

Comparative Analysis of English Proficiency of Technical and Vocational Trainees: Insights across Three Modalities

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Abstract

As higher education institutions implement varied modes of instruction, it is important to understand how these impact students' language development. However, few studies have compared proficiency levels between academic streams in Ethiopian context. This study aimed to investigate and compare English language proficiency across regular, extension and distance learning streams at a Technical and Vocational Institute of Ethiopia. A total of 108 undergraduate trainees (25 regular, 40 extension, 43 distance) completed the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) listening, speaking, reading and writing assessments. Descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U tests were used to analyze. Significant differences were found between streams for listening, speaking and writing proficiency but not for reading. Generally, regular trainees outperformed extension and distance learners. In particular, extension trainees performed better in writing, whereas regular trainees scored higher than others in speaking and listening. Varied teaching modalities may have varied effects on different language skills. Oral skills seem to benefit from regular classroom contacts, and written skills can be developed through alternate schedules. The findings stress the need for tailored teaching approaches based on context to support balanced proficiency development. Future research should explore underlying factors and track proficiency longitudinally across streams.

Keywords: Academic streams, Distance learning, English language proficiency, Extension program, Regular program

Introduction

English has become the lingua franca of the world, and proficiency in English is essential for success in many fields. In Ethiopia, English is a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools, and it is also taught at universities. However, there is a lack of research on the English language proficiency of Ethiopian Technical and Vocational trainees. English language proficiency is essential in technical and vocational education, especially in settings where English is learned as a foreign language and the training is aiming to produce technically equipped graduates targeting the international work force need (Suhaili & Mohama, 2021). Martirosyan et al. (2015) and Murphy et al. (2020) posit that students without proficiency and critical skills tend to produce lower-quality literary evaluations, highlighting the significance of

language proficiency in academic success. Gu (2015) further notes that the structural nature of language ability in young EFL learners' mirrors that of adult learners, indicating that language components are interrelated and develop through learning experiences in foreign language environments. As institutions implement varied modes of instruction like regular, extension and distance learning formats to increase access and flexibility, it is crucial to understand how these different approaches may influence students' language development. Numerous studies have explored various factors that influence the development of proficiency, including socioeconomic status, native language, gender, age, rate of acquisition, educational background, cultural background, motivation, learning environment, disabilities, and teaching methods (Chen, 2014; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014; Ranjan & Philominraj, 2020; Rintaningrum et al., 2017; Shenoy et al., 2022).

Despite these insights, there is a notable lack of contextualized research, particularly from non-Western perspectives. In Ethiopia, localized studies on this topic are scarce, making it difficult to understand the unique challenges faced by learners in this context. In Ethiopian context, Mihret and Bewuket (2018) explored the relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement but found no significant correlation across different student demographics, including gender and academic streams. This suggests that other factors, such as motivation and individual learning opportunities, may play more crucial roles in academic outcomes. Moreover, much of the previous research has relied on quantitative methods, which provide limited qualitative insights into the factors influencing language proficiency (Kim, & Lee, 2010; Wati & Afrida, 2022; Rosdiana & Sulistyawati, 2019; Sari, 2022).

In the realm of occupation-focused English skills, research has emphasized the importance of core receptive and productive abilities for technical discussions, documentation, and stakeholder interactions (Coe & Yeung, 2015; Roshid, 2014; Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2021; Wang, 2021). Studies have also identified challenges that learners face across various skill areas, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of proficiency development (Aizawa et al., 2020; Galloway, 2011; Hyland, 2004; Rahman & Hasan, 2019; Rudd & Honkiss, 2020).

This present mixed-methods study aims to address these gaps by conducting a localized needs analysis of three groups of Ethiopian Technical and Vocational trainees in regular, extension (evening/weekend), and distance programs. The findings of this study can guide the development of context-sensitive language instruction that supports the occupational integration of trainees. The study also explores the challenges faced by regular, extension and distance education trainees in learning English.

Hypotheses

The specific hypotheses of this study are:

1. There is no difference between regular and extension program trainees in terms of English language proficiency.
2. There is no difference between regular and distance program trainees in terms of English language proficiency.
3. There is no difference between extension and distance program trainees in terms of English language proficiency.

Literature Review

A substantial body of research has examined various factors influencing English language proficiency, particularly among learners where English is a foreign language. Key factors include socioeconomic characteristics, learner attributes, motivational factors, instructional methods, and contextual realities.

