

## Effects of Teacher Support on Chinese EFL University Students' Listening Ability in a Blended Learning Environment\*

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## 블렌디드 러닝 환경에서 교사의 지지가 중국 대학생의 영어 듣기 능력에 미치는 영향

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**Abstract** This study aims to explore the differential effects of teacher support on Chinese EFL students' listening ability in a blended learning environment. 87 third-year English-major students in a Chinese university participated in this study and they were randomly divided into an autonomy group (n=22), an emotional group (n=22), a cognitive group (n=22) and a control group (n=21). Each experimental group received relevant teacher support during their 17-week course learning while the control group did not. To confirm the effects of teacher support, pre- and post- listening tests were conducted. The results of the paired t-tests demonstrated that all groups showed statistically significant improvement in their English listening ability. The results of the one-way ANOVA for the post-test revealed that autonomy support and cognitive support were more effective than emotional support in improving students' listening ability. Based on the findings, this study hopes to provide insights for EFL teachers in designing and arranging the activities in a blended course.

**Key Words** : teacher support, EFL, listening ability, blended learning

요 약 본 연구의 목적은 블렌디드 러닝 환경에서 교사의 지지가 중국 대학생들의 영어 듣기 능력에 미치는 영향을 탐색하는 데 있다. 본 연구는 중국의 한 대학에서 영어를 전공하고 있는 3학년 학생 총 87명을 대상으로 진행하였으며, 실험을 위해 참가자들을 자율성 지지 그룹, 정서적 지지 그룹, 인지적 지지 그룹, 통제 그룹으로 나누었다. 모든 참가자들은 일주일에 두 시간씩 총 17주 동안 영어 듣기 수업에 참가하였고, 실험 집단에 따라 각기 다른 교사의 지지를 받았다. 교사의 지지 효과를 검증하고자 실험 전과 후 사전 사후 듣기 시험을 실시하였고, 그 결과는 다음과 같다. 모든 그룹의 영어 듣기 능력이 통계적으로 유의미하게 향상된 것으로 나타나 블렌디드 러닝 환경에서 교사의 지지가 중국 대학생들의 영어 듣기 실력을 향상시키는 데 효과적임을 보여 주었다. 그룹 간 차이를 비교해본 결과, 정서적 지지보다 자율성 지지와 인지적 지지가 학생의 듣기 실력을 향상시키는 데 더 효과적인 것으로 나타났다. 본 연구는 영어를 외국어로 학습하는 EFL 환경에서 교사가 수업 계획과 활동을 구성하는데 유용한 시사점을 제공하고자 한다.

주제어 : 교사의 지지, 외국어로서의 영어, 듣기 능력, 블렌디드 러닝

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## 1. Introduction

English, as a dominant lingua franca, transcending the boundaries of country and culture, has been used by people with different native languages [1]. Meanwhile, as an important element of individual's human capital, English proficiency plays a vital role in international trade and communication [2]. Considering its importance, English has long been part of the curriculum for most English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. EFL refers to the study of English by non-native speakers in countries where English is not the dominant language [3]. Compared to learners of English as a Second Language (ESL), EFL learners have less chance to practice the language in their daily lives [4], which makes EFL classrooms an important place to learn and develop their language proficiency [5].

According to Wang, Chen, Tai and Zhang [6], language proficiency can be regarded as students' learning achievement and can be influenced by many factors. For example, student's learning motivation, learning anxiety, learning engagement, and self-efficacy can influence students' academic achievement [7-10]. In particular, support from teachers, parents and peers are also the factors that can influence language proficiency [9]. Deci, Hodges, Pierson and Tomassone [11] pointed out that these supportive relations can directly influence student's learning achievement. In addition, teacher support has been proved to be a vital role in improving students' motivation and performance in learning a language [12].

According to Zou et al. [13], Chinese EFL students majoring in English have lower proficiency in listening skills compared to other skills such as reading and writing. Given that listening proficiency is considered the foundation of effective communication in the Chinese EFL context [14], it is necessary to investigate whether teacher support can improve

Chinese EFL students' listening skills.

