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**Papers from**  
**The Proceedings of**  
***The Third National Symposium Quality English***  
***Teaching: Let's Think Together and Make a***  
***Difference***  
**Sunday, Nov 13, 2011**

Department of Languages & Translation

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Department of Languages & Translation

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## Learning Styles as Perceived by Learners of English as a Foreign Language in the English Language Center of The Arab American University Jenin, Palestine

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The Arab American University Jenin

### **Abstract:**

Learning styles play an indispensable role in determining the teaching styles. Accordingly, this study investigated the perceptual learning styles as perceived by the students studying English as a foreign language at the English Language Center at The Arab American University in Palestine. It aimed to explore the learning styles to be the baseline for teaching English as a foreign language at AAUJ. Accordingly, the researchers attempted to answer the following questions: What are the learning styles of the EFL students at AAUJ? Are their significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) in the learning styles due to the academic level, gender and English level? To achieve this, the researchers developed a 20-item questionnaire, which was distributed amongst 190 male and 196 female students at AAUJ. This sample represented 30% of the study population. Analyzing the data, the researchers used standard deviations, means, independent T-test and One-way Anova. The researchers concluded that: AAUJ students (females and males) mainly auditory in addition to other secondary learning styles, each academic level has his own learning styles, no differences were found among the students regarding their level in English. The researchers recommended: auditory activities should be prioritized in English teaching at ELC at AAUJ, language Labs should be enriched to suit this most prevalent learning style, native and non-native instructors of English should evenly be trained to incorporate the various learning styles while teaching, more studies should be conducted to investigate the relationship the learners' residence (city, town, village, camp) and their learning styles.

### **Introduction and theatrical Background:**

If tools of success are provided, every human being is able to learn. Thus, everybody has the right to be given the chance to learn in accordance with his own preferences and needs. However, what makes it difficult for the learner to perform properly in EFL classes is the conflict between teaching and learning styles. Maggioli (1996) stressed that the more the conflict is avoided between teaching and learning styles, the more confident and self-esteemed learners and teachers we will have. Rogers (2000) reiterated his advocacy for the matchmaking between what the teachers think as an appropriate method and how their students would respond. Kanninen (2009) confirmed that people who had a clear learning style preference will tend to learn more effectively. Mulalic (2009) indicated the need to match the teaching styles of the lecturers and the learning styles of students in order to increase competency of teaching and learning.

Accordingly, a lot of definitions of the learning styles came to the surface. Each encompassed the researchers' theoretical and/or experimental points of view. The main purpose of all of those definitions was to pave the way for the learners to learn in conformity with their needs and abilities. "Learning styles are a method of personal choice to perceive and process information" Kolb (1984). In this sense, learning styles are, on one hand, sensory and on the other hand are mental. Jensen (1998) defined the learning style as a sort of way of thinking, comprehending and processing information. Brand (2010) called a person's individual way of learning his or her learning style. Bonk and Zhang (2008) noted that the pattern or tendency of an individual's learning behaviors and attitudes are called

his/her learning styles. Byrne (2002) defined learning styles as personally preferred ways of dealing with information and experiences. In other words, it is how one learns. It was also indicated that an individual's learning style indicated how he or she best retrieved and retained information. ([www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com). 2009).

In light of the earlier mentioned definitions, a plethora of learning styles emerged. In their study the researchers considered VAKT model. In other words, the researchers would view and survey the learners' attitudes according to the Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic and Tactile learning styles. The VAKT learning styles model offered a simple methodology. Therefore, researchers should bear in their minds that those styles helped understand the learners' personality, preferences and strengths. ([www.businessballs.com](http://www.businessballs.com) 2009). Kanninen (2009) considered VAKT as the observation channel model which was a base for several learning styles models. Renou (2008) termed VAKT as perceptual learning styles which allowed us to take into account aspects of several learning-style theories by synthesizing their important characteristics into an approach which can be easily implemented in a classroom situation.

What's more, scholars and researchers had a consensus on what VAKT learning styles precisely entailed. Goris (2010), Putintseva (2006), Danchak and Polhemus (2004), Mulalic (2009) clarified that:

- Visual learners prefer to study using written notes, diagrams or pictures. Image is everything to a visual learner. They also need to see the teacher's body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of a lesson. They tend to prefer sitting at the front of the classroom to avoid visual obstructions. They often prefer to take detailed notes to absorb the information.
- Auditory learners will listen to a lecture, and then write down their thoughts afterward. They will benefit from reading study notes aloud rather than simply looking at them. They learn best through verbal lectures, discussions, and listening to what others have to say. They interpret the underlying meanings of speech through listening to tone of voice, pitch, speed. These learners often benefit from reading text aloud and using a tape recorder.
- The kinesthetic learner prefers to be physically involved in learning, using his body, his hands and his sense of touch. They learn best through a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted.
- Tactile learners prefer hands work, for example, handling materials or taking notes. Working on an experiment in the laboratory is the best way for such students to learn new material. Writing notes or instruction can help such learners to remember information easily and physical involvement in the class plays major role in their retention of the information.

Since very little attention has been paid to how learners learn and how teachers teach in many institutions, the main problem of this research attempts to explore the importance of determining the learning styles and the differences in learning styles of the students regarding their gender and level. It is an attempt to contribute to the improvement of the performance of AAUJ students through introducing and adapting the various teaching styles that suit the learners' learning preferences and experiences.

### **Statement of the problem:**

Despite the fact that the ELC at the AAUJ offers multifaceted facilities to the EFL students in the various levels, there is still a nagging problem of the fluctuating performance, response, achievement and motivation of the students at various levels.

Exploring the underlying reasons of this problem, the researchers surveyed the respective theoretical and experimental studies and papers. As a result, they came up with the urgent necessity to detect the students' learning styles, and whether they conform to the teaching styles and the facilities provided by the ELC.

The researchers are wholeheartedly willing to put the corner stone in solving this problem and introducing alternative teaching styles accordingly

### **Purpose of the study:**

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. Exploring the learning styles of the EFL students at AAUJ.
2. Familiarizing the EFL instructors at AAUJ with the students' learning preferences.
3. Introducing alternative teaching styles to suit the students' learning preferences.

### **Questions of the study:**

1. What are the learning styles of the EFL students at AAUJ?
2. Do EFL male and female students at AAUJ at different levels have similar learning styles?
3. Are there significant differences in the learning styles due to the academic level among EFL students at AAUJ?
4. Are there significant differences in the learning styles due to the English level among EFL students at AAUJ?

### **The hypotheses of the study:**

1. There are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) in the EFL students' preferences of learning styles at AAUJ.
2. There are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) between EFL male and female students at different levels concerning the learning styles at AAUJ.
3. There are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) in the styles of learning used by AAUJ EFL students due to academic level.
4. There are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) in the styles of learning used by AAUJ EFL students due to English level.

### **Significance of the study:**

The findings of the study would help adapt the current teaching styles to meet the learners needs, and thus relieving the instructors of their incessant sweating and fruitless efforts in the classroom.

It is expected that this study would open a new horizon for the instructors to relinquish the traditional teacher centered teaching and adopt the student centered one.

Furthermore, it is an endeavor to exploit more effectively the facilities in use in addition to introducing new and up to date students' favored ones.

### **Definition of terms:**

The following terms will have the following meanings, wherever they come in this study:

- **AAUJ**: The Arab American University –Jenin – Palestine. It was established in 2000.

The web page is : **www.aauj.edu**

- **ELC** : English Language Center at the Arab American University in Jenin. This center is in charge of making placement tests, according which the levels of students are determined .

- **EFL**: English as a Foreign Language. It is a term used in teaching English for non-native speakers.

- **VAKT**: Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile. These are common learning styles.

- **Levels**: The AAUJ holds a placement test for all fresh the students, according which the students are classified into three Levels: beginning, intermediate, advanced.

### **Limitation of the study:**

#### **This study has the following limitations:**

- This study is limited to the students of the AAUJ.
- The scholastic year is 2010-2011
- The investigated learning styles are visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile.

### **Review of related literature:**

Students learn in a variety of ways, and their ability to attain this information also varies. A student's capacity to learn is impacted by the teacher's style of conveying information. Markova (1992) assumes that the students' failure in school is attributed to the presumption that the students' minds operate in the same way as their teachers do. Consequently, little attention is given to how students think. Educators have, for many years, noticed that some students prefer certain methods of learning more than others. These dispositions, referred to as *learning styles*, form a student's unique learning preference and aid teachers in the planning of small-group and individualized instruction (Kemp, Morrison & Ross, 1998).

Aqel and Mahmoud (2006) studied the effect of learning styles on An –Najah University students. The sample of the study consisted of 120 female and male students. Conducting their study, the researchers came up with the following results and recommendations:

- More studies should be conducted by the other Palestinian universities to identify the learning styles of their students.
- There are significant differences in learning styles due to the use of computers.
- A plethora of learning styles should be adopted in the classroom to suit the students' preferences.
- There are no significant differences in the learning styles used by An – Najah University students due to gender.

By emphasizing learning styles, we focus on the learner and by doing so we are getting the learner to reflect on how he or she learns. Hall and Moseley (2005) purported that this shift of focus can have positive effects on student motivation. Kanninen (2009) studied the importance of learning styles. In ramification of surveying the various learning styles, he concluded that:

- By including multiple learning objects that serve all kinds of learning styles, learning environment can be developed to be adaptive for learners' needs.



- It is important to focus on students' awareness of their learning style.
- The planning has to be done in a way that different styles are offered to different learning methods.

In "Creating a Learner-centered Teacher Education Program", Trombly and Alta (2001) stated that success meant slowly implementing teachers new techniques and thereby adapting students so they would understand lesson goals and objectives, value communicative tasks and activities, generate topics and choose materials, work cooperatively, and identify their own learning strategies and styles.

In his paper "The application of learning style theory in higher education teaching", Robotham (1999) argued that in order for learning to be effective in achieving desired outcomes, educators need to have an awareness and understanding of individuals' learning styles. If one was able to diagnose the learning style of an individual, then it would seem logical to assume that matching the characteristics of instruction to that style would make the instruction more effective. Students tend to enter a learning situation with a style of learning already developed. If they meet a learning environment at variance with that style, then it is likely the student will reject the learning environment.

Zhenhui (2000) found out that in all academic classrooms, no matter what the subject matter, there will be students with multiple learning styles and students with a variety of major, minor and negative learning styles. An effective means of accommodating these learning styles is for teachers to change their own styles and strategies and provide a variety of activities to meet the needs of different learning styles. Then all students will have at least some activities that appeal to them based on their learning styles, and they are more likely to be successful in these activities. It is always helpful for the teacher to divide the students into groups by learning styles and give them activities based on their learning styles. This should appeal to them because they will enjoy them and be successful.

Rao (2002) viewed 30 Chinese university students on the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in learning English as a Foreign-Language (EFL) courses in China. Most of the subjects reported that their traditional learning styles and habits had prohibited them from being actively involved in communicative activities. As students have already been in school for at least 12 years by the time they enter university, they have become accustomed to the traditional language teaching style, which is dominated by a teacher-centered, book-centered approach and an emphasis on rote memory. Some subjects suggested that language teachers in China should change their teaching approaches from kindergarten.

Kara (2009) interviewed 100 second year learners studying in ELT Department in Anadolu University, Turkey and their 12 teachers. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the potential outcomes of the mismatch between the learners' learning styles and the teaching style of teaching. The researcher concluded that:

- Both teachers and learners favored the visual and the auditory learning styles.
- Teachers did not accommodate their teaching styles to meet the students' needs.
- Learners said that they feel unhappy and frustrated when their teachers did not teach in their favored style.

Juris, (2009) investigated 254 learners and 9 teachers' attitudes towards learning styles. That paper which was conducted in public and private institutions in Cordoba, Sucre, Atlantico and Bolivar, Colombia came up with:

- The kinesthetic style was the most prevalent followed by the tactile and then the auditory style.

There was no match between students' and teachers' learning styles. -

- Teachers should identify their own teaching and learning styles to obtain better results in the classroom.
- Teachers should encourage tasks variation and creativity to enable learners to challenge the beliefs in the way they learn and acquire knowledge.
- Teachers should be involved in this type of research to assure the results found in this research study.

Mulalic (2009) explored a number of problems and challenges relating to the perceptual learning styles of students in English as Second Language in Malaysia. To achieve this objective, he developed a questionnaire which assessed the students' learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile. The results were as follows:

- Lecturers are not aware of their learning styles, and thus students' learning styles were ignored and were considered as an insignificant component in the learning process.
- The dominant learning style was kinesthetic.
- There was a significant difference in learning styles between male and female students regarding auditory and kinesthetic learning styles. Male students favored kinesthetic and auditory learning when compared with the females.
- Significant differences were found in all learning styles among students from

different ethnic background. That is, Indian students were visual; Kinesthetic learning style was reported as a major learning style for Chinese and Malay students.

- When the learning styles are determined, instructor should take into consideration the differences among the students when designing the course material.

Garland and Martin (2005) investigated the differences between the learning styles of 168 university students in face to face courses and online taught courses. They concluded that there are significant differences regarding gender. In other words, female students showed a growing number in online learning in comparison to males. This implies that gender should be considered when designing online courses.

Ramayah (2009) conducted a study concerning the learning styles of both male and female students in Malaysia. 207 males and 199 females were involved. The result was the influenced learning styles were the aural and the visual., but has no influence on read and write and kinesthetic ones. The females preferred the visual and aural learning styles more than the males did.

In a longitudinal study, Fleming ( 2010 ) reported that the main findings of the study, which targeted first and final year nursing students at an Irish university , concluded that the most common dominant learning style in the first year was dual learning category while a large proportion of the students in their final year had no dominant learning style. This shows that the academic level could affect the learning style.

Gune ( 2004 ) conducted a study at Gazi University, Turkey, to determine the learning styles of preparatory school students from Gazi University and examine the relationship between students' learning style preferences (LSP) and the faculty students will study in, gender, proficiency level of English and achievement scores on listening, reading, grammar, and writing in the English Course. The instrument, Index of Learning Style, was administered to 367 randomly selected students. The results of this study indicated that there wasn't any

difference between faculty preparatory school students will study in, gender, and proficiency level of English and their LSPs.

Reid ( 1987 ) reviewed the literature on learning styles and cognitive styles for both native speakers and nonnative speakers of English to identify their perceptual learning style preferences. Statistical analyses of the questionnaires indicated that nonnative speakers learning style preferences often differ significantly from those of native speakers. That is, ESL students from different language backgrounds sometimes differ from one another in their learning style preferences. Other variables such as sex, length of time in the United States, length of time studying English in the U. S., field of study, level of education, TOEFL score, and age are related to differences in learning styles.

### **Population of the study:**

The population of this study consisted of 1300 students from the different majors of AAUJ. Sorted out as beginners, intermediate or advanced by a regular placement test, these students are studying English as a foreign language at the English Language Center at AAUJ.

The sample of the study, randomly selected , consisted of 386 students of the total population. Of these, 196 were females and 190 were males. The sample was distributed in accordance with independent variables: gender (Table1), English Level (table 2) , Academic level (Table 3)

**Table (1) :Distribution of the sample due to gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Female	196	50.8
Male	190	49.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table (2) :Distribution of the sample due to English level**

<b>English level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Beginning	134	34.7
Intermediate	141	36.5
Advanced	111	28.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table (3) :Distribution of the sample due to academic level**

<b>Academic level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> year	134	34.7
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	68	17.6

3 <sup>rd</sup> year	73	18.9
4 <sup>th</sup> year	111	28.8
Total	386	100

**Note: The percentage of the gender, the English level and the academic level was determined by the actual number of the students in the sample of the study.**

### **Instrument of the study:**

Surveying the related literature, the researchers developed a 20 item questionnaire on the four common learning styles: visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic.

The questionnaire was judged by three experts in the field of education, methodology and statistics. Consequently, it was judged as being a suitable instrument of the study.

The five- point scale was adopted: strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree, neutral.

Each learning style was tested by five items. That is, items 1,2,3,4,5 tested the visual learning style ; items 6, 7, 8 ,9 ,10 measured the tactile ; items 11 ,12, 13, 14, 15 tested the auditory; items16, 17, 18, 19,20 checked the kinesthetic.

### **Reliability of the instrument**

The reliability of the study was calculated by using the Cronbach Alpha formula. Accordingly, the reliability coefficient was .9779 which was acceptable for the purpose of the study.

### **Statistical analysis**

The data, collected by the researchers, were analyzed by using different techniques to answer the questions of the study. These techniques included means, standard deviations, percentages, Independent T-Test and One-way ANOVA. Cronbach Alpha formula was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire. To analyze the findings, the researchers used the following ranks for analysis: strongly agree : 5, agree : 4 , disagree :3 , strongly disagree :2 , neutral :1.

### **Results:**

**To answer the first question: "What are the learning styles of the EFL students at AAUJ ?"**

**The researchers examined the first null hypothesis: "There are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) in the EFL students ' preferences of learning styles at AAUJ."**

To examine this hypothesis, the researchers analyzed the data using means and standard deviations.

**Table (4) :Students' Learning Style Preferences**

Learning style	N	Mean
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Visual	386	3.8057
Tactile	386	3.8368
Auditory	386	3.8642
Kinesthetic	386	3.8150

According to the mean score for each learning style, students in this study favored the **Auditory** learning style (3.8642) . Their minor learning style preferences were towards **Tactile** (3.8368), **Kinesthetic** (3.8150) , **Visual** (3.8057)

In order to demonstrate each learning style individually and how students responded to each statement in the questionnaire the following tables have been provided.

**Table (5): Students' Visual Learning Style Preference**

Question item	N	Mean	S.D
1. I learn better by reading what the teacher writes on the chalkboard.	386	3.8964	1.0834
6. When I read instructions, I remember them better.	386	3.8938	1.1449
9. I understand better when I read instructions.	386	3.9974	.9948
4. I learn better by reading than by listening to someone.	386	3.7591	1.0175
13. I learn more by reading textbooks than by listening to lectures.	386	3.4819	1.2446
<b>Total</b>	386	3.8057	1.0167

The mean scores in Table (5) demonstrate that the visual learning style is preferred by (3.8057). Specifically, item no.9 received the highest rating. The mean of responses was (3.9974).This implies that students with visual learning preference learn better when they read instructions. Whereas, the lowest rating was for item no. 13 which reads "I learn better by reading than by listening to someone". This would, in turn , imply that even the visual learner has certain preferences in the same learning style which should be considered . To sum up, according to the mean score, overall for visual learning, students expressed minor learning style preference.

**Table (6): Students' Tactile Learning Style Preference**

Question item	N	Mean	S.D
11. I learn more when I can make a model of something.	386	3.8394	1.1419

7. I learn more when I make something for a class project.	386	3.7254	1.0331
2. I learn better when I make drawings as I study.	386	3.9352	1.1366
5. When I build something, I remember what I have learned better.	386	3.7539	1.1138
18. I enjoy making something for a class project.	386	3.9301	.9685
<b>Total</b>	386	3.8368	1.0005

From table (6), we can see that tactile learning style received the second highest rating. The mean scores show it is preferred by (3.8368). The mean scores of items 2 and 18 were (3.9352) and (3.9301) respectively. In other words, these two items were predominant in the tactile style. Therefore, tactile learners learn more when they make drawings and when they contribute to a class project.

**Table (7): Students' Auditory Learning Style Preference**

Question item	N	Mean	S.D
17. When the teacher tells me the instructions I understand better.	386	4.1710	.9352
12. When someone tells me how to do something in class, I learn it better.	386	3.4819	1.0198
8. I remember things I have heard in class better than things I have read.	386	4.0311	.9281
16. I learn better in class when the teacher gives a lecture.	386	3.8472	1.0344
15. I learn better in class when I listen to someone.	386	3.7902	.9935
Total	386	3.8642	.8975

Table (7) indicates that the majority of the students mostly prefer the auditory learning style. The mean scores show that it is preferred by (3.8642). The highest rating in the auditory style was for items 17 (4.1710), 8 (4.0311) respectively although the other items were preferred for most of the students. This result implies that students in the auditory learning prefer listening to instructions and learn more when they hear things more than reading them. However, if we compare item 17 (auditory) "When the teacher tells me the instructions I understand better" with item 9 (visual) "I understand better when I read instructions", we find that item 17 received the higher mean score.

**Table ( 8): Students' Kinesthetic Learning Style Preference**

Question item	N	Mean	S.D
19. I prefer to learn by doing something in class.	386	3.6865	1.2619
17. When I do things in class, I learn better.	386	3.9301	1.0680
18. I enjoy learning in class by doing experiments.	386	3.9404	1.0903
3.. I understand things better in class when I participate in role-playing.	386	3.9611	1.0350
4.. I learn best in class when I can participate in related activities.	386	3.5570	1.2413
<b>Total</b>	386	3.8150	.9692

Table (8) shows that kinesthetic is a minor learning style. The overall mean score was (3.8150). The results show that the kinesthetic students learn best when they participate in role- playing ( 3.9611) , do experiments (3.9404 ) , and do things in class (3.9301) respectively.

In conclusion, the answer of the first study question "What are the learning styles of the EFL students at AAUJ?" is : the auditory learning style is the predominant learning style among the Arab American University students studying English as a foreign language at ELC . Whereas, the other learning styles (tactile, visual, kinesthetic) are considered to be minor ones.

**To answer the second question of the study : " Do EFL male and female students at AAUJ at different levels have similar learning styles? The researchers examined the second hypothesis: "There are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) between EFL male and female students at different levels concerning the learning styles at AAUJ ".**

To examine this hypothesis, the researchers analyzed the data using means and standard deviations and independent t –test.

**Table ( 9 )Gender statistics**

Gender	N	Mean	S.D	T
Male	190	3.7918	1.0098	- 815
Female	196	3.8679	07929	

Table (9) shows that the computed t – test was -815. This means that there were no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) in the learning styles of the Arab American University students studying English as a foreign language at ELC due to gender.

**To answer the third question: "Are there significant differences in the learning styles due to the academic level among EFL students at AAUJ?" The researchers examined**

**the third hypothesis: "There are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) in the styles of learning used by AAUJ EFL students due to academic level".**

To examine this hypothesis, the researchers used means, standard deviations and One-Way Anova.

One – way ANOVA Test results on differences in the styles of learning used by The Arab American University EFL students due to academic level.