Socioeconomic characteristics, such as family income and parental education, significantly impact language proficiency. Maqbool et al. (2018) demonstrate a strong correlation between English language skills—like sentence construction, grammar, vocabulary, and spelling—and students' socioeconomic status. Higher proficiency is observed among students whose parents hold managerial positions, whereas those from unskilled and semiskilled families tend to achieve lower proficiency levels in English. The effects of curriculum, socioeconomic status, and gender on L2 English reading acquisition, as examined by Shenoy, Overton, and Rao (2022), further underscore the influence of socioeconomic factors on language proficiency, particularly for vocational trainees in extension and distance programs who may face additional socioeconomic challenges.

Learner attributes, such as native language background, gender, age, rate of acquisition, and cultural influences, play critical roles in shaping English language proficiency. Studies by Meraz (2015), Gu (2015), and Sadeghi & Everatt (2015) highlight how these factors affect linguistic outcomes. For instance, Chamot (2005) points to the influence of gender and cultural values on language learning, while Chen & Tsai (2012) discuss the impact of cultural background and motivation on language acquisition. Additionally, Magee and Jacobs (2001) compare student participation across different teaching modes—traditional, extension, and distance learning—finding significant variations that likely contribute to differences in English proficiency outcomes among vocational trainees.

Attitudes towards learning English are crucial for language acquisition. Galloway (2011) investigates Japanese university students' attitudes and finds that positive attitudes significantly enhance language learning outcomes. This suggests that fostering a positive learning environment in vocational education, especially in extension and distance programs, is essential for improving English proficiency. Motivation, as explored by Seven (2020), is also a significant factor, with motivated learners typically achieving better outcomes—an insight particularly relevant for vocational trainees in extension and distance programs.

The importance of explicit instruction in language learning strategies, particularly for learners in non-traditional settings such as extension and distance education, is highlighted by Chamot (2005). Implementing these strategies could help vocational trainees enhance their English proficiency across different modalities. This idea is supported by Kurucova, Medová, and Tirpakova (2018), who find that different online education modes can effectively improve English language learning if designed to engage learners actively. In addition, the findings of Moghimi & Mirzaei (2024) revealed that online classes significantly improved writing proficiency compared to traditional in-person instruction. Furthermore, Demir & İlhan (2022) and Cottom (2018) observed that while distance learners demonstrated strong comprehension and writing abilities, their speaking and listening proficiencies were less developed due to the absence of interactive, spoken English practice.

Instructional contexts, including teaching methods and delivery modalities, have been extensively investigated. Studies by Alderson et al. (1997), Zhang et al. (2022), Meraz (2015), and Wali (2017) provide insights into the effectiveness of various teaching strategies. McDonnell (2017) emphasizes the importance of tailored instructional approaches, particularly in special education. Although focused on special education, the study's insights are applicable to vocational trainees in distance learning, where customized instruction may be necessary to meet diverse learning needs. Additionally, Thompson et al. (2016) explores the role of student discourse in supporting instructional strategies, suggesting that active participation can enhance learning outcomes—an important consideration for vocational trainees, particularly in extension and distance programs.

The shift towards online and distance learning, particularly in the post-pandemic era, has necessitated adaptations in instructional strategies. Sato et al. (2023) discuss the need for flexible and interactive learning environments in this context, which is crucial for vocational trainees in distance education. Budiman (2015) address the challenges of distance learning and propose new solutions, emphasizing the need for innovative approaches to overcome barriers. Similarly, Alsaied (2023) examines the impact of distance learning on writing skills, finding that distance education can be effective with appropriate support—a key insight for vocational trainees who rely on distance learning to develop their English proficiency.

Social and institutional factors also significantly impact language learning activities. Case (2023) finds that supportive environments lead to better language outcomes, suggesting that vocational training programs must create supportive environments across all modalities to enhance English proficiency. Integrating multimodal approaches in English Language Teaching (ELT), as investigated by Anis and Khan (2023), can further enhance engagement and learning outcomes for vocational trainees, particularly in distance learning settings.

Maula and Lina (2022) compare English achievement and technology usage between regular and special classes. The study reveals that students in special classes, who often receive more personalized instruction and access to technological resources, tend to perform better in English. This finding suggests that the integration of technology and differentiated instruction in language courses can significantly enhance language learning outcomes.

Blake et al. (2008) explore the measurement of oral proficiency in distance, face-to-face, and blended classrooms. The study finds that while face-to-face interaction remains critical for developing oral skills, blended and distance learning environments can also be effective when supplemented with appropriate technological tools. The key is to ensure that learners have ample opportunities for practice and feedback, regardless of the learning modality.

