Indonesian EFL Students' Perception Towards Online Learning: Voices From Freshmen

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Abstract. Covid-19 pandemic has inevitably shifted the conventional face-to-face learning in higher education institution to online learning. This study examined Indonesian EFL students' perceptions of online learning, especially freshmen. Employing a quantitative descriptive design with 83 respondents, this study focused on 3 aspects; 1) students' perceptions, 2) students' preferences, and 3) advantages and disadvantages of online learning based on students' experiences. The result showed that based on students' perceptions 1) online learning is effective (53%, $n = 44$) in improving English proficiency and somewhat effective (42.2%, $n = 35$) in improving social competencies, 2) even though students' enjoyment shows positive trends, they still prefer face-to-face learning (62.7%, $n = 52$) rather than online learning (37.3%, $n = 31$), and 3) the most frequent choose advantage of online learning is able to stay at home (79.5%, $n = 66$), while the most frequent disadvantage is less interaction with lecturers and classmates (74.7%, $n = 62$). This research has proven that the implementation of online learning earned numerous positive perceptions, followed with several challenges that need to be overcome by any means.

Keywords: students' perception, preferences, and online learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The global spreading of COVID-19 has shifted most human activities (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). The shift is also including the process of teaching and learning in a variety of institutions (Baczek et al., 2019; Simamora, 2020). Taking advantage of this phenomenon, online learning significantly impacts the fabric of higher education (Kim, Liu, Bonk, 2005). Furthermore, lecturers, or any education practitioner, should be aware that student expectations on online learning quality are rising rapidly (Bonk, 2004).

Numerous studies have reported favourable and unfavourable perceptions by students of online learning classrooms. Previous research indicates that the lecturer's interaction with students significantly contributes to the student's perceptions in an online learning classroom. Swan, Shea, Fredericksen, Pickett, and Pelz (2000) found that consistency in course design,

interaction with course instructors, and active discussion significantly influenced the success of online learning. Correspondingly, Jiang and Ting (1998) also reported that the degree of pedagogical emphasis on learning through interaction significantly influenced students' perceptions of learning. Additionally, students appreciated the flexibility of online learning and the opportunities to communicate with teachers and peers in online learning settings (Klingner, 2003; McCall, 2002; National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2002).

Abundant research suggests that technology use is significant in building students' perceptions and satisfaction with online learning. A study on students in Web-based distance courses has shown that students felt entangled in their online courses due to technical difficulties and communication breakdowns (Essex & Cagiltay, 2001; Hara & Kling, 2000). Furthermore, student satisfaction was positively correlated with student performance when students felt they had received adequate knowledge to use the technology (Schramm, Wagner, & Werner, 2000). Based on several studies, students also considered technical problems as one of the key challenges to online learning (Song, Singleton, Hill, & Koh, 2004).

The levels of student interaction have been proven to be a good predictor of learning outcomes (Hay et al., 2004) and the levels of class interactivity has been reported to be positively associated with student learning (Arbaugh, 2000). Despite the whole measurement of interaction, the interaction with instructor has been highlighted as a major factor of online interaction. Instructor facilitation plays two important roles; providing students direct interaction with their course instructor valued by both students and teachers (Soo & Bonk, 1998), and establishing the environment for student interaction in online classroom (Wise, Chang, Duffy, & del Valle, 2004). The establishment of a supportive environment is increasing the importance of the proposed social nature for the learning process (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Jonassen, 2002).

On the other side, research has also been done on the effectiveness of synchronous and asynchronous learning tools to promote discussions in online classrooms. Many researchers believe that online discussions in asynchronous learning enhance students' in-depth information processing and critical thinking by allowing them to process their thinking conveniently when they post a message in online conferences (Duffy, Dueber, & Hawley, 1998). Preferably, Bonk, Hansen, Grabner- Hagen, Lazar, and Mirabelli (1998) suggest that asynchronous conferencing should be the encouraged method for enhancing in-depth student online discussions in fruitful interactions. The research by Benbunan-Fich and Hiltz (1999) found that the groups that participated in asynchronous learning could generate better solutions to any case studies that students should solve. Nevertheless, they were less satisfied throughout the interaction. Henson, Kennett, and Kennedy (2003) also reported that asynchronous discussions were proven more effective in facilitating students' learning process in the online classroom.

