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## EFFECTIVENESS OF USING THE WEB-QUEST TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN AN ESL CLASSROOM

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### ABSTRACT

The place of technological resources in the classroom can never be denied in the present globalized era. Integrating technology in ESL classes affects the creativity, curricular attitude, appropriateness, and interest of the learners in the learning environment. In this regard, action research was carried out in order to solve the problem of weak comprehension skills of the EFL learners of Grade 10. The problem was identified through pre-observations of the indicators. In order to overcome the identified problem, a tool was designed in the form of a pre-posttest. After the completion of the data collection, the researcher analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data that were recorded through pre-posttest and focused group discussion respectively. For the quantitative data, the researcher used SPSS to find out the statistical differences between the reading scores of the participants in the pre-posttest. The mean scores of the pre-posttest were compared which exhibited that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants in their reading comprehension before and after the implementation of the Web-Quest technique. Moreover, a thematic analysis of the Qualitative data was made. The results of the study proved that there was a significant effect of using the Web-Quest technique to improve the reading comprehension skills of the participants.

**Keywords:** Web-Quest technique; ESL classroom; Reading comprehension skills.

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### INTRODUCTION

In the present era of globalization and advancement, the world is facing tremendous changes in every field. The extensive use of technology has made it possible for us to communicate with each other and develop a connection to the relevant strata to enhance our skills and knowledge. The role of teachers in this regard is vital. A knowledgeable, well-informed, and skilled teacher can make the learning environment interactive and productive. Thus, technology in the form of the Internet has made it both easy and challenging to work in different fields. When we talk about the role of technology in education, it has been observed that the educational system needs to be revolutionized with the help of technology as it is beneficial for both, teachers and students. However, the learners and the instructors faced many challenges in integrating technology into the teaching-learning process (Lazar, 2015).

English being an international language plays an important role in communication for every field of life including business, education, and everyday conversations. English is the global language that connects most countries through understandable and smooth conversation. In the field of education, the use of the English language has a central position as it develops the understanding, vocabulary, and communication of the learners (Handayani et al., 2022). The importance of English as a second language cannot be denied as it provides opportunities for non-native speakers to learn and communicate through the English

language for study and other purposes. English as a second language is required for direct interaction between people and the mastery of communication technology. In the education system of Pakistan, the teaching and learning of English as a second language has always been a core part of the discussion.

With the daily changes and innovations in every field, the field of education is also going through evolution. Being a teacher of ESL (English as a second language), there has always been an urge to make the learners proficient and up-to-date through the latest learning skills. The present study aimed at making ESL learners aware of the use of technology to improve their learning skills and develop their interest in the second language. The ESL learners were observed having hesitation with the reading comprehension practices provided by the instructor and this problem needed to be addressed on priority because the latest paper pattern designed by the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education is based on the planning of Students' Learning Outcomes, which are developed and being run for the first time throughout the country at Secondary level students. Therefore, most of the examination is based on comprehension activities and students need to be very proficient and critical in their learning abilities. As stated by Carlson (2019), teachers face many difficulties in ESL classrooms due to the diversity in mental level, cultural background, and individual attitude, it has been a great challenge to let the learners absorb the knowledge based on the language which is not in their mother tongue. Based on this, the study mainly focused on the use of the Web-Quest technique to improve the reading comprehension skills of ESL learners. Reading comprehension skills are not only about developing the understanding of the learners, but it is a source of engaging the learners in fruitful and collaborative activities that would involve them in the process of synthesizing the information in a step-wise and feasible way. Moreover, the Web-Quest technique was utilized by the researcher to integrate the learning process with the use of the latest technology so that the learners can make the best use of their time on the screen for their study and learning purposes.

The study would be beneficial for EFL learners to improve their reading comprehension skills by using the Web-Quest technique. This study would be significant for the EFL learners of Grade 10 and the instructors who are seeking the best ways to integrate the technology and language learning process. The study would also be significant for researchers who want to make further discoveries on the use of ICT and specifically on the use of the Web-Quest technique in any educational scenario in developing countries like Pakistan. The objective of the research is to study the effects of using the Web-Quest technique in an EFL classroom for the improvement of the reading comprehension of the learners.

### **Research Questions**

The study answered the following questions.

