THE IMPACT OF VIDEO-BASED ASYNCHRONOUS COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION ON EFL LEARNERS' ORAL LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY

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JUNE 2018

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES
OF
BAHÇEŞEHİR UNIVERSITY

BY

Nihal ÖZDEMİR

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

JUNE 2018

Approval of the Graduate School of Educational Sciences

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF VIDEO-BASED ASYNCHRONOUS COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION ON EFL LEARNERS' ORAL LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY

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Master's Thesis, Master's Program in Educational Technology

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Yavuz Samur

June 2018, 93 pages

It may be a great challenge for Turkish EFL (English as a foreign language) learners to get enough exposure to English and to be able to do sufficient authentic oral practice, which provided an impetus for the present study. Considering the benefits of blending traditional in-class and online learning environments, the researcher of the current study integrated video-based asynchronous computer-mediated communication into in-class instruction. Therefore, the initial purpose of this research study was to investigate whether blended instruction has an impact on oral proficiency development of EFL learners. The study also attempted to investigate the influence of blended instruction on EFL learners' foreign language anxiety when speaking in the target language. Lastly, it explored EFL learners' perceptions of the blended instruction that was designed to support the structures learnt in-class by practicing outside the traditional classroom environment. The participants (N=58) were recruited from two intact classes of A2 level students enrolled in a language preparatory program at a foundation university in Istanbul, Turkey. The data were collected both quantitatively and qualitatively from oral proficiency exam, foreign language anxiety scale, semi-structured student interviews and reflective journals. The quantitative findings of the study indicated that the experimental group who received blended instruction performed slightly better in the oral exams than the control group who received only traditional F2F (face-to-face) instruction. The

findings also indicated that blended instruction helped participants in the experimental group reduce foreign language speaking anxiety, whereas speaking anxiety level increased in the control group. In addition, the qualitative findings corroborate previous studies that in addition to practicing speaking skills, blended instruction was also helpful while practicing other language areas such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and writing. Lastly, the qualitative findings suggest that students hold positive perceptions towards blended instruction which was designed to improve speaking skills. Based on the interpretation of the results of the present research, recommendations for EFL practitioners and suggestions for further studies are also discussed.

Keywords: Blended Learning (BL), Video-Based Asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (ACMC), Speaking Anxiety, Oral Proficiency

ÖZ

VİDEO TABANLI BİLGİSAYAR DESTEKLİ EŞZAMANLI OLMAYAN ÖĞRENMENİN İNGİLİZCEYİ YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRENEN ÖĞRENCİLERİN KONUŞMA PERFORMANSI VE YABANCI DİL KONUŞMA ENDİŞESİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

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Tez Yöneticisi: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Yavuz Samur

Haziran 2018, 93 sayfa

İngilizceyi yabancı bir dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrenciler için, bu dile yeterince maruz kalmak ve yeteri kadar konuşma pratiği yapmak zor olabilmektedir. Geleneksel sınıf-içi ve çevirimiçi öğrenme ortamlarını harmanlamanın faydalarını göz önüne alarak, bu çalışmanın araştırmacısı video-tabanlı bilgisayar destekli eşzamanlı olmayan öğrenmeyi sınıf-içi eğitime entegre etmiştir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışmanın temel amacı harmanlanmış öğrenmenin, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin konuşma becerilerini geliştirmeleri üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktır. Çalışma ayrıca harmanlanmış öğrenmenin, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin konuşurken hissettikleri konuşma endişesi üzerindeki etkisini de araştırmayı hedeflemektedir. Son olarak, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin, sınıf içerisinde öğrendiklerini geleneksel sınıf ortamı dışarısında da pratik yapmaları için tasarlanmış harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamı hakkındaki düşünceleri de incelenmektedir. Katılımcılar İstanbul, Türkiye'de bulunan özel bir üniversitenin İngilizce hazırlık programındaki orta seviyede (A2) olan öğrencilerdir. Veriler nitel ve nicel olarak konuşma sınavı, yabancı dil endişe anketi, yarı yapılandırılmış öğrenci görüşmeleri ve yansıtıcı günlükler aracılığı ile toplanmıştır. Nicel araştırma sonuçları göstermiştir ki harmanlanmış eğitim gören deney grubu, geleneksel sınıf-içi eğitim gören control grubuna kıyasla konuşma sınavında kısmen daha iyi performans göstermiştir. Sonuçlar ayrıca göstermiştir ki,

harmanlanmış eğitim deney grubundaki katılımcılara konuşma endişelerini azaltmaya yardım ederken, kontrol grubundaki öğrencilerin konuşma endişeleri yükselmiştir. Ek olarak, nitel sonuçlar daha önce yapılan çalışmalarla doğru orantılıdır ve göstermiştir ki harmanlanmış eğitim, konuşma becerilerini geliştirmesinin yanında dilbilgisi, telafuz, kelime ve yazma becerilerini geliştirmeye de yardımcı olmuştur. Son olarak, nitel sonuçlar ayrıca göstermektedir ki öğrenciler, konuşma becerilerini geliştirme amaçlı dizayn edilen harmanlanmış eğitime karşı olumlu bakış açılarına sahiptir. Bu çalışmanın sonuçlarına bakılarak, İngilizceyi yabancı bir dil olarak öğreten eğitimciler ve gelecekte benzeri çalışmalar yapacak araştırmacılarla öneriler paylaşılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Harmanlanmış Öğrenme, Video Tabanlı Bilgisayar Destekli Asenkron Öğrenme, Konuşma Korkusu, Konuşma Becerileri

To my dear parents, beloved husband, and lovely students

…and to my little angel Pinky

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I consider myself fortunate to have had so much support and encouragement from my family, colleagues and students.

First of all, I would like to thank my advisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Yavuz Samur for the advice and guidance he provided during the time I have worked on this thesis. He provided invaluable assistance in the form of personal meetings in which he took the time to share his suggestions for revisions. Likewise, I am indebted to my committee members, Prof. Dr. Tufan ADIGÜZEL and Assist. Prof. Dr. Nur Yiğitoğlu who took the time and effort to read my thesis and give valuable feedback.

I also would like to express my appreciation to the teachers and students who participated in my study for their help, time and dedication.

My dear parents and brother, without the support and love I received from you since my childhood, it would have been just a dream to be where I am right now and do the things I have done. Thank you for your never-ending faith in me.

Finally, I need to somehow try to express my gratitude that I feel towards my beloved husband, Devrim. His support, patience at all times, help, and love enabled me to complete this thesis. His simple presence has been a guiding light to me through the ups and downs of writing this thesis. After the surgery I had to have in the middle of the writing process, he gave me the power that I needed to continue not only to write but also to live my life to the fullest. I can only hope that I have been and will be able to return the many favors and support he has extended me during this process.

As this thesis comes to a close now, all I can say is that I am truly grateful for the support I have received from everyone involved. Thank you very much, all of you.

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ACMC	Asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication
BL	Blended Learning
BLE	Blended Learning Environment
CALL	Computer-Assisted Learning
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
F2F	Face to Face
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language

Chapter 1
Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of this research study on the use of video-based asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC). The chapter points to the fact that teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has changed with the emerging technology. It continues with the purpose of the study, statement of the problem, research questions the study seeks to answer and significance of the study. Finally, the key terms that are used in this study are briefly explained.

1.1 The Changing Nature of Language Teaching

Regarding the environment where it happens, speaking generally takes place when two people are face-to-face (F2F) (Van Lier, 1989, p. 492). This aspect of speaking F2F makes the whole process both interactional and social. Yet, as Thornbury and Slade (2006) indicate, F2F communication is not necessarily the only way people may interact (p. 23). The developments in technology and emergence of Internet technologies in the last half-century created the required conditions and environment in which the online learning environments can easily support the traditional F2F education. In other words, educators now may take advantage of the online learning environments and instructional techniques not only to supplement F2F learning environments but also to switch from F2F learning environments to fully online learning environments if the need be. One example for this transformation would be implementing synchronous online sessions that take place in real-time as in a traditional classroom setting. In some other cases, students attend their classes by meeting F2F with their classmates and instructors, and additionally, they continue to communicate asynchronously outside the class environment making use of course management tools such as WebCT, BlackBoard, Angel, and the like.

Since it was introduced, there has been growing interest in the application of computers and technology in educational contexts (Albirini, 2006; Bartsch & Cobern, 2003; Connor & Wong, 2004; Timucin, 2006), and educators are taking second language teaching and learning outside of classroom bricks and using

computer-mediated (CM) technology to promote language learning (Evans, 2009; Lee, 2012). Blended instruction, the combination of F2F and online instruction, is becoming more commonplace especially in higher education.

In the past decade, educators have integrated computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology as a teaching tool and researchers have studied its pedagogical implications. Given the results of previous studies, many researchers have pointed to the impact CMC has on higher education and suggest that CMC brings about considerably positive changes in F2F classroom communication (Berge & Collins, 1995; Harasim, 1990). With the introduction of these technologies into the Second Language (L2) classroom, language instructors are concerned with how to best implement these tools so that new technology-based tasks will have the most positive impact on student language learning (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). Additionally, with the proliferation of technologies that focus on spoken communication, namely asynchronous oral CMC, L2 learners' oral performance holds enormous potential for motivational gains that can directly lead to improvements in oral proficiency (Zhao, 2003). In particular, it is believed that technology-based tasks that encourage student development of their L2 oral communication skills may be especially useful for fostering L2 motivation. Several studies suggest that by combining F2F and CMC instruction, educators may achieve certain benefits namely: (a) the quiet learners express themselves more in CMC than during F2F interaction (Beauvois, 1992; Bump, 1990; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996), and (b) students have a chance to participate equally as CMC encourages equal interaction among learners (Finholt et al., 1986). Moreover, research has also proved that in addition to promoting student participation, by integrating CMC technologies such as chat rooms, voice blogs, and voice discussion boards, educators may help their learners produce more oral output in the target language (Beauvois, 1997; Rosen, 2009); enhance L2 motivation, collaboration, and learner autonomy (Sun, 2009); and lead to effective language learning (Beauvois, 1998).

Despite the numerous studies in the literature regarding teaching English as a foreign language, research on combining in-class speaking instruction with after-class computer-mediated learning seems to be lacking. Indeed, considering the possible opportunities the blended approach promises, blending these learning environments may be the answer to the current issues about teaching English

speaking skills in Turkey as computer-mediated instruction may create considerably more speaking opportunities and help educators and students continue their teaching and learning outside the classroom. As an example, Kamhi-Stein (2000) explored the use of bulletin boards in a language teaching methods course. The results of the study suggested that the F2F discussions were led by teacher initiation, student response, and ended in teacher evaluation while the bulletin board discussions were a lot more student-centered and thanks to the electronic format more students actively participated. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that most of the studies in the literature regarding teaching English as a foreign language have been conducted by implementing text-based communication tools. On one hand, it may be acceptable that communicating with written words fosters learning in some certain subjects and educators may achieve certain pedagogical goals as a result. Supporting this claim, Beauvois (1998) proposed that slowing down the communicative process by integrating CMC may have several benefits such as balancing oral and written communications and creating opportunities for either instructors or teachers to correct mistakes that are made. On the other hand, when the target of the instruction is to develop skills such as speaking and listening, using text-based communication may be inadequate.

With these in mind, this study is designed to investigate the effectiveness of video-based asynchronous communication on improving English speaking skills. By making possible both one-to-one and one-to-many communication, the asynchronous nature of the medium is supposed to enable students to share their multiple stories and points of view with others at almost any time (Chen, 2005). In addition, to bridge the gap in the blended instruction research regarding speaking, the present study explored Turkish EFL undergraduates' strengths, weaknesses, and speaking gains after the blended instruction by integrating video-based asynchronous computer-mediated voice forum. This study also aims to provide learners with a more interactive language learning environment where they can continue to share their experiences with multiple participants outside the limited lass time.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Several researchers have emphasized the importance of speaking skill in second language acquisition. It is proposed that when language learners communicate with more competent speakers, they will benefit from it in two significant ways (Hatch, 1978). First of all, their interlocutors will assist them with their input and feedback. Secondly, by listening to their interlocutors, they may also hear a more accurate model of language. Aligned with this, Krashen (1985), with his Input hypothesis, proposes that human beings build their competence by receiving comprehensible input. However, although comprehensible input is of great importance, it may not be sufficient while learning a second language. Besides comprehensible input, language learners may also develop their language skills through comprehensible output. According to Swain's (1985) output hypothesis, while learning a language, language learners need to be aware of the language forms that cause potential problems for listeners in terms of pronunciation and grammar, and they need to revise their spoken language so that they may achieve a greater accuracy while communicating in the target language.

Connectionists suggest that 'the human mind is predisposed to look for associations between elements and create neural links between them' (Methcell & Myles, 2004, p. 127). The more these associations reoccur, the stronger the links become. Connectionists consider language as a 'set of probabilistic patterns' which can be strengthened with repeated activation. Ideally speaking, to help learners accomplish all these, an instructor may design the activities in such a way that allows them to provide each learner with input and feedback that motivates them to produce well-formed utterances. Nevertheless, even though an instructor designs such an activity, it may not be possible to monitor all the learners in action, take notes about each performance and give feedback to everyone because of some constraints such as large class size and limited classroom time. Such constraints may have helped the blended instruction to gain momentum in the field of English language education. Since it may turn into a real challenge for language instructors to assist their learners with the limited classroom time, many instructors have welcomed the idea of integrating computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Guth & Helm, 2010; Kessler, 2013; Rosell-Aguilar, 2013).

According to the literature, most existing research studies on computer-mediated communication have shown positive results on English language learners' perceptions and development of reading skills (Yang, 2012), writing skills (Liu, 2013; Shih, 2011), vocabulary gains (Al Zumor, Al Refaa, Bader Eddin, & Al-Rahman, 2013; Hsieh, 2012), and English proficiency (Lee & Liao, 2009). Yet, research on blending in-class speaking instruction with after-class online learning in order to develop oral proficiency and reduce speaking anxiety is still lacking. In fact, the blended approach may hold great potential to assist instructors in teaching English speaking skills in Turkey by providing learners with more speaking opportunities and extending their learning experiences outside the classroom as well as helping them reduce foreign language speaking anxiety.

Based on these overviews, this research study highlights the use of video-based asynchronous computer-mediated communication in an English preparatory program with a focus on its opportunities and benefits it may bring to the language teaching and learning environment regarding both improved oral proficiency and reduced foreign language anxiety.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The reason for integrating a blended learning environment (BLE) to support Turkish EFL learners' oral skills is that blended learning (BL) is currently both a popular and promising way of teaching and learning a foreign language and it allows educators help their learners continue to learn outside the classroom environment when they desire and wherever they are.

English language teaching, in its nature, aims to provide learners with specific skills and help them develop their ability to communicate with other people both in a new language and in real life like situations (Brown, 1987; Ommagio, 1986; Oxford, 1990; Widdowson, 1978), and when we consider all the other skills that English language learners need to master, speaking may be regarded as the most essential skill that one needs to be able to communicate with others (Zaremba, 2006). However, to achieve effective communication, one needs to use the language in an appropriate way when engaged in social interactions with others, which may be challenging for especially foreign language learners (Shumin, 2002). That may be

why improving the oral proficiency of EFL students is one of the many goals of foreign language (L2) teachers and it is also highly acknowledged by the L2 learners as it offers either personal satisfaction or some specific chances for the learners later in their career (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Banados further (2006) proposed that "when students finish their study programs, they are faced with a highly competitive workforce that currently calls for professionals with a high proficiency in English, especially in speaking" (p. 534). Even though speaking is one of the most significant skills to improve, it may not be easy for learners to achieve the required goals due to some facts. According to Shumin (2002), for instance, speaking a foreign language is not an easy task for EFL learners since effective oral communication demands learners to use the language appropriately in social interactions. In addition to being able to use the target language in social interactions to thoroughly master the language, the amount of the exposure to the language also plays a vital role in achieving a satisfactory level of the language. Shumin also (2002) suggests that minimal exposure to the target language and interaction with native speakers would result in relatively poor spoken English, especially in terms of "fluency, control of idiomatic expressions, and understanding of cultural pragmatics" (p. 204). Most foreign language learners have limited authentic opportunities to practice what they acquired in the classroom (Ho, 2003) since they often have insufficient opportunities to speak the target language outside the classroom (Zhang, 2009).

When these effects of the sufficient exposure to the target language taken into consideration, it may be a challenge for Turkish learners to get enough exposure to English and to be able to do sufficient authentic and quality practice either with a native speaker or a non-native speaker of English since Turkey is not a country where English is the official language. These current situations that are mentioned above provided an impetus for the present study that aims to overcome some of the interfering factors by implementing the blended approach.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to broaden the existing body of research by examining Turkish English language learners' perceptions towards the use of video-based ACMC in order to support the face-to-face learning environment and to

investigate the effects of using this blended approach to enhance the oral proficiency of the learners. Additionally, the study also seeks to find out whether blended instruction may reduce the anxiety level that most EFL students experience while speaking in the target language in the presence of others. The hypothesis is that combining traditional in-class speaking activities and video-based ACMC tasks will promote speaking skills outside the classroom environment and eventually help learners improve their oral proficiency and feel less foreign language speaking anxiety.

1.5 Research Questions

In the study, the control group learned and practiced speaking skills in-class only, whereas the experimental group learned and practiced speaking skills in-class but also continued to do oral practice outside the classroom on a blended learning environment. As stated earlier, this study aims to investigate whether blended instruction has a significant effect on Turkish EFL learners' oral language development and help them reduce foreign language speaking anxiety. Additionally, it tries to gather some data on Turkish EFL learners' perceptions of the blended instruction. Regarding this aim, specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. Is there a significant difference between control group and experimental group in terms of oral language achievement?
2. Is there a significant difference between control group and experimental group in terms of foreign language speaking anxiety?
3. What are EFL learners' perceptions of the blended instruction for supporting spoken English outside the classroom environment?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Blended learning has become a learning paradigm for teaching spoken English at the university level to promote English language learning. A large number of studies indicate that communication activities integrated through both synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) have invaluable impacts on learners' oral proficiency

development (Abrams, 2003; Blake, 2009; Chun, 1994; Hirotani, 2009; Jepson, 2005; Mendelson, 2010; Payne & Ross, 2005; Payne & Whitney, 2002; Satar & Ozdener, 2008; Sykes, 2005). Additionally, there has been a considerable amount of research on human interaction, communication, and preferences of students in both in online and distance learning. However, there seems to be a paucity of research on video-based ACMC in combination with face-to-face courses. More specifically, while there are several distance education studies of student perceptions of ACMC and SCMC to teach English as a foreign language, studies that have implications on the effect of video-based ACMC on oral proficiency, its effect on anxiety level, and student perceptions especially in English university preparatory level in Turkey are rare.

The present research is designed with an attempt to help learners overcome their language anxiety and improve their oral competency. The study intends to support in-class speaking outside the classroom walls by offering more practice opportunities using a blended learning environment that integrates video-based asynchronous computer-mediated communication. As a result, the study would be beneficial to the English language instructors who teach at university preparatory programs as it may provide some insights on how to combine their face-to-face teaching with asynchronous computer-mediated instruction. Furthermore, the findings of this study aim to shed light on the insights of the Turkish EFL learners of the integration of BLE as well as their perceptions whether they believe this blended approach improved their speaking skills and help them overcome their speaking anxiety. Finally, this study may provide baseline information on the use of video-based ACMC in university preparatory level.

1.7 Definitions

Asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication: Asynchronous online learning enables communications between students and with their teacher at different times through asynchronous online tools such as email and discussion forums (Holden & Westfall, 2006).

Blended Learning: Refers to Blended Learning. Graham's (2006) which simply defines blended learning as a combination of face-to-face and online learning.

Blended Learning Environment: The integration of online tools into traditional courses. This learning environment can also be referred to as a mixed learning environment (Graham, 2005; Masie, 2002).

English as a Foreign Language: Refers to English as a Foreign Language (Mayo, 2003).

Second Language: Refers to Second language (Winke, 2007). In this study, L2 refers to English.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter presents the literature review on speaking skills both as a human and an EFL skill and the most common factors that interfere with the process of the development of speaking skills in English language teaching as a foreign language (FL) context. It also exploits blended learning (BL) and its definitions, benefits, and the research on asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) in the context of higher education.

2.1 The Nature of Human Interaction and Speaking as a Skill in Teaching English as a Foreign Language Context (EFL)

Speaking is described as a way to verbally communicate for mostly interpersonal and somewhat transactional purposes (Nunan, 1999). According to Harmer (1991), people communicate for three reasons. The initial reason why people want to communicate is simply to say something. Harmer (1991) continued to explain that the word 'want' refers to the intentional desire that the speakers hold which motivates them to convey their messages to other people. To put it simply, people speak because they want to talk and not be silent. Another reason Harmer (1991) gives to this specific question is that people communicate with some communicative purposes. Within this context, these communicative purposes refer to the fact that the speakers expect certain things to happen as a result of the interaction that takes place. The final reason is the result of the desire to say something (as in the first reason) and the purpose of conducting communicative activities (as in the second reason).

To be able to speak in a language, people need some specific knowledge. According to Burkart (1998), speaking entails three areas of knowledge. The first area is mechanical elements of language (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary), that guides the speaker to use the right words in the correct sequence with an appropriate pronunciation. Another area of knowledge is the speaking functions (transaction and interaction). With the help of this knowledge, the speaker knows

when the clarity of the message is required (as in carrying out the transaction or in exchanging of information) and likewise when a deep understanding is not required (as in the development of relations). The final area is sociocultural norms such as turn-taking, length of pauses between speakers, relative roles of participants, the rate of speech. Sociocultural norms allow the speakers to acknowledge the conversational situation, whom they are talking to, and what the purpose of speaking is. Being able to understand these elements, the speakers will know when it is time to take the turn to speak and when it is time to listen to the other parties, the pace they should be speaking at, and how long they should pause.

