



**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES OF  
EFL STUDENTS IN ONLINE AND IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION**

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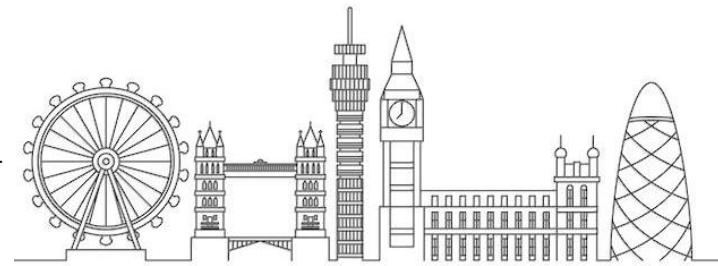
**Annotation:** *This article investigates the comparative effectiveness of online and in-person instruction in developing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' competencies. Employing a mixed-methods design, the study evaluates academic performance, engagement, and satisfaction among 100 undergraduate participants. Findings indicate that while both instructional modes led to measurable improvement, in-person learners demonstrated higher proficiency gains in speaking and listening due to enhanced interaction and immediate feedback. Online learners benefited from flexibility but faced reduced engagement. The research concludes that blended learning models integrating digital accessibility with face-to-face communication may yield optimal outcomes for EFL instruction in post-pandemic educational contexts.*

**Keywords:** *EFL learners, Online instruction, In-person learning, Learning outcomes, Student engagement, Language proficiency, Blended learning*

**Introduction.** The increasing reliance on digital technologies in education has transformed how instruction is delivered, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the most affected domains is language education, where real-time communication and interactive participation are crucial. As educational institutions transitioned to online learning, questions arose regarding its effectiveness compared to traditional classroom settings, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. These students often require immersive, communicative experiences that promote speaking, listening, and feedback-rich interaction – features that may be compromised or transformed in virtual settings.

While online learning platforms offer flexibility and accessibility, concerns remain regarding student engagement, language practice, and academic outcomes. The core of this discussion lies in understanding how each instructional mode influences learning outcomes. For EFL learners, these outcomes typically include improved language proficiency, confidence in communication, and cultural competence.

The purpose of this study is to compare learning outcomes between EFL students engaged in online instruction and those attending in-person classes. It explores academic performance, student engagement, and satisfaction to understand how each mode supports language acquisition. This comparative analysis aims to fill the gap in literature



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by providing a data-supported examination of real student experiences and performance metrics in both environments.

Finally, the findings may offer guidance for educators and institutions as they refine teaching strategies for a post-pandemic academic world, where blended and online learning models are likely to persist.

**Literature Review:** The debate over the effectiveness of online versus in-person instruction has intensified in recent years, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Several studies have investigated how different learning modalities impact student outcomes, with varying conclusions. Ferrer et al. (2022) conducted a study comparing online and onsite English proficiency classes and found that while both methods yielded improvement, onsite learners reported higher satisfaction and perceived effectiveness, particularly in speaking and listening skills.

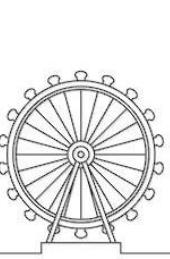
Online learning offers flexibility, individualized pacing, and accessibility—advantages often cited by both students and instructors. As highlighted by Unity College (2023), learners can access content from anywhere, allowing them to manage their time more efficiently. Similarly, Adnan and Anwar (2020) emphasized that online education reduces logistical barriers and can democratize access to instruction. However, they also acknowledged that this format often limits real-time interaction and hinders spontaneous communication—crucial aspects of language development.

On the other hand, in-person instruction offers structured classroom environments that support immediate feedback and dynamic discussions. Andriani and Dewi (2020) argue that traditional classrooms are particularly beneficial for EFL students due to increased exposure to language cues such as body language, intonation, and spontaneous dialogue. These contextual features are essential for building communicative competence.

Some studies advocate for a blended learning model that integrates the strengths of both modalities. Nambiar (2022) suggested that combining online tools with face-to-face engagement may optimize learning by balancing flexibility with interaction. However, this hybrid model also requires significant planning, institutional support, and digital literacy.

Additionally, Khadim et al. (2022) explored the instructional differences within teacher training programs, reporting that in-person trainees demonstrated better classroom management and communicative skills than those who were trained entirely online. This finding further supports the idea that language instruction may benefit more from physical presence, particularly for developing nuanced speaking abilities.

Ultimately, while online learning can be effective for grammar, reading, and writing, in-person instruction tends to offer more robust outcomes in speaking, listening, and learner motivation. The literature thus reveals a general consensus that the mode of delivery significantly influences learning outcomes, with context-specific factors such as student engagement, teacher preparedness, and curriculum design playing pivotal roles.



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**Methodology:** This study used a mixed-methods comparative design to analyze the effectiveness of online and in-person instruction for EFL students. The goal was to evaluate differences in academic outcomes, learner engagement, and satisfaction levels between the two instructional modes.

**Participants:** The research involved 100 undergraduate EFL students from three universities in Southeast Asia—50 enrolled in online courses and 50 in traditional classroom settings. Participants were selected based on similar English proficiency levels using a standardized placement test and were enrolled in comparable English communication courses.

**Data Collection:** Quantitative data was gathered through pre- and post-intervention TOEFL-style assessments administered over a 12-week semester. Additionally, students completed a Likert-scale questionnaire addressing engagement, accessibility, and perceived effectiveness of instruction. To capture deeper insights, 20 students from each group participated in semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom or in person.

