The Effectiveness of Using Hybrid Formative Assessment in Improving EFL speaking skills of Preparatory Stage Pupils

By

Shaimaa ELsayed Ibrahim Ramadan

A Teacher of English

Supervisors

Dr. Aly Abdul Samea Qoura	**Dr. Samah Rizk Hassan**
Professor of ELT	*Associate Professor of ELT*

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Abstract

The study explored the effectiveness of a proposed hybrid formative assessment program for developing EFL speaking skills of preparatory stage pupils. The instruments of the study included EFL speaking skills checklist to determine the most important sub-skills of speaking skills, EFL speaking skills test to measure pupils' speaking skills (pre-post), and EFL speaking skills scoring rubric to assess pupils' speaking skills on the pre and post EFL speaking skills test. The study adopted the quasi-experimental design utilizing two groups; one group was experimental and the other was a control group. The total number of the participants in the two groups for the study was (n=60). Results of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post-administration of the EFL speaking skills test in favor of the experimental group. This result demonstrates that the hybrid formative assessment program was effective in speaking skills of preparatory stage pupils and that improvement was a gradual process as a result of using hybrid formative assessment program. Finally, the study also suggests that further research should be conducted related to hybrid formative assessment based programs for developing other language skills.

Key words: Hybrid Formative Assessment, Speaking Skills, EFL Preparatory Stage Pupils

Introduction

Many people learn speaking because it is an efficient tool for international communication as it is a part of daily life. Most worlds' language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking (AL-Jarf, 2021) The ability to speak a second language fluently is not only a very complex task as speaking does not mean knowing linguistic features of the message, memorizing vocabulary, grammar or pronunciation i.e. linguistic competence, but the speakers recognize when, why and how to produce language i.e. sociolinguistic competence. Mastery of speaking has increased because of its importance as an international communication language; the social aspect of speaking is clear when dealing with any

person who may have a dissimilar social or cultural background: (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014).

Speaking Skill

Speaking is regarded as the process of building and sharing meaning through verbal and nonverbal symbols in a variety of contexts. Speaking is the skill which is very important to be mastered by students in order to be good communicators. Accordingly, it is the ability to express oneself orally, coherently, fluently and appropriately in a given meaningful context.

Many different definitions of speaking from many English language experts, such as Luoma (2004, p. 2) regarded speaking as "an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information".

In this respect, Kramsch (2006: 24) stated that "speaking means negotiating intended meaning and adjusting one's speech to produce the desired effect on the listener." As for listening, it is the receptive skill within the oral mode while reading is the receptive skill in the written mode.

Additionally, Rivzi (2006:92) states that speaking is interactive communicative process that involves speakers and listeners. While someone is speaking, there must be listener who listens and pays attention to the content and message. Therefore, the speaking must be understandable and comprehensible for the speaker partners.

Matin (2011) confirmed that speaking skill is a basic skill necessary for learners' success in school and in life, in general. Learners often assess their success in language learning on the basis of how well they feel they have enhanced in their spoken language proficiency; this is because many of them aspire professional careers in English dominant communities. The learners who can put their opinions and ideas into words are usually more successful in school. On the other hand, students who lack good speaking skills suffer from consequences on the long run. Moreover, the ability to speak fluent English plays an important role in developing other language skills such as reading and writing skills (Bueno et al., 2006).

Kırkgöz (2011) investigated designing and implementing a speaking course in which face-to-face instruction informed by the principles of Task-Based Learning blended with the use of technology for the First-year student teachers of English in Turkish higher education. A mixed research method was used to collect data from multiple sources: recordings of a pre- and post-course speaking task, analysis of the video-recordings of students' speaking tasks, informal interviews with the students, and a written end-of-year course evaluation survey. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data

revealed that students made noticeable improvement in their oral communication skills, and they were positive in their perceptions of integrating technology in the lesson.

Rodrigues & Vethamani (2015) aimed to study the comparative results and learners' feedback on the effectiveness of the English Proficiency in Conversation (EPiC) online learning programme that influences the speaking performance of the EPiC group and non-EPiC group students in a 12-week Intensive English Programme (IEN). The participants were 19 from Lower Intermediate and Intermediate levels took part in this study, and collection of data was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings from both research methods indicate that the EPiC group performed better than the non-EPiC group in terms of improvement in speaking grades.