It is no wonder that communication is an essential human need. For this need to be met, certain requirements must be fulfilled so that meaningful communication may take place as a result. To start with, for a meaningful communication to happen, at least two people are required. While speaking, both parties communicate using the shared contexts such as institutional, social and cultural environments (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). Also, speaking is a human activity that takes place in real time in which parties are involved in a spontaneous decision-making process (van Lier, 1989; Nunan, 1999). In addition, regarding the environment where it happens, speaking generally takes place when two people are face-to-face (van Lier, 1989), and because it requires the presence of at least two people, speaking is mostly interactive (Thornbury, 2012). This aspect of speaking F2F makes the whole process both interactional and social. When these elements and the skills they help the speaker acquire are taken into consideration, one may claim that learners of other languages need to be thought of these areas of knowledge to be involved in meaningful conversations where they listen to others and choose the right time to take turn, give pauses when necessary, clarify their messages when needed, adjust their rate of speech and make use of correct grammar, vocabulary and the pronunciation.

Bygate suggests that “speaking in a second language (L2) involves the development of a particular type of communication skill” (Carter & Nunan: 2001, p. 14) and further discusses that to acknowledge what is involved in developing oral L2 skills, we should take both the nature and conditions of speech into account (Carter & Nunan, 2001). Levelt (1989), on the other hand, suggests that four major processes are involved in speech production: 1) conceptualization, 2) formulation, 3)

articulation and 4) self-monitoring. Conceptualization is mainly about designing the message content. It makes use of background knowledge, knowledge about the topic, about the speech situation and knowledge patterns of discourse. The conceptualizer involves a *'monitor'*, which checks everything that happens during the interaction in order to make sure the communication goes as planned. As a result of this act of monitoring, speakers may find the chance to do some self-correction for expression, grammar, and pronunciation. After conceptualization, the formulator comes up with the words and phrases to convey the meanings, order them and use them with appropriate grammatical markers (such as inflection, auxiliaries, articles). Articulation is the third process. It refers to the motor control of the articulatory organs; in English: the lips, tongue, teeth, alveolar palate, velum, glottis, mouth cavity, and breath. As for the last process, self-monitoring of one's speech is based on the awareness of identifying mistakes and self-correcting these mistakes. The processes mentioned above happen quite fast and a speaker of the language needs to develop automation to be successful. However, given the fact that it is a great challenge to gain automation and to focus on all these processes while speaking, especially for an elementary L2 speaker, it may take a lot of time to produce fluent and accurate output.

Though the literature on EFL suggests that speaking is 'the most complex and difficult skill to master' (Hinkel, 2005, p. 485), when the four main English skills are taken into consideration, it also plays the most significant role when it comes to human communication (Zaremba, 2006). Nevertheless, effective oral communication in a foreign language (FL) may be challenging for language learners, specifically for beginning and intermediate level, since they are expected to pay attention to several things at the same time such as coming up with and developing a thought, shaping this thought with the correct structures, continuing the conversation, and worrying about the response given by the interlocutor (Kern, 1995). Crystal (2001) stated that foreign language learners may encounter some difficulties, mainly in the acquisition of the speaking and listening skills as they may have rare opportunities to practice these skills in a meaningful way. Most literature on EFL highlights the significance of practicing the target language to be able to improve the specific skill. That is why it is of high importance to supply diverse speaking situations and frequent speaking activities when it is the aim to improve fluency when speaking (Tam, 1997).

Similarly, Ommagio Hadley (2001) proposes that language teachers are responsible for applying strategies for teaching speaking skills and offer as much oral practice opportunities as possible. Furthermore, some researchers point out to the importance of interpersonal interaction in the target language, and since it provides language practice, it is considered as one of the significant elements of EFL classroom (Rivers, 1987). Rivers (1987) suggested that when students are engaged in interaction in either small groups or they work in pairs in the classroom, they convey and receive messages, which enables them to produce meaningful and comprehensive output by drawing on language resources and by communication with others. During this process, feedback from a teacher and peers play a significant role since it may guide and encourage them to spot their mistakes and eventually correct them (Harmer, 2007; Murphy, 2010). Likewise, Brown (2001) and Wu (1992) explain that interaction among learners promotes language development and enhances interactional capability, that is expressing, interpreting, and negotiating meanings in the target language (Kramsch, 1986; Rivers, 1987). Following this notion, Harmer (2007) emphasized three main advantages to have EFL students practice speaking skills. First of all, when an in-class speaking learning activity is done, students may have rehearsal opportunities to talk about topics that exist in the real world. Secondly, students may have an opinion about their English use and overall oral proficiency during or after the speaking activity through either teacher or peer feedback. And finally, as a result of continuous practice, which allows them to draw on their language knowledge, students may achieve automation while speaking.

Besides its communication value, speaking English also has an educational value. Even though it may sometimes challenge some students, "speaking seems intuitively the most important skill" (Ur, 1996, p. 120) compared to other three skills (listening, reading, and writing) and acquiring this skill is highly significant as formal teaching at many educational institutions is delivered through the spoken language. As a result, the ability to speak and also listen in the language of instruction is crucial to be able to actively participate in lessons as it may affect the whole understanding process of the content of the taught subject (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). In addition to its role in being able to follow and understand the subjects, speaking skills are also interrelated with the learning process of the target language. More specifically, being able to speak in a second language may actually help

throughout the learning process of the target language. In their book 'Teaching Speaking', Goh and Burns (2012) highlight the significant role that speaking plays in acquiring a new language:

> Language input is important in acquiring a new language. It may seem clear to you that reading extensively can help learners acquire a second language. You may also believe that listening is equally important in providing learners with the necessary input for learning. However, it is not just input through reading and listening that is important for language acquisition. Research studies have shown that output is also crucial in helping learners become increasingly proficient in the language. Your students' development in the target language can be helped considerably by encouraging them to speak. (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 16)

All in all, even though speaking a language is difficult to master compared to the other foreign language skills, it is also considered to be the most important skill since it both enables people to communicate with others and has an educational value. Last but not least, having the opportunity to practice this significant skill and interacting with other speakers offer several benefits which may result in automation while speaking during the language acquisition process.

2.2 Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Turkish University Preparatory Schools

Since the end of World War II, English has been acknowledged as the leading FL in many countries around the world including Turkey, where Turkish is the official language and the language of education (Kirkgöz, 2007). In Turkish education system, English has been and is currently the only language taught as the compulsory foreign language at all levels of education as a Foreign Language (FL) along with German and French which are offered as elective subjects in the curriculum of certain schools (Kirkgöz, 2007). English shows itself as the most commonly and widely taught foreign language starting from kindergarten and continuing at all stages of Turkish education system. In Turkish language-medium secondary and high schools, English is taught as a compulsory foreign language.

However, it is also acknowledged that there might be some discrepancies regarding the quality of instruction, the number of hours allocated to English language teaching, materials that are used, and the qualifications of the teachers (Kirkgöz, 2007).

As for Turkish higher education, English is taught both in private and state universities, especially to first-year students. These English programs that usually last the whole school year are referred to as English preparatory program since the main purpose of such programs is to prepare students to academic English that they would be exposed to and would actively use in their departments (Coskun, 2013). In other words, at most English-medium universities at the beginning of each academic year, new students can start studying at their departments on the condition of successfully passing an English language placement test that is given by the schools' preparatory program. English language curriculum 'aims at promoting students' knowledge of general English and help them acquire the necessary skills to read and understand English publications in their specific subject area' (Kirkgöz, 2005, p. 219) by mainly focusing on the development of both receptive and productive English skills such as listening, reading, writing, speaking grammar and vocabulary (Çetinavci & Topkaya, 2012). Such programs usually intent to teach students academic reading so that when they go to their departments they can survive the language of the departmental courses in their faculties. In addition, students are also provided with academic writing skills which teach students how to take notes while listening to lectures and eventually write different essay types. Last but not least, students are also supported by listening and speaking skills that would enable them to follow lectures, ask questions to others and make presentations (Tunç, 2010). However, most of the Turkish EFL learners are observed to be far from achieving the desired level of proficiency especially in productive skills compared to receptive skills and this fact has been a matter of discussion among EFL educators in Turkey. Some researchers also claim that Turkish foreign language learners struggle with progressing after fundamentals of English (Büyükkantarcioğlu, 2004) or they have hard times going beyond their current level of English unless they are highly motivated (Karahan, 2007), and some even proposed that the academic English needs of university students are generally neglected in these programs (Kirkgöz, 2009). Furthermore, several program evaluation studies that were carried out at English

preparatory schools in Turkey suggest that there are some issues to be considered to achieve the desired results (Gerede, 2005; Karataş & Fer, 2009; Tunç, 2010; Özkanal & Hakan, 2010; Örs, 2006). To sum up, the literature on the teaching of English in Turkey suggests that the quality of the level of Turkish EFL learners is open to argument and clearly there are some issues to be solved.

2.3 Factors that Have an Impact on the Development of Speaking Skills in Teaching English as a Foreign Language Context

It is obvious that being able to communicate in a language is essential. It is suggested that when you know a language, you are referred to as 'speaker' of that language (Ur, 1996). Similarly, Thornbury (2012) states that being able to speak a language often equals knowing a language. This is most probably why most EFL learners consider speaking a foreign language is more crucial than reading or writing it, and many want to succeed in communicating with others orally. Yet, foreign language teachers still encounter some difficulties while encouraging their students to fully participate in oral activities as some learners avoid speaking English during the speaking activities in the classroom, which may lead to a slower improvement of their communicative competence in spoken language in the long run.

In this part of the literature review, with an attempt to better understand the underlying reasons why EFL learners may abstain themselves from speaking, factors that interfere with the development of oral skills will be explored in depth as (a) anxiety and language learning, (b) large class sizes, (c) no chance to record the output, (d) limited time and unequal chance to participate, (e) not knowing what to say and lastly (f) L1 use.

2.3.1 Anxiety and language learning. Gaudry and Spielberger (1971) described anxiety as an emotional state shaped by the activation of feelings of stress and increased activity of the nervous system. According to Horwitz (2002), this kind of feelings are the reaction of human being towards fear no matter if it is real or a perceived one. Furthermore, research studies suggest that foreign language learning is influenced by human psychology and that psychological factors may interfere with the language learning process (Chastain, 1975; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz

et al., 1986; Samimy & Tabuse, 1992; Schumann, 1999; Young, 1990; Zhanibek, 2001). In other words, anxiety may have rather a negative impact on the learning process when one is learning a foreign language. Ellis (1994) defines the term 'foreign language anxiety' as a type of situation-specific anxiety with regard to the attempts in order to learn a foreign language and communicate in it. Brown (1994) claimed that second or foreign language learning is a complex task which is sensitive to human anxiety. Similarly, in some research speaking in a foreign language is described as the most challenging and complex of the four language skills (Martinez-Flor, Uso-Juan, & Soler, 2006; Nunan, 2003; Zhang, 2009). While speaking, most learners process and produce language without any planning and rehearsals (Goh & Burns, 2012), which causes speaking to be the most anxiety-producing skill for learners (Chen, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Ellis, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Young, 1990). Several researchers suggested that foreign language anxiety is related to certain constructs regarding interaction in a foreign language such as communication apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986), willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörney & Noels, 1998), sociability, and risk-taking (Ely, 1986). When these constructs are examined, the close relationship between anxiety and oral participation in a foreign language becomes obvious. It is not merely the act of speaking itself that interferes with the oral performance but the fear of self-exposure and being evaluated by others while speaking in the target language (Chen et al., 1999; Young, 1990). Horwitz (2001) claims that most learners' reaction to this fear is avoidance of the situations that results in anxiety in the first place. This kind of reaction may reduce the learners' tendency to risk-taking and participation in oral communication (Ely, 1986). As the literature supports, anxiety is a significant affective factor in second language acquisition (SLA) and might trigger other effects such as self-esteem, inhibition, and risk-taking (Brown, 1993). The anxious learner would be less participative, less willing to take risks and would engage less in the ways of expressing themselves in the target language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a). Ely (1986) links anxiety to the notion of discomfort. In this study, he found that low student participation was a result of discomfort as it decreased the level of the risk-taking and sociability among the students. Aligned with these findings, Tsui (1996) found that a group of Hong Kong learners became hesitant, and consequently

withdraw from active participation in-class speaking activities because of language anxiety.

As well as abstaining learners from speaking, language anxiety may also have an impact on the effectiveness of the language learning process. Oxford (1990, p. 140) states that 'the affective side of the learner is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure.' Similarly, Arnold (1999, p. 8) suggested that 'anxiety is possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process'. Unlike reading, writing and listening, in speaking activities learners must perform in the presences of their classmates. This real-time exposure to an audience may result in language anxiety. Shumin (2002) described speaking a foreign language in public as 'anxiety-provoking' (p. 206). This could be because students often feel overwhelmed by finding things to say when speaking a foreign language, they are highly worried about making mistakes, the criticism they might get from others, or simply shy of the attention of others while speaking (Ur, 1996). Adult learners seem to be more sensitive about making mistakes and afraid of losing face. This sensitivity forms the basis of learners' incompetence to speak English with confidence. Moreover, extreme anxiety may even result in cases where EFL learners become tongue-tied or lost for words, and unfortunately, this leads to discouragement and a general sense of failure among the students (Shumin, 2002).

As the literature suggests, the pressure of receiving negative evaluation may not only lead to less active oral participation but also result in less willingness to take risks, reduced self-esteem or a sense of failure. This whole process may even constrain learners' ability to monitor their own speech for accuracy (Goh & Burns, 2012). While learning a second language, the effects of the pressure that on language learners' shoulders in oral practices should not be undervalued. Young (1990) reached the conclusion that four out of five activities that led to the highest level of anxiety in language learners were mostly speaking activities. However, being exposed to the other learners in the classroom was also a factor that caused anxiety. She came to the conclusion that it was the fear of self-exposure, not the act of speaking in the target language only. The findings of this study show that the fear of making errors and being exposed to the judgments of the classmates were the leading reasons for anxiety, which results in low participation and less risk-taking since

learners may worry about failure and the opinions of the classmates. In another study carried out by Ohata, (2005) some Japanese learners reported that their greatest source of anxiety was fear of negative peer-evaluation in speaking-related activities and losing face, especially during oral presentations. The learners also shared that, compared with other language skills, they felt more anxious when they were asked to speak. The reason for their language anxiety was being monitored and evaluated by the other learners.

To sum up, it may be concluded that among all the other factors that may affect the oral performance, affective factors such as anxiety can be associated with the reluctant EFL learners when it comes to speaking in the presence of their teachers and classmates, which may lead to lack of motivation in the long run (Goh & Burns, 2012). In such EFL classrooms, it becomes the duty of the instructor to reduce the anxiety level as much as possible by guiding the learners to develop speaking confidence in the target language and with a careful and appropriate task design (Bailey, 2005; Nunan, 2006; Patil, 2008; Trent, 2009; Zhang, 2009).

2.3.2 Large class sizes. Many who are concerned with language teaching and learning believe that English language learning is problematic in Turkey (Kizildag, 2009). Furthermore, learners, teachers, administrators, and parents criticize Turkish learners' level of proficiency in English (Karahan, 2007). This unsatisfying level of English language proficiency may be explained by the fact that most Turkish EFL learners are not exposed to the target language outside the classroom environment as the official language is Turkish. In other words, for most learners, the oral practice seems to be limited to the speaking lessons at the schools. However, in-class speaking lessons may not be as effective as one thinks because of several factors. Among these factors is large class sizes, which implies that each learner will have few opportunities to put what they have acquired into practice (Ho, 2003). In Turkey, because of the large class sizes, it may become a challenge for students to get sufficient opportunities to practice what has been taught in the classroom. In addition, 'large class sizes' is also considered to be one of the factors that causes Turkish learners to have a low success rate in learning English (Acar, 2015).

In EFL speaking classes, pair work or grouping students is one of the most common ways to engage and motivate students to talk. Grouping students may also

be applied due to the large class sizes (Goh & Burns, 2012). Even though forming groups in oral activities may be considered as a pedagogical path to follow for teachers, one possible drawback of grouping learners especially in speaking activities is that the teacher cannot monitor all speech that the learners produce. Therefore, it would not be wrong to state that when several groups work at the same time, the errors that the learners make may go uncorrected, and learners may occasionally revert to their L1 (Ur, 1996), especially in a class where all the learners share the same L1.

2.3.3 No chance to record the output. Compared to writing lessons, speaking lessons do not normally provide teachers with documentation that may help the teacher assess the learner performance. In a writing lesson, teachers can see the written production of each student and give corrective feedback if necessary, so that the learners may work on their weaknesses as well as discovering their strengths. On the other hand, in a regular EFL speaking lesson, teachers may not have such documentation. Most of the time, if not always, students speak in pairs or groups while teachers try to monitor the learners' performances equally. Once the activity is finalized, there is little record of the learner performances since the spoken language is transient (Goh & Burns, 2012). In most Turkish university preparatory schools this seems to be the case. The focus of the speaking lessons is often on the communication that takes place between the learners. In such lessons, teacher assign the speaking task and the learners complete this task by speaking either individually, in pairs or groups. The teacher tries to monitor the students during the speaking activities and provide feedback. However, it is rare that the teacher guides the students to record this oral production. On the other hand, Harmer (2007) suggests that if students record their own oral performance, they will have a chance to do self-evaluation and realize the progress they have made or they may simply get feedback from their teachers. Furthermore, it was proposed by some researchers that, receiving feedback regarding one's oral performance may help identify the mistakes and learners may correct these mistakes thanks to the feedback (Harmer, 2007; Murphy, 2010).

2.3.4 Limited time and unequal chance to participate. To teach and practice spoken English, a speaking lesson is designed to give everyone a relatively equal opportunity to participate in the speaking activity. Yet, this might not necessarily be applicable in all foreign language teaching contexts. Whether it is a pair or group work, learners take turns and only one learner can talk at a time. Considering the average amount of time that a speaking lesson can be, each learner will have limited time to talk, especially in a large group. In addition to time constraints, another issue to keep in mind is the learners who may dominate the conversations within the group while others speak very little or not at all (Ur, 1996). Besides the limited speaking time for each individual during a lesson, limited time may also create pressure on some learners. Bygate (1987) suggests that while speaking, speech is produced 'online'. This means speakers are usually expected to create their messages and convey it instantly without taking time to go over and correct it if they wanted to do so. Therefore, this time pressure may affect the process of conceptualization, formulation and articulation as learners may require more time to plan and produce the language (Carter & Nunan, 2001).

In conclusion, one of the challenges learners face in Turkish EFL context regarding the speaking skill is the insufficient oral practice time for each learner in the classroom settings. Thus, Turkish EFL learners may gain a great deal by having more time to practice and opportunity to use the target language outside the classroom environment (Satar & Ozdener, 2008).

2.3.5 Not knowing what to say. When learners are asked to share their opinions or simply talk about a given topic, it is very likely to hear learners complain that they cannot think of anything to say even when they are provided with interesting topics. Ur (1996) proposes that learners would participate and step up to talk if they believe they may add something relevant and original to the conversation. Additionally, Thornbury (2005) draws attention to the fact that the more time the speaker has to prepare, the easier the task will be accomplished. However, the limited time the learners usually have in the classroom may not allow them the space they need to generate ideas that they would like to communicate.

2.3.6 L1 use. Using one's mother tongue has been a controversial topic in foreign language teaching. While several researchers highlight the significance of maximum use of the target language (Krashen, 1982; Savignon, 1983; Widdowson, 1978) and suggest that L1 use should be kept minimum (Lu et al., 2004), some researchers address the benefits of using L1 to learn a foreign language (Hsieh, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). As for language learners, they tend to use their L1 while doing speaking practice since they may feel more secure, and as it is easier and more natural than using another language to interact with the people who share the same first language. As Ur (1996) suggests, occasional L1 use is inevitable in a classroom setting in which the learners share the same mother tongue and learners may even benefit from it in terms of solving certain vocabulary problems. Yet, when the L1 becomes the dominant language of communication especially in oral practice tasks, there might not be enough room to practice speaking the target language, which will eventually prevent the learners from improving their oral skills in English (Ur, 1996). To sum up, research point to the importance of practicing the target language to be able to master it. Swain (1985) suggest that both the teachers and learners should bear in mind that "we learn to speak by speaking".

2.4 Blended Learning Defined

The term "blended learning" (BL) has been commonly used in the corporate world in recent years (Lamb, 2001). As a term, it has been around more than 20 years now and "has been constantly changing during this period" (Sharpe et al., 2006, p. 18). In the corporate world, BL refers to designing the professional development process that aims to keep workers productive as well as helping them take advantage of the training courses, mostly delivered through a mixture of self-study manuals, videos and more recently, web-based delivery while working. Companies offer these types of courses to their employees so that they will improve their skills outside the workplace. Furthermore, by providing their employees with these specific blended training, they also achieve to train their employees without paying for expensive training that are available. Singh and Reed (2001, p. 1) define BL as 'a learning program where more than one delivery mode is being used with the objective of optimizing the learning outcome and cost of program delivery'. In their definition,

they do not elaborate on what they mean with the delivery mode. Valiathan (2002, p. 1) suggests that these delivery modes could be 'face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning, and self-paced learning'.