1. To what extent do the reading comprehension skills of Grade 10 EFL learners improve through the use of the Web-Quest technique?
2. To what extent the skill of EFL learners to accurately answer the questions improve, after practicing the Web-Quest?
3. To what extent the skill of EFL learners to determine the appropriate contextual meanings of the text improve, after practicing the Web-Quest technique?
4. To what extent the skill of EFL learners to develop their viewpoints improve, after practicing the Web-Quest technique?
5. To what extent the skill of EFL learners to extract the theme out of the provided text improve, after practicing the Web-Quest technique?
6. To what extent the skill of EFL learners to develop meaningful sequences improve, after practicing the Web-Quest technique?

### Conceptual Framework of the Study

Learning through the Web-Quest according to Lahaie (2008) is considered to be one of the roots of the constructivist approach to allow learners' performance in research-based activities which enables them to practice and bring high thinking ability. Furthermore, the studies of Abu-Elwan (2007) state that Web-Quest is very effective in developing higher-level thinking, problem-solving, and creativity of the learners. Also, a study by Cavalho (2007) states that Web-Quest is a technique to integrate technology and learning in a classroom where the students get autonomous content and quick access to web-based information to enhance their problem-solving skills. Figure 1 demonstrates a brief overview of the conceptual framework to be followed to conduct the present study.

