

EFFICACY OF MIXED MODEL INSTRUCTION TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT STUDENTS: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The current study explores and compares the efficacy of technology-based instruction, specifically web-mediated, blended, and online instruction, on the enhancement of English language skills among students pursuing Business Management (BM), at College of Business Administration, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia.

Method. A total of two hundred and four participants were chosen randomly and divided into four groups. The control group, comprising 51 individuals, received general English instruction utilising the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, and engaged in exercises focused on developing their general English skills. On the other hand, the web-mediated learning experimental group, also consisting of 51 participants, received general English instruction through the Duolingo educational model. Similarly, the blended experimental group, comprised of 51 individuals, received general English instruction through the Enriched Virtual Blended Learning Model. Lastly, the online learning group, consisting of 51 participants, received general English instruction through the LMS instructional model.

Results. Prior to the intervention, all students underwent a pre-test, and subsequently, a post-test and a delayed post-test were administered to evaluate their proficiency in standard general English, as measured by the TOEFL exam. The study's results indicated that all groups displayed progress in their English language skills. However,

the Duolingo and Enriched Virtual learning models demonstrated superior performance in enhancing English language skills compared to the other groups.

Conclusion. These findings hold significant pedagogical implications for curriculum designers, the development of training programmes for future HR professionals, material producers, and all stakeholders involved in the field of BM education.

Keywords: technology-based instructions, communicative language teaching, language skills, mixed model instruction, blended learning

INTRODUCTION

In Business Management (BM), proficiency in English language skills is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone for professional success in a globalised business environment (Yamao & Sekiguchi, 2015). The significance of these skills stems from their role in facilitating effective communication within diverse workplaces, which is essential for managing multicultural teams (Chang & Tharenou, 2004). English, a widely accepted lingua franca in international business, is pivotal for BM professionals for clear expression of ideas, negotiation, and conflict resolution (Schutte et al., 2016). This linguistic proficiency extends beyond daily interactions to strategic decision-making, underscoring its importance in BM education and practice. Academic and professional advancement in HRM is closely linked to English language skills. Students proficient in English language skills are better positioned for career opportunities in multinational corporations, as they can confidently engage with global clients and stakeholders, enhancing their professional credibility and employability (Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2023). This ability to communicate effectively in English is not merely a functional requirement but a strategic asset facilitating cross-cultural understanding and collaboration in diverse business settings.

However, mastering English language skills presents considerable challenges, particularly for BM students from non-English speaking backgrounds (Li & Campbell, 2009). The primary obstacles include difficulties understanding accents and speech speed, navigating complex sentence structures, and expressing thoughts coherently due to linguistic barriers and low confidence (Le et al., 2023). These challenges necessitate a targeted approach to language learning. Zhanna Shmeleva (2020) highlights the need for BM students to acquire industry-specific terminology to communicate effectively in professional settings. Furthermore, the proficiency of English language skills is crucial for ensuring accurate conveyance and comprehension of messages. BM students often face difficulties in these areas, leading to potential misunderstandings and professional relationship. To address these issues, targeted language training, emphasising real-world communication skills relevant to the BM sector, is essential.

The integration of technology-based instruction, encompassing web-mediated, blended, and online learning, presents a promising strategy for addressing linguistic

challenges in higher education (Alam et al., 2022; Kobylarek et al., 2021; Russell, 2018). Over recent decades, the adoption and integration of technology-based instruction within higher education institutions have been increasingly advocated, aiming to revolutionise and enhance teaching and learning practices (Alam et al., 2024; Conole, 2014). This technology-based instruction offers interactive avenues for practicing and enhancing English language proficiency (Li, 2014). Particularly, the utilisation of web-mediated technologies plays a pivotal role in facilitating language development, both in academic and professional spheres. Jenna Gillett-Swan (2017) highlights that online instruction not only offers flexibility and access to a variety of learning materials but also augments language practice opportunities beyond the conventional classroom environment. Moreover, blended learning, specifically a model that amalgamates online resources with face-to-face interaction, emerges as a comprehensive approach to language development (Picciano et al., 2013). Such models allow learners the opportunity to interact with the language in diverse contexts, thereby improving their adaptability. Additionally, interactive and multimodal learning experiences are shown to significantly enhance students' English language capabilities (Choi & Yi, 2015). These experiences provide practical applications that reinforce language learning and bolster confidence in employing English within professional Human Resource Management (HRM) contexts. Consequently, the deployment of technology-based instruction has the potential to significantly augment traditional teaching approaches, thereby improving English language proficiency among learners (Zakirova et al., 2022).

