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Comparing Online English Language Learning and Face-to-Face English Language Learning at
El Bosque University in Colombia

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Dedication

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Abstract

COMPARING ONLINE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND FACE-TO-FACE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AT EL BOSQUE UNIVERSITY IN COLOMBIA

By Marta Luisa Montiel Chamorro

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018

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Although there is significant research surrounding online foreign language education, there are still questions on whether the outcomes are comparable to those obtained in the traditional face-to-face classroom. This study examined four classes, two online and two face-to-face, where students took the second course of a 6-level program of English as a Second Language at El Bosque University in Colombia. The International Test of English Proficiency (iTEP) was administered to students before classes started in order to establish a baseline, and then again after the courses finished. This test evaluates English language proficiency per skill: speaking, listening, reading, writing and also presents an overall proficiency score and level. Variables such as socioeconomic strata, students' age, instructors, previous experience with online courses, course completion, student satisfaction and attendance and time on course were also examined. Because not all online students completed all content of the course within the timeframe given, special attention was given to this variable. Results indicate that when

comparing the scores of only the online students who completed all the content of the course with those of their face-to-face counterparts, there are no statistically significant differences in the outcomes of any of the four skills nor there is a difference in the overall scores; however this brings up the issue of time investment as it seems to vary based upon instructional method. A qualitative component was used to support the findings in this study. This component included instructors' interviews, an end-of-course qualitative survey and class observations.

Chapter 1. Overview

Online learning is a growing educational alternative for adults who, due to time and space constraints cannot attend face-to-face classes on a regular basis. Since its beginnings, online education has maintained a crescent demand (Estevez, Castro Martinez & Rodriguez Grenobles, 2015) and it has evolved as technology itself has more to offer in terms of educational tools. Another reason why online education has become popular is because it offers the possibility to attend remote universities without having to move to new cities or countries (Alvarado & Calderon, 2013). More and more colleges and universities are going beyond their physical frontiers to offer quality education to distant learners. Despite all the advances, however, there are many who are still skeptical about the quality and the outcomes of online education.

Based on years of experience and research, entities such as Quality Matters (QM) have developed models and standards for the design and implementation of online courses that meet the minimum quality requirements in terms of educational attainments and goals. Courses that follow these standards are thought to be comparable to face-to-face courses of the same subject matters (Martin, Ndoye & Wilkins, 2016) and can, therefore, guarantee comparable educational outcomes.

In countries such as Colombia, access to education other than elementary and secondary school is very limited. This includes access to structured courses of foreign languages which have increased their demand recently due to global market competition and because it has become a requirement for graduation in all higher education institutions. In fact, Colombian

Government's educational goals related to the national English language policy include mandatory English in elementary and secondary schools and, by 2019, fluency at the B1 level of competency for secondary school graduates, B2 level for university graduates and B2 or C1 for English Language teachers (British Council, 2015).

This goal was established as a mechanism for Colombian citizens to become more competitive in the global market where they were being left behind due to their lack of English proficiency in most cases (British Council, 2015). Online English courses, however, are still regarded as an option that may not guarantee the desired learning outcomes as it is with any online program in Colombia.

According to Estevez et al. (2015), there are still some gaps to be filled in order to strengthen the development of online education in Colombia. Some of these gaps have to do with technical and sociocultural matters. In the technical aspect, there are still limitations to Internet access and good bandwidth and lack of infrastructure, especially in remote areas. Difficulties related to the sociocultural aspect have to do with previous conceptions and habits from traditional education that are hard to overcome.

Nevertheless, despite all the prejudice, in a publication made by *El Tiempo*, which is one of the main national newspapers, Lizarazo Correa (2015) talks about the growing demand in online education that according to the Ministry of Education went from 12,000 students in 2010 to 65,000 in 2015. This increase is believed to be related to the extensive promotion that the Ministries of Education and Information and Communication Technologies in the Colombia had made about the inclusion of technology in the academic processes and their strong economic support to higher education institutions to create online and blended programs. This growth is

consistent to global trends. In the United States alone, 7.1 million students were reported to be enrolled in at least one online course in higher education by 2013 (Allen & Seaman, 2014).

At El Bosque University specifically, there are many students of medicine and other health sciences who cannot attend face-to-face classes, because they have different schedules, rotations and shifts at the hospitals or clinics. Also, there are students who live outside Bogota and can only come to the campus for classes on weekends. Online courses are the best option for them to study English, because they can manage their own time and can have access from anywhere. For El Bosque University it is essential to offer quality online English language courses that help students learn the language at the same rate as their face-to-face counterparts. This study was an opportunity for El Bosque University to evaluate its program and establish an improvement plan if necessary as well as reinforce what was found to be good.

Statement of the Problem

As mentioned above, in Colombia, learning English as a foreign language has become one of the national educational goals (Ministerio de Educacion Nacional de Colombia, 2014). It is believed that learning English will allow Colombian citizens to participate in the global economy and will make them competitive in other countries. In order to fulfill this national requirement, higher education institutions have made the teaching of English a priority. Some institutions have broadened their course offerings by introducing online classes as an option for those students who cannot attend face-to-face sessions due to time constraints or location; however, little evidence is found to support that the outcomes of online courses are comparable to those in the face-to-face courses. In fact, one of the common conceptions is that they are not (York, 2017).

Offering quality online English courses has become a challenge and a necessity for universities and EL Bosque University is no exception. Within the past 6 years, the Language Center at El Bosque University has implemented an online program for students who cannot commit to fixed class schedules. The program started with five students in 2011 and currently enrolls around 250 each semester. The program uses a commercial solution from Cambridge University Press called Touchstone® Online, which is the strongest solution they have evaluated so far in terms of content, methodology, delivery of instruction, and learning management system support and layout. Touchstone® Online is aligned with the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), which are the standards used in Colombia for the teaching and evaluation of foreign language learning. Any English program would have to comply with these standards and is expected to produce learning outcomes based on them.

Until now, there had been no formal evaluation to ensure that Touchstone® Online is delivering the desired results. The Language Center has relied upon the grades that students have obtained in their classes and nothing more. In order to guarantee quality and to think about the expansion of the El Bosque Online English program to other regions of Colombia, it is necessary to assess the students' learning outcomes and compare them with the outcomes of their face-to-face counterparts. Results of this evaluation will not only inform decision makers at El Bosque University but to other similar higher education institutions using similar programs and who may have the same concerns.

Also, most studies on this topic report results based on achievement and not proficiency. The focus is given to what was taught using more subjective measures such as students' perceptions, e-portfolios, or other types of local evaluation, instead of proficiency itself

measured through standardized language proficiency tests (Deusen-Scholl, 2015; Lin & Warschauer, 2015). This study will address this gap by using the International Test for English Proficiency (iTEP) as the main source of information.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were differences in the English language learning outcomes between online students and students who received their classes in traditional face-to-face settings at El Bosque University in Bogota, Colombia. Variables such as socioeconomic status (strata as established in Colombia), instructors, age, time dedicated to the course, attendance, course completion and previous experience with online courses have been examined. Also, based on class observations, instructors' interviews and a class evaluation survey, I determined which factors may have intervened in the way students performed and how students perceived their learning processes. This study was designed based on the needs identified by the directives of the Language Center and to respond to a question they have about the comparability of the outcomes in both methodologies.

Learning a foreign language involves the development of four basic skills: listening and reading, also known as the input (receptive) skills, and speaking and writing, the output (productive) skills (Sousa, 2011). As part of this study, I analyzed each of these skills separately in order to determine if there were any differences in the development of each skill in both learning environments. For the research questions, I grouped the productive and the receptive skills for analysis as I thought it would be interesting to examine if any difference might arise based on the nature of each skill. I also considered the overall scores as part of the analysis as indicated by the ITEP, that students took twice, once before the intervention and shortly after the courses were completed.

Four classes were set up for this study: two face-to-face classes and two online classes at the Language Center of El Bosque University. All classes were given the same instructional material and were taught by the same instructors. Taking the iTEP before the intervention helped establish a baseline. This study was mostly concerned with how students performed in both settings and how similar or different their outcomes were at the end, taking into consideration all the factors that may or may have not influenced the results.

This study examined the following questions:

1. Do students in an online English language course achieve the same mastery level that students in a face-to-face course?
2. Are there differences between online and face-to-face students' reading and listening proficiency scores?
3. Are there differences between online and face-to-face students' writing and speaking proficiency scores?
4. Are there any differences in the learning outcomes between students from different socioeconomic strata?
5. How do students in online and face to face classes evaluate their class experiences?

Overview of the Literature

The literature review starts with an overview of the beginnings of distance education and how it evolved to become what we now know as online education. I provide a definition of what online education is and what it entails, before moving to the presentation of research studies that have been conducted with the specific purpose of comparing online and face-to-face instruction. The results of these studies are sometimes contradictory, with some indicating that students in the online settings outperform their face-to-face counterparts given the same conditions

(Bourelle, Bourelle, Knutson & Spong, 2016; Zhang, Zhao, Zhou & Nunamaker, 2004), while others demonstrate that, either there are no significant differences in the outcomes of students in face-to-face instruction when compared to online students (Ni, 2013), or that face-to-face students perform better (Heppen et al., 2017). In addition, some studies show that certain types of students have more difficulties succeeding in online settings than in traditional face-to-face classes (Xu & Jaggars, 2014). Features such as student characteristics and role of the instructors are also explored in the literature review.

More specifically, I examined studies related to learning a language online and the global trend about learning English as a foreign language. English has been considered the language of international relations, science, and technology since the 1950s (Graddol, 2000). The Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia (2014) has established the learning of English as one of the national educational goals and all initiatives to spread English language instruction are being encouraged. The inclusion of quality standards for the development and implementation of online courses designed by QM are also explored as well as the measures and standards from the CEFR, which are used for English programs in Colombia.

This review also included theoretical approaches for online learning, such as (a) the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, which in turn, presents the concepts of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence; and (b) constructivism and social constructivism and the concept of language proficiency.

Summary of the Methodology

Using a randomized-to-groups pretest-posttest comparison group design, I compared English language learning outcomes between face-to-face classes and online classes of the same level at El Bosque University. For this, I drew a stratified random sample of students from the

undergraduate and graduate programs who, after selection, took the iTEP as a pretest before being randomly assigned to one of two conditions: online English language instruction or face-to-face English language instruction.

Both delivery methods included the same content and materials and classes were in charge of the same instructors. Posttest scores from the same test were taken after classes ended and results were compared using the pretest scores as a covariate.

Scores from speaking, listening, reading, and writing were analyzed separately as well as the overall scores that included these four skills plus a fifth called “grammar.” Variables such as socioeconomic strata, age, previous experience in online courses, instructor, completion and time in course or attendance were also examined and included in the analysis.

A qualitative component was also used to support and understand the findings; this component consisted of a qualitative end-of-course survey for the students, interviews to the instructors, and class observations.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This literature review provides a body of relevant concepts, knowledge, and theory used in the field of online education and its comparison with traditional face-to-face education. Beginning with a brief history about the first forms of distance education and its mutation into online education, I move to studies that have compared the two methodologies—face-to-face and online—which leads to the factors of student characteristics and the role of instructors in online settings.

Quality standards for the implementation, development, and evaluation of online courses are explored. Theoretical frameworks such as community of inquiry, constructivism and social constructivism are presented. I also review some studies about online foreign language education as well as the international foreign language learning standards brought by the CEFR, which are widely used all over the world. Colombia is no exception.

Distance and Online Education

Distance education started as an alternative for many individuals whose lifestyles, location, or time constraints prevented them from attending face-to-face educational programs. According to Courtney and Wilhoite-Mathews (2015), distance education took its earliest form in the shape of correspondence teaching and learning using print-based materials. This method, however, had many limitations. One of these limitations was the slow physical delivery of materials and the lack of valuable feedback and communication.

By the 1960s, a second generation of distance education emerged when broadcast media was used to complement the print-based material. Nevertheless, there was still little or no direct interaction between the instructor and the learners or among the learners themselves.

Communication and delivery of knowledge and information remained mostly unidirectional and with a lack of timely feedback. (Courtney & Wilhoite-Mathews, 2015). However, due to the purpose it served, distance education has never disappeared. With the advance of the Internet, distance education has evolved to the point where it is now. Online education has increased the number of people opting for distance education in the last decades and has promoted new kinds of interactive education (Collins & Halverson, 2010).

Linda Harasim (2000) indicates that some of the first approaches to online education were given by network communication in the classrooms in the 1980s, where students and teachers worked together in collaborative writing and research projects. The Réseau d'Ateliers Pédagogique Pilote from Canada, was one of the first initiatives in this respect. It connected students and teachers in more than 70 secondary schools in Canada, England, France, and Italy.

RAPPI used the computer conferencing system at the University of British Columbia, Canada, to facilitate information exchange. The curricular focus was social studies and writing, and through the network, students learned about other cultures, lifestyles, and perspectives; in the process, they gained increased knowledge about themselves and how they fit into a larger global community (Harasim, 2000, p. 44)

With the boom of technological tools, the massification of the Internet and the arrival of the Web 2.0 during the 2000s (allowing the editing, interaction, and publishing of material from virtually anybody), technology has become one of the most valuable resources in educational settings, with the potential to transform the way that content and information are presented to

learners. There are three ways technology is being used for educational purposes: design and implementation of fully online courses, blended or hybrid courses that combine online content with traditional face-to-face classes (B-learning and Flipped Classrooms, for example), and technology-enhanced face-to-face classes (Powell et al. 2015).

Means et al. (2009) define online learning as the “learning that takes place partially or entirely over the Internet. This definition excludes purely print-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videoconferencing, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs which do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component” (pg. 9). For the purpose of this study, the focus was given exclusively to online learning as it was compared to traditional face-to-face learning.

Comparing Online Learning With Traditional Face-to-Face Learning

Some studies have indicated that, given the same conditions, students in online settings outperform their face-to-face counterparts (Bourelle et al., 2016; Means et Al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2004), while others demonstrate that either there are no significant differences in the outcomes of face-to-face students when compared to online students (Ni, 2013), or that face-to-face students performed better than online students (Heppen et al., 2017).

Bourelle et al. (2016) analyzed the assessment scores from three sections of English 102 (two online and one face-to-face) at the University of New Mexico to compare student learning of multimodal literacies in online and face-to-face courses. For this, the authors used a mixed-method approach in which the quantitative part used the scores students received in their e-portfolios and the qualitative section included the analysis of students’ quotes and reflections to identify potential reasons for the differences. They found that the online students obtained better results than the face-to-face students, and stated that a possible cause for these results may be the

quick formative feedback students in the online settings received from their instructors, which was more difficult to do for the face-to-face classes due to time restrictions.

Similar positive outcomes from online students had previously been obtained by Zhang et al. (2004). In order to assess the effectiveness of an online program, Zhang et al. (2004) conducted two experiments comparing traditional classroom instruction to online instruction with undergraduate students from 10 majors at the University of Arizona. For both experiments, students were randomly assigned into the experimental group or control groups. For the first experiment, the researchers placed 17 students in a traditional face-to-face classroom and 17 in the online setting. For the second experiment, there were 34 students in the traditional classroom group and 35 in the online group. The same instructors who taught the classroom groups also prepared the course materials for the online groups to ensure the content was consistent across all groups. The effectiveness was assessed through both test grades and students' satisfaction. The test grades of students who were in the online settings were significantly higher than those of students in traditional classroom groups. In contrast, the satisfaction levels of students in all groups did not show any statistically significant difference. In this particular study the delivery method had an impact on student outcomes. These results are also consistent with the results of the meta-analysis conducted by Means et al. (2009), which is one of the more comprehensive studies found at the moment.

Means et al. (2009) conducted the meta-analysis for the United States Department of Education. They analyzed a total of 176 studies: 99 contrasted online or blended learning and face-to-face instruction. Of these 99 studies, 28 referred to fully online programs. Only two favored the traditional face-to-face approach. The researchers found that

Students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction. Learning outcomes for students who engaged in online learning exceeded those of students receiving face-to-face instruction, with an average effect size of +0.24 favoring online conditions. (Means et al., 2009, p. xiv)

Another important finding in this meta-analysis relates to the type of student population: The effectiveness of online learning approaches appears quite broad across different content and learner types. Online learning appeared to be an effective option for both undergraduates (mean effect of +0.35, $p < .001$) and for graduate students and professionals (+0.17, $p < .05$) in a wide range of academic and professional studies (Means et al., 2009, p. xv).

They also found that in studies where curriculum and instruction were identical or almost identical in both the online and face-to-face classes, size effects were smaller than in those studies where the two conditions had variations in multiple aspects of instruction.

Some other studies have found that there is no difference in the outcomes for students who took their courses online and those who took them face-to-face. Ni (2013) conducted a 2-year study for the purpose of comparing student performance in online and face-to-face classes in terms of interaction and efficacy in a public administration class. She used a total of six classes to compare learning effectiveness. Three classes received online instruction while the other three attended face-to-face classes. The program used was the same for all online and face-to-face classes and they were taught by the same instructor. The results obtained through student performance records and surveys indicated that student performance is independent of the method of instruction. Also, results show that 10 % of students failed in online classes as

compared to only 4% in face-to-face classes and failure in the online courses came mostly from students who dropped out. Ni's (2013) research found this to be consistent with the research results of Carr (2000) and McLaren (2004) where dropout rates are found to be higher in online settings. Ni's results support the idea that the outcomes do not vary significantly between methods, the differences reported had to do with students' characteristics rather than with the method of instruction.