With the application of information and technology, blended learning has become a prominent method in higher education [15]. As a combination of online and traditional face-to-face learning, it remedies the defects of a single instructional form and provides more choices for teachers and students [6]. In this context, not only has the definition of teacher support expanded, but also the requirements for teacher support have increased [16].

However, only a few studies have explored the effects of teacher support on EFL learning achievement [5,9]. Furthermore, the previous studies on teacher support have been conducted either in a conventional face-to-face learning environment or an online environment [17-21]. There is a dearth of research regarding the effectiveness of teacher support in a blended EFL learning environment. Considering that blended learning can develop students' language proficiency [22,23], it is needed to examine whether teacher support has a positive effect on EFL development in a blended learning environment.

Taking all this into consideration, the present study aims to investigate whether Chinese EFL students can benefit from teacher support on their listening ability in a blended learning environment and examine the effects of different types of teacher support - autonomy support, emotional support and cognitive support - based on the previous research. According to Chai and Gong [17], it is necessary to view teacher support as a multidimensional factor including autonomy support, emotional support and cognitive support, especially in China. The results of this empirical study will give Chinese EFL teachers some pedagogical suggestions in planning and implementing a blended course. Research questions of the present study were as follows:

1. In a blended learning environment, are there any effects of teacher support - autonomy

support, emotional support, or cognitive support – on Chinese EFL university students' listening ability?

2. In a blended learning environment, which type of teacher support – autonomy support, emotional support, or cognitive support – will have more influence on EFL students' listening ability?

Based on the previous studies and the research questions, hypotheses of the first research question were established as follow:

- H1: Teacher's autonomy support positively influences on Chinese EFL university students' listening ability.  
H2: Teacher's emotional support positively influences on Chinese EFL university students' listening ability.  
H3: Teacher's cognitive support positively influences on Chinese EFL university students' listening ability.

According to Dincer, Yesilyurt and Takkac [24], teacher's autonomy support had a positive effect on EFL students' speaking ability. In addition, Liu, Zhang and Liu [20] found that teacher's emotional support were more significant than cognitive support when it comes to students' learning. Therefore, similar hypotheses could be established as follow:

- H4: Among the three types of teacher support, teacher's autonomy support will have more influence on EFL students' listening ability.  
H5: Among the three types of teacher support, teacher's emotional support will have more influence on EFL students' listening ability.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Teacher Support

Mitchell and DellaMattera [25] defined teacher support as providing help for learning tasks, expressing concern for students, and caring about students' interests and happiness. It is an

important embodiment of teachers' active behaviors and is an indispensable social–environmental variable for understanding students' academic achievement [8].

Teacher support firstly appeared within the concept of social support. In Caplan's [26] research, the concept of social support refers to the help an individual receives from their social network including family members, teachers, peers, neighbors, and so on. In this regards, Malecki and Demaray [27] stated that social support can be divided into parent support, teacher support, and peer support. For children and adolescents, family support is significant in their learning achievement [27].

With age progress, students leave home and go to school where they are less influenced by their family and parents and are more influenced by the school environment. In the school context, students share equal status and peer support becomes stronger, having relations with students' belongings [28]. Teacher support also becomes obvious and it affects students' motivation and engagement, promoting their learning and achievement [28].

Scholars have regarded teacher support as a multi–dimensional variable which can positively influence on students' learning outcomes. For example, Klem and Connell [19] viewed teacher support as structure, autonomy support, and involvement and found that they can positively affect students' academic achievement. Hoi and Mu [29] divided teacher support into teacher orientation and behavior support and also suggested that students can benefit from the two types of teacher support. Tas, Subasi, and Yerdelen [30] regarded teacher support as emotional, informational, appraisal and instrumental support and investigated their effects on students' learning motivation and engagement. In the study, teacher support was found to positively influence students' task–value, self–concept and engagement.

In China, Chai and Gong [17] considered teacher support as autonomy support, cognitive support and emotional support. Autonomy support means teachers give students enough freedom and support in arranging academic tasks and choosing learning content and methods to solve problems to enhance students' autonomy [31–33]. It also indicates teachers' low controlling behavior, respect for students' views and feelings, and providing appropriate opportunities for students' academic activities [34]. In terms of emotional support, it refers to teachers' positive attention and care, emotional connection, and support for students' negative tendencies when dealing with pressure and challenges [35]. Regarding cognitive support, it includes providing academic challenges and stimulating learning curiosity [36], providing students with support for cognitive differences [37], and promoting students' understanding of concepts [17].