**Table (10)**

Groups	Sum squares	of DF	Means square	F	Sig.
Between groups	5.803	3	5.268	6.706	.000
Within groups	0.065	382	.786		
Total	5.868	385			

Table ( 10 ) clarifies that there are significant differences at ( $\alpha = .05$  ) level in the styles of learning used by AAUJ EFL students due to academic level.

**Table (11 ): Academic level and the learning Style**

Learning style	Academic level	N	Mean	S.D
Visual	1 <sup>st</sup> year	134	3.9134	.8297
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	68	4.1353	.8683
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	73	3.5288	1.2039
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	111	3.6559	1.1057
	<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>3.8057</b>	<b>1.0167</b>
Tactile	1 <sup>st</sup> year	134	3.8388	.9295
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	68	4.1647	.7467
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	73	3.6301	1.1463
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	111	3.8368	1.0768
	<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>3.8368</b>	<b>1.0005</b>
Auditory	1 <sup>st</sup> year	134	3.9925	.7420
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	68	4.1765	.7228
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	73	3.6795	1.0820
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	111	3.6396	.9564



	<b>Total</b>	386	3.8642	.8975
Kinesthetic	1 <sup>st</sup> year	134	3.9403	.8567
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	68	4.1912	.5807
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	73	3.5507	1.2355
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	111	3.6072	.9996
	<b>Total</b>	386	3.8150	.9692
Total	1 <sup>st</sup> year	134	3.9213	.7731
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	68	4.1669	.6350
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	73	3.5973	1.1372
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	111	3.6680	.9546
	<b>Total</b>	386	3.8304	.9053

The mean scores in table ( 11 ) demonstrates clearly the learning styles in comparison to the academic level. The following results are listed in a descending order: the first year students learning styles are auditory, kinesthetic, visual, and tactile. However, the second year students are kinesthetic, auditory, tactile, and visual. Whereas, the third year students are tactile, visual, auditory kinesthetic. The fourth year students are auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, and visual.

**To answer the fourth question , " Are there significant differences in the learning styles due to the English level among EFL students at AAUJ ?" the researchers examined the fourth hypothesis, " There are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$ ) in the styles of learning used by AAUJ EFL students due to English level".**

To examine this hypothesis, the researchers used means, standard deviations and One-Way Anova.

One – way Anova Test results on differences in the styles of learning used by The Arab American University EFL students due to English level.

**Table ( 12 )**

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Sum squares</b>	<b>of</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>Means square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Between groups	4.290		2	2.145	2.637	.073
Within groups	1.578		383	.814		
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.868</b>		<b>385</b>			

Table (12) shows that there are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=.05$  ) level in the styles of learning used by AAUJ EFL students due to English level

To describe the results more specifically, the researchers used the following table :

**Table ( 13: Results description regarding English Level**

English Level	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Beginning	134	3.9213	.7731
Intermediate	141	3.8730	.9705
Advanced	111	3.6680	.9546
<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>3.8308</b>	<b>.9058</b>

The results regarding each English level were respectively beginning (3.9213), intermediate (3.8730), advanced (3.6680). However, the overall result regarding the English levels was insignificant since the computed F- value was (2.637).

### **Discussion:**

The dominant learning style as perceived by the Arab American University EFL students was Auditory. They expressed minor preferences for tactile, kinesthetic and visual learning styles. This agrees with a study conducted by Kara (2009) which concluded that auditory and visual learning styles were the most prominent ones among Anadolu University, Turkey, students. However, it doesn't agree with Mulalic (2009) whose studies accentuated the prevalence of Kinesthetic among their samples of university students in Cordoba ,Spain, and Malaysia. On the other hand, Aqel and Mahmoud ( 2006) came up with a variety of learning styles dominated by the students of An- Najah university, another Palestinian University. This incongruity between these two Palestinian universities arises since the majority of students at AAUJ is from the Green Line ( Palestine in 1948); whereas, the students at An- Najah University are mostly from the West Bank. That is , they both relate to different educational systems and different methods of English learning and teaching.

In order to accommodate different learning styles in the classroom, lecturers need to take into consideration for example that auditory students prefer more listening to the lectures and seminars, and participating in discussions. These students like to listen to the tape recordings of material and have a chance to ask questions about what they have learned or do not understand. Tactile oriented learners prefer to learn with hands-on experience. These students have to be involved physically in the class activities. Kinesthetic learners prefer to create and develop what they learn. They learn best from the trial and error experiences. Visual learners may prefer reading, observing, and more data for their interpretation or more visual aids, such as movies, diagrams, pictures, graphs. (Hall and Mosely, 2009), Goris(2010), Putintseva (2006), Polhemus (2004).

The second result of this study was there were no significant differences in the learning styles regarding gender. That is to say, both EFL males and females at AAUJ do not have different learning styles. This, in turn, implies that there is no need to consider any specific learning styles concerning gender. This result seems to be a Palestinian peculiarity since it is consistent with another Palestinian study conducted by Aqel and Mahmoud (2006) . However, it is inconsistent with some other studies.

Ramayah (2009) and Garland and Martin (2005) supported the different learning styles for both males and females.

The third result was that there were significant differences in the learning styles due to academic level. This implies that each academic level has its own properties and learning preferences which the lecturer should consider while teaching. This result agrees with Aqel and Mahmoud (2006) , Fleming ( 2010 ) and Markova (1992).

The fourth result was that there were no significant differences in the styles of learning used by AAUJ EFL students due to English level. That is, while teaching English, the instructor should adapt his teaching strategy to suit the learners learning styles with respect to the academic level no matter whether the learner is female, male, beginning, intermediate, or advanced. This result is consistent with Aqel and Mahmoud (2006) and Gune (2004), but it contradicts the study conducted by Reid (1987).

### **Recommendations:**

After surveying and discussing the results of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

- Auditory activities should be on the top of the priorities in English teaching at ELC at AAUJ. That is, textbooks and language Labs should be enriched to suit this most prevalent learning style.
- Since we have a number of minor learning styles, a combination of activities should be involved in the classroom to help the learners compromise and work together.
- These newly explored learning styles should be a catalyst for lecturers to expand and vary their teaching styles.
- Native and non-native instructors of English as a foreign language should evenly be trained to incorporate the various learning styles while teaching.
- New instruments should be tried to investigate the effectiveness of the various learning styles using experimental and controlled groups.
- New studies should be conducted to investigate the impact of the place of residence (Camp, village , town , city ) and standard of living on learning styles.

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**The Effectiveness of Adopting Blended Learning  
Strategies in Improving Learning English  
as a Foreign Language**

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**Abstract:**

Obviously, every caring teacher wants to do a good job for his or her students by looking for new methods to improve his/ her students performance. Technological advances and widespread access to information and communication technologies have facilitated the rapid growth of blended learning approaches in both higher education and corporate training contexts. The American Society for Training and Development also identified blended learning as one of the top 10 emergent trends in the knowledge delivery industry (Finn, 2002). Since then, the visibility of blended learning environments has increased dramatically in both formal education and corporate training settings. There is increasing interest in the concept of blended learning as evidenced by greater numbers of books, journal articles, and trade magazine articles that directly address issues related to blended learning. This research will investigate the effect of implementing blended learning and its appropriateness in developing students' language skills at An-Najah National University.

**Introduction:**

Arab learners of English encounter problems in both speaking and writing. This fact has been clearly stated by many researchers ( Bakir 2010, Rabab'ah 2003, Al-kuwelleh & Shoumali 2000, Abbad 1988 ). The students in Palestine, for example, learn English in their native country, where the native language is Arabic. The only way to learn English in Palestine is through formal instruction, i.e. inside the classroom where the language teachers in schools and universities are native speakers of Arabic, and there are usually large classes with more than 45 students.

Therefore, there is little opportunity for students to use English outside classrooms or through natural interaction in the target language. This is only possible when students encounter native speakers of English who come to the country as tourists, and this rarely happens.

Mostly, English language teachers ask themselves, "What are the best methods and procedures I can use to make a productive and exciting lesson for my students? What new tools of technology can improve learning to give performance and ideal better results? How can we encourage our students to learn outside the classroom?"

Blended learning is a popular topic in English Language Teaching as it has been increasingly opted for by many people in the United States ( Allen et.al, 2007) .It is a flexible approach that combines face-to-face teaching/learning with remote (usually internet-based) learning and this research is about investigating its usefulness to overcome difficulties as studies have shown that most language learning happens outside the classroom, in a blend of various learning environments. How can we integrate traditional classroom teaching with hi-tech alternatives?

**Literature Review:**

It has been a common belief that technology is a good tool to improve teaching and learning ( Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Craig, Winter 2001). It has been found that even if

teachers use technology in the classroom, the efforts made don't change the existing teaching practice (Cuban, et al., Winter 2001). The fact whether technology did really make a difference in improving students' achievement is still questionable. There is very scientific research addressing whether technology is a burden or an effective tool in increasing the academic achievement in the history of teaching (Murray, October 22, 2002). Therefore, this study will delimit whether technology, specifically blended learning, has an effect on improving students' achievement in English language.

Researchers have conducted a few research papers affirming that technology can play a positive role in improving academic achievement. Wenglinsky (1998) has done research into the effect of using technology on the students performance and found that it depends on the method the teachers adopt. To put it right, he has come up with the conclusion that teachers who have used the computer technology to develop their students problem solving skills really had training and skill in using technology. Therefore using technology for the sake of practice is more beneficial and rewarding than just merely theoretically based employment.

Akkoyunlu and Soylu conducted a study (2006) to investigate the view of students regarding the blended learning environment. The results of the study revealed that the more the students participate in the online discussion forums, the more they achieve and the more positive views they develop towards blended learning. Moreover, the study revealed that both the face-to-face lectures and the online tasks contributed to the learning process.

Research into whether blended learning is effective is reflected qualitatively instead of quantitatively. (Arbaugh, 2008) stated that due to the fact that there is no difference in terms of the summative assessment between blended and face-to-face courses. However, when performance (Simonson, Schlosser, & Hanson, 1999) is a factor, students in the online course performed better than the students taking the same activities in the traditional classroom environment mainly because the students could repeat the task and listen to the videos more than once.

Many research papers affirm the importance of blended learning in the sense that it reports higher levels of learning if compared to traditional modes of in-class lecturing (Clouse and Evans, 2003). In their study on the effect of applying blended learning to the teaching of specialized courses in business, they found that when face-to-face and online teaching environments are combined, the performance of students on exam questions improved. But, when the asynchronous and synchronous approaches to blended learning are introduced, the level of achievement on exams was poor. Yet, the students indicated that the traditional lectures revealed more clarity. Sauers and Walker (2004) found that students in a blended course indicated that their course system is more beneficial than the traditional face-to-face lectures.

It is also evident that when blended learning activities are given to the students of the blended and the traditional courses, those enrolling in the blended performed better (Simon, et al., 1999). This is due to the accessibility of the tasks, the possibility of making the suitable changes, and the availability of peer reviews. Other researcher affirmed the fact that blended learning improves students' performance (Sankaran and Bui, 2001).

Recently, Blended learning is the new trend in the history of educational technology referring to the process of combining online and face-to-face instruction (Reay, 2001; Rooney, 2003; Sands, 2002; Ward & LaBranche, 2003; Young, 2002).

Kerres (2002) affirms that the blended learning approach addresses from the very start a needs assessment approach. Therefore, traditional teaching is the main ground that is supplemented by the e-learning approach. The e-learning environment facilitates and

adds to the students' performance level by creating a flexible environment that is reachable and accessible anytime.

The president of Pennsylvania State University was quoted saying that the combining of online and traditional instruction was "the single-greatest unrecognized trend in higher education today" (Young, 2002, p. A33). Therefore, the new venture into blended learning is a great mission on both the teachers and students as well. Both need to implement blended learning and describe the results.

Rovai and Jordan (2004) indicate that in accordance with the insights provided by Colis and Moonen (2001), blended learning is correlated both traditional and online learning so that learning is obligatory both in-class and even online either at home or on campus.

As for the course design, Martyn (2003) has designed a successful blended learning model which is designed as follows:

1. Face-to-face component.
2. Weekly online assessments and synchronous chat.
3. Asynchronous discussions.
4. E-mail.
5. Final face-to-face meeting.
6. Proctored final examination.

Smith (2004) presupposes that blended learning is a novel trend in education for the sake of distance education which is nowadays combined with the traditional (or stand-up) education. He describes some IT components of teaching that if combined with the textbook, the course is considered blended. The following types of educational technologies may clarify the point:

1. Traditional workshops or seminars in conjunction with a teleconference feature.
2. Traditional courses with a continuing e-mail connection or ongoing dialogue with the participants.
3. Traditional seminars with live television broadcasts to more than one site
4. Or any other similar combination of technology and traditional educational programming.

As for the blended component to ensure rewarding results, the Encyclopaedia of Educational Technology (undated) states that it should be designed in accordance with the intended learning outcomes. Moreover, the teacher should decide whether the practice of the instructional skill should be done online or in-class. Teachers should also take into account that online various delivery methods are beneficial for the learners achievement level. E-learning could provide a pre-activity environment preceding the in-class activity.

### **Methodology:**

The study used the experimental approach to display the experience that has been done, analyze the collected data, and verify the result of using blended learning in teaching English as a foreign language in high education in Palestine.

### **Course Selection**

The course selected for applying this method in teaching English as a foreign language was the general English course (10103) taken by all students at An-Najah National university regardless of their different specializations. New concepts and structures are taught during face- to face lectures and accompanying assignments were based on the new material. To master the new material, it was important to complete the activities online. A

large number of students is expected to take advantage of the new method in teaching English if adopted.

### Sample Selection

The instructor (the researcher in this case) selected the two sections that she was teaching in the second semester during the academic year 2009-2010 at An-Najah National University. She applied the new method to one section as an experimental group and used the traditional face-to-face lectures for the other section as a controlled group. The number of the students who participated in the study was 60 students in two sections. 30 students of the sample studied the selected course with blended learning activities. Because the selected sample is not a big one and consisted of students with many different specializations, the researcher distributed the students into two categories of specialization sciences and humanities.

The following table gives more information about the sample used for the study purposes:

Table (1): The Distribution of the Selected Sample Due to Specialization

	No.	Percentage
sciences	37	61.7%
humanities	23	38.3%
Total	60	100%

As seen in table (1), the sample collected 37 students studying different science specializations, and 23 students specializing in humanities.

It is noteworthy that the researcher distributed the sample (for research purposes) due to gender into males and females as follows:

Table (2): The Distribution of the Selected Sample Due to Gender

	No.	Percentage
Male	21	35%
Female	39	65%
Total	60	100%

As seen in table (2), the sample collected 21 males, and 39 females.

### In-class Instruction to both groups:

The experimental and control groups were exposed to the same traditional in-class instruction. The topics covered in class were the same topics given online for the experimental group. The course was taught in 2008-2009 for four months. Students in both



groups did all the writing exercises either in class or at home. While doing the exercises, the author monitored students' work and provided individual help.

As for assessment, students in both groups were instructed to write as many persuasive paragraphs as possible in accordance with a rubric for writing provided at the beginning of the semester. Tests were graded, returned to the students with comments on strengths and weaknesses. Words of encouragement were given. The slightest improvement was noted and commended. Answers were discussed in class and online.

#### **4. Methods of Blended Learning Instructions:**

During the course and in addition to face-to-face classes, students were provided with materials and assignments through the OCC web site. Students were responsible for participating in the assigned on-line learning activities throughout the semester. Discussion groups were formed and as members the students participated in the online discussions and assignments with others. Some assignments were group intensive while others were individual.

#### **Online treatment ( OCC learning management system);**

In addition to the traditional in-class instruction, the experimental group used an online course container called the OCC. This site is available to all the students who simply enrolled in the course. It was easy to use. All the material given on the OCC is related to writing paragraphs related to the ILOs of the course. The experimental group used the Internet from home or university.

The blended course components were described and instructions on how to use certain course components were given to students at the beginning of the semester. Online instruction was posted to the OCC discussion forums on a weekly basis throughout the semester.

Every week, the students were asked to post their comments on a paragraph written by one of the students. **Their first writing task** was an error analysis. The teacher uploaded a paragraph written by one of the students and each student has to comment on one of the errors and provide the correction. Moreover, the student should read the posts provided by the other students before participating. By this way, students unintentional learn. The deadline for the task was 2 weeks. **The second task** was writing a paragraph on a topics related to obsession with smoking and the visual aid was provided. The researcher uploaded a photo of two smokers and this aided the students in writing so many details about the bad effects of smoking. The third task was commenting on and providing opinion regarding two uploaded videos about gender differences. The students should also answer questions related to the videos by using vocabulary items related to their course materials. All the content of the three tasks was related to the ILOs of the course and in accordance with the textbook material.

Throughout the semester, the author served as a facilitator. She responded to individual students' needs, comments and requests for certain sites. The author sent public and private messages to encourage the students to interact and communicate. She had to look for relevant websites and post them in the OCC (Online Course Container). She had to post questions, discussion topics and write model responses every week. The author did not correct spelling and grammatical mistakes. She would point out the type of errors they made especially in the grammar threads and ask the students to double-check their posts. The students who agreed and welcomed the idea of participating in the blended component were

included in the study. the students were given other online tasks related to the ILOs of the course but were not graded.

### Online Learning Activities

1. Students were asked to download online videos, comment, summarize write their opinion about issues related to information in their textbook.
2. Webpage reference e.g., ([www.scieniticamarican.com](http://www.scieniticamarican.com)) for related topics.
3. Prepare presentations using power-point/ LCD.
4. Error analysis ( paragraphs) and discussions.
5. Express their opinion by commenting on photos or videos.

### Methods of Assessment (Criteria of Evaluating Assignment)

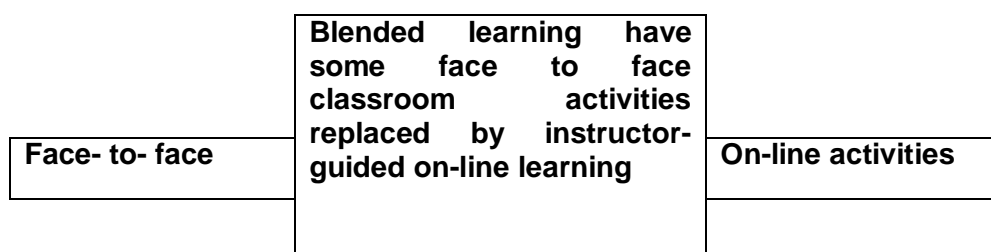
Online assignments were e-mailed for students weekly. The instructor corrected only parts of students' work in accordance with an overall scale. Three tasks were graded and upon completing each task, the students were given a grade of 10 points. Students who completed the three main tasks, received a total grade of 30 points which was transformed to 10%. Because of the institution regulations for such a general unified course, the instructor allocated only 10% of the total mark for online activities, 40% for the first and the second exam, and 50% for the final exam.

### What does Blended Learning Mean in This Course?

In addition to face- to- face lectures, this course adopted a blended format incorporating teaching and learning activities which use information communications technologies such as the internet e-mailing, discussion forums, etc. In the current study, blended learning means combining the face-to-face instruction with the online supplementary activities as an employment of the asynchronous approach to blending courses so as to improve the performance of students ( Clouse and Evans, 2003). The following diagram clarifies the point:

**In classroom**

**outside school**



### Why Blended Learning?

The main goal of this kind of learning is to:

1. promote self-directed learning and expand students' exposure to the language by providing students with an effective combination of in-class teaching and online learning.
2. Use the lecture hours more efficiently to focus on the material that is more effectively presented in a face to face format.
3. Provide students with more flexibility by allowing them to do more of their work from home and to complete online learning activities at times that best suit their weekly schedule and learning preferences.

### **Challenges that Students Face in a Blended Learning Course:**

1. Students must have basic knowledge about computer technology.
2. Students in the course were asked to complete assignments and do activities in groups, which required being open, flexible, respectful of others and accepting diversity.
3. Learning on-line is not a matter of wasting time or optional. But rather, it is a must. Students were expected to take the responsibility to actively use the online learning materials and to manage time so that they could complete online activities between the face to face sessions.
4. The grading method of allocating only 10% of the total mark was considered as demotivating for some of the students to complete some tasks.
5. In group work, some students put their load on the shoulders of others.
6. Plagiarism was a challenge and students' pre-tests were uploaded so as to refer to their modes of writing to evaluate whether plagiarism is combated. Students were told that the teacher knows her students' styles of writing. It was so clear to identify the sentences written by her own students.

### **6. Test Validity and Reliability**

As for the validity of the final exam, five instructors participated in writing the exam questions and agreed on its validity since it measured the skills of reading and writing. The questions of the test were comparable to those used on the pretest of writing. One of the authors was the instructor of the experimental and control groups and the scorer of the pre-test and final exam essays. The reliability co-efficient of the final exam was (.75)

### **Tools of the Study:**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the blended learning in supporting the teaching and learning processes, the researcher developed an achievement exam (a pre-test) to investigate students' level in the two groups at the beginning of the course, and to indicate that any significant differences at the end of the course in favor of the experimental group are due to adopting blended learning. Another tool was the unified final exam which was developed by Language Center at the university.

### **Research Questions:**

The study aimed at answering the following questions:

1. Is the blended learning technique effective in improving learning English at An Najah National University in Palestine?
2. Is there any significant differences in students' achievements due to specialization?

### 3. Is there any significant differences in students' achievements due to gender?

To answer the questions of the research, the students sat for a pre –test in both groups to ensure equivalence between the two groups; the experimental and the controlled. The results of the pre-test for the two groups are presented in table (3) as follows:

Table (3): The Differences in Students' Pre-test Scores Between the Experimental and the Controlled Groups

Test	Means		S. D.		df	t	Sig
	Ctrl. G.	Exp. G.	Ctrl. G.	Exp. G.			
Pre-test	5.90	5.33	1.52	1.30	58	1.56	0.125

The results presented in table (3) show that there are no significant differences in students' achievements between the two groups since t-value was 1.56 at the significance level 0.125 . This result ensured the equivalence of students' level in mastering English in the two groups.

#### **Data Analysis:**

The collected data was analyzed using the SPSS program to calculate the means, standard deviation, the percentages for the achievement scores for each group. The t-test was also used to investigate the significance between students' scores in the pre-test and the post –test.