The present study delves into three distinct forms of technology-based instruction. Firstly, it examines web-mediated learning, which enhances traditional classroom settings through the utilisation of the World Wide Web, enabling access to online instructional activities and electronic resources, without diminishing the number of traditional class sessions (Owston, 1997; Usama et al., 2024b). Secondly, the study explores blended learning, a method that integrates traditional face-to-face instruction with computer-assisted language learning. This approach is recognised for its accessibility, significance, and flexibility in educational contexts (Clark & Barbour, 2023; Senffner & Kepler, 2015). Lastly, the study scrutinises online learning as the third paradigm of technology-based instruction. This form of learning, which solely relies on the Web and Internet for instructional delivery, gained unprecedented importance during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Kobylarek, 2021). The pandemic, which instigated substantial transformations in various aspects of human life such as work, worship, and education, underscored the necessity of online learning as a response to the suspension of in-person classes (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020; Moorhouse, 2020). Simultaneously, there was an enthusiastic adoption of new educational models, including web-mediated and blended learning, during this period.

In the realm of educational research, several studies (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2018; Hosseinpour et al., 2019; Mahmoudi, 2020; Permana, 2017; Rahayu, 2021; Shooli et al., 2021;) have explored the application of web-mediated blended, and online learning

instruction across different contexts. However, a limited number of these investigations, as far as the current researchers are aware, have engaged in a comparative analysis of the impact these instructional methods have on the English language skills of EFL learners (Alipour, 2020; Kawinkoonlasate, 2019). This gap in research highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how each instructional approach distinctly influences language acquisition in EFL contexts.

In the sphere of higher education, the integration of technology-based instruction, despite its captivating appeal, presents formidable challenges in staying current with technological advancements in educational contexts. Academic planners are persistently engaged in a dynamic effort to identify the most suitable technological instructional methods, tailored to the unique characteristics of specific teaching and learning environments. As Wei Zhang and Chang Zhu (2018) noted, determining an optimal instructional approach that caters to the needs of almost all learners is a complex task. Furthermore, the indiscriminate selection and implementation of technological instruction can adversely affect various aspects of the learning experience, including learners' performance, the learning process, motivation, and their attitudes towards new instructional methods. Thus, a call for more comprehensive studies, thorough analyses, and meticulous planning is evident before adopting such technological instruction. While existing research has explored web-mediated, blended, and online learning instructions in EFL classrooms, there is a noticeable scarcity of comparative studies on these methods, particularly as revealed by the literature review presented (Azizi & Kralik, 2020; Azizi, Pavlíková et al., 2020; Azizi, Tkáčová et al., 2020; Azizi et al., 2021). In light of the growing interest in applying technological instruction across diverse skills and EFL contexts, this study aims to investigate the influence of these instructional methods on English language skill enhancement in the context of Saudi Arabia's higher education. Consequently, this study conducts a comparative analysis of the impact of web-mediated, blended, and online learning instruction on the improvement of EFL learners' English language skills.

This study addressed the following research questions to meet the mentioned objectives:

- *RQ1*: Does web-mediated, blended, online and CLT instruction significantly affect EFL learners' English language skills?
- *RQ2*: How does different technology-based instruction and CLT vary in its effectiveness at improving English language skills?

METHODS

Design of the study

In this research, a true experimental design was meticulously structured, encompassing pretest, posttest, and delayed-test phases, with a comparison group format.

This design included one control group and three experimental groups. The focus of the study was on English language skills, designated as the dependent variable. The impact of three distinct technology-based types of instruction web-mediated, blended, online learning, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) served as the independent variables. The study's objective was to meticulously examine and compare the effects of this varied technology-based instruction on the enhancement of English language skills.