Sabbaghan, Peglar, & Tweedie (2019) aimed to investigate how using a voice-based Asynchronous Technology Mediated Communication framework (ATMC) can affect English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students' fluency, accuracy, and intelligibility. The instructor-researchers used a practitioner enquiry research methodology to investigate the effectiveness of the voice-based ATMC for 14 participants. Findings indicate that the system resulted in overall gains in fluency, accuracy, and intelligibility due to a combination of the voice-based ATMC design, repetition and practice, and the feedback.

Çetin-Köroğlu's study (2021) utilized digital formative assessment and traditional speaking tests comparatively to evaluate 52 upper-intermediate EFL learners' English language speaking skills. The quantitative data were collected via achievement tests which had been administered both in traditional speaking tests and digital formative tests. The qualitative findings were collected with students' interviews which consisted of four open-ended questions. The results of the study showed that participants outperformed in digital formative tests in comparison to traditional speaking tests.

Hybrid Formative Assessment

Hybrid / blended learning is combination of conventional direct meeting and integration of technology in e-learning form, so that its implementation must be directly proportional to the strategies used by lecturers and students. So, hybrid learning is type of a learning which blends the power of direct face-to face in class and online class (Hubbard, 2013).

Hybrid learning provides broad opportunities in developing educators' competence, the development of technology and information in learning as

well as more dynamic access so that it is possible for students to always adapt to the current development (Hidayatullah & Anwar, 2020).

Moreover, hybrid learning gives good impact on providing interactive environment among teachers and peers, shaping students into independent learners to upgrade their skills, and improving teachers' performance in learning management (Hediansah & Surjono, 2020).

Yusuf (2020) aimed to investigate (1) the struggles teacher encounters in his/her school's online formative assessments, and (2) the strategies teacher employs to deal with struggles in his/her school's online formative assessments. This research applied a qualitative study approach. The data were gained from the interview to an EFL teacher of a school in Bandung. Results showed that the teacher has a strong interpretation of the formative assessment and the preparation of assessment is necessary in order to determine the academic success of students during the course.

Ibrahim & Yusoff (2013) indicate that the blended learning style used for a speaking course offered further opportunities for the students to exercise speaking outside of the classroom. It also encourages the students to develop and publish for real audiences. They also found that the use of a wiki in a blended learning atmosphere is beneficial for a public speaking course. Similarly, Miyazoe et al., (2018) believe that blended learning is appropriate for implementing language skills, particularly in courses related to speaking and grammar. In this regard, the students are required to be accountable for the classes they take, including speaking and writing and to exercise their language competency.

Çetin (2018) investigated the usability of the Kahoot! the digital assessment tool, in elementary schools. With this respect, the participants were selected by using the simple random sampling method. 23 students and 1 teacher in state elementary school in Muğla in Turkey participated in the study in the spring term of the 2017-2018 academic year. The Kahoot! Was implemented in the social studies class for 4 weeks. It was a qualitative and quantitative study. The results of the study indicated that the students thought the Kahoot! was enjoyable, informative, useful, perfect and fine.

Elmahdi, Al-Hattami ,& Fawzi (2018) investigated the effectiveness of using Plickers for formative assessment to enhance students' learning. They are utilizing and using Plickers in their regular classroom activities for more than three years. For the purpose of this study, and in order to achieve more precise results, each researcher used Plickers three times during the first semester of the academic year 2016/2017 to give students immediate feedback for activities he/she has done. The courses in which Plickers was

used are under the English Language Education and Science and Education Studies departments in BTC. At the end of the semester, the questionnaire was distributed to the students with the objectives of investigating their opinions about the effectiveness of using Plickers as a formative assessment tool to enhance their learning. in this study indicated the importance of using technology based formative assessment. Moreover, using technology-based tools such as Plickers helps in providing feedback and makes the class interesting, fun and informative.

Yusuf (2020) aimed to investigate (1) the struggles teacher encounters in his/her school's online formative assessments, and (2) the strategies teacher employs to deal with struggles in his/her school's online formative assessments. This research applied a qualitative study approach. The data were gained from the interview to an EFL teacher of a school in Bandung. Result showed that the teacher has a strong interpretation of the formative assessment and the preparation of assessment is necessary in order to determine the academic success of students during the course. However, the study found the teacher was not ready to face the transition from face-to-face learning to online learning; the teacher could not optimize the implementation of the formative assessment and the students had been passive in online learning so that the achievement of the students could not clearly demonstrate the success of the students. It can be assumed that online teaching and learning practice is a new way of practicing for some teachers.

The pilot study:

The researcher administered a diagnostic EFL speaking skills test to thirty second year preparatory stage students to determine their level in speaking. Most students lack the ability to participate inside the classroom or to use the English language in general. They make a lot of errors when expressing themselves orally.