The role of self-regulated and self-directed learning in developing English proficiency is critical, especially for vocational trainees in distance education. Roberts (2022) highlights the importance of self-regulated strategies for writing engagement, noting that autonomy in learning is essential for success. Hafizah Adnan and Sayadi (2022) similarly emphasize the importance of self-directed learning, finding that students prepared for autonomous learning tend to perform better—an insight particularly relevant for vocational trainees who must navigate distance learning environments.

The literature underscores the complex interplay between socioeconomic factors, learner attributes, attitudes, instructional contexts, and online learning modalities in shaping English proficiency among vocational trainees. The studies highlight the need for context-sensitive research and tailored instructional approaches to better support English language learners across different teaching modes, particularly in non-traditional and evolving educational landscapes. Creating positive and supportive learning environments, employing effective language learning strategies, and adapting to new modalities are essential for improving English proficiency among vocational trainees.

Method

The Design of the Study

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, where quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data collection to provide a deeper understanding of the initial findings. According to Tashakkori & Teddlie (2010), mixed methods approach, particularly sequential designs, provide a more complete understanding of research problems than either quantitative or qualitative methods alone. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of English proficiency among trainees across different training modalities. By analyzing quantitative data first, the researcher can identify specific areas that require further investigation. The subsequent qualitative phase is then focused on these areas, allowing the researcher to gather detailed, context-rich information that explains the reason behind the numbers.

Participants

The study involved 108 garment technology trainees from a Technical Vocational and Training (TVET) Institute in Ethiopia. The participants were purposefully selected to represent three different instructional modalities commonly offered in the Ethiopian TVET system. Specifically, the study sample was divided into three distinct groups based on their enrollment modality: 25 trainees in the Regular program, 43 trainees in the Distance learning, and 40 trainees in the Extension program. This division was made to compare the diverse learning environments offered and to examine potential differences in language development experiences across these programs.

The regular program was the most common instructional modality in Ethiopia. This program was provided primarily to full-time students who were recruited by TVET agencies and regional states, typically to upgrade their levels from a diploma to a Bachelor of Science (BSc) level. Regular programs offered continuous, daily instruction within the Institute's facilities, providing students with direct access to instructors, resources, and hands-on training. This face-to-face learning environment was conducive to consistent language practice and immediate feedback.

The distance learning program included 43 trainees and was provided primarily due to a lack of facilities to accommodate more trainees within the institute. Similar to the regular program, the trainees were recruited through TVET agencies and regional states. However, distance learning involves self-paced study with limited face-to-face interaction, primarily

delivered in the form of occasional tutorials. Instruction was typically provided through digital or print materials, with trainees receiving only occasional support.

The extension program was designed for those who wish to continue their education on a part-time basis, often while working. Trainees in this modality were selected competitively, as they must pass an entrance exam and were required to pay tuition fees. The Extension program was typically offered in the evening or weekend classes, allowing trainees to balance their education with employment or other responsibilities. This flexible scheduling provides an opportunity for those who cannot commit to full-time study but still seek to advance their education and skills.

Data Collection Instruments

Standardized Tests

English language proficiency was measured using the Cambridge English Proficiency (CPE) 2 test, a validated and widely-used instrument for evaluating English proficiency levels ((Stafford et al., 2012; Zhou & Zhang, 2022, Tadayon et al., 2024). The CPE 2 assessment contains four distinct components that together provide a comprehensive evaluation of trainees' language abilities. Speaking skill was gauged through an 8–10-minute interview on topics relating to participants' personal experiences and scored using a customized 4-point rubric. Listening involved responding to teacher-delivered passages reflecting real-world language through fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice tasks. Reading featured comprehending a passage tied to interests followed by multiple choice questions. Writing entailed composing a 120–150-word paragraph on a program-linked topic assessed for content, organization, vocabulary and grammar using another adapted rubric. Both rubrics originated from Cambridge validated resources and were evaluated by language assessment professionals, ensuring scoring reliability and validity with a strong 0.89 coefficient based on previous pilot use of the instruments.

Test Administration

The speaking evaluations were conducted in a quiet, private room, with one assessor and one participant. The presentations were audio-recorded, transcribed, and scored based on the adapted rubrics. The listening, reading comprehension, and writing evaluations were administered in a classroom, with participants completing the tests individually and in a controlled environment. The tests were administered during regular class hours, and participants were given adequate time to complete all components.

