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ESL Learners' Qualitative Perspective on Learner-to-Instructor Interaction in Blended Environment

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Abstract

English language proficiency exceptionally verbal communication is essential in achieving Sustainable Development Goal four, which is a good quality higher education. Nevertheless, past literature reported a lack of verbal communication among the graduates of English as a second language. Due to the emphasis on technology integration in Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025, blended learning has been widely implemented in most tertiary institutions. However, learners complain they face challenges during verbal communication learning, particularly in learner-to-instructor interaction in a blended environment. Therefore, this study explores the learners' opinions regarding learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication learning in a blended environment. The result of this research is substantial to English language instructors, curriculum designers, and English language learners as the input provides the information to understand the phenomenon in-depth and suggestions to improve verbal communication problems in learner-to-instructor interaction in the blended learning environment. The research question this study intends to answer is "What are the informants' opinions on learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication learning in a blended environment?". This study employed qualitative research inquiry, particularly phenomenological design, and the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, written accounts, and a focus group discussion. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed two significant themes related to the phenomenon: the roles of the instructor and the issues in the learner-to-instructor interaction as well as six sub-themes. Future studies might consider including English language instructors to obtain different perspectives.

Keywords: blended learning, English as a second language, learner-to-instructor interaction, verbal communication, qualitative perspective

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Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) aims to achieve good quality higher education (Marshall, 2019). English language proficiency exceptionally verbal communication, plays a crucial role in achieving the aim of SDG 4. The significance of English language proficiency has also been emphasized in the Roadmap for English Language Education 2015-2025. However, past literature reported that ESL graduates still face verbal communication problems (Rafiq & Hashim, 2018; Mohd Puad, 2018). ESL graduates face challenges in verbal communication and therefore fail to perform well during job interviews. Lack of verbal communication has become one of the significant causes of ESL graduates' employability (Rajendran & Yunus, 2021). Subramaniam, Shaharudin, Abdul Hamid and Abdul Wahab (2021) pointed out that inadequate English communication skills among graduates are attributed to the rise in graduates' high unemployment rate. This is because potential employers see the ability to communicate in English as a significant competency (Fabian, Xian, & Yunus 2022). This indicates good communication competence is crucial.

Due to the verbal communication problem among ESL tertiary learners, it is crucial to look into the teaching and learning approaches of ESL education, including verbal communication (Yunus, Hashim & Hashim 2019). Alsowayegh, Bardasi, Graba, and Sipra (2019) stated that it is vital for tertiary students to have good communication competence. The ninth shift of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 emphasized technology integration in teaching and learning at tertiary institutions. Therefore, blended learning has been widely used for ESL teaching and learning at higher learning institutions. The ESL instructors have also employed blended learning for teaching verbal communication in ESL classrooms. Nevertheless, ESL tertiary learners complained they face challenges learning verbal communication in a blended environment, particularly in learner-to-instructor interaction.

Past studies have reported the problems encountered by learners in learner-to-instructor interaction in blended ESL classrooms. Among the challenges faced by ESL learners in learner-to-instructor interaction include difficulty communicating and delayed instructor feedback (Paudel, 2020). If these challenges are not addressed, ESL learners will keep having problems in learner-to-instructor interaction. Consequently, there will be less interaction between the learners and instructors, and learners' verbal communication problems will be challenging to tackle. Several authors attempted to solve learners' difficulties in learner-to-instructor interaction using online approaches. Among the strategies employed to enhance the learner to instructor interaction were the cloud-based interactive code notebook (Borowczak & Burrows, 2017) and VLEWebIntera (Chen, Xu, Tang, & Chen 2017).

