

# **Pairing Students of Different Proficiency Levels in Blended Learning Context to Improve Students' Speaking Skill in Vocational High School**

**Elvandari Maulana, Patuan Raja, Ari Nurweni**

University of Lampung

elvandari16@gmail.com

## **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini menyelidiki apakah ada perbedaan yang signifikan antara siswa dari tingkat kemahiran yang berbeda dalam keterampilan berbicara mereka setelah dipasangkan dalam konteks pembelajaran campuran dan kelompok yang paling meningkat setelah dipasangkan dalam konteks pembelajaran campuran. Ada 24 siswa sebagai sampel penelitian yang dibagi menjadi kelompok tinggi dan rendah (T = 12, R = 12). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada perbedaan yang signifikan antara siswa dari tingkat kemahiran yang berbeda dalam keterampilan berbicara mereka setelah dipasangkan dalam konteks pembelajaran campuran. Selain itu, kelompok rendah adalah kelompok yang mengalami peningkatan dalam keterampilan berbicara lebih tinggi. Ditemukan bahwa kenaikan rata-rata kelompok rendah lebih tinggi daripada kelompok tinggi. Ini menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran campuran efektif untuk mengajar berbicara. Tingkat kemahiran yang berbeda dari siswa juga dapat berperan dalam membantu siswa belajar berbicara.

## **Abstract**

This research investigated whether there was a significant difference between students with different proficiency level in their speaking skill after being paired in the blended learning context and the group that is most improved after being paired in blended learning context. There were 24 students as the sample of the research which were divided into high and low-proficiency groups (H=12, L=12). The results revealed that there was a significant difference between students of different proficiency level in their speaking skill after being paired in the blended learning context. Moreover, the low-proficiency group was the one that was mostly improved in speaking skill. It was found that the mean gain of low-proficiency group was higher than the high-proficiency group. It shows that blended learning is effective for teaching speaking. The students' different proficiency level also can play role in helping students learn speaking.

**Keywords:** Speaking Skill, Blended Learning, Pairing Students of Different Level Proficiency

## INTRODUCTION

In this globalization era, having the capability of speaking English is highly demanded. In other words, the world will welcome the people who can speak English because Crystal cited in Gebhard (2009: 39) outlines that about a quarter of the world's population is already fluent or competent in English. It means that the need for being able to communicate using English is important especially for those who want to get much information spoken in English.

The secondary level in Indonesia is divided into two kinds of school. They are senior high school and vocational high school. The students of the vocational high school are the students who are supposed to have skills which can be used to get the job soon after they graduate from senior high school. Hence, mastering English especially speaking skill will help them so much because Osbon et. al. in Bakar, et.al. (2013) state that nowadays having the ability to communicate orally especially in English which is considered as a global language is crucial if these learners were to achieve success such as when attending job interviews, job training, or fulfilling other job-related tasks which require the use of the said language. This requirement is common for job seekers because a businessman must want to expand his business not only in the local area but also in the international area. To reach the international area, international communication by using international language is needed. It is used to communicate with people come from abroad to develop the business.

However, there are some problems put forward by some researchers about improving students' speaking skill in EFL context like in Indonesia. Belinda (2018) states that students in Indonesia do not learn English by interacting but by

learning the pattern or the grammar. Furthermore, they also state that they do not practice it in their daily life such as at school or outside the school with their friends. It is also supported by Gebhard (2009: 40) that in the EFL classroom, the students who are learning English have fewer chances to use English outside the classroom. It means that when they are outside classroom such as at home, they cannot practice using English to make their speaking being improved. Besides, for the students of vocational high school, learning English is divided into some skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Therefore, they will have more little chances to get deeper improving their speaking skill for they should divide the time for those skills proportionally. How can they be good at speaking if they have little chance to practice speaking the target language?