In Indonesia, few studies have been carried out highlighting students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online classrooms. Nugroho (2020) focused on finding out students' perceptions in facing e-learning during COVID-19, resulting that e-learning was quite helpful even though most students faced problems such as internet credit and lack of technological knowledge.

Another research concerning students' experience and comfort resulted that students felt positive experience and convenience in online classroom (Hendrawaty et al., 2021).

The abovementioned literature has highlighted numerous models that provide frameworks to understand students' perception of online learning. This study aimed to synthesize the literature and focus on the three major aspects; students' perceptions, preferences, and advantages and disadvantages of online learning. To the best of researchers' knowledge, study on these lines in Indonesia has rarely been conducted, specifically on freshmen students as participants. The researchers attempt to fill the gap with our study by drawing insights from the literature and exclusively focusing our attention on these research questions:

1. What is the Indonesian EFL freshmen students' perception of online learning?
2. What is the Indonesian EFL freshmen students' technical preference for online learning?
3. What are the advantages and the disadvantages of online learning based on Indonesian EFL freshmen students' experience?

To answer the 1st research questions, framework from Baczek et al. (2021), and Kim et al. (2005) are used. The student's perceptions about their own discipline competence, social competence, and learning enjoyment are being investigated. The 2nd research question about technical preference is based on the framework by Hendrawaty et al. (2021), and Almaiah et al. (2014), that studied about students' preferences during online learning. The students' preference being asked is about how the classroom is conducted, their devices, and how they manage to reach internet connectivity. Lastly, the 3rd question is about advantages and disadvantages of online learning based on the framework from Muthuprasad et al. (2021), Surani and Hamidah (2020), and Wright (2016)

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive approach. The instrument is an e-questionnaire comprised of 8 items using 5 point-liked scale. The items number 1, 2, and 3 investigated the 1st research question about students' perception. The items number 4, 5, and 6 examined the students' technical preferences. The item number 7 and 8 provided advantages and disadvantages options.

Item Number	Sub-aspects Being Asked	Aspects	Research Questions
1	English Proficiency	Students' Perception	1. What is the Indonesian EFL freshmen students' perception towards online learning?
2	Social Competence		
3	Students' Enjoyment		
4	Classroom Conduction (Online/Traditional)	Students' Preferences	2. What is the Indonesian EFL freshmen students' technical preference for online learning?
5	Device's Preferences		
6	Internet Connection		

	Preferences		
7	Advantages	Advantage and Disadvantages based on Students' Experience	3. What are the advantages and the disadvantages of online learning based on Indonesian EFL freshmen students' experience?
8	Disadvantages		

The e-questionnaire were disseminated and filled by 27 students for try-out purpose. There was no serious violation of validity and reliability ($\alpha = 0.70$) found in the instrument. Afterwards, the e-questionnaire was disseminated to study population using convenience sampling. In total, there were 83 students filled up the form. The data analysis is presented based on the descriptive qualitative nature that comprised of charts, tables, and graphs.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The characteristics of the freshmen are summarized in table 2 below. The e-questionnaire using Google from was filled up by 83 students ($M = 1.7$, $SD = .44$), comprised of 26.5% male students ($n = 22$) and 73.5% female students ($n = 61$). The students lived in different areas ($M = 2.42$, $SD = .85$) listed as big cities 24.1% ($n = 20$), city suburb 9.6% ($n = 8$), and regencies 66.3% ($n = 55$).

Characteristics of the study population ($n = 83$)

Variables	n (%)
Male	22 (26.5%)
Female	61 (71%)
Live in big cities	20 (24.1%)
Live in suburbs	8 (9.6%)
Live in regencies	55 (66.3%)

3.1 Students' perception

Students' perception of online learning is measured by 3 items using a 5-point Likert scale. The 1st item asked about the effectiveness of online learning to their improvement on English proficiency. The 2nd item asked about the effectiveness of online learning to their social competence. Lastly, the 3rd item asked about their enjoyment during e-learning.

Item Number	Question	Very ineffective	Ineffective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very effective
1	How is the effectiveness of online learning related to the improvement of your English	0 (0%)	4 (4.8%)	24 (28.9%)	44 (53%)	11 (13.3%)

Item Number	Question					
	proficiency?					
2	How is the effectiveness of online learning to your social competences?	2 (2.4%)	11 (13.3%)	35 (42.2%)	26 (31.3%)	9 (10.8%)

The first aspect, the majority of students choose that online learning is effective to improve their English proficiency 53% ($n = 44$), followed by somewhat effective 28.9% ($n = 24$), very effective 13.3% ($n = 11$), ineffective 4.8% ($n = 4$), and no one considered very ineffective 0% ($n = 0$).