Interviews

To gain a deeper understanding of the trainees' English language needs, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of three trainees from each enrollment modality (Regular, Extension, and Distance). The interviews were conducted in Amharic to ensure participant comfort and facilitate open communication.

The interview guide was carefully developed to focus on seven key areas considered essential for understanding the impact of different instructional modalities on English language proficiency. These areas were selected based on the quantitative findings from the study. The interview guide was developed based on the seven areas: perception of English proficiency; factors contributing to or hindering listening proficiency, speaking proficiency, reading proficiency, and writing

proficiency; program structure and impact on learning; and overall reflection on the three modalities (see Appendix on page 26).

The interview guide underwent a validation process to ensure its effectiveness. This involved pilot testing with a small group of trainees from each instructional modality. Feedback from these initial interviews was instrumental in refining the questions for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. In addition to pilot testing, the guide was reviewed by subject matter experts in language acquisition and vocational training. Their input helped ensure that the questions were appropriate and aligned with the study's objectives.

The interview guide ultimately consisted of eight main questions, each corresponding to one of the seven key areas. These questions were designed to prompt in-depth discussions and encourage trainees to share detailed insights into their experiences. Each interview was structured to last approximately 30 to 45 minutes, allowing enough time for follow-up questions to clarify or expand upon certain points, depending on the depth of the trainee's responses.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U tests to compare proficiency levels between the two groups. The normality tests indicated that the individual language skill scores (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) generally do not follow a normal distribution across the Regular, Summer, and Evening groups. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicates that for most of the groups across the four language skills, the p-values are below 0.05, suggesting that the distribution of these variables significantly deviates from a normal distribution. However, the overall proficiency result (ProfResult) appears to be normally distributed, as indicated by the p-values from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Given these results, non-parametric statistical methods Mann-Whitney U test were used for analyzing the differences in listening, speaking, reading, writing proficiency and overall proficiency result across the different instructional modalities. Qualitative data were analyzed using open coding to identify key themes and patterns within the interview transcripts. The combined analysis of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the English proficiency levels and needs of the trainees across different training modalities.

Ethical Consideration

Prior to the commencement of data collection, oral consent was obtained from each participant. The purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and the voluntary nature of participation were explained to the participants. They were also informed about their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences. Only those participants who provided their informed oral consent were included in the study.

Results

Comparison of Regular and Extension Trainees

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the English proficiency of regular and extension trainees across four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results indicate significant differences in some skills but not in others.

Table 1

Pairwise Analysis of Regular and Extension Trainees' English Proficiency

Skills	Modality	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Regular	25	39.84	996.00	329	1149	-2.359	0.018
	Extension	40	28.73	1149.00				
Speaking	Regular	25	42.38	1059.50	265.5	1085.5	-3.261	0.001
	Extension	40	27.14	1085.50				
Reading	Regular	25	37.00	925.00	400	1220	-1.392	0.164
	Extension	40	30.50	1220.00				
Writing	Regular	25	23.54	588.50	263.5	588.5	-3.336	0.001
	Extension	40	38.91	1556.50				

The analysis shows a significant difference in listening proficiency between regular and extension trainees ($p = 0.018$). Regular trainees have a higher mean rank (39.84) compared to extension trainees (28.73), indicating that regular trainees have better listening skills. This could be due to the more consistent and immersive nature of regular training programs, which might offer more opportunities for trainees to engage in listening exercises. The higher exposure to spoken English in regular classes likely enhances listening comprehension.

Speaking proficiency also shows a significant difference between the two groups ($p = 0.001$), with regular trainees again outperforming extension trainees. Regular trainees have a mean rank of 42.38, while extension trainees have a mean rank of 27.14. This suggests that regular trainees have more frequent and varied opportunities to practice speaking, which likely contributes to their higher proficiency. Speaking, being an active skill, requires continuous practice, which seems to be more readily available to regular trainees.

For reading proficiency, there is no significant difference between regular and extension trainees ($p = 0.164$). Regular trainees have a mean rank of 37.00, while extension trainees have a mean rank of 30.50. Another regular program trainee (IR3) highlighted the challenges of keeping up with dense reading materials in a regular class setting, though they acknowledged that the structured schedule ultimately helped them build stronger reading habits and comprehension skills. Regarding this same issue, an extension program trainee (IW3) replied, "Eh... reading, you know, with the extension classes, it's a bit different too. Em... I have the whole week to, ah... go through the materials at my own pace, and then, em... when the extension comes, ah... I feel like I understand the texts better because, eh... I've had time to really absorb them. So, yeah, I'd say it helps, em... to have that extra time to, ah... reflect on what I'm reading." The lack of a significant difference suggests that reading proficiency might be influenced more by individual study habits and less by the structure of the training program. Both regular and extension trainees may engage with reading materials at their own pace, leading to similar proficiency levels.

