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**Comparative Study of Immersive Language Learning and Conventional ESL Programs: Impact on Language Proficiency**

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**Abstract:** The growing diversity in language teaching methodologies mandates a thorough comparison of their effectiveness in enhancing language proficiency among learners of English as a second language. An effective teaching approach makes learning easy and brings much better results. There are multiple approaches to executing English teaching, but it is extremely necessary to have a suitable approach by which language learning can become easier for learners. Different methods, such as immersive language learning and conventional ESL programs, offer unique benefits and challenges that can significantly impact various aspects of language acquisition. A comparative study of these methodologies can provide valuable insights into their specific impacts on language proficiency. This research paper presents a comparative study of immersive language learning and conventional ESL programs. This knowledge can help educators design more effective language instruction programs that benefit the strength of both immersive and conventional approaches, ultimately bringing better language outcomes for ESL learners.

**Keywords:** ESL learners, Comparative study, Teaching approach, Proficiency, Language acquisition, English teaching

### **Introduction**

The study of second language acquisition has consistently attracted interest and discussion from linguists, educators, and policymakers. In recent years, the methods and approaches to teaching English as a second language have evolved, with immersive language learning and conventional ESL programs being two prominent methods. Immersive language learning, typically defined by its 'sink-or-swim' methodology, immerses learners in an

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environment where only the target language is used, promoting natural language acquisition through continuous exposure and interaction (Genesee, 2008). On the other hand, traditional ESL programs usually adhere to a structured curriculum that emphasizes grammar, vocabulary, and controlled practice exercises, offering a more gradual and systematic method of language learning (Richards, 2006). This comparative study seeks to examine the impact of these two distinct teaching methods on language learning proficiency. The motivation for this research stems from the growing interest in immersive techniques, which are believed to speed up language acquisition and enhance fluency by replicating the natural language learning process of native speakers. However, the effectiveness of these methods compared to traditional ESL instructions remains underexplored.

The study will analyze various dimensions of language proficiency, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, by comparing the outcomes of students engaged in immersive programs with those in conventional ESL classrooms. This research aims to provide insights into which method yields better results in terms of overall proficiency. The results are anticipated to add to the ongoing discussion on the best language teaching strategies, potentially influencing educational policies and instructional practices. This research aims to not only highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each method but also include a detailed analysis.

### **Immersive Language Learning**

Immersive language learning is an educational approach where learners are fully surrounded by and engaged with the target language in a natural, interactive setting. This method aims to replicate the way native speakers acquire their first language by creating environments where the target language is the primary means of communication. Learners engage with the language in context, understanding vocabulary and grammar through real-life situations rather than formal instruction. This approach promotes natural acquisition, encouraging intuitive understanding and fluency through constant exposure and use.

### **Conventional ESL Program**

Conventional ESL (CESL) is a traditional approach to language teaching that emphasizes systematic instruction in grammar, vocabulary, and language rules. This method typically involves structured classroom settings where learners receive explicit explanations of linguistic concepts, followed by practice exercises and drills. CESL often uses textbooks, worksheets, and formal assessments to evaluate progress and ensure comprehension. The focus is on building a solid foundational knowledge of the language through repetitive practice and

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theoretical understanding. Teachers guide learners through a sequence of structured lessons designed to address specific language skills and competencies.

### **Literature Review**

The examination of language acquisition methodologies has garnered considerable interest, especially when comparing immersive language learning with conventional ESL (English as a Second Language) programs. Immersive language learning involves placing learners in environments where only the target language is used, aiming to replicate the natural process of acquiring a language as native speakers do. This approach is believed to enhance language acquisition speed and fluency more effectively than traditional methods (Genesee, 2008). In contrast, conventional ESL programs generally adhere to a structured curriculum that emphasizes grammar, vocabulary, and controlled practice, offering a more methodical and gradual approach to language learning (Richards, 2006).

Research suggests that immersive language learning can lead to significant improvements in various aspects of language proficiency. For instance, Ellis (2008) notes that immersive environments enhance learners' ability to use the language spontaneously and contextually, fostering greater communicative competence. Furthermore, Lightbown and Spada (2013) argue that immersion helps learners develop a more intuitive understanding of grammatical structures and vocabulary usage, as they are constantly exposed to the language in meaningful contexts. Naturalistic exposure to the target language in immersive settings also promotes better pronunciation and listening skills, as learners frequently interact with native speakers (Krashen, 1985).

