/ she cannot understand what is said. It means speaking is closely related to listening.

- **Topical knowledge**

Topical knowledge is defined as knowledge structures in long-term memory (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). In other words, topical knowledge is the speakers 'knowledge of relevant topical information. The information that topical knowledge provides enables learners to use language with reference to the world in which they live. Bachman & Palmer (1996) state
certain test tasks may be easier for those who possess the relevant topical knowledge and more difficult for those who do not. Bachman &Palmer (1996) believe that topical knowledge has effects on speaking performance.

- **Feedback during speaking activities**

Most students want and expect their teachers to give them feedback on their performance. However, all speaking production should not be dealt with in the same way. Harmer (1991) asserts that the decisions that the teachers make about how to react to students ' performance will depend upon the stages of the lesson, the activities, the types of mistake made and the particular student who is making that mistake. If the teachers correct whenever there is a problem, the

conversational flow as well as the purpose of the speaking activity will be destroyed (Harmer, 1991). If the students are corrected all the time, they can find this very demotivating and become afraid to speak. They suggest that the teachers should always correct the students 'mistakes positively and with encouragement (Baker & Westrup, 2003).

- **Speaking problems**

For Ur (1996), there are some speaking problems that teachers can come across in getting students to talk in the classroom. These are: inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low or uneven participation and mother-tongue use.

The first problem that the students often encounter is inhibition. When students try to say things in a foreign language in the classroom they are often inhibited. They are worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face. They are shy of the attention that their speech attracts. Littlewood (2007) asserts that a foreign language classroom to can create inhibitions and anxiety easily..

Secondly, learners often complain that they cannot think of anything to say and they have no motivation to express themselves. Rivers (1968) believes that the learners have nothing to express maybe because the teacher had chosen a topic which is not suitable for him or about which he knows very little. It is difficult for many students to respond when the teachers ask them to say something in a foreign language because they might have little ideas about what to say, which vocabulary to use, or how to use the grammar correctly. (Westrup &Baker,2003)

Another problem in speaking class is that participation is low or uneven. In a large group, each student will have very little

talking time because only one participant can talk at a time so that the others can hear him/her. There is a tendency of some learners to dominate while others speak very little or not at all.

Finally, when all or a number of learners share the same mother-tongue, they tend to use it because it is easier for them. Harmer (1991) suggests some reasons why students use mother-tongue in class. Firstly, when the students are asked to have a discussion about a topic that they are incapable of, if they want to say anything about the topic, they will use their own language. Another reason is that the use of mother- tongue is a natural thing to do. In addition, using the first language to explain something to another if there is no encouragement from the teachers. Finally, if teachers frequently use the students 'language, the students will feel comfortable to do it.

## 19. Conclusion:

The blended strategy improved primary six language school students' oral communication skills. This was confirmed in the following findings:

a- The experimental group students' means were higher than the control group in the oral communication skills test. This was shown through the significant differences between the means of the two groups.

b- In the post-administration of the oral communication test, the experimental group students' means were significantly higher than in the pre-application of the test.

c- The experimental group students' means were better than those of the control group in the oral communication rubric . This was shown through the significant differences between the means of the two groups.

d- The blended strategy based on TBLL and SA was effective in enhancing the EFL oral communication skills among sixth year primary language school students.. This was confirmed by the effect size of the treatment on students' oral communication skills.

## 20.Recommendations:

1-EFL Curriculum designers should pay attention to the effectiveness of blended task-based language learning and situational approach  in developing English Language in general and EFL Oral communication Skills in particular.

2- Oral Communication skills should be prioritized to be enhanced from the start of learning a foreign language at primary, preparatory and secondary stages.

3- Teachers should pay too much attention to using Task-Based Language Learning as a new way of the learning process that would support language learning chances.

4- Teaching should be changed from a teacher –centered to a student-centered approach In order to be involved in an active learning environment.

5- Students should be trained and supported to be presenters, self-learners, self- managers, decision makers, self-correctors and problem solvers. They should also use new learning strategies to be able to improve their oral communication skills.

6- Blended strategies could be used as a successful teaching method in EFL classrooms.

7-It is recommended that EFL teachers have training in utilizing blended learning strategies.

8-To improve students' oral communication , EFL teachers must employ suitable stimulus in the classroom.

9- EFL teachers should motivate students to talk by providing enjoyable materials throughout class.

10- EFL teachers ought to provide contexts and learning opportunities that will aid in the construction of meaning. Learning environments that appreciate speaking, have a varied range of audios, encourage students to take risks, and provide time for expressing their opinions and responding to others.

11- EFL teachers should model for those students and help them develop their skills and beliefs that are required to complete a given task.

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