As stated before that the students need more time to practice their speaking, giving an additional activity outside the classroom can be a solution. The teacher can make speaking learning activity in blended learning context. Thorne (2003: 2) states that blended learning provides a chance or opportunity to make the integration between technological uses like online learning and traditional learning. Thus, speaking learning activity in blended learning context will make the students learn in the classroom through face to face, as usual, that is known as traditional learning, and they also will have the additional time or chance to learn outside the classroom through online learning.

Numerous studies have recently been undertaken concerning using combination learning: traditional and online in improving students' speaking skill. Besides, those researchers also used online media as the platforms to supports online learning named WhatsApp. Belinda (2018) investigated the effect of blended learning

activity in improving the students' English speaking skill in the context of English as a foreign language. Minalla (2018) examined the effect of WhatsApp chat group in enhancing EFL learners' verbal interaction outside the classroom context. Ta'amneh (2017) conducted the effect of using WhatsApp messenger in learning the English language among university students.

Different researchers focused on different orientation. Belinda (2018) focused on applying the blended learning by combining the traditional classroom activity and online activity through WhatsApp group chat discussion to improve the students' speaking skill and to find out the best topic chosen. Meanwhile, Minalla (2018) focused on comparing between the using of traditional way integrated with WhatsApp chat group via text messages and the using of traditional way integrated with WhatsApp chat group via voice messages to enhance students' verbal interaction. While Ta'amneh (2017) focused on comparing between the traditional learning and the combination ways: WhatsApp and traditional learning to improve students' English language abilities.

However, as far as it is concerned, no study covers the using of pair practice in blended learning context through WhatsApp, whereas Ohta in Storch and Aldosari (2012) state that pair work can provide learners with opportunities to use the L2 for the range of functions and to receive feedback from their peers. Moreover, Hadley's perspective in Young's research (1991) state that pair work also can reduce students' anxiety in speaking because when a student feels not too proficient in speaking, there will be only one person knows. Besides, the previous researchers did not see the effect of the students' level proficiency towards their speaking skill. The students may be sitting on the same grade or level at

school, but it does not mean that they have the same level proficiency of English especially in speaking. Some of them may have high proficiency but some of them also have low proficiency. Therefore, when there are heterogeneous students' proficiency in one level, pairing them with mix proficiency will give the benefit as Aljouei's research results (2018) about pairing students of different proficiency levels revealed that pairing the students with different level of proficiency in speaking can give effect on the amount of the L2 production and the feedback. Most of the previous researchers also applied blended learning through WhatsApp to university students, none of them applied it to senior high school students who also need to upgrade their speaking skill to make them better in communicating with people abroad. Therefore, the research about pairing students of different proficiency levels in blended learning context to improve students' speaking skill in Vocational High School needs to be done.

Therefore, in order to solve the problem above, this research is conducted to find out (1) the significant difference between students with different proficiency level in their speaking skill after being paired in the blended learning context and (2) the group that is most improved after being paired in blended learning context.

## **METHODS**

This research was a descriptive quantitative study. It employed a one-group pretest-posttest design. There was only one group as the experimental. The sample in this research was chosen purposively. The sample of the research was the students of Multimedia Department 1 at SMKN (vocational high school) 8 Bandar Lampung. The class consisted of 24 students which were divided into a high-proficiency group

(n=12) and a low-proficiency group (n=12).

The students' were given pre-test of speaking at the beginning of the research. After that they also were given the treatment by being taught in the blended learning context. They had two modes of learning. The offline learning was conducted in the classroom like usual, while the online learning as the additional activity was conducted through WhatsApp application in the students' smartphone. Finally, they got the posttest of speaking to know the improvement of their speaking skill.

The students' speaking results or scores in the pretest and posttest were assessed using the speaking scoring rubric from Harris (1969: 84) by two raters. The data were analyzed by using Wilcoxon and Mann Whitney U formula in SPSS 16 for windows.

