

## **Effects of Online Training on Iraqi Hotel Management Students' Speaking Skill**

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### **Abstract**

The present study investigated the effects of online training on Iraqi hotel management students' speaking skills. A quantitative approach was adopted for the purpose of the study. Thirty-eight students participated in the study. Two groups were formed randomly; experimental and control. They took the PET test. Their scores from the PET test were used to check the homogeneity of the learners. Moreover, the learners' pretest scores were considered as their speaking scores from the PET test. Based on the treatment, the experimental group received online speaking training through online applications such as Skype. On the other hand, the learners in the control group received their training through face-to-face interaction with the teacher. After the treatment, the learners took the speaking test from the PET test. Their mean scores were calculated and compared to find any significant differences. The results showed that the learners' speaking skills in the experimental group improved significantly in comparison to the control group. The results of the study also showed the importance of online training for improving the speaking skills of EFL and ESP students.

**Keywords:** Training in hospitality, online training, Speaking skills, Tourism.

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## **1. Introduction**

For over a decade, educational technology has been used sparingly in our schools and universities. Online training courses have been used since 2003 to fill the gaps in our learning system and to add extra programs besides classroom learning. Distance education is a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching. It is a suitable method for students who are not physically present in a traditional education setting such as a classroom. It is a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both. (Blue & Harun, 2003). Online training or distance education can be of great help to all students majoring in various academic disciplines. One of the most important commercial and industrial activities in the world which contributes to the economic, cultural, and political progress of many regions is tourism (Kostic Bobanovi & Grzinic, 2011). Related to this, tourism has a major part called the hospitality industry. Quality of service is a measure of how well the level of service provided meets customer expectations. Providing quality service requires constant adaptation to customer expectations. As social beings, humans are constantly communicating and sharing everything from multiple stories to good and bad experiences. The idea that the customer is always right has become common sense. In today's world, this way of thinking is obsolete. The hospitality industry has grown accustomed to putting the customer first. For this reason, the industry has been built from the perspective of developing hospitality products that meet the needs and desires of customers. Being understood by hotel staff is one of the main desires of tourists. The results of the related studies investigating the concept of quality services based on the ideas obtained from tourists have shown that hotel staff's communication skills are one of the important elements mentioned by tourists (Prachanant, 2012). Hotel management students do well aware of the need and necessity of speaking skills and take many initiatives to develop their speaking by watching news channels, movies/videos, reading magazines, newspapers, and a few more sources (Pendidikan, 2016). Bosch & Jiménez (2001) illustrate speaking as the skill of generating an oral message considering the context in which it occurs. Seidlhofer (2005) mentions that learners must improve their linguistic, discourse, and pragmatic competencies simultaneously so that they represent fluency if they want to master the speaking skills of a language. There are significant factors that must be considered to simplify interaction. The first one is to examine speaking in a face-to-face act in which the learners are normally physically present. The second perspective was to examine speaking is that it is communicative and all the participants assist in the communicative act.

Speaking takes place in real-time, so spontaneity plays a significant role in the preparation, organization, and production of the messages provided by the learners. The results of the related studies have shown that many factors can influence the quality and quantity of improving a skill. Attitude, among the many psychological factors, is one of the factors that can have considerable effect on the learner's development.

## **2. Literature review**

Online trainings are online environments or classes that enable learners and teachers to communicate so that they were face to face in a classroom. It has significant advantages for the education process. According to Desfitranita (2017), it is worthwhile to consider online and real life as not competing areas of communication; instead we should attempt to consider both situations. It has advantages for school management. The decision to perform an online learning environment (VLE) in a school displays benefits to, and enhances concerns for, school management, and should not be taken superficially (Gill & Shaw 2004; Visscher et al., 2003). Ong and Mannan (2004) describe that online education simulations and animations are significant uses that develop appropriately environment in the learning process to involve learners and improve their visions; they could be also useful to produce communications in a similar context. Online training has made it possible for learners to provide the characteristics of the Internet to vital learning atmospheres. On the other hand, obtaining knowledge of the English language and being fluent in it is not because it is popular, but because it facilitates communication with clients around the world, all of who wish to achieve something in their chosen field. Being able to speak English is not only an advantage for staying in your current job or getting promoted, but it is also seen as a valuable skill among employees. (Desfitranita, 2017). In addition, another factor to emphasize is that most of them have good professional skills and their field of work may not be placed in good companies. Learning English is believed to slightly increase one's chances of getting a job, which is the main need of every individual (Pandey et al., 2014). English is an important aspect of the tourism sector as it allows us to provide the best possible service to foreign tourists who do not speak the local language. In addition, tourism professionals should speak English to make their visits with foreigners more comfortable (Rojas, 2018). Those who need to use English at work for tourism or hospitality purposes should improve their communication skills, fluency, and accuracy (Zahedpisheh & Abu Bakar, 2017). This language is taught as a second language in educational institutions at different levels, as contacting other people around the world is an essential factor (Seidlhofer, 2005). The proficiencies