On the other hand, conventional ESL programs have their own strengths. These programs often provide a more structured and supportive learning environment, which can be particularly beneficial for beginners or those who prefer a systematic approach to language learning (Richards, 1971). Dulay and Burt (1974) highlight that traditional ESL instruction can effectively address specific linguistic challenges through targeted grammar and vocabulary exercises. Additionally, Corder (1973) points out that conventional methods allow for explicit error correction and detailed feedback, which can be crucial for learners in understanding and correcting their mistakes.

Comparative studies on the effectiveness of these two approaches reveal mixed results. Some researchers, like Skehan (1989), argue that immersive learning leads to superior outcomes in terms of speaking and listening proficiency, given the constant interaction and practice in real-life situations. However, other studies suggest that conventional ESL programs may be more effective in developing reading and writing skills due to their structured nature and emphasis on written language (Brown, 2000). Moreover, the psychological and cognitive

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impacts of these methods vary among learners. Dörnyei (2005) explores how immersion can boost motivation and engagement but also notes that it might increase anxiety for some learners due to the intense and unrelenting exposure to the target language.

Furthermore, recent research by Robinson (2002) indicates that individual differences, such as learners' cognitive styles and prior language learning experiences, play a significant role in determining the effectiveness of each approach. Therefore, it is essential to consider these factors when evaluating the relative merits of immersive and conventional ESL programs. The integration of immersive techniques into traditional ESL curricula has been proposed as a potential way to leverage the benefits of both methods, providing a more balanced and effective language learning experience (Odlin, 1989).

### **Methodology for comparative study**

This study utilized mixed methods, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative data was collected through pre and post assessments, and qualitative data was collected through questionnaires and classroom observations. The research involved two distinct groups of participants: one enrolled in an immersive language learning program and another in a conventional ESL program. Each group consisted of 40 learners from intermediate-level English courses to ensure comparability. Both methods were implemented over a period of three months.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

The comparative study of Immersive Language Learning (ILL) and Conventional ESL Programs (CESL) provides valuable insights into their relative effectiveness in enhancing different aspects of language proficiency. Immersive Language Learning, which involves integrating language use into real-life contexts and capitalizes on the natural use of language in varied, real-world situations, allowing learners to practice and internalize language patterns more organically. The interactive nature of ILL helps learners develop a more nuanced understanding of spoken language and improve their communicative competence. Conventional ESL Programs typically offer a structured curriculum with a clear focus on grammar, vocabulary, and language rules, providing a systematic approach to language learning. The pedagogical methods used in CESL, such as explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies and structured writing exercises, enable learners to build strong foundational skills. Immersive Language Learning is beneficial for developing practical language skills in authentic contexts, and CESL remains crucial for reinforcing academic literacy and writing proficiency.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Pre-Test Mean</i>	<i>Post-Test Mean</i>	<i>Pre-Test SD</i>	<i>Post-Test SD</i>
<i>Listening</i>	Immersive Language Learning	64.3	81.0	2.85	6.16
	Conventional ESL	64.7	72.5	3.19	4.62
<i>Speaking</i>	Immersive Language Learning	62.0	80.1	2.95	5.14
	Conventional ESL	62.0	63.0	3.04	4.12
<i>Reading</i>	Immersive Language Learning	64.5	66.7	3.13	3.42
	Conventional ESL	64.6	73.8	3.32	5.43
<i>Writing</i>	Immersive Language Learning	67.0	68.3	3.31	4.38
	Conventional ESL	66.0	76.0	3.78	5.31

Table 1, the Descriptive Statistics Table, displays the mean and standard deviation for pre-test and post-test scores by group and skill, allowing readers to easily compare overall proficiency levels before and after the intervention, as a result the ILL group generally achieved higher post-test mean scores compared to the CESL group, particularly in listening and speaking, with larger gains in proficiency.

