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Technology-Mediated Task-Based Teaching for Saudi EFL Learners



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Abstract

This study explores how the application of task-based instruction (TBI) in alliance with Web 2.0 tools by means of digital tools and four-skill-integrated tasks enhances self-governed learning within an online learning setting. In this regard, data were included in the course. Data were assembled through post-surveys, midterm reflections, and final group interviews. The findings demonstrate that digital tools and tasks employed enhanced learner independence in many ways. Organized tasks allowed learners to work individually to produce material, whereas open tasks enabled them to be more independent in examining their understanding of a specific topic via social interaction. Importantly, instructor scaffolding via modelling and suitable feedback influenced learners' self-managed accomplishments in an online learning environment. The current study determines that personal dedication to the course and mental involvement with the learning material contribute to the level of learning independence and the degree of social interaction within a wholly online learning environment.

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1 Introduction

Owing to the fast growth of online learning assisted by modern technologies, online learning courses are gaining popularity and becoming a more viable recourse for many adult learners. Today's second language learners can readily access a range of online resources through listening to podcasts, watching YouTube videos, talking to native speakers, and reading online newspapers and linking with others anywhere in the world at any time. Consequently, several language programs have embraced the potency of E-education to present courses in a composite format or entirely over the internet with the target of reducing cost, improving productivity, and increasing flexibility (Henry, 2014). Besides educational-program management systems like Moodle and Blackboard, commercial network-based platforms developed by language experts, such as Mango & Livemocha (1999), have been increasingly utilized to offer online course materials. Although online courses present some benefits (e.g., self-pacing, convenience) over traditional classroom learning settings, some inherent disadvantages, such as the absence of face-to-face communication and the need for self-management, are evident (Gass & Mackey, 2006). Therefore, learners may seem less stimulated, and hence engage less vigorously in the learning activities and fail to benefit from the learning opportunities provided by

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online courses. Hence, it is important to create a motivating learning environment to further collaboration and interaction via community building, and chiefly, to cultivate learner interest and capability to learn independently. An increasing number of studies concerning Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) investigations, ranging from quantitative to qualitative research, have demonstrated the advantages and drawbacks of online learning. In addition to accessibility and flexibility, independent learning and increased collaboration are other major positives of CALL (Henry, 2014; Adolphs & Schmitt, 2004). Findings show that learners responded favorably to online courses and performed as well as those in face-to-face environments (Blake, 2011). Nevertheless, deficiencies in computer skills, instructor guidance for effective learning, and face-to-face interaction are considered potential disadvantages of CALL (Hubbard & Reinders, 2013). Regardless of the fact that current research bolsters our understanding of the impacts of CALL on second language improvement and its advantages concerning independent learning, most research findings stem from hybrid courses or technology-enabled learning in the form of extracurricular tasks (Schenker, 2012, Boulton, 2009). Until now, no evidence has been found from second language research studies concerning the impact of modern technologies on learner autonomy in a fully online setting. It is important for second language instructors interested in conducting online courses to understand how second language students perceive and execute their responsibilities in an online learning environment. Therefore, the current study seeks to examine the usefulness of task-based instruction (TBI) supported by digital tools over learner independence, employing data gathered from an online language course. A number of pedagogical options were selected with the aim of promoting online instruction to facilitate active, interactive, and independent learning. Communication methods, task types, teacher scaffolding, and student involvement with the course were explored to deal with the advantages and drawbacks of online learning environment.

Literature Review

The ideas that support self-governed learning styles have been in the literature for the last three to four decades, and educators involved in language teaching have been attracted by such concepts. Such concepts demand greater communicative approaches in pedagogy, encouraging learners to be an essential part of the process of learning (Wang, 2006). The definition of self-governed learning envisages the capability of taking hold of self-learning (Slimani-Rolls, 2005), and it is also interpreted as the potential for critical reflection and acting independently (Lord & Harrington, 2013). The meaning of learner self-governance may vary from person to person (Richards & Burns, 2012), and it can be confusing to determine the capability of a student who is engaged in such a type of learning and instruction.

Self-governance on the part of a learner is most often considered equal to self- learning without entering a classroom wherein the learner has full control of all the dimensions of the process of learning. In such a conception, an independent learner can be categorized as one who is independent with the needed inner motivation, solely learning without going to a class, and without a teacher's help. Self-learning can also take place in a structurally developed classroom environment, and it can be integrated into the pedagogy of a language course at the time of designing and framing its own objectives. While designing a curriculum for promoting self-governed learning, a student-centered approach is obviously the core and focal point (Adams, 2009; Chamot & Kupper, 1989). Teachers are largely engaged in aiding students to enhance their understanding (Foster & Skehan, 1996). Enhancing self-governed learning also involves enormous elements of collaboration and various phases of learning (Ortega, 2008). Students can be motivated to ponder over the ways of enhancing their learning (Chun, 2011).

It will be better to dwell upon the approach of learning a language in terms of constructivism, particularly in the disciplines which tend to develop self-learning by means of using technological applications and tools. Constructivism leads the learners to pursue learning in a social context, assisting them to inculcate a capability of creating innovative information, solving emerging complexities, and making use of creative potential, and analyzing something critically (Portalla, & Chen, 2010). This concept favors the approaches developed by epistemologists based on collaboration, and emphasizes the active participation of the students in the process of learning (Çelik, 2011). In the theory of constructivism, experience occupies a cardinal role (Yanguas, 2010). Employing this theory in designing a course, the learner is considered a free, dynamic agent bringing exceptional attributes of learning to the context of social learning; hence, a constructivist approach is the main obligation for learning, shifting towards students' motivation for self-learning.