currently required in the tourism work environment include specific proficiencies. One of the areas of expertise stimulated by higher education is the ability to express yourself fluently in English (Bosch & Jiménez, 2001). On the other hand, an analysis by Prachanant (2012) found that when tourism workers were asked to select the three features of their knowledge of English that they primarily use at work, the results showed that the most relevant features were It showed that providing information was included, followed by providing services and then providing help. In a study on the need for and use of English in the tourism industry conducted by Prachanant (2012), when tourism workers were asked to rate their need for English skills for proper functioning in the workplace, They rated all four language skills, but they could not speak. It turns out that the order of importance is listening, reading, and writing. Among the requirements for providing good service, English appears as a mandatory requirement for communication together with our future customers. Therefore, improving language skills is essential for a successful communication process (Hossain & Khan, 2021). A study conducted in the tourism labor market in Puerto Lopez, Manabi province, Ecuador, used a survey of a population consisting of five hotel companies and three tourism agencies to examine the English proficiency of employees in the tourism sector. Results show that people believe they need to improve and master English to improve their job performance (Yavuz Çetinkaya & Oter, 2016).

The following research question was investigated in the current study.

**RQ1.** Does online training have any effect on Iraqi hotel management students' speaking skills?

Based on the aforementioned issues, the following hypothesis was formulated.

**H01.** Online training does not have any effect on Iraqi hotel management students' speaking skills.

### **3. Research method**

#### *3.1 Participants*

The participants of this study were 38 students (male and female) of hotel management from one of the colleges of Basra, Iraq which held Tourism and Hotel Staff Training Courses. The students' age ranged from 19 to 28. The homogeneity of the participants' proficiency level was determined by The Preliminary English Test (PET) before carrying out the treatment. The participants were divided into two groups; control and experimental groups. Then, a pretest (speaking section of PET) was performed. *English for*

*International Tourism Series* with the traditional method (face- to-face speaking in the classroom) was taught to the control group and the experimental group received online training (through Skype).

### *3.2 Instruments*

#### *3.2.1 The Preliminary English Test (PET)*

PET results were used as an index to check the homogeneity of the learners. The test has these sections: Reading six parts - 32 questions - 45 minutes, Writing two parts - 45 minutes, Listening four parts - 25 questions - 30 minutes, Speaking - an interview, - four parts - 12-17 minutes. The students received a separate score for each of the four papers. These four scores were averaged to give every student an overall result for the exam. Furthermore, the students' scores from the speaking section were summed up and used as the students' pretest speaking skills scores. At the end of the study to determine any development in the learners' speaking skills, they were given the speaking section same PET test.

#### *3.2.2 English for International Tourism Series*

Eight units of the English for International Tourism Series (lower-intermediate was selected based on the learner' performance on PET) were selected for the purpose of this study. The English International Tourism book series is a complete collection for people who intend to work in the field of the tourism and tourism industry. This series of books from intermediate to upper intermediate levels are published by Pearson Publications and tries to increase the language learner's interest in topics related to tourism and foreign travel. This total can also be useful for people who are active in the tourism industry and give them more ability and mastery. Each level of this book has 10 lessons that deal with the basic and important topics of tourism, including flights, hotels, and related issues. Also, considering that at the end of the book, the text of the audio files has been presented, this collection can be used for self-study or taught in classrooms.

### *3.3. Procedure*

The students were given a PET test to check their language proficiency and later based on the scores from the PET test, the most homogeneous group was selected (N=38). The participants were divided into two groups; control and experimental groups. Then, a pretest (speaking section of PET) was performed. *English for International Tourism Series* with the traditional method (face-to-face speaking in the classroom) was taught to the control group and the experimental group received the online training (through Skype). For the experimental group, the interactive scenario provided the

learner with the most immersive and true-to-life simulation of the given environment in which they could practice their spoken language skills. In the interactive scenario, the most likely flow of possible interactions is scripted, and alternative paths are created, which allows a variety of inputs from the learner. The learner interacts through speech with the teacher and other agents, but in contrast with the one-to-one scenarios, the agents respond appropriately through several conversational turns, which results in an appropriate dialogue relevant to the scene. The control group had a similar scenario but it was face-to-face interaction in the classroom. The treatment lasted eight sessions. After treatment, a posttest was performed for both groups. Then, the collected data was analyzed through three raters. Three raters were used for the reliability of the pretest and posttest. They used the rubric of the PET test for assessing the participants' speaking skills. The students also received an attitude questionnaire to check their answers on the effects of online training. For analyzing the collected data, the researcher used mainly quantitative data analysis so that the data were analyzed by using statistical techniques. The test results of both groups were analyzed, and compared regarding two instructional conditions through descriptive statistics, t-test, independent sample t-test and two pair t-tests which are used to investigate research hypotheses.

