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**The Effectiveness of an Instructional Strategy Based on
Blended Learning to Enhance Critical Reading
of 1st Year Secondary Education EFL
Linguistically Talented Students**

**A Thesis Submitted in the Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the MA Degree in Curriculum and Instruction (TEFL)**

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Title of thesis:

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Abstract:

The current study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of an instructional strategy based on blended learning to enhance critical reading of first year secondary education EFL linguistically talented students. Total of thirty first year secondary education EFL linguistically talented students (males and females) participated in this study. They were chosen randomly from first year secondary education EFL linguistically talented students who were highly achievers and proficient in English language with high IQs. The tools of the study were a check list of critical reading skills, a critical reading test, An English proficiency test and a mental ability test. The reliability and validity of the instruments were verified. The one group Quasi-experimental design was used in this experiment. Participants were first pre-tested then; they were exposed to the suggested instructional strategy based on blended learning to enhance their critical reading skills. The experiment lasted for an academic semester- second term 2012/2013 and at the end of the experiment they were post tested. Analysis of data obtained using (T-Test - Point Biserial correlation Coefficient - Person correlation - Eta-Squared) revealed that the suggested strategy had a positive impact on the participants' performance in critical reading skills.

Key words:

- Blended Learning
- Critical Reading
- EFL Linguistically Talented Students

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

In the information explosion times, the ability to read critically is more necessary than ever before especially for EFL linguistically talented students who have access to a variety of authentic English materials both in traditional and electronic resources. Hence there is an urgent need for using advanced instructional strategies, which can help in the acquisition of critical reading skills, as the traditional strategies are not enough to learn such advanced skills.

The future is unknown and we – instructors - are trying to prepare our students for this future (Karam & Minier, 1992) In the information explosion times, good English reading ability is indispensable (Hsu, 2006) English learners, especially those at higher levels, have ready access to a variety of authentic English materials such as magazines, newspapers, journals, leaflets, and so on. They also turn to Internet websites in order to gather news and information within the shortest time. It cannot be denied that these modern activities call for critical reading ability (Huijie, 2010:41).

Current curricula - which chiefly suffer of traditional teaching methods – have not been suit the Future phase after the 25th January revolution and the Egyptian community's desire to move towards what they missed during the past decades to make a quantum leap in various fields of life. (Attia, 2011) There is a growing awareness of the special needs of gifted and talented students and of the importance of providing them with an educational environment that offers maximum opportunities to develop their special abilities. There is also an increased acknowledgment that these young people represent one of our country's greatest natural resources and that failure to support them appropriately in their schooling may see this potential go unrealized (Margrain, 2000).

Gifted students have special abilities different from those of the ordinary students, so they need differentiated learning opportunities and special programs to enrich their mental abilities. In secondary schools, gifted students study the same EFL course as the ordinary students and there is not a course that is especially designed to suit the needs of the gifted (Sorour, 2006). Many verbally gifted young people may

never know that they have special abilities. In addition, there are talented children who have learned extremely rapidly and proficiently. These linguistically gifted children are unidentified as potential linguistic talent (Kerr, Cohn & McAlister, 2003) All students deserve the right to learn at their highest level of readiness—even the gifted (Kingore, 2008).

To meet the advanced thinking abilities of gifted students, differentiated educational programs should encourage the development of higher level cognitive processes. If these needs are not met in the classroom, performance suffers and the risk for emotional distress, maladjustment and isolation from peers increases (Yewchuk, 2004).

Most of English as a foreign language (EFL) programs throughout the world face numerous challenges, not least of which are a lack of English proficient teachers, large classes, student passivity and apathy, over-reliance on traditional methodologies, and insufficient authentic materials to offer students (Reilly, 2007). Learning is no longer limited by the traditional classroom, as new technologies give chances for learners and teachers to enhance learning and teaching almost anytime and anywhere. The use of technology in Education occupies every day, a new territory and achieves effective advances (Safwat, 2002:2:3).

The use of e-technology and blended learning brings about effective learning and cost effectiveness. However, like other revolutionary institutional policies, ‘human’ is the ultimate factor which governs make or break. Despite the availability of robust hardware (technology), we also need appropriate software (instructors) to make things happen. Instructors must be well trained, both technically and mentally, and accommodate themselves to the new-generation instructional media. (Lee & Chong, 2007:98:99) It is extremely difficult to come to conclusions about which approaches and methods are best and / or most appropriate for our own teaching situations.(Harmer, 2001) but The use of the blended learning approach is considered to be a key element of the higher education of the future (Aldhafeeri, 2007).

Considering students' urgent need to critical reading skills in an ever changing globe, the lack of EFL linguistically talented students' performance in critical reading, the educators' advocating for special educational care for students with special needs especially gifted and talented students-the treasures of their own nations- , the educators' approval of using new technologies into education specifically blended learning , more according to the best knowledge of the researcher there is no study tied these previous points to EFL linguistically talented students. Thus, this study is arisen to enhance 1st year secondary education EFL linguistically talented students' performance in critical reading through an Instructional strategy based on blended learning.

1.2 Context of the problem

Previous literature, studies and conferences revealed the importance of critical reading skills for individuals to face current and future challenges, weakness of student level in critical reading skills and the needed instructional treatment of this problem. According to the best knowledge of the researcher there is no study tied these previous points to EFL linguistically talented students.