Participants

The study was performed in an English classroom at Business College in Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia, particularly targeting 204 students studying Business Management in the session 2023-2024. The study used a random sampling technique to investigate how online learning, including internet-based learning, blended learning, and traditional face-to-face instruction, affected the language proficiency of EFL learners. The participants, who were between the ages of 22 and 25 and native Arabic speakers who had not previously resided in English-speaking countries, were randomly divided into three groups, each consisting of 51 individuals. These students all fulfilled the entrance requirements set by the university for the Business Management programme, thus ensuring a homogeneous study group. The investigation encompassed an eight-week instructional intervention, with four gatherings conducted weekly, each gathering lasting for an hour. Before the study, ethical approval was acquired to incorporate participants, and their informed consent was secured, thereby verifying their readiness to engage in the research.

Procedure

At the start of the programme, participants took a pre-test to assess their English proficiency using the standard Longman's TOESL test, which had modules for listening comprehension with 30 items, reading comprehension with 30 items, and structure and written expression with 40 items, serving the purpose of establishing a baseline and ensuring comparability among the three groups in terms of their English language skills. This meticulous approach was instrumental in gauging the participants' initial proficiency levels, thereby setting a benchmark for subsequent instructional interventions and assessments within the study.

Following the initial assessment of the students' general English proficiency through a pre-test, the training programme commenced for the three distinct groups. The control group was engaged in a traditional English language curriculum delivered by the instructor, grounded in the communicative language teaching (CLT) method. CLT,

a widely recognised approach in language education, particularly in EFL contexts, placing a strong emphasis on interaction as a core mechanism and ultimate objective of the learning process. This approach promotes learners' active utilisation of the language in realistic situations, enhancing their practical communication abilities, such as constructing questions based on personal information about their peers, thus enabling meaningful linguistic interactions, as demonstrated in Saudi Arabian public universities, where immersive and interactive language learning experiences are highly valued.

The first experimental group, known as the web-mediated learning group, participated in a novel technology-based instruction of learning the English language by incorporating the educational model of Duolingo into their instruction. This particular model was implemented for all four essential English language skills, with an emphasis on utilising authentic materials for practice. In a computer lab within the educational institution for the primary purpose of facilitating meaningful and productive interactions among students, enabling them to freely express their thoughts, suggestions, and opinions on a wide range of subjects, thereby fostering a cooperative and mutually supportive atmosphere conducive to effective learning and knowledge. Before commencing the experimental phase, the instructor thoroughly introduced the intricacies of the Duolingo platform to the students. This involved providing detailed guidance on how to effectively utilise the platform, access online materials, and communicate with the instructor during specific training sessions. This preliminary phase was of utmost importance in ensuring that all participants felt at ease and proficient in utilising the Duolingo model, thus maximising their ability to complete the general English tasks and exercises throughout the remaining duration of the training programme. This kind of methodological approach underscores the importance of integrating technology with traditional learning paradigms in order to enhance language learning in modern educational settings.

The second experimental group in the study, referred to as the enriched virtual blended learning group, participated in a unique instructional strategy that combined traditional teaching model with advanced virtual learning tools. This group received instruction in the four fundamental English language skills, facilitated by an enriched virtual model. Each session followed a structured format, consisting of 30 minutes of direct interaction with the instructor, during which various aspects of the language learning process were discussed and clarified. Subsequently, students devoted the remaining 30 minutes of each session to completing tasks and exercises online. The learning environment was a technologically advanced classroom, where students had access to computers for communication purposes, not only with the instructor but also with their peers, promoting a collaborative and interactive learning experience. The instructor was readily available online throughout the sessions to offer assistance when necessary. This approach, which combined face-to-face instruction with online learning activities, ensured that each session, lasting 60 minutes, provided a comprehensive and immersive English language learning experience, reflecting the evolving

nature of educational models in the digital era (Khonamri, Azizi et al., 2020; Khonamri, Pavlíková et al., 2020; Khonamri, Hashemi et al., 2021; Khonamri, Králik et al., 2021; Khonamri et al., 2024).