#### **Results of the Study:**

To investigate the effectiveness of adopting blended learning in teaching English as a foreign language at the university and to answer the first question, the researcher calculated the differences in students' achievement scores between the two groups. The results of the analysis is presented in table (4) as follows:

Table (4): The Differences in Students Scores in the Final exam Between the Experimental and the Controlled Groups in the Final Exam

Test	Means		S. D.		df	t	Sig
	Ctrl. G.	Exp. G.	Ctrl. G.	Exp. G.			
Final exam	73.47%	82.40%	13.03	12.12	58	2.75	0.008*

The means of students' achievements scored 73.47% in the controlled group, but scored 82.40% for students in the experimental group. The results indicated that this difference was significant between the two groups in the final exam in favor of the experimental group which was significant at .008. This goes in line with the findings of Sankaran and Bui (2001) who found that students' performance improved due to Blended learning strategies and not the MLS system itself. However, some studies on Blended learning taking into consideration students found that there is no significant difference in the

achievement level of both face-to-face students and those enrolling in a blended learning environment (Friday, et al, 2006). The results may differ in accordance with the sample and the students motivation to take advantage of the available IT tools on the Blended component (Sankaran and Bui 2001).

Table (5):The Differences in Students Scores Between the Experimental and the Controlled Groups in the Final Exam Due to Students' specialization

Test	Means		S. D.		df	t	Sig
	scientific	humanities	scientific	humanities			
Final exam	86.38%	73.11%	10.06	11.86	28	3.14	0.004*

The results indicated that there were significant differences between the calculated scores for the experimental group in the final exam due to specialization in favor of the scientific specializations. The achievement means of students majoring in different sciences scored 86.38% , but the achievement means of students in humanities scored 73.11 . The difference was significant at .004. Actually, students specializing in science at An-Najah National University are required to use IT tools every semester in almost all their courses, so it is no wonder that using the OCC made studying easier and more rewarding. Also, most courses are taught in English.

Table (6):The Differences in Students Scores Between the Experimental and the Controlled Groups in the Final Exam Due to Gender

Test	Means		S. D.		df	t	Sig
	male	Female	male	female			
Final test	76.67%	84.86%	14.40	10.44	28	1.76	0.09*

The results in table (6) indicated that males ' achievement means scored 76.67% while female' achievement means scored 84.86% . The difference was significant in the final exam due to gender in favor of females at the level .009. It is a fact that at An-Najah University females perform better when it comes to grades and what adds to this is that the female percentage of students enrolling in the honor faculty is over 60% of the overall population. In reference to their online participation, the researcher noticed that the females participated more than the males, and this led to their overall high performance (Arbaugh, 2000).

### **Conclusion:**

Comparing in the results of the experimental group and the controlled group, the researcher found significant differences in students' achievement scores in favor of the experimental group. Students in the experimental group performed better than their peers in the controlled group because the students stated that they enjoyed a lot relating inside instructions and illustrations to outside activities using technology.

Results also indicated that students in science faculties performed better than students in humanity faculties. This may be because students in science are better achievers in Al-tawjihi exam and also English placement exam at the university.

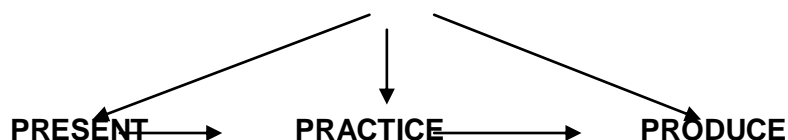
In addition, Females performed better than males in learning the language, because they have extra time to use the computer and they are more committed to submit their assignments on time.

### **General Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of the course, the students in the experimental group were:

1. Communicating clearly and correctly using written, spoken, visual media appropriate to the activity and students' needs.
2. Demonstrating interpersonal skills by listening effectively, and supporting rapport between students.
3. Learning by doing' active learning'. Students use high levels of thinking : analysis, synthesis and evaluation rather than being passive, listening and digesting (memorizing) knowledge and comprehension.
4. Emphasizing group effectiveness skills that will support the notion of a collaborating culture using technology by:
  - \*Using technology to participate in group tasks and support group effectiveness
  - \* Communicating effectively in a group setting by listening actively and giving and receiving feedback appropriately

### **3Ps**



**At the end of the course, the instructor was able to:**

1. Develop students' understanding and use of some related terms ( by asking the students to make comments on the video related to the unit of The Environment).
2. Emphasize group effectiveness skills using technology.
3. Emphasize communication skills that encouraged students to share ideas and opinions.
4. Facilitate learning the foreign language easily in informal settings among the students in their free time.

### **Conclusion and recommendations:**

Depending on the results, the researcher can make the following recommendations:

1. Working on supporting the notion of blended learning among both teachers and students.

2. Blended -learning techniques and strategies need training for teachers and students.
3. Improving the facilities and the technical infrastructure by providing higher internet speed, wireless internet, and stronger servers.

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## The Key to Improving the English Language Listening Skill is: Practice and More Practice

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### Abstract

Mastering the English language listening skill is a difficult task for teachers and students. Although the new English textbooks for our Palestinian schools *English for Palestine* contain a lot of developed listening material yet this skill is neglected because it is not included in the school exams nor in the Tawjihi English Exam (TEE) at the end of the twelfth grade. For English majors at the university level, listening is not practiced sufficiently either especially at Al-Quds Open University (QOU) where students are mostly self-learners. Thus, the researcher conducted an experiment in her listening course for English majors at QOU in the second semester 2010 -2011 on a group of (74) students. The method used was providing intensive practice in class and outside class by listening to all types of materials including a lot of on line materials, media, and by using a number of listening strategies. A pre test at the beginning of the semester was given and the final exam was used as a post test. The scores of the two tests were compared to check the development of the students' listening abilities. The hours of training for each student were calculated and the correlation between the hours of training and the improvement in achievement was analyzed using the suitable statistical methods. The experiment showed significant improvement in the performance of the students which varied in degree according to the amount of practice each student received. This proves that the more practice in listening comprehension the students get, the more improvement they achieve. The researcher recommends that practice in listening should be encouraged.

Key words : receptive skills ,productive skills, listening strategies,

### **1. 1 Introduction**

Students need to be exposed to the language if they want to learn it. And one of the ways of doing this is through listening to it. No doubt, listening is the most common communicative activity in daily life. Hence, this study presents the need for an emphasis on listening comprehension in English language learning/ teaching. According to Morley (1991, p.82), "We can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write." So, listening, as a skill, is assuming more and more weight in SL or FL classrooms . Limited listening input fails to promote face-to-face communication . On the other hand, adequate listening practice could give the learners essential contact with handy input that might trigger their utterances. Teacher talk, listening materials and peer- interaction are vital means for providing this practice.

In our schools, colleges and even in the higher levels, instructors direct students to how to read and write much more than to how to speak or listen. It is believed that these skills would be mastered by the learners automatically ( David Nunan ,1997) . Furthermore , listening evaluation is usually excluded from all school examinations. Only written exams are given (Mutawa &Kailani 1989). In the TEE (Tawjihi English Exam, TEE ) in Palestine , the listening skill is not included in this decisive exam. As a result , teachers tend to ignore this skill from their class practice. The new Palestinian English Textbook series ***English for Palestine*** follows the communicative approach of teaching English and therefore places a lot of emphasis on teaching all language skills in integration. This syllabus is very rich with listening material and practice especially for grades 10,11 &12 . These listening materials and activities are followed by speaking and writing tasks related to the listening materials . Unfortunately, teachers tend to ignore these listening exercises since listening is not

included in the TEE. They instead concentrate on the other materials which will be included in the TEE.

Educators have been talking of tests' impact on learners and teachers and also on educational systems and society. For example, Shohamy (2001: 4) asserts that "traditional testing" focuses on the test on its own without proper regard to testees, education and other relevant contexts,



## 1.2 What is listening?

Listening is a skill in a sense that it's a related but distinct process than hearing which involves merely perceiving sound in a passive way while listening occupies an active and immediate analysis of the streams of sounds. This correlation is like that between seeing and reading. Seeing is a very ordinary and passive state while reading is a focused process requiring reader's instrumental approach. Listening has a "volitional component". Tomatis' (2007) view is that listening; the desire to listen, as well as the capability to listen (comprehension) must be present with the listener for the successful recognition and analysis of the sound.

## 1.3 Nature of listening as a skill

Besides the division of the skills as 'receptive' and 'productive', another subdivision focuses on 'one-way reception' and 'interactive reception' in this age of active learning. Reading and writing are one-way skills where learners don't get direct feedback. But in speaking and listening, learners may have their understanding and reproduction checked instantly. Thus active and self-learning takes place. ( McDonough and Shaw 1993) Moreover, there is a traditional labeling for reading and listening as "passive" skills. But linguists believe that a listener is involved in guessing, anticipating, checking, interpreting, interacting and organizing by associating and accommodating their prior knowledge of meaning and form. Rost (1991) thinks, listeners "co-author" the discourse and they construct it by their responses.

Even as a receptive skill, listening differs greatly from reading as reading materials are printed and permanent enough where the learners are required to interact with the next sentence using the knowledge of the previous one while listening involves continuous material presentation where they have to respond to the immediate expression. From the view point of "product" or "process", listening is more a process than a product which instantly shapes the understanding and utterances of the learners.

What 'listening' really means is 'listening and understanding what we hear at the same time'. So, two concurrent actions are demanded to take place in this process. According to many ELT experts like Michael Rost (1991, Nation & Jonathan Newton 2009, McDonough and Shaw ( 1993 ) listening comprises some component skills which are:

- discriminating between sounds,
- recognizing words,
- identifying grammatical groupings of words,
- identifying expressions and sets of utterances that act to create meaning,

- connecting linguistic cues to non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues,
- using background knowledge to predict and later to confirm meaning and recalling important words and ideas.

#### 1.4 Problem statement and purpose of the study

This study presents the problem of neglecting the listening skill from the components of English language skills. The study discusses the consequences of the lack of emphasis on listening comprehension in language learning/teaching. Since listening is the most common communicative activity in daily life, limited listening input causes hindering the development of communication. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to measure the impact of adequate listening practice on improving the achievement of students in listening and relevant language skills. The study also aims to present effective listening strategies that help to enhance the improvement of this essential language skill. It also surveys effective listening materials that could be recommended for this purpose.

#### 1.5 Questions of the study

The study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of using training in listening to English materials on the performance and achievement of the students in the "Listening Skills" course at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region?
2. Are there statistical differences at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the effect of training on the students' performance in the post test in the "Listening skills" course at Al-Quds Open University / Ramallah Educational Region due to the sex variable?
3. Are there statistical differences at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the effect of the use of training in listening skill (in class and outside class) on the performance and achievement of students in the course "Listening skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region?
4. Are there statistical differences at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the effect of the use of training in listening skill (in class and outside class) on the performance and achievement of students in the course "Listening Skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region due to the training period variable?
5. Are there statistically significant differences at the level ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the pretest and the post test achievement of students in the course "Listening skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region?

## 2. Review of literature

### 2.1 Importance of practice in listening comprehension

All ELT experts agree that exposure to listening to real speakers of English is very essential for improving the students' ability in listening skill. Wilga Rivers 1985 says that students should be prepared from the start to understand the speech of native speakers of English speaking at normal rate in a normal manner. She says also that the prolonged exposure of students to the slow speech of ESL teachers does not prepare students to understand the natural spontaneous speech of native speakers which is one of the major roles of the ESL instruction. Tony Ridgway also says that practice is the most important thing. The more listening the better, Teach listening comprehension as the major skill; sub skills will take care of themselves as they become automatized. (Ridgway 2000 p.179-185) Ann Anderson & Tony Lynch believe that there are two principal reasons for stressing the importance of listening. First: for many students, it seems to be the most demanding and is therefore a skill that needs a considerable amount of practice and training. Second: it is an

area which is in danger of being overlooked in courses for foreign learners.”(Anderson & Lynch2003)

Jeremy Harmer 2003 also thinks that it is very essential to teach listening as it develops other language skills as well. He says that “the more students listen to English, the better they become at listening to it. The more they listen to English, the better their speaking becomes, the better pronunciation they acquire.” Brownell (2002) also thinks that with the advance of technology and new methods of communication where English is the language of communication, listeners of English confront a constantly changing and increasingly complex listening environment.

G. Buck in his book *Assessing Listening* emphasizes the need for practice in listening. He presents useful methods and practice material in addition to a sample test at the end. (Buck 2001) Krashen's (1981) view is that “acquisition” takes place as a result of the learner having understood input that is a little beyond the current level of his competence. We must take into account that the level of listening input must be higher than the level of language production of the target learners. So, language teaching pedagogy must incorporate academic and designed listening practice.

## 2.2 Listening materials

Teaching listening requires a bit more on the part of the teacher than that of the learners. It is in fact a challenging task for the teacher. Language material intended to be used for training listening comprehension should never be presented visually first.” As for materials to be used for listening practice, most specialists believe that there should be a variety of authentic materials. These could include the use of interviews, newscasts speeches, songs dialogues preferably all recorded live.

Ann Anderson2003 thinks that “all types of listening skill are valuable and necessary if a learner is to acquire an all round ability to listen effectively in a range of situations to various types of input and for a variety of listening purposes. “Celce- Murcia & Lois MacIntosh (2000) recommend the use of real or live language in teaching listening as it is necessary to comprehend what people say if we want to speak.

There are plenty of books and resources that provide listening material and suitable practice that could be used Patricia A. Dunkel & Phyllis L. Lim's book, *Intermediate listening comprehension* is a good example. The book provides a lot of listening materials in the form of tapes, videos and on line tests. The book could work as a course book. The units include talks on many topics in history technology, science, culture, sociology etc.. There is listening preparation, review of vocabulary and sentences. Post listening includes a variety of task-oriented and enjoyable listening and speaking activities that include comprehension check, listening expansion and discussion.

Another series of listening comprehension books is *Tactics for listening* by Jack C. Richards (*et al*) published by Oxford University Press 2004. It is a three- level series: basic, developing and expanding. This series could serve as graded comprehensive listening material for adults and young adult learners. The basic and developing textbooks are to be used for lower levels. *Expanding Tactics for Listening* is intended for intermediate students who need further practice in understanding everyday conversational language. It could be used as a main text for a listening course and as a complement to a speaking course. The topics have been chosen for their frequency in everyday life and for their interest to the readers. A wide variety of stimulating and useful activities are included to give students graded practice in listening. In every unit there is a follow up speaking activity which is related to the theme of the listening task. Another good textbook is *Targeting Listening and Speaking* by Keith S. Folse and Darren Bologna. The book provides short focused activities to help improve the listening and speaking skills for lower level ESL/EFL students.

*Cambridge Skills for Fluency* for Adrian Doff & Christopher Jones is another good source for listening material. It is a listening series which consists of four graded textbooks aimed at developing the learner's ability to understand real life spoken English through recordings of spontaneous natural speech. Levels 1&2 serve for lower levels while levels 3&4 are

intended for intermediate and advanced learners. The activities are designed to encourage students to draw on their own natural listening strategies and to apply them effectively in the context of language learning. Another useful textbook for practicing listening is the book used at Al-Quds Open University titled *Listening Skills* (1994) prepared by shahir Al-Hassan & Abdallah Shakir. It is made for English major students. The book integrates listening comprehension and study skills. It provides extensive practice in note-taking, getting general and specific points. The listening tasks take the form of practical exercises such as labeling diagrams, filling in missing information and completing a given layout of a lecture. All material and exercises are recorded on CDs. There is a wide variety of subject matter which helps in building broad English vocabulary varying from everyday English expressions to subject matter terms. As it is made for an open university, it is designed so that the student can study on his own and is provided with an answer key at the end of each unit.

In addition to books and recorded materials, there is a wide selection of on line materials that provide a wide variety of listening material and practice which students can use on their own. Students should be directed to certain sites and each time it is preferred to assign a task to be done at home using one of these assigned sites. The following are some of the websites that provide good listening practice and activities.

<http://www.englishlistening.com/>

<http://www.go4english.com>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/central>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish/professiona>

[http://www.britishcouncil.org/language assisstant](http://www.britishcouncil.org/language%20assisstant)

[http://www.geocities.com/abracad\\_1999/edm.html](http://www.geocities.com/abracad_1999/edm.html)

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/arabic\\_elt/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/arabic_elt/index.shtml)

<http://www.elfs.com>

<http://www.esl-lab.com>

<http://www.gotoglobalvillage.com>

The use of videos can also provide an environment for good listening practice. They are more stimulating than CDs because they provide pictures not only sound. The following site <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/> is a very good source of videos and documentaries for all sorts of knowledge. Media can be another source that could provide useful and updated listening material. Some TV shows in English could be helpful as they give students the chance to listen to informal everyday conversations in interesting contexts.

### 2.3 Listening strategies

Most experienced ELT teachers believe that practicing the listening skill has to follow certain strategies to make it productive and effective. Good listening lessons go beyond the main listening task itself with related activities before and after the listening. Usually, the listening practice includes: the phonological code, the syntactic code, the semantic code. (Celce- Murcia, 2000, Newton2009) Wilga Rivers 1985 thinks that listening passes through these stages: the sound stage then words and phrases then selection level without retention

then short term retention and finally long term selection. She thinks that at the intermediate level, students can reach the third stage immediately when listening to something. Richards (1985:191) says that 'memory works with propositions, not with sentences'. While listening, listeners categorize the received speech into meaningful sections, identify redundant material, keep hold of chunks of the sentences, think ahead and use language data to anticipate what a speaker may be going to say, accumulate information in the memory by organizing them and avoid too much immediate detail. In addition to giving students plenty of listening practice. Celce- Murcia, 2000, Harmer 2003 & others believe that that we should break the skill of listening into micro-skill components and make sure that our students are aware of what they need to know to understand how to listen. However, none of these micro-skills is either used or effective in isolation or is called listening. Successful listening refers to 'the integration of these component skills' and listening is nothing but the 'coordination of the component skills'.

Furthermore, Mutawa & Kailani 1989 state that there are three levels of listening comprehension: a. the elementary level deals with sound and meaning of words, the intermediate level can handle short conversation, and in the third level the advanced level students can deal with lengthy spoken discourse. The two levels of listening teachers need to focus upon are:

- Listening for gist (to get the general idea or meaning)
- Listening for detail (to get the specific facts).

A good sequence that could be followed in a listening practice would be: introduction, pre-listening, set task, listening, checking task, listening again & checking tasks, leading into other activities. (Lavery, 2001) Always make students listen more than once. It is usually advisable to give the questions to the students before they listen so as to know what to focus upon in their listening. Be ware of the acoustics in your classroom and of the quality of your machine. (Lavery 2001 & Harmer 2003) Some of the activities that could be used to check listening comprehension are: true- false questions & asking for details, filling certain words or expressions, choosing between words, dictation etc.

In general terms, two main types of strategies for listening have been in practice. They are defined so according to the ways of processing the text while listening:

a. **Bottom up processing**, like reading, learners utilize their linguistic knowledge to identify linguistic elements in an order from the smallest linguistic unit like phonemes (bottom) to the largest one like complete texts (top). They link the smaller units of the language together to form the larger parts and it's a linear process where meaning is derived automatically at the last stage. It is absolutely a "text based" process where learners rely on the sounds, words and grammar in the message in order to create meaning.

b. **Top- down interpretation**, on the other hand, requires learners to go to the listening with their prior knowledge of topic, context, and type of text as well as knowledge of language to reconstruct the meaning using the sounds as clues. "This back ground knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next." (Nunan. D 2003, Ridgway 2000, Saha, M. & Talukdar. A.L. 2010)

In addition to these strategies and in terms of interaction, listening could be reciprocal or interactive where the listener is required to take part in the interaction and alternately listens and speaks. Interactive listening situations include face-to-face conversations and telephone calls in which the listener has a chance to ask for clarification, repetition, or slower speech from conversation partner. There is also the non-reciprocal or non-interactive listening where the listener is engaged in listening passively to a monologue or speech or even conversation. Some non-interactive listening situations are listening to the radio, CDs, TV,

films, lectures etc. and here the listener usually doesn't have the opportunity to ask for clarification, slower speech or repetition. We can say that this type of listening is not totally non-interactive since the interaction takes place here at the 'cognitive' level. Here, students respond through understanding and creating the meaning. On the other hand, this might be turned to semi-reciprocal if the instructor makes the students respond while checking their understanding through question-answer or discussion and clarification in the class or lab. (Anderson & Ridgway 2003)

ELT experts also stress here that it is necessary to teach listening comprehension in integration with other language skills "It is probably best not to have students practice listening in isolation but rather as multi-task event. We also want students to listen to English as much as possible on their own at home in their cars, in their cars. (Buck 2000, Jeremy Harmer 2003) Bill Holden also explains the necessity for using the strategies in teaching listening. He says that if learners are trained in using certain strategies in listening because they will apply these strategies themselves when they practice on their own. He also says that most commercial listening texts are in fact listening tests These do very little to develop learners' ability to process and comprehend the material. Thus, teachers are invited to add strategies to these texts to transfer them to learning materials by tasks that call for discussion, evaluating, developing activities. They should use the listening material as stimulus for writing and speaking (Holden 2003, Lavery 2001) Another useful technique is to give homework. In teaching listening, homework is a must. A listening task between two classes prevent them forgetting. Encouraging public listening and having notes on them is a free pave to walk in teaching listening which leads to success. Providing tape recording with questions, dictation, or a worksheet to complete may bring the expected results. Another suggested strategy is cooperative listening technique as it offers advantages over traditional pedagogy on listening. It allows weak students to learn from more able ones and it reveals a range of strategies that the learners have been using. (Oxford 2002 & Djwandono 2006) Karen Farnen 2010) says "Teach your students to give each other constructive feedback to ensure that they are listening and understanding conversations." Finally, we have to remember that "some activities which are done after the students have listened to a text are not really post listening activities because they are themselves the main purpose of the lesson and the listening is no more than an introduction or stimulus for the planned work (Underwood 1989 p. 78)

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Method of the study**

The researcher used the descriptive and analytical method in her research. She conducted an action research where she evaluated the students' training and its effect on their performance as the subject of her research.

#### **3.2 Tools of the study**

The researcher used a number of tools to get information for the study.

The main ones are:

1. The pretest in listening skills was held at the beginning of the semester. It consisted of several types of listening materials dialogues, narrative, reports, news, dictation, etc. Its aim was to evaluate the level of the students' listening proficiency and to check the degree of improvement at the end of the course through comparing it with the post test.
2. The posttest which was given at the end of the semester and after the students received the training in listening to different materials and doing a number of activities in class and doing a lot of training at home using the materials provided to them. It was similar in

format and type of listening material to the pretest. The grades of the two tests were compared to check the amount of improvement the students got.