The approach concerning classroom pedagogy emphasizes self-governed learning, and hence educators are supposed to design such opportunities that should enable students to use their potential for learning by themselves and

to create an atmosphere for assuming new behaviors as a self-learner in the given social context (Brown, 1998). The project-based task is one of the examples of this approach as put forth by scholars like Piaget (1989). A series of tasks, while applying an approach relating to assigning a project described by Brown (1998) (interacting with young students), and (interacting with adult learners), are as follows: the teacher is NOT in the front driving seat during lessons; there is a use of multiple activities by the educator involving students' diaries, working in groups, and presentation by means of posters. Learners get familiar with the process of socialization in which they work in collaboration with each other and assume multiple cognitive methods while learning a language. Learners in such settings, while taking more pride in their work, are supposed to be comparatively working for longer time and trying harder to acquire a language. Exploiting a project-based approach in the classroom gives way to social contexts that are new in nature, and there is also a change between the roles of the educator and learners. While employing the concept of social constructivism, an alignment has to be made with McCombs, who defined self-governed learning as one that has an attribute of willingness on the part of a learner to take responsibility for his/her learning, keeping in view his/her aims and objectives at the same time. It leads the learner to have the ability and readiness to work independently in collaboration with others, demonstrating social responsibility.

The capability and readiness to work independently has attracted various scholars because it is very important in language teaching and learning. Achieving this goal necessitates a pedagogical change that envisages self-governed learning in things like adopting project-based and task-based models of learning. According to Adolphs & Schmitt (2004) project-based pedagogy of this kind encourages learners to reflect, interact, experiment, and participate. The role of technology is very crucial in this respect. Nevertheless, various technologies have assorted choices in terms of their affordability and limitations, and hence favor self-governed learning in multiple manners. So, it is also imperative to think about the possible uses of an environment in which technologies are exploited by the learners, and also make them aware of the effectiveness of technological applications to be used as tools in the process of learning.

Most often it is thought that exploitation of technologies while teaching and learning a language accentuates self-governed learning because students can easily access multiple resources, applications, and various environments for learning outside the boundaries of the classroom walls (Barton & Lee, 2013). Yet, for developing a concept of technology that could foster self-governed learning, it has to be accepted that there is an interrelation between technology and pedagogy. Then, dwelling upon a suitable student-centered pedagogy, taking into consideration the affordability of specific tools of technology for learning language independently, and evaluation of the utilization of such affordability are also very necessary. It is useful to conduct case studies to evaluate informal learning out of the classroom by language learners in modern communicative contexts, as these turn out to be very beneficial initiatives in comprehending technological affordability.

Self-governed learning is largely considered a cardinal feature of language learning, and this concept has gained enormous focus from those who have been involved in L2 research and teaching (Brown, 2011). There are various forms of self-governed learning styles to be used in varying degrees according to the learner and the context of learning. One of the definitions of such a type of learning is that it is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Brown, 1998). Self-governance learning lays emphasis on self-dependency and self-direction, and it should not be confused with self-study in terms of access. It rather deals with pursuing the way of self-regulated learning, in which the student comes forward on his own, checks his improvement, and makes an assessment of his attained skills and competencies (Benson, 2013). While exploring the area of learner independence, Benson & Reinders (2011) devised a model dynamic in its nature. This model dwells upon cognition, metacognition, and affective and social aspects of self-governed learning. It also demonstrates how a learner gains more awareness about his learning through self-evaluation and self-contemplation about the process of learning. For independent learning promotion, the educator should make use of 'affective strategies' that deal with having reduction in the anxiety level and motivating the learner to have monitoring of his/ her own stress level and emotional disturbances. The teacher can also play a cardinal role in enhancing self-learning by providing guidance, supervising, and assessing the process of learning.

Computer technologies as well as communicative multimodalities enable L2 educators to develop Task-based Instruction (TBI) for optimum learning that is supposed to have interaction, contextualization, and authenticity. TBI has an enormous potential for encouraging self-regulated learning, meaningfully involving the learners in the process of learning. By means of TBI, learners make use of the target language to accomplish communicative assignments related to real life (Benson & Reinders, 2011). In fact, TBI comes from teaching language by the communicative method that focuses on a meaningful use of language, and is primarily socio-constructive in its very nature (Adolphs & Schmitt, 2004). Tasks suggested by the communicative method are mostly student-centered, wherein learners utilize linguistic resources for sharing and exchanging their knowledge. Instead of making use of uncommon linguistic constructs, TBI tasks provide learners with plenty of chances for negotiating meaningfully, producing language, and focusing on form

as well (Ellis, 2003). Hence, not only does TBI make it easier to acquire a second language but also contribute to its promotion. Several studies have been conducted by Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) researchers to determine how effective TBI is when implemented in various contexts of instruction (Reinder & Benson, 2017). The tasks that are effectively designed motivate L2 learners to participate actively, interact, and collaborate. Most importantly, tasks inspire students to focus on both meaning and form that represent ideas and grammar, respectively. This helps learners be more aware of language intricacies and expands the scope for multilingualism in terms of synchronous and asynchronous CMC (Slimani-Rolls, 2005). Wang (2006) is of the view that the types of tasks influence the manner in which students make meaning by interacting and negotiating together with their language output. For instance, the tasks in which information is exchanged expand students' comprehension of grammatical rules if scaffolded effectively. Moreover, students make use of linguistic scaffolds and enhance their proficiency in the target language. Though the tasks designed in the context of CMC increase learners' interest and engage them interactively in issues concerning multimodalities, proficiency in computer use might cause anxiety for the students, thereby affecting the way they complete a task (Lord & Harrington, 2013).