To solve learners' problems related to learner-to-instructor interaction, a few researchers employed technology-integrated teaching and learning techniques. For instance, Al-Murtadha (2019) examined the effects of video games on 206 Yemeni learners' verbal communication for six weeks. The researcher found that using video games helped the students increase their confidence level and reduced anxiety when speaking in English with their peers and lecturer. In a similar vein, Panah and Babar (2020) investigated the use of WhatsApp social media applications for learner-to-instructor interaction. In addition, Tang (2021) studied learner-to-instructor interaction in Massive Open Online Communication (MOOC). However, fewer in-depth studies have been conducted to investigate the learners' challenges related to learner-to-instructor interaction in a blended environment. This is because

the current studies on the phenomenon employed quantitative and mixed-method designs (Abdul Rahman et al., 2020; Muhamad Rusly, Abd Aziz, & Ngadiron., 2020). Existing qualitative studies focused on case study design (Ansarimoghaddam, Tan & Yong., 2017; Hamdan, Mohamad & Shaharuddin., 2017). Thus, there is a strong need for this qualitative phenomenological study to be conducted. This study aims to explore ESL informants' opinions on learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication in a blended environment. The result of this research is substantial to English language instructors, curriculum designers, and English language learners as the input provides the information to understand the phenomenon in-depth and suggestions to improve verbal communication problems in learner-to-instructor interaction in the blended learning environment. The objective of this study is to explore the ESL learners' views on the interaction between them and their instructor in the blended environment during verbal communication learning. This research intends to answer the following research question:

What are the informants' opinions on learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication learning in a blended environment?

This paper begins with the introduction section which provides the research problem, the significance of the study, and the research objective. Then, it reviews the key terms and the theory used in the research. Other than that, this paper also describes the methodology of the research, following by the discussion of the findings. Finally, this paper concludes the overall study by providing the implications and future recommendations.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of this study is explained using Moore's Interaction Framework. It is also called Interactivity Theory. According to Moore (1989), interaction is a reciprocating communication process between humans and between humans and non-humans, such as computer and human contact. This framework focuses on the three types of remote learning interaction: learner-content interaction, learner-teacher interaction, and learner-learner interaction. Moore's Interaction theory is relevant to the phenomenon of this study as it has the element of learner-to-instructor interaction. This element can help to understand the phenomenon of the study which is learner to instructor for verbal communication in a blended environment.

Moore's Interaction Framework is frequently utilised in distance learning, however, it may be applied to any educational format, including the design of communicative blended learning courses (Zimmerman, 2012). This is because implementing a blended learning course includes both face-to-face and online education. Good interaction between learner to instructor is the fundamental component of effective blended learning practice. This interaction supports the development of various course components for blended learning. Since Moore's Interaction Theory addresses essential aspects of the design, it should be carefully considered in the blended learning implementation for ESL learners' verbal communication.

Learner-to-instructor interaction in Moore's Interaction Framework is the relationship between the learner and the instructor. It includes motivation, instruction, and evaluation. A well-designed course can encourage appropriate interaction between the instructor and the students, and the instructor will decide on the practical outcomes. Frequent student feedback and scheduled synchronous meetings between instructors and students are important in a course. Interactions between the instructor and the students are essential in a blended learning

setting. Significant interaction between the learners and the instructor is vital to enable the instructor to conduct the lesson effectively. For instance, the instructors could create an interactive atmosphere for the learners' communication practice (John & Yunus, 2021). Learner-instructor interaction has been identified as a frequent type of interaction in a study by Taghizadeh and Hajhosseini (2020). This is because information could be passed between members of the learning community more easily through effective communication. Whether in a face-to-face or online classroom, effective engagement enables students to absorb information from their instructors effortlessly. Effective interaction between learners and instructors is essential for implementing blended learning in ESL classrooms, particularly during communication lessons.

Instructors play significant roles in learner-to-instructor interaction during verbal communication teaching and learning in a blended environment. Nyathi and Sibanda (2022) stated that "instructors have a strong influence towards the learners' learning experience" (p. 4). As the instructors facilitate the learners' learning process they are considered the drivers of the learning experiences (Quadir, Yang, & Chen., 2022). Instructors' efforts in learner-to-instructor interaction provide opportunities for the learners to make connections and communicate with the other learners. In the context of verbal communication teaching and learning in a blended environment, the instructor's role is essential too. Thus, the quality of learner-to-instructor interaction in a communicative blended learning environment must be good to maximize the learning experience of verbal communication.