3. A questionnaire given at the end of the semester where students were asked about the training in listening which the students made in class and outside class. The questionnaire asked about the number of hours they spent in training (inside class & outside class) and which materials they chose for their outside class training.

**Note:** The students received intensive training during the class meetings. This consisted of ten lectures of an hour and a half each for each section (a total of 15 hours). This was explained earlier and the materials and strategies used as well. As attendance is not obligatory, some students attended all these lectures while others attended some of them. To check this, students had to mention in the questionnaire the number of hours they attended and also class attendance was taken. They were also asked about the number of training hours they made on their own at home using the materials and resources the teacher (the researcher) provided for them.

Q1: How many hours of class practice did you attend?.....

Q2: How many hours of home practice did you make?.....

Q3: Which listening materials did you use most in your home practice? .....

### 3.3 Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of all the students in the English major at Al-Quds Open University who study one of the required courses at the English Department titled "Listening Skills". The course is offered to students in their second year and aims primarily at improving their listening ability with their other language skills as well.

### 3.4 Sample of the study

It consisted of all the students who are registering in the "Listening Skills" course for the second semester in the academic year 2010/2011 at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region.

Their number is (74) students divided into three sections (1,2&3)

Table (1) shows the descriptive data for the sample of the study.

Table (1)

Class number	Student total	Percentage
1	26	35.1%
2	27	%36.5
3	21	%28.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100%</b>

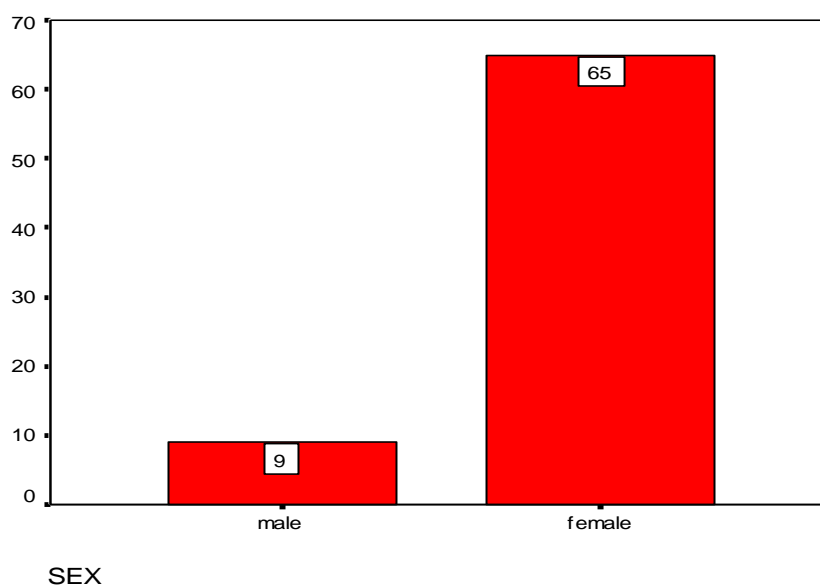




Table (2) shows the distribution of the sample according to sex.

Table (2)

sex	Student total	Percentage
male	9	%12.2
female	65	%87.8
total	74	100.0 %

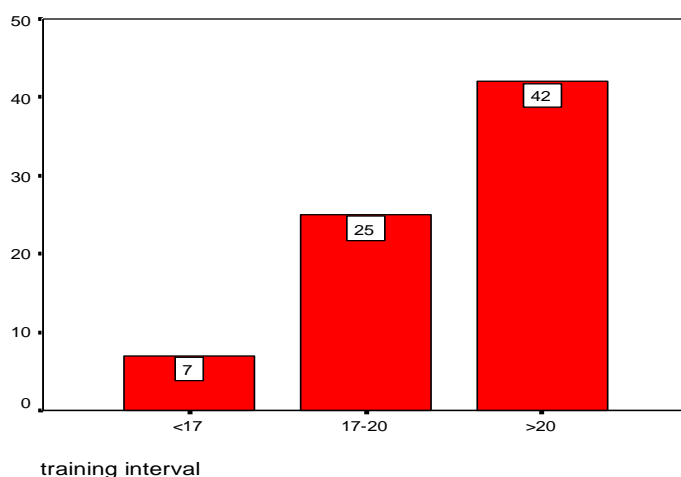


The table shows that the majority of students are females.

Table (3) shows the descriptive data for the sample of the study showing the number of training hours divided into categories and percentages.

Table (3)

Training interval	Student total	Percentage
Less than 17 hours	7	%9.5
Between 17 and 20 hours	25	%33.8
More than 20 hours	42	%56.8
Total	74	100 %



### 3.5 The variables of the Study

The study contained the following variables:

#### 1. The independent variables:

- Section variable: it contained (3) sections: 1,2, & 3
- Sex variable: males & females.
- Total hours of training variable which is divided into three categories:
  - a. Less than 17 hours
  - b. 17-20 hours
  - c. More than 20 hours

#### 2. The dependent variables:

- The total of the grades for the pre test.
- The total of the grades for the post test.

#### 4. Results of the study

- 4.1 Results related to the first and major question of the study.
- 4.2 Results related to the second question of the study.
- 4.3 Results related to the third question of the study.
- 4.4 Results related to the fourth question of the study.

#### 4.5 Results related to the fifth question of the study.

This study aimed at identifying the result of training on the performance and achievement of the students in "The English Listening Skills" course at Al-Quds Open University, Ramallah Educational Region second semester 2010-2011

This section presents the statistical data that have been analyzed using the SPSS statistical program. The data have been collected through the tool of the study represented by the pre test and the post test for the Listening Skills course at Ramallah . The hypotheses have been tested. These were generated from the basic question of the study which deals with the effect of training on the performance and achievement of the students in "The English Listening Skills" course at Ramallah .

#### 4.1 Results related to the first and major question of the study.

The question states the following:

- What is the effect of using training in listening to English materials on the performance and achievement of the students in the Listening Skills course at Al-Quds Open University/Ramallah Educational Region?

To answer the first question, the researcher used the average for every student for the grades of the pre test and the post test as in table (4) below.

Table (4)

The average and the degree of the effect of training on the achievement of the students in "Listening Skill" at Al-Quds Open University/Ramallah.

Student number	Pre-test	Post-test	Total Average
1	73.00	88.00	80.50
2	78.00	90.00	84.00
3	52.00	67.00	59.50
4	74.00	95.00	84.50
5	70.00	85.00	77.50
6	61.00	73.00	67.00
7	75.00	88.00	81.50
8	70.00	85.00	77.50
9	75.00	90.00	82.50
10	74.00	86.00	80.00
11	60.00	71.00	65.50
12	70.00	78.00	74.00
13	61.00	76.00	68.50
14	75.00	92.00	83.50

15	80.00	90.00	85.00
16	73.00	82.00	77.50
17	70.00	79.00	74.50
18	65.00	78.00	71.50
19	62.00	74.00	68.00
20	60.00	81.00	70.50
21	59.00	80.00	69.50
22	75.00	86.00	80.50
23	87.00	72.00	79.50
24	76.00	85.00	80.50
25	72.00	88.00	80.00
26	65.00	87.00	78.50
27	70.00	83.00	74.00
28	80.00	84.00	77.00
29	70.00	90.00	85.00
30	90.00	77.00	73.50
31	55.00	81.00	85.50
32	66.00	67.00	61.00
33	91.00	78.00	72.00
34	72.00	82.00	86.50
35	71.00	86.00	79.00
36	62.00	84.00	77.50
37	89.00	73.00	67.50
38	63.00	91.00	90.00
39	82.00	75.00	69.00
40	72.00	91.00	86.50
41	67.00	85.00	78.50
42	74.00	80.00	73.50
43	80.00	85.00	79.50
44	70.00	91.00	85.50
45	58.00	83.00	76.50

46	70.00	65.00	61.50
47	71.00	82.00	76.00
48	73.00	80.00	75.50
49	72.00	82.00	77.50
50	65.00	83.00	77.50
51	70.00	73.00	69.00
52	60.00	81.00	75.50
53	72.00	71.00	65.50
54	70.00	83.00	77.50
55	55.00	81.00	75.50
56	73.00	68.00	61.50
57	53.00	82.00	77.50
58	72.00	69.00	61.00
59	70.00	84.00	78.00
60	65.00	82.00	76.00
61	76.00	90.00	83.00
62	67.00	78.00	72.50
63	76.00	84.00	80.00
64	61.00	72.00	66.50
65	80.00	91.00	85.50
66	56.00	70.00	63.00
67	60.00	79.00	69.50
68	71.00	87.00	79.00
69	40.00	52.00	46.00
70	73.00	84.00	78.50
71	65.00	74.00	69.50
72	58.00	77.00	67.50
73	60.00	84.00	72.00
74	61.00	78.00	69.50
General total Average	69.11	80.78	74.95

To answer the main question of the study which is related to the effect of using training in listening to English materials on the performance and achievement of the students in the Listening Skills course at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region, the researcher stated some hypotheses. To discuss the results, we will examine these hypotheses.

**4:2** The results related to the second question of the study which is stated in for ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) the following way: There are no statistical differences at the effect of training on the students' performance in the post test in the "Listening skills" course at Al-Quds Open University / Ramallah Educational Region due to the sex variable. To answer the second question, the researcher used the (T) (independent t-test) to know the significance of the differences on the final grade of the tool of the study to measure the post achievement in the course "Listening skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region due to the sex variable. The results were as stated in table (5) below.

The (T) (independent t-test) for the post achievement in the course "Listening skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region due to the sex variable.

Table (5)

Sex	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Male	76.33	11.54	72	-1.89	0.062
Female	81.40	6.87			

**\*Statistically significant at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )**

The table shows that there are no statistical differences at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the post achievement in the course "Listening skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region due to the sex variable.

#### 4:3 Results related to the third question

The third question states that there are no statistical differences at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the effect of use of training in listening skill ( in class and outside class ) on the performance and achievement of students in the course "Listening skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region. To answer this question, the researcher used the T test ( Paired Sample t-test) to know significance of the differences in the total grade for the tool of the study by measuring the mean of the students' grades in the pretest and the post test. The results are illustrated in table (6) below.

Table (6): The T test ( Paired Sample t-test) for the achievement of the students in the pre test and the post test for the students in the course "Listening skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region.

Exam	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pre-Test	69.11	9.12	73	-16.77	00.
Post-Test	80.78	7.67			

- **Statistically significant at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )**

It is evident from table (6) above that there are statistically significant differences at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the total grades in the achievement of the students in the pre test and the post test in the course "Listening skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region. The mean for the pre test reached (69.11) while the mean for the post test reached (80.78) Testing this previous hypothesis showed that training had a positive effect on the achievement of the students.

4.4 Results related to the fourth question.

The question states that there are no statistical differences at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the effect of the period of training in listening skill ( in class and outside class ) variable on the performance and achievement of students in the course "Listening Skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region.

To answer this question, the researcher used the average for the total degree of the post test grades in correlation with the period of training variable. Table (7) below illustrates this relationship.

Table (7)

The total post test average of the students according to the training period variable

Post-Test Average Total	Less than 17 hours	Between 17 and 20 hours	More than 20 hours
	72.86	83.33	81.08

In order to calculate the degree of differences in the mean square, the one way (ANOVA) test was used for the training period variable. Table (8) below shows the results.

Table (8)

The results for the One Way ANOVA for the mean scores in correlation with the training period

	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	* Significant
Post-Test Average Total	Between Groups	494.51	2	247.25	4.62	0.012
	Within Groups	3798.03	71	53.49		
	Total	4292.54	73			

0.05)  $\alpha \leq$  ( Significant on the level\*

Table (8) shows that there are statistically significant differences at the level ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the effect of the training period variable on the students' performance and the post test achievement in the course "Listening Skills" at Al-Quds Open University/Ramallah Educational Region. Furthermore, to know the significance of these differences, the LSD (Least Square Differences) test was used. Table (9) below illustrates this.

Table (9)

The differences between averages according to training period in correlation with the total grade of the post test

Training Period	Less than 17 hours	Between 17 and 20 hours	More than 20 hours
Less than 17 hours		*-8.86	-8.48*
Between 17 and 20 hours	9.22*		0.746
More than 20 hours	8.48*	-0.746	

Table (9) shows that there are statistically significant differences at the level ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the averages of the post test in correlation with the period of training for the two groups: the first with the training between 17-20 hours and the second group with the less than 17 training hours in favor of the first group i.e. training between 17-20 hours in favor of those having more than 20 training hours (having more than less than 17 training hours) in the post test achievement in the course "Listening Skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region. There are also statistically significant differences between those who had more than 20 training hours in favor of those having more than 20 (more than less than 17) training hours in the post test achievement. Thus, it is clear that having more training hours gave a positive effect in the post test achievement in the course "Listening Skills" at Al-Quds Open University/Ramallah Educational Region.

#### 4:5 Results related to the fifth question

This question states that there are no statistically significant differences at the level ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the pretest and the post test achievement of students. To answer this question, the researcher used the means and the standard deviation for the pre test and the post test and the significance for the correlation between them as is shown in table (10) Table (10)

#### The means and the standard deviation for the pre test and the post test and the significance of the correlation between them

Post-Test and Pre-test Average Total	Pre-test Average		Post-Test Average		Pearson Correlation	Significant*
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
	<b>69.11</b>	9.12	<b>80.78</b>	7.67	*0.758	00.

Table( 10) above shows that there is a statistically significant relation at the level ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) for the total grade of the students' pre and post achievement in listening skill in the course "Listening Skills" at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region second semester 2010-2011.

From this table , we can see that there is a strong and very positive correlation between the achievement of the students in the two tests .This correlation reached (0.758) This shows that the students really benefited from the training they made in preparing themselves for the post test.



## **5. DISCUSSION**

As was pointed earlier, although listening is a vital skill that is needed to make students able to understand and thus interact, practice in listening is under emphasized in the EFL classroom whether at schools or at universities. . Students may be able to listen to lectures usually given by their non native English teachers. Yet when they are encountered by real communicative language discourse, they may not be able to handle the situation. Thus, they need to be trained to listen to authentic material. (Anderson & Lynch 2003) They need to be trained through effective listening strategies. This study tried to examine the effect of training EFL students to listen to a variety of English materials in an organized and well-structured way using the suitable strategies to make the practice productive and beneficial . Thus, the study serves this purpose. The study used a sample of students (74) who received a considerable amount of listening practice through being exposed to a variety of authentic materials inside and outside class.

### **Materials and strategies used in the listening training**

The main textbook used in this practice was the textbook of the course referred to earlier titled Listening Skills (Al-Quds Open University publications) Another major textbook was one of the series *Tactics for Listening* by Richard J.C.(ed.) (*The Expanding Level*). The students were provided with the listening material for these textbooks. In the listening practice, The students were often given the questions before they listened so as to know what to focus upon in their listening.. The listening was usually repeated more than one time and new tasks were assigned after each listening. Various activities and tasks were given to make the training pedagogically and communicatively purposeful. Some of these activities were interactive to encourage students to work together. In an attempt to integrate language skills, listening tasks were often combined with writing and speaking activities. This coincides with what ELT experts recommend in this respect "Good listening skills result in better communication skills overall, for listeners and for speakers." (Deschel 2010) The acoustics in the classroom were taken care of. Some of the training was in the internet lab. The researcher made sure to create a suitable listening environment. Thus, the tests were conducted in the computer lab to ensure the sound quality.

A lot of the listening material used or suggested for the training was in the form of online resources. Students were directed to certain listening sites. In most times, they were assigned tasks to be done at home. To encourage them to use these sites, an example of this was watching some documentary videos and other listening material and giving the students tasks on these subjects: e.g.:

<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/the-truth-about-vitamins/>

<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/food-matters>      <http://www.go4english.com>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish>

In their answers to the question in the questionnaire about the material they used most in their home listening practice, most of them said they used their main textbook most. They also used the material provided from the listening textbook *The Tactics for Listening (The Expanding Level)* They said they also frequently referred to the websites recommended especially the listening assignments chosen from the website: go4english.com. Some said they also listened to some news broadcast and reports on English TV channels especially AL-Jazeera.

### **The achievement in the post test and its relation to the training made**

The study used a pre- test and a post test. The results of the two tests were compared to check the amount of improvement the students gained after receiving the listening practice . The amount of training which differed from one student to another as is explained in the data given in table (7) was correlated to the amount of improvement each student gained in the post test using the suitable statistical methods . The numbers show that those who had

the most in class and outside class practice ( more than 20 hours) gained the highest total averages in the post test (83.33) and those who received between 17-20 training hours gained an average of ( 81.08) and the third category who made less than 17 hours of practice received a total average of 72.86 in the post test. The study also showed that there is a strong and very positive correlation between the achievement of the students in the pre test and the post test. This correlation reached (0.758). The calculated mean for the pre test was ( 69.11 ) while it was ( 80.78 ) for the post test. This shows that the students' achievement in listening comprehension really improved after the practice they made in preparing themselves for the post test. This coincides with a big number of studies and pedagogies that stress the importance of using practice to improve the achievement of the students e.g. Harmer 2003, Buck 2001, Ridgway 2000)

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Listening comprehension is a vital part of the English language acquisition process. It is a condition for achieving oral fluency and accuracy. It is needed for interaction and communication. Yet despite its importance, it is the least stressed skill in the EFL classroom. It is very often not practiced at all in the English language classroom. This results in causing frustration for EFL learners as they will not be able to understand spoken language or follow conversation with native language speakers. Therefore, it is the teacher's task to get his students exposed to listening materials, conversational English in everyday situations, public speech, news , interviews etc. In this regard, a lot of practice is needed to make the learners get accustomed to understanding all kinds of speech. This study aimed at examining the role of using intensive practice in improving the EFL learners capacity in listening proficiency. The learners in the sample of the study showed considerable improvement in their achievement in the post test which was given to them at the end of the training course when it was compared to their achievement in the pretest which was given to them prior to their exposure to the listening practice . This illustrates that EFL learners can develop their listening fluency and become more accurate comprehenders of English if they receive good listening practice in various types of extended discourse including a wide variety of available on line materials. This requires that this exposure be extensive, well-prepared and utilizing all sorts of effective listening strategies. Thus, it is recommended that teachers should not ignore this important language skill. Developing the listening abilities of the learners results in making them more confident of their language competency .It will also result in the development of their other language skills especially the speaking skill which is related tightly to their understanding of the oral discourse to be able to communicate. Thus, we can say that the key to developing listening and consequently other related language skills is practice and more practice. It is true then that practice and more practice makes perfect.

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## Towards a Class-centered Approach to EFL teaching in the Palestinian Context

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### **Abstract:**

The paper attempts to highlight the significance of introducing a class-centered approach (henceforth CCA) to L2 teaching in the Palestinian context. Additionally, it aims to pinpoint that experienced teachers can make their teaching strategies more motivating and more communicative, through intertwining their learners' pedagogical and social demands. The paper is centered on the EFL teachers' everyday behaviors in a language classroom. It tries to precisely give an explanation and a definition of the concept of (CCA) and its implication in classroom language learning. In addition, the paper investigates the theoretical framework that underlie the CCA to teaching. In order to provide an overview of the present teaching preferences in L2 classroom conducted by EFL teachers at home, a questionnaire has been distributed to a sample population of EFL teachers from a Palestinian university. Meanwhile, the paper tries to justify the need and the appropriateness of CCA to language teaching, with special focus on the Palestinian context. Alongside discussing and analyzing the questionnaire results, the paper also makes use of major findings reached by many studies in this respect. Ultimately, the paper concludes discussion by confirming that language teachers' success in meeting and intertwining the learners' socio-pedagogic needs help EFL teachers cultivate and create a non-threatening classroom environment in which learners interact readily in the target language.

### **Introduction:**

English as a foreign language (EFL) has long been the centre of attention of educationalists, linguists, EFL teachers and learners. This can be noticed in the large number of studies geared towards research in L2, EFL approaches and difficulties encountered by learners (Hamdan 1994). Like too many EFL learners, Palestinian students face serious problems in English learning at almost every level all through their schooling. (IIEP, 1997). Low proficiency in English among Palestinian learners is evident in their inability to communicate in English following many years of learning. ( For example, see ELC-AAUJ Placement Exam results 2005-2009).

In his classroom-centered approach, Allwright (1986) who argues that learning a language is 'hardly' an easy task reviews some of teachers' classroom habits which influence EFL learning experience. Senior (2002;2006a;2006b) focuses on the importance of identifying a framework for understanding the basis of the teachers' everyday behavior in classroom, on which she believes that it underlies the theoretical assumptions language teachers base their everyday classroom practices and decisions.

Language teachers agree that no two of their classes are identical- even when the two are given the same course. In some classes teachers approach teaching pleasantly, while in others, things are quite the opposite. Hadfield (1997) agrees that language teachers' main concern is related to the atmosphere of the classroom and components of the class group. This presentation is going to address the concept of class-centered approach, its teaching and learning implications, its realization and materialization in our classrooms at home situation, and its *appropriateness* in mono-cultural class settings as observed in the Palestinian context.

On the one hand, it is the concern of this presentation to review the language teachers' willingness to create and maintain a learning community within the classroom. On the other hand, it highlights EFL teachers' teaching preferences inside language classroom at home, and aims to pinpoint that experienced teachers can make their teaching strategies more motivating, constructive and communicative. The presentation stresses that our EFL teachers need to work on a real compromise between the learners' pedagogical and social demands. Once language teachers succeed in intertwining these needs, they can foster and cultivate a class-centered approach (CCA) in our teaching career, and, eventually, they will be able to create a non-threatening classroom environment in which learners interact readily in the target language.

One may argue that the socio-pedagogic consideration is likely to work well in multi-national classes where learners come from different cultural background; still, learners from the same cultural setting – as the case in the Palestinian context- have great opportunities to improve their language if teachers approach teaching under a framework that successfully balances between social and pedagogic priorities.

It is true that this trend in L2 is not new; nevertheless, it is an essential assumption that our teachers can exploit effectively and efficiently in their ongoing efforts they exert to help learners overcome difficulties in the learning. Rivers (1992) argue that successful teachers are those who understand their learners' different needs.

This paper overviews a group of Palestinian EFL teachers' everyday behavior preferences in their classrooms. For this purpose, a questionnaire has been distributed to EFL teachers at the Arab American University-Jenin (AAUJ) as a sample of the target population (see appendix 1). The results show the present practices in classroom and the wanted ones as priorities expressed by the teachers.