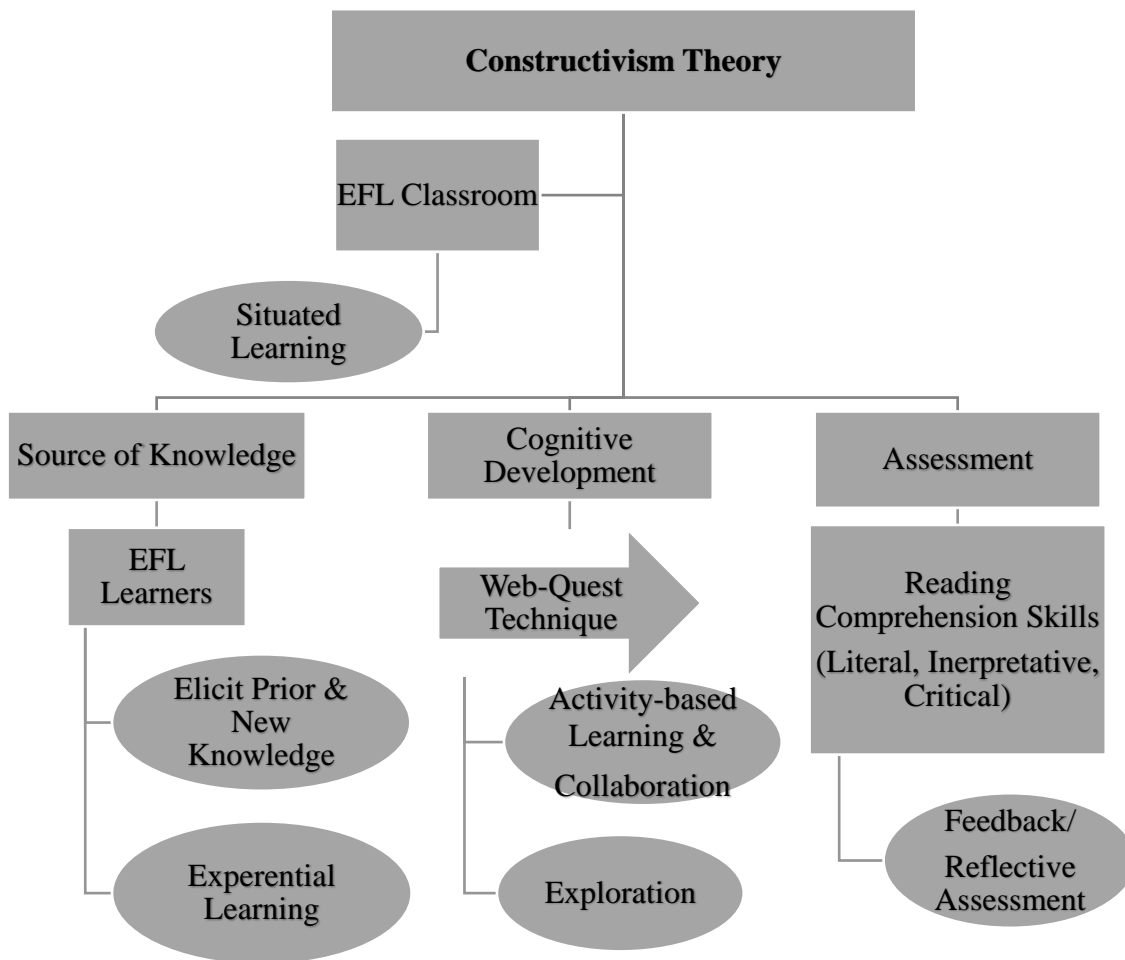


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

Thus, in the light of the literature and according to the requirement of the present study the researcher developed the conceptual framework of this study based on Constructivism theory. According to Figure 1, the study was based on the Constructivist approach where situated learning took place in the EFL classroom, the participants connected their prior knowledge with the new one and learned through the experiences according to the classroom situation. According to the constructivist theory the cognitive development of the participants was made through the activity-based and collaborative learning environment. Furthermore, the learners constructed new knowledge through the exploration by using the web-based resources and the teamwork assigned after every web-quest. The participants were assessed through the scores of their reading skills and their feedback was taken in the form of reflections which they gave on their learning experience with the web-quest technique.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **English as a Foreign Language**

Teaching and learning are a bi-face process involving both ends at the same time. The core thread binds the sides together and is the channel of communication. Communication has been done in multiple ways however, language is the strongest way to enhance the teaching and learning process. English is a widespread language to be used as a medium of instruction throughout the globe. The problem with the use of English as a medium of instruction is a concern because it is not their native or National language. Those with English as a second language, considerably go through difficulty in learning. The issue does not only prevail for the students but for teachers as well. There is a strong need to understand the circumstances and analyze the context of their teaching and learning experiences to offer some improvement in the process of teaching and learning.

The English language in the context of Pakistan is taught as a subject at all levels of education. In most of the private sector institutes the medium of instruction is also English, therefore it would not be wrong to say that it has become like the blood in veins. But in case of public schools and non-elite schools, the influence of the English language is not very strong (Yaqoob & Zubair, 2012). A number of studies have been conducted on EFL learning in the scenario of Pakistan on the reading and writing issues, mode of instruction, teaching strategies in EFL classrooms, curriculum, and the comparative analysis of the language teaching by the public and private sector schools (Rasheed et al., 2011).

### **The Concept of Reading Comprehension**

Goodman (1970) stated that the reading aims at comprehending what is being addressed by the writer. In addition, the connection-building between known and unknown information is called reading comprehension (Bernhardt & James, 1987). Initiating with the concept of reading comprehension with these definitions, the contemporary ideas about reading comprehension skills are discussed here. The reading comprehension skills are proven to be developed as stated by Koda (2005) when the readers are able to use their prior knowledge to combine it with the existing knowledge and derive new ideas. It claims that the process of reading comprehension is not bound to the understanding only, but it needs the readers to think, perceive, and utter their views and ideas through the interpretations they have developed. Therefore, reading comprehension refers to a process of reading, understanding, and reflecting on the provided text. It has two elements, the first is vocabulary and the second element is the provided text or material. Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as an activity of simultaneously extracting and constructing the meanings of the provided text through interaction and involvement in the language.

### **The Concept of Web-Quest**

In the race of technology, there have been a number of the latest ways used in order to communicate information with more collaboration and perfection. One such technical tool is Web-Quest which is used in educational scenarios to assist the interactive learning process. The Web-Quest was developed by Dodge (1995) and March (1995) on the basic philosophy of constructivism in order to enhance the learning process through collaboration and scaffolding. Dodge (1995), defined Web-Quest as an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information comes from the web.

There is a wide range of technological tools that are in use in the educational field in order to assist influential learning processes. However, the use of the Web-Quest technique in the scenario of EFL classrooms has always proved to be feasible and fruitful for the improvement of the learning skills of the students. Dodge (1997) suggests that Web-Quest is one of the best methods to engage learners through a deeper understanding of the content, he also recommends that the Web-Quest carries five basic elements in its structure that include; an introduction, task, process, evaluation, and conclusion. These elements are sequenced as mentioned in Figure 2.