Table 2: Paired t-test Results for Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t-Statistic</i>	<i>p-Value</i>
<i>Listening</i>	Immersive Language Learning	16.7	1.28	13.05	< 0.01
	Conventional ESL	7.8	0.80	9.75	< 0.01
<i>Speaking</i>	Immersive Language Learning	18.1	1.31	13.82	< 0.01
	Conventional ESL	1.0	0.81	1.23	0.22

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<i>Reading</i>	Immersive Language Learning	2.2	0.80	2.75	0.01
	Conventional ESL	9.2	1.13	8.13	< 0.01
<i>Writing</i>	Immersive Language Learning	1.3	0.94	1.38	0.18
	Conventional ESL	10.0	1.49	6.72	< 0.01

Table 2, the Paired t-test Results Table, shows the results of paired t-tests for each skill and group, including mean difference, standard error, t-statistic, and p-value, which help assess the statistical significance of changes in proficiency within each group. It reveals that the ILL group exhibited statistically significant improvements in listening and speaking skills, as evidenced by higher mean differences and lower p-values, indicating robust effectiveness. In contrast, the CESL group demonstrated notable improvements in reading and writing, though the improvements in speaking were minimal and not statistically significant.

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Proficiency Gains

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Group ILL</i>	<i>Group CESL</i>	<i>Mean Improvement Difference</i>	<i>t-Statistic</i>	<i>p-Value</i>
<i>Listening</i>	16.7	7.8	8.9	4.77	< 0.01
<i>Speaking</i>	18.1	1.0	17.1	11.24	< 0.01
<i>Reading</i>	2.2	9.2	-7.0	-4.20	< 0.01
<i>Writing</i>	1.3	10.0	-8.7	-6.27	< 0.01

Table 3, the Comparative Analysis Table, compares the mean improvements between the two groups for each skill, detailing the difference in mean improvements, t-statistic, and p-value to illustrate the comparative effectiveness of the two teaching methods. It compares the mean proficiency gains between the two groups, with ILL outperforming CESL in listening and speaking, while CESL showed greater improvements in reading and writing. The t-statistics and p-values confirm the statistical significance of these differences, especially in listening and speaking.

Table 4: Effect Size Calculations

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Mean Improvement (Group ILL - Group CESL)</i>	<i>Pooled SD</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>
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<i>Speaking</i>	17.1	5.15	3.32
<i>Listening</i>	8.9	4.98	1.79
<i>Reading</i>	-7.0	5.46	-1.28
<i>Writing</i>	-8.7	7.69	-1.13

Table 4, the Effect Size Calculations Table, provides Cohen's *d* for each skill area, offering insight into the practical significance of the observed differences, with the pooled standard deviation included for reference that provides the effect size calculations, with Cohen's *d* values indicating large effect sizes for ILL in speaking and listening, and negative effect sizes for CESL in reading and writing, reflecting the practical significance of the observed differences.

The analysis of the study is detailed through several tables. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, indicating that ILL consistently shows greater improvement compared to Conventional ESL. For instance, in Listening and Speaking, ILL students exhibited notable gains, with mean post-test scores of 81.0 and 80.1, respectively, compared to the Conventional ESL group's scores of 72.5 and 63.0. The standard deviations for ILL in these skills also suggest a broader range of improvement, reflecting both high achievement and variability in responses. Table 2 reports paired t-test results, which highlight statistically significant mean differences between pre-test and post-test scores in most skills for ILL. Particularly, Listening and Speaking skills demonstrated substantial improvements, with t-statistics of 13.05 and 13.82 and p-values < 0.01, respectively. These results suggest that ILL has a strong effect on enhancing these skills. In contrast, Conventional ESL shows a significant improvement only in Listening (mean difference of 7.8, t-statistic of 9.75) but not in Speaking (mean difference of 1.0, t-statistic of 1.23), indicating that Conventional ESL may be less effective in this area. Table 3 provides a comparative analysis of proficiency gains, illustrating that ILL outperforms Conventional ESL in Listening and Speaking with mean improvement differences of 8.9 and 17.1, respectively. Conversely, Conventional ESL shows superior gains in Reading and Writing, with mean improvement differences of 9.2 and 10.0, suggesting that it may be more effective in these skills. The t-statistics confirm the significance of these differences, with p-values < 0.01 for the majority of comparisons. Table 4 calculates effect sizes to quantify the magnitude of the differences observed. Cohen's *d* values indicate large effects for Speaking (*d* = 3.32) and Listening (*d* = 1.79) in favor of ILL, demonstrating a substantial benefit of this approach in these areas. In contrast, Cohen's *d* values for Reading and Writing are negative, with Reading (*d* = -1.28) and Writing (*d* = -1.13), suggesting that Conventional ESL has a