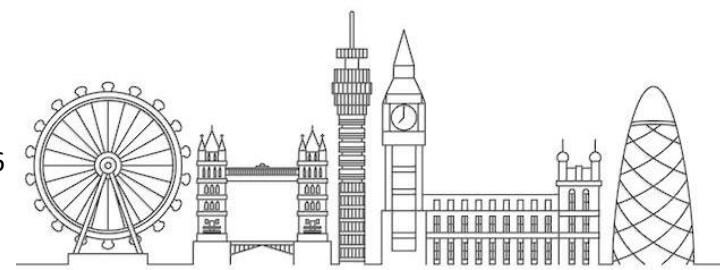
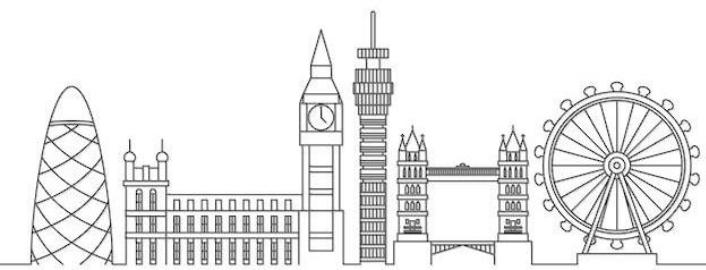
**Instruments:** The standardized tests measured progress in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The questionnaire was adapted from previous validated studies (Adnan & Anwar, 2020), while interviews followed a guided protocol focused on instructional experience and language development.

**Data Analysis:** Test results were analyzed using paired t-tests to assess score improvements within and between groups. Descriptive statistics summarized survey responses, and thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts using NVivo software. Patterns of engagement, challenges, and perceived advantages were categorized to enrich the quantitative findings.

**Ethical Considerations:** Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all students. Data confidentiality was maintained throughout, and institutional review board (IRB) approval was secured.

**Results:** The analysis of test scores revealed significant improvement in both the online and in-person groups over the 12-week instruction period. However, students in in-person classes demonstrated slightly higher gains in total language proficiency. The average improvement for the in-person group was 13.4 points ( $SD = 3.9$ ), compared to 10.2 points ( $SD = 4.3$ ) in the online group. The difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), particularly in the speaking and listening sub-sections.

Survey responses revealed varied perceptions of engagement and satisfaction. Approximately 78% of in-person students reported feeling “highly engaged” during lessons, while only 58% of online learners expressed similar sentiments. Key factors for high engagement in traditional settings included physical interaction, peer support, and structured classroom dynamics. In contrast, online learners appreciated flexibility but struggled with motivation and participation. About 61% of online students reported frequent distractions or connectivity issues.



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The questionnaire also highlighted perceived instructional quality. While 83% of in-person learners rated their instruction as “very effective,” only 64% of online students did. However, a majority of online learners (72%) acknowledged the benefit of accessing materials at their own pace and the convenience of remote learning.

Thematic analysis of interviews underscored these findings. In-person students emphasized the value of face-to-face discussion, immediate feedback, and group activities. One participant noted, “Classroom discussions helped me practice speaking naturally. Online, it’s harder to do that.” Conversely, online learners appreciated the flexibility and recorded sessions but mentioned difficulty in maintaining focus and practicing pronunciation.

Overall, the data suggests that in-person instruction better supports oral language skills and learner engagement, while online learning provides greater autonomy and flexibility at the expense of real-time interaction.

**Discussion:** The findings align with prior research indicating that in-person instruction remains more effective in developing EFL learners' communicative competencies. The significant difference in speaking and listening performance between groups supports Ferrer et al.'s (2022) conclusion that physical interaction enhances language acquisition. In-person environments promote richer dialogue, immediate clarification, and spontaneous speaking opportunities—all essential for mastering a new language.

Nonetheless, the online group also demonstrated notable gains, highlighting that digital instruction can be successful when well-structured. The flexibility of asynchronous access, recorded lectures, and multimedia content enabled many students to learn at their own pace, echoing benefits cited by Unity College (2023) and Adnan and Anwar (2020). However, online instruction demands strong self-regulation and reliable technological infrastructure, factors that affected student performance and satisfaction in this study.

A key insight is the importance of engagement in EFL instruction. The higher engagement reported by in-person students reinforces Andriani and Dewi's (2020) argument that traditional classrooms provide a more stimulating and responsive learning environment. Engagement, in turn, appears to correlate with better academic outcomes and learner confidence.

These results suggest that while online instruction is viable for grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, it may be less effective for interactive components of language learning unless supplemented with communicative tools like live discussions, peer review, and virtual simulations.

Limitations of this study include a relatively small sample size and the short duration of the instructional period. Future research should explore long-term retention, teacher feedback quality, and the impact of hybrid models, which combine online content delivery with face-to-face interaction. Such models could potentially integrate the strengths of both modalities to support a more comprehensive EFL learning experience.



**Conclusion.** This study provided a comparative analysis of online and in-person instruction for EFL learners, focusing on academic performance, engagement, and perceived satisfaction. While both groups showed improvement, in-person students demonstrated stronger gains in speaking and listening proficiency, higher engagement levels, and greater satisfaction with instructional quality. These findings suggest that traditional classrooms offer more advantages for communication-oriented language skills due to richer interaction and immediate feedback.

Online learning, while effective in supporting independent study and flexibility, faces challenges in maintaining consistent engagement and providing sufficient oral practice. Still, its potential remains significant, especially when paired with interactive technologies and supportive teaching strategies. The evidence supports the growing view that instructional success depends not only on the mode of delivery but also on pedagogical design, learner motivation, and technological accessibility.

As educational institutions continue to embrace digital innovation, striking a balance between flexibility and communicative effectiveness will be essential. Hybrid models that merge online convenience with in-person interaction may offer the most comprehensive solutions for EFL instruction in a post-pandemic world. Continued research is needed to optimize these evolving approaches and ensure they meet the diverse needs of global learners.

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