Past studies which were related to learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication in blended learning reported some of the challenges in the interaction. One of the challenges is the problem with an internet connection (Shin & Yunus, 2021). This issue has been widely discussed by previous researchers. Internet connection has become a common technical issue in learner-to-instructor interaction in communicative blended learning environments. Other challenges in learner-to-instructor interaction related to the learners themselves such as learners' lack of motivation, learners' challenges in using digital tools, and others. Other than that, learners' challenges in learner-to-instructor interaction in blended learning are also related to learners' language anxiety (Santhanasamy & Yunus, 2022). Furthermore, problem in learner-to-instructor interaction also includes a delayed response from the instructors (Paris, 2022).

Few other studies focused on various patterns of social interaction between the learners and instructors in a blended learning environment, Alzamil (2021) spotlighted social interaction between the learning community as one of the crucial components. Similarly, few other studies reported the role of instructor particularly in facilitating the learning process has a strong influence over the learners' overall learning experience (Nyathi & Sibanda, 2022; Quadir et al., 2022). On the subject of social interaction in a blended learning setting, Manoharan, Hua & Sultan (2022) offered a different viewpoint. These researchers found that blended learning reduced the amount of time that students and lecturers spent interacting socially through online, leaving less time for questions from the students concerning the course material. Thus, there is a need to look into the social interaction between the learners and instructors in-depth due to the differing views among scholars about the interaction between learners and instructors. Besides, there are fewer in-depth studies on ESL learners' opinions on learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication learning in a blended environment. Hence, this study is required to explore the phenomenon of learner-to-instructor interaction in a blended

environment in detail.

Method

This research employed qualitative research inquiry to explore the informants' opinions on learner-to-instructor interaction during verbal communication learning in a blended environment. The goal of qualitative study is to find and comprehend people's experiences concerning their attitudes, values, and culture (Merriam, 2009). A phenomenological research design was selected for this study to obtain in-depth information about the phenomenon investigated in this study. Langridge (2007) emphasized phenomenology as a "study of human experience and how things are perceived as they appear to consciousness (p. 10). The phenomenological research design helps to obtain the underlying meaning of the studied phenomenon.

Participants

The informants for this study were chosen from a selected tertiary institution from the final semester of the year 2022 based on purposive sampling. Ten ESL tertiary learners were chosen to participate in this study, as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Polkinghorne (2005). These qualitative researchers recommended five to 25 informants for a qualitative study. These are final-year tertiary students at the institution. Merriam (2009) stated that informants with significant experiences with a phenomenon could provide accurate information about it. Several pre-determined criteria were set before choosing the informants of the study such as (i) the informants must have the experiences of the phenomenon studied so that they can provide first-hand information, (ii) the informants must have taken English proficiency courses, (iii) the informants must be willing to be approached at least two times. Apart from that, key informants' criteria by Marshall (1996) were also considered for the selection of the informants. Four criteria, such as roles in the student community of practice, willingness, communicability, and impartiality were considered. Pseudonyms were used to address each informant instead of the actual name to ensure anonymity.

Research Instruments

Several instruments were used in this study for data collection. The data for this study is gathered through the main research instrument, semi-structured interviews. Among the benefits of the semi-structured interview is it enables the researcher to ask open-ended questions that are more flexible (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews help produce rich and precise information during the data collection process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). An interview protocol was developed based on Interview Protocol Refinement Framework by Castillo-Montoya (2016). There are four stages involved in the development of the interview protocol. Firstly, the researcher ensured the interview questions were consistent with the purpose of the study. Then, the researcher used the inquiry-based conversation to create the interview questions. Introductory questions, key questions, and transition questions were among the types of questions used in the interview protocol. Thirdly, the researcher sent the interview protocol to two experts from TESL and technology in education background. These two experts have more than ten years of working experience related to their expertise. Then, the interview protocol was amended according to the feedback provided by the two experts. Finally, the interview protocol was used in a pilot study to check if the questions were appropriate.