According to Chai and Gong [17], autonomy support greatly influences students' online learning engagement which can affect students' academic achievement. Liu, Zhang and Liu [20] explored the effects of different types of teacher support – autonomy support, cognitive support and emotional support – on online students' learning engagement and confirmed the findings of Chai and Gong's study [17].

As can be seen above, there have been studies regarding teacher support and learning outcomes. However, only a few have explored the effects of teacher support on EFL learning achievement [5,9]. In this regards, it is necessary to examine whether EFL students can benefit from teacher support. Particularly considering the Chai and Gong's study [17], the effectiveness of teacher support should be investigated from the three dimensions including autonomy support, cognitive support and emotional support.

## 2.2 Blended Learning in the EFL Context

Blended learning is the combination of traditional face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction [38]. Hoic-Bozic [39] regarded blended learning is the combination of face-to-face classroom learning with internet learning and technical supported learning to create a more effective learning environment. Blended learning has been recommended mainly because it has the advantages of improved pedagogy, increased access and flexibility, and increased cost-effectiveness [40]. It can provide more frequently training without a lot of extra costs [41]. Particularly, Means et al. [42] claimed that blended learning has the maximum effect on learner's learning outcomes.

In order to improve students' learning outcomes, many EFL teachers have adopted blended learning in their teaching [43]. Scholars have also confirmed the positive effects of blended learning on EFL learner's language proficiency development [22,23,44]. Banditvilai [45], Dincer, Yesilyurt and Takkac [24], Yoon and Lee [46] regarded blended learning as a means to increase students' self-determination, motivation and engagement in learning.

Studies on blended learning have also been conducted in the Chinese EFL context [6]. Cui [47] investigated the effectiveness of blended learning approach which aimed at improving students' listening and speaking skills. The results showed that students' listening and speaking abilities were improved and their initiative and autonomy were effectively promoted compared with the traditional method of teaching. Huang [48] conducted a blended English course and found EFL students felt online learning was more advantageous to students' listening ability and face-to-face learning could help learners to improving interests in learning English. Zou [49] also explored how teacher helped EFL students enhance their listening and speaking ability by blending a CALL programme.

With the application of information and technology, blended learning has become a prominent method in higher education [15]. However, in reviewing previous studies, most have investigated the effects of blended learning model by comparing it with traditional face-to-face learning model [44,50]. There is a lack of research on the effectiveness of teacher support in a blended EFL learning environment.

According to Jiang et al. [16], in blended learning, the definition of teacher support has been expanded and the requirements for teacher support have increased. Considering that blended learning can develop students' language proficiency [22,23], it is needed to examine whether teacher support has a positive effect on EFL development in a blended learning environment.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

As a part of Chinese EFL Learners, students majoring in English have more chance to apply English in school, but their listening proficiency is still lower than other language proficiency [13].

In order to improve EFL students' listening ability, 87 junior students took part in this empirical study. The participants were from a public university in Southwest China and aged from 20 to 25. They had experienced English education as a foreign language for 9 consecutive years from primary school to high school and they were enrolled in a listening course that met once a week for 100 minutes over 17 weeks in the spring semester of 2021. The course was compulsory for the junior students at the university. All participants were taught by one of the researchers in the current study.

To compare the extent to which the participants were influenced by different types of

teacher support, the participants were divided into four groups at random. These four groups were designed to reflect autonomy support (AS,  $n = 22$ ), emotional support (ES,  $n = 22$ ), cognitive support (CS,  $n = 22$ ) and a control group (C,  $n = 21$ ). Participants' listening proficiency was measured by a pre-test from the listening part of the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4, an official and public English comprehensive test for university students in China). One-Way ANOVA was adopted to examine the difference in the pre-test scores among the four groups.