Despite being originated in the business world in connection with corporate training, mostly as a cost-saving measure (Sharma & Barrett, 2007), BL was later applied in higher education (MacDonald, 2006) and is also currently a buzz term in language teaching (Motteram & Sharma, 2009). Yet, the definition of blended learning has been open to the argument since it was first introduced (Graham, Allen & Ure, 2003; Hofmann, 2006; Jones, 2006; Oliver & Trigwell, 2005; Whitelock & Jelfs, 2003). In higher education and the field of ELT, some argue that it is a challenge to define the term blended learning since there seems to exist various definitions (Kerres & De Witt, 2003; MacDonald, 2006; Oliver & Trigwell, 2005; Sharma & Barrett, 2007; Sharpe et al., 2006;). In addition to the various descriptions the researchers provide to the field, blended learning may even mean different things to different people as well depending on the culture and the country (Driscoll, 2002). Earlier literature suggests that some researchers basically focused on the what BL included. For instance, BL is explained as an instruction that blends online and F2F teaching (Reay, 2001). Thorne (2002) suggests that "blended learning is a mixture of traditional classroom teaching and online learning, virtual classes, voice messages, e-mail, teleconferencing, online written texts and videos" (p. 80), whereas Oliver and Trigwell (2005) describe blended learning as "the integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches". One of the simplest definitions is that of Graham's (2006) which simply defines blended learning as a combination of face-to-face and online learning.

There has been a notable increase in the popularity of BL in recent years, yet this pervasiveness also led to the diversity and debates on its definitions (Chew et al., 2008b). Shepard (2005) referred to BL as 'e-learning', and Banados (2006, p. 534) referred to it as 'b-learning'. Others used percentages to specifically define these terms. Smith and Kurthen (2007) in Gruba and Hinkelman (2012, p. 4) divide the blended learning into four different types: 1) web-enhanced, 2) blended, 3) hybrid and 4) fully online. When a subject employs a minimal amount of online materials (such as posting a syllabus and course announcements), it is called 'web-enhanced'. If a subject utilizes some important online activities with a percentage that is less

than 45% along with F2F instruction, it is referred to as ‘blended’. In hybrid learning, online activities replace 45-80% of F2F class meetings. And lastly, as can be inferred from the term itself, fully online lessons are composed of 80% or more online learning materials. Littlejohn and Pegler (2007) followed a different path to simplify the confusion by setting four general areas: 1) the space blend: F2F or technology-mediated communication, 2) the time blend: geographically and availability; synchronously or asynchronously, 3) the media blend: tools, technologies and resources, and 4) the activity blend: learning and teaching activities, individual or group (p. 75-76).

Compared to the diversity of BL definitions that can be found in corporate training and higher education, blended learning definitions in language learning and teaching seem clear and concise. Neumeier (2005, p. 164) defines BL in her study as ‘a combination of F2F and computer-assisted learning (CAL) in a single teaching and learning environment’. Similarly, Stracke (2007, p. 57) describes blended language learning as ‘a particular learning and teaching environment, that combines F2F and computer-assisted language learning (CALL)’. Dudeney and Hockly (2007) and Sharma and Barrett (2007) contribute to the field with similar definitions to Neumeier’s (2005). Sharma and Barrett (2007) substitute the definition with ‘technology’ instead of using the CALL mode:

> ‘Blended learning refers to a language course which combines a F2F classroom component with an appropriate use of technology. The term technology covers a wide range of recent technologies, such as the Internet, CD-ROMs and interactive whiteboards’. (Sharma & Barrett, 2007, p. 7)

Likewise, Dudeney and Hockly (2007, p. 137) also do not include the term CAL(L) in their definition yet replace it with ‘online’ delivery. According to them, BL is a combination of online and face-to-face instruction. They also widen their description by saying that ‘in some situations, the digital element is done offline with a CD-ROM’. In brief, there exist a wide variety of definitions of blended learning in the literature. Most definitions are simply variations of a few common themes which were documented by Graham, Allen, and Ure (2003) as: (1) combination of delivery media and tools employed (Singh and Reed, 2001; Orey, 2002), (2) combination of a

few pedagogical approaches or instructional methods (Driscoll, 2002; Rossett, 2002), and (3) combination of F2F traditional learning with online instruction (Reay, 2001; Rooney, 2003; Sands, 2002; Ward & LaBranche, 2003; Young, 2002). It should be noted that this present study has implemented the definition which was given by Graham (2006), that is blended learning is a combination of face-to-face and computer-mediated communication.

2.4.1 Computer-mediated communication and English language teaching. Blended learning, which has been implemented in many higher education institutions, may be simply defined as combining face-to-face (F2F) instruction with computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Bonk & Graham, 2005). CMC has become one of the most commonly used media for teaching and learning English speaking skills (Bueno-Alastuey & López Pérez, 2014; Ko, 2012; Yanguas, 2010). With a broader explanation, CMC has been referred to as an electronic exchange of information by using the computers as input, storage, output and routing devices. CMC may also be described as "communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers" (Herring, 1996, p.1).

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) consists of two dimensions: time and modality (Hubbard, 2004; Warschauer, 2001). In terms of time, CMC activities can be real-time (synchronous) or delayed (asynchronous) (Peterson, 2009; Yamada, 2009). Synchronous CMC activities happen online at the same time while the participants are all online either reading or listening to the messages and do everything simultaneously. On the other hand, in asynchronous CMC, participants may join the lesson whenever and wherever it is convenient for them to do the assigned activities. In brief, with these current technologies, learners may collaborate synchronously in a chat-room, or video/ audio conferencing context or they may asynchronously work in wikis, blogs, e-mails, bulletin boards (Sotillo, 2000) either with their classmates or with even other foreign language learners anytime anywhere. Regarding the modality, CMC activities can be text-based that use written forms of language such as email, online discussion forums, and other text on the Internet or can focus on oral discourse via online chat rooms. Given the fact that CMC has time and modality dimensions while deciding which specific dimensions to work with, instructors may first consider the learner level of the target language. For instance,

synchronous communication is considered to be more convenient and effective for high-proficiency learners since it requires learners to generate language faster as it is simultaneous, which may lead to pressure and cognitive load on individuals (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). On the contrary, in asynchronous communication, learners have considerably more time for creating output, which works well with all levels and is thought to be more suitable for low-proficiency learners. All in all, the findings of several studies (Mendelson, 2010; Satar & Ozdener, 2008) show that CMC may show significant effects during the acquisition of beginner level productive skills. Specifically, in a foreign language teaching and learning context, CMC offers L2 learners the opportunity to speak in the target language and it is believed to be especially important for L2 students who may not have both the sufficient time and the authentic context in their own countries (Warschauer, 1996).

Studies on synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) so far have mainly concentrated on text-based communication (e.g., Blake, 2000; Greenfield, 2003), on the other hand, voice-based CMC in a blended learning environment did not get much attention (Chen, 2015). Yet recently, the focus of CMC has also shifted to investigating various types of asynchronous voice-based CMC on L2 oral skill development. Among these are; podcasts (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007), video blogs (Hung, 2011; Shih, 2010), and voice blogs (Hsu et al., 2008; Huang, 2015; Sun, 2009, 2012). Some studies reported that communication activities implemented in both SCMC and ACMC settings have beneficial effects on learners' oral proficiency development (Abrams, 2003; Blake, 2009; Chun, 1994; Hirotani, 2009; Jepson, 2005; Mendelson, 2010; Payne & Ross, 2005; Payne & Whitney, 2002; Satar & Ozdener, 2008; Sykes, 2005). It was also found that online discussions promote learning skills and it increases the quality of learning (Harasim, 1987; Wu & Hiltz, 2004). However, even though research is mostly focused on synchronous communication, there are several studies that suggest learners who have a low cognitive level show a better performance when they are engaged in asynchronous communication since it allows more time to think critically (Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010) and enables more time for pre-planning and reflection (Ono et al., 2015). In addition, specifically for non-native learners, implementation of asynchronous discussions may provide the learners with the development of English language skills while increasing

participation in a way that traditional instruction may not (Kahmi-Stein, 2000; Lamy & Goodfellow, 1999). It is also pointed out that asynchronous communication may be considered as a better medium to help L2 learners overcome their linguistic barriers (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2003). ACMC enables language learners to engage in interactions with a wider range of interlocutors because ACMC is not bounded by the limits of time or space (Kitade, 2008). This facilitates participation among students because it allows all students an equal opportunity to respond to a topic (Birch & Volkov, 2007; Ortega, 1997), and is also conducive to the presentation of heterogeneous perspectives (Chen & Looi, 2007). Consequently, students learn to express themselves, are exposed to alternative points of view, and are better positioned to respect differences in opinions, since none of the participants can easily dominate the discussion (Branon & Essex, 2001; Ortega, 1997). Furthermore, the asynchronous features also provide learners with more time to think and edit. Students involved in online discussions create more thoughtful responses because they have more time to process input (Abrams, 2003) and to reflect on what they want to express (Althaus, 1996).

To put it in a nutshell, several researchers have pointed out the fact that ACMC brings positive changes into face-to-face classroom interactions (Berge & Collins, 1995; Harasim, 1990). It is suggested that CMC activities may lower the anxiety level FL learners encounter while speaking in the target language (Paulsen, 1995). In addition, in order to improve the speaking skills of low-level students, ACMC tasks are more suitable. That's why the researcher of the present study has integrated the ACMC tasks into F2F instruction in an attempt to improve oral proficiency and reduce speaking anxiety.

2.4.2 The benefits of blending face-to-face instruction and computer-mediated communication in teaching English as a foreign language context. The popularity of CMC in education has led to numerous research studies being conducted aiming to learn more about its effectiveness during the acquisition of foreign languages (Chapelle, 2001; Guth & Helm, 2010; Lamy & Goodfellow, 2010; Warschauer 1997a, 2000; Warschauer & Kern, 2000). In this part of the literature review, the benefits of combining face-to-face and online learning environments will be explored as: 1) improvement in oral proficiency, 2) low anxiety environment for

oral communication, 3) more active learning strategies employed, 4) flexibility to work independently, 5) peer-to-peer learning, 6) increased student participation and output, 7) equal chance to participate, 8) chance to record the output, 9) teacher feedback, 10) institutional benefits. Additionally, literature on ACMC while teaching EFL speaking skill will be shared.

2.4.2.1 Improvement in oral proficiency. Several research studies investigated the effectiveness of CMC on improving oral production by comparing it to traditional face-to-face instruction. Salaberry (2000) explored the use of Spanish past-tense markers both in face-to-face communication and chat. He found that in the chat setting, students were more likely to use past tense in required contexts while in face-to-face communication, they used the present tense to express past events. He concluded that monitoring time had a positive effect on learners' success. In another study, Abrams (2003) examined the effect of synchronous and asynchronous text-based CMC on oral production of German in terms of the quality and quantity of language that was produced by the learners. In the study, there were two experimental groups and one control group that engaged in normal classroom activities. One of the experimental groups were involved in asynchronous activities during a week whereas the other experimental group participated in one hour of synchronous CMC before each of the follow-up interviews. Even though there were no significant differences between the two modes, it was observed that student learning outcomes are more superior in asynchronous online discussion than classroom discussion. Some researchers also investigated the effectiveness of text-based CMC and face-to-face communication for language acquisition. For instance, De la Fuente (2003) found that both text-based CMC and face-to-face communication enable learning new words while face-to-face communication is more efficient for the development of new vocabulary and she drew the conclusion that "text-based CMC negotiated interaction may not be the best answer for development of productive, oral skills" (p. 74). In another study, Mclntosh et al. (2003) implemented Wimba Voice tool and asked participants to take part in organized voice-based debates and discussions in class and online to improve their oral skills. The results show that the online environment supported the development of communicative competence in an environment where student felt less anxious. In

another study conducted with students on an English program in a Chilean University, Banados (2006) found that there is 'a remarkable improvement in speaking skills' as well as 'important improvements in all the skills, especially in listening, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar' (p. 542, 543). Furthermore, Hsu et al. (2008) explored the use of audio-blogs in EFL instruction and noted that audio-blogging enhances learners' speaking skills and enables learners receive individual feedback. In another study, Sun (2009) implemented blogs and discovered that blogging helps learners develop skills such as conceptualization, brainstorming, articulation, monitoring, evaluating, self-presentation and information exchange. Later, with an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of extensive speaking in fluency, pronunciation, complexity, and accuracy, Sun (2012) carried out a study by applying voice blogs. The results indicate that learners observed improvements in their oral proficiency. On the other hand, no significant improvement was observed related to pronunciation, language complexity, fluency, or accuracy.

2.4.2.2 Low-anxiety environment for oral communication. Several researchers have investigated the effects of implementing ACMC tasks on foreign language speaking anxiety that most students experience when speaking in the target language. More specifically, CMC discussions provide an opportunity for ESL students, who may be reluctant to speak up in a face-to-face environment, to engage in class discussions (Curtin, 2002; Kahmi-Stein, 2000; Lamy & Goodfellow, 1999; Murphy & Coleman, 2004; Ortega, 1997; Warschauer, 1997) and some studies have indicated that students experienced less fear of negative evaluation by others while using the online medium (Beauvois, 1996; Chun, 1994; Kelm, 1992; Kivela, 1996). Many studies also indicate that CMC can lower foreign language learners' anxiety levels (Perez, 2003; Roed, 2003; Warschauer, 1996) since this environment provides a low-stress atmosphere that motivates the learners and significantly facilitates self-expression (Beauvois, 1994, 1996, 1999; Kivela, 1996; Kronenberg, 1995; Lee, 2004; Meunier, 1998; Skinner & Austin, 1999; Warschauer, 1996a). Furthermore, as it reduces social-context clues such as gender, race, and status as well as nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language, CMC is supposed to provide relatively a safer and more relaxed environment for foreign language learners, especially for the shy or less confident ones (Hanson-Smith, 2001; Sproull & Kiesler,

1991). In addition, numerous research studies indicate that students are less afraid of making errors in the presence of others in the electronic medium than they are in the traditional classroom (Beauvois, 1996; Chun, 1994; Kelm, 1992; Kivela, 1996). Computer conferencing technologies such as email, chat rooms, or bulletin boards may provide learners with a low-anxiety environment for oral interaction in a second language, as their special features reduce not only the fear of being 'on the spot' that learners suffer while they are speaking in the classroom but also the fear of making mistakes in the presence of the others and being negatively evaluated by both the classmates and the instructors (Aida, 1994; Bailey, 1983; Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990). Since learners are freed from the pressure of the anxiety of the classroom by learning in a CM environment, they also tend to take the initiative more than they actually would in a regular classroom (Chun, 1994). In a study carried out by Kelm (1992), the participants of the study stated that they were able to interact with others without feeling the pressure that the traditional classroom creates. Similar results can be observed in other research. Kroonenberg (1995) found that the usage of bulletin boards enabled everyone to share their opinions with the others and as the slow-paced interaction among the students made them feel more comfortable, they found it more effective to use chat mode. Furthermore, the results also show that the fear of negative evaluation both by their instructor and peers was the underlying reason for the anxiety that arises when they were asked to speak in the target language. In another study, Kivela (1996) concluded that having more time to think and organize their ideas, almost 72 % of the students felt more confident while sharing their ideas in the electronic environment. Beauvois (1996) validated Kivela's (1996) finding in that the nature of the CMC environment helped learners feel less time and peer pressure. In a similar fashion, Warschauer (1996a) conducted a study in an attempt to compare F2F and online discussions via chatroom in an EFL classroom. Compared to F2F classroom, the students stated that they felt less stressful in the CM environment. It was also found that the CM environment provided the students with a platform in which they could express themselves more comfortably and creatively than in the F2F environment. Similarly, Skinner and Austin (1999) suggest that the CM environment promoted a more confident atmosphere among the students who were usually shy, which enabled them to produce more messages in the computer conferencing environment compared to F2F.

Furthermore, several studies have focused on the role of online tasks in reducing learner anxiety by integrating specific tools such as Wimba Voice. In their study, Cho and Carey (2001) observed that certain tasks in the CM environment reduced the anxiety level students felt. What's more, an increase in student accuracy and fluency was present both in listening and speaking tasks. McIntosh et al. (2003) conducted a pilot project in an English for Academic Purposes course at a university by implementing a voice-based conferencing tool called Wimba. Students were asked to participate in debates and discussions both in class and online to enhance their oral skills. The results indicated that students had positive opinions of the online environment and the online discussions helped most learners feel less anxious while speaking by offering a non-threatening environment for oral practice. However, some students were not quite comfortable posting their recordings to the online system and stated that they did not like the idea of listening their own voice or they felt rather embarrassed. Nevertheless, most of the students who participated in the study said that they felt more confident when speaking in class after engaging in the asynchronous discussions. Moreover, analyzing the students' postings on Wimba discussion board, the author considered Wimba as "a viable tool for language learning and effective in enhancing students' listening and speaking skills" (McIntosh et al., 2003, p. 68). Poza's (2005) study showed similar results. In her study, Poza (2005) investigated the effects of asynchronous computer voice conferencing technology and found that the absence of time pressure helped learners to be more comfortable and less anxious. Additionally, since students had the chance to edit their entries when they could, they felt more confident in the quality of their contributions. On the other hand, Lee (2004) obtained some results that conflict with previous research. Despite the CM environment, students still experienced language anxiety and were afraid of making mistakes when talking. However, the author draws attention to the fact that the proficiency level of the students, their computer skills, and age differences may have had an impact on the study results. Likewise, Kivela (1996) and Beauvois (1994) also found that some students could not improve their oral skills. Yet, it was linked to the text-based nature of the technology that was implemented.

A drawback of asynchronous discussion, nevertheless, is the time delay between postings, resulting in a less dynamic exchange of ideas. In the study carried

out by McIntosh et al. (2003), some students expressed frustration with this by saying 'Wimba takes too much time'. They liked the debate but believed that the feedback from the other students was not instant enough. Likewise, Poza (2011) obtained similar results in terms of reduction of anxiety by using Wimba as the voice conferencing communication tool. The interviews suggested that the tool proved itself to reduce L2 anxiety, yet it was also suggested that not all participants have benefitted from the discussions equally. Among the reasons are the presence of other in the language laboratory, the proximity of the computers, restrictive hours, and lastly technical difficulties.

2.4.2.3 More active learning strategies employed. Institutions today are required to provide their learners with the 21st century skills which are assumed to be necessary to be life-long learners. That is why these institutions pay attention to develop their learners' reasoning skills that will eventually help them synthesize, analyze, and integrate material while learning (Elder 1991). The use of CMC is supposed to increase the amount of the active learning strategies used by learners (Morgan, 2002). According to Larkin-Hein (2001), the discussions that learners have in an online environment have the potential to enable learners to adopt a more active role during the process of learning and promote the acquisition of higher order skills (Aviv, 2000; Gibbs, 1992; Murphy & Coleman, 2004; Shapley, 2000). Furthermore, online discussions give learners the opportunity to reflect on their responses (Heckman & Annabi, 2003) while promoting "high levels of cognitive engagement and critical thinking" (Aviv, Erlich, Ravid & Geva, 2003; Thomas, 2002; Wu & Hiltz, 2004).

2.4.2.4 Flexibility to work independently. It is proposed that when the traditional face-to-face instruction is supported with technology, the effectiveness of L2 learning increases since learners have the flexibility to work independently, that is they choose the time they study at their own pace (Collentine, 2000; Felix, 2003; Singh, 2003). In a study carried out by Aycock, Garnham and Kaleta (2002), it was found that 80% of the students who attended a blended learning course at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee campus, thought that the blended instruction offered them the opportunity to control the time and the place of their own learning.

The students were highly motivated and satisfied with the blended format of the course. Qualitative studies at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee campus also showed that students learned better at the blended coursed when compared to traditional courses.

In contrast to the real-time modality of synchronous CMC, asynchronous CMC may allow L2 learners to express themselves at their own pace and continue their learning in a less threatening online environment (Sun, 2009; Zhao, 2003). In addition, as learners participate in the online discussions at their own pace, they may have more time to think through their entries and edit them before sharing them in the discussion (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2003; Ortega, 1997, Poza 2005).

2.4.2.5 Peer-to-peer learning. Previous literature on collaborative learning suggest that when learners work collaboratively with their classmates, a higher degree of learning takes place, which is accompanied by increased levels of satisfaction with the overall learning and the course outcomes (Johnson & Johnson 1989). Kern (1998, p. 81) found out that computer-mediated social environments permitted "one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many communication". Studies further support the claim that CMC activities in a blended learning environment may create more possibilities for interaction with remote peer review of projects (Levine & Wake, 2000) and enable a considerable amount of emphasis on peer-to-peer learning (Collis, 2003). There is also some evidence that learning may be much more cooperative when learners are engaged in a chat environment. For instance, Salaberry (2000) found that students tried to help one another more often in order to succeed in communicating. It was also observed that there was more scaffolding applied in chat compared to in classroom settings (p. 19). Similarly, Smith (2004) points to the positive effects for CMC negotiated interaction on lexical acquisition. The results of the study indicated that when students face unknown lexical items, they engage in negotiated interaction with others to make meaning clearer, which helps the students to remember these items considerably better later on.