Even though the previous studies give useful understanding of the way TBI is used while learning on the internet, with its possible advantages and disadvantages concerning self- learning, the issue remains alive regarding effective implementation of TBI for providing learners the kind of interaction that they experience during face-to-face learning. Hence, the research aims to explore the potential affordability and implications relating to synchronous and asynchronous TBI with the multimodalities of "Web 2.0 technologies" linked with learners' self-cognition in the courses that are offered by the universities. The research also tends to find out the features of curriculum design in the offered courses together with the kinds of activities, computer tools and applications, procedures, methods, modes of interacting, and how the teacher intervenes to enhance learners' responses while engaged in online TBI. The study looks into exploring these questions: how do Saudi learners perceive technology-mediated instruction, how these students regulate their own learning in such settings, and finally, how does the instructor's scaffolding help learners.

2 Materials and Methods

The research was conducted employing a fully online Preparatory Year Program (PYP) course over the period of 8 weeks of study during the first semester of the academic year 2014. The period of this research was divided into two four-week periods where learning tasks were repeated every week. Online course allowed learners convenience and adjustability to meet their busy timetable and assist them accomplish the language obligations outside the university. The online environment aimed at developing learners' basic communicative skills and the cultural awareness of their target language. CMS tools were employed to enhance communication and cooperation between learners and the teacher, and to create an online learning community. Task-based learning activities were generated for both collaborative and individual assignments. To assist and optimize the learning process, the teacher provided learners with constant advice and remedial feedback during the course. The teacher hoped that a change from an instructor-centered mode to a student-focused approach via task-based instruction would promote self-governed learning among students. Additionally, online self-access help by employing a class wiki site would encourage and engage students in learning activities individually as well as collaboratively.

Participants

Forty male students of the Preparatory Year Program between the ages of 19 and 21 participated in the research study. All the students were native speakers of Arabic, and they had essential knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar. Since the participants were enrolled in the Preparatory Year Program to fulfil the university English language requirement for professional colleges and were not specifically interested in taking English classes for personal interests, they were not regarded as highly motivated language learners. With respect to computer skills and knowledge, a quick survey measuring students' ability to use the study digital tools indicated that the majority of participants were proficient in Web 2.0 technology in conjunction with social media.

Course Design, Materials, and Digital Tools

The course was constructed contingent on task-based activities suggested by Chapelle's (2001) six principles for CALL task suitability (e.g., authenticity, meaning focus, learner fit) and the main rules of language learning (e.g., input, output, interaction). Alongside input-based activities through an electronic platform, course materials concentrating on output-based tasks were constructed and presented in a separate class wiki2 through Wiki spaces. The wiki class contained a set of wiki pages, which included all the information concerning the course, like course composition, course description, weekly schedule, tools, resources, and grading criteria. A self-made quick handbook was provided to supply learners with a step-by-step guide on how to use digital tools and the wiki site, besides YouTube video tutorials. Daily learning stuff with hyperlinks were indexed under the weekly schedule page. Both instructor-made as well as YouTube videos were employed into daily study plan to assist learners study grammar and vocabulary. All completed activities were uploaded to different wiki pages subsequently. For instance, Voice casts for cultural activities were integrated into the Voice thread display page, whereas blog links were displayed on the Blogger page. WhatsApp was also used for group discussion and recording sharing,

A four-skill-embedded approach alongside specific digital tools was utilized in task design to further authentic interaction (see Table 1). Each digital tool embodied exclusive technical characteristics and pedagogical values. For instance, Blogger allowed learners to practice writing via self-expression, and also share and interchange ideas via social networking, while Blackboard Collaborate was employed to organize web conferencing sessions that helped learners develop interpersonal interaction skills. The same four weeks were repeated four times to determine the duration of this study.

Table 1
Digital Tools and Focused Skills

Weekly Calendar and Topics	Learning Tasks	Focused Skills	Digital Tool Used
Week 1/ Holidays and celebrations	Talk and record about an event you attended during last summer vacation Listen to other recordings and make your own comments	Use of past tense for narration and use of some oral skills. Vocabulary about social events	VoiceThread & Use of WhatsApp Audiobooks
Week 2: Jobs and professions	Talk about a future dream job	Learn vocabulary about occupations, Use of the future format, build up speaking skills	Blackboard Collaborate
Week 3: favorite clothing	In groups of four, carry out a dialog about your favorite clothing.	Use vocabulary on clothing,	demonstrate blackboard dialogue skills
Week 4: Description and imagination	See the image of the beautiful Kingdom Tower in the capital city of Saudi Arabia in the pictures given to you. Talk about the tower, and in groups of four, share your ideas to create the best essay that describes your view of this nice landmark in Riyadh. You can also talk about first-hand experience if you have visited the tower or the area around it lately	Use of description vocabulary, learn how to work in teams and write a collective writing, read your writings to the rest of the class	WhatsApp groups Blackboard

Based on the main topics of chapters, different types of activities were introduced to enhance learners' language competence and cultural awareness (see Table 2). Meaning-centered activities with a focus on certain grammatical

structures were introduced to enable learners to employ the target language to enunciate ideas and practice grammar. For example, one of the activities required learners to employ the present subjunctive to make suggestions and give advice. While some activities required learners to employ interpersonal interaction skills (e.g., expressing about last week), others permitted them to use their analytical skills (e.g., reading a complaint letter, listening to a job advertisement). In order to guide learners during the learning process, instructor modelling was employed as an instructional strategy throughout the course.