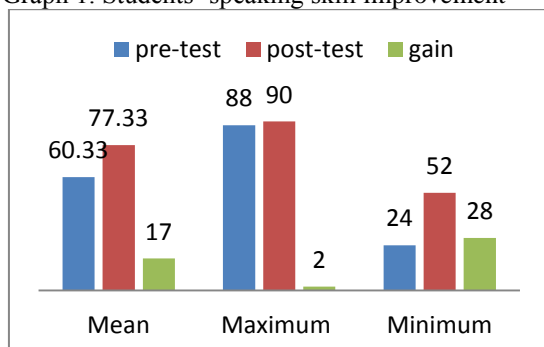
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following explanations are the results and discussion of the two research questions in this research.

### Results

After analyzing the data, it was found that the students' speaking skill was improved after being paired in the blended learning context. The improvement of the students' speaking skill could be seen in the graph 1 below.

Graph 1. Students' speaking skill improvement



Based on the data on the graph 1, we could see that the students' mean score of speaking in the post-test was higher than the students' mean score in the pre-test. There was 17 gain points of the students' speaking skill improvement.

Moreover, the difference of the students' speaking results also could be seen from the improvement of the maximum and the minimum score of the students. For the maximum score, there was 2 gain points from pretest to posttest of speaking. Meanwhile, for the minimum score, the gain was 28 points. It indicates that no student got score of speaking less than 52 in the post-test. It was better than in the pre-test where the minimum score that the students got was 24.

However, to know whether the improvement of the students' speaking skill before and after the treatment was significant or not, Wilcoxon formula in SPSS 16 for windows was used to analyze it. In this research, the researcher would prove the hypothesis alternative of the first research question.

Ha: there was a significant difference between students of different proficiency level in their speaking skill after being paired in the blended learning context.

Table 1. Wilcoxon Test

Test Statistics <sup>b</sup>	
	posttest - pretest
Z	-4.022 <sup>a</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Based on negative ranks

b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

The criterion of Ha acceptance is if the sig < sig. level (0.05). From the table 1 above, it was found that the sig. (0.000) was less than sig. level (0.05). It shows that there was a significant difference

between students of different proficiency level in their speaking skill after being paired in the blended learning context.

In addition, there were two groups proficiency level of speaking in this research. They were high and low-proficiency groups. The groups were divided into two based on the students' score of speaking in the pre-test.

Table 2. Students' proficiency level in speaking

No	Students' Level Proficiency	Total
1	High	12
2	Low	12
Total		24

Furthermore, to know the group that is most improved after being paired in blended learning context, the data were analyzed through Mann Whitney U formula in SPSS 16 for windows.

Table 3. Mann Whitney U Test

Ranks				
	Proficiency	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Gain Score	high	12	<b>7.00</b>	84.00
	low	12	<b>18.00</b>	216.00
	Total	24		

Test Statistics <sup>b</sup>	
	Gain Score
Mann-Whitney U	6.000
Wilcoxon W	84.000
Z	-3.836
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>.000</b>
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.000 <sup>a</sup>

a. Not corrected for ties.

b. Grouping Variable: Proficiency

The table 3 shows that the low-proficiency group had the higher mean than the high-proficiency group. The mean of the high-proficiency group was 7.00. Meanwhile the mean of the low-proficiency group was 18.00. The range between the mean both of groups was 11.00. Moreover, the table

statistic b also shows that there was significant difference between both of groups because the significant result was less than the significant level ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ). It indicates that the low-proficiency group was the group that was most improved after being paired in blended learning context.

## Discussion

It has been proved through the results of this research that pairing the students of different proficiency levels in blended learning context can improve the students' speaking skill. Through pairing the students of different proficiency levels, the students could exchange their knowledge they have. The student of high-proficiency group could teach the student of low-proficiency group how to speak English better than they usually do. Therefore, the student of low-proficiency group would get the benefit from it. They could ask how to speak better. Their pronunciation could be corrected and given the comment to be improved. Their grammar mastery also could be checked during the discussion with their pair. Moreover, the discussion occurred between them also could make their vocabulary improved because discussion using English words made them find the appropriate vocabulary related to the topic. It also could give the contribution to their fluency and comprehension. Moreover, the students in high-proficiency group also can add their knowledge in order they can share it to the low-proficiency group students. The students in high-proficiency group will be shy if they cannot answer the students of low-proficiency group's questions.