2.4.2.6 Increased student participation and output. Learner participation and interaction between learners is significant in successful language acquisition in both face-to-face and blended instruction (Sun, 2011). Furthermore, it is claimed that

greater participation in course communication enables learners to experience greater cognitive and explanatory learning (Paskey, 2001). Research has found that the CM learning environment promotes increased participation in the target language and that there was an increase also in both the quantity and the quality of the sentences the learners created (Poza, 2011). Furthermore, it was observed that learners who normally wouldn't normally participate much in a regular F2F conversations were actually more active in a CM learning environment (Hampel & Baber, 2003). For instance, Abrams (2003) compared two CMC environments (networked-based synchronous chat and asynchronous discussion boards) with F2F discussion. Abrams found that students who practiced with written chat subsequently produced the greatest quantity of output in post-test face-to-face discussions, whereas those who used asynchronous chat produced the least amount of output. Abrams suggested that training with synchronous chat can help students produce more idea-units than training with F2F discussion and asynchronous discussion boards. Skyes (2005) found that Spanish learners who used written chat to practice pragmatic skills produced more complex output and used a wider variety of pragmatic strategies at post-test than did students in either voice chat or face-to-face discussion practice groups. Sykes hypothesized that this effect may be due to learners' having more time to construct, and so practice, complex structures because of the natural delay inherent in written chat interactions. Recent advancements in educational pedagogies have contributed to form a more learner-centered learning environment. For instance, Kamhi and Stein (2000) explored the integration of bulletin boards in a language teaching methods course. The results showed that face-to-face discussions were mostly teacher initiated followed by student response and teacher evaluation while the bulletin board discussions were observed to be more student-centered, that is, discussions were mainly initiated by the students. As a result, the asynchronous nature of the study created opportunities for more students to be heard. In a similar study, Poza (2005) found that online environments enable increased student participation and students used more linguistically complex sentences and ideas. In addition, compared to face-to-face conversations, the online environment encourages learners to actively engage in the activities which results in equal interaction among learners. Hence, in blended communication the interaction becomes student-centered since student participation increases and teacher interventions decrease. To sum up,

studies so far suggest that the combination of face-to-face and online learning environments results in a higher level of student interaction and participation compared to implementation of face-to-face instruction alone (Dziuban et al., 2004; Waddoups & Howell, 2002; Wingard, 2004).

2.4.2.7 Equal chance to participate. Previous studies suggest that internet technologies provide equal chances to all learners and everyone may contribute in the discussions (Everett & Ahern, 1994; Lamy & Goodfellow, 1999; Ortega, 1997; Pratt & Sullivan, 1994; Warschauer, 2000), which may mean that dominant students would have less opportunities to dominate the conversation as may happen in face-to-face communication in traditional environments (Ortega, 1997). Warschauer (1997), citing Sproull & Kiesler (1991), proposes that CMC offers more equal interaction due to the following facts: a) CMC lessens social context clues related to race, gender, handicap, accent, and status; b) CMC lowers nonverbal cues, such as frowning and hesitating; and c) CMC enables learners to participate independently at their own time and pace. A number of studies also report that CMC is less hierarchical and more student-centered than traditional classroom settings (Beauvois, 1998; Salaberry, 2000; Warschauer, 1995). More specifically, CMC activities enable learners to send their messages whenever they want, and produce more output compared to traditional classroom settings as they do not have to wait for confirmation from their instructor to speak (Collentine & Collentine, 1997). Aligned with these findings, Beauvois (1998) found that students initiate topics in CMC activities more often compared to the classroom settings, where topics are mainly initiated by the teacher. Hierarchical relationships in traditional classrooms exist not only among teachers and students, but also among more and less advanced students.

2.4.2.8 Chance to record the output. Unlike the discussions in a traditional classroom, asynchronous discussions can be recorded and can easily be referred to anytime by either the instructor or learners. Harmer (2007) argues that when students record their oral performance in the target language, they may listen to these recordings, assess their oral performance, and follow their progress. For instance, McIntosh et al. (2003) propose that digital tools used in CMC environments are valuable tools for self-reflection. One student who participated in their study shared

that ‘I can record my opinion and find shortcomings of my spoken English’. As a consequence, CMC tool are invaluable during the learning process and students may reflect on their own learning using these digital tools (Shadiev et al., 2014).

2.4.2.9 Teacher feedback. In addition to the previously shared advantages of asynchronous CMC environments, they are also significant for L2 learning due to the fact they offer peer and instructor feedback (Meskill & Anthony, 2005). Aydin (2014) advocates that as well as promoting more student-centered learning experience, these environments also help teachers to assess their students instantly and to give feedback to each learner. And as for the students, it provides both instructor and peer-evaluation (Kabata, Wiebe, & Chao, 2005).

2.4.2.10 Institutional benefits. Besides the advantages it provides learners during the L2 acquisition, blended instruction is also believed to offer some advantages to educational institutions (Owston et al., 2013). Owston et al. further goes on to suggest that:

> With regard to student satisfaction, an overwhelming body of research demonstrates that students have greater satisfaction with blended courses, compared with both traditional face-to-face or fully online modes of education since students can not only benefit from increased time and spatial flexibility for their study, wider and easier access to learning resources, and a higher level of autonomy in regulating their learning but also they can communicate directly with faculty and, in case they need it, to receive immediate support and guidance. **(**Owston et al., 2013, p. 38)

Furthermore, Carroll (2003) suggests that with the integration of blended instruction institutions may address their students’ needs, different learner styles and the ones who needs extra practice with the target language. Likewise, Wingard (2004) proposes that educational institutions may design their courses taking their students specific needs and learning styles into consideration by implementing certain CMC tools. To be more specific, if certain students need extra practice, they may be provided with more repetition and practice opportunities without stealing any time from face-to-face class time.

In conclusion, these specific characteristics of CMC may help learners to feel more confident while speaking in the target language as they have the opportunity to practice as much as they desire, which enables institutions to offer a better learning environment to their learners.

2.5 The Student and Instructor Perceptions of Blending Face-to-face Instruction and Computer-mediated Communication

As mentioned earlier, the vast integration and also availability of online learning technologies has given rise to increased usage of CM instructional elements into F2F learning. Research on CMC so far has revealed that both the instructors and the students hold positive perceptions towards foreign language learning through the use of CMC activities. Kabata et al., (2005) investigated the perceptions of students and instructors of Wimba Voice tool and concluded that students consider Wimba discussions beneficial for enhancing L2 pronunciation. It was also noted that students encountered some technical problems while using the tool. Nonetheless, students stated that they enjoyed using the online tool since it was flexible in terms of time, it provided them with feedback to their oral performances, it is more user-friendly compared to a tape recorder, and eventually, it offered a low anxiety level unlike the classroom settings. Similar results were obtained in Wang's study (2006) that both the instructor and students have rather positive perceptions toward voice mediated asynchronous communication and they consider voice-mediated CMC activities to be more suitable for beginning and intermediate L2 learners in order to practice speaking.

Chiu, Liou, and Yeh (2007) created the Web-based conversation environment called CandleTalk with an intention to assist EFL learners to practice explicit speech acts training so that they could improve their oral competence. When students talked to the CandleTalk, the system automatically evaluated if the students produce appropriate input. The results suggested that the tool helped non-native English major students during the acquisition of speech acts, and most of the students hold positive perceptions toward the instruction that employed voice mediated communication.

To explore the benefits and downsides of the blended instruction, Chen and Looi (2007) compared online discussion in a face to face class with its two counterparts, namely; off-class online discussion as well as in-class and face-to-face oral discussion. It was reported that students were pleased with the particular educational pedagogy, and furthermore, the applied approach helped students improve their academic success. On the other hand, Delialioglu and Yildirim (2007) found that students stated that reduced face-to-face communication challenged them while completing the tasks in terms of self-discipline and time management skills.

Several studies reflect such problems that students face while doing the activities, yet it is also suggested that these problems may be avoided with a careful instructional design. For instance, Lee (2007) investigated participants experiences with the video-conferencing communication that aims to promote speaking skills. Looking at the interview results, she concluded that it is of great significance to design the online environment effectively and motivating, and instructors need to select the linguistic context carefully and eventually offer training in video-conferencing prior to the study. In Hsu et al.'s study (2008), that combined web-based reading texts and voice blogging, students reported that they improved both their speaking and listening by doing voice blogging assignments and they also benefitted from the feedback they received from the teacher. When the results of the study are taken into consideration, it was concluded that students appreciated the voice-based CMC instruction owing to the fact that it enhanced their English language learning, provided social networking among classmates, and helped them construct knowledge. Similar results were observed in a Kember et al.'s (2010) study. The data shows that "Students believe that using interactive technologies helps them to increase learning productivity, encourage a deeper approach to learning, promote the development of communication skills, and improve their understanding of course content".

Ducate and Lomicka (2009) investigated whether podcasts enhanced pronunciation skills of the students in an intermediate German class and found that students recognized their pronunciation mistakes, and even though it did not lead to any significant improvement after the intervention, students could monitor their phonological development. Furthermore, students held positive perceptions of the voice CMC activities and they enjoyed creating podcasts. In a not dissimilar study,

Grgurovic (2011) explored the effects of a blended learning environment that integrated an LMS system. The results of the study suggested that students benefitted from the blending learning environment with regard to improving pronunciation, and instructors could offer individualized instruction.

Several studies suggest that learners may prefer asynchronous video communication to synchronous video communication. In Rosen's (2009), the students experienced both synchronous and asynchronous video conferencing and the results of the study suggest that L2 students prefer asynchronous video conferencing using Wimba voice discussion board to synchronous classroom-based videoconferencing since they feel more comfortable while speaking in the target language without the immediate proximity of their classmates. As a result, the author hypothesized that asynchronous video CMC using the voice conferencing tool may be integrated into the curriculum in order to provide learners with additional speaking opportunities outside of the classroom settings.

Despite the fact that audio CMC includes vocal cues that help learners understand the conveyed message, it is obvious that it lacks visual cues such as facial expressions and hand gestures. Hence, the focus has shifted to use asynchronous video communication (Borup, 2011). For instance, Griffiths and Graham (2009a) conducted a study to investigate how asynchronous video communication would help include both verbal and non-verbal cues in order to create a high level of social presence and instructor immediacy in an online learning environment. In the study (Griffiths & Graham, 2009a), the instructor implemented asynchronous video while describing the instructions of the material and ask students questions as part of their assignment. To complete their assignments, students were asked to record their videos and shared them as email attachments, and the instructor responded to each student via asynchronous video. The data of the study suggest that asynchronous video communication may actually utilize the advantages of both conventional F2F and online instructional environments by combining these two different learning environments.

Wang (2010) conducted a study to observe online collaborative characteristics as well as offline interaction among students from two different colleges in a blended learning ACMC environment in an attempt to find out the extent of collaborative learning in an online environment. In the study, students' offline atmosphere in-class

was also considered whether the implementation of in class online discussions after doing the in-class activities would have a significant effect. Results indicate that asynchronous environment may provide the necessary conditions for collaborative learning to take place and furthermore integrating ICT (information and communication technology) tools in a blended learning environment promotes social interaction among the learners and ensures their engagement even though it may not ensure the adaptation of active learning strategies student might need. In Wang's (2010) study, the online atmosphere in carrying out the ACMC activities was categorized into five: 1) struggling with platform operations, 2) handling technical problems, 3) passive attitudes towards the procedure, 4) tense atmosphere in class, and 5) engagement in tasks.

Several researchers also combined F2F instruction and video-based ACMC to investigate the effects of the blended design. In Shih's (2010) study, video-based blogs were combined with in-class speaking instruction with the purpose of improving English public speaking skills. The course had four phases including traditional face-to-face classroom teaching, video construction, giving peer comments on the constructed video clips, uploading revised video clips, face-to-face discussions with the instructor about the video clips, and in-class presentations and lectures. Students perceived blended instruction as interesting and the flexible nature of the approach was appreciated by the students. The students also believed that the blended learning environment improved their public speaking skills and it made it possible to learn collaboratively with their classmates. In a similar study, Huang and Hung (2009) investigated the perceptions of 17 Taiwanese EFL students with respect to video-blogging that was integrated with an aim of enhancing speaking skills and received positive results. The participated students perceived video blogging both as advantageous and disadvantageous. Its visibility and feasibility were considered to be an advantage whereas technical issues, affective interferences and no connection between the real life and the virtual environment were acknowledged as drawbacks. On the other hand, the results of the study suggest that integrating video blogs as electronic-speaking portfolios allow both the teacher and the student to recognize students' weak points while speaking English, enable the teacher to provide the weak students with more speaking opportunities, and lastly reduced foreign language speaking anxiety. Furthermore, the study also suggests that video-blogging may be

used to archive student performances, follow students' progress and may offer an alternative to the existing speaking assessment.

In order to examine the usefulness and effectiveness of the voice forum in developing English speaking skills, Pop et al. (2011) engaged L2 learners in Voxopop activities- a voice CMC tool that allows threaded discussions with an online community of speakers on assigned topics- upon doing speaking activities in class. The interview results demonstrate that students who participated in the study felt proud to create and publish entries online and held positive perceptions towards both the voice forum and interactions that took place. Moreover, low-intermediate students stated that the asynchronous nature of the voice forum provided students with time to prepare, edit and share their responses as well as helping them reduce the L2 speaking anxiety that they often feel in face-to-face communications. In a similar fashion, Gleason and Suvorov (2011) explored the perceptions of international teaching assistants towards ACMC with the integration of Wimba Voice (WV) in order to develop L2 speaking skills as well as investigating how ACMC may promote the development of these learners' L2 selves. The findings of the study indicate that asynchronous WV tasks may provide foreign language learners with more self-confidence as it supplies additional speaking opportunities. However, learners hold diverse perceptions concerning the use of asynchronous WV tasks in promoting L2 oral proficiency. In addition, most of the learners may choose oral CMC environments where they can continue interaction and negotiate meaning with their classmates. As mentioned, the results of the effectiveness of WV tasks on participants' perceptions of their future L2 selves were ambiguous, yet the author suggests that one of the reasons for this may be the short period of time allocated for the WV tasks.

Several studies have indicated that implementing a blended instruction encourages learners to be more enthusiastic towards learning a foreign language. Alastuey and Perez (2014) investigated students' perceptions of the efficacy of ICT in a course that integrated blended instruction. When compared to the students who were taught using F2F instruction, students who were taught by blended instruction had a considerable level of intrinsic motivation towards learning English. Furthermore, they valued English lesson as a subject and were more satisfied with the learning environment. Similarly, Sarkeil and Azarnoosh (2014) examined the

perceptions and motivation of both the Iranian EFL teachers and students towards the use of CMC to assist teaching speaking skill. Findings of the study indicate that students are much more enthusiastic about speaking, and the EFL teachers and students hold positive perceptions towards the voice and text-based CMC instruction. Nevertheless, teachers' responses revealed some difficulties such as curriculum issues, access to the computer or the Internet, and finding international partners while doing the tasks. As a result, the participants suggest that there are several points to be considered while integrating CMC tools into teaching: needs analysis, proper training, and administrative support.

Lee (2014) examined whether the digital news-storytelling promote the development of content knowledge as well as speaking skills by focusing on the effects of peer comments on asynchronous CMC from sociocultural perspectives. During one semester, 15 advanced Spanish students produced and exchanged digital news by using a multimedia tool, VoiceThread. The participants were asked to read or listen to the news online, write their own scripts and finally record their voice, which helped them to practice four language-skills. The findings of the study indicate that creating digital news and sharing them with the other learners permit students to use their voices for expressing themselves and self-reflection. Even though the study mainly focused on literacy skills, students also improved their speaking fluency and pronunciation while creating digital entries since they had additional opportunities to use the target language. The study also proposes that the blended learning tasks need to be carefully designed and instructors may assist learners with guidance by offering 'thought-provoking questions' while learners are doing critical reflection. In another study, Huang (2015) asked Intermediate level Taiwanese EFL learners to read online and share their viewpoints with the other students in the class. Findings suggest that students perceived voice blogging to be beneficial since it promotes language learning, knowledge construction, and social networking. Additionally, participants made some suggestions, such as teaching more online search skills, applying better online recording system, combining F2F and online interactions, so that the project would improve. In another study that explored the effectiveness of voice-blogging, Chen (2015) found out that students hold affirmative perceptions toward learning English with blended instruction. Moreover, they believe that the asynchronous CMC voice forum tasks helped them improve their oral proficiency, accuracy, and

pronunciation. In the study, the nature of the asynchronous voice forum that allows learners to continue learning and relate to the knowledge they gained in the class with after-class speaking assignments is perceived to be one of the benefits of ACMC.

Some studies have also reported the effectiveness of implementing blended language learning on enhancing listening skills in addition to speaking skills. In Guangying's (2014) study, the experimental group was taught with blended instruction whereas the control group received traditional instruction, and the findings show that the blended learning approach proves itself to be efficient in developing learners speaking and listening skills while promoting learner autonomy. Furthermore, the results of the scores received from four standardized language exams indicate that the experimental group outperformed the control group.

In addition to a blended instruction that combines face-to-face and online instruction in traditional education contexts, video-based ACMC was also integrated into distance learning environments. Borup et al. (2014) conducted a study to explore the effectiveness of asynchronous video-based communication in improving both students' and instructors' social presence and learning. The results of the interviews suggested that the asynchronous video-based instruction was a valuable tool for establishing instructors' social presence. In other words, a large number of students indicated that they felt they were actually talking to their instructor while making the video comments. They also expressed that seeing the instructors' video helped them regard the instructor as a real person and the communication during the course was very much alike face-to-face instruction. Furthermore, receiving video feedback from the instructor was considered to be valuable, which supports the research that claims asynchronous audio feedback is effective (Ice et al., 2007; Oomen-Early et al., 2008).

Several researchers investigated the effectiveness of integrating asynchronous audio-based communication instead of using asynchronous text-based discussions. To give an example, in their case study Hew and Cheung (2012) found that students express their feelings and understand others' better in audio-based communication compared to text-based communication. Moreover, students stated that audio-based interaction was more real-life like and it enabled students who had poor typing skills to engage more in discussions. Nonetheless, a large number of the students who participated in the study still preferred text discussion boards as they felt more

comfortable structuring their comments and reading others' comments was more effective than listening to their comments. However, Hew and Cheung (2012) emphasize that choosing structure over expressiveness, in other words, text-based over audio-based communication, may be due to the fact that the participants were of Asian ethnicity, which urges them to understand the conveyed message correctly and produce grammar-wise correct structures. On the contrary, some research also indicates that when the learners are given the option, whether to choose text-based or audio-based for communication, students may prefer audio feedback to text (Ice, Curtis, Phillips, & Wells, 2007; Lunt & Curran, 2010). More specifically, Ice et al. (2007) found that vocal cues created an atmosphere that promoted a sense of community and students felt that their instructor cared about them. However, even though audio-based communication includes verbal cues that text-based communication lacks, audio communication still lacks the visual cues that may help to build the social presence. That may be the reason why researchers have started to focus on video-based communication.

In conclusion, the aforementioned research studies above have indicated the potential opportunities of integrating either voice-based or video-based ACMC tools such as podcasts, voice or video blogs have demonstrated that it is effective in developing English oral proficiency and reducing L2 language anxiety. However, some issues were also observed regarding access to the tool and curriculum issues (Sarkheil & Azarnoosh, 2014) as well as technical issues, affective interferences and the limited connection between the real life and the virtual environment (Huang & Hung, 2009). Despite the mentioned drawbacks, literature holds mainly positive student perceptions towards ACMC integration while teaching English as a foreign language. Yet, it should be acknowledged that asynchronous video-based communication as a means for promoting oral development and reducing language anxiety that most foreign language learners encounter still requires more research. For this very reason, I propose the study outlined in the following sections.

Chapter 3
Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology of the present study is introduced. Regarding the overall aim of this study, research design, setting, participants and the procedures of sampling, data collection instruments that were used to gather data along with the data analysis are presented. Finally, reliability and validity, and limitations are presented. The research questions for this study are as follows;

1. Is there a significant difference between control group and experimental group in terms of oral language achievement?
2. Is there a significant difference between control group and experimental group in terms of foreign language speaking anxiety?
3. What are EFL learners' perceptions of the blended instruction for supporting spoken English outside the classroom environment?

3.1 Research Design

Concerning the aim of the present study, a mixed methods research design was applied to investigate whether the blended instruction has an effect on developing L2 oral proficiency, whether blended instruction may reduce the foreign language anxiety level and explore student perceptions of the blended instruction. The data were collected from four different sources of data; oral proficiency exam, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), semi-structured interviews and reflective journals. With these sources, the researcher pursued finding a link among students' perceptions of blended learning, their oral performance, and anxiety level after applying the treatment. For quantitative part, a quasi-experimental design (a non-randomized control group, pre-test post-test design) was adopted through the implementation of pre-test post-test oral exam and pre-test post-test FLCAS.

As can be seen below in Table 1, the participants in the experimental group received treatment while the control group received no treatment. The independent variable was indicated with the letter X, which is the treatment in the present study. The participants in both the experimental and the control group were given the oral

performance and foreign language anxiety pre-test and post-tests. The letter Y stands for oral proficiency exam and the letter Z represents foreign language anxiety test. The number 1 indicates that the exact same tests were used both in the pre-test and post-test. Table 1 summarizes the pre-test post-test design of the present study:

Table 1

Pre-Test Post-Test Research Design

Group	Pre-test	Independent Variable	Post-test
Experimental	Y1, Z1	X	Y1, Z1
Control	Y1, Z1	-	Y1, Z1

And finally, in order to obtain more reliable findings and gain a better understanding of the perceptions of the participants in the experimental group, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and had participants reflect on their experience through writing a reflection journal. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data through pre-test and post-test, semi-structured interviews and reflection journal empowered the researcher to attain triangulation.

3.2 Target Population and Participants

3.2.1 Type of sampling. In the present study, convenience sampling technique was applied to draw a sample from the existing population. Convenience sampling is considered as a type of nonprobability sampling, that is, the researcher chooses the participants as they are available at the time of the research, or willing to participate (Dörnyei, 2007). It is also described as researching the sample of the population that the researcher may have easy access to. To put it another way, convenience sampling suggests that the people who participate in the study are chosen because they are readily available (Henry, 1990; Patton, 2002). At the beginning of the track, two classes which were at the same level were assigned to the researcher by the school administration. The researcher of the present study assumed that the members of the target population were homogeneous since they all shared the same level of English and were the same age. In other words, the results obtained from the sample would show no differences when compared to a random sample.