Table 2
Digital Tools and Focused Skills

Topic	Task
To Know each other	During this task, students were given a main framework of information to write about each other such as name, age, hobbies, places visited, plans, and so forth
A welcoming speech: take the PYP speech as an example	Dean of Preparatory Year gives a welcoming speech to all new students. Students in this task were required to take that speech and make their own
My favorite trip	Students were asked to write about a trip that they still remember. Guided information was given to them, such as where the trip was, who was participating, what makes it so special, and so on

Data collection and analysis

Week 6 Reflections

Midterm exam during the course and exactly at the sixth week was conducted. Open questions were introduced to allow learners to deliberate upon (1) the effectiveness of CMC tasks and the course wiki, (2) the appropriateness of digital tools, and (3) the usefulness of instructor scaffolding regarding self-governed learning. The open questions provided learners with an opportunity to express their views employing the approach. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the learners (n= 34) posted their responses anonymously through Pollfish surveys.

Post-Surveys

The post-survey was conducted to get students' views regarding the impacts of online courses upon self-governed learning environments and their second language improvement. The post-survey was constructed based upon Lee's (2011a) questionnaire regarding four facets of online independent study relating to online TBI usage (see Table 1). Eighty percent (80%) of the learners (n=32) willingly completed the survey through Pollfish Surveys. The survey contained 12 statements that required answers relating to self-governed learning. In order to find out students' responses to instructor scaffolding, five additional statements were introduced alongside the post-survey. The post-survey employed a five-point Likert scale to measure different views ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Learners showed their satisfaction level by rating the questions from 1 to 5, in addition to an explanation for each score. Learners also rated the usefulness of different kinds of activities and the effectiveness of digital tools.

Final Interviews

Small group interviews were conducted by the instructor at the end of the course, employing Blackboard Collaborate to collect additional information from the learners regarding online self-governed language learning and provide them an opportunity to present ideas for improvement. Every group consisted of 6-7 learners. Each interview was recorded for more analysis and took about 30 minutes. Content analysis of learners' group interviews was used to determine factors that challenged learners and provided them the chance to take up the online course. Students were asked to write their perceptions about the learning process, and their writings were read and examined employing an open coding method to determine the common repeated themes that appeared in the writings. The prevailing themes were later classified into three main categories: advantages of employing online activities and digital tools (e.g., reflective

thinking, social interaction, and teacher scaffolding); challenges linked with online courses (e.g., language proficiency, social presence, and shortage of time); and self-governed learning (e.g., taking initiative, making plans, motivation, and commitment level). Qualitative data obtained from blog posts and comments, along with digital recordings, provided extra evidence to explain and support the results.

3 Results and Discussions

Table 3 presents learners' viewpoints on the use of TBI in connection with self-governed learning. A high rating for statement 2 (Mean= 4.85) shows that most learners responded positively to the online course. The majority of learners agreed that employing TBI was a useful way to improve their language competence and get information regarding the target culture.

Table 3
Participants' Statements about Views of Task-based Instruction

NO	Statement	Mean
1	استطعت تعلم دروس القواعد بشكل ذاتي باستخدام فيديوهات اليوتيوب التي أعدها المحاضر وزودنا بها .	3.68
2	استخدام الأنشطة القائمة على المهام سمح بتعزيز تفاعلي وتعاوني مع أقراني بشكل أعمق .	4.85
3	شعرت براحة أكثر لاستخدام الأدوات الرقمية للقيام بالأنشطة الالكترونية .	4.45
4	استطعت الدراسة اعتماداً على ذاتي من خلال توظيف المواد المتاحة المعروضة على منصة الفصل.	4.02
5	القراءة والاستماع لأعمال زملائي سمحت لي بالتفكير التأملي المعرفي للموضوعات المختارة للمقرر	3.00
6	وجدت السبورة التفاعلية مفيدة لممارسة مهارات اللغة الانجليزية مع معلمي وزملائي.	4.00
7	غالباً ما أعد خططاً مع التفكير التأملي للقيام بالأنشطة القائمة على المهام .	4.11
8	استمتعت باستخدام المدونات وخاصة الصوت للمشاركة وتبادل الأفكار مع زملائي .	4.56
9	قضيت الوقت في الدراسة اليومية وإكمال المهام بانتظام في وقتها المحدد .	4.00
10	بشكل عام، كانت تجربة وخبرة إيجابية دراسة المقرر بشكل الكتروني عن بعد .	4.49
11	وجدت المهام التكاملية للأربع مهارات شيقة وممتعة وقد حفزتني خلال المقرر كاملاً	4.25
12	استفدت من التغذية الراجعة للمحاضر لمراجعة واجباتي وتقييم تقدمي الذاتي .	3.62

When asked regarding the effectiveness of the class wiki, more than 81% of the learners stated that the wiki site designed by the instructor helped them to learn on their own (Statement 4). Learners regarded the class wiki as user-friendly and easy to operate. One of the learners, for instance, stated the following in the final group interview:

أعتقد أن منصات الفصول ويكي هي طريقة منهجية للمهام والواجبات والأعمال التدريسية، حيث يتم عرضها بطريقة منظمة تيسر تشارك الجميع في فضاء تعليم الإلكتروني، ولقد تألفت وتكيفت بشكل سريع مع هذا النظام والمنصات الإلكترونية، ومن خلال معرفة ما هو مطلوب بدقة والوقت. استطعت تنظيم عملية التعلم الخاص بي، وقد ساعدني ذلك على التفكير في كيفية إنهاء مهامي وواجباتي بشكل سليم.

Wiki classes were an important platform for me to find my assignments and tasks. Things were presented in a good, orderly manner and were easier for everyone to participate. It was also easy for me to adapt to the new settings and know my duties and deadlines. I was able to organize my learning tasks, which helped me think of better ways to finish my duties.

