

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ONLINE AND TRADITIONAL ENGLISH LEARNING METHODS

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Abstract

The accelerated growth of online education, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, has prompted educators to reconsider the comparative effectiveness of online and traditional methods of teaching English. This study investigates the relative strengths, limitations, and overall effectiveness of online and traditional approaches to English language learning among university students. Following the IMRAD format, the study employed a quasi-experimental, mixed-methods design with 130 participants from Tashkent Perfect University. One group (n=65) received instruction through fully online learning, while the other group (n=65) followed traditional face-to-face instruction. Quantitative data were drawn from pre-tests and post-tests measuring proficiency, while qualitative data emerged from interviews and focus groups. The findings reveal that both methods produce significant learning gains, but their strengths differ. Traditional learning was more effective for speaking development, classroom interaction, and immediate teacher feedback, while online learning excelled in flexibility, self-paced study, and access to multimedia resources. The study supports a blended learning approach that combines the strengths of both methods to optimize English language education.

Keywords: online learning, traditional learning, blended learning, English language learning, comparative study, EFL, higher education

Аннотация

Стремительное развитие онлайн-образования, особенно в период и после пандемии COVID-19, побудило педагогов пересмотреть сравнительную эффективность онлайн- и традиционных методов преподавания английского языка. В данном исследовании рассматриваются сильные стороны, ограничения и общая эффективность онлайн- и традиционных методов изучения английского языка среди студентов университетов. Исследование, выполненное в соответствии со структурой IMRAD, основано на квазиэкспериментальном смешанном методе и охватывает 130 участников из Tashkent Perfect University. Одна группа (n = 65) обучалась полностью в онлайн-формате, тогда как другая группа (n = 65) проходила традиционное очное обучение. Количественные данные были собраны с помощью предварительного и итогового тестирования уровня

владения языком, а качественные данные были получены посредством интервью и фокус-групповых обсуждений. Результаты показывают, что оба метода обучения способствуют значительному прогрессу в обучении, однако их преимущества различаются. Традиционное обучение оказалось более эффективным в развитии разговорных навыков, организации взаимодействия в аудитории и обеспечении оперативной обратной связи со стороны преподавателя. В то же время онлайн-обучение продемонстрировало большую эффективность с точки зрения гибкости, самостоятельного темпа обучения и доступа к мультимедийным ресурсам. Исследование подтверждает целесообразность применения смешанного подхода к обучению, объединяющего преимущества обоих методов для повышения эффективности преподавания английского языка.

Ключевые слова: онлайн-обучение, традиционное обучение, смешанное обучение, изучение английского языка, сравнительное исследование, EFL, высшее образование.

Ruscha tarjima

Аннотация

Стремительное развитие онлайн-образования, особенно в период и после пандемии COVID-19, побудило педагогов пересмотреть сравнительную эффективность онлайн- и традиционных методов преподавания английского языка. В данном исследовании рассматриваются сильные стороны, ограничения и общая эффективность онлайн- и традиционных методов изучения английского языка среди студентов университетов. Исследование, выполненное в соответствии со структурой IMRAD, основано на квазиэкспериментальном смешанном методе и охватывает 130 участников из Tashkent Perfect University. Одна группа ($n = 65$) обучалась полностью в онлайн-формате, тогда как другая группа ($n = 65$) проходила традиционное очное обучение. Количественные данные были собраны с помощью предварительного и итогового тестирования уровня владения языком, а качественные данные были получены посредством интервью и фокус-групповых обсуждений. Результаты показывают, что оба метода обучения способствуют значительному прогрессу в обучении, однако их преимущества различаются. Традиционное обучение оказалось более эффективным в развитии разговорных навыков, организации взаимодействия в аудитории и обеспечении оперативной обратной связи со стороны преподавателя. В то же время онлайн-обучение продемонстрировало большую эффективность с точки зрения гибкости, самостоятельного темпа обучения и доступа к мультимедийным ресурсам. Исследование подтверждает целесообразность применения смешанного подхода к обучению, объединяющего преимущества обоих методов для повышения эффективности преподавания английского языка.