The speaking skills test, consisted of five oral questions derived from the content of the student's book "Hello 2", and was administered to the students. The researcher used an analytical rubric for scoring the results of the speaking test. It included five sub skills: fluency, vocabulary, comprehensibility, pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. The results of the pilot study are shown in the following table:

Table 1: Pupils Performance in the EFL of Speaking Skills Test

Speaking sub-skills	Max.	Min.	Mean	S. D.	N	%
Fluency	1`	0	.6	0.41	30	68%
Vocabulary	2	1	1.2	0.58	30	48%
Comprehensibility	2	0	.9	0.52	30	57.5%
Pronunciation	1	0	.8	0.55	30	60%
Grammar	1	0	.6	0.30	30	50%
Accuracy	1	0	6	0.30	30	50%
Total	7	1	4.1	2.36	30	56%

Results in Table 1 show that the pupils' mean score in each speaking sub-skill was low. This indicates that the pupils' EFL speaking ability is low and needs improvement; as the mean (m= 4.1) and the total percentage of the skills is (56%).

Statement of the problem:

The problem of the study can be stated as follows:

Based on the previous studies, the pilot study and the researcher experience, the problem of the present study springs from students' low performance in speaking skills level, the researcher suggested using hybrid formative assessment to help the pupils improve their speaking level .

Research Questions:

This research attempted to find answer the following main questions:

1. What are the hybrid formative assessment techniques suitable for enhancing EFL speaking skills of preparatory stage pupils?
2. What are the characteristics of a proposed hybrid formative assessment program in enhancing speaking skills for prep stage pupils?
3. What is the effectiveness of a proposed hybrid formative assessment program in enhancing EFL speaking skills for prep stage pupils?

Hypothesis of the study:

This study attempted to verify the following hypothesis:

1. There is a statistically significant difference at the $\leq$ 0.05 level between the mean score of the experimental group and that of the control group on the post administration of the EFL speaking skills test in favor of the experimental group.

Purpose of the study:

The current research aims to:

1. Developing a hybrid formative assessment program to improve EFL speaking of preparatory stage pupils.

2. Identifying the most suitable tools of hybrid formative assessment that can be applied for enhancing EFL speaking of preparatory stage pupils.

Significance of the study:

The current study would contribute to:

1. Enriching the literature concerning the effectiveness of hybrid learning particularly the formative assessment methods that are suitable for enhancing EFL speaking skills.
2. Designing and implementing hybrid formative assessment program for Prep-stage pupils to develop EFL speaking skills.
3. Indicating the possibility of integrating hybrid formative assessment program for pre-service teachers' preparation in order to be able to face the future challenges.
4. Paving the way for other researchers to do more studies on the effectiveness of using hybrid formative assessment program in improving the English language skills.
5. Promoting preparatory stage teachers with a teachers' guide on how to use hybrid formative assessment to enhance their pupils speaking skills.

Delimitations of the study:

This research is delimited to:

1- The research participants: Second year preparatory stage (60 pupils)
2- Some EFL speaking skills identified through the content of "New Hello! English for Preparatory Schools" represented in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehensibility.

Methods of the Study

A. Participants:

The participants of the current research were 2nd preparatory stage pupils. The participants were chosen randomly and experiment was applied in the first term during the academic year 2023/2024 .The participants were divided into two groups an experimental and a control groups of thirty pupils each.

Instruments:

- An EFL speaking skills checklist to determine the most important sub-skills of speaking skills.
- An EFL speaking skills test to measure pupils' speaking skills (pre-post).
- An EFL speaking skills scoring rubric to assess pupils' speaking skills on the pre and post EFL speaking skills test.

