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ELT IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: THE BOUNDARIES AND BEYOND

The Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use of Online Learning amid the Covid-19 Pandemic: EFL Learners' Perspectives

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Abstract

This article reports a small part of the study on EFL learners' perceptions, challenges, and expectations on online learning amid the Covid-19 pandemic. This mainly presents the perceived usefulness and ease of use of online learning during Covid-19 Pandemic. The participants of this study were the second semester students of Magister of English Study Program in one public university in Banten. Questionnaire was distributed to the participants to collect the data. The research results show that the students perceived positively on the usefulness of online learning. The students gave positive responses on online learning in terms of learning autonomy, motivation, discipline, and technological skill. In relation with the ease of use of online learning, the students give positive perceptions. They perceived online learning positively dealing with its flexibility, accessibility, and the students readiness dealing with technical things. Despite several challenges of online learning, EFL learners in magister of English study program perceived online learning positively.

Keywords: EFL learners, perception, online learning

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has turned education in the world into online learning, including higher education. Like other university students around the world, Indonesian university students also do online learning at their homes. They make use of several online learning platforms whether synchronous or asynchronous online learning,

As one department in one public university in Banten, magister or graduate program of English Education department has been conducting online learning. The lecturers and students has interacted using online learning platforms for two semesters. Thus, whether this online learning useful or not, need to be investigated.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the studies on online learning had been conducted. Some studies indicated that online learning enhanced the students' self-regulation, learner reflection and offered the freedom of content, space, medium, and access (You & Kang, 2014; Kongchan, 2012, Manowong, 2016; Westberry, 2009; Hartnett, et al, 2011). However, online learning also has challenges (Hildebrandt & Teschler, 2006; Ghaffari & Emami, 2011, such as the ease and effectiveness of online learning, self-discipline and procrastination.

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, several studies on online learning, especially in higher education around the globe have been conducted. Some studies found that online learning during the

Covid-19 pandemic was negatively perceived by university students due to technical and financial issues (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Barzani & Jamil, 2021; Zboun & Farrah, 2021). However, some studies indicated that for higher education students, online learning amid the Covid-19 pandemic offered benefits in terms of accessibility, self-learning, flexibility and cost (Şenol, Lesinger, & Çağlar M, 2021; Almahasees, Mohsen, & Amen, 2021). Viewed from lecturer's perspective, in Indonesia, Simamora, et al, (2020) found that online learning applications are beneficial for some lecturers to deliver lecture material without face to face, although there are some obstacles such as inadequate internet access.

In Indonesian context, the study on how EFL learners in higher education perceived online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic have been conducted (Agung, Surtikanti, & Quinones, 2020; Nugroho et.al, 2020). Those studies reported undergraduate students' perception on online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. None were conducted to find out the magister or graduate program's perceptions on online learning amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study is intended to investigate how the EFL learners perceive online learning in learning English during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Online Learning

Several definitions of online learning have been proposed. Khan (1997) defined online learning as the delivery of instruction to a remote audience using the Web as an intermediary. In addition, Watson & Kalmon (2005) argue that online learning is education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the internet. The later definition, for the purpose of the study, is taken.

The Use of Online Learning in Language Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning benefits students in language learning as it provides the students with resources or information and place for practicing language skills. Online learning provides tools for language learning and tools for acquisition of language skills.

Research Method

This case study was conducted at graduate or magister program of English Education department in one public university in Banten. The research participants were fifteen second semester students who voluntarily joined the research. Most of them are part time students as they own their main job. To collect the data, questionnaire adapted from Kongchan (2012) and Manowong (2016) was used. This is a 20 item closed-ended questionnaire using five-lickert scale consisting of ten statements which deal with the students' perception on the usefulness of online learning and ten statements of the students' perceptions on the ease of use of online learning. The data taken from questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively employing the data analysis technique proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The analysis was done through three procedures: data reduction which involved the categorization based on the themes, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Findings and Discussion

This section displays the result as well as its discussion of questionnaire dealing with students' perceptions on online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The detail will be elaborated below.

a. The Perceptions of Usefulness of Online Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The result of questionnaire showed that the students agreed online learning was helpful in the context of pandemic era. The diagram below explained that point:

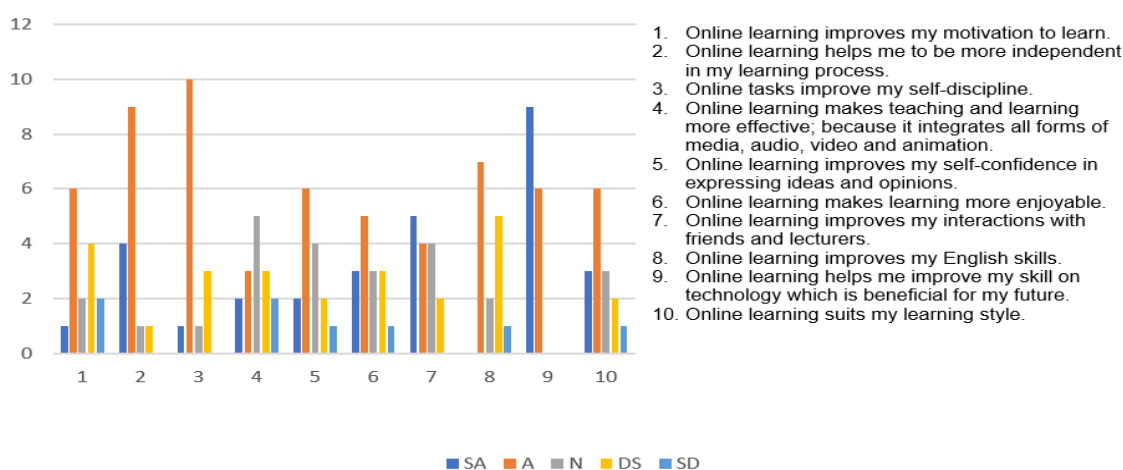


Diagram 1
Students' Perceptions on the Usefulness of Online Learning

All students (100%) agreed that online learning improved their technological skill. Since the students were more familiar with the use of applications, websites, and many more which were used for their learning, they put themselves in advance for future learning. As stated in OECD Learning Compass 2030 there were three skills needed for future learning: practical and physical skills, and using new information and communication technology devices (OECD, 2019).

Not only improving students' technological skill, another benefit was encouraging students to be more independent. There was 86% of students claimed that online learning could raise their autonomy; while 73% of the students agreed that online learning improved their self-discipline. As it has been stated by the previous research in their study, online learning is conducive to students who favor self-regulated learning (Holmes and Gardner, 2006; You & Kang, 2014; Almahaasees, Mohsen, & Amen, 2021). In terms of learning style, 60% of the students confirmed that online learning could accommodate the students different learning style.

In terms of self-confidence, 53% of them agreed that their confidence in learning English as foreign language improved well. Confidence has been the focus of the studies on learning English as the foreign language around the globe (Vazques, 2017; Elaidi, 2016; Jamila, 2014).

Interesting point found from the students found that online learning was also enjoyable, claimed by 53%. Crisfield and White (2012) stated that motivation is considered as one of the crucial factors that can affect individual differences in acquiring a language. However, less than 50% students agreed that online learning was motivating in which 39% of them disagreed that online learning was useful and 13% of them stayed neutral. This point is to be the lecturers' attention as students lacking motivation can easily forget original goal, quickly become lost within the course, and ultimately withdraw (Chaney, 2001).

In terms of language mastery, the students perceived positively although it was not significant compared to other factors mentioned before. 46% of the agreed that online learning helped them learn language skills, while 39% of them disagreed, and 13% stayed neutral. This probably correlated with what they perceived regarding effective learning as the number of the students who agreed, disagreed, and undecided were the same. 33% of the students voted in each category that online learning made teaching and learning more effective; because it integrated all forms of media, audio, video, and animation.