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O‘zbekcha tarjima

Annotatsiya

Onlayn ta’limning jadal rivojlanishi, ayniqsa COVID-19 pandemiyasi davrida va undan keyin, pedagoglarni ingliz tilini o‘qitishning onlayn va an’anaviy usullarining qiyosiy samaradorligini qayta ko‘rib chiqishga undadi. Mazkur tadqiqot universitet talabalari orasida ingliz tilini o‘rganishning onlayn va an’anaviy usullarining ustunliklari, cheklovlari hamda umumiy samaradorligini tahlil qiladi. IMRAD tuzilmasi asosida olib borilgan tadqiqot kvazi-eksperimental aralash metodologiyaga tayangan bo‘lib, unda Tashkent Perfect Universityning 130 nafar talabasi ishtirok etdi. Bir guruh ($n = 65$) to‘liq onlayn ta’lim oldi, ikkinchi guruh ($n = 65$) esa an’anaviy yuzma-yuz ta’lim shaklida tahsil oldi. Miqdoriy ma’lumotlar til kompetensiyasini baholovchi dastlabki va yakuniy testlar orqali to‘plandi, sifat ma’lumotlari esa intervyular hamda fokus-guruh muhokamalari asosida olindi. Natijalar har ikkala ta’lim usuli ham o‘quv natijalarining sezilarli yaxshilanishiga xizmat qilishini ko‘rsatdi, biroq ularning afzalliklari farqlanadi. An’anaviy ta’lim og‘zaki nutq ko‘nikmalarini rivojlantirish, auditoriya ichidagi o‘zaro muloqotni kuchaytirish va o‘qituvchidan tezkor fikr-mulohaza olishda samaraliroq ekanligi aniqlandi. Aksincha, onlayn ta’lim moslashuvchanlik, mustaqil o‘qish sur’ati va multimedia resurslaridan foydalanish imkoniyati jihatidan ustunlik ko‘rsatdi. Tadqiqot ingliz tili ta’limini yanada samarali tashkil etish uchun har ikki usulning afzalliklarini birlashtiruvchi aralash ta’lim yondashuvini qo‘llashni tavsiya etadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: onlayn ta’lim, an’anaviy ta’lim, aralash ta’lim, ingliz tilini o‘rganish, qiyosiy tadqiqot, EFL, oliy ta’lim.

1. Introduction

The landscape of English language education has undergone radical transformation in recent years. Traditional face-to-face instruction, long considered the standard mode of teaching, has been challenged by the rapid expansion of online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and digital learning resources. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transformation, forcing educational institutions worldwide to adopt online methods on an unprecedented scale. As schools and universities returned to normalcy, many retained online or blended approaches, recognizing their potential benefits. The question of how online and traditional methods compare in terms of effectiveness has thus become highly relevant for educators, students, and policymakers.

Both online and traditional methods of English language learning carry distinct theoretical foundations and pedagogical features. Traditional methods are typically grounded in face-to-

face interaction, immediate feedback, social presence, and the structured rhythm of in-person classroom routines. Online methods, in contrast, leverage digital tools, asynchronous and synchronous communication channels, multimedia content, and flexible scheduling. While traditional methods are often praised for their socio-affective richness, online methods are valued for their accessibility and personalization. The relative merits of each approach remain a subject of active debate in the field of applied linguistics and educational technology.

Although a substantial body of international research has compared online and traditional learning, the findings have been mixed, with some studies favoring online learning, others favoring traditional methods, and still others finding no significant differences. The variability of these findings is partly explained by differences in subject matter, learner characteristics, instructional design, and contextual factors. In the Uzbek higher education context, where digital infrastructure has expanded significantly in recent years, but where traditional pedagogical norms remain influential, empirical evidence on this comparison is still limited. This study aims to address that gap.