The results are in line with Kim and McDonough (2008), Lesser (2004), and Aljouei (2018). Kim and McDonough's (2008) research revealed that when the students are paired with different levels of proficiency, they become more productive in speaking. High-proficiency group

students are able to provide the meaning and spelling of unfamiliar vocabulary items and explain grammatical rules for the low one. Lesser (2004) also found that the students of low-proficiency group could learn the pattern of sentences in speaking well from the high-proficiency group. The other advantage of pairing the students with mix level proficiency is they will do more negotiations than pairing with the same level proficiency (Long and Porter, 1984). Therefore, they can produce more L2 in their speaking (Aljouei, 2018).

Moreover, through learning in the blended learning context, the students have more chances and sources to practicing speaking. As Hubackova, et. al. (2011) states that giving students more chances and sources in learning speaking through blended learning context can make their speaking being improved.

Even though in this research, the students were not too active in online learning because of some reasons, such as because the students sometimes had no internet connection and their own activity outside classroom or school, but they still got the benefit of the online learning in blended learning context. In the online learning, the teacher can give the stimulus activity to engage the students being active in the offline learning, such as giving the task that can be presented in the offline activity as the main activity. In addition, the teacher and the students can take the benefit of WhatsApp feature to have the additional learning or activity of speaking. The feature can be voice recording. This feature can improve the students' speaking skill, especially in pronunciation and vocabulary components. The students of high-proficiency group can check the students of low-proficiency group's pronunciation and providing them with the new vocabulary. Therefore, the activity in the online learning which is functioned as the additional activity can complete the

activity in the offline learning as the main activity.

The result of this research is congruent with the previous research study of Minalla (2018) who researched using mix learning or blended learning in enhancing students' verbal interaction or speaking. The results concluded that there is a significant difference between mix learning, they were traditional learning and through WhatsApp voice message and the traditional one which only uses WhatsApp text message. The additional learning activity through voice message on WhatsApp can give them the additional practice of speaking than the text message. Therefore, the students' speaking skill or verbal interaction is improved. Through voice messages in WhatsApp, the students could record their voice and send to their friend in the group any time. Moreover, the study of Belinda, et.al (2018) also shows that using blended learning could improve students' speaking skill. Furthermore, the results revealed that when students join both online and offline learning, they get more sources of learning. They can share information they get or the idea they have in the group of WhatsApp when they are in the distant that can be useful for each other.

Even though students from both of groups get the improvement of their speaking skill, this research result proved that by pairing the students of different proficiency levels in the blended learning context could make the students in low-proficiency group improve their speaking skill more than the high-proficiency group. They could learn how to speak well from the students with high-level proficiency. When the students in low-proficiency group learnt much from the student in high-proficiency group, they really practiced what they got from the student in high-proficiency group to make the improvement of their speaking.

The result is in line with Lesser's research results (2004) that also proved that the students with low proficiency levels get the benefit in speaking skill when paired with them who are high proficiency level. Furthermore, when the students with high proficiency level are giving advice, the students in low-proficiency group would be listening to them because Pearce, et.al., (2009) state that students care about what their friends think. The low level proficiency students sometimes will complain when their pair does the correction for them, and ask the right one when they do the mistakes.

Meanwhile, the students' speaking in high-proficiency group is improved but not too much because they focused on guiding the students in low-proficiency group. They did not add their knowledge maximally because the students in low-proficiency group were rarely asking the questions out of their knowledge of speaking. According to Kim and McDonough (2010), when the students are paired with the students who have lower proficiency level than them, it will make them frustrated. The students of high-proficiency group can provide the source of learning speaking by sharing their knowledge of speaking, but not vice versa.

## CONCLUSION

Blended learning is effective for teaching speaking. In blended learning context, the students could be given more chances besides in the classroom to practicing speaking.