The third experimental cohort in the investigation, known as the online learning, embarked on an educational voyage exclusively within the digital domain, utilising the Learning Management System (LMS) as their primary pedagogical framework. This approach entailed comprehensive instruction in the four fundamental skills of the English language, facilitated by the same instructor responsible for overseeing the entirety of the instructional programme for all cohorts. To guarantee the efficacy of this approach, authentic materials were meticulously chosen for the students' practice, enhancing the practicality and pertinence of their learning experience. Additionally, a virtual platform was established, allowing students to actively participate in discussions and the exchange of ideas, thereby fostering a collaborative online learning environment. Prior to the initiation of the experimental phase, the instructor provided a detailed introduction to the LMS, which included guidance on accessing materials, utilising the system's features, and methods of communication with the instructor during specific instructional sessions. This preparatory measure was pivotal in ensuring that all participants in the online cohort were proficient in navigating the LMS, thus facilitating their successful completion of the general English tasks and exercises throughout the programme. Such a pedagogical approach highlights the growing significance of digital platforms in providing flexible, accessible, and interactive learning experiences in modern educational settings.

Upon completion of the training programme, all participants underwent two assessments to measure their general English proficiency: a post-test immediately following the programme and a delayed post-test administered after a set period. These evaluations employed the standard Longman English language proficiency tests, although different versions of the test were used for each assessment (pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test) to prevent recall bias and ensure that students did not remember specific content from the pre-test. Care was taken to maintain a consistent level of difficulty across all tests, in line with the established standards of the Longman proficiency tests. Additionally, to ensure uniformity in the assessment conditions, all tests were administered in a classroom setting. This approach allowed for a controlled environment where all participants experienced the same testing atmosphere, thereby contributing to the reliability and validity of the assessment outcomes in evaluating the effectiveness of the different teaching methodologies employed during the programme.

Throughout the duration of the technology-based instructional programme, formative assessments were conducted, serving a twofold purpose: firstly, to evaluate and assess the progress made by the participants and secondly, to identify any challenges or obstacles they might be encountering. The primary objective of these assessments is to facilitate continuous monitoring of student learning, enabling instructors to receive immediate feedback. This feedback is essential in improving the effectiveness

of teaching methodologies and supporting students in enhancing their learning processes. Formative assessments are especially advantageous as they enable students to identify and comprehend their areas of strength as well as those that necessitate improvement. Concurrently, these evaluations provide educators with the necessary resources to identify and tackle student challenges promptly, thereby ensuring a more individualised and responsive learning experience.

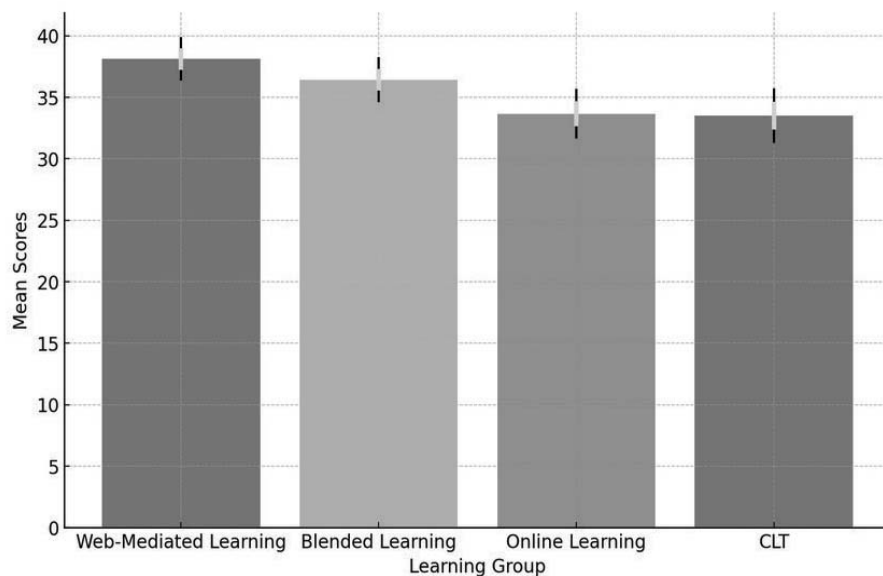
The assessment procedure, involving the preliminary, mid and final assessments, was organised based on objective criteria, specifically through the application of multiple-choice questions. This approach facilitated an impartial and systematic evaluation, with responses being documented on a response form. The scoring system for three examinations was quantitatively established, covering a spectrum from 0 to 100. This spectrum not only provided a distinct standard for performance assessment but also ensured consistency and objectivity in the measurement of participants' knowledge and comprehension prior to and following the intervention.