Heppen et al. (2017), did not obtain such positive or neutral results. Their experimental study compared the impact between online Algebra I for credit recovery and the face-to-face version of the course for students in Chicago public school students who failed the course during their first year in high school. They concluded that online students found the course to be more difficult and had more negative attitudes about mathematics than their face-to-face counterparts. Additionally, online students had lower algebra assessment scores, grades, and credit recovery rates than the face-to-face students, but they also found that longer-term academic outcomes were not significantly different for online or face-to-face students. Despite the difficulties, the authors suggest that both online and face-to-face credit recovery courses allow students to recover credit, and that the continuous improvement of online courses is essential to fulfill the great need for flexible alternatives for many students.

Interested in the role of students' characteristics in the success or failure of students enrolled in online courses, Xu and Jaggars (2014) examined the performance gap between online and face-to-face students and the variation of the gaps based on student subgroups and subject areas in students enrolled in over 500,000 courses from over 40,000 community colleges in Washington State. They found that the typical student had more difficulty succeeding in online courses than in face-to-face courses and that the size of the gap varied significantly across

subgroups: male, Black students, and students with lower levels of academic preparation had stronger performance gaps. The researchers also found that students of the social sciences and applied professions such as nursing or law had wider performance gaps. These results suggest that variables such as socioeconomic strata, students' backgrounds, and lower academic performance may have an effect in the overall performance in online courses. This conclusion also supports the idea that students' characteristics may play an important role in the success or failure of online courses and they will be explored further here.

Student Characteristics

Alberth (2011) suggests that students' personal characteristics influence their perceptions towards online courses, which in turn may have an impact on their performance and outcomes. He states that the teacher's physical absence can be detrimental to some students' motivation. In his study some students reported that they just could not stand being exposed to a computer screen and would prefer to read course materials from course books. Some others said that even though they had enjoyed the dynamic interaction of the online courses, they still believed that they would learn more effectively in a conventional classroom. On the contrary, other students reported that they had enjoyed working and interacting online using both synchronous and asynchronous communication and expressed their strong interest in taking future online classes. These same students said they appreciated the flexibility in terms of time and space that the course offered. Alberth argues that the differences in students' perceptions of online learning may be partially attributed to students' individual characteristics. Those students who are more independent and/or have been previously exposed to technology are more likely to take advantage of online classes than those who have not been working with technology or rely on the presence of a teacher for confidence. Some research suggests that there are certain characteristics

often found in successful online students (Bell & Akroyd, 2006; Blocher, de Montes; Vrasidas & Glass, 2002; Wang, Newlin & Pressley, 2000; Willis & Tucker, 2002). These students usually have an internal locus of control, self-motivation, and are independent. They establish how much interaction they need with the instructor and seek clarification in advance of deadlines. In addition, Mehrotra and McGahey (2012) suggest that students who engage in metacognitive monitoring (which includes tracking the extent to which they have or have not acquired the skills and knowledge) can be as important as the actual levels of skills and knowledge. Successful online students demonstrate self-regulation and show a positive attitude. The concept of self-regulation is found in almost all these studies examining student characteristics. According to Zimmerman (2002)

Self-regulation is not a mental ability or an academic performance skill; rather it is the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills.” (p. 65)

Similarly, as one of the conclusions in her study, Kirovska-Simjanoska (2016) stated that digital learning depends on students’ initiative and motivation, and she added that learning can be affected by distractions that students are facing when studying at home.

In regard to the impact of learners’ attitudes while learning online, Cinkara and Bageci (2013) conducted a study about learning English online, at a state university in southeastern Turkey. The purpose of their study was to discover the learners’ attitudes toward the online courses and determine if these attitudes correlated with their success in the classes. The study used data from 1,783 first-year undergraduate students. The researchers found that students who exhibited high levels of motivation and positive attitudes towards the online classes obtained better scores at the end of the courses. This study used the Online Language Learning Attitudes

questionnaire to measure the attitudes and perceptions of the students before they started the courses and the results were correlated to the courses scores at the end. Although the content, design, and methodology of online courses play an important role on the students' outcomes, how the students assume their roles is of extreme importance as is the role of the instructor.

The Role of the Instructor

Panckhurst and Marsh (2011) refers to the shifting role of the instructor as control has been replaced by influence. Teachers no longer control a classroom, but now influence a network. Hampel and Stickler (2015) argue that online language teaching is a socio-constructivist endeavor, but despite being aware of this theoretical trend, many educators still use technology to adapt the new tools to their own old teaching style. Instead, they should be acquiring new skills to use pedagogically transformative practice with the potential to empower both online teachers and online students. They add that this may have happened because previous literature about training teachers to become online instructors focused mainly on the technical aspects of the role. More recent approaches, however, consider the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2010; Murphy, 2015) to develop online teaching and learning. This framework implies three important elements for teachers within the online environment: (a) social presence, (b) cognitive presence, and (c) teaching presence.

The visibility of instructors in the traditional face-to-face education is absent from online settings. Researchers have linked the concept of visibility to the concept of social presence (Fabro & Garrison, 1998; Garrison, & Archer, 1999; McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996; Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 1999; Savery, 2010). Savery defines social presence as the “degree of feeling, perception and reaction of being connected to another intellectual entity”

(Savery, 2010, p. 142). Garrison et al. (2010) offered a more expanded, yet similar definition, “the ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships by the way of projecting their individual personalities” (p. 32). The second concept of the CoI framework is cognitive presence, which involves information exchange, connecting ideas, and applying new ideas (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007).

Teaching presence also defined by Garrison et al. (2010) as “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (p. 32) is an important element in online education. For online learners, not feeling that presence from the teacher can lead to frustration. Instructors need to implement strategies to maintain effective communication and visibility within the virtual classroom to prevent discouragement in the students (Murphy, 2015).

Linda Murphy (2015) and her colleagues found that teacher presence is important in terms of the systemic, affective, and cognitive functions of the teacher’s role, and it helps to create a constructive teacher-student relationship. In addition to maintaining fluent communication and an online presence, there are specific characteristics that determine the performance of online instructors: (a) attitude towards technology, (b) teaching style, and (c) control of the technology (Alberth, 2011; Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Murphy, 2015). Alberth (2011) suggests that while some instructors may have positive attitudes, others may have strong reservations about online education. Teachers who believe in the use of technology have greater enthusiasm and motivation when teaching online and a greater capacity to face the challenges of online learning. These attitudes may be transferred to students. Also, the instructor’s facilitating skills have an impact on students’ motivation, participation, and engagement in online activities.

In a study conducted by Lin, Zheng and Zhang (2017), the results of multiple regression showed that learner-instructor and learner-content interactions had significantly positive effects on satisfaction, whereas learner-learner interaction did not affect satisfaction. Based on these results, the role of the instructor is still valued and desired by the students as they can make a difference in the overall satisfaction and motivation.

Furthermore, instructors need to be prepared to do troubleshooting or make modifications to course content or quizzes when necessary and for that, they need to feel comfortable manipulating the hardware and software. Ushida (2005) showed that each teacher's style affects students' motivation and attitudes toward studying a second language online. His findings reinforced the importance of students' attitudes, but also the critical role of the instructor in technology-enhanced teaching.

Compton (2009) created a model for teaching skills needed for online settings. This model includes three sets of skills: (a) technological skills, which include the knowledge and ability to handle hardware and software issues; (b) pedagogical skills that relate to the ability to facilitate teaching and learning activities; and (c) evaluative skills which refer to the ability to assess tasks and make the adjustments and modifications necessary to ensure the achievement of the language learning objectives (Compton, 2009).

Additionally, for Senior (2010), one essential quality that teachers must possess is their ability to develop a relationship with their students. She argues that regardless of their age, maturity or ability level—whether they are children in primary school or adult students in tertiary institutions—students are more responsive and engage more readily in learning tasks if they sense that their teacher is ‘with’ rather than

‘against’ them: that some kind of a connection exists between themselves, the learners, and the person in charge of their learning, the teacher. (p. 141)

Quality Standards for Online Courses

Having clear rubrics and standards to design and assess online courses is a key component of online education. It will allow faculty, designers, administrators, and students to know what to look for and what to expect. In this respect, Quality Matters (QM), a “continuous improvement program for assuring the design quality of online courses” (Shattuck, 2012, p. 2) is an initiative that has earned recognition as a foundational tool to promote the monitoring and analysis of information for online courses and has become one of the most widely used and adopted guidelines for assuring or maintaining the quality of online courses (Martin et al., 2016)

Quality Matters started in 2003, as a group of scholars at MarylandOnline used an educational fund to create a scalable process for quality assurance of online courses. They developed a rubric of course design standards to provide guidance and certify the quality of online and blended courses in higher education. The word spread and after the standards were launched more than 1,300 institutions throughout the world enrolled in the QM program and used the higher education rubric for course design (QM, 2017). The number of institutions has grown over the years and the standards have been updated five times in the past years to keep up with the current trends and technologies.

The QM research-based standards are currently used by a wide number of institutions both in the United States and internationally (QM, 2017). There are standards for K-12 education, continuing and professional education, and for higher education. For the purpose of this study, I focused solely on the higher education standards.

The standards from the QM Higher Education Rubric (2017) is divided into eight categories: (a) course overview and introduction, (b) learning objectives, (c) assessment and measurement, (d) instructional materials, (e) course activities and learner interaction, (f) course technology, (g) learner support, and (h) accessibility and usability (see Appendix A).

Some authors have used QM to assess the quality of online courses. Lowenthal and Hodges (2015) used all eight standards to evaluate quality of massive, open, online courses (MOOCS) from Coursera, EdX and Udacity (three of the main leading massive, open, online course providers). They chose QM because it had a higher education rubric, it is widely used for quality assurance, and the review process using this rubric is straightforward. Hoffman (2012) also used QM to certify her cataloguing and classification course. The author said that one important aspect for QM is alignment, therefore the set of standards must “work together to ensure that students achieve desired learning outcomes” (Hoffman, 2012, p. 160). She chose QM to ensure her course would lower her students’ anxiety levels by having a well-designed course, and because she wanted her students to spend time on content not figuring out how to do the course. She believed QM would make sure her course complied with this.

The QM framework was used to evaluate the online courses of this study and to design the evaluation of all online courses at the Language Center of El Bosque University.

Frameworks for Online Learning

Community of inquiry. As mentioned above, the CoI framework is an approach that supports the processes of teaching and learning in online settings. This framework was presented by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) and is seen as a coherent and credible theory (Akyol & Garrison, 2013). Rovai (2002) defines what community is in the sense of a collaborative learning environment. In a community, he says, there is a “mutual interdependence among members,

connectedness, interactivity, overlapping histories among members, spirit, trust, common expectations, and shared values and beliefs” (p. 42). Rubin, Fernandes, and Avgerinou (2013) state that one characteristic of a successful online course is its capability to create a CoI where learners, instructors, and learning materials interact to develop knowledge and skills. The framework provides structured guidelines and principles to maintain effective learning environments and successful educational experiences (Akyol & Garrison, 2013). The CoI framework suggests that a community of inquiry occurs at the intersection of three types of presences: social, teaching, and cognitive. The social and cognitive presences, according to Senior (2010), refer to both the instructor and the students.

Social presence. Using Vygotsky’s (1978) view of learning as a social activity, interaction between instructors and students becomes essential to the learning process. Social presence relates to the sense of belonging through the development of relationships as part of a community (Akyol & Garrison, 2013). Current technology facilitates this interaction, reinforcing social presence of both actors within the online environment.

Cognitive presence. Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) state that the process of inquiry that represents cognitive presence, refers to students moving from the exploration stage in an online course, to the integration stage and then to application. Moving past the exploration stage will depend generally on teaching presence (Rienties et al., 2012), but will mark cognitive presence in the subsequent activities, tasks, and interventions within the course. As defined by Akyol and Garrison (2013), cognitive presence is “the description of the progression through the phases of practical inquiry to construct and confirm meaning through sustained discourse” (p. xvii).

Teaching presence. Senior (2010) points out that teaching presence has historically been divided into three components: (a) instructional design and organization, (b) facilitating

discourse, and (c) direct instruction. The way instructors design and set up their courses influence how students perceive them as present in the online classroom. Communication tools such as the discussion forums and the chat rooms help facilitate the discourse and promote student-student and student-teacher interaction. According to Akyol and Garrison (2013), only when all the three elements are balanced and have been developed in a collaborative environment, can there be a meaningful learning experience.

Akyol and Garrison (2013) add that there must also be a pedagogic leadership to create that sense of belonging and meaningful academic collaboration that a virtual community would require to build knowledge among its participants. They also state that “collaboration reflects the reality of mutual interdependence and raises issues of common purpose, trust and identification with the community” (p. 2). The CoI framework sets the personal and social standards for online learning in the sense that humans build knowledge together and need each other to progress at any level and area. Therefore, this framework is widely linked to the concepts of constructivism and social constructivism.

Constructivism and Social Constructivism

Piaget (1952) stated that humans construct knowledge based on their own experiences and actions. These experiences can be either physical or mental and are obtained by encountering the object or idea in the first place and exploring afterwards. After the exploration, these new experiences will be added to an existing schema or if they don't fit, a new schema will need to be constructed. According to Akyol and Garrison (2013), the essence of constructivism is that “the individual is responsible for making sense (creating meaning) of new experiences by building on and integrating previous knowledge and experiences” (p. 3). Carswell (2001) argued that, within the constructivist model, the learners are not passive recipients but rather the center of

instruction, where they build their learning experiences through discovery and have the instructor as a mediator of the process.

It has been recommended that online courses have a student-centered, constructivist approach to learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2011). More specifically, online courses need social interaction to solve conflicts and build knowledge. Social constructivism is a branch of constructivism found in the work of Vygotsky (1978), where learning is socially supported and there is a central role of collaborative inquiry. For Akyol and Garrison (2013), “the great epistemological advantage of social constructivism is that meaning is precipitated and confirmed through discourse and negotiation” (p. 4). Additionally, Senior (2010) reports that scholars involved in the field of e-learning recognize the relationship between interactions based on technologies and the social constructivism theory.

Senior (2010) also suggests that students will collaboratively build new understandings when they are actively engaged in educational experiences with guidance from their teachers or more experienced peers, and when they are encouraged to share ideas in an environment where all participants have a voice without imposing any particular point of view. She adds “rather than transmitting knowledge to students, teachers collaborate with them to create knowledge and understanding in their mutual social context. Rather than seeking to cover the curriculum, learning focuses on the learner’s experiences, needs, interests, and aspirations” (p. 138).

Learning a Language Online

Hockly (2015) presents the term ‘online language learning’ to refer to language learning that takes place fully online, via the internet, with no face-to-face component, within the context of both formal language courses and more informal learning scenarios. Hockly also states that early opportunities for learning a foreign language online were at the tertiary level at first, but

with the development of technology these opportunities increased. Formal courses have been offered by schools and universities where students are assessed and credited. These courses use a learning management system for delivery. These learning management systems can contain instructional material and content developed by the institutions or packages of learning materials developed by publishing houses. The material in these courses is usually designed to develop and strengthen all four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. One of the advantages is that learners can replay, revisit, and revise content easier than in face-to-face settings. However, it requires a lot more from the learner who will need to be active and ambitious and may need the support of their CoI.

Research studies about online language learning in higher education have reported that the outcomes are comparable and sometimes slightly superior to the ones from face-to-face courses (Blake, Wilson, Cetto & Pardo-Ballester, 2008; Chenoweth & Murday, 2003; Despain, 2003; Isenberg, 2010). Despain (2003) conducted a two and a half year study on achievement and attrition rate differences between a Spanish class delivered online and one with the same characteristics delivered in the traditional classroom. The results suggest that the online course can provide an experience nearly identical to that of the classroom setting; the achievement was not significantly different between both classes, but the attrition rates were significantly higher in the online class, which is comparable to the results of other studies (Carr, 2000; McLaren, 2004; Ni, 2013).

Chenoweth and Murday (2003) compared two beginner French classes at Carnegie Mellon University with the purpose of determining if there were any differences in achievement, satisfaction, and time spent on the course between the students in an online course and those in a conventional face-to-face course. They measured students' background, language experience,

technology experience, and individual differences in learning styles. Students were compared on measures of grammatical knowledge, written production, oral production, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension. The results showed that the online French students outperformed their traditional face-to-face counterparts in written production and achieved comparable results in listening comprehension, reading comprehension, grammar, and oral production. Interviews showed that the levels of satisfaction were mainly positive in both environments, with some online students expressing some frustration related to the course programming. Students were asked to complete faculty course evaluations at the end of their courses; the Likert-scale questions on this instrument showed a difference in general satisfaction in several areas. The instructor in the face-to-face class was rated as 4.8 on a scale of 1 to 5, while the online instructor's average rating was 4.3. The face-to-face course received a mean rating of 4.8 while the online students rated their course with an average of 3.8. These students also reported spending less time learning French than did their face-to-face peers. This result differs from other studies in which online students report spending more time on task (Harasim, 2000; Means et al., 2009)

Isenberg (2010) also used a traditional face-to-face class and an online German class to conduct a comparative study at Pennsylvania State University. Most aspects of instruction (automated grammar exercises and mobile immersion activities) were the same across both conditions. Learning was measured by a variety of pre- and posttests. On all measures, they found that the online and the classroom-based classes showed comparable results.

Previously, Uschi Felix (2004) had conducted two large-scale studies about the potential of using the Web as a medium of language instruction both as a complement to face-to-face classes and as the foundation of fully online courses. The first study in 2001, focused primarily

on adult language learners enrolled in colleges in New York and Melbourne, Australia. The 2004 study was a replica of the first one, but the focus was on secondary students. Results of both studies concurred in that students perceived working with the Web very positive and useful, although the majority indicated that they preferred to use the Web as a complement to the face-to-face setting. The author reports that the advantages in both studies outweighed disadvantages. The secondary students felt significantly more comfortable working online, they reported working longer hours and reported more evenly distributed study preferences. They appreciated that the online setting favored different learning styles.