Finally, the paper concludes the discussion with suggesting certain aspects of classroom language teaching- among too many, and ways through which language teachers teach and manage their classes at the same time.

### **Objectives:**

The paper attempts to highlight the significance of introducing a class-centered approach to L2 teaching in the Palestinian context. However, the study is not necessarily confined to certain EFL target group in terms of their qualifications, classes they teach or experience. As the study is centered on the everyday behavior in a language classroom, it precisely attempts to:

- delineate the concept of (CCA) and investigate its theoretical and practical implications
- review EFL teaching preferences and practices in L2 classroom.
- examine the appropriateness of the approach at home situation.
- look into EFL teachers' need to identify their learners' socio-pedagogical demands.

In their attempt to create a non-threatening classroom teaching environment, EFL teachers try hectically to experiment, and eventually, employ methods that 'best' fulfill the objectives of EFL leaning at home situation. With the introduction of a class-centered approach into their classes, EFL teachers are likely to 'shift' from their traditional role as knowledgeable resource for learners into other roles that not less significant than this, and even go beyond it. They can help in creating a learning community -classroom learners- in which the members wok together in a cohesive way that each finds a role in this learning community.

### ***The Concept of Class-centered Approach: Theoretical Framework***

Allwright (1986) argues that language learning is 'hardly' an easy task. In his classroom-centered research, Allwright (1983 ;1986) "tries to understand the processes that happen in classroom and why and how they take place that way." (1983:191).

The critical issue here is not the teaching methods that language teachers employ in class, neither it is the classroom management in terms of discipline or physical setting. It is an issue that goes beyond that, a situation in which we try to give responses to questions that concern both language teachers and learners: what behaviours and practices do teachers perform in class? Why do teachers find some classes easier to teach than others? Why do teachers believe that no two classes are identical while they have the same teacher with the same course syllabus? What makes language learning more difficult? What experience, other than pedagogical , makes learning more effective? How can experienced teachers deal with a non-unified individuals as a unified unit or a learning community that share more than they differ?

In her answer to some of these queries, Senior (1997;2002;2006a; 2006 b; 2008) claims that the introduction of a (CCA) into our classes may respond partly to the issue of effective learning. This approach does not simply mean creating a non-threatening class environment; rather it calls for intertwining learners' learning wants with their social demands. More precisely, Senior (2002) believes " ...that teachers are sensitive to the social needs of their class groups, and that their pedagogically and socially-oriented behaviours are closely intertwined." ( 2002: 399)

There is no doubt that some EFL teachers are class-centred ones consciously or subconsciously. They pay attention to their learners' needs, wants and demands that go too far beyond the learning and language tasks in their classes. These teachers are the ones who know their stuff, who can also develop a relationship with their learners individually and collectively. These teachers are best described by Finch, 2002 as " agents of social change" in the classroom. How we can put this role in a context of humanistic goal is the critical question.

Rivers (1992) argues that,

" Language teachers must study the language learners in their classes- their ages, their background, their aspirations, their interest, their goals in language learning, their aptitude for language acquisition in a formal setting." ( Rivers, 1997: 376) .

Is the (CCA) a proven way to effective learning and efficient teaching? How can classroom-centered research provide a theoretical framework for language teachers? To what extent can intertwining the learners' social needs with their learning experience be of any help in the teaching and learning process? These questions presume that the assumption that efficient teaching and effective learning can result from the introduction of a (CCA) to our classes. Classroom research has shown that pedagogical experience is only one part of the ' complicated' learning process. In summing up her major findings of classroom observations she conducted for different EFL teachers' performance in classes, Senior (2002) believes that there is a correlation between quality of class groups & quality of teaching/ learning; she concludes that:

Teachers have demonstrated through their everyday classroom behavior that language teaching is a highly complex business that not only involves teaching effectively, but also attending to the social well-being of their class groups.  
( 2002: 402)

It is true that gathering a group of learners with a teacher in a classroom is going to be complex and full of experiences of the members. ( Wright: 2006; Ashour: 2008 ) Our awareness of this complexity of the individuals- learners – may require us to look deeply into these individuals' needs: be social, pedagogical, cognitive or psychological, once we agreed to take teaching as our career.

The ultimate goal of teaching EFL in our context as expressed in the syllabus outlines (see ELC-AAUJ Advanced English syllabus 2009 ) is to enable learners to learn, or, eventually, 'master' the language four skills and sub-skills and to enable them to become skilled and trained on dealing with the language components. With this goal ahead, EFL teachers are exerting endless efforts to fulfill this aim through employing different teaching approaches and other cognitive- functional means that would enhance the achievement of this goal. (Tomasello:1992).

One major effort teachers may consider is paying close attention to their learners' social needs alongside the pedagogical experience, as the latter is existing in any teaching agenda after all, why not including the former if it motivates and creates a free-stress, friendly and non-threatening context for learning in class. Also, teachers who are class-centered do focus on their learners, how they feel and on how effectively they learn; an assumption that best forms a realization of the learning-centered or learner-centered teaching method , and ultimately, the communicative approach. (Littlewood, 1981).

It is very significant to clarify what connotation social needs of an EFL learner refers to. In the first place, we have to agree that learners are members of a group in a classroom known as learning community. Therefore, it is EFL teachers' concern, as Hadfield (1992) claims, to think of the atmosphere in the classroom and the chemistry of the group than problems of how to teach the language. This assumption calls for dealing with the class as a whole-group unit which requires the participation of each member to the uniqueness, activation techniques and the 'success' of the group. In her feedback on this paper, Senior assumes that "Developing a sense of unity within the class as a whole is the overall goal of the class-centred approach" ( Senior's email commenting on this paper, on June 2, 2011). Tian et al ( 2004) understand that the cohesiveness of the learning group in class means furnishing for the idea of accepting the other , open-mindedness, safe L2 practice, less discipline burden on teachers, individual's self-esteem and success of both the individual learner and the group. It is clear then that these values can be best achieved once challenging and convenient language tasks are given to the target learners of the group.

For example, in teaching paragraph writing, a teacher can brainstorm learners first to agree on a topic for writing. This can be carried out by consensus and voting for a topic. Then groups are formed with a spokesperson and a group reporter for each group. To ensure that learning is taking place, the teacher can sit with each group, discuss, listen and share ideas. The teacher's mindful discussion with the groups is one way of establishing a kind of relationship with the class or the learning community there. Each group presents their product on a board in class, where the different groups share and compare their writings. Evidently, the group work is a main feature of the communicative teaching of English.

Therefore, what makes a 'good' teacher for the learners is dependent on the teacher-learner interpersonal relations that are geared towards fulfilling the pedagogical wants. Sowden (2007) believes that:

*Success as a teacher does not depend on the approach or method that you follow so much as on your integrity as a person and the relationships that you*

*are able to develop in the classroom. The ability to build and maintain human relationships in this way is central to effective teaching. (2007: 308)*

Peterson (2005) agrees that a relaxing classroom learning environment takes place when a learner feels that he/she belongs to a group with a caring teacher, and when feeling accepted by other learners.

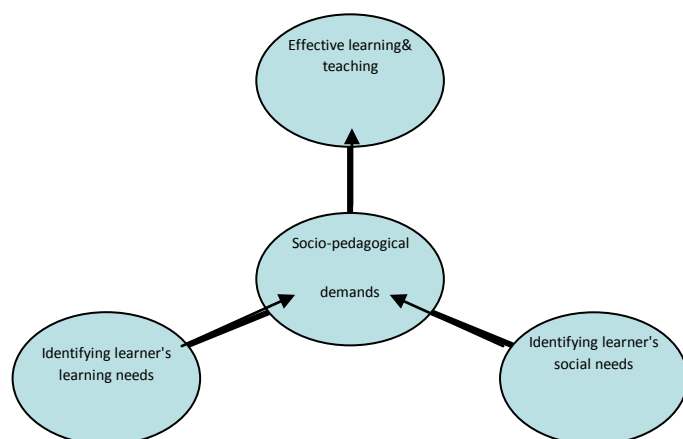


Diagram 1: Intertwining learner's pedagogical and social needs produce effective learning

Finch (2002) and Senior (2006 b) agree that CCA to EFL teaching approach has certain principles that can be viewed as general guidelines for classroom behaviors. They add that teachers are required to enjoy many characteristics that make both learning and teaching effective. Accordingly, teachers are asked to value their learners equally, to ensure there is a variety in activities which are supposed to be effective both socially and pedagogically, to encourage self-confidence without focusing on competence or performance, and reflect a student-centered view of language learning. With these principles in mind, we can furnish for a motivating learning setting that is considered a cornerstone in EFL learning. There is no doubt that some EFL learners do better than others because they are better motivated. Gardner (1991) and Littlewood (1986) argue that such learners will find it difficult to learn a foreign language in a classroom if they have neither instrumental nor integrative motivation.

The way EFL teachers can link their learners' social needs with their learning experiences is an easy task by itself. It is true that experienced teachers are class-centered, as Senior (2006a) mentioned above; still approaching the concept and employing it in class is a critical story.

### ***Teachers' Preferences in language classroom:***

As this presentation intends to highlight EFL teachers' attitude and teaching preferences inside language classroom, pinpoint the significance of intertwining their learners' pedagogical and social demands and to urge our EFL teachers to introduce and practice (CCA) in their teaching career, the study target population will be all EFL teachers in the Palestinian universities of the West Bank. The paper took a sample population of EFL teachers and teacher assistants at the Arab American University-Jenin (AAUJ). This presentation used a questionnaire-based tool to get first-hand information from EFL teachers on their language classroom behavior preferences and practices. The questionnaire is



comprised of three sections that include background information, 13 items and one ranking question. (see Appendix 1).

The questionnaire has been distributed to EFL teachers and teacher assistants who teach English courses and language lab classes at the English Language Center (ELC) at the (AAUJ) in the academic year 2010/2011. The second part of the questionnaire with its 13 items supposedly cover specific aspects of the topic in focus. In their answer to item 6 of the questionnaire (see table 1), more than half of the teachers (53 %) believes that meeting their learners' learning demands is a priority.

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents for each item

No.	Item	Agree	No opinion	Disagree
1	Humor is an essential part of my classroom teaching techniques.	80	6.7	13.3
2	My learners' social demands come second priority	27	33	40
3	My classroom physical setting is my first priority in teaching.	40	20	40
4	I always manage to identify my learners' learning needs.	73	27	0
5	My learners have identical cultural background.	13	13	86.7
6	Meeting my learners' pedagogical needs is my ultimate goal of teaching.	53	27	20
7	I consider each of my classes as one unit.	47	13	40
8	I can easily explain why I feel relaxed when teaching certain classes.	73	0	26.7
9	I don't have the same feeling when I teach different classes with the same level and syllabus.	67	13	20
10	Creating a homelike setting in my classroom is difficult.	33	33	33.3
11	Some of my classes are pedagogically frustrating.	73	13	13.3
12	I follow different teaching approaches for similar classes.	87	0	13.3
13	Meeting my learners' social demands help me overcome teaching obstacles.	47	53	0

With a percentage of (27 %) who has no opinion on the same item, one can draw a conclusion that most teachers see pedagogical needs as a main concern. From experience, it is believed that our EFL teachers understand that the ultimate goal of any EFL syllabus is, roughly, to enable learners to acquire language skills and sub-skills, and, therefore, the

'contract' between teachers and learners is leaning/teaching proceedings. Another related consideration of preferring pedagogy is the pressure of time span limit and administrative requirements to abide by a given syllabus outline. Even though these considerations may be justified, again learners need a teacher who, as Senior (2006) puts it, is not only "an expert in their field as a language teacher; but also they want somebody who can actually develop a relationship with them both individually and with the class as a whole." (2006: 400).

Another expression of EFL teachers' focus on pedagogy is seen in the questionnaire item 11 in which (73 %) feels that some of their classes are pedagogically frustrating. Moreover, about 79 % of the teachers ranked their classes pedagogical setting as the most important, and the remaining percentage ranked it second.

A major surprising response is the teachers' uncertainty about the effect of meeting the learner's social needs in helping them overcome teaching obstacles as expressed in item 13, where 53 % has no opinion. This also explains the teachers' opinion on the difficulty to create a homelike learning setting in class which positively reflects on the learners' approaching the class activities in a relaxing atmosphere. More than one third of the teachers agree that it is difficult for them to create a friendly environment in class (item 10), while another third expresses no opinion in this respect. This difficulty may be associated with teaching experience as we find that the majority of teachers who find it easy to set up a friendly class setting is among those with more than 10 years of teaching experience. Also, these findings explain the teachers' ranking of social setting where 60 % of the respondents placed it in the third or fourth place. (see table 2).

Table 2 ( questionnaire section 3)

Percentage of ranked items in terms of importance

Item	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4
Class physical environment	20	6.6	26.6	46.6
Class social setting	20	20	33.3	26.6
Class pedagogical setting	60	26.6	6.6	6.6
Class cultural background	6.6	46.6	26.4	20

Note: No. 1 is the most important, 2 is less important, ..etc.

In their answer to the importance of humour in class (item 1), the majority of the teachers- 80 %- believes that employing humour in their classes is a vital aspect in their teaching techniques. It looks that teachers do not consider the sense of humour as part of the learners' social needs, rather they may think of it as an occasional incident for motivating purposes, or as an on-the-spot energizer.

When more than 86 % of the teachers (item 5) thinks that their learners' cultural backgrounds are non-identical, they agree that they deal with dissimilar individuals/learners-who are culturally different. This leads us to the conclusion that the concept of cultural background is a vague and ambiguous notion for the teachers who could have found as an interchangeable term with learners' prior knowledge or their socioeconomic status. However, this issue is not the concern of this paper. What concerns us here is that most, if not all, our

learners share the same cultural background in terms of ethnic group, traditions, norms and socially-oriented behavior. They are definitely different in their leaning styles, classroom behavior, and other individual aspects that influence their learning.

Another surprising preference of the teachers' practices in classroom is that 40 % of teachers and another 13 % with no opinion see their classes as individual learners, and not as one unit (item7). This implies that the consideration of the needs of the learning community still ranked second after the individual learner's needs. Apparently, this implication may look promising in terms of approaching learner-centered teaching method which ultimately focuses on the learner (Littlewood,1983). However, the teachers' previous preference is likely to be viewed as a misleading, unless it is explicitly understood that the individuals are members with different learning abilities who form a cohesive leaning community where each contributes, shares and works in beehive-like environment. (Senior, 2006 a).

The percentage of 73 % is significantly high when teachers expressed their ability to identify their learners' learning needs as seen in (item 4 ). Again, the teachers must be talking about pedagogical wants, and might be fully dependent on their tuition, observations and teaching experience. If this is the case, the question of identifying the learners' learning needs is subjectively-oriented process that lacks scientific research and objective identification and analysis of these needs.

### ***Class-centered in the Palestinian context: Does it work ?***

In one of my Advanced classes in the summer session in 2010, one of the best students expressed a significant point of view about the English course he was attending. He said, "When I do language tasks in this class, I must say that I feel so comfortable as if I'm talking to my father, brothers and sisters at the dining table." Even though this may not be the case with most EFL learners at home situation, this learner with his sincere expression has triggered and ignited an idea that geared me to try to look for an acceptable and precise educational interpretation for a better teaching classroom practices that may go beyond the methods of teaching I have learnt, practiced and tried in my classes.

This assumption leads us to recall what Senior (1997) said about teachers' position in the cohesive group, that they "are both an integral part of their class groups, and in a sense set apart-just as a parent who bonds with a child is both a blood relation and an authority figure (1997:4)".

In other occasions, other learners would voice other negative views about their roles in a class where they may have mixed feelings of tense, anxiety and pressure. In a podcast interview on the concept of class-centered, Senior (2006 b) stressed that experienced teachers always link pedagogical and social classroom behaviors in a way that both influence and are influenced by the atmosphere of the class. She also states that a major principle in (CCA) requires teachers to "develop rapport with individuals and with the class as a whole." (The podcast interview 2006).

Cehan (2002) believes that teachers try to gear learners towards interaction through establishing a creative discourse by providing continuous classroom social roles tasks that get all learners involved in activities no matter how small the role may be.

Palestinian teachers, in particular EFL ones, may argue that this trend we are calling for- socio-pedagogic consideration- works well in classes with cultural diversity or multicultural

background which is likely to be different from the Palestinian context. Nevertheless, learners with similar cultural setting, as in our case, have great opportunities to approach language and learn its skills once a framework that successfully embraces their social and pedagogic priorities. Rivers (1992) argues that successful teachers are those who understand their learners' different needs.

Colibaba (2009) criticizes the teacher who "... does not make pedagogical choices which provide cohesion to the class and thereby stimulate the perception of a positive learning environment," because she thinks that the learners in such a class will never reach a satisfying level of communication in the foreign language. (2009: 184).

As Palestinian EFL teachers and their learners are monoculture, and nearly all our learners themselves share the same cultural background, one can assume that establishing friendly ties between the learners and their teachers in *classroom* is attainable. While it is apparently easier for learners to set up good social relationship within their classmates through language pair-tasks or group ones, teachers are the best people to set as examples for their learners, to show respect to the members of their learning groups, to be good listeners to them, to stand at the same distance from each learner, and basically to treat them in a humanistic way. As this behavior may cultivate a mutual respect between learners and their teacher, and, eventually develop a more motivating atmosphere, a positive pedagogical experience is going to be fostered.

### **Conclusion:**

As the presentation first introduces the concept of (CCA) to EFL teaching, it should be stated that teachers, particularly the experienced, employ it in classroom in a way or another. However, in order to meet learners' social and pedagogical needs, teachers are urged to objectively do classroom-based research that can give answers to their day-to-day practices in class. The research should target classroom teaching and learning management in an attempt to give explanations for the most effective and efficient practices –other than teaching approaches- that teachers may practice in their classes. For example, teachers can identify and then analyze their learners' learning needs through using a questionnaire that gives first-hand information about their learners' pedagogical background, their past learning experience, their preferred ways of approaching a course. In their analysis of learners' learning needs, teachers, on the one hand, are expected to plan, outline and organize their courses; on the other hand, they get clear ideas that gear them towards *appropriate* methods of approaching their teaching process. It is through the identification and analysis of the learners' needs, teachers will have to consider the learner's socio-pedagogical demands in their teaching plans. The social demands discussed earlier are best realized in classroom everyday behavior through teachers' employment of a humanistic teaching context where they cultivate values that foster learner's self-esteem, self-confidence, respect, participatory trend in the learning community ( class), sense of belonging, democracy, and equality-oriented practices. However, the present EFL teachers' preferences and classroom behaviors analyzed in the paper indicate that theoretical assumptions that underlie the approach in focus, i.e. CCA to teaching, still need to be spotlighted among EFL teachers at home situation.

### ***Further studies:***

Although the class-centered approach is not a new trend in EFL teaching, much more research is needed in this respect. Both qualitative and quantitative research will provide a more objective framework that can form criteria for teachers to benefit from concerning approaching learners' socio-pedagogical demands. How to practically apply the approach in class needs to be established in a form of guidelines for EFL teachers. These principles can

be drawn out from longitudinal research that includes class observations, interviews of both teachers and learners, review of theories on teaching as a humanistic process.

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## Appendix 1: The Questionnaire

### Towards a Classroom-centered approach to L2 Teaching in the Palestinian Context

#### Section 1:

Gender : M\_\_\_\_ F\_\_\_\_

Post title \_\_\_\_\_

University: \_\_\_\_\_

Your learners' level : All levels \_\_\_\_\_

Average number of students in each class: \_\_\_\_\_

Teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_ years .

Academic year: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 2:

- Respond to each point by adding a tick ( ✓ ) next to the item that applies to you:

No.	Item	Agree	No opinion	Disagree
1	Humor is an essential part of my classroom teaching techniques.			
2	My learners' social demands come second priority			
3	My classroom physical setting is my first priority in teaching.			
4	I always manage to identify my learners' learning needs.			
5	My learners have identical cultural background.			
6	Meeting my learners' pedagogical needs is my ultimate goal			

	of teaching.			
7	I consider each of my classes as one unit.			
8	I can easily explain why I feel relaxed when teaching certain classes.			
9	I don't have the same feeling when I teach different classes with the same level and syllabus.			
10	Creating a homelike setting in my classroom is difficult.			
11	Some of my classes are pedagogically frustrating.			
12	I follow different teaching approaches for similar classes.			
13	Meeting my learners' social demands help me overcome teaching obstacles.			

### **Section 3:**

**As an EFL teacher, rank the following concepts in terms of importance**

**to you when you teach: (no. 1 is the most important, 2 is less important, ..etc)**

\_\_\_ **Classroom physical environment:**

\_\_\_ **Class social setting:**

\_\_\_ **Class pedagogical setting**

\_\_\_ **Classroom cultural background**

### **Appendix 2:**

Questionnaire results : 8 Teachers

#### Section 1:

Gender : M\_\_7\_\_ F\_\_8\_\_

Post title :\_\_8 teachers\_\_\_\_ 7TAs\_\_\_\_

University: \_\_\_\_\_

Your learners' level : All levels\_\_\_\_\_

Average number of students in each class:\_\_\_\_\_

Teaching experience: \_1- 25\_\_\_\_\_ years .

Academic year:\_\_\_\_\_2010/2011\_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2:**

- Respond to each point by adding a tick (✓) next to the item that applies to you:

No.	Item	Agree	No opinion	Disagree
1	Humor is an essential part of my classroom teaching techniques.	6		2
2	My learners' social demands come second priority	1	2	5
3	My classroom physical setting is my first priority in teaching.	2		6
4	I always manage to identify my learners' learning needs.	5	3	
5	My learners have identical cultural background.	1	2	5
6	Meeting my learners' pedagogical needs is my ultimate goal of teaching.	5	1	2
7	I consider each of my classes as one unit.	3	1	4
8	I can easily explain why I feel relaxed when teaching certain classes.	6		2
9	I don't have the same feeling when I teach different classes with the same level and syllabus.	6	1	1
10	Creating a homelike setting in my classroom is difficult.	4	1	3
11	Some of my classes are pedagogically frustrating.	4	2	2
12	I follow different teaching approaches for similar classes.	7		1
13	Meeting my learners' social demands help me overcome teaching obstacles.	5	3	

**Section 3:**

As an EFL teacher, rank the following concepts in terms of importance

to you when you teach: (no. 1 is the most important, 2 is less important, ..etc)

\_\_\_ Classroom physical environment: 34344431

\_\_\_ Class social setting: 42431313

\_\_\_ Class pedagogical setting: 13112122

\_\_\_ Classroom cultural background: 21223244



Appendix 3: Questionnaire Results: 7 Teacher AssistantsQuestionnaire Results: 7 TAsSection 1:

Gender : M\_7\_\_ F\_8\_\_

Post title :\_\_ 8 teachers\_\_\_\_ 7TAs\_\_\_\_

University: \_\_\_\_\_

Your learners' level : All levels\_\_\_\_\_

Average number of students in each class:\_\_\_\_\_

Teaching experience: \_1- 25\_\_\_\_\_ years .