Data Analysis

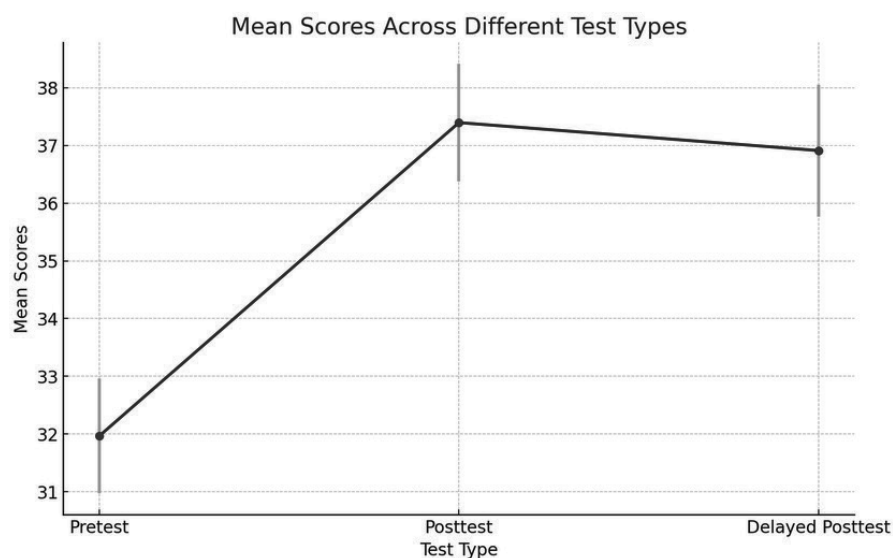
The data accumulated underwent analytical processing using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, specifically version 23. The initial stage of analysis involved conducting a one-way ANOVA on the pre-test results of all participant groups. This initial step ensured that the groups were homogeneous based on their pre-test outcomes. Following this, a repeated measures two-way ANOVA was utilised. This advanced statistical technique was essential in examining the differential effects across the groups and across three distinct assessment phases: the pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test. This analytical approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the effects on the groups and the temporal changes in the assessed parameters.

Results of the Study

An analysis of Variance (ANOVA), was undertaken to investigate unrelated samples and evaluate disparities between groups. The statistical results revealed that the impact of the group did not exhibit any statistical importance, as substantiated by an F-value of 0.689 with degrees of freedom at (3, 200) and a p-value of .982. These discoveries suggest that there was no notable variation in English language proficiency among the three groups at the initiation of the programme. This lack of noteworthy distinction implies similarity in the fundamental language aptitudes across the groups, thus granting a consistent starting point for the programme's interventions.

Figure 1*Variations across groups in English language proficiency*

Source. Own research.

Figure 2*Mean Scores across different Test types*

Source. Own research.

In the study, we used a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to explore the scores across four unique learning groups, namely web-mediated, blended learning, online learning, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Furthermore, we examined these scores throughout three evaluation stages, specifically pre, post, delayed post-test assessment. The results of our analysis indicated a significant primary impact of the learning group, as shown by an F-value of 9.399 ($df = 3, 200$) and a p-value of .001.