Emerging from the lack of research on the use of video-based ACMC for foreign language teaching in the Turkish context, this study was carried out at an English language preparatory program in a private university during the 2017-2018 fall semester in Istanbul, Turkey so as to offer additional practice opportunities to foreign language (English) lessons. The university, where the present study was conducted, aims to teach academic English (AE) during a yearlong English supplementary program in order to help students reach a required level of proficiency. In this program, at the beginning of each academic year, new students can start studying at their departments on the condition of successfully passing an English language proficiency test that is given by the schools' preparatory program. This is, of course, the scenario only if they cannot get enough points after taking the proficiency exam. The students who get 75 and above (out of 100) are approved by their departments. On the other hand, students who score below 75 must take a placement test. According to the scores they get from this placement test, they are placed in different proficiency level classes in the program. Once the students are assigned to the preparatory school, they are expected to attend the lessons throughout the year. The English preparatory program consists of four eight-week tracks. In each track, students study the four major skills (Reading, Speaking, Writing and Grammar) in an academic context. The program has four proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1, and B2+) take Common European Framework (CEFR) into consideration and was designed accordingly. In each level, students receive 8 weeks of instruction, which is referred to as one teaching 'track' (referred to as 'semester', or 'term' in some other institutions). At the end of each module, the students are required to take the Track Achievement Test (TAT). Upon completing all the tracks, the students may start to attend the classes in their departments.

In this study, the participants were 58 Turkish EFL learners (31 females and 27 males) studying in two different classes at the English Language Preparatory program. Their average age range was 19 years. Before they started the preparatory program, they have received formal English language instruction in the school settings for approximately 9 years. According to the test results they received from the placement test at the beginning of the school year, they were placed at A1 level in Track 1. During the research, they were studying in A2 level in Track 2, which means that they were expected to understand simple, straightforward information and

to be able to express oneself in similar contexts. Table 2 shows the demographic information of the participants:

Table 2

Demographic Information of the Participants in the Experimental and Control Group

Group	Male	Female	N
Experimental	13	16	29
Control	14	15	29

The control group in the study (N=29) consisted of female (15) and male (14) students. During the research, which was conducted in Track 2, they were taught by the same teachers for 8 weeks and received the same type of instruction that they received in Track 1, which is traditional F2F in-classroom teaching. That is, students received instruction, did practices either in pairs or groups, and communicated both with the teacher and the classmates only in the classroom. It was observed that most of the students were eager to communicate and participate during the lessons, yet they mostly tended to use their L1 but not English. The experimental group (N=29) consisted of female (16) and male (13) students. In contrast to the control group, the participants in the experimental group received a blended instruction, that is, they engaged in video-based ACMC which aimed to support the in-class speaking. Up until the treatment, the learners in the experimental group had no experience with CMC while learning English. According to the results of the demographic survey, they had convenient access to the Internet and were comfortable with computer technology.

To protect participants confidentiality and privacy during the research, the researcher guided the participants to answer the questionnaires by giving numbers instead of writing their names. Before conducting the surveys, the researcher gave participants in the control (N=29) and experimental (N=29) group some time so that they could choose their numbers (from 1 to 29) among themselves. The researcher had no knowledge of the numbers that participants chose for themselves. As a final step, the participants were reminded to note these numbers down for future reference (post-test).

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Data collection tools. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through several instruments namely: an oral proficiency exam, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey (FLCAS), semi-structured student interviews and reflective journals. The section below describes each data collection instrument in further detail.

3.3.1.1 Oral Proficiency Exam. To answer the first research question, the participants in both control and experimental groups were given an oral proficiency exam by the researcher as an observer along with one of the senior instructor's involvement as an interlocutor. The exam questions, observation criteria, and assessment chart were obtained from the level supervisor on request as these materials are only used when it is necessary to assess the level of a student. The oral proficiency exam includes 6 main topics and questions. They were specifically created by the preparatory program to assess A2 level oral proficiency (see Appendix A). Among these questions were "Describe your personality. What kinds of people do you get along well with?", "What are some things students should do to improve their English? What were some of your favorite activities when you were a child?".

The pre-test oral proficiency exam provided the instructor (the researcher) with some insights about the L2 oral proficiency of the students in both groups. To be able to compare the possible speaking oral performance differences before and after the treatment, a post-test oral proficiency exam was given to the participants (N=58) in the control and the experimental group. The procedure that was applied in pre-test process was followed at the end of the track during the post-test process. No verbal or written feedback was given to any participant during or after any test.

3.3.1.2 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. In an effort to respond to the second research question, the researcher conducted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) at the beginning (pre-test) and at the end (post-test) of the research study.

The questionnaire in the present study was adopted from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) and aimed to explore the effects of blended instruction on the anxiety

level while speaking in the target language. To enable students to share their perceptions without any language limitations, the questionnaire which was adopted to Turkish by Aydin (1999) used in this present study. On the fourth day of the track, the anxiety questionnaire was conducted to the participants both in the control (N=29) and experimental (N=29) group in order to gather some insights into the students' level of foreign language anxiety. In the present study, the participants (N=58) stated their level of agreement at a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The questions attempted to find out the perceptions of the participants in both groups regarding English language learning and speaking (see Appendix B). An example of an item in the scale can be given as, "I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class", "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class", "When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed", "I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language", "I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance". Finally, after the pre-test at the beginning of the track, students in both groups (N=58) were given the post-test in the last week of the track.

3.3.1.3 Semi-structured Interviews. In the present study, a student interview was administered for the purpose of obtaining more in-depth information on students' opinions about the applied blended instruction. The interview questions were adopted from Hung (2010) (Appendix C). On the last week of the blended instruction, students in the experimental group were informed about the interview and were asked to send an email notifying that they would contribute to the study by accepting to be interviewed. The first 6 students out of 29 to send an email were scheduled for one-to-one interviews. The interview was held in Turkish so that participants' English knowledge would not interfere with their responses to each survey item. Each interview lasted about 8 minutes in length. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of each interviewee. Unlike the oral proficiency exam, the researcher and the interviewees were alone during the interviews. To help participants feel comfortable and relaxed during the interview, the researcher asked some entrée questions as ice-breakers and continued with the questions that reflect the perceptions of participants regarding the blended learning experience. No

interruption was experienced during the interviews. An example of an item in the scale would be given as, “Before this course, what did you know about video blogs?”, “What did you benefit from this project?”, “In your opinion, how can video blogs help improve your English-speaking skills in this class?”. It is worth to share that for ethical concerns, the students who were interviewed were named “Student A, Student B…”.

3.3.1.4 Reflective Journals. To triangulate the findings of the applied surveys and interviews, and along with a further investigation of the participants’ perceptions, students in the treatment group were asked to write a reflective journal. The reflective journal implemented in the present study was adapted from Hung (2010). Participants in the treatment group were asked to write a reflective journal of 90-120 words, where they can reflect on the whole process by analyzing their accomplishments, identifying the difficulties they experienced and suggest areas for improvement of the instruction (Appendix D). On the last day of the track, the reflective journal papers were distributed to the students and they were given 40 minutes to share their insights anonymously about the overall blended instruction process. Table 3 presents an overview of the research questions and corresponding procedures:

Table 3

Research questions and corresponding procedures

Research Questions	Data Collection Instruments	Data Analysis
1. Is there a significant difference between control group and experimental group in terms of oral language achievement?	Pre-test, Post-test Oral Proficiency Exam	Quantitative Normality Test T-test
2. Is there a significant difference between control group and experimental group in terms of foreign language speaking anxiety level?	Pre-test, Post-test FLCAS (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986)	Quantitative Normality Test T-test
3. What are EFL learners’ perceptions of the blended learning for supporting spoken English outside the classroom environment?	Semi-structured Interviews (adapted from Hung, 2010), Reflective Journal (adapted from Hung, 2010)	Qualitative Thematic analysis Document analysis

3.3.2 Data collection procedures. The study had three main stages and the data were collected in December 2017 and January 2018 at a foundation university English preparatory program in Istanbul, Turkey. The researcher got permission from both the Ethics Board Committee and the Head of the English Preparatory Program of the university where the present study was carried out.

At the first stage, the researcher informed the experimental group about the study, oral proficiency exam pre-test and FLCAS pre-test, which helped the researcher answer the first and second research questions. At the beginning of the research, the students in two different classes (N=58), who were assigned to the researcher of the present study by the school administration, were informed about the research study briefly. Later, they were asked to fill in the demographic survey on the first day of the track. By looking at the responses of participants, the control and the experimental groups were identified. The experimental group was chosen as so since all participants had easy access to both devices and the Internet, which would help the researcher to achieve the research goals without having any problems concerning lack of technological devices. The participants in the experimental group were informed that the ACMC tasks were not going to be a part of the assessment.

The researcher taught English as an L2 both in the control and the experimental groups which were morning classes during the research, each group consisted of students who had the same level of English, and there was an equal number of students in each class. As the researcher was actually teaching equal hours in both groups, she carried out all the tasks herself. On the first day of the Track, the researcher met two classes that were assigned to her. The researcher shared these classes with one other colleague, yet taught completely different skills. After identifying the control and experimental groups, students (N=58) were informed about the oral proficiency exam and everyone was given a specific time for the second and the third day of the first week. On the second day, the participants in the control and the experimental group were given an oral exam. On the fourth day of the Track, all participants in both groups were given the printed FLCAS survey to complete, and the researcher made sure that all students were present in class and gave an answer to all of the questions.

The second stage was the application of the treatment. Starting from the first week, the participants in the experimental group started to receive the treatment, that

is the integration of ACMC application, VoiceThread. The research was carried out in 8 weeks: the blended instruction intervention lasted for 7 weeks in total and in the 8th week the researcher implemented the post-tests, interviews, and reflective journal. Each week, after practicing the language provided in the book (learning new contextual vocabulary, listening to and reading topic related materials, and doing the pair and group speaking tasks etc.), the participants in the experimental group were given an ACMC task to complete by using the application. As soon as the participants completed their ACMC tasks, the researcher gave feedback to each participants' individual recording by using the application. Since the participants received notification emails from the system at the end of each day, they were reminded of the instructor feedback and the contributions other participants did, which enabled them to reflect on their performances taking the feedback into consideration and follow other videos created by their classmates. The teacher (researcher) gave the ACMC tasks in class verbally by making sure that everyone was on the same page regarding the objective of the assigned task, the skills to be practiced, the expected language and the target context. To be organized and to be able to finish the assignments on time each week, the students were always given a deadline even though they were not graded for making or not making a contribution.

The third stage was carried out in the last week (8th week) of the research study. Both the control and experimental groups were given an oral exam (post-test) and FLCAS (post-test). To provide the researcher with some deeper insights into the treatment, randomly chosen participants (N=6) from the experimental group were interviewed. Each interview lasted about 5 minutes. The interviews with each participant were recorded so that the researcher could transcribe any missed utterance. The interview took place in the mother tongue of the participants, which is Turkish so that the participants could express themselves better. After each interview, the researcher translated the responses of the students. And as a final step, all participants (N=29) in the experimental group were given a reflective journal. While students in the experimental group were writing their reflective journals in the classroom on the last day of the track, the researcher avoided any kind of guidance that may have interfered with the student reflection of the whole process. Instead, the students were guided by the reflective journal paper itself (see Appendix D).

3.3.3 Materials

3.3.3.1 Asynchronous Video-Recorded Speaking by VoiceThread. At the beginning of the track, in addition to in-class oral communication tasks, students in the experimental group (N=29) were informed that they were given an opportunity to continue practice English speaking skills outside the classroom walls by using an application called VoiceThread (see VoiceThread.com).

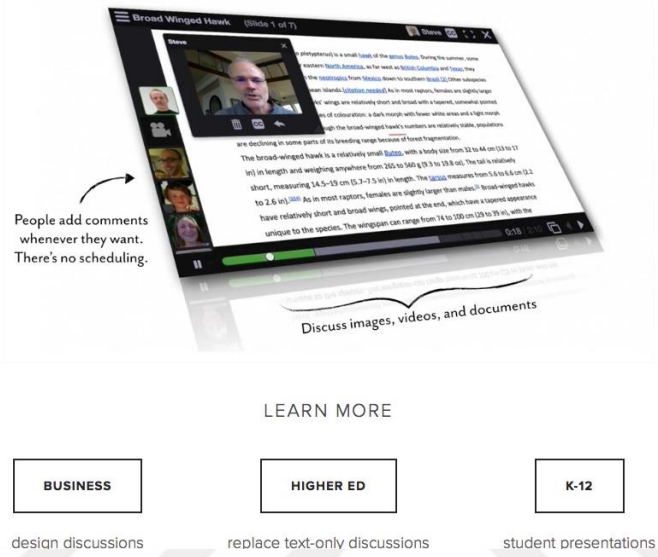

Figure 1. VoiceThread main page

VoiceThread is a cloud application that runs inside one's web browser, it means one doesn't need to download or update it. The only system requirement is an up-to-date version of Adobe Flash. Participants may download the application to their mobile phones or tablets, and capture images or videos from their camera, or upload them from their photo library. As well as reaching out to and creating content, participants may also view and comment on other participants.

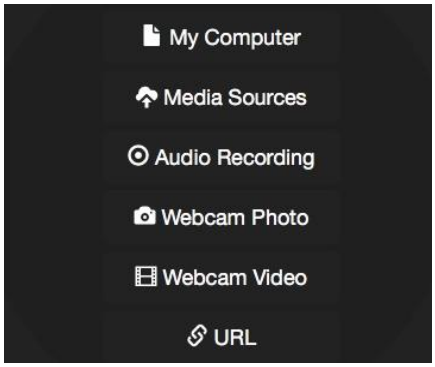

Figure 2. Screenshot of the options that can be used while creating content

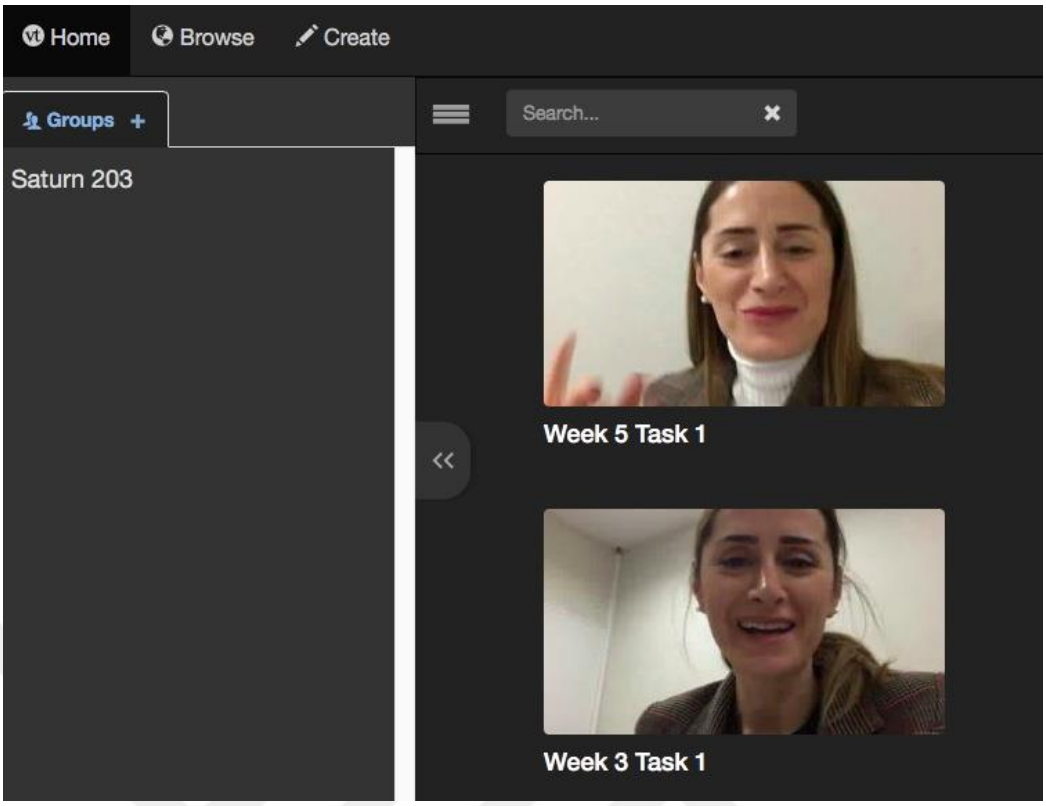

Figure 3. A Screenshot of the weekly tasks

As soon as the classroom is created, a teacher may start creating content to be shared with the classroom. As can be seen in Figure 2, there are many options that allow you to basically share something that you have created before or something that you create at that very moment. It enables the user to create and share audio and video recordings as well as creating presentations with images and documents. The recordings are asynchronous, which gives users the flexibility to record their audios or videos whenever they want and wherever they are. Additionally, participants nay use VoiceThread from any computer, web browser, or phone.

The tool VoiceThread has been used by educators for expanding classroom discussions, online teaching, professional development training and so forth. More pedagogically speaking, learners may create and share messages with the other learners through meaningful communication in a virtual environment.

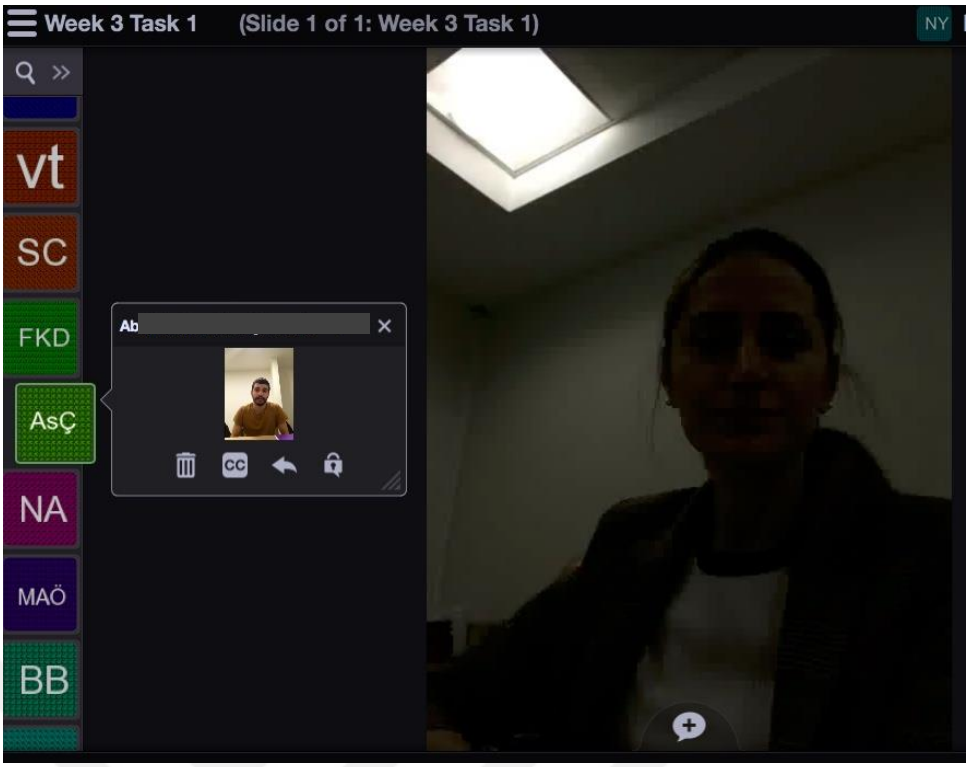

Figure 4. Screenshot of the student video-recorded replies to the given tasks on VoiceThread.

Once the classroom is created, teachers can ask their students to sign up free using a valid email address. Then, the teachers add them as contacts and invite them to the VoiceThreads that they create. Students can then start making comments once a new thread is created using their microphone and text an unlimited number of times for free. Teachers as administrators can control who can participate and what they can do.

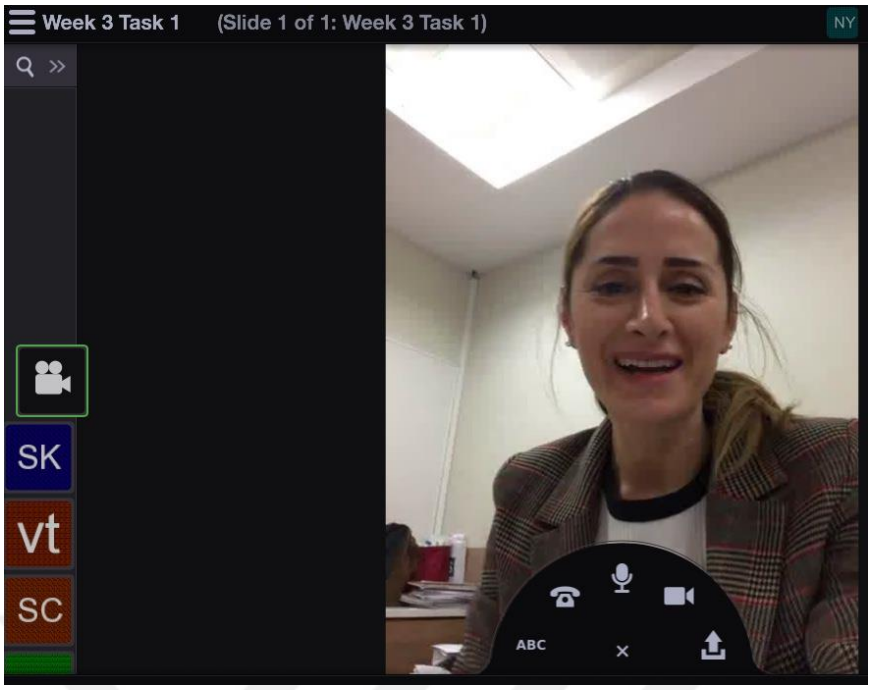

Figure 5. Screenshot of the reply options

As soon as the students sign in, they can easily access their virtual classroom and see the assigned tasks. When they are ready to contribute to the weekly assignments, they have several options for replying, these are text message, telephone, microphone, and video. As well as they could use these options to directly record their contribution, they may also upload them later on after recording them using the functions their computers or smartphones have.