Table 1. Participants

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
AS ( $n = 22$ )	108.14	34.90	.111	.953
ES ( $n = 22$ )	104.82	29.73		
CS ( $n = 22$ )	110.95	39.35		
C ( $n = 21$ )	107.57	36.83		

\*AS: Autonomy support group, ES: Emotional support group;  
CS: Cognitive support group; C: Control group

As can be seen from Table 1 above, there was no statistically significant group difference observed in the pre-test. Students' listening proficiency turned out to be homogeneous among the four groups ( $F = 0.111$ ,  $p > .05$ ), which means that all participants were at a similar level of English listening ability before the treatment.

#### 3.2 Teacher Support

According to the previous definition and description on different types of teacher support [16,17,20,29,36,51], a relevant operational teacher support type was given to each experimental group. They were autonomy support, emotional autonomy and cognitive support. For the control group, no additional teacher support was provided.

In terms of the AS group, students received autonomy support based on the previous research [16,17,20]. The students were asked for

their opinion before the course began. They were encouraged to raise questions on what they have learned and also allowed to give different answers when their answers were different from the standard one. The students were provided with resources on the learning contents and exercises based on their English proficiency levels. They were given enough time to arrange the online learning progress. In order to learn autonomously, the students decided what they learn and when.

As for the ES group, the students were given emotional support following the previous studies [16,17,51]. The teacher took care of the students' daily status by inquiring whether they have any problem in learning. The students were able to receive feedback on their question both online and in classroom. The teacher tried to understand the students' perceptions of their study and gave suggestions on their study. Furthermore, if the students looked frustrated and did not catch up the class, the teacher encouraged them to try harder. The teacher also gave the students praise and compliments when they got progress or completed a given task.

When it comes to the CS group, the teacher gave the students cognitive support according to the previous research [16,17,29,36]. The students were instructed to complete the task and guided for further study. They were given more difficult tasks within their ability. The students were also provided with various strategies to improve their listening ability. The teacher taught the students how to evaluate whether they mastered their language skill.

### 3.3 Pre- and Post-tests

All participants were enrolled in a 17-week course. They took the pre-test at the first week and then began the study on the blended listening course from week 2 to week 16. The post-test was conducted at the 17th week. In the

current study, the listening part of the College English Test (CET) was chosen as the pre-test and post-test to determine the effects of teacher support on students' listening ability. Aiming at improving English teaching at Chinese universities and measuring Chinese undergraduates' level of English proficiency objectively and accurately, the test has been conducted as a standardized examination by the Higher Education Bureau of China [52]. As an official English test, the CET has a crucial effect on Chinese university students' graduation and future employment. According to Jia and Yue [53], most job seekers in China are required to prove their English proficiency through CET certificates and their first basic salary depends on whether they got a CET certificate.

The test involved 30-minutes of listening with 25 multiple choice questions. In this listening test, three parts are involved. The first part includes three short news with 7 items; the second part includes two long conversations with 8 items; and the last part contains three passages with 10 items. Students are going to hear each audio for only once. They need to catch the question for each item and then choose the best answer from the four choices. The full mark of each item is 7.1 credit in the first 15 items and each of the rest 10 items is 14.2 credits. Because the listening test is only a part of the CET, the full score in the listening test is 248.5 which accounts for 35% of the total CET score of 710. The passing score in this listening test is 149.

### 3.4 Procedure

The purpose of this study was to examine whether teacher support has a positive effect on EFL development in a blended learning environment. In particular, the current study aimed to investigate the effects of different types of teacher support - autonomy support, emotional support, and cognitive support - on

Chinese EFL students' listening proficiency.

For this empirical study, participants from a public university in Southwest China were recruited. They were enrolled in a listening course that met once a week for 100 minutes over 17 weeks in the spring semester of 2021. For the experiment, the students were randomly divided into four groups with three experimental groups and one control group. A pre-test to determine the students' listening ability was conducted at the first week of the course.

All participants continued their course learning for 15 weeks. Based on Neumeier's [54] framework of blended language learning environment, participants in the present study spent 34% of time in the online mode, and 66% of time in the face-to-face mode. The learning contents were organized in a parallel way. The online resources were closely connected with the skills practiced in classroom and closely followed the organization of the textbook. The blended learning model designed based on the previous study [54] can be seen from Table 2.