In a study specifically designed to compare vocabulary acquisition in a second language in an online setting versus a traditional setting, Kilickaya and Krajka (2010) found that the students learning the new words via the Internet outperformed the students in the traditional setting. They assessed vocabulary acquisition through a posttest given 3 months after the study began.

One of the most common questions regarding online language learning is related to oral proficiency. According to Blake et al. (2008), many educators and institutions still harbor doubts that oral skills in a foreign language can be developed in online courses. In their study, Blake et al. examined a first-year language course offered at the University of California-Davis, called Spanish Without Walls. To address the development of oral proficiency, they compared the results from face-to-face, hybrid, and online students who took the 20-minute Versant for Spanish test, which is delivered by phone and automatically graded. The results showed that classroom, hybrid, and distance foreign language learners reached comparable levels of oral proficiency during their first year of study. The researchers also suggested that online foreign language education may be a good solution for teaching less commonly taught languages such as

Arabic or Punjabi which suffer from “teacher shortages, low enrollments and the concomitant financial constraints” (Blake et al., 2008, p. 105).

Language Proficiency

According to Lin and Warschauer (2015), “most studies measuring language learning in online environments focus on achievement, not proficiency” (p. 395). The authors suggest that one reason may be the cost and organizational difficulties to perform standardized proficiency tests. Most proficiency tests are expensive and usually students must pay for them. Using these types of tests to evaluate the results of instruction is ideal, but it costs money. Research studies not using proficiency tests (Chenoweth, Ushida, & Murday, 2006; Despain, 2003; Isenberg, 2010; Ushida, 2005) focus on what was taught rather than overall proficiency and this can be seen as a limitation. This is consistent to what Deusen-Scholl (2015) reports about assessing outcomes in online foreign education. She states that few data are available on standardized proficiency assessments and most studies rely on more subjective outcome measures such as learners’ self-perceptions and different studies have evaluated the impact of certain technological tools but have not addressed language proficiency.

It is important to define language proficiency. Lord (2015) considers that comparing student outcomes between online and face-to-face classes would be a reasonable exercise if professionals of the field knew beforehand how to measure language proficiency rigorously and understand what it entails. Language proficiency is not just about “knowing words, phrases, and verb conjugations, but being able to put those together to form coherent meaning and to use that meaning appropriately to engage in real or realistic communication with other speakers of the language” (Lord, 2015, p. 401).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

As a result of over 20 years of research, the Council of Europe (2001) presented the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). It was designed to provide a coherent and comprehensive basis for the design of language syllabi, curriculum guidelines, teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency. It began to be used in Europe but it soon spread to all continents and is now being used in around 47 countries and has been translated to 40 languages (Council of Europe, 2016). The adoption of this framework allows the comparison of proficiency levels, tests, and examination across languages and in different countries, which in turn, facilitates the recognition of language qualifications and the academic and occupational mobility.

The CEFR describes foreign language proficiency at six levels: A1 (Breakthrough), A2 (Waystage), B1 (Threshold), B2 (Vantage), C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) and C2 (Mastery). Table 1 explains the general description of what users of the foreign language can do once they reach each level.

Colombian institutions, as in most countries in Latin America and Europe, use the standards of the CEFR to plan, develop, implement and assess all foreign language courses. These standards and guidelines are being used at El Bosque University as well, and all courses are modeled after its parameters.

Table 1

Common Reference Levels: Global Scale

Proficiency levels		
Proficient user	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes.

Table 1 - continued

Proficiency levels		
		Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.
Independent user	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic user	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate

Basic user

in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment, and matters in area of immediate need.

- A1** Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows, and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Note. Adapted from "Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment by Council of Europe, 2001, Cambridge, UK, Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.

Chapter 3. Methodology

While this study used a quantitative design to answer the research questions, it also included a qualitative component to support the findings and understand the results. A randomized-to-groups pretest-posttest comparison group design was used to determine if there were differences in the outcomes of students taking their English course face-to-face with those taking it online. The independent variable was the instructional method, some other variables were considered: socioeconomic strata, age, previous experience with online courses, instructors, course completion, attendance and time on course. The dependent variables were the posttest scores on speaking, listening, reading, writing, and the overall scores on the iTEP exam. The pretest scores served as a covariate.

Site and Participants

El Bosque University is a non-for-profit private institution located in Bogota, Colombia, with about 12,000 students in graduate and undergraduate programs. Graduate students make up 15% of the student population and the undergraduate students constitute 85%. Although El Bosque University is a comprehensive institution, it is most recognized for its programs on health sciences.

Colombia has a socioeconomic stratification system to classify urban populations into different residential strata with similar economic characteristics. These strata range from 1 to 6,

with 1 being the lowest and 6 the highest. El Bosque University serves students from all socioeconomic strata, but its population comes mostly from strata 3 and 4 as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Percentage of El Bosque University students who come from each SE stratum. Source: Office of the President, 2018.

Since 2009, it is a graduation requirement that all students from the graduate and the undergraduate programs develop competencies in a foreign language, especially English. The Language Center at El Bosque University is in charge of all language courses and assuring the fulfillment of the graduation requirement. Students can either take courses or take a proficiency test to demonstrate that they have the required level of English or of the language of their preference. However, 98% of the university students choose English to fulfill the requirement and 28.1% of these students are placed to start the A2 (Elementary) level of proficiency when taking the entry placement test (M. Maya, personal communication, August 16, 2017).

The proficiency level students require to graduate varies depending on the academic program in which they are enrolled. Most of the undergraduate programs require an intermediate level (or B1) according to the CEFR. For graduate programs, the requirement is based on the length of each program and it ranges between A2 (Elementary) to B2 (Upper intermediate).

The Language Center enrolls approximately 900 students in its regular English courses each semester with about 250 students placed to begin the A2 Elementary level, which is the

second of the six-level English program the center offers. For the purpose of this study, a sample of 72 students placed to begin in A2 were chosen to participate. Of those students, 58 completed the study. These students were a mix of undergraduate and graduate students between the ages of 18 and 46 from strata 2 to 6. This sample reflected the actual Language Center population in terms of socioeconomic strata and age range.

Research Design

I used a randomized-to-groups pretest-posttest comparison group design and a qualitative component. The pretest scores were used to establish a baseline and as a covariate in the final results. The independent variable was the instructional method (with two levels: face-to-face and online), other variables were also considered: socioeconomic strata, age, previous experience with online courses, instructors, course completion, attendance, and time on course. The dependent variables were the posttest scores on speaking, listening, reading, writing, and the overall scores on the ITEP exam.

Planning was an essential part of this study. Strategies for data collection for the qualitative part had to be adjusted after the intervention started as the needs to obtain additional information became clearer with time. This study used an inductive approach as there are no theories or hypothesis to test and the research questions were used to guide the procedure.

Procedure

Recruitment. To recruit the participants, announcements were posted on social media (Facebook® and Twitter®) inviting students to an information session. E-mails were sent to students who, according to the Language Center database, were classified as A1. Additionally, fliers were distributed to students who walked into the center. After five informational sessions,

72 students signed up for the study. They were randomly assigned to classes as follows: 36 for the virtual classes and 36 for the face-to-face classes.

Pretest and class start. After signing up, all students were scheduled to take the iTEP. They took this proficiency test in one of six different times and dates designated for this purpose. Their scores were recorded to determine their baseline. Figure 2 shows an example of how the iTEP scores are presented.

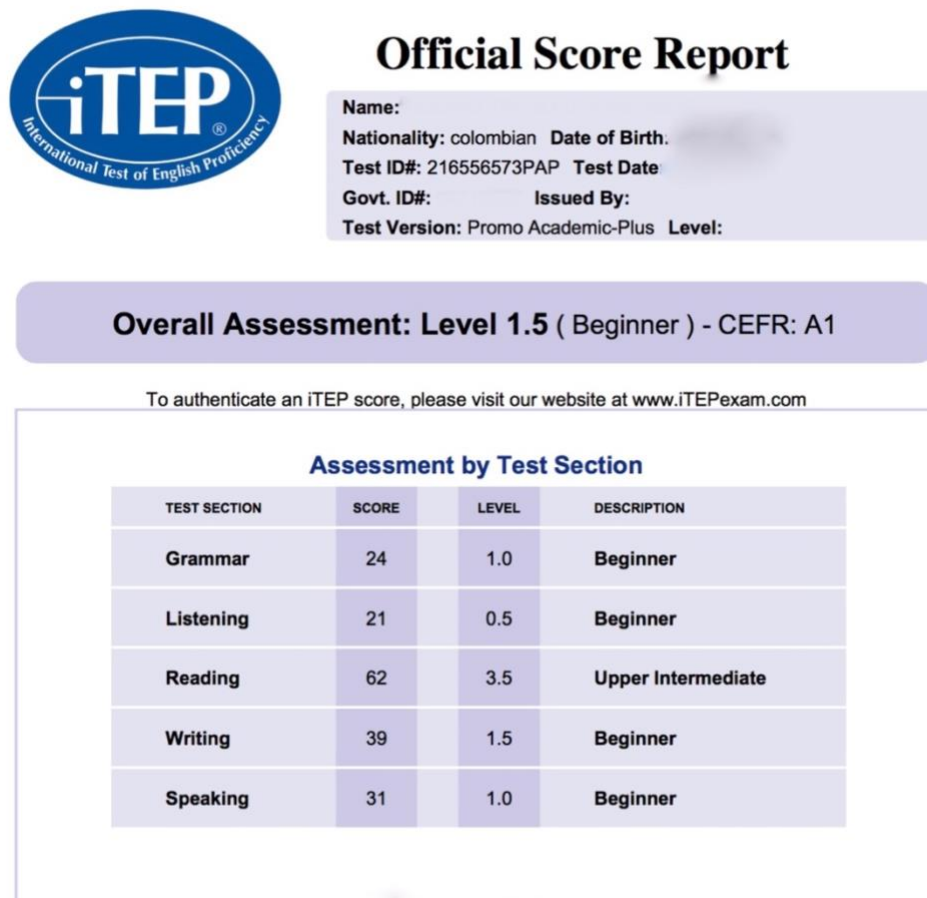


Figure 2. iTEP official score report.

Before classes started, six students assigned to the face-to-face courses asked to be changed to the virtual courses because they needed flexibility, and they did not have enough time

to commit to coming to class 10 hours a week. This request was declined and they withdrew from the study. Three more students from the face-to-face classes did not enroll because of economic issues. The final distribution of participants was: 36 students in the online classes divided in two groups of 18 students each, and 27 students in the face-to-face classes, 12 in one class and 15 in the other.

The online and the face-to-face students were enrolled in A2 (elementary) classes. The face-to-face classes and the online classes were taught by the same instructors. Students in both conditions were exposed to the same content and had the same learning objectives.

The educational material used for the four classes was Touchstone® from Cambridge University Press. Touchstone® has an online version as well as a print version. Both versions are equal in content and objectives. The online version includes a strong instructional component to provide the students with an experience very similar to having a teacher explaining concepts in front of them. Additionally, it has plenty of activities (workbook, video activities, reviews and games). Figure 3 shows Unit 1 for one of the six components of the content. Each unit has four lessons and each lesson has between 10 to 12 activities, plus the instructional piece.

Face-to-face classes. Students in the face-to-face classes received instruction in the classroom 10 hours a week for 9 weeks for a total of 90 hours of instruction, plus 4 hours for the final exam and oral interview. The class format included lectures, group activities, individual timed activities, in-class workshops, contests, games, presentations and class discussions. Additionally, they had homework and other independent activities that accounted for around 20 hours of independent work. Students had the option to go to their teachers' office hours for tutoring.

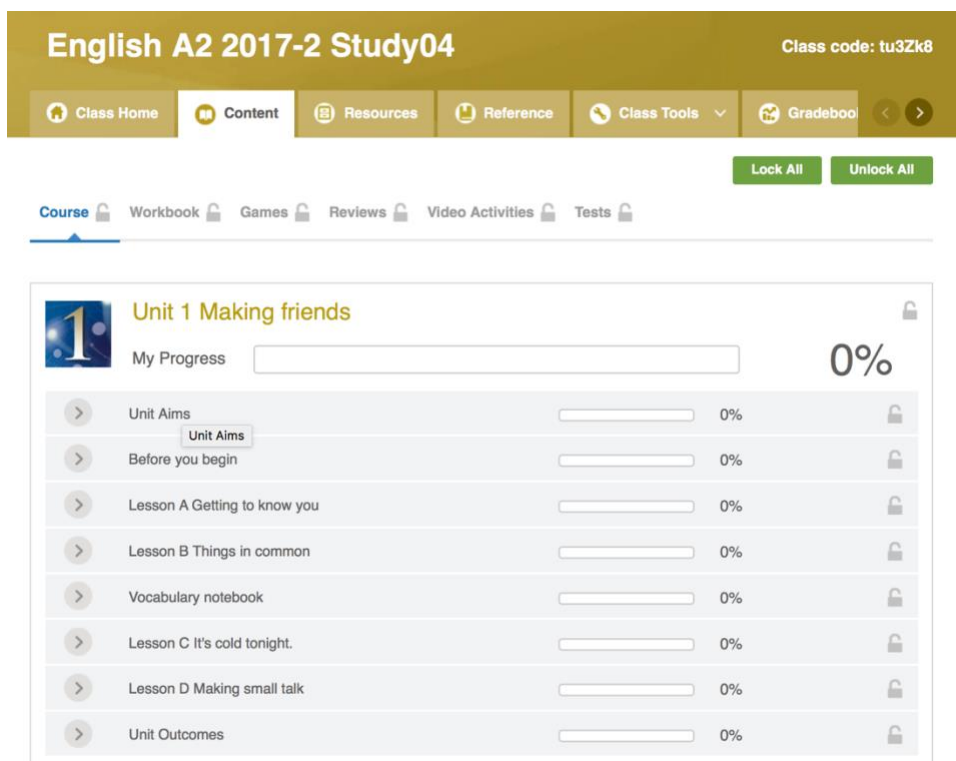


Figure 3. Touchstone® online, level A2, Unit 1, course component.

Online classes. Online students were instructed to spend a minimum of 10 hours a week studying at the learning management system. Each online unit has an instructional section, workbook exercises, video activities, interactive games, unit tests and discussion forums. Students started by exploring each unit's aims, then moved to warm-up activities that included the presentation of new vocabulary in context and the recycling of previous knowledge. After this, each unit presented its instructional section, in which all new grammar and concepts were introduced and explained. Afterwards, students were offered additional exercises and activities for practice (this practice included listening, oral, and written interactive exercises). Students were required to go to the unit discussion forum to post a thread and reply to other students' threads, based on the instructions that the teacher had given previously. Finally, students took a unit test. Instructors of this class established teaching and social presence by posting daily

announcements within the course, participating and responding to the online discussion forums, and by communicating with the students synchronically via phone or chat.

Four synchronous sessions were set via Blackboard Collaborate. Online students also had the option to attend to their teachers' office hours for tutoring, either in person or through Skype®. Figure 4 shows one way the instructional component in the online classes was presented:

6 Grammar: Simple present and present continuous

Watch and listen to the presentation. Take notes.

Hint

Use the simple present to talk about "all the time" and routines.

Simple present
How do you stay in shape?
I walk everywhere. I don't have a car.
Do you get regular exercise?
Yes, I do . I exercise six days a week.
No, we don't . We don't exercise at all.
Does she get regular exercise?
Yes, she does . She exercises six days a week.
No, she doesn't . She doesn't exercise at all.

Figure 4. Example of instructional component.

Data Collection

The iTEP was administered as a pretest to all students before classes started. This test provided separate scores for speaking, listening, reading, writing, and grammar; as well as the overall scores that represented each student's English proficiency. The scores in the test are

aligned with the CEFR. This same test was used as a posttest. Data from the pretest and posttest were used as part of the analysis.

When students enrolled, they were asked to complete a short form with their names, ID number, institutional e-mail address, socioeconomic strata they resided, and to answer whether or not they had taken an online course before. The ID numbers served as identifiers during the data analysis process in Statistical Package for Social Sciences®. Information about students' age was obtained through the university internal management system using their ID numbers.

Classes were observed in three opportunities. For the face-to-face courses, classes that introduced the topics of Units 3, 6 and 9 were chosen. For these same units, synchronous encounters took place for the online students. These encounters were also observed.

The week classes ended, students were asked to take an end-of-course survey with specific questions about their experience in the course (Appendix B). Additionally, an analysis of information provided by the Cambridge Learning Management System (for the online students) in which Touchstone® Online is host, provided the data related to the number of hours students spent on the course and number of units and the content each student completed. Semi-structured interviews with the instructors were conducted after the classes had been completed. The protocol for these interviews and their transcripts can be found in Appendix C.

The results of a course evaluation were taken into account to assess students' perception and satisfaction with the online courses. This instrument was designed using the QM standards for higher education as its foundation. A Likert scale was used to present response options to the statements. Options ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 being *poor* and 5 being *excellent*.

Dose and content data. Student attendance for the face-to-face students and time spent on the course for the online students was collected and examined. For this, instructors in the

face-to-face settings recorded attendance for each class. I provided a pacing guide to help them plan and cover all content units. For the online classes, the learning management system provided the information related to the time students and instructors spent in the course.