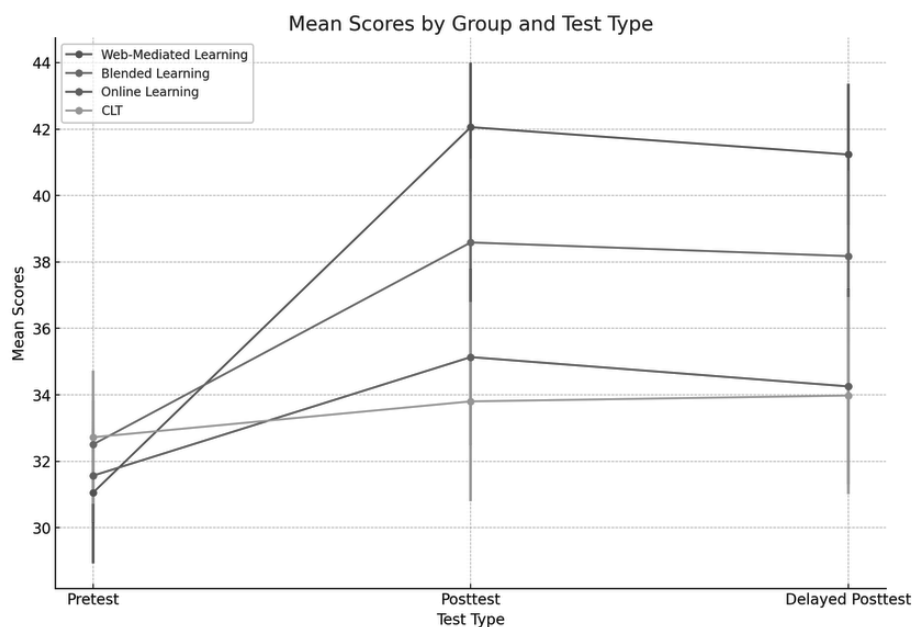
Furthermore, this main effect was accompanied by a partial eta squared (η^2p) value of .370. It is striking that the scores acquired by students in the web-mediated and blended learning groups were higher compared to those in the online learning and CLT groups. This finding suggests that students who engaged in web-mediated and blended learning approaches experienced an improvement in their English language proficiency. This enhancement is further (Figure 1). In addition, our findings underscore the effectiveness of these techniques, which were determined to be more comprehensible when compared to alternative technology-based instructional forms. Thus, the significance of these findings underscores the effectiveness of web-mediated and blended learning approaches in facilitating the improving English language skills.

Moreover, the analysis also showed a significant main effect of the assessment stages, with an F-value of 58.449 ($df = 3, 200$), $p = .001$, and $\eta^2p = .705$. This denotes a higher score in the post-test (after the instruction) compared to the pre-test (before the instruction), as depicted in Figure 2. Furthermore, it suggests that the effectiveness of technology-based instruction was sustained in the delayed post-test phase.

Crucially, there was a significant two-way interaction between the four learning groups and the three assessment stages ($F(3, 200) = 4.339$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2p = .367$), indicating a notable increase in assessment scores from the pre-test to post-test specifically for the web-mediated and blended learning groups, as shown in Fig. 3. This outcome highlights the distinct effectiveness of these instructional methods in enhancing English proficiency, an effectiveness that was maintained in the delayed post-test across all technology-based instructional formats.

Figure 3

Mean scores by group and test type



Source. Own research.

DISCUSSION

The outcomes of this investigation, addressing the first research questions, demonstrated a notable enhancement in the English language proficiency of EFL learners, as evidenced by the substantial improvement from pre-tests to post-tests in diverse educational settings including web-mediated, blended, and online learning environments. This progression is corroborated by a significant body of research (Alipour, 2020; Ebadi & Rahimi, 2018; Kawinkoonlasate, 2019; Permana, 2017; Rahayu, 2021; Zhang & Zhu, 2018), which validates the efficacy of innovative technology-based instructional approaches in EFL contexts. These findings collectively underscore the positive impact of technological integration in language learning and its potential to foster linguistic advancement among EFL students.

The integration of technology-based instruction, exemplified by web-mediated, blended, online learning has yielded fruitful outcomes, aligning closely with the tenets of constructivist learning theory (Gilakjan et al., 2013). This theory, now widely accepted, posits that learners actively construct knowledge, diverging from the positivist learning theory which seeks a universal truth and reality for all learners. Constructivism, in contrast, recognises the significance of individual and social experiences in shaping learners' personal truths and knowledge (Prawat & Floden, 1994). Key principles of this theory include the learner's active role in knowledge construction, the value of individual and social experiences in learning, and the recognition of diverse realities (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Usama et al., 2024a). Correspondingly, in the present study, technology-based instruction utilised simulated real-life experiences delivered through various digital methods. This approach facilitated the construction of new knowledge through processes such as gathering, analysing, summarising, and synthesising information (Ayse, 2018). It also engaged learners in authentic learning experiences, heightened their participation in activities, and enhanced their prior knowledge in acquiring language skills (Wen & Walters; 2022). Consequently, this led to a marked improvement in all language skills, showcasing a well-developed proficiency in English.