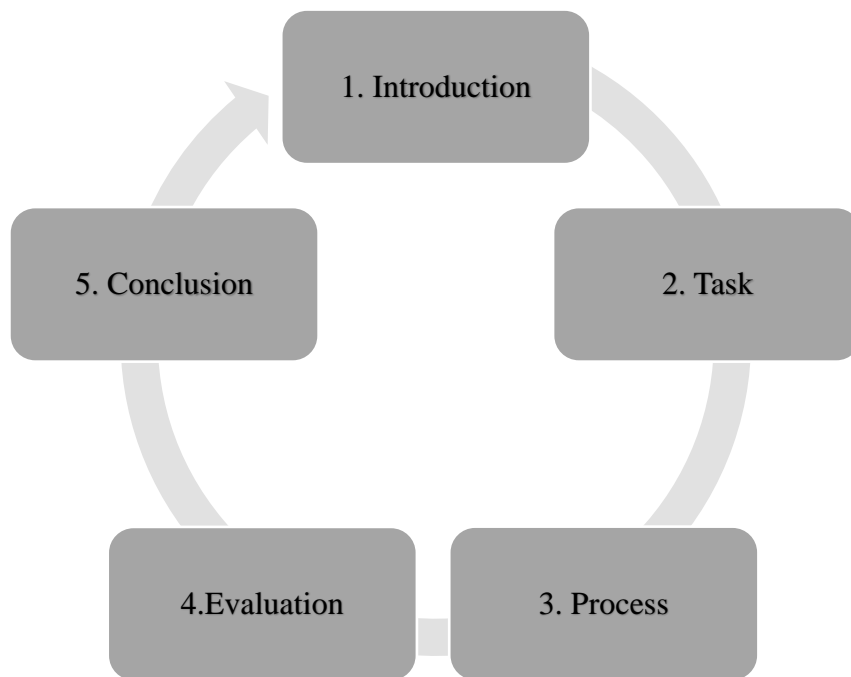


Figure 2. Structure of the Web-Quest.

Mostly, the web-quests are group activities that end in creating a document that assembles, analyzes, synthesizes, and summarizes the information. It is developed through authentic resources that cover daily-life problems and their solutions. It is a teaching tool that is widely used throughout the world as we Google search the term “Web-Quest”, it shows 9,150,000 results (18-01-2024). A large number of Web-Quests have been developed and shared during the last two decades because they help learners to develop appropriate learning experiences through language-oriented activities. Moreover, the significance of the Web-Quest technique in EFL is described through its efficiency in the level of linguistic knowledge, the results of the tasks in the form of rubrics, the collection of authentic resources, which can be used to plan the improvement of language skills (Perez, 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The current study was an action research that was based on a pragmatic framework as its foundation lies in the problem that exists in the classroom scenario of the researcher and the improvement in the current setting is focused on. The study was conducted by the researcher as an educator with the collaboration of the participants and the language experts of the school, to overcome the problem of weak comprehension skills of the EFL learners, through the utilization of the Web-Quest technique.

The mixed-methods research design was used in the study as required by the research questions; the effectiveness of the Web-Quest technique could be studied through the reading scores.

### **Participants of the Study**

The researcher conducted Action research using a convenience sampling technique, on the students of Grade 10 who were ESL learners. The number of participants was 40 from the initial to the final stage of the study.

### **Implementation Plan**

The study was carried out based on a systematic plan that is demonstrated in Figure 3.



Table 1 shows the results of the t-test applied to the scores of the 5 indicators of reading comprehension skills of the participants. The first column carries the indicators of the reading comprehension skills showing 1 for the pre-test and 2 for the post-test, the second column carries the results of the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test, column 3 carries the number of participants that is denoted by N=40. Forth column contains values of standard deviation for the mean of each indicator and finally, the last column carries the mean standard error of each indicator for the pre-test and the post-test. In order to find out the significant difference between the scores of pre-test and post-test of the participants within the same group, a paired sample t-test was calculated (Al Riyami, 2015).

Table 2. Paired samples test calculated for level of significance.