#### **4. Results**

##### *4.1 Results related to the first question of the study*

RQ1. Does online training have any effect on Iraqi hotel management students' speaking skills?

Analyzing the mean scores in Table 1 showed that the learners in the control group had improvement from pretest to posttest. This improvement could be due to the natural process of face to face instruction.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Control Group's Pretest and Posttest Speaking Skill

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest Speaking Skill Control Group	19	42.00	81.00	55.5372	11.48359
Posttest Speaking Skill Control Group	19	49.00	86.00	63.0515	10.35620
Valid N (list wise)	19				

**Table 2.** One-Sample Statistics for Control Group’s Pretest and Posttest speaking Skill

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Pretest Speaking Skill Control Group	24.857	22	.000	55.5372	54.5955	64.5349
Posttest Speaking Skill Control Group	30.383	22	.000	63.0515	60.6038	69.4832

Moreover, the results indicated in Table 3 proved the assumption of the experimental group’s speaking skills significant development under the positive influence of online training.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics for Experimental Group’s Pretest and Posttest Speaking Skill

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest Speaking Skill Experimental Group	19	54.00	77.00	53.5438	10.03476
Posttest Speaking Skill Experimental Group	19	58.00	88.00	74.3457	8.43201
Valid N (list-wise)	19				

**Table 4.** One-Sample Statistics for Experimental Group’s Pretest and Posttest Speaking Skills

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Pretest Speaking Skill Experimental Group	28.961	22	.000	62.63216	56.1879	64.8556
Posttest Speaking Skill Experimental Group	43.929	22	.000	74.54671	67.8552	74.5796

The research question investigated the effects of online training on Iraqi hotel management students’ speaking skill. The result of the independent samples test has shown that the post-test score of the experimental group (M= 74.54) is statistically higher than the post-score of the control group (M=63.05) (See Tables 3 and 4). Students in the experimental group

outperformed the students in the control group concerning their speaking skills. The result of the study approves the effectiveness of online training.

**Table 5.** Comparing Posttest Mean Scores of both Control and Experimental Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest Speaking	1.00	19	63.05	10.03476	2.14078
Skill Control & Experimental	2.00	19	74.54	8.43201	1.62120

Although, both groups had improved, as it is indicated in the tables, the experimental group's improvement was more significant than the control group.

### **5. Discussion and conclusion**

This study had two significant findings. First, the results indicated that developing reliable and practical speaking skills is very crucial for EFL learners, especially students of tourism and hospitality. The second finding indicated that online training can produce significant effects on education. These findings are discussed with the results of the studies found in the literature. These results displayed the effect of online training on the students' speaking skills which is in agreement and disagreement with some previous studies which were carried out. For example, the current finding is contrary to Dwyer, Carlson, and Kahre (2002), Dwyer and Fus (2002), and Rubin, Rubin, and Jordan (1997)'s results that signify the speaking course is a significant mediation in reducing speaking anxiety in the traditional format and the current study develops their certainty to remain true in online formats.

The finding is in line with the outcomes of McCroskey (2009)'s research which represented that learners in the online treatment group, which had the most atmosphere to improve due to well above-average public speaking anxiety at baseline, reduced significantly more than in traditional face-to-face treatment group, who entered and exited the course with below-average public speaking anxiety. The finding used in the current study disagreed with the findings of Allen and Franklin (2002) who reported that there is little reduction in student satisfaction between traditional and fully-online course delivery. The current study advocates the results of Benoit, Benoit, Milyo, and Hansen. (2006) who reported that students were slightly, although not



vitaly more satisfied with online training courses than with face-to-face courses. In addition, the result is incongruent with Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann (2009) who mentioned the face-to-face interaction hours carried out the same activities but met in real life at a conference room at a university. The activities used for both types of conversation hours were designed accompany by a model of action-learning in which students had to communicate in authentic tasks that needed them to investigate context, plan and act a role, and reflect on their own learning. This finding is also consistent with Abdous, Camarena, and Facer (2009), who mentioned that podcasting, a recording application, can effectively enhance the acquisition of a number of language skills if the teachers utilize the technology for many aims, in and outside of the classroom. The students' high interest in using the applications was consistent with the findings of Abdous, Camarena, and Facer (2009) whose learners mentioned that podcasts assisted them make their vocabulary and enhance their knowledge of grammatical rules.

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