Apart from semi-structured interviews, written accounts, and focus group discussions have also been employed to collect the data for this study. Langridge (2007) emphasized that written accounts help to encourage deep reflection on the issue studied. Focus group discussion, on the other hand, is beneficial when the informants are reluctant to open up during one-to-one interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

Research Procedures

The researcher prepared an interview consent form before the data collection. The informants were required to sign the consent form before they participated in the interview session. The researcher told the informants that the interview session would be conducted for approximately one hour, and the interview session would be audio-recorded. The study's informants were given lots of time and complete freedom to express themselves during the interview sessions. During the interview sessions, the researcher made notes on the nonverbal actions of the informants. The same researcher performed each interview session using the interview protocol as guidance. All informants provided satisfactory answers to the interview questions. There is no monetary reward for the informants' participation. The researcher transcribed the interview sessions with the informants and did initial coding for the transcriptions. Other than that, the researcher also gathered information from written accounts and focus group discussions.

Analysis

The data gathered from this study was organized in Atlas. Ti 9 and thematic analysis were employed to analyze the data. The researcher used thematic analysis as Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended. It involves six steps such as getting familiarized with the data, assigning preliminary codes, creating the themes, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and producing the written report based on the themes. The researcher began with the initial coding process and then continued identifying categories based on the codes. The coding process is done based on the literature review and in the context of the research question of this study. Later, the identified categories were combined to create the themes related to the study.

Rigour and Trustworthiness

The researcher has employed several methods, as recommended by Merriam (2009), to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the data from this study. Among the methods used for data trustworthiness for this study were member checking and triangulation. Interview transcripts were sent to the informants, and they were asked to check the transcripts. The researcher did member checking during and after the data collection stage. Other than that, the researcher also used triangulation to ensure the data's trustworthiness. Merriam (2009) emphasized four types of triangulation commonly used in qualitative research: multiple investigators, multiple methods, multiple sources of data, and multiple theories. However, the researcher employed methods of triangulation for this study. The information obtained from the informants during the interviews was triangulated with the responses from the informants' written accounts and a focus group discussion.

Results

Two themes were derived based on this study's data analysis: the roles of the instructor and the problems. Based on these two themes, six sub-themes have emerged. Three sub-themes were derived for Theme one, and another three were derived for Theme two. A summary of the themes and sub-themes is shown in Table One.

Table 1. *Summary of main themes and sub-themes*

Research question	What are the informants' opinions on learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication learning in a blended environment?		
Theme	Theme 1: Roles of instructor		
Sub-themes	Provides encouragement	Provides guidance	Knowledge provider
Theme	Theme 2: Problems		
Sub-themes	Technical issues	Learners' attitude	Communication issue with the instructor

Theme One: Roles of Instructor

According to the data analysis, the first theme derived was the roles of the instructor. The analysis revealed three roles of the instructor: encouragement, guidance, and knowledge provider.

Sub-theme One: Provides Encouragement

It has been discovered from the findings that the instructor in a blended ESL classroom has a significant impact on the students' learning of communication. The informants said their instructor gives them the motivation and encouragement to speak English. Sofea mentioned, "my lecturers always encourage their students to speak in English so we can learn together"(Sofea_wa). This is also supported by what Sofea mentioned during the interview, "lecturers make us feel more confident to speak in the English language. It makes us less fear, and we do not feel afraid to make mistakes"(Sofea_int). Eddie added that the interaction between the instructor and the students boost their confidence level, "it increases our confidence" (Eddie_Fgd). In a similar vein, Man concurred that speaking with the instructor gives him more self-assurance. He mentioned the following during the focus group discussion.

