

ONLINE VS. FACE-TO-FACE EFL TEACHING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Yoqubjonova Maftuna Ismoiljon kizi

Trainee Lecturer at the University of Business and Science

+998 91 180 57 78

Abstract. The rapid development of digital technologies and the global shift toward online education have significantly influenced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. This article presents a comparative analysis of online and face-to-face EFL instruction, focusing on effectiveness, learner engagement, teacher roles, assessment, and pedagogical challenges. Drawing on recent theoretical and empirical studies, the paper highlights the strengths and limitations of both modes and argues for a blended approach as a pedagogically sound alternative in contemporary EFL contexts.

Keywords: EFL teaching, online learning, face-to-face instruction, blended learning, language education

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, EFL teaching has undergone substantial transformation due to globalization and advances in educational technology. Traditional face-to-face instruction, long considered the dominant mode of language teaching, has increasingly been complemented or replaced by online learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this shift, forcing institutions worldwide to adopt emergency remote teaching. As a result, the effectiveness of online versus face-to-face EFL instruction has become a central issue in applied linguistics and language pedagogy.

This article aims to compare online and face-to-face EFL teaching by examining their pedagogical characteristics, advantages, and challenges. The study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do online and face-to-face EFL teaching differ in terms of interaction and learner engagement? (2) What are the implications of each mode for language skills development? (3) Which instructional mode better supports assessment and feedback in EFL learning?

Literature Review

Face-to-face EFL teaching has traditionally emphasized direct interaction, immediate feedback, and classroom-based communicative activities¹. According to Harmer, physical presence allows teachers to monitor learners' progress closely and respond instantly to their needs. Communicative Language

¹ Jeremy Harmer, *How to Teach English* (Harlow: Longman, 2007).

Teaching (CLT), which prioritizes interaction and authentic communication, has been particularly effective in face-to-face settings².

In contrast, online EFL teaching relies on digital platforms, learning management systems, and virtual communication tools. Researchers such as Dudeney and Hockly note that online learning offers flexibility, learner autonomy, and access to authentic multimedia resources. However, studies also report challenges related to reduced interaction, technical difficulties, and learner motivation.

Recent comparative studies suggest that neither mode is inherently superior; rather, their effectiveness depends on pedagogical design, learner characteristics, and institutional support. This has led to increased interest in blended learning models that integrate online and face-to-face instruction.

3. Methodological Considerations

This article adopts a qualitative comparative approach based on the analysis of existing scholarly literature in TEFL and applied linguistics. Key studies published between 2010 and 2024 were reviewed to identify recurring themes related to instructional effectiveness, learner engagement, and assessment practices in online and face-to-face EFL contexts.

4. Comparison of Online and Face-to-Face EFL Teaching

4.1 Interaction and Learner Engagement

In face-to-face classrooms, interaction occurs naturally through pair work, group discussions, role plays, and non-verbal communication. Such interaction fosters speaking fluency and pragmatic competence. Teachers can easily adjust activities based on learners' reactions and comprehension³.

Online EFL teaching, while offering synchronous and asynchronous interaction, often lacks the immediacy of physical presence. Video conferencing tools enable real-time communication, yet technical issues and limited non-verbal cues may hinder spontaneous interaction⁴. Nevertheless, online

² Gavin Dudeney and Nicky Hockly, *How to Teach English with Technology* (Harlow: Pearson, 2007).

³ Jack C. Richards, *Communicative Language Teaching Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴ Mark Warschauer, "Online Learning in Second Language Education," *TESOL Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2010): 589–603.

forums and chat-based tasks can benefit shy learners who may feel more comfortable participating digitally.

4.2 Language Skills Development

Face-to-face instruction is particularly effective for developing speaking and listening skills due to real-time communication and authentic classroom interaction. Pronunciation and intonation are more easily monitored and corrected.

Online instruction, on the other hand, provides strong support for reading and writing skills through digital texts, collaborative documents, and automated feedback tools. Listening skills can also be enhanced through podcasts and recorded materials, allowing repeated exposure.

4.3 Teacher Role and Classroom Management

In face-to-face settings, teachers act as facilitators, organizers, and immediate feedback providers. Classroom management relies on physical presence and established routines.

Online EFL teaching requires teachers to adopt additional roles as course designers and technology managers. Effective online instruction demands digital literacy, clear task instructions, and careful monitoring of learner participation.

4.4 Assessment and Feedback

Assessment in face-to-face EFL classes often includes oral tests, in-class writing, and continuous observation. Feedback is typically immediate and personalized.

Online assessment offers advantages such as automated quizzes, digital portfolios, and detailed written feedback. However, issues of academic integrity and the validity of online testing remain concerns.

5. Discussion

The comparison reveals that both online and face-to-face EFL teaching have distinct pedagogical strengths and limitations. Face-to-face instruction excels in fostering communicative competence and social interaction, while online learning promotes flexibility, autonomy, and access to diverse resources. The effectiveness of either mode depends largely on instructional design rather than the medium itself.

Many scholars argue that blended learning, which combines online resources with face-to-face interaction, offers an optimal solution. Such an approach allows teachers to capitalize on the advantages of both modes while minimizing their weaknesses.

6. Conclusion

This comparative study demonstrates that online and face-to-face EFL teaching are not mutually exclusive but complementary. While face-to-face instruction remains crucial for

communicative and interactive aspects of language learning, online teaching provides valuable opportunities for individualized learning and skill reinforcement. EFL educators are encouraged to adopt flexible, learner-centered approaches that integrate both modes to enhance learning outcomes.

Future research may focus on empirical classroom-based studies and learner perceptions in specific EFL contexts, particularly in developing educational systems.

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