Moreover, the students' different proficiency level can play role in helping students learn speaking. The heterogeneous class could give the benefit in learning speaking. The high-proficiency level students can be paired with the low-proficiency level students in order the students in high-proficiency group can help the low one in learning speaking.

However, the researcher found some things that need to be considered because the researcher missed it in this research. Therefore, for the further research, it is suggested that the treatment should be applied longer in order to get more accurate result of the data. More time or longer frequency of the treatment day is needed, so that better result will be obtained.

Moreover, the teacher and the students can do the online learning activity through synchronous activity in order to make the students being on time in doing the online activity, such as submitting the task. Therefore, the next activity will be not interrupted by the previous activity which is not complete done.

Besides, in doing the pre-test and post-test of speaking for the students, the researcher should provide the context of every topic provided (who speaks, to whom the speaker speaks, and where does the speaker speaks) in order the students can know the use of the topic for in the real life. Additionally, the researcher also should give the time for every student to tell or to speak to make it more conducive, such as the minimum and the maximum time of speaking.

## REFERENCE

- Aljouei, K. F. (2018). Pairing students of different proficiency levels in Saudi secondary schools. *Art and Social Sciences Journal*, 9(2) 1-4. doi: 10.4172/2151-6200.1000329
- Bakar, N. A., Latiff, H., and Hamat A. (2013). Enhancing ESL learners speaking skills through asynchronous online discussion forum. *Asian Social Science* 9(9) 224-233. doi:10.5539/ass.v9n9p224

- Belinda, R. V. (2018). *The effect of blended learning activity in improving the students' English speaking skill in the context of English as a foreign language*. Published Script. Bandar Lampung: University of Lampung. Retrieved from <http://digilib.unila.ac.id/32606/>
- Belinda, R. V., Raja, P., & Nurweni, A. (2018). The use of chatting in social media using English in improving the students' English speaking skill in the context of English as a foreign language. *Unila Journal of English Teaching (U-JET)* 7(3).
- Gebhard, J. G. (2009). *Teaching English as a foreign or second language: A self-development and methodology guide*. USA: The University of Michigan Press.
- Harris, D. P. (1969). *Testing English as a second language*. Georgetown University: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Hubackova, S., Semradova, I., & Klimova, B. F. (2011). Blended learning in a foreign language teaching. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 28(2011) 281 – 285. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.054
- Kim, Y. & McDonough, K. (2008). The effect of interlocutor proficiency on the collaborative dialogue between Korean as a second language learners. *Language Teaching Research* 12(2) 211–234. doi: 10.1177/1362168807086288
- Lesser, M. J. (2004). Learner proficiency and focus on form during collaborative dialogue. *Language Teaching Research Journal* 8(1) 55–81. doi: 10.1191/1362168804lr134oa
- Long, M. H. & Porter, P. A. (1984). *Group work, interlanguage talk and second language acquisition*. Revised version of a paper presented at the 18th annual TESOL Convention, Houston, Texas, March 6-11, 1984.
- Minalla, A. A. (2018). The effect of WhatsApp chat group in enhancing EFL learners' verbal interaction outside classroom contexts. *English Language Teaching* 11(3) 1-7. doi: 10.5539/elt.v11n3p1
- Pearce, J., Mulder, R., & Chi, B. (2009). *Involving students in peer review case studies and practical strategies for university teaching*. Cambridge: The University of Cambridge.
- Storch, N. & Aldosari, A. (2012). Pairing learners in pair work activity. *Language Teaching Research* 17(1) 31–48. doi: 10.1177/1362168812457530
- Ta'amneh, M. A. (2017). The effect of using WhatsApp messenger in learning English language among university students. *International Research Education* 5(1) 143-151. doi:10.5296/ire.v5i1.10801
- Thorne, K. (2003). *Blended learning how to integrate online and traditional learning*. London: Kogan Page.
- Young, D.J. (1991). Language anxiety from the foreign language specialist's perspective: Interview with Khrasen, Omaggio Hadley, Terrell and Rardin. *Conference Papers* (150).