B. Design:

The current research adopted the quasi-experimental design to apply the hybrid formative assessment program. The participants were divided into two groups; an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group was taught through using the proposed program to improve their speaking skills and while the control group continued to study according to the regular method of teaching. The pre-post speaking test was administered to both groups before and after the program. The results of the pre-post speaking tests were analyzed to find out whether there was any significant difference between the mean score of the two groups ,after the implementation of the program. Figure 1 illustrates the quasi-experimental design of the research.
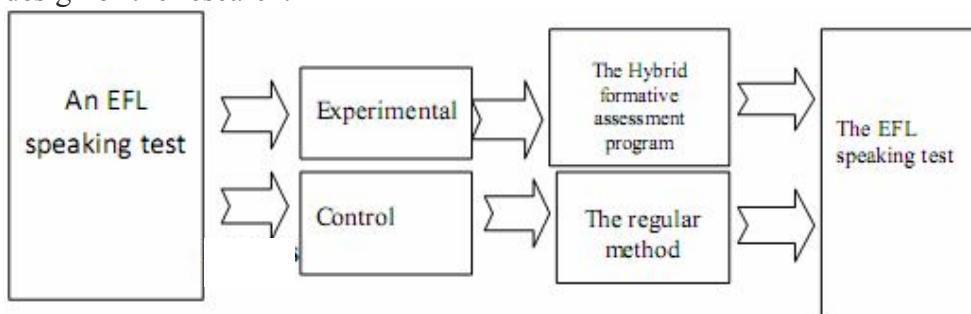
Definitions of terms:

Hybrid formative assessment:

For the purpose of the study and in the light of (Miller, 2020), hybrid formative assessment is defined as a method that the instructors utilize the platforms or tools that already in place to effectively monitor student progress by using the right assessment tools.

Speaking skill:

For the purpose of the study and in the light of Don (2015:5) defined speaking as " an interactive process that includes certain skills such as asking and answering personal interview questions, making a conversation based on a ready –given situation, describing pictures, making questions-answers about a given topic, oral presentation skills."

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are reported in terms of its hypothesis

Testing the first hypothesis "There is a statistically significant difference at the ≤ 0.05 level between the mean score of the experimental group and that of the control group on the post administration of the EFL speaking skills test in favor of the experimental group".

The *t*-test for dependent samples was used to compare the difference between the mean score of the experimental group and control group pupils in the EFL speaking skills test before and after implementing the hybrid formative assessment program. Results are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparing the Performance of the Control and Experimental Groups on the Post-Administration of the EFL speaking Skills Test

| Skills	groups	n	Mean	SD.	t	Df	Sign.	η^2	Effect level
Fluency	Exp	30	5.23	.897	4.608	58	0.01	0.27	Great
	Control	30	3.80	1.44					
Vocabulary	Exp	30	4.33	1.06	5.165	58	0.01	0.32	Great
	Control	30	2.76	1.27					
Grammar	Exp	30	4.53	1.33	5.920	58	0.01	0.38	Great
	Control	30	2.33	1.53					
Pronunciation	Exp	30	4.43	1.04	4.541	58	0.01	0.26	Great
	Control	30	3.20	1.06					
Comprehensibility	Exp	30	4.70	.987	7.375	58	0.01	0.48	Great
	Control	30	2.86	.937					
Total score	Exp	30	23.23	3.72	7.375	58	0.01	0.53	Great
	Control	30	14.96	4.18					

Results in Table 2 reveal that the mean score in the post-administration of the speaking skills test of the experimental group was greater than that of the post-administration in all EFL speaking skills of the control group. The *t*-test value was significant at the 0.01 level for all the speaking skills (Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation, Fluency, and Comprehensibility) and the total score of all speaking skills were (4.608, 5.165, 22. 5.920.3, 4.541, 7.375 and 7.375 respectively). In addition, all differences were in favor of the post-administration of the EFL speaking skills test of the experimental group.

To verify the contribution of the hybrid formative assessment program in developing speaking skill, the effect size of treatment (the hybrid program) was estimated through using the eta square (η2) in order to compare the mean scores of the control group and experimental group of pupils on the pre and post-administration of speaking test. The following graph shows the difference.