Students graduating from school are lacking in critical reading and thinking skills necessary for them to deal with information presented to them through the media and through complicated written material. It is a necessity in today's society that students be able to read and think critically, whether involved in formal continuing education, career preparation or merely trying to be a responsible member of today's complex society (Acott, 1985: 15). Over the past fifteen years educators have become increasingly concerned about the level of literacy and cognitive skills that students join post-secondary institutions with. A growing number of high school graduates appear to be unable to read critically (Gray,2006)

Due to the rapidly changing knowledge and information the focus of the objectives of the curriculum is no longer to keep in mind and store a large amount of facts and information, However ,it is turned to the development of higher thinking capacities, students need to learn how to think rather than what to think (Kojak, 1995:39:40). Because of the importance of reading, many countries in recent years

have commissioned studies to compile and analyze research and provide recommendations on how to improve instruction (Baker, 2008).

Learners use appropriate strategies to aid them in the acquisition of English as a foreign language. These strategies include self-motivation, learning strategies, organizational skills, study skills, higher order thinking skills and information retrieval skills from oral, printed and electronic sources (The Egyptian Ministry of Education, 2005). Current twenty one century countries competition will be information based race which definitely will lead to the change of societies (Ahmed,,2005)

Reading proficiency is undoubtedly crucial to academic success, and students definitely need guidance and practice in order to become efficient readers (Wen, 2007:469:470) so, the reading class should train critical readers Therefore, critical readers “question, organize, interpret, synthesize, and digest what they read (Paul, 1995:491). It is recommended that critical reading needs to be introduced in our language classes in the pre-university level (Nassar, 2009).

Previous literature and conferences revealed the vital role of gifted and talented individuals in making better future of their countries and humanity as a whole. There is a worldwide concern to provide special educational care for students with special needs especially gifted and talented students. According to the best knowledge of the researcher there is no study tied these previous points to EFL linguistically talented students specifically.

The pedagogical assumption that says that the talent does not require a special method in teaching and learning is not sound what emphasizes the need for working hard innovating and discovering special teaching methods for gifted and talented students (Arab Organization for Education, Science and Culture, 1996). Many verbally gifted young people may never know that they have special abilities. In addition, there are talented children who have learned extremely rapidly and proficiently. These linguistically gifted children are unidentified as potential linguistic talent. (Kerr,Cohn and McAlister, 2003) All students deserve the right to learn at their highest level of readiness—even the gifted (Kingore, 2008).

In the field of education, every decision must remain student-centered. When considering the implications of gifted education the focus must remain on the needs of the gifted student. Gifted students are the nation's most precious resource with the ability to remain competitive in a global society. In order for the talents and gifts of the gifted student to remain strong, the gifted learner must be nurtured within the educational system (Miller, 2011:152).

Like all other students with special needs, gifted students require instructional adaptation to encourage full nurturance of their potential. The adaptation stems from their educational needs as exceptional learners. To meet the advanced thinking abilities of gifted students, differentiated educational programs should encourage the development of higher level cognitive processes. If these needs are not met in the classroom, performance suffers and the risk for emotional distress, maladjustment and isolation from peers increases. It is recommended that whether in regular or congregated classes, gifted children require a curriculum differentiated to accommodate their exceptional learning characteristics, and counseling services to help in understanding and coping with being different from average peers. (Yewchuk, 2004).

In order to transform the perspectives from education for all to education for excellence, the National Conference for Gifted and Talented Pupils was held on April 9-10, 2000. Holding preliminary workshops preceded this conference. It tackled three important areas such as definitions of giftedness, talented people, how to discover gifted pupils, and means of educating and caring for gifted pupils. This conference aimed at making decisions and decrees concerning building, regulating, and implementing school curricula and educational activities for gifted people (NCERD, 2001:27) but there is no notable interest or care given to EFL linguistically talented students specifically.

The challenge for educators is twofold: (a) our gifted and talented population must have a full service education if we expect these students to thrive in the manner in which they are capable. (b), these students must be involved in educational experiences that are challenging and appropriate to their needs and achievement levels. The place to begin is in the regular classroom (Parke, 1992).

Previous literature and conferences revealed the necessity of applying new technologies into education in an ever changing world into a smaller village. Blended learning benefits from face to face instruction and electronic learning, providing a various environments that match students' differences, more according to the best knowledge of the researcher there is no study tied these previous points to EFL linguistically talented students specifically.

Modern societies face several challenges which imposed on life styles, systems and organizations; one of the most prominent is the development of information and communication technologies (Dahshan, 2007). The new situation entails a new program for a new generation for a new world. The electronic community is a complex subsystem of the educational community founded on the values espoused by that community, so it becomes very important for trust technological empowerment of individuals and organizations In the digital era (Kamal-Aldin,2009)

Foreign language research findings show that teaching, as well as learning, processes and actions need to be differentiated to match the characteristics of the learners that vary according to their biological age.(Dadour,2003) Language learning reform should adopt technology as a trend to solve traditional problems with nontraditional solutions.(Gheith,2008) It is also recommended that integrating and employing technology is a criterion of performance excellence in educational systems.(Abou-Risk, 2008) Most of previous studies indicated that teaching program is always in need of continuous development and improvement. Lack of audio-visual aids in school was the highest and represents the top problem for student at school. (Alliy & Abed, 2005: 9:12)Hence, blended learning is the needed development of instructional strategy providing various worlds for various needs of the EFL learners.

Learning requirements and preferences of each learner tend to be different. Organizations must use a blend of learning approaches in their strategies to get the right content in the right format to the right people at the right time. Blended learning combines multiple delivery media that are designed to complement each other and promote learning and application-learned behavior. Blended learning programs may include several forms of learning tools. (Singh, 2003:52:53) Blended learning has become popular among instructional designers for a variety of reasons, some curricular, some personal (Sparks, 2007).