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more pronounced effect on these skills. Overall, the data indicates that while ILL is highly effective in improving Listening and Speaking skills, Conventional ESL may offer better results in Reading and Writing.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of ILL & CESL**

#### Immersive Language Learning (ILL)

##### Advantages:

- **Enhanced Communicative Competence:** ILL fosters deeper language acquisition by embedding learning in real-world contexts, which can enhance students' ability to use language effectively in various social interactions and practical situations.
- **Promotion of Spontaneous Language Use:** Immersive approaches encourage learners to use language in authentic contexts, leading to more natural and fluent communication skills that are essential for real-life language use.
- **Increased Motivation Through Engagement:** The dynamic and interactive nature of ILL can significantly boost learner motivation by providing engaging and contextually rich experiences that make language learning more appealing and relevant.

##### Disadvantages:

- **Potential Overemphasis on Practicality:** While ILL excels in real-world language use, it may lack systematic instruction in foundational grammar and vocabulary, which can be crucial for comprehensive language development.
- **Resource Intensive:** Effective implementation of ILL often requires significant resources, including access to immersive environments or technology, which may not be feasible for all educational settings.
- **Possible Overwhelm for Beginners:** Learners with limited language proficiency may find the immersive approach overwhelming without a solid grounding in basic language structures, potentially leading to confusion or frustration.

#### Conventional ESL Programs (CESL)

##### Advantages:

- **Systematic Skill Development:** CESL provides a structured approach to language learning, focusing on explicit instruction in grammar, vocabulary, and language rules, which helps build a strong foundation and systematic understanding of language.
- **Focused Academic Preparation:** Traditional methods emphasize academic literacy and formal writing skills, making them well-suited for preparing students for academic and professional communication tasks.



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- **Measurable Outcomes:** The structured nature of CESL allows for clear assessment and tracking of progress, facilitating the evaluation of learners' improvements through standardized testing and metrics.

Disadvantages:

- **Limited Real-World Application:** CESL's focus on formal language instruction may not adequately address the complexities of real-world language use, potentially limiting learners' ability to apply language skills in authentic contexts.
- **Reduced Engagement and Motivation:** The conventional approach may sometimes result in a passive learning experience, with repetitive drills and exercises that can lead to reduced student motivation and engagement.
- **Inflexibility in Catering to Diverse Needs:** Standardized curricula in CESL programs may not account for the varying needs and learning styles of individual students, which can hinder personalized instruction and support.
- **Overemphasis on Accuracy Over Fluency:** CESL may prioritize grammatical precision and error correction, which can inhibit students from developing fluency and spontaneous language use and may contribute to language anxiety.

### Conclusion

This comparative study highlights significant differences between Immersive Language Learning (ILL) and Conventional ESL programs in terms of their impact on language proficiency. The findings indicate that ILL is particularly effective in enhancing Listening and Speaking skills, showing substantial improvements in these areas. This suggests that immersive approaches may offer a more engaging and effective method for developing oral communication skills. On the other hand, Conventional ESL programs demonstrate notable gains in Reading and Writing, implying that traditional methods may be better suited for strengthening these skills.

The analysis of effect sizes supports these conclusions, with ILL showing large positive effects in Speaking and Listening, while Conventional ESL presents more pronounced effects in Reading and Writing. These results emphasize the importance of selecting the appropriate instructional method based on the specific language skills targeted. To optimize language proficiency, it is crucial to tailor educational approaches to the distinct strengths and weaknesses of each program. This study contributes valuable insights into the comparative effectiveness of these language learning methodologies, guiding future instructional strategies and research in the field.

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