Data Analysis

Five separate Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) tests were used to determine whether there were significant differences in the learning outcomes of students enrolled in the online classes when compared to students in the face-to-face classes. One ANCOVA test was used to examine each of the four skills of the language: speaking, listening, reading, and writing; as well as one to analyze the overall results that included these four skills plus the one of “grammar.” Independent samples *t*-tests were used to compare the pretest outcomes to determine if there were any baseline differences that needed adjustments. After realizing that course content completion was a variable that needed examination, additional ANCOVAs were run to compare the results of only the online students who had completed all 12 content units of the course.

Additionally, the following tests were conducted to examine other variables:

1. A two-way ANOVA was used to determine if there were differences in the overall posttest outcomes based on the instructor variable.
2. Two additional ANCOVA tests were run. One to check for differences in the posttest outcomes based on socioeconomic strata after controlling for the pretest results, which served as the covariate, and the other to examine the variables of attendance (face-to-face) and time on the course (online).
3. The variables of age and previous experience in online courses were examined through independent samples *t*-tests.

4. A linear regression was conducted to examine the percentage of the variation that was due to each variable of interest.

For the qualitative component, an observation protocol was developed to record what happened in the classes that were chosen for observation (see Appendix D). A total of six classes were observed, three face-to-face and three online. The classes observed matched each other in terms of content (Units 3, 6 and 9 of the Touchstone® program). Also, semi-structured interviews with both instructors about the challenges and achievements they believed they had in the courses assigned provided additional comparative data. Students were asked to complete an end-of-course survey that contained questions about the dynamic of their courses, the evaluation, the course activities, and their instructors.

Data from the learning management system and the course evaluation, which was developed using the QM standards for higher education, were also included in the analysis. Items in the course evaluation format were rated in a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was *poor* and 5 was *excellent*.

Limitations and Assumptions

One limitation of this study had to do with the difficulty of including a larger number of students. The fact that students had to pay for the courses reduced the possibility of getting a higher number for the study. This situation is a reflection of the current economic situation in Colombia, where many cannot access this type of course offering and, therefore, seek other alternatives to fulfill their graduation requirement.

Another limitation was created when some students in the face-to-face classes wanted to move to the virtual course because it offered time flexibility. When the request was not granted, they dropped their classes leaving uneven numbers for both groups. The ANCOVA tests used for

the analysis are a strong option for uneven samples, but it would have been meaningful to have kept all participants in the study.

The dynamics and extension of the online courses made it difficult for some students to finish by the date established. Even though an extension was granted, some students still did not finish the entire content of their courses. This is the biggest limitations of this study.

Based on what was found in the literature (York, 2015), one possible limitation was the short duration of the courses and the fact that the study was conducted using only the elementary level. A replication of this study in which the participants stay for more than one level and get at least to a B2 (Upper intermediate), spending enough time in each, will probably provide more accurate results in terms of language proficiency.

An assumption I had in this study was that all students would follow the pacing guides and that the time given for the courses was enough for everybody. Some students did follow the pacing and completed the course on time, but not everyone. Students who had jobs or other obligations struggled to complete the online course in 10 weeks.

Institutional Review Board and Ethical Assurances

This study was conducted under the approval of the Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board IRB # HM20010060 (see Appendix E). The Board of Directors at Universidad El Bosque gave full permission for the study to be conducted at the University Language Center. The identities of the participating students were kept confidential, only their ID numbers were used while processing the data in Statistical Program for the Social Sciences ®, and I was the only one who had access to them. The activities that met the definitions of human subjects or research were approved before the start of the study. All students were informed

about the study, its purpose, and its procedure prior to the intervention and the pretest and they were asked to sign a consent form. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix F.

Chapter 4. Findings and Analysis

This study compared the outcomes of students who learn English language online and the students who take face-to-face classes for the same purpose at El Bosque University in Colombia. I also explored the impact of socioeconomic strata on outcomes, as well as the interaction of instructor. Additional analysis examined the relationship of previous experience with online courses, time in class, and age to student outcomes. In this study, the outcome measure is the iTEP exam scores.

As part of the analysis, scores for speaking, listening, reading, and writing were considered separately as they are the skills students are expected to develop in any language learning process. However, the iTEP test also includes a section called “Grammar” that assesses the capability of the test taker to use the grammar structures of the English language. These grammar scores are included as part of the overall scores, also reported in the analysis. This study also contained a qualitative component, which included class observations for all classes, the results of a descriptive survey about the course, and interviews of instructors.

Before running the tests scores, all data were checked for outliers. There was one outlier within the overall posttest scores, which had a residual value of 3.03. I decided not to remove it from the data set, because after comparing the results with and without the outlier, they were not substantially affected. For the rest of the variables, there were no outliers, as assessed by examination of residuals for values greater than ± 3 . Also, the data were normally distributed, as

assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk's test of normality ($p > .05$). There was homogeneity of variances ($p > .05$) and covariances ($p > .05$), as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances and Box's M test, respectively.

Variables

As discussed in the previous chapter, the outcome variables in this study are the post course scores on the iTEP. The iTEP exam scores are presented on a scale from 0 (*no language*) to 6 (*fully proficient, a native speaker of the language*). Students in this study were expected to score somewhere between 1.0 and 3.0 after the intervention.

Prior to beginning the study, the two samples were compared on a number of variables to determine if the samples were different in important ways. I included those variables where there were differences in the analysis.

Age. I wanted to determine if there were differences in the make-up of the 27 students in the face-to-face sample and the 31 students in the online sample that might account for differences, irrespective of English language learning. I used age as a comparison because that was the information available. An independent samples *t*-test was run showing there was no difference in age between the groups, face-to-face ($M = 28.3, SD = 7.02$) and online ($M = 28.7, SD = 6.4$). $t(56) = -2.17, p = .829, d = .06$ which is a meaningless effect size (Cohen, 1969). Therefore, I did not include age as a variable.

Pretest. To determine whether or not the instructional groups had comparable initial scores in all the skills, I compared the samples using independent samples *t*-tests and found statistically significant differences in the pretest for speaking $t(56) = 2.46, p = .017, d = .65$ and for writing $t(56) = 2.0, p = .05, d = .52$. Cohen's values ($d = .65$ and $.52$) suggest a medium effect size. Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations of all tests and Table 3 the results of the

comparisons of pretest scores by instructional group where there were statistically significant differences.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Pretests Scores Per Ability

Instructional method	Speaking		Listening		Pretest scores		Writing		Overall	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Face-to-face	1.17	.747	1.1	.69	2.34	1.5	1.38	.75	1.43	.55
Online	.71	.67	1.05	.69	2.37	.97	1.00	.68	1.21	.45

Table 3

Comparison of Pretest Scores by Instructional Group (ANOVA Table)

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Speaking in pretest per instructional method	Between groups (combined)	3.014	1	3.014	6.052	.017
	Within groups	27.887	56	.498		
	Total	30.901	57			
Writing in pretest per instructional method	Between groups (combined)	2.060	1	2.060	4.009	.050
	Within groups	28.767	56	.514		
	Total	30.826	57			

Because of differences in pretest scores, I employed an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to compare the posttest overall scores on the iTEP exam of both groups for all variables, using the pretest scores as the covariate. The analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) can be thought of as an extension of the one-way ANOVA to incorporate a covariate variable. This covariate is linearly related to the dependent variable and its inclusion into the analysis can increase the ability to detect differences between groups of an independent variable (Laerd

Statistics, 2018). With ANCOVA, precision in detecting the effects of treatments on the dependent variable can be increased by adjusting its observed values for the effect of the covariate. Without the adjustments, the values of the covariate could inflate the error mean square and make true differences in the response due to treatments harder to detect (University of New Hampshire, 2011). ANCOVA performs the adjustments by removing the variation in the dependent variable that is associated with the variation in the covariate from the error variance, which results in more precise estimates. Also, individual observations of the dependent variable are adjusted to correspond to a common value of the covariate. This will produce group means that are not biased by the covariate, as well as equitable group comparisons (University of New Hampshire, 2011).

Instructional time. I examined differences by group in number of hours of instruction to determine if this might account for differences in the posttest score. There was no statistically significant difference of hours of instruction by group $F(1,15) = .143, p = .71, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .009$.

Number of modules completed. There were 12 modules in the class. All of the face-to-face students completed 12 modules. The average for online students was 9.55 modules, with a range from 3 modules to 12 modules. Therefore, I compared number of modules completed by group to determine if this represented a statistically significant difference in the groups. There was a statistically significant difference between number of modules completed by instructional group $F(1,56) = 16.65, p = .000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .23$, and therefore, number of modules completed is a variable in this analysis.

Instructors. Students in this study had one of two possible instructors, Mr. Andrés Barrero or Ms. Kelley Knapp. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences in the outcomes based on instructors as well as

determine if there was a significant interaction between instructor and instructional method. Results indicate that there was no statistically significant interaction between instructor and instructional method for the posttest overall scores, $F(1, 54) = .611, p = .438, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .011$. Thus, I was able to rule out effect of instructor when comparing the outcomes of the two instructional groups. In other words, the effects of instructional methods on the scores are comparable for students who had Mr. Andrés Barrero as their instructor and for students who had Ms. Kelley Knapp as their instructor. Both Mr. Barrero and Ms. Knapp were in charge of one face-to-face section and one online section.

Previous online experience. Additionally, to find out if students in the online setting who had previously been enrolled in other online classes performed differently than those who had not, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the means of the overall scores based on the reported previous experience with online courses. There were 16 students with experience and 15 who did not have any experience with online courses. Results indicate that there was no statistically significant difference in the posttest overall scores between students who had previously taken online classes ($M = 1.31, SD = .56$) and those who had not ($M = 1.36, SD = .45$); $t(29) = -.257, p = .799$.

An Overview of the Classes

Both face-to-face classes started and ended their course as scheduled (September 11th – November 14th). All content (12 units) was covered and the most students attended most of the classes (mean number of classes attended = 41 out of 45). El Bosque University has a policy for attendance in which students must attend 80% of the total number of hours for each class in order to pass. I observed each class three times and the instructors planned for their classes jointly. Mr. Barrero's face-to-face class had 12 students and Ms. Knapp's had 15 students.

Although online classes started as scheduled on September 11th, an extension had to be granted for students after several requests they made to their instructors through the telephone or e-mails for more time to complete. They were given until November 30th to complete the course. Posttest sessions for them were scheduled on November 30th and December 1st. From the 36 online students, 31 took the posttest (86%). The remaining five students did not attend the posttest session and, therefore, are not included in the results.

Research Question 1

Do students in an online English language course achieve the same mastery level of the English language as students in a face-to-face English language course?

I compared the overall and subtest post scores by instructional method, using pretest scores as a covariant. Table 4 presents the unadjusted and adjusted means and variability for posttest overall scores using the pretest overall scores as a covariate.

After adjustment for the overall pretest scores, results showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the overall posttest scores between the students who took their classes face-to-face and those who took them online, $F(1, 55) = 4.307, p = .043$, partial $\eta^2 = .073$

Table 4

Adjusted and Unadjusted Instructional Method Means and Variability for Overall Posttest Scores With Overall Pretest Scores as a Covariate and 95% Confidence Intervals

	<u>Unadjusted</u>			<u>Adjusted</u>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Face-to-face	27	1.7	.47	1.6	.07
Online	31	1.3	.50	1.4	.07

The value of partial η^2 indicates that 7% of the difference in posttest scores can be accounted for by instructional method, a small effect size.

Because not all online students completed all modules, a linear regression was calculated to predict the overall iTEP score based on the pretest overall score, the number of modules completed, and the instructional method.

My model equation was:

$$A = B + B_1 X_1 + B_2 X_2 + B_3 X_3 + e$$

Where:

A = Overall iTEP post scores

B = *intercept*

X_1 = *overall pretest score*

X_2 = *number of modules completed*

X_3 = *Instructional method*

e = *error*

A statistically significant regression was found. $F(3, 54) = 21.66, p = .000$. Overall, these three variables account for an adjusted R Square of .521: number of units completed = .128, instructional method = .019, and pretest for .374. Instructional method does not explain meaningful differences in post overall scores. Number of units explains 13% of the difference, pretest scores explain 52%, and the remainder is left unexplained.

Research Question 2

Are there differences between online and face-to-face students' reading and listening proficiency scores?

Reading. An independent sample *t*-test on the reading pretest scores indicated that there was no significant difference between groups at the baseline, $t(56) = -.092, p = .927$. However, as with the overall scores, in order to compare the true effects of the instructional method on the reading scores (without the bias by differences in the means of the pretest scores), the reading posttest means are adjusted to what their values would have been if all students had had the same initial scores. An ANCOVA was used to make this analysis.

After adjusting for the reading pretest scores, there was a statistically significant difference in the posttest scores between the face-to-face and the online groups $F(1, 55) = 5.485, p = .02, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .091$. The mean for face-to-face students was 3.0, and the mean for online students was 2.4. Partial η^2 indicates that 9% of the difference between the outcomes can be explained by instructional method, with 91% is left unexplained.

Table 5 presents the unadjusted and adjusted means and variability for posttest reading scores using the pretest overall scores as a covariate. The score range in the iTEP exam for the reading scores (as for the scores in each of the skills separately) are the same as for the overall scores: 0 to 6, with 6 representing full proficiency. Scores for entry students in this study were expected to be between 0.5 and 1.9 and for exit they were expected to be between 2.0 and 3.0.

Table 5

Adjusted and Unadjusted Instructional Method Means and Variability for Reading Posttest Scores With Reading Pretest Scores as a Covariate

	<u>Unadjusted</u>			<u>Adjusted</u>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Face-to-face	27	3.0	.9	3.0	.20
Online	31	2.4	1.1	2.4	.18

Reading is the skill in which both groups scored higher than they did on other subtests. Based on class observations, I can say that students had no difficulty when developing reading activities in class. In the face-to-face classes students volunteered to read passages or statements during their classes and completed reading comprehension activities that they revised together with the instructors.

The difference by instructional method on posttest performance may be due to the fact that not all online students completed the 100% of the course. Therefore, I examined reading post scores based upon pretest score, instructional method, and modules completed.

A linear regression was calculated to predict the reading iTEP score based on the pretest overall score, the number of modules completed, and the instructional method. My model equation was:

$$A = B + B_1 X_1 + B_2 X_2 + B_3 X_3 + e$$

Where:

A = Reading Posttest score

B = intercept

X₁ = reading pretest score

$X_2 = \text{number of modules completed}$

$X_3 = \text{Instructional method}$

$E = \text{error}$

A statistically significant regression equation was found $F(3,54) = 2.9, p = .043$, accounting for an adjusted r^2 of .091. The reading pretest and instructional modules each accounted for less than 1% of the variance, and the instructional method accounted for 8.2%, indicating a meaningful difference in post reading scores. Nevertheless, the majority of the reason for differences is left unexplained (90.9%).

Online students showed growth in reading, but not at the same rate as their face-to-face counterparts who came to class every day for 2 hours. Although online students were expected to work at a similar rate, only very few did it this way. Most of them used the course flexibility and the excuse of having other things to do, to procrastinate. One of them stated: “Mis tareas extracurriculares al curso no me permitieron realizarlo al tiempo recomendado lo que impidió un aprendizaje efectivo” (My activities outside the course did not allow me to complete it as recommended which prevented effective learning).

Listening. An ANCOVA was run to compare listening posttest scores. This test adjusted the listening posttest means to what their values would have been if all students had had the same initial scores.

Results of the ANCOVA found no statistically significant difference in the posttest listening scores after adjusting for the pretest scores, $F(1, 55) = .004, p = .95$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$. The value of Partial $\eta^2 = .000$ indicates that there was no effect of the instructional method on the scores. Both groups scored very poorly in this skill. This is an area that will require attention and an action plan for all courses (online and face-to-face) at the Language Center.

Table 6 presents the unadjusted and adjusted means and variability for posttest listening scores using the pretest overall scores as a covariate. As for the other skills, the iTEP score range for listening is 0 to 6.

Table 6

Adjusted and Unadjusted Instructional Method Means and Variability for Listening Posttest Scores With Listening Pretest Scores as a Covariate

	<u>Unadjusted</u>			<u>Adjusted</u>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Face-to-face	27	0.97	.73	0.96	.13
Online	31	0.96	.73	0.97	.12

I decided to include a regression analysis to keep the same procedure as with the other skills. My equation model was:

$$A = B + B_1 X_1 + B_2 X_2 + B_3 X_3 + e$$

Where:

A = Listening Posttest score

B = *intercept*

*X*₁ = *listening pretest score*

*X*₂ = *number of modules completed*

*X*₃ = *Instructional method*

E = *error*

A statistically significant regression equation was found $F(3,54) = 3.7, p = .017$, accounting for an adjusted r^2 of .125. The listening pretest scores accounted for 15% of the

variance, the number of modules completed accounted for only 2.5% and the instructional method accounted for 0%.

In this regard, Ms. Knapp shared her opinion on developing listening skills in her classes: Regarding the listening, I feel like that might be an issue with the content. I can recall one specific example in my face-to-face class. We were doing the unit on directions and following directions and they had a map in their book, which would have been the same in the virtual course since the content is the same, and they were listening to three people from a hotel ask for directions and they had to mark in the map where to go and on one of them I followed the directions myself and I felt like ended up in a lake or something, you know, it was really challenging and we had to, you know, listen to this over and over again for them to try to understand, cause [sic] the listenings were quite long, for their level I thought, compared to other materials I've used and I felt like this kind of sense of frustration built up for them that they felt like they weren't understanding anything, but, you know, when I was talking with them, one on one and you know kind of in a slower tone, using vocabulary and structures that I know that they knew that didn't seem to have a problem understanding me, but when they were listening to some of these exercises provided by Cambridge, I just from my experience, I thought they were, quite challenging and I feel like a lot of them just kind of gave up after a while. Some of them start covering their heads and, 'No teacher, I don't understand' and the rest just kind of, you know, is just like a kind of domino effect. (K. Knapp, personal interview, Dec 14, 2017)

Based on Ms. Knapp's perception, listening was one of the hardest abilities to develop during her classes, and the fact that students did not understand, led to frustration and lack of

confidence on having strengths in this skill. She also said the problem goes for both the face-to-face and the online students:

I think both groups still require quite a bit of support for listening, and many in both commented to me that, you know, that's the skill they find the most difficult. I think that's usually for most. . . people when they're learning the language, you know, that they. . . You know when they see it, you know, they can kind of put together the meaning of a sentence but listening sometimes I think is a bit more difficult for both (K. Knapp, personal interview, Dec 14, 2017).