The above-mentioned remark shows that an easy approach to the course material and activities promoted the learning process. Learners were able to accommodate their own schedules in order to accomplish online tasks (Statement 7). Learners repeatedly stated that weekly schedules were very helpful to them as they provided them with an opportunity to plan ahead of time. However, a few learners acknowledged that they had to work hard in order to be more competent and not lag in the course timetable. As anticipated, some learners were more self-regulated and self-determined as compared to others. There is also a possibility that they may have had different objectives and motives for their learning. Self- management is one of the basic factors for the prosperity of online learning. Teaching online learners self-management and self-regulation strategies would be particularly helpful to promote learner independent learning, as proposed by Ortega (2008). With regard to time investment, around 78% learners stated that they spent reasonable time learning new stuff and accomplishing course assignments (Statement 9). There was a clear agreement among the learners that the course stuff designed by the instructor inspired them to study on their own (Statement 1). Furthermore, 80% of the learners reported that they concentrated on instructor feedback to rectify their errors and were able to check their own improvement (Statement 12). One learner commented the following during the mid-term reflection:

وتتسم التغذية الراجعة للمحاضر بالسرعة والدقة والعمق، فقد وجدت تلك التغذية الراجعة مساعدة جداً لي، حيث ساعدتني في تحديد أخطائي وكيفية تصحيحها. كما استمتعت بتطوير المدونات الإلكترونية محتواها، كما أصبحت على دراية أكثر بما أستطيع أداءه وتنظيمه واكتشاف أخطائي قبل إرسال الواجبات والمهام المطلوبة مني

Feedback from the teacher was quick and helpful, as it helped me figure out my mistakes and correct them. I particularly liked the blogs and I was more aware about what I can do and can't do before I work on my assignments and send them to the teacher.

These results clearly show that the class wiki provided learners the opportunity to take control of their own learning and focus on making progress in their coursework. Regardless of the favorable results, around 45% of the learners found managing daily tasks demanding. One learner, for instance, admitted being unable to accomplish some of the audio recordings and not attending a few meetings owing to a hectic work schedule. Online independent learning necessitates learners to have self-motivation and self-discipline. This result states that learners' lack of time investment resulted in their poor performance.

As mentioned earlier, most of the learners registered in the course to accomplish the second language requirement for their respective graduation program. It is possible that they were unaware of how much time they required to invest to accomplish their daily course activities. Therefore, some learners were not ready for self-governed online learning. The following remarks from some learners during the final interview demonstrate their approach towards self-managed online learning:

كان من الصعب إنهاء كل واجباتي حيث يتطلب بعضها مزيداً من الوقت، ولم أكن على دراية كيف سيكون المقرر الإلكتروني عن بعد، حيث لم يسبق لي ذلك، وكنت أشعر أن المقررات الإلكترونية أصعب في التعامل معها من المقررات التقليدية، معتقداً أن المهام والواجبات ستكون أكثر مما ينبغي وتمثل عبئاً كبيراً.

"I was not aware of how demanding the online course would be because I had never completed such a course before. It was difficult to accomplish all the assignments as some of the assignments required more time. I felt that the online course was fast and more difficult to handle compared to a regular course. I was overwhelmed by the workload I had to accomplish each day."

لقد خاب أملي لأني لم أستطع إرسال الواجبات في الوقت المحدد مما أثر سلبياً على درجاتي ومعدلي النهائي، والحقيقة فإن هذا المقرر لم يكن من ضمن أولوياتي؛ لذلك لم أعطه وقتاً كافياً، وإني اعترف أنني قد تعودت على انتظار الساعة التي أنتهي من كل تلك المهام والواجبات

"I was sad because I could not turn in my duties on time, and it affected my final marks considerably. Honestly, this course was not my first priority, so I did not spend enough time on it. I believe that I used to wait until the hour to accomplish my assignments."

These remarks confirm the significance of fostering learner self-management and preparedness for independent learning in second language acquisition suggested in earlier studies. In order to become self-governed learners, it is necessary to acquire management skills, like deciding when and how to study, and be aware of how to regulate their own study.

Effectiveness of Digital Tools and Task Types on Learner Self-Governed Learning. In general, learners had a positive experience with different kinds of activities and digital tools employed during the online course. Learners overwhelmingly reported that online tasks kept them engaged throughout the course (Statement 11) and allowed them to work together with their class fellows (Statement 2). Some learners noted that TBI furnished them with ideal circumstances to practice all four language skills. One learner expressed his approval for employing four-skill-integrated activities during the group interview:

لقد أعجبني حقاً وانبهرت فعلًا بأن معظم المهام والواجبات ركزت على مهارات محدودة، وقد أحببت صنع تسجيلات صوتية لدقيقة باستخدام وسائل ومعينات حقيقية أمدنا بها المعلم، فقد ساعدتني تلك التسجيلات الصوتية والشفهية أن أمارس وأنمي مهارات التحدث والنطق والتي كانت أضعف مهارة عندي، بالإضافة إلى ذلك فضلت ربط الموضوعات بعناصر المفردات والقواعد في كل فصل.

I" was really happy to see that most of the duties were focused on certain skills. I liked making recordings because it helped me practice my language and my speaking skills and pronunciation, which were my weak skills. I also liked the linkage between what we study and real life."

The above remark reveals that learners found online tasks to be attractive, as they were related to the course material and real-life situations. The present study employed both instructor-made and learner-chosen activities. Table 4 exemplifies the high ratings of different types of learners' tasks.