Based on my experience, talking with our instructor in English and he responds in English makes me confident. It gives me the vibe that the instructor looking at me as a student. I can feel that. If a student tries to speak with them no matter how broken it is, it gives them confidence. It gives them joy

The informants seem to prefer getting encouragement from their instructors, probably because they perceive it as a booster for them to interact more with their instructors. The positive vibe from the instructor helps boost the informants' motivation to actively participate in learner-to-instructor interaction in a blended environment.

Sub-theme Two: Provides Guidance

Moreover, the informants related the role of an instructor in a blended environment with guiding them in communicating in English. The informants revealed that the instructor gave them communication-related tips and techniques. This can be seen in, “my lecturers try to educate me like how I should communicate with them” (Eddie_Fgd), “my lecturer gives tips to communicate” (Yam_int), “sometimes they give us the information how to pronounce, how to use the words” (Sue_int), “we will having a group discussion with a group member and also with the lecturer. It will help us in the way communicate with other” (Syida_wa). Additionally, the informants reported that their instructor corrects their grammar while they are interacting. For instance, Sofea stated that her instructor guides her in terms of grammar while speaking, “they will correct me if my grammar goes wrong. I always have problems with my past tense present tense, so it is important to me to improve my English. For me, the instructor helpful” (Sofea_Fgd). This is also supported by her written accounts, “They also will correct me if my grammar goes wrong”(Sofea_wa). Furthermore, Syida also added that she could easily have discussions on grammar with her instructor.

The informants also mentioned how helpful it is to engage with their instructor, particularly when they need clarification on an assignment. The instructor's guidance aids the informants in better understanding their tasks and instruction. Yam stated, “If there is anything that I do not understand about any assignment or task, I will ask my instructor” (Yam_int). The man added, “When interacting with the lecturers, I talked more about the lesson things” (Man_int). Similarly, Sofea stated, “We can ask about the assignments during the class or when the class is about to finish. We can also have consultations regarding our assignments” (Sofea_int).

When the informants mentioned obtaining guidance from their instructors for their social interaction in a blended environment, it shows they appreciate their interaction with the instructor. This is also indicated that the informants of the study valued the interaction between them and instructors in a blended learning environment.

Sub-theme Three: Knowledge Provider

According to the data analysis, the role of the instructor was explained as a knowledge provider. The informants felt that their interaction with their instructor was essential in learning verbal communication as the instructors were more knowledgeable. This can be seen in “instructors have more knowledge, and they know how to make the students understand the lesson they are teaching” (Rina_int). This is also supported by Man, “It’s very good..it’s very important..It’s because instructors they have a full knowledge what I mean that is they have been trained and they know what they are doing”(Man_int). Eddie also mentioned that “I like to communicate with my lecturers using English because they know our level, they know how to speak with us” (Eddie_int). The informants viewed their instructor in social interaction as a knowledge provider most probably because they depend on their instructor in ESL blended environment. This could be the reason why the informants regarded learner-to-instructor as the most important type of interaction.

Theme Two: Problems

The responses to semi-structured interviews, written accounts, and a focus group discussion have shown that the informants had several challenges when interacting with their

instructors. The challenges mentioned by the informants included technical issues, learners' attitude problems, and communication issues with the instructor.

Sub-theme One: Technical Issues

The informants stated having trouble with internet connection regarding technical issues. This can be seen in some of the verbal responses from the informants, "that was online time. My lecturer asked us whether there is any question to ask. I was about to ask but suddenly the screen went blank" (Sofea_int), "it is challenging. If it is face to face, there is not lost of connection, but blended learning consists of online too. So the problem is the internet coverage" (Rina_int), "sometimes my internet has a problem too"(Eddie_int).

The comments from the written account created by the informants also corroborate the idea that there are internet connection problems., "But the biggest problem during online class was lost of connection which there is not much coverage at my place. Sometimes the Google Meet will pause" (Sofea_wa), "online class it will have many obstacles such as internet problems"(Atie_wa). The responses provided by the informants during the focus group discussion also supported the issue of connection, "for the online it is obviously my internet connection" (Eddie_fgd), "When it comes to the online class, yes, it is same which is my internet connection" (Sofea_Fgd), "if online classes, I think it's hard because the loss of connection sometimes" (Elle_Fgd).