Academic year:\_\_\_\_\_ 2010/2011\_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2:***- Respond to each point by adding a tick ( ✓ ) next to the item that applies to you:*

No.	Item	Agree	No opinion	Disagree
1	Humor is an essential part of my classroom teaching techniques.	6	1	
2	My learners' social demands come second priority	3	3	1
3	My classroom physical setting is my first priority in teaching.	4	3	
4	I always manage to identify my learners' learning needs.	5	1	1
5	My learners have identical cultural background.	1		6
6	Meeting my learners' pedagogical needs is my ultimate goal of teaching.	3	3	1
7	I consider each of my classes as one unit.	4	1	2
8	I can easily explain why I feel relaxed when teaching certain classes.	6		1
9	I don't have the same feeling when I teach different classes with the same level and syllabus.	4	1	2
10	Creating a homelike setting in my classroom is difficult.	1	4	2
11	Some of my classes are pedagogically frustrating.	7		
12	I follow different teaching approaches for similar classes.	6		1
13	Meeting my learners' social demands help me overcome teaching obstacles.	2	5	

**Section 3:**

As an EFL teacher, rank the following concepts in terms of importance

to you when you teach: (no. 1 is the most important, 2 is less important, ..etc)

\_\_\_ Classroom physical environment: 14441332

\_\_\_ Class social setting:3324124

\_\_\_ Class pedagogical setting:1111124

\_\_\_ Classroom cultural background:2223334

Appendix 4: Questionnaire All respondents Percentage

**Section 1:**

Gender : M\_\_7\_\_ F\_\_8\_\_

Post title :\_\_ 8 teachers\_\_\_\_\_ 7TAs\_\_\_\_\_

University: \_\_\_\_\_

Your learners' level : All levels\_\_\_\_\_

Average number of students in each class:\_\_\_\_\_

Teaching experience: \_1- 25\_\_\_\_\_ years .

Academic year:\_\_\_\_\_ 2010/2011\_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2:**

- Respond to each point by adding a tick (√) next to the item that applies to you:

No.	Item	Agree	No opinion	Disagree
1	Humor is an essential part of my classroom teaching techniques.	80.0	6.7	13.3
2	My learners' social demands come second priority	26.7	33.3	40.0
3	My classroom physical setting is my first priority in teaching.	40.0	20.0	40.0
4	I always manage to identify my learners' learning needs.	73.3	26.7	0.0
5	My learners have identical cultural background.	13.3	13.3	86.7
6	Meeting my learners' pedagogical needs is my ultimate goal of teaching.	53.3	26.7	20.0

7	I consider each of my classes as one unit.	46.7	13.3	40.0
8	I can easily explain why I feel relaxed when teaching certain classes.	73.3	0.0	26.7
9	I don't have the same feeling when I teach different classes with the same level and syllabus.	66.7	13.3	20.0
10	Creating a homelike setting in my classroom is difficult.	33.3	33.3	33.3
11	Some of my classes are pedagogically frustrating.	73.3	13.3	13.3
12	I follow different teaching approaches for similar classes.	86.7	0.0	13.3
13	Meeting my learners' social demands help me overcome teaching obstacles.	46.7	53.3	0.0

### **Section 3:**

**As an EFL teacher, rank the following concepts in terms of importance**

**to you when you teach: (no. 1 is the most important, 2 is less important, ..etc)**

\_\_\_ **Classroom physical environment: 34344431--1444132**

\_\_\_ **Class social setting: 42431313--3324124**

\_\_\_ **Class pedagogical setting 13112122--1111124**

\_\_\_ **Classroom cultural background: 21223244--2223334**

**Appendix 5:** Questionnaire section 3: Ranking items in terms of importance

Table 2 ( questionnaire section 3)

Ranking items in terms of importance

<b>Item</b>	<b>Rank 1</b>	<b>Rank 2</b>	<b>Rank 3</b>	<b>Rank 4</b>
Class physical environment	3	1	4	7
Class social setting	3	3	5	4
Class pedagogical setting	9	4	1	1
Class cultural background	1	7	4	3

## **Improving Testing strategies and techniques while teaching the English language skills.**

**Osama Abu Baha**

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### **Abstract:**

The focus of the study will be on the achievement tests for undergraduate students at Educational Sciences Faculty / UNRWA . There are many elicitation techniques that can be used when writing a test. Using the right kind of question at the right time can be enormously important in giving us a clear understanding of our students' abilities, but we must also be aware of the limitations of each of these tasks or question types so that we use each one appropriately. The study found that the best achievement test should contain: multiple choice, cloze , gap filling, transformation, true/ false, matching, open-ended questions and error- correction .There are of course many other elicitation techniques such as translation, essays, dictations, ordering words/phrases into a sequence and sentence construction. It is important to ask yourself what exactly you are trying to test, which techniques suit this purpose best and to bear in mind the drawbacks of each technique. As a recommendation, awareness of this will help university teachers to minimize the problems and produce a more effective test.

### **Introduction:**

Lately, there has been a great debate about the types of techniques that should be used in testing the English language. Matsumoto (1996) has noticed that it is the role of the teacher to choose the best strategies to test his/her students in a positive atmosphere. Moreover, Nunan (1989) has notified that designing the best examination tasks will improve the students' achievement in the test. Therefore, it became apparent that using different elicitation techniques might be helpful in improving the students' results.

In the universities of Al-Quds and the Educational Sciences Faculty, there is a weakness in the student achievement in the English Tests. The scope of this study does not look at the methodology of teaching and improving them; however, it looks at the way we design the English test and the diversity of techniques that should be used.

The study begins with a review about the elicitation techniques and the types of English Exams. Then, in the methodology section, the researcher will deal with the tool used in the study: a post exam for both the control and the experimental groups. After that an analysis for the students' results will be conducted and calculated to uncover the means of their achievement. Some limitations and recommendations will be discussed at the end of the study.

### **Literature Review:**

This study focuses on how we could make the English tests more reliable and useful. I will go on to look at testing and elicitation techniques , in particular some different question types and their functions, advantages and disadvantages. These are the following:

1. Types of test
2. Types of task
  - Multiple choice
  - Transformation
  - Gap-filling

- Matching
- Cloze
- True / False
- Open questions
- Error correction

### **Types of test:**

Before writing a test, it is important to think about what you want to test and what your aim is. One has to make a distinction here between proficiency tests, achievement tests, diagnostic tests and prognostic tests.

- A proficiency test is one that measures a candidate's overall ability in a language; it isn't related to a specific course.
- An achievement test on the other hand tests the students' knowledge of the material that has been taught on a course.
- A diagnostic test highlights the strong and weak points that a learner may have in a particular area.
- A prognostic test attempts to predict how a student will perform on a course.

There are of course many other types of tests. It is important to choose elicitation techniques carefully when you prepare your tests.

### **Types of task:**

Many elicitation methods that can be used when we prepare a test. Below are some widely used types with some guidance on their strengths and weaknesses. Using the right kind of question at the right time can be extremely important in providing us a clear understanding of our students' abilities, but we must also be aware of the limitations of each of these question types so that we can use each one fittingly.

### **Multiple choice**

Choose the correct word to complete the sentence.

**America was \_\_\_\_\_ by Columbus in 1492.**

- a) discovers    b) discovered    c) was discovered    d) has been discovered

In this question type, there is a stem and various options to choose from. The advantages of this question type are that it is easy to mark and reduces guess work by having multiple distracters. The disadvantage is that it can be very time-consuming to create effective multiple choice items. Also it takes time for the candidate to process the information which leads to problems with the validity of the exam. If a low level student has to read through lots of complicated information before they can answer the question, you may find you are testing their reading skills more than their lexical knowledge.

Finally, we can say that multiple choice can be used to test most things such as grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening etc. but you must remember that it is still possible for students to just 'guess' without knowing the correct answer. Cook (2001)

### **Transformation**

In this type, the student is asked to complete the second sentence so that it has the same meaning as the first.

**'Do you know how the weather is like, John?' asked Dave.**

Dave asked John -----

This time a candidate has to rewrite a sentence based on an instruction or a key word given. In the above case, it is reported speech. This type of task is fairly easy to mark, but the problem is that it doesn't test understanding. A candidate may simply be able to rewrite sentences to a formula. The fact that a candidate has to paraphrase the whole meaning of the sentence in the example above however minimizes this drawback.

Therefore, Transformations are particularly effectual for testing grammar and understanding of form. This wouldn't be an appropriate question type if you wanted to test skills such as reading or listening.

### Gap-filling

This time a candidate has to complete the sentence.

***This ----(N)-----is very important (inform)***

The student fills in the gap to complete the sentence. A clue may sometimes be given such as a root verb that needs to be changed, or the first letter of the word etc. This usually tests grammar or vocabulary. Again this type of task is easy to mark and comparatively easy to write. The teacher must bear in mind though that in some cases there may be many possible correct answers.

Finally, gap-filling can be used to test a variety of areas such as vocabulary, grammar and are very effective at testing listening for specific words.

### Matching

This time a candidate has to match the word on the left to the word with the opposite meaning.

a. Word \_\_\_\_\_ b. Opposite

large	small
full	rapidly
slowly	empty

In this question type, the candidate must link items from the first column to items in the second. This could be individual words, words and definitions, parts of sentences, pictures to words etc. Though it is easy to mark, students can get the right answers without knowing the words, if he/ she has most of the answers correct he/she knows the last one left must be right. To avoid this, teachers should have more words than is necessary in one of the columns.

It is advisable that matching exercises are most often used to test vocabulary.

### Cloze

In this question type, the candidate has to complete the text by adding a word to each gap.

*This is the type \_\_\_\_\_ test where a word \_\_\_\_\_ omitted from a sentence every so often. The candidate must \_\_\_\_\_ the gaps, usually the first two lines are without gaps.*

This kind of task type is much more integrative as candidates have to process the components of the language simultaneously. It has also been proved to be a good indicator of overall language proficiency. The teacher must be careful about multiple correct answers and students may need some practice of this type of task.

It is essential to say that cloze tests can be very effective for testing grammar, vocabulary and intensive reading.

### **True / False**

In this question type, the candidate has to decide if the statement is true or false.

### ***Einstein discovered the Relativity Theory . T/F***

Here the candidate must decide if a statement is true or false. Again this type is easy to mark but guessing can result in many correct answers. The best way to counteract this effect is to have a lot of items.

It has been noticed that this question type is mostly used to test listening and reading comprehension. Hedge (2000)

### **Open questions**

Here the candidate must answer the questions according to an acceptable answer.

### ***Is Odious guilty when he married his mother and killed his father unintentionally?***

Here the candidate must answer a question after reading or listening or as part of an oral interview. It can be used to test anything. If the answer is open-ended it will be more difficult and time consuming to mark and there may also be an element of subjectivity involved in judging how 'complete' the answer is, but it may also be a more accurate test.

It has been noticed that this question type is very useful for testing any of the four skills, but less useful for testing grammar or vocabulary. Hedge (2000)

### **Error Correction**

Here the candidate must Find the mistakes in the sentence and correct them.

### ***Asia is a small country in the world.***

Errors must be found and corrected in a sentence or passage. It could be an extra word, mistakes with verb forms, words missed etc. One problem with this question type is that some errors can be corrected in more than one way.

- A lot of studies have found that error correction is useful for testing grammar and vocabulary as well as readings and listening. Abu Baha (2007)

### **Different types of exams and how to study for them:**

The way you study for an exam will depend on the exam type. It is important that you know the format of the exam so that you can use an appropriate study strategy. For example, Humanities and Social Science courses might rely largely on essay based exams, while Math and Science courses might rely on solving problems. Some exams might use a mixture

of questions (such as multiple choice and short answers), so you will need to use a mix of study methods. At the UNRWA college in Ramallah, a diversity of questions is used in order to reduce the individual differences between students and to motivate other students for best achievement.

### **Methodology and Sampling:**

The researcher has the following aims to fulfill:

1. What are the best elicitation techniques in formulating an achievement test?
2. Which kind of tests appeals more to students?
3. What kind of tests should be used less than others?
4. Does the load of questions affect the students' achievement?
5. Do the aesthetic and beauty of the exam editing affect their achievement?

The study has been conducted within two universities, namely Al Quds University and Educational sciences Faculty. Four sections of different majors have participated in the study during the second semester of 2010/2011. The researcher has divided the four sections into a control group and an experimental group. Each university has two sections: one of them was called the control group and was given its English exams according to the traditional way without too much care and planning of the exams items; the other section was called the experimental group and was given its English exams according the elicitation techniques mentioned in the literature review. The sample consisted of 120 students in both universities and the students in the four sections were chosen randomly. Those students were not enrolled as English majors but they were enrolled in other majors such as science, elementary education, Arabic, Geography,...Both groups were taught according to the same criteria; however, the achievement tests differ for both the groups. Our focus was not the methodology of teaching , but it was the way we conduct the English Exam and what the major criteria it should contain in order to elevate the students' achievement in the English Language. At the end of the semester two post exams has been conducted for both groups.( see appendix A+B for both the control and the experimental groups) One of the exams has not followed all the criteria of the elicitation techniques and the other exam has been conducted according to all criteria mentioned in our objectives. The analysis of the results was very astonishing.

### **Results:**

After conducting the post test for both the control and experimental groups, it was found that:

1. The overall achievement using the diversity of elicitation techniques for the experimental group was higher than the control group. It was calculated that the mean of the control group was 51% but the experimental group was 65%.
2. The best elicitation techniques for students are the objective, matching and the open questions. The achievement was 72% for the experimental group. Those two techniques appeal more for the students.
3. The worst elicitation techniques were gap filling and Transformation questions. The achievement was 53% for the experimental group. These two techniques appeal less for the students
4. The control group's exam consists of four domains: listening, reading, writing and speaking with a load of 25% for each question. That means each sub-question has a load of five marks. However, the experimental group has the same domains but each sub- question has only one mark. Upon the exam analysis, it was found that the load of the exam has reduced the amount of



mistakes and raised the achievement of the experimental group. If a student in the control group has a faulty answer, he will therefore lose five marks; however, if a student in the experimental group has a faulty answer, he will consequently lose only one mark.

5. It was found that 85% of the experimental group has a positive attitude towards the aesthetic and beauty of the exam editing. However, the control group was very neutral towards the traditional exam and was found that 51% of the students has not been attracted to traditional exams.
6. In the table below, you can find the results and achievement of both groups.

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Listening	55%	40%
Reading	75%	70%
Writing	75%	60%
Speaking	55%	34%

### **Results analysis:**

1. The overall achievement using the diversity of elicitation techniques for the experimental group was higher than the control group. It was calculated that the mean of the control group was 51% but the experimental group was 65%. This is significantly obvious since the increase in the techniques has widened the opportunity for students to achieve better. The exam has contained all types of techniques: objective, true/false, cloze, matching, open questions, transformation,..etc. However, the control group was exposed only to two types of questions which are objective (for grammar) and comprehension ( for reading) questions.
2. The best elicitation techniques for students are the objective, matching and the open questions. The achievement was 72% for the experimental group. Those two techniques appeal more for the students. It was significantly found that the experimental group is in favour of these three types because they are not time consuming and referring to the text was very helpful in answering these types of questions. It was also found the open questions have increased the critical thinking. This was very obvious when they were asked to write a composition of three paragraphs about why do you think red, blue and white colours were very important in our life?
3. The worst elicitation techniques were gap filling and Transformation questions. The achievement was 53% for the experimental group. These two techniques appeal less for the students. Gap filling needs memorizing things and information from the reading text and most students do not prefer memorizing because it is the toughest for them. In addition, Transformation questions needs high recognition of special groups such as changing from passive to active or changing normal speech into reported speech.
4. The control group's exam consists of four domains: listening, reading, writing and speaking with a load of 25% for each question. That means each sub-question has a load of five marks. However, the experimental group has the same domains but each sub- question has only one mark. Upon the exam analysis, it was found that the load of the exam has reduced the amount of mistakes and raised the achievement of the experimental group. If a student in the control group has a faulty answer, he will therefore lose five marks; however, if a student in the experimental group has a faulty answer, he will consequently lose only one mark. According to Richards (1990) in his book,

The language Teaching Matrix, the load of each exam item is so important in the achievement of the students and having several mistakes will not necessarily affect the students' achievement. He added also the less the mark, the greater opportunity is given to the student.

5. It was found that 85% of the experimental group has a positive attitude towards the aesthetic and beauty of the exam editing. However, the control group was very neutral towards the traditional exam and was found that 51% of the students has not been attracted to traditional exams. Here, the form of the exam and the way it was introduced to students create a visual impact on him and elevates his motivation positively. Pica (1985) has suggested various techniques to increase the potentiality of the students by using different forms of exams.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

So far, we have discussed using different elicitation methods on the achievement of the target group: students of both AI – Quds University and the Educational Sciences Faculty. It has been found that using questions of multiple choices, matching and open questions has increased the students' achievement. It has been found that teachers shouldn't depend on memorizing questions such as filling in the gaps since the study shows that the least of the students' achievement was in gap filling and transformation questions. It has also been noticed that the aesthetic and beauty of the exam editing have influenced the students' attitudes positively and therefore motivated them.

There are some limitations to this study. First, the study has been conducted within two universities only and the target group was 120 students. Secondly, one type of quantitative tool was used which was considering the means of the students' results in the midterm and final exams.

For further studies, the researcher has some recommendations. First of all, a study should be conducted of how the English Exam should look like; I mean the form away from content. Second, how we can improve the transformation questions that might be more understandable for the students. Therefore, should we give the rules of grammar on a separate sheet as what Math teachers do in some of their exams?

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### **Appendix A: Experimental group Exam**

Name: ----- English Final Exam Major:-----

#### **Section A: Listen to the cassette and then fill in the spaces: ( 6 Marks)**

- A. Dr. Lisa lives in -----
- B. Her hobbies are-----and -----
- C. She works in -----hospital.
- D. She spent all her night in the hospital this night because-----
- E. Her-----and -----were worried.
- F. She called them at -----o'clock.

#### **Section B: Reading comprehension: ( 10 Marks)**

1. Read the text and questions below.

John Fisher, a builder, and his wife Elizabeth wanted more living space, so they left their small flat for an old 40-metre-high castle tower. They have spent five years turning it into a beautiful home with six floors, winning three architectural prizes.

'I love the space, and being private,' Elizabeth says. 'You feel separated from the world. If I'm in the kitchen, which is 25 meters above the ground floor, and the doorbell rings, I don't have to answer it because visitors can't see I'm in!'

'There are 142 steps to the top, so if I go up and down five or six times a day, it's very good exercise! But having to carry heavy things to the top is terrible, so I never buy more than two bags of shopping from the supermarket at a time. Apart from that, it's a brilliant place to live.'

'When we first saw the place, I asked my father's advice about buying it, because we couldn't decide. After paying for it, we were a bit worried because it looked awful. But we really loved it, and knew how we wanted it to look.'

'Living here can be difficult – yesterday I climbed a four-meter ladder to clean the

windows. But when you stand on the roof you can see all the way out to sea on a clear day, and that's a wonderful experience. I'm really glad we moved.'

**1. What is the writer trying to do in the text?**

**A describe how to turn an old tower into a house**

**B recommend a particular builder**

**C describe what it is like to live in a tower**

**D explain how to win prizes for building work**

**2. From this text, a reader can find out**

**A why visitors are not welcome at John and Elizabeth's house.**

**B why Elizabeth exercises every day.**

**C why Elizabeth asked her father to buy the tower.**

**D why John and Elizabeth left their flat.**

**3. Which of the following best describes Elizabeth's feelings about the tower?**

**A She wanted it as soon as she saw it.**

**B She likes most things about it.**

**C She has been worried since they paid for it.**

**D She finds it unsuitable to live in.**

**4. What problem does Elizabeth have with living in such a tall building?**

**A Her visitors find it difficult to see if she is at home.**

**B She feels separated from other people.**

**C She cannot bring home lots of shopping at once.**

**D It is impossible to clean any of the windows.**

**5. The pronoun it refers to :**

**A. the bought house B. the sold house C. the balcony D. awful**

**Section three : Writing ( 23 Marks)**

**A. Change the following sentences into passive voice(3)**

**1. I will see you next week.**

---

---





- a) go      b) make      c) take      d) pass

13. I -----she is very smart.

- a) am think      b) am thinking      c) thought      d) think

14. ----- all things in the kitchen recently?

- a) Was you eaten    b) Have you eaten    c) Did you eat    d)Were you eating

15. Many housewives have to go to work-----

- a- nowadays      b- contemporarily    c- in the meantime    d- actually

16. She was sick, ----- she went to the doctor.

- a- however      b- therefore      c- but      d- and

17. We use the linking word "however" for -----

- a. addition    b. cause/result    c. concession    d. exemplification

18. When Selma ----- , we were having coffee.

- a. arrived    b. arrives    c. was arriving    d. has arrived

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18

**6. . Match the linking words with their functions: (5)**

1. for instance -----      a. concessive  
 2. because -----      b. causative





**John Fisher, a builder, and his wife Elizabeth wanted more living space, so they left their small flat for an old 40-metre-high castle tower. They have spent five years turning it into a beautiful home with six floors, winning three architectural prizes.**

**'I love the space, and being private,' Elizabeth says. 'You feel separated from the world. If I'm in the kitchen, which is 25 meters above the ground floor, and the doorbell rings, I don't have to answer it because visitors can't see I'm in!'**

**'There are 142 steps to the top, so if I go up and down five or six times a day, it's very good exercise! But having to carry heavy things to the top is terrible, so I never buy more than two bags of shopping from the supermarket at a time. Apart from that, it's a brilliant place to live.'**

**'When we first saw the place, I asked my father's advice about buying it, because we couldn't decide. After paying for it, we were a bit worried because it looked awful. But we really loved it, and knew how we wanted it to look.'**

**'Living here can be difficult – yesterday I climbed a four-meter ladder to clean the windows. But when you stand on the roof you can see all the way out to sea on a clear day, and that's a wonderful experience. I'm really glad we moved.'**

1. What is the writer trying to do in the text?

A describe how to turn an old tower into a house

B recommend a particular builder

C describe what it is like to live in a tower

D explain how to win prizes for building work

2. From this text, a reader can find out

A why visitors are not welcome at John and Elizabeth's house.