Table 4
Learners' Views Concerning Various Types of Tasks

Digital Tools Used	Very interesting	Interesting	Somewhat interesting	Not interesting
Blog writing (Teacher/student-selected)	42.7%	45.9%	9.2%	2.2%
Oral recordings (Teacher-assigned)	69.1%	29.9%	1.00%	0%
VoiceThread interactive activities (Teacher-assigned)	70.1%	22.5%	4.9%	2.5%
Video conferencing (Teacher/student-selected)	50.1%	41.2%	8.7%	0%
Cultural presentations (Student-selected)	54.1%	27.1%	16.8%	2.00%

Both learner-chosen and instructor-chosen tasks for blogs and video conferencing assignments obtained considerably high ratings. Learners remarked that structured tasks provided them clear directions to accomplish the given assignments (see Table 2 for VoiceThread and blog topics). A detailed view of the data reveals that 72% of the learners found audio recordings to be interesting, whereas 68% of the learners were satisfied with interactive tasks through VoiceThread. Instructor-chosen topics appeared to influence the quantity of the work learners produced, because learners spoke and wrote more on the topics assigned to them by their instructor than on the open topics. It is probable that the beginning language learners had little knowledge of the second language, and hence felt less positive expressing their points of view using the less instructor guidance-based open topic tasks.

Unorganized tasks, like open questions, provided learners the choice to probe a specific topic via social involvement (see Table1 for Blackboard Collaborate topic). It was worthy to note that only a handful of linguistically sound learners showed their inclinations for using open topics:

لقد شعرت أن بعض الموضوعات التي يحددها المحاضر أو يعطيها كواجبات تكون مملة ومكررة، لكن اختياري للموضوعات الخاصة بي من فصول المقرر قد سمحت لي بتنمية إبداعي. فقد كان من الصعب علي التعليق أو سؤال بعض الأسئلة إذا كان الزملاء لديهم نفس الموضوعات بشكل مكرر ومتشابه.

I felt some of the course materials or assignments were boring but my content that I get to choose was more into my need and helped me improve myself. And it was difficult for me to share the same comments when students pick similar topics."

Another learner who stayed in the United States of America for two months during his annual vacation expressed his excitement regarding the final cultural assignment: " I was happy that I could select the topic of my own choice as I wanted to share what I learned about American life and their culture with my class-fellows." It is probable that learners felt galvanized to discuss topics concerning their personal experiences. These positive attitudes induced towards the learning activities by motivating learners to make choices and trigger attempts to share their ideas with other learners revealed in the study. With regard to digital tools, the findings revealed that learners not only felt at peace with digital tools (Statement 3), but they also loved employing them, such as Blackboard Collaborate (Statement 6). As per the midterm reflections, the majority of the learners (n=29) discovered real-time communication immensely useful for developing their communication skills. For instance, one learner stated the following:

أعتقد أن السبورة التفاعلية أفضل وسيلة لأنها توفر لي فرصة أن أسأل كل أسئلتي والحصول على تغذية راجعة وقتية تماشياً مثل الفصل الحقيقي. كما استمتعت أيضاً بالتواصل مع زملائي خلال المهام القائمة على تمثيل الأدوار.

For me, Blackboard was the most important tool since it provided me a chance to ask questions and get feedback when needed, as I am in a regular classroom. I also enjoyed my contact with my colleagues when we had tasks like role play."

Many learners described Blackboard Collaborate as a useful tool that can be employed to communicate with each other and improve oral fluency (Yanguas, 2010). As revealed in the table, learners predominantly were in favor of employing Audioboo for oral practice and Blogger for completing assignments.

Table 5
Learners' Views of Effectiveness of Digital Tools in Online Learning

Digital Tools Used	Essential to Me	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Very Useful	Not Useful
Blogger: Personal entries	66.3%	32.1%	1.6%	0%	0%
Audioboo: Oral recordings	72.9%	21.8%	4.7%	0.6%	0%
VoiceThread: Interactive comments	36.7%	44.1%	18.6%	0.6%	0%
Blackboard Collaborate: Oral activities	48.1%	51.1%	0.8%	0%	0%
VoiceThread: Cultural projects	49.8%	38.7%	8.7%	2.8%	0%

Learners also described that podcasting and blogging improved their digital proficiency and collaboration together with online content generation and sharing. In addition, more than 81% of the learners stated that they really enjoyed employing CMC tools for their individual as well as collective activities (Statement 8). Although the beginner learners constructed simple sentences and made several grammatical mistakes, they seriously participated in the activities via collaborative participation through VoiceThread.

Even though 80% of the learners enjoyed employing VoiceThread to communicate among each other, they observed a few flaws, such as the inadequacy to edit audio recordings and the ongoing absence of a timestamp in asynchronous computer-based communication. Some learners reported in their midterm reviews that they often forgot to log into VoiceThread to listen and reply to their classmates, as they did not have any idea when the comments were posted. These remarks endorse Lee's (2014) findings reported in his study concerning pitfalls of nonsynchronous CMC with regard to improving the learning experience through feedback. Owing to the lack of consistent and felicitous peer feedback, roughly 40% of the learners found online commenting ineffective and unhelpful in encouraging further reflection when employing VoiceThread. Therefore, VoiceThread might not be the best choice for social interaction in a constructivist-learning setting. This finding reveals that an online interactive task cannot in itself encourage social interaction and collaboration. Alternatively, it relies upon how much effort students put in while working under testing situations, like routinely checking and posting on peer remarks without waiting for the teacher's reminders. Clear-cut policies and procedures should be expressed in the course syllabus for online collaboration and engagement to ensure learner participation in VoiceThread.

The findings shown in Table 6 seemingly reveal that instructor scaffolding provided learners with motivation and context to understand the learning material and the ways to accomplish online tasks. Eighty-five percent of the learners reported that the instructor motivated them to get seriously involved with the course stuff (Statement 17). They appreciated the perceptibility of the teacher by communicating with them during the whole course. They also stated that the teacher was ready to provide them with extra assistance when required, such as interacting online with them through Blackboard Collaborate (Statement 16).