The informants also mentioned the issue with sound as a technical issue. Due to the sound problem, the informants could not hear clearly during class and could not comprehend what was being taught., "If online sometimes I cannot understand because maybe their voice is too loud and then too slow so that affects my learning" (Eddie_int). The response given by Eddie during the focus group discussion supported what he mentioned earlier, "For the online, it is quite hard for me like talking with my lecturer. Sometimes, I hear like robot sound..so I cannot understand what they are trying to say. I am not sure if I say something they can clearly hear me or what" (Eddie_Fgd). Similarly, a few other informants also mentioned the same issue, "online class will have many obstacles such as noise problems"(Atie_wa), "there will be a sound problem when there is an online class" (Yam_int). Technical issues during learner-to-instructor interaction in a blended environment are probably due to different geographical locations.

Sub-theme Two: Learners' Attitude

In addition to technical problems, the informants discussed their personal attitude problems when speaking with their instructor. They admitted having issues speaking up in class and feeling uneasy when asking questions. Sofea mentioned, "When I want to communicate with my lecturer, I feel shy. I know my English is not good. I feel difficult to talk and I feel shy to ask questions. This was at the beginning. When I started to have a good bond with the lecturer, I do not feel shy anymore and can do anything" (Sofea_int). On the other hand, Elle stated that "During face-to-face classes, I am quite shy, so, I don't like to ask them" (Elle_Fgd). Eddie, on the other hand, mentioned, "For face to face my confident level well sometimes I don't have the confidence to ask them some questions that I really need the answer to" (Eddie_int). During the focus group discussion, Eddie added, "I think sometimes my confidence level is quite down. I rarely speak with them. So, I don't want to take any chance to speak with them"(Eddie_Fgd).

The informants' attitude problems, such as feeling uneasy about asking questions, being shy to speak, and being less confident in learner-to-instructor interaction, are possibly due to their being second language learners. Generally, second language learners face language anxiety when they have below-average language proficiency.

Sub-theme Three: Communication Issue with the Instructor

Communication problems with the instructor were another difficulty that the informants encountered during learner-instructor interactions. The informants highlighted several communication problems with their instructor, including misunderstandings, delayed feedback, and a lack of one-on-one time. Ara explained, "When we ask questions using Oles or Google Classroom, we will receive a late reply. That is the challenge" (Ara_int). A few other informants mentioned their limited time with their instructor, "Our time with the lecturers is so limited" (Man_int). Syida added, "during online class, when I want to ask a question to the lecturer, other students will be asking as well. So, the lecturer might not notice my question," (Syida_int). Other informants talked about misunderstandings between the instructors and themselves. Elle stated, "I think the online classes are more difficult because when I say something, the lecturer is not quite understood" (Elle_int). Another informant, Sue also had a similar opinion with Elle.

Sometimes the way they talk we don't understand but it is more like an online classroom like I said earlier they post something on Google Classroom and Oles and those kinds of things. So, sometimes when we try to communicate with them and try to ask them about all those kinds of things about all those questions they will misunderstand. So, sometimes they said to us that we did not understand, and sometimes it might upset us because we tried to learn all those kinds of things but whenever we ask it is always like a misunderstanding. So, the communication there is quite challenging.

The informants' concern about the challenges they face in learner-to-instructor interaction is due to online communication learning. This showed that the informants face fewer challenges in conventional face-to-face learner-to-instructor interaction.