Mr. Barrero also had the impression students had trouble with listening in both his online and face-to-face class:

In the e-mails that they sent me, they were telling me like, 'Teacher, I have problems with listening what can you recommend?' So I told them like. . . 'You have several activities that you can do or you can use a lot of platforms,' yeah, and in my face-to-face classes the listening was really difficult too. (A. Barrero, personal interview, Dec 14, 2017)

Having identified these issues, may help explain why students performed so poorly in the listening section of the posttests. This skill requires an additional effort in both programs to ensure students develop it at a similar rate they develop the other three (speaking, reading, and writing). Further research on this particular area may be necessary.

Research Question 3

Are there differences between online and face-to-face students' speaking and writing proficiency scores?

Speaking. After adjusting for speaking pretest scores, a statistically significant difference in the speaking posttest scores between the two groups was found, $F(1, 55) = 4.307, p = .043$, partial $\eta^2 = .073$. However, Partial η^2 indicates that only 7% of the difference in posttest scores could be accounted for by instructional method.

Table 7 presents the unadjusted and adjusted means and variability for posttest speaking scores using the pretest overall scores as a covariate.

In order to examine the relationships of number of modules completed, pretest scores and instructional method with posttest speaking scores, I conducted a regression analysis. A statistically significant regression equation was found $F(3,54) = 19.35, p = .000$, accounting for an adjusted r^2 of .491. My model equation was:

Table 7

Adjusted and Unadjusted Instructional Method Means and Variability for Speaking Posttest Scores With Speaking Pretest Scores as a Covariate

	Unadjusted			Adjusted	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Face-to-face	27	1.5	.58	1.4	.09
Online	31	0.9	.60	1.0	.09

$$A = B + B_1 X_1 + B_2 X_2 + B_3 X_3 + e$$

Where:

A = Speaking Posttest scores

B = intercept

X₁ = speaking pretest scores

X₂ = number of modules completed

X₃ = Instructional method

E = error

Results indicate that the three variables predict 49.1% of the variation; pretest accounts for 46.8%, number of modules completed accounts for 1%, and instructional method accounts for 4% of the variance.

Based on the instructors' interviews and students' responses at the end of course survey, I found that face-to-face classes have an advantage when developing and practicing speaking skills in their classes because they may have more opportunities to practice than their online counterparts.

Ms. Knapp explains how she focused on speaking the most in her face-to-face class: Probably in class I tried to focus the most on speaking. . . I think that's the benefit of the 'presencial' classes, that they have that ability to speak with someone, they were listening to me, a lot, all the time and you know, reading is. . . and writing is something that they can do at home and bring back for revision in class, but speaking isn't something they always have an opportunity for outside the classroom. So I really tried to focus a lot in speaking in the class. (K. Knapp, personal interview, December 14, 2017)

According to Ms. Knapp, class sessions are used as an opportunity to practice this skill as they may not have a lot of chances elsewhere. She believes other skills can be developed in other

ways, but that class time is needed to develop speaking skills. Seeing it this way, online students are at a disadvantage since opportunities for them are not as many. In this regard, she added:

In the face to face classes I really tried to focus on speaking. . . I think there's just, you know, I think we may be on the verge of having, you know, online speaking but I just don't think is the same as, you know, being face-to-face with someone and also being presented with their body language which can help, you know, help aid and understanding and. . . I don't know just developing a repertoire with someone you trust. . . [in the online sessions] the speaking sometimes could get a bit wonky because, you know, everyone trying to speak at the same time with microphone is, I mean, not the ideal context, but I mean, so far I think that, you know, for speaking, that virtual courses still have like, I mean, they're just still not the same, is being with someone or talking with a partner, again on a daily, well five times a week basis. (K. Knapp, personal interview, Dec 14, 2017)

Online students also identified speaking practice as an area that requires attention.

Responses obtained in the end of course survey indicate this need:

- Hacer más enfoque en speaking (More emphasis on speaking).
- Tener algunos encuentros presenciales para reforzar speaking (Meet face-to-face sometimes to reinforce speaking).
- Siento que aprendí mas vocabulario pero la parte de habla no mucho (I feel I learned more vocabulary, but the speaking part, not so much).

Writing. After adjustment for the writing pretest scores' means, results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the writing posttest scores between the students who took their classes face-to-face and those who took them online, $F(1, 55) = 12.896, p = .001$,

partial $\eta^2 = .19$. Partial η^2 indicates that the instructional method accounted for 19% of the difference in the writing posttest scores. Table 8 presents the unadjusted and adjusted means and variability for posttest overall scores using the pretest overall scores as a covariate.

Table 8

Adjusted and Unadjusted Instructional Method Means and Variability for Writing Posttest Scores With Writing Pretest Scores as a Covariate

	<u>Unadjusted</u>			<u>Adjusted</u>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Face-to-face	27	1.8	.52	1.7	.08
Online	31	1.2	.54	1.3	.08

A regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationships of number of modules completed, pretest scores, and instructional method with posttest writing scores. A statistically significant regression equation was found $F(3,54) = 23.74, p = .000$, accounting for an adjusted r^2 of .545. My model equation was:

$$A = B + B_1 X_1 + B_2 X_2 + B_3 X_3 + e$$

Where:

A = Writing Posttest score

B = *intercept*

X_1 = *writing overall pre scores*

X_2 = *number of modules completed*

X_3 = *Instructional method*

E = *error*

The model accounts for 54.5% of the variance. The pretest accounts for 43%, the number of units completed accounts for 8.7%, and instructional method accounts for 5% of the variance.

Instructors find the approach to writing to be different in both of their classes. While Ms. Knapp thought there is potential for the online students due to the popularity of texting in today's society when compared to the reluctance of writing in paper; Mr. Barrero believes there is an advantage for the face-to-face students due to the teachers' constant presence and instant correction.

Ms. Knapp stated:

It was really interesting, you know, in the face-to-face class, we, you know. . . Kind of more typical A2 writing activities, you know, like write a letter to your friend or, you know, describe yourself, you know the kind of the typical things that go along with the grammar and vocabulary, that are expected for that, and then the students, you know, I feel like writing is kind of a burden sometimes in the face-to-face classes because, I feel like a lot of them don't even like writing in Spanish. So why are then, you know, like, writing in English? When Andrès and I did the online sessions for our virtual students, those were interesting because, sometimes we would have kind of writing contests where they would have to write a sentence in a certain amount of time and I thought it was, you know, I. . . I never had that experience in a class before where it's just kind of imitating like texting on your phone which I feel like for, you know, this. . .it was something that they were a lot more interested in, just because they're writing, you know, they're writing, you know, by hand anymore, it's on their phone, on the computer, which is how they were joining the sessions. So, I thought that they were. . .That virtual student, at least in that environment of the virtual classroom were a lot more interested in writing and

correcting their mistakes in real time also, because it wasn't just, you know, you receive the paper and it comes back with a bunch of wrong marks on it. You have to correct it. So, I thought that was. . .I don't know I thought that was kind of revelatory for me, that the way they write is changing and you know, we should kind of, move in that direction instead of, you know, sticking with the old. . .the old ways, so it was fun. I thought that the virtual students, yeah, they have like in some way of a little advantage that they were in that virtual environment. (K. Knapp, personal interview, Dec 14, 2017)

Students could benefit more of texting or texting simulation activities as suggested by Ms. Knapp. Unfortunately, online students may have been less exposed to writing opportunities as stated by Mr. Barrero:

Writing in my face-to-face classes was really good, because. . .well, they told me that they wanted to be prepared for the exam, so I taught them. . . the structure of a paragraph from the essay. . . But in the online course is the same that I told you. You don't have control of that, they have to do it by themselves. So it is totally different, let's say, not difficult but different. (A. Barrero, personal Interview, Dec 14, 2017)

In the end of the course survey, online students expressed their regret for not having enough opportunities to develop their writing skills as demanded by proficiency tests such as iTEP:

- “Que enseñen como hacer un texto largo como los que debemos presentar en el iTEP”
(I would like to be taught how to write a long text like the ones we need to write in the iTEP)

- “Me gustaría que se implementarán más clases de como redactar escritos y cómo hacer una carta” (I would like to see more classes on how to develop writings and how to write letters).

Additional Analysis for Questions 1, 2, and 3

Based on the findings so far, in which important percentages of the variations in most cases were due to the number of modules students had completed, I wondered whether the results would be different if I compared the posttest scores of *only* the online students who completed all 12 modules to those of the face-to-face students. The purpose of this new analysis was to establish if by completing the entire course as expected, students were able to perform similarly to their face-to-face counterparts.

For this, I decided to run new ANCOVA tests. For the overall posttest scores, results indicated that no statistically significant difference was found between the posttest scores of the face-to-face students and those online students who completed all the content of the course $F(1, 38) = .676, p = .42, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .017$. This finding implies that students who take the online courses and fully complete all of their content are very likely to perform at the same level as students who take their classes face-to-face.

As support for this finding, Ms. Knapp reported in the interview that she could see a difference in a student who completed the course as expected and within the timeframe given:

I had one student who's really hardworking in the online course and she did everything according to like the original schedule, the way presented everything on time, and when she came in to do her final exam and I thought she could speak and listen and kind of joke with me a lot more than students who kind of saved 70% of the class for the last few weeks, so you feel like if they stick with the routine and they're really dedicated to doing

a certain amount of time a day or a week that, it does provide the benefit. (K. Knapp, personal interview, Dec 14, 2017).

The new ANCOVA to analyze reading posttest scores also showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups $F(1, 38) = .868, p = .357, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .022$. This finding allowed me to conclude that implementing the right strategies, having the instructors onboard and making sure students followed the suggested pacing guide might catapult the results of online students in the reading skills in a way that they could even outperform the face-to-face students.

The ANCOVA to compare listening scores of only those who completed all content, indicated that in this case there were no statistically significant differences either per instructional method, $F(1, 38) = .001, p = .970, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .000$.

Similar results were obtained when I compared the speaking posttest scores where there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups either $F(1, 38) = 2.382, p = .131, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .059$; or when I compared the writing posttest scores and found no statistically significant difference $F(1, 38) = 3.204, p = .081, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .078$.

Research Question 4

Are there any differences in the learning outcomes between students from different socio-economic strata?

To analyze the effect of socioeconomic strata, it is important to understand that Colombia has a socioeconomic stratification system to classify urban populations into different strata with similar economic characteristics. The system classifies areas on a scale from 1 to 6 with 1 being the lowest income area and 6 being the highest. This stratification system and subsequent policy were made into law mainly to grant subsidies to the poorest population. The system is organized

so that the people living in upper strata (5 and 6) pay more for services like electricity, water, and sewage than the groups in the lower strata (International Federation for Housing and Planning, 2012). It is believed that people from the higher strata have more opportunities and access to better education and better services than those in lower strata. El Bosque University serves students from all socioeconomic strata, but the majority of its students come from strata 3 and 4. The sample for this study involved students from the strata 2 to 6 which reflects and is consistent to the real population of the university.

An ANCOVA was run to determine the effects, if any, of socioeconomic strata (2 to 6) on posttest overall scores. To improve power, given that there were not enough students in each strata to make the analysis, strata 2 and 3 (lower, lower middle) were grouped into one value and strata 4, 5, and 6 (middle, upper-middle and upper) into one value as well. After controlling for overall pretest scores, results indicate that there was no statistically significant difference in the overall posttest scores among socioeconomic strata, $F(1, 55) = .852, p = .36, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .015$. The effect size based on SES according to the value of $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .015$ is small (Cohen, 1969). Only 2% of the variation can be explained by the socioeconomic strata. Table 9 presents the means and standard deviation for the overall posttest scores with the overall pretest scores as a covariate.

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviation for Overall Posttest Scores With Overall Pretest Scores as a Covariate

Socioeconomic strata	Mean	SD	N
Lower, lower-middle	1.5	.59	34
Middle, upper middle, upper	1.5	.41	24
Total	1.5	.52	58

Research Question 5

How do students in online and face-to-face classes evaluate their class experiences?

Weerasinghe, Lalitha, and Fernando (2017) define student satisfaction as “a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of students’ educational experience, services and facilities” (p. 1). It is always important to learn how satisfied students are in their respective programs and how they perceive them, as these perceptions also provide information that help to improve such programs.

At the end of each academic semester, the Language Center at El Bosque University sends out course evaluations to all the students. The format used contains items about student satisfaction, to be ranked from 1 to 5 with 1 being *poor* and 5 being *excellent*. This format was sent to all the face-to-face students in November and the responses from the two classes that were part of this study are examined here. Likewise, a survey was developed for the online courses. Until now, there was no course evaluation format for them. This survey was designed using the QM standards for higher education as its foundation and it also used elements from the one used for the face-to-face students. A Likert scale was used to present response options to the statements. Options ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 being *poor* and 5 being *excellent*.

Fifteen students (48.4%) responded to the online course evaluation format and twelve (44.4%) responded the face-to-face one. Table 10 shows the average rating for each statement in the online course instrument.

Table 10

Results of Online Course Evaluation

Items based on QM standards	<i>n</i>	Average rating
Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components.	15	4.4
Minimum technology requirements are clearly stated and instructions for use provided.	15	4.2
The instructor introduced him/herself appropriately and provided his/her contact information.	15	4.8
The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated course and module/unit learning objectives or competencies.	15	4.4
The instructional materials are current.	15	4.4
A variety of instructional materials is used in the course.	15	4.4
The distinction between required and optional materials is clearly explained.	15	4.4
Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners' work and are tied to the course grading policy.	15	4.5
The module/unit learning objectives or competencies describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives or competencies.	15	4.7
The learning objectives or competencies are suited to the level of the course.	15	4.5
The assessments measure the stated learning objectives of competencies.	15	4.5
The course provides learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress.	15	4.1
The instructors' response time to students' inquiries and need of support is appropriate (within 24 hours).	15	4.6

Table 10 - continued

Items based on QM standards	<i>n</i>	Average rating
The instructor answers your questions in a clear way.	15	4.6
The instructor promotes interaction among participants.	15	4.5
The instructor is kind and respectful.	15	4.6
The instructor has supported your process and has helped you achieve your goals.	15	4.4
The tools used in the course support the learning objectives and competencies.	15	4.4
Course tools promote learning engagement and active learning.	15	4.2
Technologies required in the course are readily obtainable.	15	4.6
The course technologies are current.	15	4.5
The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the of the technical support offered and how to obtain it.	15	3.4
Course navigation facilitates ease of use.	15	4.4
Overall average.	15	4.4

Scale: 1-Poor to 5 = Excellent.

There is an overall student satisfaction as indicated by the results of the evaluation. Students gave “The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to obtain it” the lowest rating. Results also indicate that students are satisfied with the attention and response from their instructors. They also thought that the content, assessment, technology, and course objectives were suitable for the level of the course. Table 11 depicts the results of the university course evaluation for the face-to-face group.

Table 11

Results of the Face-to-Face Evaluation

Item based on the University course evaluation format	<i>n</i>	Average rating
The instructor presented the course content and objectives at the beginning of the course.	12	4.58
The instructor explained course methodology and assessment.	12	4.83
The instructor was knowledgeable.	12	4.83
The instructor motivated students to share ideas and participate.	12	4.75
Strategies used were appropriate for the fulfillment of the course objectives.	12	4.67
The instructor was respectful and had a positive attitude.	12	4.75
The instructor and the class met the requirements of the class schedule.	12	4.58
The course and the instructor met my expectations.	12	4.92
I developed the skills as I had expected.	12	4.58
All course content and objectives were covered.	12	4.67
There was a good use of technological tools to support the classes.	12	4.67
Appropriate feedback was given in respect to class activities and assessment.	12	4.33
Overall average	12	4.68

Scale: 1-Poor to 5 + Excellent

Results of the course evaluation indicate an overall student satisfaction in the face-to-face courses. Students gave “Appropriate feedback was given in respect to class activities and assessment” the lowest rating. It is not a bad rating but it is not as high as the rest of them. The highest rating was obtained from the statement about the course and the instructor meeting students’ expectations. This is satisfactory and speaks very highly of the courses.

In general, results of both evaluations are good and shed light on how students perceived the courses and the instructors, which helps El Bosque University to know what areas may need examination and to keep the current strengths.

Qualitative Data

Based on the students' responses to the end of course survey, the online course was perceived as being "too long" and students said they did not have enough time to dedicate themselves to it.

When asked, what would you like us to do differently, one student said: "Realmente el curso es muy largo para hacerlo en poco tiempo, uno se satura de información" (Course is too long to complete it in short time. Information is overwhelming). Another one stated: "Me gustaría que el curso virtual fuera menos extenso por el tiempo, o que el tiempo fuera más largo para el curso" (I wish the virtual course was shorter because of the time or that we had had more time for the course).