Dealing with learning interactions, online learning was regarded less useful. 40% of them did not support that online learning could improve their interactions with lecturers and peers. This has been explained by Rovai, et al (2005) who suggested that online students feel a weaker sense of connectedness and belonging than on campus students who attend face-to-face classes.

b. The Perceptions of the Ease of Use of Online Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The data displayed that the students showed their positivity on the ease of use of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic as illustrated in the following diagram:

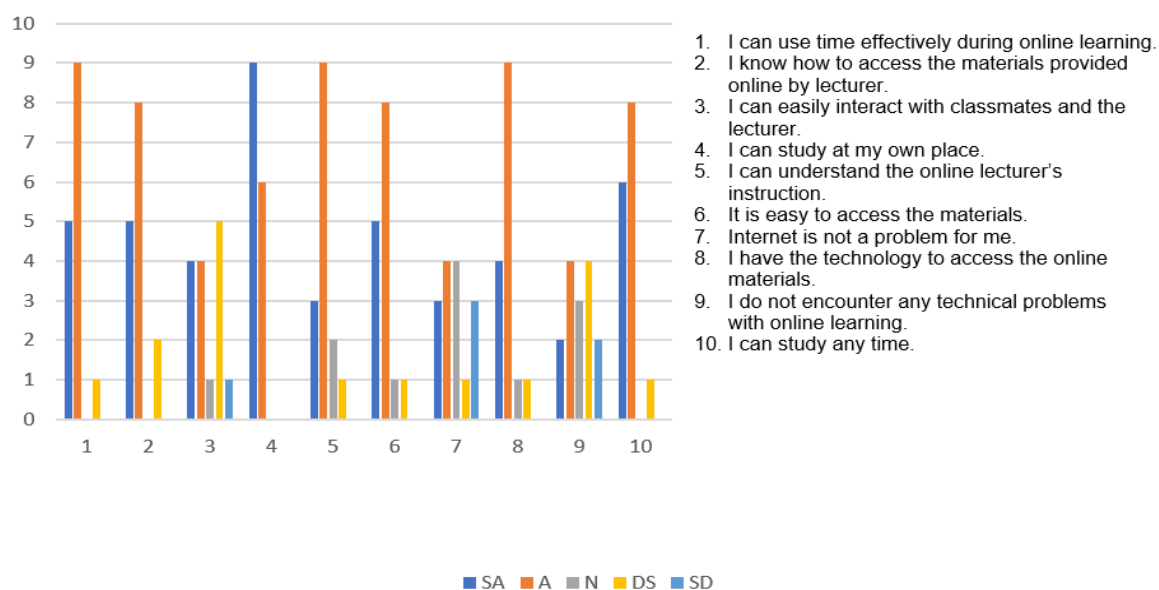


Diagram 2
Students' Perception on the Ease of Use of Online Learning

Students' positivity displayed from diagram 2 showed the ease of use of online learning, especially learning flexibility and accessibility. This has been predicted by Thomson (2010) that online learning made the students focus more of their attention on the content of the course and less on issues such as parking, traffic, and other problems that may arise when attending a traditional class environment.

In terms of place, all students (100%) agreed that online learning giving the flexibility. They flexibility provide students feel free to study anywhere and anytime. It is supported by 93% of them agreed that they could study any time and they could use their time wisely. This recognized with their perception that online learning suited their learning style and independent learning.

In terms of accessibility, 86% of the students claimed that learning material could be accessed by themselves. Furthermore, 86% supported that they knew how to access the material. This percentage of students agreed that they had technological skill to access the material. This correlates with the previous result on perception that online learning can facilitate technological aspect even they still coped technical problems and internet connection during online learning as it had been found by Agung, Surtikanti, and Quinones (2020) who reported that the respondents had problems in the accessibility of teaching media.

The students found that this online learning was less useful in terms of their interactions with their lecturers and friends, however, technology keeps them to collaborate in interaction. It is supported by 53% that they could easily interact with their lecturers and classmates.

From the point learning instruction, 86% of the students coincided that they could understand the learning instruction. This could support them with the bulk of assignments and activities during online learning.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In terms of the usefulness of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, the students found that online learning was useful regarding technological skill mastery and learning autonomy. This means that online learning still can be a hope during this situation. Dealing with the students' perception on the ease of use of online learning, the students positively perceived positively regarding the flexibility and accessibility. This might help the students as all of them are part time students who own their main job. Finally, due to the limitation of the study, a larger scale study employing other methods is recommended to gain deeper and different perspectives on EFL perception on online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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