NO	Statements of the Survey on the Post-Course Survey	Mean
13	لقد طورت من فهمي للمادة المقررة من خلال مشاهدة الأستاذ كنموذج	4.03
14	التغذية الراجعة من الأستاذ ساعدتني في تطوير مهارتي الكتابة والحديث	4.08
15	شروحات الأستاذ كانت واضحة, وساعدتني في فهم أخطائي وتصحيحها .	4.27
16	الأستاذ وفر لي التوجيه المطلوب والدعم خلال الفصل .	4.11
17	الأستاذ شجعني لأخذ دوراً أكثر إيجابية في تعلمي .	4.25

Comments collected from the final group interviews showed that learners praised the dynamic assistance received from the teacher. For instance, one learner reported that the teacher always expressed very encouraging remarks to give feedback, such as "good job" or "excellent" to offer motivation. The study clearly reveals that the instructor's advice and help provided via technology was a crucial factor, as described by one learner during the final group interview:

ولقد حصلت على دعم كبير من المحاضر من خلال البريد الإلكتروني والجوال، حيث كانت ردوده سريعة مساعدة، كما كان على استعداد للدخول والتواصل لشرع الموضوعات الصعبة لدي في فهمها. لقد ساعدني الاتصال والتواصل المنتظم مع المحاضر على التركيز وفهم واستيعاب محتوى المقرر وفي الحقيقة، سوف يكون من الصعب علي ومستحيل أن أكمل هذا المقرر بنجاح دون مساعدة المعلم وتوجيهه.

I had the needed support from the teacher through email and cell phone calls. His response was prompt, and he was ready to explain things to me when I had difficulties understanding them. Being in close contact with the teacher

helped me concentrate and understand the course content. It would have been more difficult for me to continue with the course had the teacher's help not been there."

This finding endorses the fact that the teacher had a greatly visible presence during the entire course, as one important feature of self-learning recommended by Gass (2009). In fact, the teacher regularly facilitated communication between learners by intervening when required through organizing tasks and choosing suitable tools for learners to collaborate with the course staff. This presence of the instructor as beneficial scaffolding permitted the evolution of self-governed learning. This finding authenticates the findings of Lee's (2008) CMC investigation, claiming that expert scaffolding via cooperative interaction promotes linguistic understanding by activating students' zone of proximal development. Beginners, on the other hand, do not automatically know how to learn effectively on their own. In the absence of face-to-face communication, the instructor was still capable of providing important guidance to involve students in accomplishing both collaborative and individual tasks. These findings endorse those presented in earlier investigations showing that the teacher's presence is crucial for computer-based online learning and moreover affects students' inspiration (Kost, 2008). One more useful scaffolding strategy is modeling, which facilitates task help through prompting, cueing, and questioning methods. Learners stated that employing online models helped them gain a better awareness of learning tasks (Statement 13). Instructor modeling, in fact, enhanced learners' comfort level through the use of oral recordings. One of the learners stated the following in the final group interview:

لقد كان أسلوب النمذجة أو صنع النماذج مفيد جداً لي وتارة كنت أستمع لتسجيلات المحاضر مرتين أو ثلاث قبل أن أقوم بعمل تسجيلاتي الصوتية، وقد وجدت توجيه المحاضر خطوة بخطوها مفيد جداً في التعلم وأداء كل مهمة مطلوبة مني، ومع نهاية الأسبوع الثاني، شعرت بمزيد من الثقة بالنفس أثناء المهام المرتبطة بمهارة التحدث وقل اعتمادي على نماذج المحاضر.

"It was important for me to see the teacher model for me when I was listening to the teacher's recordings two or more times before I start my own recordings. The step-by-step instructor's guidance was essential in making out every task required. At the end of week 2 I felt more confident to do the tasks and I was more independent."

Furthermore, eighty-five percent of learners believed that they comprehended the instructor's clarifications of their errors and made error rectifications (Statement 15). The instructor's feedback concerning linguistic features indeed assisted them in enhancing their oral as well as writing skills (Statement 14). The statement below by a beginner shows how important the teacher's corrective feedback:

ولقد ساعدتني التغذية الراجعة من المحاضر أثناء عملية التصحيح الذاتي لأدائي وسمحت لي بالتعرف على أخطائي وتذكرها، على الرغم من أن عملية تصحيح الأخطاء كانت تأخذ وقتاً، إلى أنها في الحقيقة قد ساعدتني كثيرا

Feedback from the instructor was helpful in my self-correction process for my work. It also allowed me to know my mistakes and remember them easily, though this process consumed too much time and effort. It was really helpful.

Beginners with low second language competence are not well equipped to self-correct their own mistakes. Therefore, the teacher plays the role of a facilitator in guiding learners during the error correction process. The results show that linguistic feedback provided by the teacher enhanced attention to grammar for the development of language competence (Lee, 2010). Furthermore, instructor scaffolding via continuous monitoring of learners' progress provided an opportunity for learner independence.

Drawbacks and Recommendations for Future Studies

While the results of this investigation have elucidated our understanding of the usefulness of CMC tasks by employing Web 2.0 and its effects on learner independence during fully online courses, more investigation is still required. The current investigation has many limitations. First, the content and design of the course created by one teacher cannot be indicative of other online environments. Second, the investigation acknowledges the short period of an eight-week session. Subsequent investigation would require probing an increased course duration to find out if task-based instruction (TBI), together with digital tools, influences how second language students independently and collectively work in an online setting. Third, the study only involved beginning language learners whose main goal was to accomplish the university's second language demands. More research is needed to identify how various language competency levels affect the level of motivation and learner autonomy in an online learning environment. Fourth, the study was conducted only in an online scheme. It would be important to conduct future studies comparing courses presented in face-to-face and hybrid schemes to those offered in a completely online format so as to further give evidence to determine if there is a notable distinction in the anticipated presence of student autonomy. Fifth, the study investigated only teacher scaffolding, concentrating on remedial feedback. Further investigations are needed to analyze

how peer feedback influences error correction and focus-on-grammar via self-reflection. Lastly, inherent flaws of self-report surveys are yet another pitfall. Future studies employing both pre- and post-surveys along with a broad qualitative sample, like self-reflections on a weekly basis, will determine an explicit understanding of the usefulness of task-based instructions (TBI) with regard to online independent learning.