As mentioned above, after a request by several students an extension was granted for all online students. Face-to-face classes ended during the second week of November and the online classes' deadline was November 30th. Despite the extension, most online students did not complete all course content. This lack of completion contributed to their lower posttest scores.

As presented earlier, Ms. Knapp reported in the interview that there was a visible difference when students completed their courses:

So you feel like if they stick with the routine and they're really dedicated to doing a certain amount of time a day or a week that, it does provide the benefit. But, one has to be quite motivated and organized and have a certain sort of disciplinary personality to

achieve that, but yeah I think that was interesting, that she came in, and she was really. . . she was speaking and laughing and joking with me and a few others of them were. . . hadn't had her persistence and were quiet at that level. (K. Knapp, personal interview, December 14, 2017).

Based on Ms. Knapp's statement, the student's characteristics played a role in her success. When she said that students need to have a "disciplinary personality," as well as being motivated and organized, Ms. Knapp may be implying that not all students would be a fit for the online model and that those who were not would need to develop disciplinary habits to benefit from an online course. This is consistent with the literature (Alberth, 2011; Bell & Akroyd, 2006; Blocher et al., 2002; Vrasidas & Glass, 2002; Wang, Newlin & Pressley 2000) in which certain characteristics of students are an asset to succeed in online courses.

During the observation of the synchronous encounters for the online students, I noticed that at the beginning of each session, some students apologized for not being able to work enough in the course and there were promises of future dedication.

Instructors believed that they did not have the same control over the online students as they did with the face-to-face classes. When asked if there were differences between the two formats that might relate to teaching approach, Mr. Barrero said:

Probably the control that you can have in the face-to-face classes that you don't have in the online course. That's the only thing. Maybe if we want to improve our online courses [it] would be with the sessions, synchronous sessions. That's going to help a lot. . .the students can contact you in order to [say]. . . 'Teacher I have a problem with this, oh okay let's have an exercise.' (A. Barrero, personal interview, December 14, 2017)

There were four synchronous classes during the intervention. Blackboard Collaborate was used to conduct them. Seventeen out of the 31 online students participated in all four synchronous sessions. Direct observation showed that in these meetings, students were more reluctant to speak when compared to students in the face-to-face classes. At the end of the course survey, most online students chose the synchronous virtual sessions as what they liked the most about the course. Here are examples of their responses:

- Me gusta que los profesores hacen encuentro virtuales con el fin de que entendamos los temas (I like it that the instructors plan the synchronous sessions for us to better understand the topics).
- Me gustó mucho que los dos profesores nos citaran de forma virtual con el fin de realizar clases donde podíamos indicar nuestras inquietudes frente a temas de la unidades y adicional se hacían juegos con el fin de aprender mejor el tema (I really liked that both instructors invited us to the synchronous sessions so we could have a class to express our concerns about the unit topics and additionally, we played games to learn the topics better).

In the future, more synchronous sessions may help students improve their skills while taking their classes online. This is consistent with what the instructors report. Mr. Barrero said ‘I think that the blackboard collaborate sessions can be used to emphasize. . . the skills, so let's work on listening, let's work on writing, or speaking. That's gonna' help.’ (A. Barrero, personal interview, December 14, 2017).

Similarly, Ms. Knapp thought that the synchronous sessions can be useful: “I think for virtual classes . . .those virtual synchronous sessions helped” (K. Knapp, personal interview, December 14, 2017). Online students also valued the course time flexibility and being able to

manage their own time. Although this flexibility is something that requires self-regulation, it is one of the primary reasons why students at El Bosque University choose these courses. Some of the students' responses to the question What did you like most about the course include:

- Se puede manejar el tiempo (Time can be managed).
- No manejar un horario (Not having to be stuck to a fixed schedule).
- La libertad de tiempo para tomar las clases, la metodología es muy dinámica y divertida, se aprende fácil. (Time freedom to take the classes, methodology is very dynamic and fun, learning is made easy).
- El tiempo yo lo manejo (I manage my own time).

For all class observations, an observation protocol was used (see Appendix D). In Mr. Barrero's face-to-face classes, instructions were given in English. Focus was mostly getting students to participate and use the new content and grammar structures. Mr. Barrero used games and contests to get students to speak. Some were more willing than others. Ms. Knapp's activities included workshops, presentations, and class discussions. Some of her students were reluctant to voluntarily participate, but participated when asked. Figures 5 and 6 show Mr. Barrero's and Ms. Knapp's face-to-face classes:



Figure 5. Face-to-face class observation. Mr. Barrero's class.

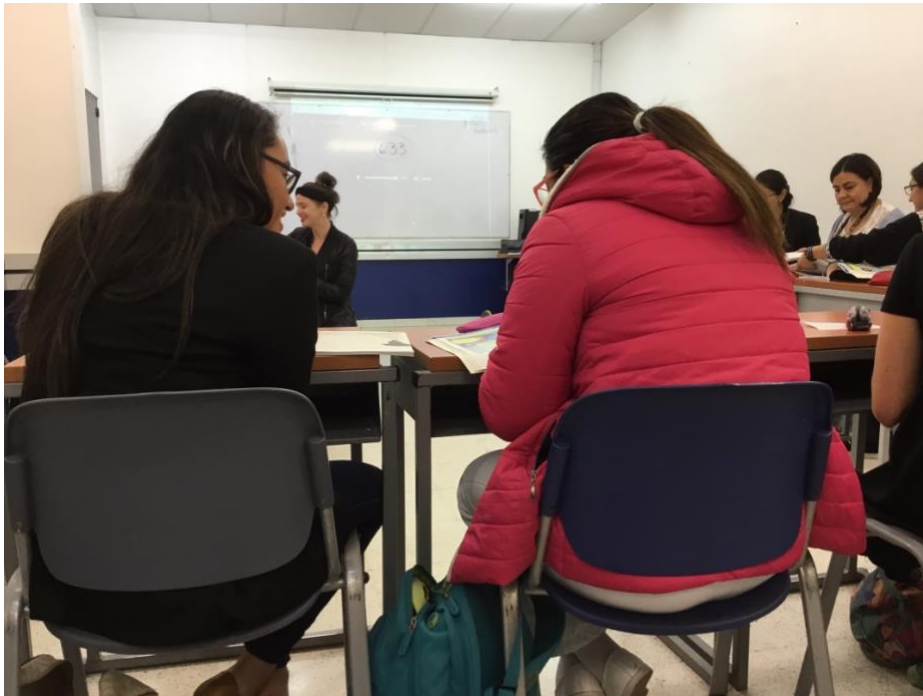


Figure 6. Face-to-face class observation. Ms. Knapp's class.

At the end of the course survey, students from the face-to-face classes chose the instructors' methodology and dynamics as what they liked the most about the course:

- La metodología del docente para dar a entender las temáticas a los estudiantes es muy buena (The instructor's methodology to explain the topics to students is very good).
- Dinámica de enseñanza (Teaching dynamics).
- Metodología y forma del curso, muy didáctico y divertido. (Methodology of the course, very didactic and fun).
- La metodología, la colaboración y disposición del docente (Methodology, collaboration and willingness of the instructor).
- La metodología del docente (The instructor's methodology).

Students' motivation, willingness to be in the class, and appreciation of their instructors are elements that can make a difference in student success. The fact that the students from the face-to-face classes expressed their like for the class instructors and methodology is a good indicator of disposition to learn and may have influenced their results.

Summary

Table 13 depicts a summary of findings.

Table 13

Summary of Findings

Research questions for students taking an English language course:	Variance accounted for by instructional method	Variance accounted for when number of units completed are added	Variance accounted for when only those students who completed all modules are compared	Conclusion
Are there differences between online and face-to-face students' overall English language proficiency?	.07	.02	.02	No
Are there differences between online and face-to-face students' reading	.09	.01	.02	No

proficiency scores?

Are there differences between online and face-to-face students' listening proficiency scores?	.00	.00	.00	No
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Are there differences between online and face-to-face students' speaking proficiency scores?	.07	.07	.06	No
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Are there differences between online and face-to-face students' writing proficiency scores?	.19	.05	.08	No
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Are there differences in the learning outcomes between students from different socioeconomic strata?	.02	.00	.03	No
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Chapter 5. Conclusions, Discussion and Recommendations

This chapter presents the findings of this study as contextualized by previous research and the theory presented in Chapter 2. It also includes recommendations for practice and further research, the limitations and a final discussion section.

Connections to the Literature

Some studies suggest that, given the same conditions, online students outperform their face-to-face counterparts (Bourelle et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2004) while other studies claim that there are no significant differences in the outcomes of face-to-face students when compared to the online students (Blake, Wilson, Cetto, & Pardo-Ballester, 2008; Ni, 2013), or that face-to-face students perform better than the online peers (Heppen et al. 2017). In this regard, I found that the initial differences that arose from the data had to do with factors other than the instructional method, these factors were completion of all content and pretest scores. To examine this further, I compared the results of only the online students who completed all content with those of the face-to-face setting and found that under this new condition, no statistically significant differences were found between their scores. However, this brings up another factor, the factor of the role of time investment in these particular courses. Based on the end-of-course survey, online students stated that the course content was too long to be completed in the period of time they were given. A good portion (45%) of the online students did not finish all 12 content units and the average number of units completed was 9.55 units, which means that, even though, there were no statistically significant differences between instructional method when students

complete the course, there is a difference in the amount of time needed to do so. The outcomes may be comparable, but the conditions change for online students because they need more time to finish all content.

An important implication of this research study has to do with the measurement of English language proficiency. So far, most studies comparing online and face-to-face education report results based on achievement and not proficiency. The focus is usually given to the content taught, measured through subjective instruments such as students' perceptions,

e-portfolios or other teacher-made evaluations. It has been uncommon to see studies where actual measurement of language proficiency through standardized proficiency tests takes place (Lin & Warschauer, 2015; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2015). This study addressed this gap by using results of the iTEP.

Xu and Jaggars (2014) considered that the students' socioeconomic strata and background had an effect on students' performance in online courses. This variable was also considered in this study and no significant difference in the performance of students based on the socioeconomic strata was found. There were not enough students representing each stratum in this study, which could have affected power. I had to combine the strata from which we had representation, into two groups which did not give me much of a chance for variance. However, based on the results obtained after the combination, this finding may suggest that students benefited from the orientation meetings and the other measures the instructors offered before and while the classes were starting. Further research may contribute to either confirm or reject this assumption.

Alberth (2011) suggests that the instructors' attitudes are transferred to students. When they show enthusiasm and motivation about teaching online and a greater capacity to face the challenges of online learning, they set an example for their students and impact their motivation, participation, and engagement in online activities. This is also supported by Lin et al. (2017), who found that learner-instructor and learner-content interactions had significantly positive effects on student satisfaction and motivation. Students' responses at the end-of-course survey and the course evaluations in this study, suggest that students had good relationships with their instructors and valued their support and engagement. This is an area that needs to be maintained and monitored to ensure that students succeed in the online environment.

In this regard, the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2010; Murphy, 2015) considers that any online environment must ensure the three presences (social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence) to overcome the “invisibility” of the instructors and peers in the online courses that do not exist in the traditional face-to-face environment. Teaching presence in the two online classes of this study was ensured through weekly announcements, participation of the instructor and peers (also social presence) in the common chat room in the platform, group messages sent via WhatsApp® around three times a week, participation in the synchronous sessions, and via individual tutoring through Skype® (these last two, served to establish cognitive presence as well). Knowing about the CoI framework in advance allowed me to create opportunities to make sure the courses had those presences. The sense of belonging and having the presence of the instructor may have had an impact on course evaluation and satisfaction, and may have also ensured the good relations between students and instructors contributing to retention rates. Although a significant portion (45%) of the online students did not complete the course content within the stipulated dates, the actual dropout rate (13%) was lower than in the face-to-face courses (25%). Carr (2000), McLaren (2004) and Ni (2013) found that online students’ dropout rates are higher than face-to-face students’ rates; nevertheless, this was not the case in this research study.

Ni (2013) demonstrated that outcomes do not vary significantly between methods, and that the differences found were more related to students' characteristics rather than to the method of instruction. In this regards, other research suggests that successful online students usually possess certain characteristics (Bell & Akroyd, 2006; Blocher et al., 2002; Vrasidas & Glass, 2002; Wang, Newlin & Pressley, 2000). These characteristics refer to self-control, self-motivation, and independence. Student characteristics were not widely explored in this study, but

based on the instructors' interviews, students who completed all content, were organized, disciplined and motivated.

Another important factor in this study that is related to student satisfaction and motivation is quality assurance. Lowenthal and Hodges (2015) and Hoffman (2012) chose the QM standards to evaluate courses. They believed it would help determine the compliance of certain characteristics that courses must have for the students to be successful. By creating an evaluation instrument that was merely based on these standards, I can say that the Touchstone® courses at El Bosque are well-developed and that students perceive them to be. The standards served as a check list and provided guidance in my research process, which at the end is about course evaluation and improvement.

At a more local level, Estevez et al. (2015) identified that in order to strengthen the development of online education in Colombia, there are some technical and sociocultural matters that need to be overcome. Regarding the sociocultural matters, there is the belief that online courses cannot be compared to face-to-face courses and that the presence of the instructor is essential to the learning process, which is consistent to what a few students in the study wrote at the end of course survey about missing having an instructor to explain grammar and work on pronunciation. Instructors also suggested they lacked control over their online classes where they should be focusing on having an influence instead of control, as suggested by Panckhurst and Marsh (2011). As for the technical matters, the Ministries of Education and Information and Communication Technologies in Colombia are making some important efforts to ensure that every time more people in more regions have better access and this in turn would strengthen online education (Lozano Mier, 2017). Although there were no difficulties related to access with

students from this study specifically, these issues could potentially affect El Bosque University students where several of the graduate students live outside the city.

Finally, I can relate to the sentiment of Heppen et al. (2017). They may not have obtained positive or neutral results in their comparative study about online and face-to-face Algebra I credit recovery course, but they are aware that despite the difficulties, the online courses served the purpose of helping students recover credit. They also stated that the focus should be the continuous improvement of online courses, because students would still have a great need for flexible alternatives. At El Bosque University, as in many other institutions in Colombia and South America, one of the main objectives is to reach those who may not have many choices to pursue a higher education. El Bosque University is working towards the expansion of its academic programs, not only English as a Foreign Language, but also other programs, through the implementation of online and blended education. This study will help establish some guidelines and internal policies to ensure that the online English courses offered are fulfilling students' needs in terms of quality and learning outcomes, which in turn, can help the other programs at the university as well.

Limitations

On the one hand, I noticed that there were differences in the means of the pretest scores between students placed in the online classes and the students placed in the face-to-face classes. Pretest scores predicted an important percentage of posttest scores in all areas as indicated by a regression analysis. These differences were only discovered after the intervention was over. If I had noticed them before the intervention had started, I would have made a different distribution of students. In a future study or possible replica of this study, it is advisable to look for differences before students are assigned to the conditions. I only made sure they were placed at

the same starting level which was A1(beginners), but I did not look for differences in the scores which for A1 can range between 0.5 and 1.9. Nevertheless, independent samples *t*-tests were run to verify whether these mean differences were statistically significant or not and it helped establish a course of action.

On the other hand, it was very difficult for students in the online setting to finish the course within the timeframe that was established. A 3-week extension was needed and even with this extension, 45% of the students did not complete the content of the course. The online course required more time and this needs to be taken into account in future opportunities. The fact that the study needed to be completed between September and November became a limitation as it may have affected the results.

Recommendations for Practice

As mentioned above, at the end-of-course survey, online students stated that they found the course to be too long to complete within the timeframe given. They argued that they had other academic and work obligations. Therefore, it is not advisable for the Language Center at El Bosque University or for any other similar institutions to offer the Touchstone® online courses to be completed in less than twenty weeks. This is consistent to what was found in the literature (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2015) where short course duration may be considered a limitation to conclude real advances for online courses.

When analyzing the scores of only the students who completed all modules, the outcomes are comparable; therefore, strategies for helping online students complete all content need to be ensured. Besides giving students enough time to complete the course, the guidance and influence of the instructors can play an important role. Submitting regular checkpoint reports to students,

motivating them to participate in synchronous online encounters and maintaining a constant and meaningful communication can be key to comply with the necessary teaching presence.

Online students can benefit from having a good number of synchronous sessions during their course. If possible they should have one once a week. These sessions will not need to be limited to enhancing oral production, but they can be used to foster other skills such as writing and listening. At the end-of-course survey almost all students mentioned that they would like to have more of these sessions as they felt they made a difference and gave them a chance for real practice.

Additionally, given the role of student characteristics presented by the literature, it would be beneficial to include an orientation module on self-regulated learning before students access the actual content of the class. This module should contain strategies and suggestions to successfully regulate the pacing of work and dosage of content. Potential students could also benefit of completing a test to check whether or not online courses are a good choice for them or if they need to adjust and make some changes to be able to succeed in online settings.

Recommendations for Further Research

A replica of this research study, but using courses that last longer and including more than one course level, could provide further and more specific information on the subject of online foreign language education. Such study should include analysis of the gains in each skill and ensure that participants in both conditions have comparable starting levels. A repeated measures design could shed light on how students advance every time they complete a course level. A minimum of three course levels should be included to elaborate some more on the subject of language proficiency.

Future research could also examine the role of student characteristics closely as they

relate to student success in online environments. Topics such as independence, comfort level with technology, self-regulation, self-control, attitude and perceptions of online learning should be explored.

The skill of listening requires a follow up either at El Bosque University or at similar institutions as to why students take longer to develop it, why it is considered more difficult, why the scores tend to be lower than in the other skills and what interventions could help overcome these situations. A thorough literature review could provide ideas on an intervention or the use of strategies to improve listening for foreign language learners.