Table 2. Basic blended learning model of the present EFL course

	Before class	During class		After class
Time	Two period (100 mins)	Two period (100 mins)	Two period (100 mins)	Flexible
Place	Flexible	Classroom		Flexible
Task	Autonomous learning, search and collect topic related information, cooperative activities, online exercises, online test, discussion	Face-to-face lecture, individual task	Paired work, group work, role play, presentation	Skill practice, group work, learning feedback, unit test
Auxiliaries	LMS, QQ, Wechat, websites, mobile phone	Computer, projector, video, audio, textbook	Computer, projector, video, audio, mobile phone	LMS, QQ, Wechat, mobile phone

All four groups in the current study –

autonomy support group, emotional support group, cognitive support group, and control group – took the listening course based on this blended model (Table 2). The teacher provided different types of teacher support depending on the experimental condition. No additional teacher support was given to the control group. At the last week of the course, a post-test was carried out.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

This study adopted SPSS 23 software program to analyze the data. The obtained scores from pre- and post-tests were analyzed using descriptive analysis, paired samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA. Paired t-tests were employed to compare the improvements in participants' listening ability before and after the treatment. One-way ANOVA was adopted to determine whether there were any differential effects of teacher support on the participants' listening ability. The alpha level was set at .05.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Changes in EFL Listening Proficiency

To investigate the effects of teacher support on EFL students' listening ability, pre- and post-tests were carried out with all participants. Paired samples t-tests were conducted to analyze the collected data of the present study. Table 3 represents the descriptive statistics and the results of the t-tests.

As shown in Table 3, the positive effects of teacher support on EFL listening proficiency were confirmed. After receiving the teacher support, all experimental groups significantly improved their listening ability ( $p < .05$ ). Specifically, in the autonomy support group, participants scored 108.14 in the pre-test while 201.00 in the post-test. The mean score changes

Table 3. Effects of teacher support on EFL students' listening ability

	Pre-test		Post-test		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
AS (n = 22)	108.14	34.90	201.00	39.04	8.286	.000
ES (n = 22)	104.82	29.73	167.86	44.35	6.833	.000
CS (n = 22)	110.95	39.35	210.77	39.11	7.733	.000
C (n = 21)	107.57	36.83	161.00	53.55	6.282	.000

\* AS: Autonomy support group, ES: Emotional support group;  
CS: Cognitive support group; C: Control group

turned out to be statistically significant ( $t = 8.286$ ,  $p = .000$ ). For the emotional support group, the participants also showed significant improvements in English listening proficiency ( $t = 6.833$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The mean score in the pre-test was 104.82 and that in the post-test was 167.86. Likewise, the cognitive support group significantly improved their listening ability from 110.95 in the pre-test to 210.77 in the post-test ( $t = 7.733$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Interestingly, the control group also increased their listening test scores from 107.57 in the pre-test to 161.00 in the post-test. The  $p$ -value was less than the significance level ( $t = 6.282$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

Considering the participants' improvement in their listening ability, it can be concluded that hypotheses 1, 2, 3 were all confirmed that teacher support was effective in enhancing Chinese EFL students' listening ability in a blended learning environment. The findings of the current study were consistent with Kazemi, Zarehmoghadam and Emami's study [55] suggesting that teacher support has a vital role in improving students' language performance. To be specific, the results of this study are in line with Dincer's study [24] confirming that students can improve their learning outcomes when their teacher creates an autonomous environment. The improvement of the ES group also corroborate Wentzel's study [56] proving that students can benefit from their teachers' emotional support.

This study also confirmed the positive effects of cognitive support on language learning, as Kazemi, Zarehmoghadam and Emami [55] suggested. Overall, these findings support Liu, Zhang and Liu's study [20] suggesting that autonomy support, emotional support and cognitive support can all play a positive role in enhancing students' academic achievement.

Regarding the improvement in listening proficiency of the control group, it can be explained by the practice effect. According to Kim [57], this improvement might be attributed to the practice effect because the students took the same test twice as pre- and post-tests. However, the practice effect was not a major issue for the current study since the control group just served as a basis for group comparisons to check the effects of different types of teacher support.