Related to the second aspect, the majority of students choose that online learning is effective to improve their social competences as 42.2% ($n = 35$), followed by somewhat effective 31.3% ($n = 26$), ineffective 13.3% ($n = 11$), very effective 10.8% ($n = 9$), and very ineffective 2.4% (n = 2),

Item Number	Question	Very unenjoyable	Unenjoyable	Somewhat enjoyable	Enjoyable	Very enjoyable
3	Do you enjoy online learning?	1 (1.2%)	3 (3.6%)	29 (34.9%)	26 (31.3%)	24 (28.9%)

Lastly, the 3rd aspect about enjoyment, most students chose somewhat enjoyable 34.9% ($n = 29$), followed by enjoyable 31.3% ($n = 26$), very enjoyable 28.9% ($n = 24$), unenjoyable 3.6% ($n = 3$), and very unenjoyable 1.2% ($n = 1$).

3.2 Students' technical preference

Students' technical preference is being asked by 3 items, item number 4, 5, and 6. Item number 4 asked about students' preference on the classroom conduction (face-to-face or online). Item number 5 asked about students' most frequent device being used to conduct online learning. Item number 6 asked about students' internet connectivity.

Item Number	Question	Online learning	Face-to-face learning
4	Do you prefer online learning or face-to-face learning?	31 (37.3%)	52 (62.7%)

The students' preference having face-to-face learning is 62% ($n = 52$), higher than the online learning that obtained merely 37.3% ($n = 31$). It can be concluded that majority of students prefer face-to-face learning to online learning.

Item Number	Question	Desktop (Personal Computer)	Notebook	Smartphone	Tablet
5	What is the most frequent device you use during online learning)	6 (7.2%)	48 (57.8%)	29 (34.9%)	0 (0%)

The most frequent device used by students to conduct online learning is notebook 57.8% ($n = 48$), followed by smartphone 34.9% ($n = 29$), desktop 7.2% ($n = 6$), and no one used tablet 0% (n = 0).

Item Number	Question	Wi-Fi	Cellular Data
6	What is your source of internet connection?	50 (60.2%)	33 (39.8%)

The most source of internet connection being used by students is through Wi-Fi 60.2% ($n = 50$), followed by cellular data 39.8% ($n = 33$).

3.3 Advantages and disadvantages of online learning based on students' experience

The options for advantages and disadvantages of online learning were available in the items number 7 and 8. Students were given options to choose based on their experience. In addition, students were also allowed to write their own choice in their own words.

Item 7: What are the advantages of online learning based on your experience?

Variables	Total $n = 83$ (100%)
Advantages of Online Learning	
Ease of materials access	53 (63.9%)
Relaxed learning atmosphere	56 (67.5%)
Stay at home	66 (79.5%)
More concentration and focus	15 (18.1%)
Self-discipline and responsibility	21 (25.3%)
Able to record meetings	45 (54.2%)
Feeling less-anxious when taking test	36 (43.4%)
Student-written advantages	
Save money since no need to pay rent in city	1 (1.2%)
Ease of learning as no need to go campus back and forth	1 (1.2%)
Able to join online classroom without taking bath	1 (1.2%)

The most chosen advantage of online learning is the relaxed learning atmosphere 79.5% ($n = 66$), followed by relaxed learning atmosphere 67.5% ($n = 56$), ease of materials access 63.9% ($n = 53$), able to record meetings 54.2% ($n = 45$), feeling less-anxious when taking test

43.4% (*n* =36), and more concentration and focus 18.1% (*n* = 15). 3 students wrote their own advantages listed as save money since no need to pay rent in city 1.2% (*n* =1), ease of learning as no need to go campus back and forth 1.2% (*n* = 1), and able to join online classroom without taking bath 1.2% (*n* = 1).

Item 8: What are the advantages of online learning based on your experience?