Moreover, in course evaluations for the face-to-face classes, there was an item that scored lower than the rest and it was the one related to appropriate feedback to activities and assessment. Further inquiries are needed in this regard to evaluate why some students feel there may be a shortcoming in this area.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were differences in the English language learning outcomes between online English language students and English language students who received their classes in traditional face-to-face settings at El Bosque University. While fulfilling this purpose I conducted a close examination and evaluation of the English courses at El Bosque University which is something the Language Center needed. Results are seen as an opportunity to improve the courses, introduce important changes, establish collaboration, and create an action plan to support instructors through professional development, the analysis and production of research, and the implementation of new forms of delivering content to offer more effective online solutions.

Online courses have the potential to be as good or even better than face-to-face courses as suggested by the literature. They allow for time flexibility, revisiting content when needed and can be completed from virtually anywhere. Additionally, meeting quality standards such as the ones developed by QM will guarantee that the courses have all the requirements for student success.

Certain student characteristics play an important role in the success of online students. Self-regulation, discipline, and consistency are required to an optimal performance. Students who follow the pacing guides and work as expected, completing all tasks and assignments, are more likely to develop the language skills they need to advance in their language learning process.

English Language online courses at El Bosque University need to be programmed to last approximately twenty weeks for students not to rush into the content and to develop the desired language skills. Although the ideal scenario is to have online classes become blended (Means et al., 2009), reality is that for most students who take online courses at El Bosque University, this is not an option, because they either reside outside the city or work in hospitals and clinics with hectic and not regular schedules.

Additional opportunities for online students to increase their speaking practice need to be considered. Activities such as Teletandem® exchange (online synchronous video meetings with peers who are native speakers of the language from a partner university) and having regular “chatting” sessions with their classmates and instructors, may help students develop their oral skills further.

The fact that students evaluated the courses well, is a good indicator of satisfaction and, even though some adjustments need to be made to ensure that all students complete all the

content of the course, at least we can count on them being pleased to be in the courses. The only item that seems to need immediate attention in online courses is what students identified as “lack of immediate technical assistance,” which may lead to frustration and may decrease student motivation in turn. Fortunately, this area is easy to correct as Cambridge University, the online course provider, does offer access to technical support 24/7.

Online education is here to stay and only through continuous monitoring, evaluation, and subsequent improvement can institutions guarantee they will maintain and expand their online offer and reach other regions of Colombia where access to higher education and, more specifically, quality foreign language courses are limited. According to Weerasinghe et al. (2017), globalization has increased competition among institutions, leading them to develop market-oriented strategies to attract and keep students by meeting their needs, their expectations, and ensuring their satisfaction. This is the case of El Bosque University and one of the main reasons why the directives of the Language Center needed the study I conducted. I believe this study will help El Bosque University to achieve its goal of reaching more individuals in Colombia and internationally.

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Appendix A

Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric



Non-annotated Standards from the QM Higher Education Rubric, Fifth Edition

For more information or access to the full annotated QM Rubric visit www.qualitymatters.org or email info@qualitymatters.org

Standards	Points
Course Overview Introduction	1.1 Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components. 3
	1.2 Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course. 3
	1.3 Etiquette expectations (sometimes called "netiquette") for online discussions, email, and other forms of communication are clearly stated. 2
	1.4 Course and/or institutional policies with which the learner is expected to comply are clearly stated, or a link to current policies is provided. 2
	1.5 Minimum technology requirements are clearly stated and instructions for use provided. 2
	1.6 Prerequisite knowledge in the discipline and/or any required competencies are clearly stated. 1
	1.7 Minimum technical skills expected of the learner are clearly stated. 1
	1.8 The self-introduction by the instructor is appropriate and is available online. 1
	1.9 Learners are asked to introduce themselves to the class. 1
Learning Objectives (Competencies)	2.1 The course learning objectives, or course/program competencies, describe outcomes that are measurable. 3
	2.2 The module/unit learning objectives or competencies describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives or competencies. 3
	2.3 All learning objectives or competencies are stated clearly and written from the learner's perspective. 3
	2.4 The relationship between learning objectives or competencies and course activities is clearly stated. 3
	2.5 The learning objectives or competencies are suited to the level of the course. 3
Assessment and Measurement	3.1 The assessments measure the stated learning objectives or competencies. 3
	3.2 The course grading policy is stated clearly. 3
	3.3 Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners' work and are tied to the course grading policy. 3
	3.4 The assessment instruments selected are sequenced, varied, and suited to the learner work being assessed. 2
	3.5 The course provides learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress. 2
Instructional Materials	4.1 The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated course and module/unit learning objectives or competencies. 3
	4.2 Both the purpose of instructional materials and how the materials are to be used for learning activities are clearly explained. 3
	4.3 All instructional materials used in the course are appropriately cited. 2
	4.4 The instructional materials are current. 2
	4.5 A variety of instructional materials is used in the course. 2
	4.6 The distinction between required and optional materials is clearly explained. 1
Course Activities and Learner Interaction	5.1 The learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies. 3
	5.2 Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning. 3
	5.3 The instructor's plan for classroom response time and feedback on assignments is clearly stated. 3
	5.4 The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated. 2
Course Technology	6.1 The tools used in the course support the learning objectives and competencies. 3
	6.2 Course tools promote learner engagement and active learning. 3
	6.3 Technologies required in the course are readily obtainable. 2
	6.4 The course technologies are current. 1
	6.5 Links are provided to privacy policies for all external tools required in the course. 1
Learner Support	7.1 The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to obtain it. 3
	7.2 Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's accessibility policies and services. 3
	7.3 Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution's academic support services and resources can help learners succeed in the course and how learners can obtain them. 2
	7.4 Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution's student services and resources can help learners succeed and how learners can obtain them. 1
Accessibility and Usability*	8.1 Course navigation facilitates ease of use. 3
	8.2 Information is provided about the accessibility of all technologies required in the course. 3
	8.3 The course provides alternative means of access to course materials in formats that meet the needs of diverse learners. 2
	8.4 The course design facilitates readability. 2
	8.5 Course multimedia facilitate ease of use. 2

* Meeting QM's accessibility Standards does not guarantee or imply that specific country/federal/state/local accessibility regulations are met. Consult with an accessibility specialist to ensure that accessibility regulations are met.

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Non-annotated Standards from the QM Higher Education Rubric, Fifth Edition 2/22/17

Appendix B

End of Course Survey

1. ¿Qué aspecto del curso le ha gustado más?

- Se puede manejar el tiempo
- Curso Intensivo
- La disposición del profesor para ayudar a sus estudiantes, la virtualidad.
- Metodología y profesor nativo
- La forma como enseñaban los temas claros de este nivel.
- No manejar un horario.
- La metodología para aprender.
- la claridad de las actividades
- los juegos interactivos
- El enfoque en la cotidianidad americana y los usos de la conversación coloquial en inglés
- Las teoría
- Que es interactivo
- EL TIEMPO
- Me gusta que los profesores hacen encuentro virtuales con el fin de que entendamos los temas
- Me gustan los encuentros considero que son enriquecedores y la docente asignada me pareció muy buena ya que las dudas que se tenían eran aclaradas de manera rápida
- la plataforma es muy completa
- Dinámica de enseñanza
- la plataforma y la metodología
- La corrección de tareas. Fue imposible aprovechar las asesorías por el horario que asignaron para ellas. Uno como estudiante espera que si un curso es en la noche, las asesorías sean planeadas antes de la clase, no en la mañana
- A pesar de ser virtual la profesora Kelley, está muy presta a solucionar dudas y a brindar información adicional, el seguimiento de la docente es oportuno y eficaz, pense que por ser virtual estaría muy sola, pero ella siempre está ahí para solucionar inquietudes.
- El seguimiento de la profe
- El curso en general fue interesante, la didáctica hace parte del aprendizaje, por lo que los juegos que se encontraban allí generaban un mejor proceso en la ejecución.

- El método usado por el profesor especialmente los didácticos
- La libertad de tiempo para tomar las clases, la metodología es muy dinámica y divertida, se aprende fácil.
- La metodología del docente para dar a entender las temáticas a los estudiantes es muy buena.
- Me gusto mucho que los dos profesores nos citaran de forma virtual con el fin de realizar clases donde podíamos indicar nuestras inquietudes frente a temas de la unidades y adiciona se hacían juegos con el fin de aprender mejor el tema.
- La forma como en la plataforma se explican las actividades y la ayuda que nos dieron los tutores.
- Los encuentros virtuales aun que muchas veces es muy complicado por que se cruzan con la actividades académicas.
- Las clases que fueron muy didácticas y los nuevos conocimientos que recibí
- El tiempo yo lo manejo
- Vídeo conferencias

2. ¿Qué le gustaría que se hiciera diferente?

- Tener algunos encuentros presenciales para reforzar speaking
- Grupos más reducidos. Más enfoque en speaking
- Curso virtual menos extenso por tiempo, o que el tiempo fuera mas largo para el curso.
- Flexibilidad horaria
- Que enseñen como hacer un texto largo como los que debemos presentar en el ITEP.
- Nada
- Que hubiera un poco mas de tiempo
- así esta bien
- que hubiera una retroalimentacion acerca del proceso que se lleva a cabo.
- que fuera mas corto
- Fomentar más conversación entre docente-estudiante, que estudiante-estudiante, dado que el docente tiene más conocimiento y puede corregir mejor los errores gramaticales y de pronunciación
- Hablar más español
- Que la gramatica se explicara de forma presencial, quedan muchas dudas
- NADA
- Qué las explicaciones de la plataforma fueran mucho mejor, donde indiquen el tema y se haga ejercicios pero cada vez que uno sé equivoque debería la plataforma poderlo retroalimentar indicándole en que falla
- Me gustaría que se hiciera entrega de libro ayudaría a reforzar más los temas y que los encuentros con los docentes fueran semanales
- no me parece que esta bien

- Que se explicaran algunas cosas en español, la profesora es nativa, por consiguiente habla muy rápido y para este nivel no contamos con todo su vocabulario. No obtuve los objetivos planteados de este curso porque muchas veces no entendí sus instrucciones, entonces obtenía bajas notas en los quis y exámenes. La mayoría de las veces tuve que pedir ayuda a mis compañeros para saber que era lo que decía
- Son unidades muy densas, se repiten varias cosas, los juegos y las actividades, pueden ser las unidades y los test, eso permite tener más tiempo para desarrollar y aprender más, por el poco tiempo y la cantidad se debe hacer muy rápido y dificulta el aprendizaje.
- Mas ejercicios con videos
- Me gusto.
- Me parece que como esta estructurado esta bien.
- Considero que no tiene nada que cambiarse, todo me parece que esta muy bien planeado y estructurado.
- En general y comparandolo con cursos pasados me gusto mucho
- la plataforma, las lecciones son muy largas y causa cansancio
- Que no fueran tan larga las explicaciones de los temas puede llegar hacer aburrido en un momento del curso.
- Que la plataforma no sea tan tediosa es muy extensa y esto interfiere mucho en el aprendizaje.
- Me gustaría que se implementarán más clases de como redactar escritos y cómo hacer una carta
- Nada

3. ¿Siente que hubo aprendizaje?

3 personas respondieron No

29 personas respondieron Sí

4. Si su respuesta fue Sí, por favor indique lo que cree que contribuyó a este proceso de aprendizaje.

- Dedicarle tiempo al curso
- Metodologia
- Forma del curso, muy didáctico y divertido.
- Metodología y las tareas constantes
- Los temas que se veían eran explicados de forma muy clara y hasta que no se entendían en su totalidad no pasábamos al siguiente tema y que constantemente practicábamos.
- La persistencia en el estudio de las unidades.

- Ahora puedo entender lo que leo en ingles, reconozco verbos y las formas gramaticales.
- las actividades
- mas vocabulario pero la parte de habla no mucho
- Creo que el tener una docente nativa ayuda mucho para mejorar en pronunciación y usos del lenguaje en contextos cotidianos. Se explicaron muy bien las formas de hablar sin sonar tan acartonados.
- Constancia
- La exigencia del curso y la cantidda de horas que toca dedicarle
- EN GRAMATICA
- Los encuentros virtuales
- Con respecto a gramática aunque considero que hay más aprendizaje en un curso presencial por que en la plataforma pueden quedar algunas dudas.
- la ayuda de los profesores
- Docente tiempo de lección
- la metodologia
- Repasar mucho, ver videos por YouTube. Aprendí bastante aunque eso no se viera reflejado en las notas
- Los "Grammar" que incluye el componente "Course" son muy claros, sus ejemplos permiten entender la gramatica del inglés. Este componente me dio claridad.
- El contenido es muy extenso pero me ha ayudado a reforzar conceptos y mucho vocabulario aun me hace falta finalizar el curso
- Conocer verbos diferentes y conjugaciones. Aunque debe ser un proceso mas práctico por parte del estudiante.
- Las clases didácticas, los juegos, el diseño de quices, etc..
- La metodología, la colaboración y disposición del docente.
- La metodologia del docente
- lo encuentros virtuales
- Mas vocabulario y en la escritura.
- El profesor reforzó conocimientos sobre temas ya vistos en A1 y aprendimos sobre temas nuevos
- He mejorado en vocabulario
- Mas videoconferencias

5. Si su respuesta fue No por favor indique lo que cree que dificultó el avance.

- mis tareas extracurriculares al curso no me permitieron realizarlo al tiempo recomendado lo que impidió un aprendizaje efectivo.

- Falta un poco de pedagogía para la enseñanza del idioma. Con una simple explicación se ahorraría uno bastante trabajo al aprender el objetivo de cada tema.
- La plataforma tan extensa y se cae mucho por esta razón es difícil acceder a la plataforma y no guarda todas las actividades.
- Eran muchas actividades por realizar y ya llegaba un punto en el que uno las respondía por avanzar rápido y poder tener todas las actividades realizadas para la fecha asignada y no para aprender y entender cada uno de los temas

Appendix C

Interview Protocol and Transcripts

Interview #1 Mr. Barrero

Marta: Hello Mr. Barrero, this is an interview thank you for agreeing on doing this.

Mr. Barrero: No problem...

Marta: This interview is about the two sections you had last semester. The one online and one face to face course in which you used touchstone... to teach.

My first question is: Tell me about your typical face to face class.

Mr. Barrero: Well I try to get very dynamic, in which the students ... can feel identified with the teacher, that they can feel like a connection with the teacher, also I don't like the typical or the traditional classes, that's why I try to innovate in every class, so I try to make games... to do activities in which students can feel connected with the language.

Marta: Okay... and ... what... How do you distribute the practice for the skills? Like the listening, speaking, the writing, the... How do you ...How do you?

Mr. Barrero: ... I try to do in every session like a connection with all of them in which we started with a reading like to contextualize the students and then we start practicing or discussing in which we are, they're going to practice speaking and after that they're going to write or, ... Well in every class I try to... use all the skills, in order that they can complement or they can connect all the skills in one session. That's what I try to do in every class.

Marta: Do you think you like emphasize more in ones than others?

Mr. Barrero: Yeah, of course. It is vital to emphasize in the ones that you... that you recognize they can have problems with. So, I try to use a lot of activities in which they can practice a lot of speaking, cause' I think that "speaking" is one of the most difficult skills in that level, let's say ... But other one that it is very difficult is writing because I mean they have the connection with the Spanish so they have... or they always translate what they want to say or their ideas, that's very important.

Marta: Uhum... when they are adults...

Mr. Barrero: Yes!

Marta: ...You think that's more common?

Mr. Barrero: yeah, because... I had the opportunity to practice or to teach it to... to kids, but it was totally different from teenagers, I mean they have the connection with Spanish so hard that they always try to translate the ideas into Engli... I mean from Spanish to English, so it is very difficult to take out that connection that they have.

Marta: Mmh, thank you, yeah, that's important, okay... What do you think of the development of the listening skills in both your classes; the online and the face to face?

Mr. Barrero: Well, in the online, well I have the opportunity to start like working with them, like, I mean, in the ... the sessions that we have like the virtual ones in Skype or in the Blackboard collaborate sorry, it was really good because in that case I can see that they can understand what we were saying; Kell and me, but besides that, I don't have any connection with them, so I don't know how they did in listening, if they have problems with listening.

Only because the emails that they sent me, they were telling me like, teacher: I have problems with listening what can you recommend me? yeah,

Martha: Uhum

Mr. Barrero: So I told them like... you have several activities that you can do or you can use a lot of platforms, yeah, and in my face to face classes the listening was really difficult. One activity that helped me a lot was to do a dictate, so I put a listening and the have to record it in their cellphones, so they have to listen again and again and again and they have to write what they say. And they ... I mean the activity was totally successfully because they told me like: Teacher the activity was really good, it helped me a lot, for the listening, so it was...

Marta: Okay. So in your opinion, face to face and online are not compatible?

Mr. Barrero: No

Marta: In terms of listening development?

Mr. Barrero: No, not really because you don't have any idea how they go in the listening. Probably they have... they can have problems, but you cannot help them, I mean you can help them like giving them resources and everything, but being with them is really hard.

Marta: Okay. What do you think of the development of writing skills in both your classes?

Mr. Barrero: Well, writing in my face to face classes was really good, because...well, they told me that they had... They wanted to be prepared for the exam, so I taught them, like the structure of a paragraph from the essay so they were really... But in the online course is the same that I told you. You don't have like control of that, they have to do it by themselves. So it is totally different, let's say, not difficult but different.

Marta: Right, right. Okay, maybe a suggestion for the online writing part would be...