The analysis found a significant difference in writing proficiency between extension and regular trainees, with extension trainees performing better on average. Specifically, the mean rank for extension trainees' writing proficiency was 38.91 compared to 23.54 for regular trainees,

as indicated by the statistical finding ($p = 0.001$). This suggests the extension program structure may better support the development of writing skills. One extension trainee (IW2) provided qualitative insights into how their schedule advantages writing specifically, noting they have more time to "think and work on assignments without feeling rushed." They explained being able to use the week to plan assignments allowed for really focusing on writing during dedicated extension sessions. This perspective aligns with the quantitative results, implying the extension format provides opportunities for more focused attention on writing tasks over longer class periods. The extension program structure, with potentially longer but less frequent class meetings, may place greater emphasis on writing exercises that require time for drafting, redrafting and practice to strengthen.

The comparison between regular and extension trainees reveals significant differences in listening, speaking, and writing proficiency, with regular trainees excelling in listening and speaking, while extension trainees show higher proficiency in writing. There is no significant difference in reading proficiency between the two groups. These findings suggest that the mode of instruction impacts different language skills in distinct ways, with regular exposure benefiting listening and speaking, while focused, less frequent sessions might enhance writing skills.

Comparison of Regular and Distance Trainees

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the English proficiency of Regular and Distance trainees across four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results show significant differences in some areas, while others are more comparable.

Table 2

Pairwise Analysis of Regular and Distance Trainees' English Proficiency

Skills	Modality	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Regular	25	44.68	1117.00	283.000	1229.000	-3.360	.001
	Distance	43	28.58	1229.00				
Speaking	Regular	25	46.38	1159.50	240.500	1186.500	-3.902	.000
	Distance	43	27.59	1186.50				
Reading	Regular	25	38.06	951.50	448.500	1394.500	-1.167	.243
	Distance	43	32.43	1394.50				
Writing	Regular	25	29.04	726.00	401.000	726.000	-1.840	.066
	Distance	43	37.67	1620.00				

There is a significant difference in listening proficiency between regular and distance trainees ($p = 0.001$). Regular trainees have a higher mean rank (44.68) compared to distance trainees (28.58), indicating that regular trainees are more proficient in listening. In the interview held with the respondents, two (IR1 and IR2) of the regular program interviewees stated that the consistent exposure to English in a regular class setting significantly improved their listening and speaking skills. He (IR1) stated, "I feel like, eh... the regular class schedule has, you know, really impacted my ability to understand spoken English. The, ah... daily exposure to English through

lectures and discussions, *em... has really helped me get used to different accents and speeds of speech, you know?*" Another trainee (IR2) also stated, *"Listening to, eh... audio materials or teacher read transcripts and summarizing them in class has been, you know, particularly helpful. It, ah... challenges me to not just hear the words but, em... also understand the context and, you know, the meaning behind them."* This suggests that the more frequent and structured interaction with spoken English in Regular programs significantly benefits listening skills. Distance trainees may have fewer opportunities for real-time auditory exposure, which is critical for developing listening proficiency.

Speaking proficiency also shows a significant difference ($p = 0.000$), with regular trainees again outperforming distance trainees. Regular trainees have a mean rank of 46.38, while Distance trainees have a mean rank of 27.59. The third regular program interviewee (IR3) noted *"Eh... regular classes have definitely, you know, made me more confident in speaking. The daily practice, em... helps me stay in the flow of the language, and I've, ah... noticed that my pronunciation and fluency have, you know, improved significantly."* The structure of regular training, which likely includes more interactive sessions and practice opportunities, seems to facilitate better speaking skills. In contrast, distance trainees might have fewer chances for verbal interaction, impacting their speaking proficiency.

For reading proficiency, there is no significant difference between regular and distance trainees ($p = 0.243$). Regular trainees have a mean rank of 38.06, while distance trainees have a mean rank of 32.43. However, in the interview, one of the regular program trainees (IR3) highlighted the challenges of keeping up with dense reading materials in a regular class setting, though they acknowledged that the structured schedule ultimately helped them build stronger reading habits and comprehension skills. However, the distance program interviewee (ID3) stated:

Em... reading in the distance learning, ah... is something I've, you know, adapted to. Ah... I like that I can, em... go through the readings at my own speed, and, eh... revisit them if I need to. But, em... it's also a bit isolating, you know, because, ah... you don't have those, em... immediate discussions with, ah... classmates or, eh... the teacher to, ah... clarify things right away. Ah... so I have to, em... be more proactive, you know, in understanding the material.