Pair	Mean	SD	T	Df	PSig. (2tailed)	Effect Size
Question/Answers	-.950	.714	-8.411	39	.000	80
Contextual Meanings	-1.175	.549	-13.524	39	.000	91
Viewpoints	-1.100	.379	-18.360	39	.000	94
Main Idea	-1.375	.740	-11.747	39	.000	88
Sequencing	-1.400	.709	-12.490	39	.000	89

Table 2 illustrates the results of the t-test which shows that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of all five indicators in the pre- and post-test. The level of significance between the mean scores of all five indicators in  $p=0.000$  shows that there is a significant difference between the mean scores in pre- and post-test of each pair of the test items. The values of Pearson's  $r$  range from -1 to 1 and also tell about the direction of the linear relationship, as the positive value shows a direct relation between the variables and the negative value shows an indirect proportion between the variables (Bhandari, 2022).

### Focused Group Discussion

The focused group discussion was conducted in order to take the viewpoints about the lived experience of the participants to use the web-quest technique to improve their reading comprehension skills. According to Smith and Dunworth (2003), the lived experiences of people are a collection of the factors that lead to make differences in their viewpoints about reality. Thus, the subjective experiences are understood and interpreted through thematic analysis of the transcribed data gathered through the focus group discussion of the participants.

The Qualitative data gathered through the Focused Group Discussion were analyzed by using the themes. For the analysis, the researcher coded the data under the following themes on the basis of the comprehension skills of the participants followed by the constructive theory that laid the foundation of the current study; Access to the Web-Quest, difficulty level of the content, relevance of the resources with the syllabus topics, components of the reading comprehension skills, challenges in the use of the Web-Quest technique. Table 3 exhibits the coherence between the generated themes with respect to the constructive approach.

Table 3. Derived themes and constructive approach.

Themes	Constructive Approach
Accessibility	Learning through experience
Appropriateness of the resources/material	Relate and modify existing knowledge with experiences
Difficulty level of the resources	Interacting prior knowledge with new knowledge
Transformation of Comprehension skills	Learning through practice, scaffolding
Challenges	Self-reflection for new knowledge

## **Discussion**

The study was conducted based on the constructivist theory which was followed by the pragmatic paradigm of educational research, their combination with the mixed-methods research design helped to carry out the research which proved that the hands-on activities and experiences of the participants made them improve their knowledge that is based on the prior knowledge. The participants connected their previous knowledge about the basic vocabulary, comprehension skills, and use of the web to the new knowledge of using the web-quest for their comprehension activity. Moreover, according to the pragmatic paradigm of the study participants developed a collaborative learning environment which developed a sense of ownership and civic sense of the participants. The participants had a very positive attitude towards the use of the web-quest technique for their other subjects as well. This aspect of the study is among the side learning of the research, the informal observations and findings of these aspects may help future researchers in the field of education to think of the social, moral, and cognitive development of the learners at different levels, followed by different contextual backgrounds.

The study also concluded with the finding that the critical thinking ability of the participants may be improved by the use of technology. Specifically, the use of the web-quest technique can make the learning outcomes significantly different in case of reading comprehension skills. Here, it seems to be the ethical responsibility of the researcher to mention that the findings of the current study cannot be generalized to all the school settings or all the levels of the learners. However, there is a need to bring innovation in teaching methodologies to keep pace with the present-day world of advancement and technology.

Hence, the study conducted through the mixed methods proved that the participants had not only achieved the academic goals by improving the quantitative results through reading scores but they also had developed a remarkable understanding of the objectives of the study, as they expressed their experiences through focus group discussion by giving comprehensive feedback about the positivity of using the web-quest technique along with the challenges that they faced during the study. On the basis of the literal support from the existing research, it has been proved that the application of the Web-Quest technique is effective in improving the reading comprehension skills of EFL learners. Moreover, it has been shown through the study that the material and the resources must be efficient and according to the learning needs of the participants. The researcher had taken into consideration the basic learning requirements of the participants including; the level of learners, the relevance of the selected Web-Quest with the syllabus of participants, the topics having activities of reading comprehension, accessibility to the web and the resources, the combination of individual and group activities, and time management for every lesson.