#### 4.2 Group Differences in EFL Listening Proficiency

The current study also investigated whether there were any differential effects of teacher support based on its types. The four groups – autonomy support group, emotional support group, cognitive support group, and control group were homogeneous in terms of their listening ability at the beginning of the study, as can be seen from Table 1 in the previous section. Therefore, one-way ANOVA was adopted again to explore whether there were any significant differences in EFL students' post-listening test between the groups.

Table 4. One-way ANOVA for the listening post-test

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	38784.95	3	12928.32	6.592	.000
Within Groups	162774.46	83	1961.14		
Total	201559.40	86			

As demonstrated in Table 4, a statistically



significant difference was found for the post-test among the four groups ( $F = 6.592$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In other words, the effects of teacher support on EFL listening proficiency varied depending on its type. In order to detect the significant differences between groups, a post hoc test with LSD was applied.

Table 5. Results of the post hoc test (LSD)

Groups	MD	SE	<i>p</i>
AS > ES	33.14	13.35	.015
> C	40.00	13.51	.004
CS > ES	-42.91	13.35	.002
>C	49.77	13.51	.000

\* AS: Autonomy support group, ES: Emotional support group;  
CS: Cognitive support group, C: Control group

As can be seen from Table 5, the results of the LSD post hoc test revealed that the autonomy support group received a higher score than the emotional support group. The mean difference between the AS group and the ES group was 33.14 and it was turned out to be statistically significant ( $p = .015$ ). That is, autonomy support was more effective than emotional support in increasing EFL listening ability. A statistically significant mean score difference was also found between the autonomy support group and the control group (MD = 40.00,  $p = .004$ ). The post-test score of the autonomy support group was higher than that of the control group. It was found that EFL students more benefited from autonomy support than no support. Therefore, when comparing with emotional support and no support, teacher's autonomy support had more influence on EFL students' listening ability, which partly confirm H4.

The mean difference between the cognitive support group and the emotional support group also turned out to be statistically significant (MD = 42.91,  $p = .002$ ). In the post-listening test, the CS group scored higher than did the ES group. That is, cognitive support played a more positive role in enhancing EFL listening proficiency in

comparison to emotional support. This result was conflict with the hypothesis H5, which assumed that emotional support had more influence on students' listening ability. In addition, the post-test score of the cognitive support group was also higher than that of the control group (MD = 49.77). The mean score difference appeared to be statistically significant ( $p = .000$ ), suggesting that cognitive support was more effective than no support in enhancing EFL listening ability.

Interestingly, although it was found that the mean score of the post-listening test in the cognitive support group was slightly higher than that in the autonomy support group (CS: M = 210.77, AS: M = 201) (Table 4), but no significant difference was shown between the autonomy support group and the cognitive support group. That is, autonomy support and cognitive support were equally effective on EFL students' listening ability. Likewise, there was no significant difference between the emotional support group and the control group on their mean scores, which indicated emotional support and no support in a blended learning model had the same effect on EFL students' listening ability. It also revealed that the blended learning model in the present study was effective to improve students' listening ability.

The findings of this study were in line with the previous research [20] suggesting that autonomy support is more effective than emotional support. The autonomy support group had more options to choose from regarding curriculum management, task design and learning resources. According to Black and Deci [58], when students receive autonomy support from their teacher, they become more autonomous during the course learning and show better learning achievement. Dincer, Yesilyurt and Takkac [24] also suggested that students who receive more autonomy support by the teacher have a higher level of language proficiency and show a better

performance in learning.

Considering the effectiveness of teacher's autonomy support, EFL teachers could focus more on the support to students' learning autonomy when preparing and designing for a blended listening course. For example, in order to enhance students' autonomy in choice and satisfy their need for autonomy [59], EFL teachers could take students' language proficiency level into instructional consideration, enrich the academic online resources respectively. In addition, teachers could also give students more choice and determining rights on their course task and assignment based on students' own language proficiency [20].

The current study also found that Chinese EFL students benefited more from the cognitive support than did the emotional support regarding listening proficiency. However, previous studies have shown mixed findings on this issue. For example, Liu et al. [20] found that emotional support was more influential than cognitive support when it comes to students' learning. Rajuan, Beijaard and Verloop [60] confirmed that cognitive support was as important as emotional support.