Variables	Total n = 83 (100%)
Disadvantages of Online Learning	
Less interaction with lecturer and classmates	62 (74.7%)
Limited cellular data	36 (43.4%)
Bad internet signal	50 (60.2%)
Unsupported device	34 (41%)
Unable to operate device	12 (14.5%)
Unsupporting home atmosphere	22 (26.5%)
Lack of self-discipline	32 (38.6%)
Student-written disadvantages	
Frequently distracted at home	1 (1.2%)
Easily distracted by surroundings	1 (1.2%)
Unstable internet connection	1 (1.2%)
Lack of management	1 (1.2%)
Difficulties in understanding materials	1 (1.2%)
Difficulties in focus and concentration	1 (1.2%)
Lack of competitiveness	1 (1.2%)

The most choose disadvantage of online learning is less interaction with lecturer and classmates 74.7% (*n* = 62), followed by bad internet signal 60.2% (n = 50), limited cellular data 43.4% (*n* = 36), unsupported device 41% (*n* = 34), lack of self-discipline 38.6% (*n* = 32), unsupported home atmosphere 26.5% (*n* = 22). 6 students wrote their own disadvantages listed as frequently distract at home 1.2% (*n* = 1), easily distracted by surroundings 1.2% (*n* = 1), unstable internet connection 1.2% (*n* = 1), lack of management 1.2% (*n* = 1), difficulties in understanding materials 1.2% (*n* = 1), and difficulties in focus and concentration 1.2% (*n* = 1).

This study reveals interesting results to be discussed in correspondence with the three aspects being studied; students' perceptions, technical preferences, and advantages and disadvantages of online learning based on students' experiences.

Related to the first aspect, students' perception, more than 50% of the students perceived that online learning is effective in improving their English proficiency. Nonetheless, the result is quite different compared to the improvement of their social competence. Most students perceived that online learning is somewhat effective in improving their social competence. This trend continues to be negative if we look closer to the number of students who perceived online

classroom is ineffective to improve social competences. In contrast, the result of the student's improvement in social competence is somehow different with their enjoyment during online learning. A few students perceived that they somewhat enjoyed the online learning compared to those who did enjoy it. Thus, the trend of students' enjoyment is positive.

The surprising result comes from the second aspect, students' preferences. Even though the trend of students' enjoyment is positive, more than 60% of students are still prefer having face-to-face class than online class. The researcher believed that during 1 year and half of COVID-19 pandemic, students get used to have online class, and get comforted. Nonetheless, they still miss the face-to-face classroom as they used to have before the pandemic. Other researchers are invited to prove this thought empirically using longitudinal studies or other designs that match the gap.

The last aspect is about the advantages and disadvantages of online learning based on students' experience. In alignment with the research by Baczek et al. (2021), the most frequent advantage of online learning felt by students is the ability to stay at home. In that research, the option of ability at home is chosen by 69% students. Similar to this research, the option of staying at home was the highest chosen advantage by 79.5% students. The highest 2nd option of online learning advantage was relaxed learning atmosphere that more than 60% students chose. This result is in correspondence with students' enjoyment, that shows a positive trend.

The most chosen disadvantage by students is less interaction with lecturers and classmates (74.7%). As interaction is a part of social competences, the above most mentioned disadvantage reveals the negative trend of students' improvement of social competence in online classroom. The highest 2nd option of online learning disadvantage was bad internet signal. Limited cellular data and unsupported device follow other disadvantages. Those disadvantages are closely related to the conduction of online learning. Those disadvantages are why students prefer face-to-face rather than online learning. Even though the trend of online learning is positive, the students still feel these disadvantages as extremely disturbing entangles in their online classroom. Those disadvantages do not exist in face-to-face learning. This is why students prefer moving from online learning to face-to-face learning if there is any chance.

4. CONCLUSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning is an inevitable shift from face-to-face learning. This study provided Indonesian EFL students' perceptions of online learning, especially freshmen. The respondents perceived that online learning is effective in improving their English proficiency and correspondingly somewhat effective in improving their social competences. In addition, students' enjoyment on online learning shows a positive trend. This aligns with the most frequent advantage chosen by students, enabling them to stay at home during online learning.

Nevertheless, the application of online learning is not merely without any challenge. The most chosen disadvantage is the lack of interaction in the online classroom, that leads to a negative trend of students' perception of improving their social interaction. Those disadvantages

should be overcome by any means in order to maximize the students' learning output during online learning.

SUGGESTION

The author would like to invite other researchers to conduct a study in order to overcome the issues encountered in this research. The issues are the lack of interaction in online learning, and the negative trends of students' perception in the improvement of social competences through online learning. Any research design, whether quantitative or qualitative, is encouraged to effectively address the gaps.

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