The use of the Web-Quest technique enhances the reading comprehension skills of EFL learners. Most of the problems related to reading comprehension are reduced by using the reading comprehension skills of the learners. The specified components of reading comprehension gave a significant expression of improvement found through the results of the t-test. These results were further supported by the views of the participants. The use of the web-quest technique made the participants confident to use web-based activities for their learning process. The views of participants were taken through which they talked about their experiences with the technique. The participants had an interactive, collaborative, and knowledgeable experience that made them think out of the boundaries of their textbook knowledge and discover wider areas for their better learning experiences. The views of participants also illustrate that they found the web-quest technique suitable for their learning in aspects other than comprehension, they learned to improve their digital skills, teamwork, self-studies, and globalization through their learning. Thus, according to the findings of the t-test, effect size, and viewpoints of the participants, the Web-Quest technique was a very fruitful and innovative idea to improve their learning process in an interactive way.

The introduction phase of the web-quest helps the learners to understand and predict the content of the text to be read. Phase 2 of the web-quest contains the instructions and a list of the tasks to be performed by the learners. The process phase contains all of the required study resources and materials about the



relevant topic and according to the study needs of the learners. The last phase contains the rubrics to summarize the performance of the learners. It is also noted that the availability of web-based activities, resources, and access to the laboratory plays a vital role in motivating learners toward effective reading through authentic texts (Rachmawati et al., 2018).

According to Soraya (2021), it is witnessed that the use of Web-Quest technique improves the collaborative skills of the learners as they work on assignments and actively participate in the given tasks. The current study in this regard provides the findings that are positive towards the utilization of the web-quest technique for the improvement of reading comprehension skills in the EFL classroom. The participants expressed in the focus group discussion that they had a great learning experience because of the collaborative tasks assigned by the teacher. They said that they performed group tasks with more ease because their fellows had the knowledge that they did not have this is the way they shared differentiated ideas through the collaborative assignments. Moreover, the improved academic performance of the learners is also observed through pre-posttest.

In addition, Anggry (2018) stated the positive effect of the Web-Quest on the active participation of the learners as they get to work in a more interactive and sophisticated environment through this web-based activity. In the current study, it was found that the participants were involved in the class participation more enthusiastically and with more focus on the lesson taught. The level of confidence among the participants was among the side findings of the study that were not meant for the research conduction. Moreover, there were also the aspects of confidence, interest, cooperative learning, and social connections that were found during the observations of the study. These side findings of the research open the areas for more research in the field of education.

It is also worth noticing that the use of the Web-Quest improved the digital literacy of the learners, as they practiced collaboration through group and pair work activities, the use of technology makes the learners think out of the classroom situations in order to learn on their own. The participants had been informed before the formal conduction of the study about the use of the web-quest technique. Therefore, they tried practicing the use of the Internet at home. The further collaboration with the whole class in the scenario of the computer lab made them use the internet with more confidence with the assistance of the teacher. Although these findings are not a part of the formal results of the study, however, they might be considered as the side learning points for the study. Therefore, these points add more to the meaningfulness of the Web-Quest technique and open a new window towards the exploration of other areas of improvement for a healthy and productive learning atmosphere.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the present classroom situations of Pakistan context, the EFL learners and the instructors must be equipped with the latest technical skills and tools. The current study focused on the use of the Web-Quest technique to initiate such a learning process that connects the learners and the teachers to the latest global learning hub that possesses authentic and accessible content in a feasible and affordable way. The study deeply analyzed the implementation of the Web-Quest in an EFL classroom in order to improve the reading comprehension skills of the learners at the secondary level. These skills are placed in the list of the fundamental parts of the basic four language learning stages. Thus, the study aimed at helping the EFL teachers in the context of Pakistan, to create a collaborative, interactive, and communicative classroom environment that would make the learners develop a deep urge to learn the second language with enthusiasm and interest.

In addition, based on the constructionist approach and inquiry-based learning, the study involved a cooperative learning environment while using the web-quest technique. It worked out to be a stimulus for the instructor providing an appropriate methodology making the teaching-learning process interactive and

fruitful. Among the most significant contributions of the study was the collaboration of the students which made them more confident and active towards the learning process.

### **Way Forward**

The suggested way forward after concluding the study is that there is a dire need to encourage teachers to modify their teaching methodologies by using technology in their teaching practices. Further research might be conducted to enhance the cumulative learning skills of the students by using the Web-Quest technique.

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