B why Elizabeth exercises every day.

C why Elizabeth asked her father to buy the tower.

D why John and Elizabeth left their flat.

3. Which of the following best describes Elizabeth's feelings about the tower?

A She wanted it as soon as she saw it.

- B She likes most things about it.
  - C She has been worried since they paid for it.
  - D She finds it unsuitable to live in.
4. What problem does Elizabeth have with living in such a tall building?
- A Her visitors find it difficult to see if she is at home.
  - B She feels separated from other people.
  - C She cannot bring home lots of shopping at once.
  - D It is impossible to clean any of the windows.
5. The pronoun it refers to :
- A. the bought house B. the sold house C. the balcony D. awful

**Section three :Writing ( 52 Marks)**

3. What are the four types of sentences? Give an example on each.(8)

- 1.( )
  - 2. ( )
  - 3. ( )
  - 4. ( )
- 

4. What are the four criteria for a coherent paragraph?(8)

- 1.-----
- 2.-----
- 3.-----
- 4.-----

5. Write a coherent paragraph about the dangers of smoking?(8)

-----

-----

-----

-----

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-----

-----

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-----

6. Choose the best answer(18)

5. I don't have -----to say right now.  
a. anything b something c. nothing d. everything
6. Every autumn the agency send some booklets about holidays that will be -----  
the next year  
a. impossible b. permissible c. capable d. available
7. An-----girl went on a skating trip.  
a. old seventy-two b. seventy-two-year-old  
c. seventy-two years old c. seventy- two years'
4. I saw a man -----car was broken yesterday.  
a. who b. whom c. which d. whose
5. The baker has -----, but the bank has clients.  
a. clients b. customers c. dealers d. patients
6. Someone is saying that my Mum is a good-----since she cooks well.  
a. cook b. cooker c. baker d. oven
7. You should decide -----to spend this money right now.  
a. why b. what c. how d. which
8. I ----- the movie yet.  
a. have seen b. don't see c. didn't see d. haven't seen
9. The word ( dough) is pronounced as-----  
a. do b. dew c. doe d. tough
10. What are the -----men opinions?  
a) other's b) others' c) others d) other
11. Selma ----- in the field when I saw her.  
a) jog b) jogged c) was jogging d) jogs
12. People come into the office to make reservations because they want to -----a  
holiday.  
a) go b) make c) take d) pass
13. I -----she is very smart.

- a) am think                      b) am thinking                      c) thought                      d) think

14. ----- all things in the kitchen recently?

- a) Was you eaten    b) Have you eaten    c) Did you eat    d)Were you eating

15. Many housewives have to go to work-----

- a- nowadays            b- contemporarily    c- in the meantime    d- actually

16. She was sick, ----- she went to the doctor.

- a- however                      b- therefore                      c- but                      d- and

17. We use the linking word "however" for -----

- a. addition    b. cause/result    c. concession    d. exemplification

18. When Selma ----- , we were having coffee.

- a. arrived    b. arrives    c. was arriving    d. has arrived

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18

**6. . Match the linking words with their functions: (10)**

- 1. for instance ----- a. concessive
- 2. because ----- b. causative
- 3. and so ----- c. exemplary
- 4. moreover ----- d. additive
- 5. although ----- e. result

**Section 4 : Speaking: ( 14 Marks)**

**2. Invite Mosa to your birthday:**

-----**Give your opinion towards the olive oil of Palestine**

-----

**3. Congratulate Slama upon passing in the Tawjihi Exam.**

-----

**8. Agree with Ali in his idea to leave earlier**

-----

## The Employment of E-Blended Learning in Teaching

### English as a Foreign Language

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#### **Abstract:**

Recently, the use of e-learning is considered as one of the most important mediums for instruction. It is considered as a current educational tool that aims at changing our educational system from the traditional into the interactive (Sacchanand, 2008). This study aims to compare students' course achievement and attitudes toward learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) between two course delivery methods: Blended and face-to-face (FTF). A pretest-posttest control group experimental design model was used, so participants were assigned to experimental and control groups purposefully in order to achieve group equivalency. The study was conducted during the fall of the 2010-2011 academic year. Participants consisted of 179 university students who were taking an EFL course as a university requirement course at Al-Quds University. The experimental group was taught with the blended mode of instruction, which involved using both FTF and online instruction; on the other hand, the control group was taught with FTF mode alone. At the beginning of the study, EFL prior knowledge was measured in both groups. At the end of the study, students' final course scores and attitude scores toward EFL learning were evaluated. Data were analyzed using independent samples t-tests. A statistically significant difference was found between the FTF and blended group. The analysis showed that the blended group was more successful than the traditional group in terms of both course achievement and attitudes toward EFL learning.

**Keywords:** Blended learning; Face-to-face instruction; EFL learning; Attitudes toward EFL learning

#### **Introduction:**

##### **Background**

Recently, there has been a paradigm shift away from the traditional teacher-centered classroom in which the instruction occurs with an instructor and students at the same time and place, toward the learner-centered classroom which focuses on the individual learner combined with the methods and practices that best exemplify the promotion of high motivation, learning, and achievement (McCombs, 1999). Nowadays, the development and application of information technology (IT) became a major strategy in the teaching and learning processes.

Online learning is considered nowadays as the most popular form of instructional technology which is growing rapidly. Numerous varieties of online education have been examined in the literature such as online, web-based, web-enhanced, blended, hybrid and mixed mode online learning. Smith and Kurthen (2007) stated that courses include a minimal number of web-based elements are called web-enhanced, courses that incorporate some online learning activities (less than 45%) are called blended. If online activities are between 45% and 80% then the course can be called hybrid. Classes with 80% or more e-learning are thought fully online.

This paper introduces the employment of blended learning in teaching an EFL course as a university requirement course to Palestinian university students at Al-Quds University to find out how instructional technology can help students become better foreign language learners.

According to (Bourne, Harris, and Mayadas, 2005) blended learning is defined as an optimal combination of face-to-face (FTF) and online education that improves learning and satisfaction of instructors and students at a reasonable cost. Yoon & Lim (2007) state that the concept of blending should help teaching and performance professionals create and manage plans to make the best use of FTF and technological formats, selecting the optimum instructional or non-instructional performance solutions.

Despite the fact that online learning is a widely used learning practice with many strategic advantages, FTF and online learning are still side by side in the educational world. Some researchers believe that there will always be a place for instructor-led educational programs. Others believe that online learning is more successful than FTF learning, and may therefore possibly take the place of FTF learning in the future. When we look at the literature, we find many advocates of these two opinions. Russell (1999) cataloged 355 comparative studies in distance education between 1928 and 1996 and argued that no one method of delivering instruction is more effective than any other.

On the other hand, although blended learning is a relatively new concept in online education, empirical studies of some researchers have looked specifically at blended courses which indicated that online education is more effective than traditional FTF education. Robertson, Grant, and Jackson (2005) examined students' perceived quality of the learning experience in online courses as compared to classroom-based learning in a graduate program. They stated that students perceived the quality of their online learning in the graduate program similar or even superior to campus courses. Guiller, Durndell, and Ross (2008) conducted a study that engaged students in a critical thinking activity using both online and FTF methods, and compared the two modes in terms of evidence for critical thinking skills. They stated that more evidence for critical thinking was found in the online condition, and more students stated that they preferred this mode of discussion.

Another emerging idea is that mixing FTF and online delivery options provides the most successful instruction. Schrum, Burbank, and Capps (2007) researched students in introductory teacher preparation courses and stated that the best online teacher preparation courses maybe those that blend virtual and FTF interaction, rather than those that are strictly online.

According to Amrein-Beardsley, Foulger, and Toth (2007), instructors reported that the blended course model allows them to accomplish course objectives more successfully than either an online course model or a traditional course model. Most instructors noted increased interaction and contact among their students in a blended learning environment (Smith, 2005).

However, little research has examined how learners perceive their e-learning environment and how learners are assisted or hindered in their learning (Chen & Macredie, 2002; Moore & Aspden, 2004). Tang and Byrne (2007) found no significant difference in course achievement between FTF instruction and blended instruction, though they stated that students appeared to be more satisfied with the blended mode of delivery than the FTF mode of delivery. Torgerson and Zhu (2004) suggest a relationship between the subject being taught and the appropriateness of employing e-learning environments in their teaching.

As Palestinians began to incorporate learner-centered ideology into their Palestinian classes, many Palestinian institutions and organizations have shown great interest in developing the potential of e-learning, and since blended learning is a relatively new concept of online learning, few empirical research studies in the literature have looked specifically at blended courses and evaluated students' learning outcomes and their attitudes toward this mode of instruction (Delialioglu and Yildirim, 2008; Lin, 2008). In addition, most of the research practices are from the Western world, and were conducted under different

conditions and with different subjects. So, this study is an empirical study that evaluates the effectiveness of the blended mode of delivery on Palestinian students' course achievement and attitudes toward EFL learning.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

This research assesses to what extent the implementation of blended learning into teaching EFL as a university requirement course has improved students' course achievement and their attitude toward EFL learning. It is intended to compare students' course achievement and attitude toward EFL learning before and after implementing two course delivery methods: Blended and face-to-face (FTF).

To accomplish this purpose, two major questions are addressed:

- (1) Is there a significant difference between the FTF group and the blended group in terms of course achievement?
- (2) Is there a significant difference between the FTF group and the blended group in terms of attitudes toward EFL learning?

### **Method:**

#### **Design of the Study**

In this study, the researcher used a pretest-posttest control group experimental design model. The independent samples t-test was employed to determine the difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of course achievement and attitudes toward EFL learning. The independent variable was the instructional method (FTF or blended). The dependent variables were students' course achievement and attitudes toward EFL learning.

#### **Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of 179 students at the college level who were taking an EFL course as a university requirement course at Al-Quds University. 86 students were taught with the blended mode of delivery, which involved using both FTF and online modes of instruction; 93 students were taught with FTF mode alone. The students were assigned to the control group and the experimental group purposefully in order to achieve group equivalency based on test scores examining their prior knowledge about EFL and attitudes toward EFL learning.

#### **Data Collection Tools**

The researcher used an achievement test and an attitude scale as data collection tools. The achievement test consisted of final exam questions used in the EFL course, and it was used to test students' previous knowledge at the beginning of the study. The same test was used at the end of the course. The test was prepared with three subject matter experts who were other instructors of the same course. The attitude scale that was used in this study was developed by the researcher. The scale consisted of 40 items with a four-point Likert response format; values ranged from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1).

In order to guarantee the validity of the instruments, a jury of judges comprising educational experts and experts from the language center at Al-Quds was invited to comment on the instruments. On the basis of their comments, modified versions of the instruments were prepared by the researcher and the jury was again requested to assess its validity.

As for the reliability of the instruments, the researcher conducted a pilot study by trying out the instruments on a group of 20 students from the population, who were excluded from the participants of the study. The computed reliability for the instruments' re- test was computed

using Pearson correlation formula . The obtained value of reliability on the test was (0.87), and the obtained value for the attitude scale was (0.92) which were high and accepted for the purpose of the study.

### **Procedures of the Study:**

At the beginning of the study, performance objectives were written and instructional materials were developed. After that, the achievement test and the attitude scale were given to the control and the experimental groups as pretests. The control group and the experimental group were then taught for 14 weeks using two course delivery methods: Blended for the experimental group and FTF for the control group. The FTF group took the course traditionally (two hours of theoretical material in the classroom weekly). The lectures were supported by PowerPoint presentations, books, lecture notes. Classroom discussions and question and answer techniques were used in teacher-student interactions. Teamwork, classroom discussions and projects were used in order to provide opportunities for collaborative learning. On the other hand, classroom meetings for the blended group were one hour each weekly. In addition to these classroom meetings, the blended group used a website that was developed for the course. Additional learning materials consisted of online lecture notes and multimedia-rich components such as screen captures, assessment simulations and online tutorials. The students in blended group were able to access these learning materials through the web site. Questions, e-mail and web announcements were used as means of student-teacher interaction. Teamwork, classroom discussions and e-mail were used in order to enhance students' collaborative learning experiences. The website was developed like a small model of a learning management system. Students in the blended group could log in to this website with their passwords reaching the systematically structured learning materials.

Learners are given ample opportunities for L2 input exposure through different channels (written, aural, and visual) to support their different cognitive styles. L2 aural input is delivered through a variety of intensive and extensive listening activities designed in a way to provide opportunities to focus on meaning and form. Learners are also encouraged to watch films and to listen to television and radio programs in English for additional extensive listening. The online software makes use of devices for explicit enhancement of input, such as marking specific written forms through colors, enlarged letters, stress, animations, and other modifications and elaborations. This is done with the purpose of increasing learners' chances to notice selected forms focused on in particular lessons to positively influence their acquisition.

The language-learning tasks have been designed to engage learners in three types of interaction: interpersonal communication, learner-computer, and intrapersonal (learner-mind). Learners are encouraged to interact with their partners in problem-solving or information-gap activities and games. They have to work collaboratively in computer-supported activities relying on both computer-mediated and face-to-face communication with other speakers. Learners have opportunities to negotiate meaning and to focus on form as they speak to and get feedback from their partners and teachers. Virtual recording tools for practicing pronunciation and speaking skills are provided to maximize their opportunities to focus on output. With regard to intrapersonal interaction, as learners perform their skill-practice activities on the computer, they can make use of locally produced devices such as a vocabulary tool, available on request, as well as glosses, pictures, and hypertext, all of which facilitate making connections between meaning and form.

At the end of the course, the same test and scale were given to students as posttests. The data collected before the course and after the course were analyzed using SPSS software.



An independent samples t-test was used in order to compare the groups in terms of achievement in EFL and attitudes toward this course.

### **Results:**

#### **Achievement**

In order to answer the first research question which states, "Is there a significant difference between the FTF group and the blended group in terms of course achievement?", students' prior knowledge results on the achievement test were compared. The FTF and the blended groups' pretest results (EFL prior knowledge) are demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

Comparison of EFL prior knowledge in the FTF and blended groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	p
FTF	93	26.173	13.587	177	.999	0.319
Blended	86	24.071	14.331			

As indicated in Table 1, the independent samples t-test technique was applied to the mean pretest scores for the FTF and blended groups in order to examine the differences in prior knowledge. According to the test results, there was no significant difference in prior knowledge about the course between the FTF and blended groups ( $p=.319$ ). The FTF and blended groups' posttest results (course achievement) are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

Comparison of course achievement in the FTF and blended groups at the end of instruction

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	p
FTF	93	51.16	9.97	177	6.913	0.000
Blended	86	61.49	10.003			

As shown in Table 2, the independent samples t-test technique was applied to the mean posttest scores for the FTF and blended groups in order to examine the differences in course achievement. According to the test results, there was significant difference in course achievement between the FTF and blended groups ( $p<.01$ ). The experimental (blended) group's mean score on the achievement test was higher than the control (FTF) group's mean score. The results indicate that the blended mode of instructional design, which was the combination of FTF and online instruction, had a positive effect on students' learning outcomes. There was no statistically significant difference in EFL prior knowledge between the experimental group (blended group) and the control group (FTF group) at the beginning of the course. After 14 weeks of instruction, the experimental group received higher scores than the control group on the achievement test. The difference in the mean scores of the groups was statistically significant.

#### **Attitudes**

In order to answer the second question which states, "Is there a significant difference between the FTF group and the blended group in terms of attitudes toward EFL?", the

Attitude Scale was applied to the FTF and blended groups at the beginning and at the end of the instructional period. The independent samples t-test technique was applied to the mean scores of both groups, and the results were compared at the significance level of .05. The comparison of the FTF and blended groups' mean scores at the beginning of the instructional period are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

Comparison of the FTF and blended groups' mean Attitude Scale scores at the beginning of instruction

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	p
FTF	93	126.868	12.422	177	.237	.813
Blended	86	127.337	13.948			

As shown in Table 3, there was no significant difference in attitudes towards EFL learning between the control and experimental groups before instruction ( $p=.813$ ). The comparison of the FTF and blended groups' mean scores on the Attitude Scale at the end of instruction are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.**

Comparison of the FTF and blended groups' mean Attitude Scale scores at the end of instruction

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	p
FTF	93	124.505	12.180	177	3.003	0.003
Blended	86	130.535	14.644			

According to the test results shown in Table 4, there was a significant difference in attitudes towards EFL learning between the FTF and blended groups after the instruction took place ( $p<.01$ ). The experimental (blended) group's mean score on the Attitude Scale was higher than the control (FTF) group's mean score. The results indicate that the blended mode of instructional design had a positive effect on students' attitudes towards EFL learning. Before the instruction, there was no statistically significant difference in the Attitude Scale mean scores between the experimental group (blended group) and the control group (FTF group). After 14 weeks of instruction, the experimental group received higher scores than the control group on the same Attitude Scale. The difference in mean scores of both groups was statistically significant.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

The current research answered the call by many researchers to provide a participant perspective and evaluation of their e-learning environments (Moore & Aspden, 2004). It also suggested how the EFL e-learning resource supported participants' learning by providing appropriate material, specifically designed for the e-learning environment it was used in, provided the participants with opportunities to effectively interact with the 'on-line tutor' and employ their own evaluation criteria. So, this study examined the effects of blended and face-to-face course delivery methods on students' achievement and attitudes towards EFL

learning in an EFL requirement course where the only difference between the experimental (blended) and control (FTF) groups was the learning strategy, in other words, course delivery method. According to the test results, the blended mode course delivery method was more successful than the FTF course delivery method in terms of both students' course achievement and attitudes towards EFL learning.

It is believed that the benefits of blended learning environment with interactive materials including instructional videos, screen captures, and assessment simulations are the most effective factors for success. Literature supports that blended learning offers more successful learning environment than FTF learning. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) stated that blended learning offers improved pedagogy, increased access to knowledge, and fostered social interaction between learners. Teachers are able to use a variety of instructional methods in blended learning environment (Vaughan, 2007) and students can control the pace of their own learning, select the materials and manage their own times. Moreover, Garrison and Kanuka (2004) stated that "*it is inevitable that campus-based higher education institutions will adopt blended learning approaches in a significant way*" (p.104).

As stated above, the findings of this study are supported by the literature: Schrum, Burbank, and Capps (2007), Amrein-Beardsley, Foulger, and Toth (2007) and Smith (2005) emphasized that the blended learning environment provides improved learning outcomes and improved student and faculty satisfaction. They also stated that faculty-student interaction and instructors' abilities to accomplish course objectives increased in the blended learning environments compared to an online or traditional course. On the other hand, although researchers such as Tang and Byrne (2007) and Delialioglu and Yildirim (2008) have found no significant difference in course achievement between FTF instruction and blended instruction, most reviewed literature concluded that blending online and FTF instruction, on average, produces stronger learning blended instruction, outcomes than FTF instruction alone.

### **Recommendations:**

Since learner-centered practices are being considered in the literature to be one of the best approaches to teaching and learning, and because online learning is quickly pervading higher education, it is crucial that instructors be trained to successfully integrate (learner-centered practices) into their learning environment. The importance of training instructors to understand the impact of the learner-centered practices and to implement them into both traditional and online practices will be an important part of professional development.

Therefore, the researcher recommends that instructors' training modules should be developed to define and stress the aspects of learner-centeredness. Such training modules should also emphasize how instructors' attitudes, caring about the students, and trying a variety of teaching strategies create more learner-centered environments and are beneficial to student learning. So, if instructors realized the value of incorporating learner-centered practices into their teaching practices, it is likely that they would be more interested in making the necessary instructional changes needed to reach those ratings. Therefore, the researcher is recommending that all training modules should:

- Address individual and social learning needs and stress collaboration and group activities and provide examples of each.
- Use online resources to illustrate at least one successful collaboration technique that involves the instructors interacting with the other instructors in the training module.
- Develop at least one collaborative activity in their new course while in the training.
- Stress the importance of interaction, of getting to know the students, and of making the students feel valued.
- Define and emphasize learner-centered practices in areas of collaboration, interaction, caring about students, and creating a variety of assessments.

So, it is better to say that: we should provide the conditions in which our learners can learn better and to be more active and successful learners.

And as Albert Einstein said: **“I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the condition in which they can learn”**

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## **Intercultural Competencies at Birzeit University**

**By: Raja' Hamayel, Birzeit University**

### **Birzeit University (Overview)**

Birzeit university is one of five universities in the occupied Palestinian territories. It was established in 1924 where it started as a school and gradually developed into a college. After the June 1967 war, the West Bank and Gaza fell under Israeli military occupation, and travel restrictions imposed by the occupation authorities often prevented students from pursuing educational opportunities abroad. College administrators saw the pressing need for a university that could meet the educational needs of Palestinian students locally. In 1972 plans were underway to develop a four-year program leading to bachelor's degrees in arts and sciences and to build a new campus on the outskirts of the town of Birzeit

Today, Birzeit University has a capacity of more than 8000 students and around eight faculties. It also offers a postgraduate degree in five main disciplines.

Birzeit University is a member in the Association of the Arab Universities as well as the Association of the International Universities. It is ranked fourth university in the Middle East.

### **English at Birzeit University:**

English language was the main medium of instructions at the university until 1982 when students protested in demand for the Arabicization of the university's curriculum. The university took a decision to change the main medium of instruction into Arabic. But, English remained an important component of the curriculum in all disciplines. The Department of languages and Translation offers four main requirement courses for all university students.

### **The English Courses:**

The courses offered at the department are of four different levels. The students enroll in each level based on their achievement in the placement exam they take upon their admittance to the university. Low achievers enroll in a zero credit course (101). Then they get promoted to 102, 141 and finally 231. High achievers enroll either in 141 or 231.

### **Course Content:**

The courses in general introduce reading and writing skills, but on different levels. The first two courses deal with English more on a micro level where there is emphasis on the sentence structure, so grammar and vocabulary are discussed thoroughly. Skills such as pre fixes, guessing meaning from context, verb tenses, signal words and markers are emphasized. On another level, the advanced courses, 141 and 231 revolve around reading strategies in addition to writing skills which are introduced more thoroughly in the 231 course. All these courses are introduced by American and English textbooks.