Mr. Barrero: I think that the blackboard collaborate sessions can be emphasized in of the skills, so let's going to work on listening, let's going to work on writing, that's gonna help.

Marta: Do you think the... like having them write a blog would help?

Mr. Barrero: Not really.

Marta: For the online, I mean.

Mr. Barrero: No, because they are going to put it in the google translator, everything and what are you going to control? I mean you can identify that is google translator, but what are you going to tell them? Like, don't do it! But they are going to... I... I don't know, maybe they are going to put another guy to write a thing and... and that's not the idea, the idea is that they learn, right? So what I do is to do a session in which you can be connected with the student and to see what the difficult, the problems that they have in writing are, so that they can, or you can...

Marta: Your talking about synchronous sessions

Mr. Barrero: Yeah, yeah that's gonna help

Marta: Okay

Mr. Barrero: But that's gonna be really difficult, because you have to do it one by one or I don't know, in a session that there are going to be the excuses that a: "teacher I don't I... I... I cannot be in the session, because I have whatever. So, it's gonna be difficult, but...

Marta: Or do you think ask them to do a specific something and send it to you via email so you can send feedback, would help?

Mr. Barrero: Yeah, for example in speaking I would do videos, videos in which they can record themselves and start working on that. In writings, I would say maybe chatting, texting in Facebook would be really good, I mean they can feel connected with the tools that hey use every day, so for example if you... let's going to chat in WhatsApp for, I don't know... five minutes, let's going to chat whatever or yeah, it's gonna be difficult but it helps...

Marta: Mhm

Mr. Barrero: For the successful the course

Marta: Okay. thanks... What about speaking in both your classes?

Mr. Barrero: Well in both of my classes were really difficult. With the online it was really good, I mean I felt that they tried to use all the things that we were... That we were teaching, but,

it is like difficult for the online, but in the face to face, well I tried to do a lot of activities in which they can use the things that I teach in real contexts for example, but in the online, the blackboard platform was a total...

Marta: Success...

Mr. Barrero: Success Mhm

Marta: Okay... Do you think in your opinion, the development of speaking skills in online and face to face... were they compatible?

Mr. Barrero: Yeah, in that case yeah

Marta: Okay. In general, for you, what were the main differences between your online and face to face classes?

Mr. Barrero: Probably the control that you can have in the face to face classes, that you don't have in the online course. That's the only thing. Maybe if we... we want to improve our online courses would be with the sessions, synchronize sessions. That's going to help a lot. Because you can, I mean, the students can contact you in order to... "teacher I have a problem with this", "oh okay let's have an exercise" yeah.

Marta: Okay. How do you feel about teaching the two sections?

Mr. Barrero: Well, in the face to face well it was a normal class, like all the ones that I have, but with the online was like new for me the Blackboard collaborations. It was really new for me and it was really good. One of... One thing that I can say about it is that, if you don't try to sell the things in a good way they are going to get bored, because let's going to have or an example in which you have the Blackboard collaborate and you start teaching the traditional grammar they are going to get bored really easy, so what I try to recommend is to have a lot of activities in which they can feel connected and in which they can participate, so in that way that's gonna be really good.

Marta: Okay. Anything you would like to add, related to that experience?

Mr. Barrero: I think that it was really good. I mean, the Blackboard collaborate it's going to be a really good complement for our courses.

Marta: Okay, thank you Mr: Barrero.

Mr. Barrero: Your welcome.

Interview #2 Part 1

Marta: Good morning Ms. Knapp

Ms. Knapp: Good morning Martha

Marta: Okay. Thank you for agreeing on this interview. This interview is about the two sections you had last semester with Touchstone, the online and face to face class.

Ms. Knapp: Okay

Marta: So, I'm going to start with the first question. I would like you to tell me about your typical class in the face to face environment.

Ms. Knapp: ... The typical class, well, we met five days a week for two hours at a time and I had eighteen students I believe or was it nineteen? ... And we were prescribed to use the materials from Cambridge, so the classes were pretty routine covering of a certain amount of material every class, plus additional activities or programs to help supplement and kind of 'make the class a bit more dynamic and...

Marta: What kind of activities?

Ms. Knapp: For example, student... an activity that students really like is we had a theme in one of the chapters in the book about vocabulary for using the telephone. So, what I had them do was to do a role play in partners and there was maybe eight or ten scenarios... But where each student had a different scenario but they were in different classrooms, so there were half in one classroom and the other half in the other classroom and they were presented with these scenarios, you know, for example a New York calling to make a reservation, okay, and you want this room and whatever, and the other partner in the other room had... you work at the hotel but you don't have this room, you know, communicate with your partner. And they really liked doing that because they got to use their cell phones in class, cause' they were actually calling each other on WhatsApp. But, you know, just ways to kind of' supplement what we were doing in class with thing that were a little bit more... improvisational and just out of the book, so that was a typical class. was making sure we went through the materials, but adding a little something extra.

Marta: Okay, thanks. How do you distribute the practice of the skills, of the four skills?

Ms. Knapp: ... Well I think, you know, at that level I really tried to give them grammar and vocabulary, you know, resources that they can use and come back to so I would usually do for the grammar like a power point and sometimes for the vocabulary to, and then for. you know, the applied skills; reading a writing and so forth. I would always try to start the bases with a, you know, grammar and vocab' and then give them some recorded activity to practice. So, I was, just, you know, building on those two; vocab' and grammar basic all the time.

Marta: Okay. What do you think you focused more on... out of four skills; reading, writing, listening or speaking?

Ms. Knapp: ... Probably in class I tried to focus the most on speaking... I think that's the benefit of the "presencial" classes, that they have that ability to speak with someone, they were listening to me, a lot, all the time and you know, reading is... and writing is something that they can do at home and bring back for revision in class, but speaking isn't something they always have an opportunity for outside the classroom. So I really tried to focus a lot in speaking in the class.

Marta: Okay. What do you think of the development of the listening skills, listening skills in both your classes? In your opinion were they comparable or...?

Ms. Knapp: For listening skills... Well I think for the online class, you know, when they were, I think it was a lot more, just a lot more visual in nature, because they have the instructions there and I... I supplement the online class with song or videos for them to watch as well. but I feel like just because you're with a teacher and you're with each other, you are just kind of in a "presencial" class, that you're in a face to face class, you're just "forced" to hear more, I suppose. You know, that being said... at this level, you know, I think both groups still require quite a bit of support for listening, and many in both commented to me that, you know, that's the skill they find the most difficult

Marta: They did?

Ms. Knapp: Yeah, I think that's usually for most...people when they're learning the language, you know, that they... You know when they see it, you know, they can kind of put together the meaning of a sentence but listening sometimes I think is a bit more difficult for both but I would definitely say that... the face to face students, you know, had this... A bit of an advantage, just because they were listening to me, listening to each other every single day, and you know, that constant, you know 6:00 to 8:00 pm they were constantly in this English environment, you know, I think that can be a little bit of a benefit for them so.

Marta: Okay. Because... the online classes were supposed to be getting ten hours a week as well

Ms. Knapp: Yeah, they were supposed to, and, you know, if we can encourage them as much as we can, you know, here's the program... that you're supposed to do. It was curious because, I had one student who's really hardworking in the online course and she did everything according to like the original schedule, the way presented you know, everything on time, and when she came in to do her final exam and I thought she could, you know, speak and listen and kind of joke with me a lot more than students who kind of saved, you know, seventy percent of the class for the last few weeks, so you feel like, you know, if they stick with the routine and they're really dedicated to, you know doing a certain amount of time a day or a week that, it does provide the benefit, but, you know, one has to be quite motivated and organized and have a certain sort of disciplinary personality to achieve that, but yeah I think that was interesting, that she came in, and she was really... she was, you know, speaking and laughing and joking with me and a few others of them were... hadn't had her persistence and were quiet at that level.

Marta: Okay. Thank you... What about the writing skills? What do you think of the development of writing skills in both your classes; the online and the face to face?

Ms. Knapp: Well... I love writing, that's my favorite thing to teach. It was really interesting, you know, in the face to face class, we, you know... Kind of more typical A2 writing activities, you know, like write a letter to your friend or, you know, describe yourself, you know the kind of the typical things that go along with the grammar and vocabulary, that are expected for that, and then the students, you know, I feel like writing is kind of a burden sometimes in the face to face classes because, I feel like a lot of them don't even like writing in Spanish. So why are then, you know, like, writing in English? When Andres and I did the online sessions for our virtual students, those were interesting because, sometimes we would have kind of writing contests where they would have to write a sentence in a certain amount of time and I thought it was, you know, I... I never had that experience in a class before where it's just kind of imitating like texting on your phone which I feel like for, you know, this... it was something that they were a lot more interested in, just because they're writing, you know, they're writing... you know by hand anymore, it's on their phone, on the computer, which is how they were joining the sessions. So, I thought that they were... That virtual student, at least in that environment of the virtual classroom were a lot more interested in writing and correcting their mistakes in real time also, because it wasn't just, you know, you receive the paper and it comes back with a bunch of wrong marks on it. You have to correct it. So, I thought that was... I don't know I thought that was kind of revelatory for me, that the way they write is changing and you know, we should kind of, move in that direction instead of you know, sticking with the old... The old ways, so it was fun. I thought that the virtual students, yeah, they have like in some way of a little advantage, that they were in that virtual environment.

Marta: Okay. Thanks. What about the development of speaking skills in both your classes?

Ms. Knapp: Speaking skills... Definitely I think that goes along with the listening skills to, but... And specially because in the face to face classes I really tried to focus on speaking... I think there's just... you know, I think we maybe were on the verge of having you know, online speaking but, I just don't think is the same as you know, being face to face with someone and also being presented with their body language which can help. you know help aid and understanding and... I don't know just developing a (*repertoire*) with someone a trust... I think for virtual classes is still, you know, no matter what the program is, is something that we're still trying to improve, and I kind of thing those virtual sessions helped. The speaking sometimes could get a bit wonky because, you know, everyone trying to speak at the same time with microphone is, I mean, not the ideal context, but, I mean, so far I think that, you know, for speaking, that, virtual courses still have like... I mean, they're just still not the same, is being with someone or talking with a partner, again on a daily, well five times a week basis, so...

Marta: Uhm okay. Thanks. For you in general what were the main, like, the differences between your online and your face to face classes?

Ms. Knapp: Well, I mean, I felt I.. The biggest difference probably was just, I felt I had more of a relationship with the face to face classes, just because again, I was seeing them for ten hours a week and, you know, some of my virtual students I felt I knew very well because they were, you

know, sending me messages at, like all hours of the night, like "please help me" like "can I come in" and they came to the office hours that I would have here were they would make an appointment, but I mean they, you know, I think, people who sign up for the virtual course like hopefully they would, they'll be more kind of independent by nature, probably why they want... the online course, but I... do feel that I got just like I had more of a relationship with the face to face students, just, again, because of the nature of the class, that, you know they had to be there, like all the time so...

Marta: Thanks Kelly. Finally, last question. How did you feel about teaching the two sections?

Ms. Knapp: I learnt so much, teaching the same content with, you know, completely different methodology. I thought it was really challenging to apply the content in such strictly different learning context, and again you're really able to see as I was explaining before that the benefits and that kind of pitfall, not pitfalls, but like the challenges because better to say each one and I... think, yeah, like in my courses now I want to take, you know, kind of learnt from each one and say, you know, this really works well in this environment, you know, speaking as something you think you should do face to face, but writing on the other hand is something that students seem to really prefer to do you know in real time and more kind of in informal context; in chatting, especially at this more beginning levels, so I think, you know, I was trying to see, you know, what really worked in what students really grabbed on to any on each section. I hopefully try to incorporate like, best of those worlds into future classes no matter if they're virtual or face to face in the future so...

Ms. Knapp: Regarding the listening, I feel like that might be in issue with the content. I can recall one specific example in my face to face class, we were doing the unit on directions and following directions and they had a map in their book which would have been the same in the virtual course, since the content is the same, and they were listening to three people from a hotel ask for directions and they had to mark in the map were to go and on one of them I followed the directions myself and I felt like ended up in a lake or something, you know, it was really challenging and we had to you know listen to this over and over again for them to try to understand, cause' the listenings were quite long, for their level I thought, compared to other materials I've used and I felt like this kind of sense of frustration built up for them that they felt like they weren't understanding anything, but, you know, when I was talking with them, one on one and you know kind of in a slower tone, using vocabulary and structures that I know that they knew that didn't seem to have a problem understanding me, but when they were listening to some of these exercises provided by Cambridge, I just from my experience, I thought they were, quite challenging and I feel like a lot of them just kind of gave up after a while because they...

Marta: They think they may have felt discouraged?

Ms. Knapp: Yeah, I definitely I think I felt discouraged and, you know, sometimes, you know it just kind of becomes like a, in a larger size class to, you know, that, you know, some of them start covering their heads and: "No teacher, I don't understand" and the rest just kind of, you know is just like a kind of domino effect. But that is something that, Andres and I also discussed together, "the listenings are really long". And the questions that go along with them, sometime I'm kind of inductive reasoning questions and that even, you know, at this level I think it should

just be, you know, you hear the three, you know, fruits that the person mentioned at the grocery store or whatever, so I mean that could possibly be something in that program that we could work to change.

Marta: Okay. Anything you would like to add?

Ms. Knapp: Thanks for the opportunity, good luck

Marta: Thank you Kelly

Ms. Knapp: Your welcome

Appendix D. Class Observation Protocol

General information about the session:

- Date and time:
- Number of students who are present:
- Is the session objective displayed or shared with the students? YES/ NO

Academic Rigor:

- Appropriateness of course content and instructional materials
- Clear presentation of materials
- Checking for understanding
- Use of time
- Students' participation
- Meaningful feedback

Class Activities:

- Do class activities stimulate students' production of the English Language?
- Are activities about topics that seem to be interesting for the students?
- Are activities related to the session objective?

Appendix E

Institutional Review Board Approval



Office of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Subjects Protection
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TO: Charol Shakeshaft

Marta Montiel

CC: Charol Shakeshaft

FROM:

RE IRB [HM20010060](#) A Comparative Study of Online English Language Learning and Face-To-Face English Language Learning
:
at El Bosque University in Colombia

On 6/16/2017 the referenced research study **qualified for exemption** according to 45 CFR 46.101(b), **category 1**.

The information found in the electronic version of this study's smart form and uploaded documents now represents the currently approved study, documents, and HIPAA pathway (if applicable). You may access this information by clicking the Study Number above.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Subjects Protection (ORSP) or the IRB reviewer(s) assigned to this study. The reviewer(s) assigned to your study will be listed in the History tab and on the study workspace. Click on their name to see their contact information.

Attachment – Conditions of Exempt Approval

Appendix F

Research Subject Information and Consent Form

TITLE: A Comparative Study of Online English Language Learning and Face-To-Face English Language Learning at El Bosque University in Colombia

VCU IRB NO.:

INVESTIGATOR: Charol Shakeshaft

Marta Montiel

If any information contained in this consent form is not clear, please ask the study staff to explain any information that you do not fully understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine if there are differences in the English language acquisition outcomes between online English language students and English language students who receive their classes in traditional face-to-face settings at Universidad El Bosque in Bogota, Colombia.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an undergraduate student at El Bosque University who has been placed to start English Level A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form.

It is essential that, as part of this project, you take one test before the course starts and one test after the course has been completed. These tests will come at no additional cost to you and won't affect your academic or personal records in any way. The results of the tests will be kept confidential and won't be shared with anyone at Universidad El Bosque or any other institution or person. There will be a total of 72 participants in this study. The classes will last 90 hours which you will take in 9 weeks.

You will be randomly assigned to one of two conditions: online or face-to-face. There may be observations of the classes you are attending, but none of these will include remarks about you individually.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is no risk related to your participation in this study.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

This course will come to you at half the cost of the course. You will only pay 569000 COP including all class materials. Also, the course will count as part of the requirement for graduation as does any other course at the Language Center.

The findings of this study may benefit other students who are choosing between online and face-to-face classes in that it may help in the design of more effective teaching approaches..

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of your residential stratum, name and email address. Data is being collected only for research purposes.

Your data will be identified by ID numbers, not names, and stored separately in a locked research area. All personal identifying information will be kept in password protected files and these files will be deleted six months after the study has been concluded. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel.

We will not share the answers you give us; however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University or Universidad El Bosque.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to not participate in this study. Your decision not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you do participate, you may freely withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study staff without your consent. The reasons might include:

- the study staff thinks it necessary for your health or safety;
- you have not followed study instructions; or
- administrative reasons require your withdrawal.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research, contact:

Marta L. Montiel at montielmarta@unbosque.edu.co

Tel. 314-3329729

If you have any general questions about your rights as a participant in this or any other research, you may contact:

Office of Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: (804) 827-2157

Contact this number to ask general questions, to obtain information or offer input, and to express concerns or complaints about research. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or if you wish to talk with someone else. General information about participation in research studies can also be found at

http://www.research.vcu.edu/human_research/volunteers.htm.

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

Participant name printed

Participant signature

Date

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion

(Printed)

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion Date

Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above) Date

Vita

Marta Luisa Montiel was born on November 6, 1975, in Colombia, where she lives and works. She graduated from Instituto de Cultura Femenina, Sincelejo, Colombia in 1991. She received her Bachelor of Arts in the Teaching of Modern Languages from Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Medellin, Colombia in 1995. Subsequently, she taught at Universidad de Antioquia for 2 years, Universidad EAFIT for 7 years, Cumberland County Schools in North Carolina for 3 years and has been working at Universidad El Bosque in Bogota since 2008, where she was the coordinator of the Language Center for 10 years and has recently been elected as the new Dean of the School of Education. She received a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2007.