According to Taras [61], teachers' cognitive support can help students regulate their learning through self-monitoring, self-evaluation of their performance and self-reflection to identify future directions. This can promote students' autonomy and motivation in their language learning process [62]. Wu, Ge and He [63] also argued that cognitive teacher support positively influences students' academic achievement.

Although different findings were obtained from the previous research, given that the potential of cognitive support has been neglected [64]. The current study provides insight into the effects of teachers' cognitive support in EFL learning. For instance, both in face-to-face classroom and the online learning phrase, teachers could provide listening contents and

activities from the shallow to the deep [17] which could guide students to further study. Meanwhile, it is also necessary for teachers to provide language learning skills in classroom environment [17] and afford enough help to students on mastering the online learning management system or relevant applications [29].

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Conclusion and Implications

The current study explored the effects of different types of teacher support in a blended course on Chinese EFL students' listening ability. The findings from the present study were as follows: Firstly, in terms of the effects of teacher support in an EFL blended learning environment, the findings showed that teacher support positively influenced students' listening ability. All the three types of teacher support – autonomy support, emotional support and cognitive – played a positive role in enhancing EFL listening proficiency. Secondly, there were differential effects of teacher support depending on its types. Chinese EFL students benefitted more from the autonomy and cognitive support compared to the emotional support regarding English listening proficiency.

There have been only a few studies exploring the effects of teacher support on EFL learning achievement [5,9]. Moreover, the previous studies on teacher support have been conducted either in a conventional face-to-face learning environment or in an online learning environment [17-21]. Considering that there is a lack of research studying the effectiveness of teacher support in a blended course, the present study shed light on how to support students in a blended EFL learning environment. In order to improve the language learning achievement, EFL teachers could add appropriate supportive behaviors which could achieve the maximum

effect in different phase of the blended learning environment. For example, EFL students' autonomy and competence could be improved and satisfied if teachers could help students master relevant language skills and encourage them to raise questions in the face-to-face learning phase and supply students enough learning resource and different evaluations based on their language proficiency in the online learning phase. Once students' basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, their learning achievements will be enhanced [58].

In particular, the current study revealed the differential effects of teacher support on EFL listening by comparing the three types of teacher support: autonomy support, emotional support and cognitive support. Given that it is necessary to view teacher support as a multidimensional factor and examine the effectiveness of teacher support types [17,20], this study provides insight into the effects of different types of teacher support in a blended EFL learning environment.

The findings of this study open up the possibility of designing an EFL blended course with different types of teacher support. Providing all the three types of teacher support – autonomy support, emotional support and cognitive support – can be beneficial for enhancing EFL listening proficiency. However, to help the EFL students to achieve more improvements in their English listening ability, it may be more meaningful for teachers to give autonomy support and cognitive support compared to emotional support.

Based on the results of the present study, different types of teacher support could be given to EFL students to improve their listening ability. But in order to achieve a more comprehensive and effective result on language improvement in a blended learning environment, it might be better to combine the three types of teacher support together, which could satisfy students'

basic needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence to stimulate students' motivation and gain better language achievement [58].

## 5.2 Limitations and Future Research

The current study, however, is constrained by several limitations. First, it was conducted only in the Chinese EFL context with English-major students, which means the results of this research cannot be generalized to a wider population. That is, the different results can be obtained in different EFL settings. In order to obtain a more generalized result, it is necessary to investigate the effects of teacher support in different EFL settings in future study. Second, although participants in the current study were randomly divided into different groups, the initial differences of their listening proficiency in each group was not taken into consideration because of the small scale participants. Students may perceive teacher support differently and thus achieve different learning effects since students have different level of language proficiency. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate whether students with different language proficiency perform different effect when different teacher support is given. Third, this study investigated the effects of different types of teacher support. It is assumed that to combine different types of teacher support together in a blended course may get more effective learning achievement. It could be further investigated in future. Fourth, the current study only investigated the effects of teacher support on EFL listening proficiency. As affective factors such as interest and motivation are also important in language learning [57], further studies should also consider these affective variables. Fifth, other learner variables such as learning styles and technology literacy should be taken into consideration. According to [65], they can also affect EFL students' learning outcomes.

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