4 Conclusion

Although the employment of CMC tasks through digital tools in an online course and its impacts on independent learning are finite in extent and depth, the results of the current study are significant. The study indicates that the implementation of various kinds of digital tools and CMC tasks fostered learner self-governed learning. For instance, the teacher-provided tasks with controlled questions were more attractive to beginners than the less teacher-guided tasks with free topics. With respect to Web 2.0 digital tools, it seems that Audioboo for oral practice and Blogger for writing tasks were more productive in fostering learner autonomy within a fully online learning setting. TBIs reinforce cognitive, social, and intuitive aspects of independent learning by permitting learners to study autonomously and collectively with their classmates and teacher. TBIs allow learners to employ the second language vigorously and purposefully in order to accomplish four-skill-integrated assignments. The results demonstrate that CMS tasks concerning real-life language usage were beneficial in motivating beginners to actively participate in the learning process. The current study involved multiple Web2.0 tools, like Blackboard Collaborate, Voice Thread, and Audioboo, to investigate the function of online learner autonomy. This collective usage of web tools presented significant gains to second language learners, as they independently made audio recordings, created blogs, and collectively interacted with their classmates within a collaborative learning environment. Therefore, the social presence of concurrent and nonconcurrent CMC enhanced learner involvement and motivation and increased learner autonomy. The research recommends that students should be mindful of their own learning through self-determination and self-management in accordance with (Gass, 2009) recommendations. Furthermore, instructor involvement allows learners not merely to acquire the target language, but also to obtain independence. Adequate scaffolding with a focus on grammar allows learners to improve their target language. Instructors should continuously provide both specific and implied remedial feedback via concurrent CMC, like videoconferencing conclaves. The study reaches the conclusion that instructors need to spend a lot of time and effort to develop and create online courses that fulfill the requirements of students similar to those of the face-to-face learning process. Cautiously generated CMC tasks together with effective strategies, such as instructor scaffolding and modeling for thoroughly online instruction, are important to enhance learner autonomy in a productive and meaningful way.

Conflict of interest statement
The author declared that he has no competing interests.

Statement of authorship
The author has a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author has approved the final article.

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Appendix

	Items	Scale
1	Blog writing (Teacher/student-selected)	Not interesting to Very interesting
2	Oral recordings (Teacher-assigned)	Not interesting to Very interesting
3	Voice Thread interactive activities (Teacher-assigned)	Not interesting to Very interesting
4	Video conferencing (Teacher/student-selected)	Not interesting to Very interesting
5	Cultural presentations (Student-selected)	Not interesting to Very interesting
1	Blogger: Personal entries	Not Useful to Essential to Me
2	Audioboo: Oral recordings	Not Useful to Essential to Me
3	VoiceThread: Interactive comments	Not Useful to Essential to Me
4	Blackboard Collaborate: Oral activities	Not Useful to Essential to Me
5	Voice Thread: Cultural projects	Not Useful to Essential to Me
1	استطعت تعلم دروس القواعد بشكل ذاتي باستخدام فيديوهات اليوتيوب التي أعدها المحاضر وزودنا بها .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
2	استخدام الأنشطة القائمة على المهام سمح بتعزيز تفاعلي وتعاوني مع أقراني بشكل أعمق .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
3	شعرت براحة أكثر لاستخدام الأدوات الرقمية للقيام بالأنشطة الالكترونية .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
4	استطعت الدراسة اعتماداً على ذاتي من خلال توظيف المواد المتاحة المعروضة على منصة الفصل.	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
5	القراءة والاستماع لأعمال زملائي سمحت لي بالتفكير التأملى المعرفي للموضوعات المختارة للمقرر	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
6	وجدت السبورة التفاعلية مفيدة الممارسة مهارات اللغة الانجليزية مع معلمي وزملائي.	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
7	غالباً ما أعد خططاً مع التفكير التأملي للقيام بالأنشطة القائمة على المهام .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
8	استمتعت باستخدام المدونات وخاصة الصوت للمشاركة وتبادل الأفكار مع زملائي .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
9	قضيت الوقت في الدراسة اليومية وإكمال المهام بانتظام في وقتها المحدد .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
10	بشكل عام، كانت تجربة وخبرة إيجابية دراسة المقرر بشكل الكتروني عن بعد .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
11	وجدت المهام التكاملية للأربع مهارات شيقة وممتعة وقد حفزتني خلال المقرر كاملاً	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
12	استفدت من التغذية الراجعة للمحاضر المراجعة واجباتي وتقييم تقدمى الذاتي .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
13	لقد طورت من فهمي للمادة المقررة من خلال مشاهدة الأستاذ كنموذج	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
14	التغذية الراجعة من الأستاذ ساعدتني في تطوير مهارتي الكتابة والحديث	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
15	شروحات الأستاذ كانت واضحة وساعدتني في فهم أخطائي وتصحيحها .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
16	الأستاذ وفر لي التوجيه المطلوب والدعم خلال الفصل .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree
17	الأستاذ شجعني لأخذ دوراً أكثر إيجابية في تعلمي .	Strongly disagree to strongly agree