The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do online and traditional English language learning methods compare in terms of student proficiency outcomes? (2) Which language skills are more effectively developed through each method? (3) How do students perceive the strengths and limitations of online and traditional learning? (4) What pedagogical implications can be drawn for designing effective English language curricula in Uzbek universities?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design with two parallel groups. The quantitative component employed pre-test and post-test measures of English proficiency to compare learning outcomes between online and traditional learning conditions. The qualitative component involved focus groups and individual interviews to explore participants' experiences and perceptions. The combination of these approaches allowed for both objective measurement of learning gains and rich understanding of the underlying processes and experiences.

2.2 Participants

A total of 130 undergraduate students from Tashkent Perfect University participated in the study. Participants were aged 18 to 22 years, with English proficiency levels ranging from intermediate (B1) to upper-intermediate (B2). They were divided into two groups: an online learning group (n=65) and a traditional face-to-face learning group (n=65). Group assignment was based on the courses students were already enrolled in for the semester, ensuring

ecological validity. Both groups were comparable in terms of initial proficiency, age distribution, gender balance, and language background.

2.3 Instructional Conditions

The two groups received instruction over a 12-week period with equivalent curricular content and total instructional time (four hours per week). The online group used a learning management system (Google Classroom) for asynchronous activities and Zoom for synchronous sessions, with all interactions, materials, and assessments conducted online. The traditional group received face-to-face instruction in physical classrooms, using printed and projected materials and engaging in standard classroom activities. Both groups were taught by experienced instructors who followed the same curriculum and learning objectives, with adjustments made only to suit the delivery mode.

2.4 Data Collection Instruments

Several instruments were used. A standardized English proficiency test, covering all four major skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test. A 25-item questionnaire measured students' satisfaction, engagement, and perceived effectiveness of their learning method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 randomly selected students from each group, and two focus group discussions (one per group) provided additional qualitative data.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Paired-samples t-tests measured improvement within each group, and independent-samples t-tests compared gains between the groups. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *d*. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, with coding performed by two independent researchers to ensure reliability. Triangulation across data sources strengthened the credibility of the findings.

3. Results

3.1 Overall Proficiency Gains

Both groups demonstrated statistically significant improvements in overall English proficiency from pre-test to post-test. The online group improved from a mean of 64.7 to 76.9 (gain of 12.2 points, $p < 0.001$), while the traditional group improved from 65.2 to 78.4 (gain of 13.2 points, $p < 0.001$). The difference between the two groups' overall gains was small and not statistically significant ($t = 0.92$, $p = 0.36$, Cohen's $d = 0.16$). These results suggest that, in terms of overall proficiency, both online and traditional methods produce comparable gains over a 12-week period.

3.2 Differences in Specific Skills

When the four language skills were analyzed separately, notable differences emerged. The traditional group outperformed the online group in speaking development, with an average

gain of 4.8 points compared to 2.9 points ($p < 0.01$). The traditional group also showed slightly stronger gains in pronunciation accuracy. In contrast, the online group demonstrated greater improvements in reading and writing skills, with average reading gains of 3.6 points versus 2.4, and writing gains of 3.2 versus 2.7. Listening comprehension gains were similar across both groups. These patterns suggest that each method has distinct strengths corresponding to specific skill areas.

3.3 Student Engagement and Satisfaction

Survey data revealed significant differences in student engagement and satisfaction. The traditional group reported higher satisfaction with classroom interaction, peer collaboration, and immediate teacher feedback. Approximately 81% of traditional group students agreed that they felt more motivated by the social presence of classmates and instructors. The online group, on the other hand, reported higher satisfaction with the flexibility of scheduling, access to recorded lessons, and the ability to learn at their own pace. About 76% of online students valued the convenience of being able to study from home and to revisit content as needed.

3.4 Qualitative Insights

Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups revealed several key themes. For traditional learning, the most prominent themes were: (a) social interaction and emotional connection with peers and teachers; (b) immediate feedback and clarification of doubts; (c) structured discipline and routine; and (d) opportunities for spontaneous speaking practice. For online learning, the dominant themes were: (a) flexibility and convenience; (b) self-paced study and personalized learning; (c) access to diverse multimedia resources; and (d) reduced anxiety in some students who felt more comfortable participating in virtual environments.