Although there is not enough evidence in the qualitative data to prove significant difference between the two modalities, the interview results suggest that reading is less difficult for the distance program trainees than the regular program trainees. Reading is often an individual activity that can be practiced independently, possibly leading to similar outcomes across different training formats.

Writing proficiency shows no significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level ($p = 0.066$), though there is a trend towards distance trainees having higher proficiency. Distance trainees have a mean rank of 37.67, while Regular trainees have a mean rank of 29.04. This trend might indicate that distance trainees, who possibly have more flexible schedules, spend more time on writing tasks. However, since the difference is not statistically significant, more data would be needed to confirm any definitive conclusions. However, the reply of the interview explained it a bit. IR1 stated, *"Regular reading assignments, eh... have improved my, you know, comprehension skills. The materials we, ah... read in class are usually, em... challenging, but they, you know,*

push me to expand my vocabulary and understand, ah... more complex ideas." He (IR1) added: *"One challenge I, eh... face is keeping up with, ah... the reading pace, especially when the, em... material is difficult. However, discussing the readings, you know, in class helps a lot in, ah... overcoming this challenge."* Regarding this similar issue, one of the distance program interviewees (ID2) also said *"Eh... with reading, I find, ah... the distance learning, you know, has its pros and cons. Em... I can read at my own pace, ah... which is good because, eh... I can, you know, really absorb the material. But, ah... sometimes it's harder to, you know, stay engaged, em... without the regular discussions or, ah... in-class activities that, eh... reinforce what I've read. So, yeah, it's a bit of a trade-off."*

The comparison between Regular and Distance trainees reveals significant differences in listening and speaking proficiency, with Regular trainees outperforming Distance trainees in these areas. There is no significant difference in reading and writing proficiency, though there is a trend toward Distance trainees having slightly better writing skills. These findings suggest that while regular, structured interaction benefits listening and speaking skills, reading and writing proficiency may be less affected by the modality of training and more by individual effort and practice.

Comparison of Extension and Distance Trainees

The Mann-Whitney U test was employed to compare the English proficiency of Extension and Distance trainees across four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results show no significant differences in listening, speaking, and reading, but there is a significant difference in writing proficiency.

Table 3

Pairwise Analysis of Extension and Distance Trainees' English Proficiency

Skills	Modality	N	Mean Rank	Sum Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Extension	40	44.08	1763.00	777.000	1723.00	-.794	.427
	Distance	43	40.07	1723.00				
Speaking	Extension	40	43.76	1750.50	789.500	1735.50	-.675	.500
	Distance	43	40.36	1735.50				
Reading	Extension	40	41.19	1647.50	827.500	1647.50	-.307	.759
	Distance	43	42.76	1838.50				
Writing	Extension	40	47.91	1916.50	623.500	1569.50	-2.328	.020
	Distance	43	36.50	1569.50				

There is no significant difference in listening proficiency between extension and distance trainees ($p = 0.427$). Extension trainees have a slightly higher mean rank (44.08) compared to

distance trainees (40.07), but this difference is not statistically significant. However, in the interview the extension program trainee (IW2) said, *"Well, eh... extension classes are, you know, kind of intense, and em... that really helps with listening. Ah... it's like you're thrown into this, em... full English environment all of a sudden, and it forces you to, eh... keep up. So, I'd say, em... my listening has improved because I have to, ah... focus more during those sessions."* Similarly, IW3 stated, *"Eh... honestly, I find the extension classes, ah... challenging but, you know, in a good way. Em... they force you to, ah... really concentrate because, eh... you're not in that English environment all week. So, when you do get there, ah... you have to, em... tune in quickly, and I think, eh... that's improved my listening over time."* Another interview from distance program (ID3) stated, *"... the distance learning format, ah... it makes listening, you know, a bit harder because, em... you're not in a classroom setting. Ah... sometimes, it's easy to, eh... zone out during lectures, so I have to, em... actively engage, you know? Em... I use strategies like, ah... taking notes and, eh... replaying parts of the lecture to, ah... make sure I catch everything."* This suggests that both extension and distance trainees have similar levels of listening proficiency. The lack of significant difference might indicate that the modalities provide comparable exposure to spoken English, notwithstanding through different structures.