Throughout the research, the researcher encouraged them to use the video function, except for the first assignment. Not to discourage the shy ones, they were allowed to record their voices if they didn't feel comfortable.

3.3.3.2 Descriptions of the tasks for each week. It was suggested that doing an initial session may help students get familiar with the technology they would be using (Beauvois, 1999; Skinner & Austin, 1999). Following this suggestion, the first assigned task required the students to tell things about themselves. Upon the introduction to the system, which took place in the classroom on the first day of the school, students were asked to share two true and one false statement about themselves by recording either an audio or a video on Voicethread under the task Week 1 Getting to know you. Even though they were highly encouraged to record a video, they were also allowed to record their voice at the first week with an attempt

to not to discourage shy students until they got more comfortable while using the application and sharing their recordings. They were also informed that they were randomly assigned as partners and were expected to spot the lies and the truth about their partners, which also served as a self-introduction opportunity in a virtual environment. To encourage the use of the asynchronous computer-mediated communication and inspire students to have a look at others recordings, Week 1 task was brought into the classroom. At the end of the week 1, students were given 10 minutes in class and shared their guesses on the topic with their week 1 partners. After the pair work finished, a short whole class verbal feedback about the first task and the ACMC was taken and given.

Regarding the design of the oral activities in EFL speaking lessons, some researches emphasized the importance of the amount of the oral practice. For instance, Zhang (2009) stated that most EFL learners neither have adequate opportunities to speak English outside the classroom nor the chance to interact with the speakers of English or members of the international community. This could be interpreted that English language instructors need to create such oral activities that enable learners to improve their speaking competencies by offering as many situations as possible. Aligned with Zhang's, Nunan (1999) suggested that learners need to be provided with not only as many opportunities as possible but also these opportunities should offer learners both meaningful contexts and situations to practice the target language. In short, we may conclude that creating opportunities for learners to practice the target language is crucial when it comes to speaking lessons. And that's why each week during the research, students were provided with a speaking task upon completing a unit in F2F class time. Moreover, it is also pointed out that EFL students, on the contrary to common belief, do not participate in L2 conversations as they cannot relate to the learning tasks when they are asked to share their thoughts and understanding (Kocak, 2010). With this in mind, the ACMC practice tasks in each week were planned in such a way that gives the learner an opportunity to relate the learning tasks to their lives. Table 4 shows the weekly ACMC tasks that were assigned in VoiceThread:

Table 4

Definitions of the Weekly Tasks

Week	Task Definition
1	Getting to know you: Two Lies and One Truth
2	Describe an important person in your life
3	How do you keep fit?
4	The advantages/disadvantages of living in a countryside or a city
5	For you, is technology a good or a bad thing?
6	Talk about new experiences: How has your life changed?
7	Be a judge: Punishment that fits the crime
8	Overall feedback

In week 2, in the course book in F2F lessons, students learned some personality adjectives and present simple. After doing in class activities during the week, by using VoiceThread, students were asked to describe a person that they valued. They were inspired to include pictures of these people if they could. The students who preferred to record their voice in the first week's task were also encouraged to record a video this time. There were no time limits for the recordings, and moreover, they were welcomed to keep it as long as they wished.

The following week, upon doing a unit on health in Week 3, students were required to record a video in which they would relate to the topic by sharing if they did anything to keep fit. They were given options such as talking about their diets, or any activities they do to be healthy and so on. In addition, considering the students who might have bad eating habits or who may not be so active in their daily lives, the teacher also encouraged these students to share their routines, thoughts, or goals for future and so forth.

On the fourth week, in in-class teaching, students were introduced to comparative and superlative forms of adjectives in grammar part of the lessons. In addition to grammar focus, they also read passages on the environment and listened to a radio show on protecting the environment. For further speaking practice on the topic and additionally to be able to make a connection with real life, students were given an option to talk about either the advantages or disadvantages of living in a countryside or a city by recycling the grammar and vocabulary items they have acquired in F2F teaching. In Week 5, students were asked to extend the short speaking topic in the book where they were expected to be able to use the expressions that show one's personal opinion such as 'in my opinion, I believe, it

seems to me that'. The focus of the speaking task was whether they believed technology is a good or a bad thing. Students were asked to complete the speaking task by giving examples from their own lives. In Week 6, the unit in the book focused on new experiences in people's lives. After finishing the unit in class, students were encouraged to extend on the topic 'how their lives have changed since they started studying in the language school' using the application. The unit topic in Week 7 was 'Crime and Punishment'. After class, students were given several situations and were asked to elaborate some punishments related to one crime from the list they wanted to talk about. They were informed that they could give a punishment they believed to fit the crime.

Finally, in the eighth week, the instructor asked the students in the experimental group to reflect on their experience by participating in semi-structured interviews and writing a reflection journal. Additionally, the students in both the control and the experimental groups attended the oral proficiency and speaking anxiety post-test. It is worth to mention that the original instructional design of the blended instruction was carried out during the whole research. In other words, the researcher did not change any preset instruction in order to fix encountered problems or to test the effectiveness of any other possible instruction.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Data analysis procedures. Prior to the analysis, the data that was obtained through survey instruments was first converted to an exportable format via Microsoft Excel, then it was imported to the statistical analysis software, which is the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0 version. As for the quantitative data, in order to see whether the data were normally distributed, normality checks were carried out separately for each group. As for the experimental group, pre-test sig value is p=.119 and post-test sig value is p=.555, which indicates that the dependent variable was normally distributed (p>.05). On the other hand, as for the control group, pre-test sig value is p=.010 and post-test sig value is p=.084, that is, the data significantly deviate from a normal distribution (p<.05). This is the reason why the researcher used a paired sample t-test for the experimental group and Wilcoxon signed-rank test for the control group to compare the pre-test and post-test

results and test if there was a significant difference in the average of the two tests. And regarding the qualitative data, the researcher worked with a colleague during the document analysis of the transcribed semi-structured interview and reflective journal.

In an attempt to answer the first research question, more specifically, in order to measure the impact of ACMC on oral performance, the data was gathered from the speaking exam pre- and post-tests. To decide whether there are any statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-test results, a paired-sample t-test was applied for experimental group scores and a Wilcoxon signed ranks test was conducted for the control group scores.

In order to answer the second research question, which aimed to explore whether blended instruction helped participants feel less anxious while speaking English, the data was obtained from the FLCAS pre-test and post-test of both the control and experimental groups, which was analyzed quantitatively applying SPSS. The mean scores of both the experimental and control group were first tested for normality with Shapiro Wilk test. Then, according to the results, a paired-sample t-test was applied to explore the effects of the treatment on the participants in the experimental group. In contrast, since the data collected from the participants in the control group wasn't normally distributed, Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted to compare the results of the pre-test and post-test scores. And finally, to determine whether there was a significant difference between these two independent groups, an independent t-test was administered.

The data gathered from the semi-structured interview and student reflective journal served as a triangulating source in this study to examine participants' opinions related to blended learning, which was the third research question that this study intended to answer. The semi-structured interviews were held with the participation of randomly selected 6 students from the experimental group. The data collected via the semi-structured interviews were transcribed from the recordings and pattern coded by the researcher. Since the interviews were held in Turkish, the transcribing language was also Turkish. To maintain reliability, the researcher consulted a second rater other than herself. After analyzing the transcribed interviews separately, these two raters came together and compared the main themes and the concepts they formed. Since the interviewed students gave clear answers to the questions, the main themes and concepts by the two raters were almost identical.

Coding and consulting a second-rater procedure was also used in the analysis of the reflection journals written by the students in the experimental group. It should also be noted that while coding, neither the researcher nor the second rater implemented any preset codes. The codes rather emerged themselves during the document analysis process.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

In this study, the researcher reduced the effects of internal threats in the following ways. One of the extraneous variables that might have threaten internal validity of this study was history, the events that may occur during the study and may influence the results. (Mertens, 2010). By conducting pre- and post-tests all at once, the researcher minimized the effects of history. To be more specific, the participants both in the control group and the experimental group were tested at the same time period without a considerable time gap between the pre- and the post-tests. Furthermore, no major political or economic events, that could have interfered with the results of the study, have occurred.

Another internal threat which was taken into consideration was maturation, the biological and psychological changes that participants may go through in time (Ary et al., 2010) such as becoming stronger, more coordinated, or tired as the study progresses (Mertens, 2010). The influence of the maturation threat in this study was considered to be minimal, in other words, neither biological nor psychological changes in study participants have influenced the results as all of the participants were the same age (between 18 and 19), and even if they were from different cities they shared rather similar socioeconomic backgrounds. The most obvious maturational difference between the participants was that the control group did not receive the experimental treatment. In other words, the participants in the control group did only in-class speaking practice unlike the experimental group.

In addition, since this study used pre- and post-tests, testing was among the threats that could have jeopardized the validity of the study. After taking the pre-test, the participants would know what to expect or may even learn some specific things from the pretest, which may result in influenced outcomes of the post-test. Nevertheless, this treat was controlled since the components of the pre- and the post-

tests were alike, and when the time period between the pre- and the post-tests taken into consideration, it is safe to say that the pre-test may have created similar impacts on both groups. It should also be noted that the researcher avoided giving any feedback to the participants on their performances or choices, which did not allow them to work on their weaknesses. Furthermore, in the present study, there was no change in the instruments between the pre- and post-tests. In other words, the instruments were applied without any changes throughout the study both in the experimental and the control group, which indicates that one test was never easier or more difficult than the other test.

Selection bias is another threat to the internal validity of a study. This treat arises if high-achieving students are assigned to the experimental group while learners who have average skills are assigned to the control group. However, in the present study, the participants in the control and the experimental group achieved similar results from the proficiency exam, which shows they had equal levels of English. Also, these students were already assigned randomly to their classes by the school administration according to their English language skills, which eliminated the selection bias threat by placing students who have the same level of English.

Additionally, since students in the experimental group participated in the study voluntarily and were not graded for their participation, there was always a risk of drop-out during the treatment, which is considered as another threat to validity called as experimental mortality. To eliminate experimental mortality threat, the researcher explained that and tried to make it very clear that no one was going to be judged or penalized for not being involved in the present study. Also, she indicated that once they started to contribute to the blended learning environment, they were expected to do so without missing any tasks and continue until the study ended. All participants in the experimental group agreed, and since no one dropped out during the treatment, experimental mortality treat was controlled.

Last but not least, the fact that the researcher asked for the assistance and opinion of a second-rater during the qualitative data analysis has surely contributed to the reliability of the present study. In other words, the results that the researcher concluded from the written transcriptions of both the semi-structured interview and reflective journal were almost identical to the results the second-rater reached. This suggests that the results of these tools are reliable.

Nevertheless, despite the efforts of minimizing or eliminating the effects of these threats, the validity of the research study may still be arguable. Underlying reasons for this may be referred to as different personality traits, learning styles and abilities of the participants, and finally the Hawthorne effect.

3.5.1 Reliability of the data collection tools. In a very general sense, reliability and validity concentrates on the quality of the obtained data and the methods used in a research study. In the current study, the researcher assured the reliability of the measuring instruments considering "the effect of an error on the consistency of scores" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 237). Random errors are considered to be the major problems threatening the study and jeopardizing the reliability. Ary et al. (2010) state that the main sources of random errors that may cause conflicting scores are "the individual being measured, the administration of the measuring instrument, and the instrument" (p. 237). The researcher minimized the errors that the administration of the measuring instrument could cause by administering and evaluating the instruments herself and by using the same instruments in both pre- and post-tests without any changes. Furthermore, A test should be comprehensive and it shouldn't be either too short or too easy to measure whatever subject matter it was designed to measure (Ary et al., 2010). Considering the validity and the reliability of the data collection tools, in the present study the researcher applied previous questionnaires which were validated and proved to be reliable by the other researchers and data triangulation was used for verification concerns.

3.5.1.1 Oral Proficiency Exam. To assess the oral performance of the participants (N=58) both in the control and experimental groups, the A2 level oral proficiency exam prepared by the assessment department of the present institution was implemented. During the preparation process of such exams, the institution follows the Common European Framework (CEFR) and designs the exams according to the CEFR ability level. In this case, the A2 level oral exam was prepared bearing in mind what an A2 level learner can do according to the CEFR. To give an example, an A2 level learner can interact with reasonable ease in structured situations and short conversations, can manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort, can ask and answer questions, as well as exchanging ideas on familiar topics, can give

his/her opinions on practical problems and so forth. By taking these skills into account, the assessment department creates a pool of speaking questions that would help learners reflect these skills. Then, the members of the assessment department eliminate some of these questions and choose the main the questions that would test these skills. Furthermore, oral proficiency pre- and post-test were conducted by two raters, that is, the researcher herself as the observer and a senior instructor as an interlocutor. Inter-rater reliability was protected by the oral proficiency rubric which was created by the institution's assessment department (Appendix E). Because of its nature, the grading system did not allow any discrepancy to occur between the raters. To be more specific, each criterion has maximum 4 point and minimum 1 point. If there are 2 points discrepancies between the raters, they should go over these discrepancies and agree on a final grade, which allows only 1-point discrepancy. The participants were assessed by their performances on specific skills namely a) task response, b) fluency and pronunciation, c) accuracy, d) vocabulary, and e) interaction.

3.5.1.2 FLCAS. The questionnaire used in this present study, which aims to examine foreign language anxiety level, was adopted to Turkish by Aydin (1999) and tested by a pilot study on 72 language learners of 3rd year ELT students in Anadolu University. The questionnaire has 32 items and its internal consistency is .91.

3.6 Limitations

Even though the current research is considered to have fulfilled its purpose, there are some limitations that should be taken into consideration. The first limitation to be considered is the number of the participants in the study. The students who took part in this study (N=58) may be considered as insufficient to draw conclusions about the successfulness and effectiveness of ACMC tasks to improve foreign language oral skills and to reduce foreign language speaking anxiety level.

The second limitation is that this study was conducted at an English Language Preparatory School of a foundation (non-profit, private) university in Istanbul and all of the students were elementary level learners of English in the same university. If this study is replicated in another university, the researcher may reach different

results. For this very reason, the findings of the study may not be generalized to the other contexts and settings in Turkey. To be able to obtain more reliable and valid findings, similar studies may be carried out with the involvement of students who have different level skills (such as pre-intermediate, intermediate, advanced) and at different contexts and settings.

A third limitation could be the student profiles. More specifically, despite the fact that the treatment required the use of technology for learning purposes, the participants in the experimental group were not tested for their knowledge of technology use. However, since the integrated tool is quite user-friendly, students were provided with a brief introduction to the system, and the researcher offered help whenever there might be a need, no issues were experienced where the students couldn't finish their assignments. On the contrary, even though there were a couple of technical issues while doing the recordings, the students were able to sort them out on their own without the help of the researcher.

Another limitation of the study may be the oral proficiency exam which was administered in the study. The oral exam was designed by the institution where the present study was carried out. It may be considered as a limitation since it may cause validity issues if the study is replicated. To be more precise, the individual's scores from oral proficiency exam were meaningful and the researcher could draw conclusions from the sample. However, the same oral proficiency exam may not be applicable in other institutions because of several reasons such as objectives of the institutions, student profiles and so forth.

Lastly, time constraints in the curriculum was another limitation of this study. The present study was conducted over the course of eight weeks. A research study that had been carried out over a longer period of time could have been more generalizable. In addition, it could also increase the external validity of the study.

Chapter 4
Findings

This chapter presents the data collected from the pre-test and post-test results of oral proficiency exam and foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), semi-structured interviews and reflective journal. The quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS 22.0. The overall differences between the test scores of the control and the experimental groups were tested for normality using Shapiro Wilk test. In cases where the data was normally distributed, a paired- sample t-test was used. When the scores were not distributed normally, Mann-Whitney U Test was applied to analyze the data. As for the qualitative data, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and reflective journal are presented to identify the perceptions of the students regarding practicing English language speaking skills. Data were classified into quantitative and qualitative findings. As for quantitative findings, the findings from the pre-test and post-tests about the impact of the blended learning integrating video-based ACMC tasks on oral performances on the oral proficiency as well as its impact on the anxiety level of the participants in the experimental and control groups are presented. And as for the qualitative findings, the findings from the semi-structured interviews and reflective journal about the perceptions of the participants in the experimental group are presented.

4.1 Quantitative Findings on the Difference Between the Experimental and Control Group Regarding English Language Oral Performance

As for the first research question, to explore the effects of video-based ACMC tasks on English language oral performance, data was gathered from the students' pre-test and post-test speaking exam scores and compared to each other before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the treatment. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of the experimental group from the pre-test and post-test oral proficiency exam:

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Oral Proficiency Pre- and Post-test Results of the EG

		N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	df	*t*	*p*
EG	Pre-test	29	43.103	10.300	1.912	28	12.6	.000
	Post-test	29	69.828	10.131	1.881			

EG: experimental group

As shown in the table above, the scores that the participants in the experimental group received in pre-test (*M=43.10, SD=10.300*) that was done in the beginning of the track is significantly different than the scores they received in the post-test (*M=69.82, SD=10.131*) which was given at the end of the treatment. The difference between the scores clearly points out to an increase in their oral proficiency at the end of the track. To determine whether this increase is significant or not, in other words, if this increase was the result of the treatment, a paired sample t-test was conducted. As can be seen from Table 5, the pre-test (*M=43.10, SD=10.300*) and post-test (*M=69.82, SD=10.131*) comparison shows that there is a significant difference in the scores; $t(28)=12.67$, $p<.05$. As a result, it can be concluded that the treatment was effective in increasing the oral proficiency scores of the students in the experimental group as there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test ($p<.05$).

On the other hand, as for the control group, it should be noted that the control group did not receive any treatment, which may result in any kind of change to be observed. In order to compare the results, the mean scores that the students in the control group received from the pre-test and post-test oral proficiency exam are presented below in table 6:

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Oral Proficiency Pre-test and Post-test Results of the CG

		N	Mean	SD	Median	z	*p*
CG	Pre-test	29	37.241	9.782	35.000	-4.71*	.000
	Post-test	29	60.172	6.193	60.000		

* Based on negative ranks

CG: control group

As can be seen from the table above, the post-test scores *(M=60.17, SD=6.194)* of the students in the control group were higher than their pre-test scores *(M=37.24, SD=9.782)*, which reveals the increase in their post-test scores. To decide whether this increase is significant, Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied. According to Wilcoxon signed-rank test results of the control group's total scores in oral proficiency exam, the asymptotic significance value was 0.000 which means that it is smaller than the alpha value 0.05. This means that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-tests (z=4.71) scores of the participants in the control group. According to these findings, it can be claimed that the students in the control group have improved their oral proficiency scores.

Finally, in an attempt to answer the first research question which focuses on determining whether the treatment had a significant effect on the oral proficiency, the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental and control group regarding the oral proficiency scores were compared. Normality test results show that the oral proficiency scores of the experimental and control group are not normally distributed since the sig value of the pre-and post-test of the experimental group is *p*=.031 and the sig value of the pre-and post-test of the control group is *p*=.126. Therefore, Mann Whitney *U* test was used to compare the differences between these two independent groups, which is presented in Table 7:

Table 7

Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test of Differences in the Mean Rank of Oral Proficiency Between the Experimental and Control Group

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	*p*
Experimental	29	32.34	938	338	.195
Control	29	26.66	773		

As a result of comparing the differences between the pre-test and post-test scores of both the experimental group and the control group oral proficiency exam in an attempt to determine the impact of the treatment on oral proficiency, no significant differences were observed (*p*>.05). However, it is worth to mention that the mean scores between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group were higher.

4.2 Quantitative Findings on the Difference Between the Experimental and Control Group Regarding the Foreign Language Classroom Speaking Anxiety (FLCAS)

To answer the second research question which investigates L2 speaking anxiety difference between the EFL students who did video-based ACMC practice and those who did not, a normality test for the experimental and control group was performed to test for normality. As for the experimental group, given that the pre-test sig value is p=.180 and post-test sig value is p=.351, we would conclude that pre-test and post-test anxiety scores are normally distributed (p>.05). Based on the normality test results, a paired-samples t-test was applied to investigate the impact of the treatment on the anxiety level of the participants in the experimental group since the data of this group is normally distributed.

On the other hand, for the control group, the pre-test sig value is .216>.05 which indicates that scores are normally distributed, yet the post-test sig value is .000<.05 which means that the data are not normally distributed. As a result, Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted. Table 8 illustrates the findings of the descriptive statistics of the pre-test and post-test FLCAS of the experimental group:

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of the Pre-test and Post-test of the EG Regarding FLCAS

		N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	df	*t*	*p*
EG	Pre-test	29	2.927	. 680	.126	28	7.58	.000
	Post-test	29	2.144	.396	.073			

EG: experimental group

According to the table above, the pre-test scores *(M=2.92, SD=0.680)* are higher than their post-test scores *(M=2.14, SD=0.396)*, which indicates that the anxiety level of the participants in the experimental group was higher before the treatment, and after the treatment, their anxiety level decreased. To determine if this decrease in the anxiety level of the participants is significant or not, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. The results of the paired sample t-test show that $t(28)=7.58$ $p<.05$. There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test ($p<.05$),

which leads to the fact that the treatment enabled the participants in the experimental group felt less foreign language anxiety while speaking.

On the other hand, considering the normality test results of the pre-test and post-test FLCAS of the control group, which indicated that the data was not distributed normally, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied in order to test whether there was a difference in the control groups anxiety level. Table 9 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the control group regarding the anxiety scale:

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics of the Pre-test and Post-test FLCAS Results of the CG

		N	Mean	SD	Median	z	*p*
CG	Pre-test	29	2.627	.626	2.687	-3.28*	.001
	Post-test	29	3.157	.429	3.281		

*Based on negative ranks

CG: control group

An increase in mean scores between the pre-test (*M=2.63, SD=0.627*) and the post-test (*M=3.16, SD=0.429*) was observed. This clearly shows that, unlike the experimental group, there is an increase in the anxiety level of the participants in the control group. To decide if this increase is significant or not, a Wilcoxon signed ranks test was conducted. According to the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test results of the control group's scores in FLCAS, z=-3.28 and the asymptotic value was 0.001 which means that it is smaller than the alpha value (0.05) and it is statistically significant. In addition, it clearly indicates that the anxiety level of the control group has increased whereas the anxiety level of the experimental group decreased. This suggests that there is a statistical relationship between L2 speaking anxiety and video-based ACMC tasks practice.