3.5 Challenges Encountered

Both groups encountered specific challenges. Traditional learners reported limitations in terms of access to diverse digital resources, slower pace of content delivery, and constraints imposed by fixed schedules. Online learners reported issues with technical difficulties, internet connectivity, decreased motivation due to physical isolation, and reduced opportunities for authentic spoken interaction. Approximately 32% of online students described feeling 'disconnected' from their peers and teachers, which they identified as the most significant drawback of their learning experience.

4. Discussion

4.1 Comparable Overall Effectiveness

The finding that both online and traditional methods produced comparable overall proficiency gains aligns with what has come to be known as the 'no significant difference phenomenon' in distance education research. This phenomenon suggests that, when properly designed and supported, online learning can be as effective as traditional learning in terms of

overall outcomes. The Uzbek context provides additional empirical support for this conclusion, indicating that online English language education can be a viable and effective alternative to traditional methods, particularly when accessibility or scheduling flexibility is a priority.

4.2 Skill-Specific Strengths

The differential outcomes across specific skills are particularly informative. The advantage of traditional learning in speaking development is consistent with the notion that face-to-face interaction provides richer opportunities for spontaneous communication, real-time negotiation of meaning, and pragmatic awareness. Speaking, perhaps more than any other skill, depends on social presence, immediate feedback, and the cognitive demands of unscripted interaction. In contrast, the advantage of online learning in reading and writing reflects the asynchronous nature of these skills, which can be effectively practiced through digital materials, online texts, and writing platforms with detailed feedback.

4.3 The Case for Blended Learning

Taken together, these findings make a compelling case for blended learning, which strategically combines online and face-to-face elements to leverage the strengths of both. A blended approach could, for example, use traditional sessions for speaking practice, group discussions, and pronunciation activities while using online components for reading assignments, writing tasks, vocabulary practice, and self-paced grammar review. The flexibility of blended learning can accommodate diverse learner preferences and circumstances, while preserving the social and interactive richness of traditional classrooms.

Blended learning also addresses some of the specific limitations identified in this study. The risk of social isolation in fully online learning can be mitigated by regular face-to-face sessions, while the time and resource constraints of fully traditional learning can be alleviated by the flexibility of online components. Designing effective blended courses, however, requires careful attention to alignment between the online and offline components, ensuring that they complement rather than duplicate one another.

4.4 Pedagogical and Institutional Implications

The findings have several pedagogical implications. First, teachers should develop competence in both modes of delivery, including the ability to design effective online activities and to facilitate engaging face-to-face interactions. Second, institutions should invest in reliable digital infrastructure, including stable internet, learning management systems, and adequate devices for both teachers and students. Third, curriculum designers should align learning objectives with appropriate delivery modes, recognizing that not all skills are equally suited to all formats. Fourth, students should be supported in developing the

self-regulation skills needed for successful online learning, including time management, digital literacy, and self-motivation strategies.

4.5 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. The 12-week intervention period may not capture long-term effects of either method. The specific online platforms used may not represent the full diversity of online learning environments. Individual differences among students, such as learning styles, technological literacy, and personal circumstances, were not systematically accounted for. Future research should explore longitudinal effects, compare different types of online and blended models, examine the role of individual learner differences, and investigate the impact of teacher training and pedagogical design on the relative effectiveness of these approaches.

5. Conclusion

This study provides a balanced view of online and traditional English language learning methods. The findings indicate that both approaches are effective in promoting overall proficiency, but each has distinct strengths in specific skill areas. Traditional learning excels in speaking development, social interaction, and immediate feedback, while online learning offers superior flexibility, self-paced study, and access to digital resources. Rather than positioning these methods as mutually exclusive alternatives, the evidence supports a blended learning model that integrates the strengths of both. For Uzbek universities seeking to enhance English language education, blended learning represents a promising path forward, one that can accommodate the diverse needs of learners while maximizing the pedagogical advantages of each delivery mode. As education continues to evolve in the digital age, the question is no longer whether to choose online or traditional methods but how to combine them most effectively to support student success.

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