Speaking proficiency shows significant difference ($p = 0.500$) between the two groups. extension trainees have a mean rank of 43.76, while distance trainees have a mean rank of 40.36. In terms of speaking proficiency, extension trainee (IW1) shared how the structure of their classes positively impacted their confidence: *"Em... in my opinion, the less frequent but, you know, longer extension classes, they actually, ah... help me with my speaking confidence. It's like... you get more time to think and prepare before speaking, and then during the class, em... we do these longer discussions. So... yeah, I feel like my speaking is, ah... getting better because I have time to, em... really dive into it during the sessions."* In terms of speaking proficiency, another distance learner (ID2) reflected on the limitations of the format: *"Eh... without face-to-face interaction, ah... it's tough to, you know, practice speaking as much as I'd like. Em... we do have, ah... some online activities where we, you know, get to speak, but, eh... it's not as frequent or, ah... spontaneous as in a regular classroom. Eh... I try to, em... practice on my own or, ah... with friends outside of class, but, eh... it's definitely, you know, a challenge."* This comment highlights how the absence of spontaneous, real-time interactions in distance learning can hinder the development of speaking skills. This indicates that the extended discussions during extension sessions may provide more opportunities for deeper engagement and practice in speaking.

Unlike listening, the speaking proficiency of extension and distance trainees appears to have differences suggesting that the extension class gives more opportunity for practicing speaking skills.

There is no significant difference in reading proficiency between extension and distance trainees ($p = 0.759$). The mean ranks are close, with extension trainees at 41.19 and Distance trainees at 42.76. This result aligns with previous findings that reading skills are less impacted by the modality of training, likely because reading is an activity that can be practiced independently of the training structure.

Writing proficiency shows a significant difference ($p = 0.020$), with extension trainees having a higher mean rank (47.91) compared to distance trainees (36.50). The higher proficiency in writing among extension trainees could be due to the more structured and possibly more

frequent writing assignments or feedback sessions they receive compared to distance trainees. This significant difference highlights the impact of structured practice and feedback in improving writing skills.

The comparison between extension and distance trainees shows no significant differences in listening, and reading proficiency, indicating that these skills are similarly developed across both modalities. However, there is a significant difference in writing and speaking proficiency, with extension trainees outperforming distance trainees. This suggests that the more structured environment of extension training may provide better support for developing writing and speaking skills, whereas other skills might be less dependent on the modality and more on individual practice.

Discussion

The result of this study's findings reveals significant differences in listening, speaking, and writing proficiency among trainees based on their mode of instruction, as evidenced by the Mann-Whitney U test. This finding aligns with previous studies, such as Meraz (2015) and Kurucova et al., (2018), which suggest that instructional modes can significantly impact language skill development. Interestingly, no significant differences were observed in reading proficiency, a result that contrasts with prior research highlighting factors like language background as influential in reading ability (Meraz, 2015). This discrepancy suggests that contextual factors and individual learner characteristics may play varying roles depending on the language skill in question. Overall, the mode of instruction appears to have distinct effects on different language skills, warranting further investigation into the specific factors contributing to these differences (Magee & Jacobs, 2001).

The finding of this study indicates statistically significant differences in listening, speaking, and writing proficiency between Regular and Extension trainees. Regular trainees outperform their Extension counterparts in listening and speaking, which is consistent with prior studies emphasizing the importance of classroom interactions for oral proficiency development (Bicha 2016; Gu, 2015). Regular, face-to-face sessions likely provide more opportunities for student-teacher interaction and peer practice, which are critical for listening comprehension and spoken fluency. Conversely, Extension trainees excel in writing, possibly due to their workplace experience and the dedicated time they have for assignments. This aligns with the findings of Abad et al., (2019) and Hafizah Adnan, & Sayadi, (2022), which suggest that writing skills may develop more independently from classroom contexts and benefit from focused study time. These results highlight the need for tailored support to address the specific strengths and weaknesses of trainees in different instructional streams.

The result of this study indicates that there is statistically significant difference in listening and speaking proficiency between Regular and Distance trainees, with Regular trainees showing higher mean ranks. This finding supports the view that in-person instruction is more conducive to the development of oral language skills (Moghimi & Mirzaei, 2024; Shenoy et al., 2022). The lack of synchronous interactions in distance education may limit the development of both receptive and productive skills, as suggested by Derakhshan (2021). However, no significant differences were found in reading or writing proficiency between these two groups, suggesting that both instructional contexts can support the development of these skills when the curriculum

is well-designed (Zhou & Zhang, 2022; McDonnell, 2017). However, Demir & İlhan (2022) and Cottom (2018) revealed that distance learners demonstrated strong comprehension and writing abilities, whereas as their speaking and listening proficiencies were less developed due to the absence of interactive, spoken English practice.