The comparative analysis conducted to address the second research question revealed that groups engaged in web-mediated and blended learning demonstrated superior performance in enhancing English language skills compared to those involved in online learning and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. This study, albeit situated within a relatively sparse landscape of literature that concurrently examines these three instructional modalities, aligns with the outcomes of prior research. Specifically, studies indexed (Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019; Bataineh & Atoum, 2021; Oweis, 2018) corroborate the relative underperformance of purely online learning approaches. However, this finding contrasts with the results of studies (Alipour, 2020; Nugroho, 2020; Usama, 2023), which do not concur with the current study's outcomes. The interpretation of these findings is anchored in the theoretical framework of social

constructivism and traditional educational perspectives, particularly focusing on the interaction dimension as a critical component of the learning process.

The study's findings can be explained using social constructivism, a sociological theory that highlights knowledge construction through social interactions (Duffy & Jonassen, 2013). This theory offers a framework for understanding the superior performance observed in web-mediated and blended learning groups by fostering a strong learning community and high-quality interactions (Duffy & Jonassen, 2013). The integration of online and traditional learning environments enhances the sense of community among learners and promotes engagement and cooperation (McMillan & Chavis, 1987). However, online learning groups faced challenges due to factors like poor internet connectivity, which affected the nature and quality of interactions (Smyth, 2012). The limitations of the online environment pose potential threats to the success of online instruction.

CONCLUSION

The current study highlights the effectiveness of technology-based instructional methods, including web-mediated, blended, online learning in developing English language skills. This research supports the assertion that when technology-based instruction is effectively implemented, it can revolutionise instructional practices in higher education rather than CLT. It marks a transition from a traditional 'knowledge-transfer' approach, predominantly focused on content delivery, to a more progressive 'knowledge-construction' approach, emphasising active learning. Specifically, technology-enhanced instruction enables educators to create more dynamic and engaging teaching and learning environments. It facilitates the use of authentic materials that closely resemble real-life contexts of the target language usage, thereby making the learning experience more relevant and practical. Additionally, such instructional approaches actively involve learners in the learning process, significantly reducing their passive participation during lectures. This shift encourages a more collaborative and interactive educational process, enhancing communication and teamwork among learners. Consequently, technology-based instructions hold the potential to transform educational methodologies by fostering a more engaging, practical, and collaborative learning environment.

The study's findings demonstrate that learners engaged in web-mediated and blended learning and online learning environments exhibited superior performance compared to their counterparts in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) settings. This outcome underscores the importance of recognising learners' customary reliance on physical presence and direct instructor guidance in traditional learning environments. To optimise learning outcomes in online contexts, it is crucial to address learners' readiness and adaptability to these settings. Achieving this goal involves providing necessary training and adequate exposure to online instructional platforms. The extent of training and exposure required varies, depending on individual learners' interests, skills,

and prior experience with online learning environments. Consequently, incorporating more web-mediated and blended learning approaches can serve as a bridge, facilitating and supporting learners' and instructors' transition to effective online learning. This transitional strategy can help mitigate technical and affective challenges associated with online learning, as learners become more familiar and comfortable with online platforms through their experiences in web-mediated and blended learning contexts.

The encouraging results of this study provide valuable insights for instructors, particularly in the context of teaching native digital English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. These findings suggest ways to enhance instructional practices by integrating advanced technological tools and methodologies, catering to the evolving needs and preferences of this learner demographic. Additionally, the study's outcomes offer guidance for syllabus designers, highlighting the potential for creating more contemporary and practical lesson plans that incorporate technology-based instruction. This approach can effectively bridge traditional teaching methods with the demands of modern educational environments. Furthermore, the implications of these findings extend to educational stakeholders and administrators, who may consider the implementation of additional teacher training courses or professional development programmes. Such initiatives would be instrumental in equipping instructors with the necessary skills and knowledge to integrate new teaching methodologies, ultimately contributing to their professional growth and enhancing the overall quality of education.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This scholarly research acknowledges certain limitations that ought to be taken into account in future studies, including the potential limitation of the study's small sample size. To tackle this issue, future research should strive for a wider range of subjects in terms of time frame and number of participants, as well as investigate a more diverse group of students from different age categories and proficiency levels in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, forthcoming investigations may explore other language proficiencies and diverse forms of blended learning models, along with assessing variables like the quality and quantity of feedback, attitudes towards online evaluation, and the roles played by instructors and learners in the learning process. Moreover, additional investigation into the idea of interaction in technology-based instructional methods might offer valuable insights into effective instructional practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study is supported via funding from Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, project number (PSAU/2024/R/1446).

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