In order to determine the effect of the hybrid formative assessment program in developing speaking skill, the effect size of treatment (the hybrid program) was estimated through using the eta square (η2) in order to compare the mean scores of the control group and experimental group of pupils on the pre and post-administration of speaking test. Results are shown in figure (2) and (3).
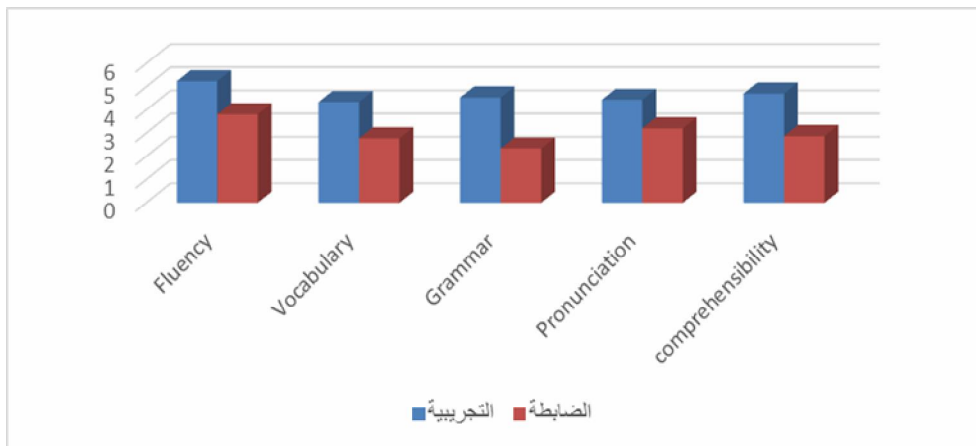
Figure (2): The mean scores of the experimental group and control group on post- administration of the speaking test
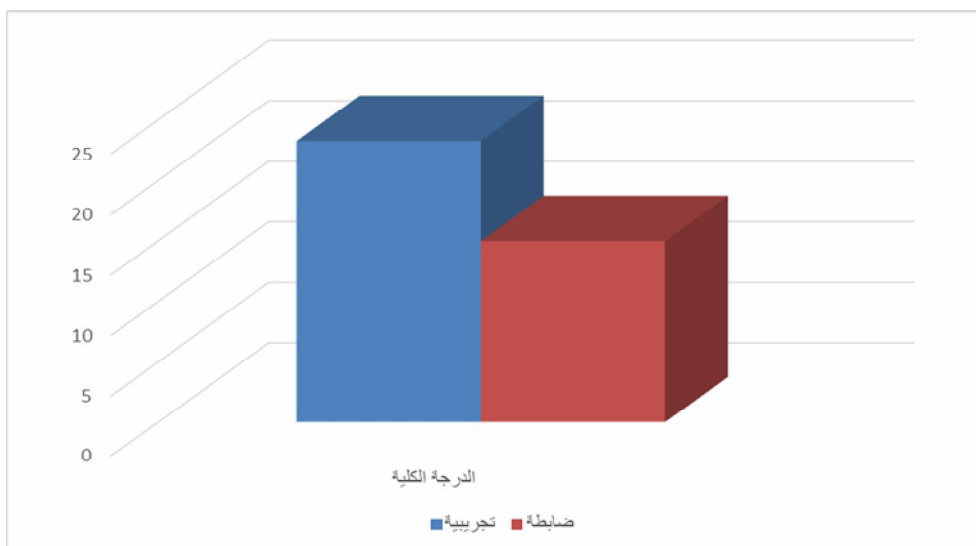
Figure (3): The mean scores of the experimental group and control group on post- administration of the test and the overall grade of the speaking test

Discussion of Results

In the light of the statistical analysis of the EFL speaking skills hypotheses, it was clear that the experimental group pupils outperformed the control group pupils in all the EFL speaking skills, and the t-values were highly significant at 0.01 level. Besides, the experimental group's posttest results were much better than the control group results, and the effect size

was great (96%). These findings indicate that the hybrid formative assessment program proved to be more effective in developing the participants' ability to speak better and enhance their EFL speaking skills.

The *t*-test results of the posttest revealed that "comprehensibility" was the most improved skill. The hybrid formative assessment helped pupils through: participating in class discussions, and interacting with each other and the researcher via the wix.com, to understand what they talk about. Moreover, they learned to think well before speaking. Some of the speaking tasks, which they enjoyed, included giving a talk about voluntary work, sports, and society problems; and holding a conversation about how to solve problems of our society. The speaking activities include look and say, watch and answer using videos, talk about …and make a mini- presentation through using Zoom app.

Conclusion:

Based on the statistical analysis of the study results and the discussion mentioned above, it can be included that the hybrid formative assessment was effective in enhancing EFL listening and speaking skills of preparatory stage pupils and their self-regulation.

Recommendations of the study:

Based on the results of the research, the following recommendations should be considered when teaching EFL:

1. Faculties of Education experts should supply pre service teachers with training that helps teach the pupils to become autonomous learners through using different types of strategies.
2- English teachers need to be prepared to enable pupils to get the advantages that ICTs applies.
3-The hybrid formative assessment based program can be adopted by preparatory school teachers for teaching English in general and EFL speaking skills in particular.
4- It is necessary to devote more time to teaching speaking.
5- Reflection logs should be activated inside classrooms to give pupils an opportunity to assess themselves and their own learning or their peers'.
6- Cooperative learning, peer learning, group work and pair work should all be activated inside the EFL classroom
7- Teachers should devote some time for teaching pupils how to give an oral presentation and/or peer-interview

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