### **The Need for Change:**

It has been noticed that students who enroll in these courses are not motivated enough. Teachers have been complaining about the feasibility of these courses in particular since they do not meet student's needs through their academic studies. It is a fact that most students can graduate their bachelor degree in most disciplines with the little English they managed to learn during their school years. The students realize the importance of English, but what they have in mind is a totally different content ( see survey). The question then is how can English courses be more relevant to students needs and how can this contribute to the increase in students motivation in learning English. ICC is suggested here as a new method that contributes to the change we need in our university.

## What is ICC/Intercultural Competencies?

English is expanded in three circles: inner circle, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, England, and Ireland where English is spoken as First Language. Second circle, in countries where English is used in an institutional Level (colonization) such as, India, Philippines. Finally, in countries where English doesn't have official status, but taught as a foreign language such as Europe, Arab countries including Palestine. The number of population speaking English in the second and third category is four times no of speakers of the first category.

In each one of these situations English is used in a different spoken and written form. The question is what kind of English should be taught that could serve the needs of our students.

A hybrid hypothesis of English solves the problem (accepting different types of English that have emerged around the world. In other words as suggested by Sifakis (2004) a new perspective that prioritizes the nature of cross-cultural comprehension rather than regularity, patterns or standards is needed.

This hypothesis will imply a replacement of the native speaker as a model or a reference point by a mediator between cultures. "The same components included in the pedagogical model of communicative competence will be considered, i.e. language learners goals, grammatical, sociolinguistics, discourse and strategic, but will be understood from a different point of view: that of a mediator rather than the native speaker"( Soler,2007).

The individual's knowledge of more than one language presents the challenge of analyzing how this knowledge is used in interaction with different patterns and in different contexts. Thus NNS ( non-native speaker) does not need to be measured by native speaker's pragmatic norms, but by the notion of language user's expertise.

It has usually been thought that the aim of learning an FL is to be able to communicate with its NS ( native speaker) or to become familiar with some aspects of its culture. This is not necessarily true especially for English since you can find many situations where participants in a particular communicative situation come from different backgrounds and communicate in a specific language i.e., English. This is where the target language serves as a lingua franca. The participants here find themselves dealing with different cultures and are forced to look at the world from a multicultural perspective since the world is becoming a complex world (Soler,2007). Here learners have to become mediators where they have to mediate between the home and the target language and culture. They have to become mediators who have the ability to manage communication and interaction between people of different cultural identities and languages. Consequently the NS (native speaker) of a target language should be replaced with Is (Intercultural Speaker) as was proposed by Byram@Zarate ( 1994).

This doesn't mean that becoming an IS(intercultural speaker) lowers the achievement expected by FL learner, rather the IS will be better regarding communication abilities and interaction. In addition "He/she will come from a more relaxed position since he is allowed to retain his own social, linguistic and cultural baggage".( Agular,2007 ).

### ICC in English Language Classroom :

NS (native speaker) is no longer a model for FL learner and CC (communicative competence ) is also not the most appropriate approach. ( Byram, 1977) when a

person interacts with another in a different language they bring to this situation their knowledge of their own country and that of the other. Part of the success in this interaction will depend on maintaining the human relation that will in turn depend on attitudes. This requires a philosophy of political education and developing the learner's critical cultural awareness of all cultures involved.

So the main aim here is to create an intercultural speaker where She/he has managed to settle for the In-between, who knows and can perform in both his and her native culture and in another acquired at some later date. (Solar& Jorda' 2007)

### **ICC at Birzeit University:**

To inquire how feasible ICC is for students at Birzeit University, I conducted a survey that included ten questions. The survey aimed at exploring the attitude of students towards the language and the culture of the target language and the actual needs of students for learning the target language in addition to their preferences on the material and methods to be used. The survey also tried to find out the students' preferred cultural content of their English courses.

The survey was sent to 100 students via e-mail and around 60 students answered the questions.

### **The Survey's results and analysis:**

#### **Students' attitude towards English Language and Culture:**

- Most students think that English courses should be required courses which reveals the realization of students on the importance of this language ( 89.2%) said English should be required.
- 57% of students thought that English language and American culture are interesting.
- Students chose topics that discuss a variety of cultures including their own culture and the American culture.
- Students answered that their courses introduced them mostly to American and British culture 45%, while only 5% of them said that their courses introduced them to their own culture.

#### **Students Needs of Target Language:**

Students answered questions that revealed their needs of learning English by expressing the following:

- They said that in Palestine they need English to be able to use the internet, speak with people from different cultures, in Business situations, speak about their country in the foreign media and to get to know lyrics of English songs.
- Students also thought that spoken skills are their preference in learning English.
- Only 11.4% of the students enjoyed writing essays while 45% of students enjoyed the activities that involved speaking either with the teacher or in groups.

#### **Preferred Cultural Content:**

- Students showed some positive attitude towards the American culture (40% said it is an interesting culture), 40% had neutral feeling about the culture.

- Students expressed their desire to discuss topics that involve different cultures including their own and not only the American culture.

### Teachers Feedback:

I also interviewed some teachers and asked them about what they think students need of the TI and how can we motivate them. Three teachers were interviewed and here are some extracts of their opinion:

- Students start the course with enthusiasm and high motivation, but they get de-motivated because of the nature and content of the textbooks which are irrelevant to their needs and interests.
- “Students often talk about their need for more spoken activities so they can communicate with foreigners”.
- “Students think that the topics introduced do not stimulate them therefore, they become bored”.
- “Students get frustrated because they feel that what is taught in class does not improve their language skills needed in their daily life”.
- “ I also get frustrated because I feel classes are boring and students only motivation is passing the course”.
- “I notice the increase in students’ participation in interactive situations where students are given the opportunity to go beyond the required material and talk about global issues, especially youth issues.

### Conclusion:

- There is a discrepancy between what English courses offer in the skills introduced and the skills desired by the students and teachers.
- The need for using English in Palestine are not met in the English courses at B.Z.U.
- Com. courses at B.Z.U are not relevant in cultural content with students’ interest. This means that we could suggest ICC as a more feasible approach to learning English at B.Z.U.
- English as a lingua franca could be more suitable in the Palestinian context.

### Recommendations:

1. Teachers should be introduced to ICC at the Department of Languages and Translation at Birzeit University through workshops and seminars.
2. ICC should be considered in material development for the different comm. Courses introduced by the department of languages and Translation. This should include both the cultural component and the methodology.

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## Using On-line Resources and a Course Management System in Writing I at Al Quds University

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### *Teachers open the door; you enter by yourself – Chinese proverb*

#### **Introduction:**

The focus of Writing I at Al Quds University is on the study and practice of complex sentence constructions.<sup>i</sup> In spring 2011, I was interested in exploring what the Internet and computer-assisted learning had to offer my students in Writing I in the areas of

1. making writing in English fun<sup>ii</sup>,
2. developing learners' ability to express ideas in complex sentences,
3. improving vocabulary and spelling<sup>iii</sup>,
4. Individualizing learning<sup>iv</sup>, and
5. encouraging independent learning<sup>v</sup>.

Following are descriptions of the course structure and resources I used to achieve the above objectives. I hope to develop the structure and content of the course in future and to systematically measure the effectiveness of student learning in such an environment.

#### **Structure of the course (Writing I)**

Twenty students were enrolled in my section of Writing I. We met twice a week in the computer lab and used the university's course management environment called E-Class (Moodle) on which I posted online resources and opened forums for students to respond to assignments.

The course components were as follows:

#### **Journal**

Each student kept an e-journal on E-Class and was expected to write there freely, however briefly, five times a week. The journal was also used to keep track of online activity (exercises/games/quizzes). I checked and commented on the journals once a week. Based on student writing in the journals, I suggested individualized practice exercises for each student chosen from the following site or other online resources:

Sentence Structure Writing Practice  
<http://www.rong-chang.com/writing/index>

For help with journal ideas, students linked to "Story Starters: Powerful Sentences".  
[http://writingfix.com/right\\_brain/Story\\_Starting\\_Sentences1.htm](http://writingfix.com/right_brain/Story_Starting_Sentences1.htm)

This site has a story-starting generator that provides interesting complete sentences. The student is instructed to press a button until she finds a sentence she likes: "Write down that one sentence...feel free to add words to it or modify it slightly, if you wish...then write the rest of the story that follows the strong first sentence. Or write a poem! Or just a paragraph!" An example: "The dusty, old book was sitting there, just begging to be read."

#### **Lab Sessions**

For each class session (twice a week), I posted a homework assignment on E-Class designed to allow students to generate sentences ("exploding" sentences, unscrambling sentences, combining ideas in complex sentences, responding to a picture, responding to a

topic). I graded these assignments. We spent part of each session going over the assignments, identifying and correcting errors collectively (this was made easy, because each student could see the responses of all other students on her screen. Students who did not like their grades were allowed to redo the exercise for a better grade on their own time.

For the rest of each lab session, students worked independently or in pairs on an exercise from the compiled resources. In an attempt to foster independent learning, I often allowed students to choose which exercise/game to work on.

Examples of homework assignments:

- Revising sentences for concreteness and specificity  
<http://grammar.about.com/od/tests/a/Exercise-In-Writing-With-Specific-Details.htm>
- Sentence combination exercise followed by guided writing exercise  
[http://esl.about.com/od/writinglessonplans/a/l\\_wguided.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/writinglessonplans/a/l_wguided.htm)
- Complex Sentence - from Simple Sentence to Complex Sentence  
[http://esl.about.com/od/intermediatewriting/a/cplex\\_sentence.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/intermediatewriting/a/cplex_sentence.htm)
- Pictures to use as writing prompts  
<http://fictionwriting.about.com/od/writingexercises/ss/pictures.htm>

### Grading

Assignments and journals: 50%

Final exam: 50% (The final had three parts: A. Filling in the blanks in a reading passage [from a list of words], B. combining short sentence sets into compound-complex sentences, and C. writing five original complex sentences on the topic of the reading passage.)

### Grammar Review References/Practice

- **Sentence Structure Writing Practice**  
<http://www.rong-chang.com/writing/>  
Yes/No and Wh questions, scrambled sentences with various tenses, passive voice, adjective clauses, noun clauses and reported speech.  
  
*Example* from a quiz titled "The Present Progressive: Questions" (#1 of 10)  
/for download / what / offer / the software company /  
Student types in the answer and has three options: 1) Check 2) Hint and 3) Show Answer. The "check" function highlights the wrong parts of the sentence (including punctuation, capitalization and spelling) in yellow.
- **Parts of a Sentence Review** (includes punctuation, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and frequently confused words)  
[http://www2.actden.com/writ\\_den/tips/sentence/puctuate.htm](http://www2.actden.com/writ_den/tips/sentence/puctuate.htm)
- **Punctuation Made Simple**  
<http://liit.ilstu.edu/golson/punctuation/>

### Online Dictionary

*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (pronounces words in British and American accents)  
<http://www.oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com/>

### Online Resources

### Computer Assisted Sentence Production (CASP)

<http://www.manythings.org/casp/>

Description: This resource has three types of interactive exercises. The first is fill-in-the-blanks/choose from a drop-down menu that allows the computer to then write a personalized self introductory passage for the student. The second allows the student to answer a few questions about six topics (food and drink, write a quick letter, favorites, daily schedule, frequency, and personal information). A JavaScript code uses the input to produce simple and complex sentences and also post the information as “data”.

The last type of JavaScript (titled “Fun with Words and Sentences for ESL Students”) asks the student to write a set of conjugated verbs, adverbs, people and things, and then presents the students with four written versions emphasizing various constructions (sets of short sentences with various tenses, a set of questions, and a paragraph with various constructions). In each case, the student is invited to make changes to the generated text.

*Example:*

Change as many words as you like:

Rima has a few cars, but he doesn't have a car or an umbrella. I think that her students traveling with her wish they had some money. Where did Rima find the money? I know that her students traveling with her have never eaten any cars. Has Rima ever traveled while holding a car?

This site also contains a grammar page (with quizzes based on Voice of America's Special English Programs, flash quizzes, super quiz, random sentences, sentence machine, and scrambled sentences), listening and speaking and other resources.

*Comments:* These computer-aided sentence production exercises may seem too elementary for college-level students, but I have found that many of my students in Writing I still have trouble introducing themselves in correct English and still make frequent basic errors. When doing this exercise, it's a good idea to pair students and ask them to spot spelling, logic, and pronoun or capitalization mistakes for each other. The site is fun to use as a warm-up activity at the beginning of the semester. The computerized program gives weak students confidence in their ability to produce sentences and paragraphs in English. It models correct grammatical structures by using personalized student input. What each student produces could be copied in the journal for the teacher to look over later.

### **Spelling/Vocabulary Practice**

1. Voice of America Special English Study (Interesting Things for ESL Students)  
<http://www.manythings.org/e/voa.html>

Description: There are 151 quizzes (1,500 words) on the site titled “Spelling Vocabulary Quizzes” (<http://www.manythings.org/fq/1/spelling.php?u=1>). Each quiz includes ten questions in which a hint is given with or without the first and last letters of the word to be typed. For example, one question in the first quiz gives the following hints for the word “guard”: v. to watch or protect a person, place or thing (“They g---d the president.”); n. a person or thing that watches or protects (“He is a prison g---d.”). Each question is timed for 100 seconds and game points are awarded for correct answers and speed.

2. Catch the Spelling (Practice your spelling and review vocabulary while having fun) <http://www.manythings.org/cts/>)

Example: <http://www.manythings.org/cts/sc948.htm> (VOA Special English Vocabulary 1400+ words)

In these exercises, students are asked to catch the letters in the correct order to spell a word. The catcher is safe if the letter is “caught” before crossing a yellow line. Players are able to control the speed of falling letters and other factors. There are three levels of difficulty. These sites provide hand-eye coordination as well as spelling practice.

3. Word Based Games for ESL Students (The words used in these games were chosen for students of English as a Second Language)

<http://www.manythings.org/wbg/>

This site has three types of games for word topics such as irregular plurals, prefixes, homonyms, irregular verbs, suffixes, etc. “Jig Words” is a matching game in the form of a jigsaw; Match Words is a game of knowledge and memory. For example, in the exercise titled “Animals and Their Babies

([http://www.manythings.org/wbg/animal\\_babies-mw.html](http://www.manythings.org/wbg/animal_babies-mw.html)) one or two players can play by clicking on pairs of cards in order to match them. Points are added or subtracted. In Speed Words, the player is shown one word every ten seconds and asked to click on tiles to spell another form of the word. An example is this exercise on past irregular verbs: [http://www.manythings.org/wbg/verbs\\_past4-sw.html](http://www.manythings.org/wbg/verbs_past4-sw.html))

4. Lists for Advanced Students (<http://www.uspeller.com/gradeadv.html>)

These lists include 540 of the most frequently misspelled words in 27 lists. In each game, an audio pronounces the word, a definition and the first letter of the word are also given. The player can take advantage of visual hints (a list of different spellings of the word can be produced) and can try multiple times during the 100 seconds allocated for each word to achieve the correct spelling. A score is kept. This site (<http://www.uspeller.com/>) includes spelling lists for different grades.

5. English Vocabulary Quizzes and Tests for ESL EFL ([http://esl.about.com/od/vocabularyquizzes1/English\\_Vocabulary\\_Quizzes\\_and\\_Tests\\_for\\_ESL\\_EFL.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/vocabularyquizzes1/English_Vocabulary_Quizzes_and_Tests_for_ESL_EFL.htm))

This site has English vocabulary quizzes and tests for beginning, intermediate, upper and advanced level ESL EFL English classes and learners to help build vocabulary skills in a wide range of topics such as building phrasal verbs vocabulary, idioms and expressions, action verbs idioms. Here is an example from an exercise titled “homophone quizzes”:

Q: She wanted to \_\_\_\_\_ the students in a way they'd never forget.

affect  
effect

Immediate feedback is given: "Correct answer" or "The answer was not correct. The correct answer to x is y."

#### 6. Common Idiomatic Phrase Quizzes

<http://esl.about.com/b/2011/06/30/common-phrase-quizzes.htm>

"*Shall we start the meeting and get down to \_\_\_\_\_ tacks? - brass / gold / bronze / copper*

Idioms are the salt, pepper and garlic of English. Practice idiomatic phrases with these idiomatic phrase quizzes. Each question provides immediate feedback on correct and incorrect answers with a follow-up score at the end of each quiz."

#### Practice in Combining and Arranging Sentences

Comment: About.com (Grammar and Composition) has information about sentence structures and sentence combining as well as exercises. Many of the exercises are based on authentic language taken from various sources. Here is an example from an exercise titled Sentence Combining #7: Out of the Ice Age - Combining Sentences and Building Paragraphs with Adjective Clauses. Students are instructed to combine the sentences in each set and then arrange the new sentences into coherent paragraphs. Sentences that can be turned into adjective clauses are indicated in italics. When done with the exercise, students compare what they have written with the edited passage (in this exercise, the passage is taken from a book by Lauren Eiseley called The Immense Journey).

[http://grammar.about.com/od/combining-sentences/Practice\\_in\\_Combining\\_and\\_Arranging\\_Sentences.htm](http://grammar.about.com/od/combining-sentences/Practice_in_Combining_and_Arranging_Sentences.htm)

Example (<http://grammar.about.com/od/combining-sentences/a/SCexEisely.htm>):

The bisons faded back into the past.  
 The bisons were long-horned.  
*Man had nourished himself upon the herds of the bisons.*  
*Man had nourished himself for many a century.*  
*It had been a century of wanderings.\**  
 [\* Use the phrase *upon whose* to begin this adjective clause.]

Edited: The long-horned bisons upon whose herds man had nourished himself for many a long century of wanderings, faded back into the past.

Another sentence combining exercise from this site titled Sentence Combining #12: Orwell's "A Hanging" (<http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/a/orwellhanging.htm>) is adapted from the opening three paragraphs of Orwell's essay, invites the student to experiment with a variety of sentence structures. The instructions urge the student "to vary the length and structure of sentences to convey ideas clearly, concisely, logically, and smoothly" and to avoid repeating any one structure too frequently.

It was in Burma, a morning of the rains.  
 The morning was sodden.  
 A sickly light was slanting over the walls into the jail yard.

The light was like yellow tinfoil.  
The walls were high.

Orwell's sentences: It was in Burma, a sodden morning of the rains. A sickly light, like yellow tinfoil, was slanting over the high walls into the jail yard.

And here is a third example from an exercise titled "Building sentences with noun phrases and noun clauses"

(<http://grammar.about.com/od/buildingsentences/a/sentbuildnounphrases.htm>). The student is instructed to "Combine the sentences in each set into a single clear sentence with at least one noun phrase or noun clause. Turn all questions (interrogative sentences) into declarative statements, and eliminate any needless repetition."

What is the teacher's job?

It is not to implant facts.

It is to place the subject to be learned in front of the learner.

It is to awaken in the learner the restless drive for answers and insights.

These answers and insights give meaning to the personal life.

The teacher must awaken through sympathy.

The teacher must awaken through emotion.

The teacher must awaken through imagination.

The teacher must awaken through patience.

Sample combination: The teacher's job is not to implant facts, but to place the subject to be learned in front of the learner and, through sympathy, emotion, imagination, and patience, awake in the learner the restless drive for answers and insights that enlarge and give meaning to the personal life.

### Practice Reading and Writing

100 free short English stories for ESL learners (<http://www.rong-chang.com/qa2/>)

This site contains 153 newspaper-style short stories (with an audio option) about life in America. Each story is followed by sets of exercises designed to test for comprehension and allow the learner to write short answers or questions. Immediate feedback is given; errors (including punctuation, capitalization and spelling) are highlighted in yellow and the learner can choose to get a hint or see the correct answer. For each story, there is a vocabulary list in which the vocabulary words are linked to dictionary definitions in Dictionary.com, two crossword puzzles and a dictation exercise. There is a cloze exercise that uses the text of each story and forces the learner to pay attention to parts of speech and sentence structure in order to fill in the blanks correctly.

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<sup>i</sup> See "Writing well at the Sentence Level"

[http://www.englishstutes.com/Writing\\_well\\_at\\_the\\_sentence\\_level/Writing\\_well\\_at\\_the\\_sentence\\_level.shtml](http://www.englishstutes.com/Writing_well_at_the_sentence_level/Writing_well_at_the_sentence_level.shtml)

<sup>ii</sup> Researchers have long emphasized the role that individual differences play in both learning and instruction and that there is more than one way to learn/teach effectively. It is also accepted that having fun while learning enhances retention. The Internet (especially in the absence of engaging textbooks and audio-visual materials in many of our university programs in Palestine) makes having fun while learning very easy because of the abundant availability of interactive games, vivid graphics, audio and streaming video. Additionally, many of the interactive resources provide instant feedback, an important element in language learning. Unlike exercises in textbooks, games can create contexts that make learning useful and meaningful.

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“A useful interpretation of 'meaningfulness' is that the learners respond to the content in a definite way. If they are amused, angered, intrigued or surprised, the content is clearly meaningful to them.”

“Language learning is hard work ... Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work.”

“It is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as *central* to a teacher's repertoire.”

(From 'Games for Language Learning' Andrew Wright, David Betteridge and Michael Buckby, Cambridge University Press, 1984)

<sup>iii</sup> “If you are to improve your English usage and writing skills, you would be wise to make every effort to learn such words [words that are unfamiliar to you] and to increase your vocabulary.” (From Eleven Steps to Improve Your English Writing Skills II/ Building Vocabulary and Using a Dictionary <http://www.englishessaywritingtips.com/2011/06/eleven-steps-to-improve-your-english-skills-ii-building-vocabulary-and-using-a-dictionary/>)

See spelling problems for Arabic speakers and what to do about them in “Remedial Spelling in EFL” by Johanna Sterling, 2003 ([http://www.elgweb.net/spelling\\_article.html](http://www.elgweb.net/spelling_article.html)).

<sup>iv</sup> I see individualized learning as the answer to the challenge of teaching/learning in multi-level ability classes. The use of the computer/Internet facilitates this task by making it easier for the instructor to have immediate access to student online work, to give prompt and much more frequent feedback and to individualize student learning by assigning individualized exercises and drills at the appropriate level related to specific objectives based on each student's evolving writing. At the same time, a development record is generated automatically in one place (the E-Class Journal) for both student and instructor to follow.

<sup>v</sup> Giving students multiple options and a certain amount of room to choose what, how often, and how much to learn develops learning independence. The use of the Internet facilitates such learner-centered practices because of the availability of a wide variety of learning materials and the ease with which student work can be managed. I include a special forum where students can share online “finds” and explain how they benefited from them.