Finally, to answer the second research question that focuses on whether the treatment had a significant impact on speaking anxiety, the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the experimental and control group regarding the FLCAS scores were compared. Normality test results show that the FLCAS scores of the experimental and control group are normally distributed $p>.05$ since the sig value of the pre-and

post-test of the experimental group is p=.729 and the sig value of the pre-and post-test of the control group is p=.853. Therefore, independent t-test was used to compare the differences between these two independent groups, which is presented in Table 10:

Table 10

Results of the Independent T-Test of Experimental and Control Group FLCAS Scores

Group	N	X	SD	df	*t*	*p*
Experimental	29	-25.06	17.81	56	7.86	.000
Control	29	16.96	22.61			

The pre-test and post-test FLCAS scores of both the experimental group and the control group were compared in an attempt to determine the effect of the treatment on speaking anxiety and a significant difference was observed (p<.05). The results of the independent t-test show that the treatment helped the experimental group reduce speaking anxiety *(M=-25.06)* and at the end of the track speaking anxiety level of the control group increased *(M=16.96).* This clearly shows that the treatment, video-based ACMC tasks, was effective in reducing speaking anxiety.

4.3 Findings on the Perceptions of Students Regarding the Blended Instruction and Blended Learning Environment (BLE)

To investigate the perceptions of the students about the blended learning, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals. In order to ensure inter-rater reliability, a second rater coded the transcribed interviews and reflective journal. Qualitative data results are presented by combining the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and the reflective journal.

4.3.1 The Analysis of the Semi-Structured Interviews and the Reflective Journal. To complement the data which was collected quantitatively and qualitatively, 6 students from the experimental group were interviewed and all participants (N=29) in the experimental group were given a reflective journal at the end of the treatment, which aimed to have students reflect upon their blended

learning experience. The semi-structured interviews were first audio-recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. It is worth to share that for ethical concerns, the students who were interviewed were named as "Student A, Student B…" and as for the reflective journal students were asked not to write their names on the given papers. The researcher manually coded and analyzed the data, and then compared it to the analysis which was done by another rater. Table 11 presents 15 major categories and 31 associated themes emerging from the analysis of students' experiences with learning through the blended instruction, and experiences with the blended learning environment (BLE) and the application itself (VoiceThread):

Table 11

Major Categories and Associated Concepts of the Semi-Structured Student Interviews and Reflective Journal

Major Categories	Associated Themes
Confidence	Increased confidence thanks to rehearsal opportunities More comfortable while speaking
Anxiety	Overcoming the fear of speaking in front of others Having enough time to think Less anxious about making mistakes
Vocabulary revision	Further practice opportunity Room and reason for revision Revision before recording
Listening	Listening to other students' videos Learning new words and grammar forms from others Recognizing the task organization
Writing	Brainstorming about the task in advance
Grammar	Focus on related structures and functions
Pronunciation	Checking pronunciation of the words Listening to self and correct any pronunciation mistakes
Feedback	Feedback from the teacher Assessing own performance Focus on weaknesses for improvement
Re-recording	Re-recording opportunity when not satisfied

Table 11 (cont.d)

Major Categories	Associated Themes
Convenience	No time constraints
Technical issues	Problems while uploading the video to the system Misfunction of video recording option Unsupported website interface by each mobile phone system
Improvement	Improvement in speaking skills in time
Meaningful assignment	Effective assignment for learning English
Prejudgments	Disbelief in the effectiveness of the tasks
Satisfaction	Witnessing the improvement Having fun while contributing in the BLE

Confidence. To begin with, when the transcribed semi-structured interviews were analyzed and coded, it was observed that the mostly referred category by the interviewed students was confidence. Confidence was also referred to by a big majority of the students in the reflective journal. Most students stated that they felt much more confident while speaking after engaging in video-based ACMC tasks and were more confident when they spoke without the presence of others. Students believed doing these tasks provided them with extra time to think and time to reflect on their performance and time to revise the vocabulary items they might have needed while speaking. Additionally, students also reflected that making mistakes while speaking was no longer a problem since they knew they could go back and correct them. The following excerpts exemplify how doing ACMC tasks helped participants feel more confident while speaking:

> *"I can say that I improved my speaking. Normally, I speak too slow because I spend too much time thinking about what I am going to say and I am often too concerned about making a grammatically correct sentence. Then, my friends get bored and they don't listen to me so I feel nervous and I stop talking. But in VoiceThread, nobody is waiting for me*

to finish my sentence so I have enough time to think." (Student D, semi-structured interview).

"In the beginning, I've always been shy while speaking English. But in time, this changed and I felt more comfortable with speaking English and recording videos. I was more confident of myself after a couple of videos." (Reflective journal)

Anxiety. While helping students improve their confidence, the blended instruction also helped them control and decrease their level of anxiety. Some students reflected that since their friends were listening to them in the classroom environment, they felt nervous and as a result, they could not produce the language as they desired to. However, most students expressed that they felt less anxious while doing the recordings outside the classroom compared to speaking in class in front of other students. The following excerpt represents the decrease in the anxiety level:

"Thanks to VoiceThread, I feel less anxious when I speak. Speaking in a video is easier than speaking in class I think. In class, everybody looks at me and waits for me for an answer. But in VoiceThread, take my time and record as many times I can and I don't feel nervous." (Student C, semi-structured interview).

Vocabulary Revision. Another mostly communicated outcome of the blended instruction was the opportunity to do vocabulary revision. When speaking in the classroom, the students may not have enough time to revise the vocabulary, spend time on them as much as they may need to, or be sure if they used the correct words because of the time constraints and not enough opportunities to get individual feedback from the teacher. On the other hand, many students reported that outside the classroom, they have the chance to revise the specific vocabulary items to be used in the task and even have time to check their pronunciation before recording their voice or video. Additionally, some students reported that they found video-based ACMC tasks helpful and effective since it gave them a meaningful reason to revise the vocabulary items they had learned in the classroom. Furthermore, some students indicated that they sometimes learned some vocabulary items from each

other as a result of listening to each others' recordings and some also mentioned that they also tried to copy some complex sentence structures they heard from their friends.

Listening. In addition to vocabulary practice, students shared that they also had the opportunity to do listening practice. Since they were allowed by the system and teacher to check other students' oral contributions, some students reported that before shaping their speech, they first listened to their friends' recordings and then started brainstorming about their own contribution. Students reported that as much as learning new words from the videos, by listening to others they were also exposed to a variety of ideas and could recognize the organization and catch the main ideas in their friends' oral performances. Some even reported that they enjoyed listening to their friends talking in English and this motivated them to record their own oral performances. The following excerpt illustrates this:

> *"Being able to watch others' videos is quite good. I watched my friends' videos and I think they helped me. I watched them and they gave me ideas. It was also listening practice I guess. I learned some new words from them as well and tried to use them in my speaking." (Student A, semi-structured interview).*

Writing. Another language skill students believed that they practiced was writing. Most students reported that before they recorded their oral contribution to the system, they felt more comfortable when they did brainstorming and organized their ideas on a paper first. In addition to the idea development process, they reported that each time they read their written production aloud, they felt the need to produce more complex structures and include more different vocabulary items. A couple of students even shared that they spent more time on writing than speaking.

Grammar. It should be noted that doing video-based ACMC tasks also enabled some students to do further practice in grammar. Specifically, students stated that brainstorming and writing down what they would say, focusing on which grammar structure to use, how they would form their sentences correctly encouraged them to complete the tasks. Some students reported that in addition to revising the

grammar structures learned at school, they would also pay attention to the grammar structures their friends used in their videos. Some even stated that they would imitate and integrate some specific and complex grammar structures that they learned from their friends in the videos.

Pronunciation. There are several students who expressed that they benefitted from the blended instruction in terms of pronunciation. Before sharing the final version of the video on the BLE, students stated that most of the time they had several attempts of recording since they paid great attention to their grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Some students reported that doing the video-based ACMC tasks enabled them to re-record until they pronounced the words correctly and as a result, it helped them speak more fluently.

Feedback. The feedback given to the students' videos by the teacher was another concept repeated by the students in the semi-structured interviews and reflective journal. In a regular traditional classroom environment, language teachers may not always be able to give individual feedback to students' oral production due to large class sizes and time constraints. However, on the contrary to in-class speaking, through video-based ACMC tasks, the teacher may listen to each individual and provide feedback on their oral contribution. In the present study, students stated that they had a chance to get feedback from their teacher for each of the tasks they completed in the BLE. In addition, some students reported that they could also reflect on their own oral performance since the BLE served as a portfolio where they could simply save their production and reflect on it whenever they wanted. Finally, some students highlighted the value of the feedback they received from their teacher upon completing the task. According to some students in this study, receiving feedback on their oral performance encouraged them to focus on their weaknesses and work on them to improve as much as possible. The following excerpts show the impact of the teacher feedback:

> *"I learned that if I study and practice, I can improve my speaking skills. In the classroom, I don't feel this since I only speak to my friends and they don't correct my mistakes. And my teacher cannot give me feedback*

all the time, but on VoiceThread when I do my task, I receive the teacher feedback." (Student B, semi-structured interview).

"Before recording my videos, I brainstormed and put my ideas on a paper first. After some rehearsal, I recorded the videos. I was very happy when my teacher watched my video and gave me feedback. I felt quite encouraged by the teacher feedback to continue recording each week."(Reflective journal)

Re-recording. Both in the interviews and reflective journal students stated that re-recording option of the BLE enabled them with the opportunity to create and share a better version of their contribution if the need be. To illustrate, when they were not satisfied either with grammar, pronunciation and so on, they could easily delete the existing one and record a new one as many times as they needed, which gave them a feeling of comfort while doing the task. A majority of the students reported that they usually made several attempts while doing video-based ACMC tasks until they were satisfied with their oral performance. Some students stated that they did not have enough time and sometimes the opportunity to make as many attempts as they needed. The following excerpt exemplifies the appreciation of the re-recording option:

"Well, you can record your voice or video and then if you don't like it, you can delete it and record again. In class, when I speak, I speak. But I can't go back and speak again, we don't have time." (Student F, semi-structured interview).

Convenience. Some students mentioned the convenience of the BLE since it didn't have the constraints of time and place unlike the traditional classroom environment. Several students shared their enthusiasm about doing language practice outside the classroom whenever and wherever they wanted to by downloading the application to their mobile phones. Some students also mentioned that they could control and choose the most convenient time and the place for studying, which motivated them to speak.

Technical Issues. Technical issues were emphasized especially in the reflective journal. While some students had difficulties recording their videos on the system, some claimed that even though they recorded a video using their phone instead of using the system, when they uploaded it on the online environment, it turned into a voice recording. Some others dealt with some difficulties as the website didn't support the system of the mobile phones they were using for recording. On the other hand, it should be noted that some other students did not mention any technical issues while doing the tasks. Despite the technical challenges encountered, students also reported that without too much effort they usually overcame these difficulties and were able to record and or upload their videos.

Improvement. As for the results of the analysis, the dominant category most frequently referred to in student reflections was the improvement. Most of the students believe that doing the video-based ACMC tasks helped them improve their speaking abilities. To be more precise, most students stated they saw the improvement in their speaking skills when they made a comparison between the first and the last week. In the beginning, most felt the need to brainstorm about the topic for some time, choose the correct words, work on the pronunciation, and come up with the best grammar patterns they could, in other words, they felt dependent. Nevertheless, towards the end of the track and treatment, most felt less dependent on this preparation stage and were able to produce better sentences and speak with more eligible pronunciation and fluency, which gave them the feeling of improvement. The following excerpt exemplifies this:

> *"Before recording, I used to try to remember everything by heart. Then, I could record my video. This started to bother me as I was quite dependent on remembering. However, after a while, I wasn't even trying to remember but producing sentences on the go. I felt that I was improving my speaking." (Reflective journal)*

Meaningful Assignment. Some students also mentioned how they actually felt about this new type of learning. Many students stated that even though they knew the teacher was not going to grade the recordings, they still tried to do their best since they valued the speaking and feedback opportunity given by the teacher. One student

claimed that video-based ACMC tasks were the most effective assignment that was given to them during the entire track. In addition, several students stated that they were eager to do the tasks since they believed it was meaningful and effective, and they would develop their speaking skills as a result.

Prejudgments. A couple of students confessed that they held prejudgments about doing the tasks at the beginning, yet in time they realized that they were wrong in their prejudgments and this experience with the ACMC tasks had turned out to be quite effective for improving their speaking skills. The following excerpt clarifies this finding:

> *"Before doing my first video, I had some prejudgments about the application. Actually, I didn't really want to do the assignments. But after my first video, I changed my mind. I realized that I started to like and benefit from the assignments. I wish we could use it longer." (Reflective journal)*

Satisfaction. Finally, some students shared the happiness and the satisfaction the ACMC tasks gave them as a result of witnessing the improvement in their skills and having fun while contributing to the BLE. Several students reported that when they reflected on the process and their language progress, they believed that they were more fluent while speaking and spent less time thinking what they would say next, which made them feel satisfied with both the process and their progress. Lastly, a big majority of the students stated in the reflective journal that they enjoyed recording videos and watching other videos created by their classmates.

In conclusion, despite of the fact that the blended instruction in this study mainly aimed to help students develop their oral proficiency and reduce speaking anxiety, it should be noted that students in the experimental group believed that doing video-based ACMC tasks also enabled them to do extra practice in other language areas such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing and listening. The results of the semi-structured interviews and reflective journal indicate that students held positive perceptions of the blended instruction and appreciated the benefits it provided even though several students encountered some technical issues while doing the tasks.

Chapter 5
Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Discussion of the Findings for Research Questions

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of integrating video-based ACMC tasks on the oral proficiency and speaking anxiety level on Turkish A2 level EFL students. Furthermore, this study also aimed to explore the students' perceptions of blended instruction. In an attempt to seek answers to the research questions of the current study, data were collected through quantitative and qualitative instruments, namely pre-test and post-test, semi-structured interviews with the students and student reflective journal. Based on the data gathered from the participants, the findings will be further explored with respect to the purposes of this study. The following sections discuss the results of this study by including each research question in depth referring to the reviewed literature. Finally, conclusion and pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research studies will be presented.

5.1.1 Discussion of findings of RQ 1: Is there a significant difference between control group and experimental group in terms of oral language achievement? The first research question investigated the impact of integrating video-based ACMC tasks on the L2 oral proficiency by comparing the differences obtained with pre-test and post-test oral exam results. The hypothesis was that complementing the in-class speaking practice, video-based ACMC tasks would promote speaking skills outside the classroom environment and eventually help learners enhance their oral proficiency. Based on the oral performance pre-test and post-test scores of the participants (N=58), the analysis indicated that both the experimental and control group developed their L2 oral proficiency at the end of the track which lasted 8 weeks.

The findings indicated that the participants in the experimental group gained higher scores in the post-test (*M=69.82*) compared to the pre-test oral exam (*M=43.10*). As explained in chapter 3, upon in-class learning and practice,

participants in the experimental group were assigned with the video-based ACMC tasks and were asked to record videos responding to the assignment of that specific week. Supported by the qualitative findings, this enabled them to put the newly learned structures into further practice and do more language practice in addition to in-class activities. Furthermore, unlike the control group, the experimental group received individual teacher feedback on their contributions each week. Previous research studies suggest that receiving feedback from the teacher may encourage learners to see their mistakes and make an effort to correct them (Harmer, 2007; Murphy, 2010). Both the semi-structured interview and reflective journal findings of the present study support the fact that receiving feedback on their oral production, students could see their weaknesses along with their strengths, which enabled them to do self-reflection (Harmer, 2007), work on these weaknesses and not repeat them in the upcoming tasks. On the other hand, the participants in the control group were limited to the speaking practice that they did in the classroom. Even though they had the opportunities to do in-class speaking tasks, talk to their classmates and occasionally receive teacher feedback, it is questionable whether each individual's needs were catered for. More specifically, as an observation, during most in-class speaking tasks done in the control group, shy students were dominated by the dominant students (Ortega, 1997), or couldn't produce the target language that satisfied both themselves and the teacher in the given time. Furthermore, as another observation, students in the control group were not able to receive individual feedback from the teacher each time they produced the target language because of larger class size and time constraints (Acar, 2015; Ho, 2003), which may suggest that they were not always aware of their weaknesses along with their strengths. As a result, unlike the experimental group, students in the control group may not have been able to gain the awareness or feel the need to work on these weaknesses. However, the pre-test *(M=37.24)* and post-test *(M=60.17)* oral exam results of the control group point to a significant increase in the oral proficiency. This could be interpreted that even without the video-based ACMC treatment, students in the control group improved their oral proficiency. It should be noted that this increase is considered to be an expected and intended outcome, and it should be acknowledged that even without any treatment, it is quite natural for L2 learners to develop their oral proficiency and communication competencies up to a certain point after eight

weeks of in-class teaching. However, even though there is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of these groups regarding oral performance, it is worth to state that the increase in the oral proficiency was higher in the experimental group compared to the increase in the control group. For two classes which had students with the same language proficiency level (A2), these higher scores of the experimental group may be interpreted as the result of the treatment. In other words, bearing in mind that all participants (N=58) were taught by the same teacher, studied the same books and followed the same in-class teaching procedures, the higher success the participants in the experimental group achieved could be explained by the additional oral practice they did outside the classroom for eight weeks through the video-based ACMC tasks. More specifically, this higher increase in the scores can be explained with the fact that they were more engaged in vocabulary items, grammar structures, and pronunciation since experimental group often spent some certain time getting ready for the video recordings.

As stated in the literature review, Burkart (1998) suggested that to speak in a language, people need three areas of knowledge namely pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. This knowledge helps the learners to use the right words with the right grammar and pronunciation. It should be noted that the participants in both experimental and control group did practices in-class in the language areas aforementioned by following the content of the book. Nevertheless, it is open to argument whether the time allocated to the given tasks was enough for each student to brainstorm on the topic, produce the related language, reflect on the product, and to receive either teacher or peer feedback. On the other hand, the findings of the reflective journal suggest that by doing the video-based ACMC tasks, students in the experimental group reported that they had the chance to do additional practice not only in speaking but also in other language areas such as grammar, listening, vocabulary, pronunciation, and writing. More specifically, most students believed that they did grammar, writing and vocabulary practice by brainstorming on the topic before recording the video, listening practice by listening to their friend's videos, and pronunciation practice by re-recording their videos. These findings are similar to Banados (2006) that found online environment enabled students to improve their listening, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. However, in another study carried out by Sun (2012), no significant improvement was observed regarding

pronunciation or grammar even though the students improved their oral proficiency. When the post-test oral exam results and the qualitative findings of the present study are taken into consideration, differences between the studies regarding the improvements in other language areas are obvious. These different findings could be due to several reasons namely a) the instructional design of the tasks and teacher guidance and b) student awareness as a result of this guidance. To be more specific, the researcher in the present study informed the participants in the experimental group on how she would give feedback to the videos, that is the feedback would cover specific language areas: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This might have encouraged the students to pay additional attention to these areas while they were recording their videos.

Last but not least, students in the experimental group were allowed plentiful time to conceptualize their message content, formalize the words and phrases, articulate the message and self-monitor their weaknesses and strength (Levelt, 1989). It is worth to mention that when the results of the quantitative data (pre-test post-test oral exam) are taken into consideration it is clear that the students in the experimental group improved their communicative skills more than the participants in the control group. Supported by the qualitative data, the communication skills may have improved as a result of focusing on the given ACMC topics and brainstorming about the related message and conveying this as a message on their own time and pace. To be more precise, one of the criteria in the oral exam rubric is ‘interaction’, which means staying on task, responding appropriately, communicating effectively and developing the interaction. In addition to this, receiving teacher feedback to their oral productions, the participants had the opportunity to recognize and even fix any problems related to the appropriate response, being on or off topic, and conveying the message effectively since doing video-based ACMC tasks provided participants in the experimental group with plentiful time for self-reflection (Chen & Looi, 2007; Ng & Cheung, 2007). On the other hand, as an observation from the classroom, whenever the students were given a task, they had limited time to complete these tasks and not everyone could receive individual feedback for their oral production. These results of this study are similar to several studies which reported that voice-based debates and discussions in class and online promote the development of communicative competency (Banados, 2006; McIntosh et al., 2003) and the

integration of video-based blogs into in-class speaking instruction improve English public speaking skills (Shih, 2010).

5.1.2 Discussion of findings of RQ 2: Is there a significant difference between control group and experimental group in terms of foreign language speaking anxiety level? In order to address the second research question that explored the impact of the video-based ACMC tasks on L2 speaking anxiety, the data was collected through the pre-test and post-test anxiety scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). The hypothesis was that doing the video-based ACMC tasks would help participants in the experimental group feel less speaking anxiety while speaking in the target language. The findings suggested that the participants in the experimental group had lower anxiety level at the end of the treatment whereas the participants in the control group developed a higher level of speaking anxiety, which suggests there is a strong relationship between L2 speaking anxiety level and doing video-based ACMC tasks.