This result implies that while distance education may be less effective for oral skills, it can still support the development of cognitive language skills like reading and writing.

The result of this study shows that there are no significant differences in listening, speaking, or reading proficiency between extension and distance trainees. However, extension trainees have a significant advantage in writing proficiency, with higher mean ranks compared to distance trainees. This finding suggests that the structured and dedicated time available in the extension format provides a beneficial environment for developing writing skills, reinforcing the findings from previous research by Hafizah Adnan, & Sayadi, (2022). The similarity in other language skills between these two groups contrasts with the differences observed between regular and extension, and regular and distance trainees, indicating that when resources and instructional strategies are optimized, alternate instructional formats can offer comparable learning opportunities (Stafford et al., 2012). The extension stream's superiority in writing aligns with research that emphasizes the role of self-direction in writing development, as opposed to the more immersive for other contexts needed language skills (Hafizah Adnan & Sayadi, 2022).

These results emphasize the importance of evaluating English proficiency across multiple dimensions and considering the impact of different instructional environments on specific language skills. They confirm established findings while also offering new insights into the skill-specific proficiency differences among regular, extension, and distance trainees. The findings emphasize the need for personalized, context-sensitive teaching approaches to support trainees in enhancing their English abilities. Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of effective language education strategies across different instructional modalities.

Conclusion

The significant differences in listening and speaking proficiency between regular trainees and both extension and distance trainees highlight the potential benefits of regular instruction and face-to-face interaction. Regular trainees likely have more opportunities to engage in real-time communication, participate in class discussions, and receive immediate feedback from instructors. These factors may contribute to their higher levels of listening and speaking skills compared to trainees in extension or distance learning settings.

On the other hand, extension trainees' superior performance in writing proficiency test suggests that the alternative schedule of extension classes may provide them with additional time and focus to work on their writing assignments. With fewer distractions and more dedicated time for writing, these trainees may have developed stronger written expression skills.

It is essential to consider that the differences observed in language proficiency may not be solely attributed to the mode of instruction. Individual student characteristics, such as motivation, prior language exposure, and study habits, can also influence language development. Additionally, factors like the quality of instruction, teaching methods, and resources available to each group might contribute to the observed differences. In conclusion, the observed differences in English language proficiency among regular, extension, and distance trainees highlight the

potential advantages and disadvantages of each mode of instruction. Regular trainees demonstrate stronger listening and speaking skills, while extension trainees excel in writing proficiency. These findings underline the importance of considering various factors, including instructional methods, individual characteristics, and external influences, when assessing language proficiency. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors influencing language proficiency, future research could explore additional variables. For example, investigating the amount of exposure to the English language outside of the classroom, the level of support and resources provided to distance trainees, or the specific teaching strategies employed in each mode of instruction could provide valuable insights.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am conducting this study to understand better how different instructional modalities—Regular, Extension, and Distance programs—impact English language proficiency. This interview aims to gain deeper insights into your experiences and clarify the quantitative findings I have obtained. Your input will help me understand the factors that influence language learning in these different contexts.

Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Do you have any questions before we begin? If you are ready, we can start the interview now.

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your proficiency in English across the four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing? Have you noticed any improvements in these skills since you started the program? If so, in which areas have you seen the most improvement?
2. Can you describe the types of listening activities or exercises you encounter in your program? How do these activities help you improve your listening skills? What challenges, if any, do you face in developing listening skills in your program?
3. How often do you engage in speaking activities, and what impact do they have on your confidence and fluency? Do you find it challenging to practice speaking in your current program? Why or why not? What strategies do you use to improve your speaking skills outside of class time?
4. How do you typically approach reading assignments in your program? Do you think the structure of your program (regular, extension, distance) influences your reading habits or comprehension? If so, how?
5. How do you typically manage your writing assignments? Do you feel you have enough time and support to develop your writing skills? What challenges do you face when it comes to writing tasks? Are there any specific activities or practices that you think could help improve your writing skills in this setting?
7. How do you feel the structure of your program (regular, extension, distance) supports or hinders your overall language learning?
8. In what ways does the program structure provide you with opportunities or challenges in developing your English skills?
9. Based on your understanding, how do you think your experience would differ if you were in one of the other programs (regular, extension, distance)?