Discussion

This study aims to explore ESL learners' opinions on learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication learning in a blended environment. In a blended learning environment, instructors are crucial to the verbal communication development of ESL students. In Interaction Framework, Moore (1989) accentuated that educators must fulfil their duties by motivating students. The study's informants emphasized the value of their instructors in helping them to enhance verbal communication in a blended environment, particularly in terms of offering support and encouragement. This is consistent with what Moore wrote about the instructor's role in the Interaction Framework. Although Moore spoke about the roles of teachers in distant learning, this statement can also be used for blended learning as it combines traditional classroom instruction with online components. Similar to the findings of this study, previous studies like Quadir et al., (2022) also revealed that the instructors' role as a facilitator is the driver of the informants' learning experience during verbal communication learning in a blended atmosphere. Moore (1989) pointed out the need for instructors to sustain their students' enthusiasm and interest in the learning process. The roles and responsibilities of the instructor

are deemed crucial in ESL learner-to-instructor interaction in a blended environment.

The study's informants highlighted in the findings that when studying verbal communication in a blended learning environment, they encounter several difficulties with learner-to-instructor interaction. One of the challenges the study's informants pointed out was technical issues; however, this problem has received lots of attention in earlier studies. The results of this study have indicated a few additional challenges that the informants had when interacting in a blended context. One of the major issues raised by the students is their attitude, which makes them afraid to approach their instructors during interactions with them. Research by Santhanasamy and Yunus, (2022), which supports this finding, showed that English language learners' shyness and nervousness in the language were caused by their inadequate language proficiency. In a similar vein, research by Hussain, Akhtar, Shabir, Aslam, and Arshad (2021) also supported the notion that a lack of vocabulary and language competence causes ESL students' shyness and speaking anxiety. There is less information about the difficulties that students encounter in learner-to-instructor interactions in Moore's Interaction Framework. Hence, this study has the potential to broaden the theory in terms of the challenges that students face while interacting with instructors in a blended environment.

This study also revealed that the informants complained about having issues getting their instructor to respond promptly and interact with them during verbal communication learning in a blended environment. This is corroborated by a study by Manoharan et al., (2022) which found that learners, particularly in online classes, experienced insufficient time interacting with their instructors and asking questions during blended classrooms. In the study done by Hijazi and Alnatour, (2021), the learners do not fully engage in blended learning particularly online communication learning as it is more of a one-way mode of interaction. This study's results, however, contradict what Hijazi and Alnatour (2021) stated. The informants of the current study pointed out that communicating with their instructors online is challenging due to the large class size (Du, Wang & Wang., (2022). When there are many learners in a classroom, especially during an online communication lesson, the informants find it challenging to interact with their teachers or ask questions. To create an effective communicative blended learning classroom, the size of the classroom should be taken into consideration as one of the key factors.

The findings of this study are the roles of instructors and challenges in learner-to-instructor interaction are significant to ensure effective blended learning implementation for verbal communication teaching and learning in ESL classrooms. The quality of learner-to-instructor interaction is crucial for the learners' verbal communication learning in a blended environment. Hence, it is essential to always make sure of the good quality of learner-to-instructor interaction in the communicative blended learning environment.

Conclusion

The main aim of this study is to explore the informants' opinions on learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication learning in a blended environment. To conclude, ESL instructors' roles and responsibilities are crucial for second language learners' verbal communication in a blended environment. Even though blended learning combines face-to-face and online approaches, good facilitation from ESL instructors is significant during teaching and learning verbal communication. Encouragement and guidance from ESL instructors would assist ESL learners in reducing their English language anxiety in learner-to-instructor interaction in a

communicative blended classroom. As for the learners who have good language proficiency, outstanding support from ESL instructors would be helpful to increase further the learners' motivation to engage actively during the verbal communication lesson and activities in a blended environment. Other than that, serious attention needs to be provided to the group size, particularly for online verbal communication, to help reduce the ESL learners' problems in learning verbal communication through online platforms. This reduces the learners' challenges in learner-to-instructor interaction in a blended environment. The findings of this study provide practical implications for curriculum designers to plan and design verbal communication lessons and activities accordingly. On top of that, the result of the study also offers theoretical implications by extending the theory of Interaction Framework that underlies this study. Since this study focused on ten ESL informants only, future research might want to consider learners from various geographical locations. Future studies may also select ESL instructors as informants to obtain different perspectives on the phenomenon.

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