It is suggested that students may feel quite anxious while speaking in the target language since they process and produce the language without any planning and rehearsals (Goh & Burns, 2012). In the present study, considering the fact that the participants in the experimental and control group had the same amount of in-class learning hours, were taught with the same materials and by the same teacher, it is no wonder that the participants in the experimental group were able to feel less anxious as a result of additional speaking practice. To be more precise, in the present study, the participants in the experimental group had the opportunity to brainstorm and then produce the language without worrying about the presence of the teacher and others. This may have helped especially the shy students by providing a safer and more relaxed environment to speak in the target language (Hanson-Smith, 2001; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991). They were also able to re-record as many times as they needed if they believed they could perform better in the next attempt, and do self-evaluation (Harmer, 2007), which may often not so possible in a traditional classroom because of the time constraints and large class sizes. Therefore, bearing in mind the qualitative findings, being exposed to the language in and outside the classroom as well as being able to process and produce the language in their own pace helped the participants in the experimental group develop self-confidence, which eventually

reduced the anxiety level. On the other hand, the participants in the control group were limited to in-class speaking activities and time to process and produce the target language. Moreover, compared to the experimental group, the students in the control group had fewer opportunities to do practice due to the large class size (Ho, 2003) and most of the time students could not get individual feedback to their oral performances as a result. It is suggested that to process the language completely learners may need time to plan and produce (Carter & Nunan, 2001). Hence, the absence of the additional oral practice and time constraints in the classroom may have caused the participants in the control group to feel more L2 speaking anxiety. It is also worth to highlight the significant difference between the pre- and post-test FLCAS scores of the participants in the control group regarding speaking anxiety. The results suggest that compared to the level at the beginning of the track, the anxiety level of the participants has increased at the end of the track, while this level has decreased in the experimental group. This increase in speaking anxiety could be due to the increasing expectations of both the program and the A2 language level. In other words, at the beginning of the track, the students in the control group were new at A2 level when they had the pre-test FLCAS. However, when they took the post-test FLCAS, they have just finished the 8-weeks-track and unlike the experimental group, they did not have additional speaking practice outside the classroom, which may have resulted in higher speaking anxiety since they had limited time to produce the language and had to perform in front of others.

The findings of this study are in line with previous research studies showing that the use of ACMC tasks reduces speaking anxiety. Online discussions (McIntosh et, al., 2003), voice conferencing communication (Poza, 2011) and being supplied with additional speaking opportunities (Gleason and Suvorov, 2011) help learners feel less anxious and more confident after doing online assignments (Cho & Carey, 2001). However, in their study McIntosh et al., (2003) also found that there were some students who were not very comfortable with the idea of sharing their recordings on the online system and when they listened to themselves they felt rather embarrassed. Also, Lee (2004) found that students still felt language anxiety despite the CMC integration and suggested that the proficiency level of the students, their computer skills, and age differences may have interfered with the study results. Nevertheless, in the present study, the qualitative findings indicate that even though

several students felt anxious about doing the recordings and posting them on the online environment at first. In the reflective journals, these students mentioned feeling a little nervous before the first recording, but they also mentioned that they realized how 'unnecessary' this nervousness was. They stated that before posting their first videos, they overcame this feeling of nervousness while doing rehearsals. Also, after the first week's task, they have never felt such a feeling because they felt more 'comfortable' and 'secure' while doing their recordings. This qualitative finding is supported by the quantitative findings of the study that suggests significantly reduced speaking anxiety after the treatment.

In conclusion, based on the analysis of the FLCAS, it may be suggested that when given additional ACMC oral practice opportunities outside the classroom, students may create self-confidence and they may feel less anxious as a result, practice not only speaking but other language areas such as grammar, vocabulary, writing, listening, and pronunciation.

5.1.3 Discussion of findings of RQ 3: What are EFL learners' perceptions of the blended learning environment for supporting spoken English outside the classroom environment? In an attempt to address the third research question that examined the perceptions of the students of using video-based ACMC tasks to practice speaking skills, data was collected from semi-structured interviews with participants (N=6) in the experimental group and the reflective journal with the contribution of the all participants (N= 29) in the experimental group. The findings of the semi-structured interviews revealed that the participants in the experimental group held mostly positive perceptions towards practicing English language speaking by doing video-based ACMC tasks. According to the findings of both the semi-structured interviews and student reflective journal, students stated that it helped them improve communicative competence, feel more confident, do skills practice, and feel less anxious. They also mentioned the constructive effect of the teacher feedback they received for their recordings, which promoted self-correction related to grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and so forth and created an environment for language development. Last but not least, the findings also revealed that the participants encountered some technical problems while either recording or

uploading the videos. Nevertheless, they indicated that they enjoyed and benefitted from doing the online tasks.

In line with the findings of this current study, there exist several research studies on voice and video-based ACMC integration while teaching L2. The literature suggests that voice-based ACMC tasks help learners enhance their L2 pronunciation (Ducate and Lomicka, 2009; Kabata et al., 2005;), spot their weaknesses (Huang and Hung, 2009), improve their speaking skills along with their listening skills (Hsu et al., 2008), receive feedback to their oral production even though they may face some technical issues while doing the tasks (Kabata et al., 2005). The findings of the present study showed similar results. For one thing, the participants in the study stated that the feedback they received to their oral contribution was effective as it enabled them to recognize their weaknesses. They believed that this encouraged them to continue to participate in the BLE and also try not to repeat their previous mistakes. Additionally, the participants in the study also mentioned that doing ACMC tasks not only helped them develop their communicative competencies but also created an environment where students could also do practice in some other language areas such as grammar, vocabulary, writing and listening. The students reported that before speaking they felt the need to do brainstorming about the topic. In the first couple of weeks, this brainstorming process was mainly writing down everything they were planning to say in the video. Later on, it turned into a more natural contribution for many students, where they came up with the ideas while recording the video without any preparation process.

Furthermore, the students in the experimental group also mentioned that being able to monitor their own speaking, they could also pay attention to their pronunciation. Since they had the chance to re-record their oral contribution, they mentioned that they checked the pronunciation of some specific words in online dictionaries and tried to imitate and pronounce it the best way they could. Even though there isn't any significant data to prove any pronunciation development in this study, it can still be suggested that using video-based ACMC tasks enable learners to pay attention to their pronunciation while speaking, and work on any problematic vocabulary items by creating an awareness.

The interview findings indicated that students held positive perceptions towards doing online practice. Additionally, students reported that doing the

asynchronous assignments provided them with the time they needed to prepare, edit and share their responses. As for the present study, the participants were A2 elementary level students, which means that they needed all the time they could get to feel ready to put what they have learned into practice and produce language. Participants in the experimental group reported that they had enough time to think about the topics, write down what they would say in the video, check for the pronunciation of difficult words and finally record and share it. Thus, the asynchronous nature of the CMC tasks enabled the learners to do the oral practice without the pressure of audience and time.

In their reflective journals, two students used the word 'meaningful homework'. In the preparatory school where the present research was carried out, the usual homework assignments are either ready-to-use or teacher-designed worksheets or their student book's workbook. As an observation, students, in general, do not really find these kinds of assignments useful as they usually have one correct answer and there is not much room for creativity. There have been cases where some students got the answers to these assignments from their friends who finished earlier. And some other students did not even bother to complete these assignments even though they were a part of the assessment. The reason why these worksheets and workbook assignments are not favored by the students is that these assignments are often either too difficult which may be challenging or too easy which is not motivating. On the other hand, the video-based ACMC tasks were designed in such a way that was neither challenging for their levels nor demotivating as they were supposed to create something about them and everyone would create something of their own. As a result, students completed these tasks even though they knew they were not going to be graded, and they usually completed these tasks before the given deadline. Unlike the worksheet and workbook assignments, video-based ACMC tasks could give the students the opportunity to personalize each week's tasks and shape it as they desired as long as they were answering the main question. Supported by the reflective journal, the satisfaction the students got from creating such a personalized product enabled them to continue doing the ACMC tasks without any encouragement. As for final remarks of the student interviews and reflective journal, a majority of the students said that they would love to continue to do ACMC tasks for developing their oral performances in the upcoming tracks.

Even though the literature mostly points to the benefits, there may be several drawbacks of using ACMC tasks (Azarnoosh, 2014; Huang and Hung, 2009; Kabata et al., 2005). Considering the literature and the findings from the current study, it is safe to say that some technical issues may occur while using voice or video-based ACMC tools. However, to the knowledge of the researcher, none of these studies reported any drawbacks that resulted in poor student contribution, drop-outs or reason to not to participate. Likewise, in the present study, reflective journals highlighted the common technical issues students experienced while doing their video-based ACMC tasks. Among these were not being able to record the video on the online environment when pressed the record button, recording a video which then would turn into a voice recording and uploading the videos they recorded using their phones' recording tools. Yet again, it was observed by the researcher and reported by the students that none of these technical issues discouraged learners from doing the tasks since there was always another option students could try or the system would simply fix itself and let recording happen.

To put it in a nutshell, the integration of video-based ACMC tasks into the traditional F2F instruction proved itself to be beneficial since it enabled students to practice not only speaking skills but also other language skills, helped them reduce their speaking anxiety and feel more comfortable while speaking. All in all, it is safe to say that the participants in this current study, Turkish A2 level EFL students, held positive perceptions of the video-based ACMC tasks integrated into their F2F lessons.

5.2 Recommendations and Suggestions

5.2.1 Recommendations and Suggestions for Practitioners. The current study holds promising pedagogical implications in tertiary level for integrating video-based ACMC tasks for practicing and improving speaking skills and reducing L2 speaking anxiety. First of all, the findings of this study add to the body of the video-based ACMC literature regarding the design and implementation of blended instruction. The literature on the use of ACMC is mainly focused on text-based communication (Blake, 2000; Greenfield, 2003) whereas voice-based CMC in a blended learning environment did not get much attention (Chen, 2015). Furthermore,

to the best of researcher's knowledge, there is limited number of research studies in Turkey on video-based ACMC tasks regarding oral proficiency and foreign language speaking anxiety. Consequently, the findings of this study shed light on the use of video-based ACMC tasks to improve oral competency and reduce anxiety level of L2 learners.

In addition, based on the results of this study, it can be proposed that combining the advantages of both F2F teaching and the online instructional environments may help learners feel less L2 anxiety while speaking, which provides insights and valuable implications for curriculum designers and language instructors while designing speaking syllabuses. The present study revealed that the participants in the control group developed a higher speaking anxiety while the participants in the experimental group reduced their anxiety level after the treatment. Considering these findings, instructors may conduct a needs analysis at the beginning of the term and when they reach the conclusion that speaking anxiety might have some negative effects on oral performance, it could be an alternative way to deal with foreign language speaking anxiety to assign video-based ACMC tasks either individually or as a whole class.

Moreover, the findings of this study provide insights for curriculum designers, testing departments at institutions, and English language instructors in several ways. First of all, especially in countries where English is not the official language, it may be a challenge for students to find native speakers to put the newly learned structures into use. In addition, the in-class practice opportunities may not be enough for all students to be able to develop communication competencies. In such cases, providing additional speaking opportunities outside the classroom may give the learners the development opportunity they seek. Furthermore, it may also enable them to overcome the speaking barriers they might have and feel less anxious while speaking in English since they have a chance to process and practice the language without the presence of others and the pressure it may create. Additionally, due to the limitation in face-to-face or in class speaking performance such as large class sizes, time constraints, speaking in the presence of others, students' performance may be hindered. As a result, it may be a plausible thought to consider the inclusion of asynchronous speaking tasks into the assessment schemes where some of the benefits

like low-anxiety environment for oral communication and the chance to record the output may help increase the effectiveness of speaking assessment.

Additionally, compared to writing, as a productive skill speaking lessons do not normally offer the opportunity to keep a record of language production. Learners often speak and there is usually no chance to listen to what they said, whereas in a writing lesson, students may go to their written production whenever they like and work on their weaknesses, which may lead to improvement (Harmer, 2007). However, the present study proved that by integrating video-based ACMC tasks, an instructor may be able to guide their learners to use these assignments as a portfolio system. In other words, curriculum designers and instructors may integrate video-based ACMC tasks so as to help students create an electronic oral portfolio which allows learners to listen to themselves speaking, recognize their weaknesses as well as strengths, and take the responsibility to follow their own progress. This also means that language instructors may follow student progress and offer an alternative to existing speaking instruction and assessment.

To conclude, these implications may be useful to instructional designers, L2 language instructors, curriculum designers, and lastly researchers who desire to further the blended instruction practices.

5.2.2 Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research. This study investigated the impacts of video-based ACMC tasks on both L2 oral proficiency and speaking anxiety level. Based on the discussions and implications above, the study may propose several areas for future research.

For one thing, future studies could explore the impact of video-based ACMC tasks on L2 oral proficiency development and anxiety level in order to confirm or disconfirm the findings of this study. In other words, the study may be replicated with other audiences in other settings.

Another possibility for future research could be the use of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) to improve oral proficiency and reduce speaking anxiety. The reason why ACMC tasks were used in this study is the level of the students, which was A2. Previous research indicates that synchronous communication is considered to be more convenient and effective for high-proficiency learners since it requires learners to generate language faster as it is

simultaneous, which may lead to pressure and cognitive load on individuals (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). In contrast, in asynchronous communication, learners have considerably more time for creating output (Pop et al., 2011), which works well with all levels and is thought to be more suitable for low-proficiency learners.

Furthermore, in the present study, only the perceptions of the students were explored. However, a study that involves the language instructors may be conducted in order to investigate the perceptions of the instructors regarding blended instruction.

Last but not least, another follow-up study could be carried out to investigate the perceptions in depth. More specifically, the study may focus on the impact of the instructional design of the blended instruction and environment on overall learning.

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APPENDICES

A. Speaking Exam Questions

DESCRIBING PERSONALITY

1. Describe your personality. What kinds of people do you usually get along well with?

TRAVELLING

2. Where do you like to go on vacation? Do you prefer travelling with family or friends?

GIVING ADVICE

3. What are some things students should do to improve their English?

MAKING COMPARISONS

4. Do you prefer to live in a city or the country side? Which is better and why?

PRESENT SIMPLE & SHARING PERSONAL OPINIONS

5. How often do you eat fast food? What do you usually eat? Where? Why is fast food so popular?

TALKING ABOUT FUTURE

6. When will you graduate? How do you think you will use English in the future?

B. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

Turkish Version

Aşağıdaki her bir ifadeyi okuduktan sonra şu seçeneklerden birisini size verilen kağıda işaretleyiniz. **Hiçbir ifadeyi boş bırakmayınız.**

1. Hiçbir zaman 2. Nadiren 3. Bazen 4. Sıklıkla 5. Her zaman

1. İngilizce konuşurken kendimden emin olamıyorum.
2. İngilizce derslerinde hata yapmaktan korkuyorum.
3. İngilizce derslerinde sıra bana geldiğini bildiğim zaman heyecandan ölüyorum.
4. İngilizce derslerinde öğretmenin ne söylediğini anlamamak beni korkutuyor.
5. Haftada daha fazla İngilizce ders saatimin olmasını isterdim.
6. İngilizce dersi sırasında kendimi dersle hiç de ilgisi olmayan başka şeyleri düşünürken buluyorum.
7. Diğer öğrencilerin İngilizce derslerinde benden daha iyi olduklarını düşünüyorum.
8. İngilizce derslerinin sınavlarında kendimi endişeli hissediyorum.
9. İngilizce derslerinde hazırlıksız konuşmak zorunda kaldığımda paniğe kapılıyorum.
10. İngilizce derslerinde başarısız olmak beni endişelendiriyor.
11. Yabancı dil dersleri konusunda bazılarının niye endişe duyduklarını anlayabiliyorum.
12. İngilizce derslerinde bazen öyle heyecanlanıyorum ki, bildiğim şeyleri bile unutuyorum.
13. İngilizce derslerinde sorulan sorulara gönüllü olarak cevap vermekten sıkılıyorum.
14. İngilizceyi, ana dili İngilizce olan insanlarla konuşmak beni heyecanlandırıyor.

15. Öğretmenin hangi hatalarını düzelttiğini anlamamak beni endişelendiriyİngilizce derslerinde, önceden çok iyi hazırlanmış olsam bile derste heyecanlanıyorum.
16. İngilizce derslerine girmek istemiyorum.
17. İngilizce derslerinde konuştuğum zaman kendime güvenmiyorum.
18. İngilizce öğretmenim yaptığım her hatayı düzeltmeye çalışıyor.
19. İngilizce derslerinde sıra bana geldiği zaman kalbimin hızlı hızlı attığını hissediyorum.
20. İngilizce sınavlarına ne kadar çok çalışırsam kafam o kadar çok karışıyor.
21. Kendimi İngilizce derslerine çok iyi hazırlanıp gitmek zorunda hissediyorum.
22. Her zaman diğer öğrencilerin benden daha iyi İngilizce konuştuğunu düşünüyorum.
23. Diğer öğrencilerin önünde İngilizce konuşurken kendimi çok tedirgin hissediyorum.
24. İngilizce dersleri o kadar hızlı akıp gidiyor ki sınıfa ayak uyduramamaktan korkuyorum.
25. İngilizce derslerinde konuştuğum zaman hem sıkılıyorum hem de kafam karışıyor.
26. İngilizce derslerine girerken kendimi çok rahatsız ve güvensiz hissediyorum.
27. İngilizce öğretmenimin söylediği her kelimeyi anlayamadığım zaman paniğe kapılıyorum.
28. İngilizce konuşabilmek için öğrenmek zorunda olduğum kuralların sayısının çok fazla olması beni kaygılandırıyor.
29. İngilizce konuştuğum zaman diğer öğrencilerin bana güleceğinden endişe duyuyorum.
30. İngilizceyi, ana dili İngilizce olan insanların yanında kullanırken rahatsız oluyorum.
31. İngilizce öğretmenimin cevabını önceden hazırlamadığım sorular sorduğunda heyecanlanıyorum.

C. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Before this course, what did you know about Voicethread?
2. What did you benefit from this project?
3. Did video blog help you learn in this class? If it did, in what ways?
4. In your opinion, how can video blogs help improve your English-speaking skills in this class?
5. What components of video blogs were most useful?
6. Are there any other thoughts about video blogs that you would like to share?

D. Reflective Journal

This paper aims to help you reflect on our project. Please do **not** share your name.

Please write a reflection of **90 to 120 English words** to reflect on your Voicethread experience this semester. You can talk about **ANYTHING** related to your Voicethread experience.

For example, what do you like about it and what don't you like about it? How does it improve your speaking? How helpful is teacher feedback? Does it help with your self-confidence? Did it also help your writing skills? Etc.

Thank you for your participation.

E. Speaking Exam Rubric

2017-2018 ACADEMIC YEAR ENGLISH PREPARATORY SCHOOL HALF TERM PROFICIENCY EXAM SPEAKING RUBRIC					
Task Response	**Fluency/Pronunciation**	**Accuracy**	**Vocabulary**	**Interaction**	**TOTAL (20)**
4 points	**4 points**	**4 points**	**4 points**	**4 points**	**16-20 points**
Gives a relevant, organized response	Able to communicate without long pauses and appropriate speed; pronunciation easy to understand	Succeeds in building a full range of correct sentences naturally, with minimal errors	Able to make use of a variety of words correctly at the intermediate level or better; naturally utilizes connectors and discourse markers	Stays on task and communicates effectively; almost always responds appropriately and always tries to develop the interaction	The student is proficient
3 points	3 points	3 points	3 points	3 points	11-15 points
The response is a bit short or disorganized, but still on topic	Pauses but not frequently or long; pronunciation is generally understood	Uses a range of structures but only moderate success with complex structures; some grammatical mistakes but does not cause communication problems	Makes use of a limited number of intermediate vocabulary and connectors/discourse markers	Stays on task most of the time and communicates effectively; generally responds appropriately and keeps trying to develop interaction	The student is close to proficient
2 points	2 points	2 points	2 points	2 points	6-10 points
The response is either too short or sometimes lacking relevance	Pauses frequently and long; mispronunciations are frequent, causing difficulty in understanding	Produces basic sentences with reasonable accuracy; complex forms contain errors that lead to misunderstanding	Fails to make use of intermediate level vocabulary	Tries to communicate, but sometimes does not respond appropriately or clearly	The student has long to progress
1 point	1 point	1 point	1 point	1 point	0-5 points
Almost no response or off-topic	Long and awkward pauses; speech is often unintelligible	Attempts basic forms but is generally unsuccessful; relies completely on memorized expressions	Sentences mostly contain elementary or pre-intermediate level vocabulary	Purpose isn't clear; needs a lot of help communicating; usually does not respond appropriately or clearly	The student is far below the expected level

F. Curriculum Vitae

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name	:	Nihal Özdemir
Nationality	:	Turkish (T.C.)
Date and Place of Birth	:	20 June 1985, Bursa
Marital Status	:	Married
Phone	:	+90 530 174 99 10
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EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
MA	Bahçeşehir University, Educational Technology	2018
BA	Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, ELT	2010

WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrollment
2018- present	Istanbul Medipol University	ENARC Unit CPD Member
2018- present	Cambridge University Press, Istanbul	Freelance Teacher Trainer
2018- present	Istanbul Medipol University	English Instructor
2012- 2016	Istanbul Bilgi University	English Instructor
2011- 2012	Ludus Academy, Canakkale	English Teacher
2010- 2011	Direzione Didacttica di Gemona, Italy	English Teacher

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Advanced English, Pre-Intermediate Spanish

CERTIFICATES

- Teacher Induction Course (Online) – Laureate International Universities, 2013
- Teaching Writing and Speaking (Online) - Laureate International Universities, 2013
- Teaching Grammar, Vocabulary and Pronunciation (Online) - Laureate International Universities, 2014
- Microsoft Recognized Educator Certificate, 2016
- Blendit- Blended Learning Course (Online), 2016
- Training the Teacher Trainer Course, 2018

PROFESSINONAL INTERESTS

Blended Instruction and Second Language Learning, Differentiated Learning, Collaborative Learning