

EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTION OF ONLINE LEARNING MEDIA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTION OF ONLINE LEARNING MEDIA DURING
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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Abstract 2

This study reviews the EFL perception towards the use of online learning media in EFL instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic at the secondary level. It aims to discover whether or not the use of online learning media has an impact on learners in learning English. Several aspects are considered to be discovered in the use of online learning media such as student's positive perception towards the use of online learning media in EFL instruction, student's negative perception towards the use of online learning media in EFL instruction, and the challenges of the use of online learning media in EFL instruction. In short, the study revealed that some students may have different points of view regarding the use of online learning media. On one hand, the use of online learning media can enhance independent learning, add flexibility and convenience in EFL instruction, and can establish new technical skills. On the other hand, the students have difficulty understanding the material on online learning media, the excessive use of smartphones and laptops can result in sore eyes, and unavailable technical support from the instructor in using online learning media. Besides, there are some challenges in the use of online learning media in EFL instruction such as the students' unstable internet connection, the students' low digital literacy, and the students have a limited internet quota. Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to investigate the practices of online learning media in EFL instruction in a low technology context and the needs of students on technology integration in language learning.

Keywords: review, online learning media, EFL learners' perception, Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, online learning has replaced traditional face-to-face learning during the Covid-19 pandemic to keep student's learning at home (Dong, Cao, and Li, 2020; Bagata, Umamah, and Fikri, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Heng and Sol, 2020; Pal, Vanijja, and Patra, 2020; Nambiar, 2020; Novianti and Garzia, 2020; Agung et al, 2020). The Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia has ordered all education units to run

online learning from 24 March 2020 due to the increasing spread of Covid-19 and maintaining the health of students, teachers, and all educational staff (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Agung et al, 2020). In this pandemic era, all levels of schools in Indonesia carried out an online learning process (Mendikbud, 2020a). Starting from teaching and learning material, teaching and learning media, teaching and learning activities, teaching and learning strategy, teaching and learning evaluation, and so on.

Covid-19 has an impact on changing the use of learning media used by students' secondary school during their online learning. So far, online learning is often done at the tertiary level. However, online learning is still rarely done at the secondary school level. Based on my observation, before the pandemic Covid-19 the English learning process mostly used offline media such as ppt, whiteboards, textbooks, and so on. Since this pandemic, online learning media are increasingly used to support the learning process. The Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, recommended teachers use various e-learning platforms such as Rumah Belajar, Quipper School, Ruang Guru, Google Classroom, Zoom, and so on (Antonius et al, 2020).

So far, research associated with the use of online media in online learning has come to be the awareness of diverse researchers. Many studies have been conducted by researchers related to the use of online media in online learning (Armstrong, 2011; Cakrawati, 2017; Bagata et al, 2020; Alqudah et al, 2020; Hassan et al, 2020; Alameri et al, 2020; Sari et al, 2020; Sujarwo et al, 2020; Agung et al, 2020; Nassoura, 2020; Purwasih and Mustakim, 2020; Adnan and Anwar, 2020; Sheth et al, 2020; Abbasi et al, 2020; Baczek et al, 2020; Biswas et al, 2020; Hasan and Khan, 2020; Serhan, 2020). The study conducted by Cakrawati (2017) revealed that online platforms promote both inquiry-based learning and independent learning since the online platforms facilitate interactions between teachers and students although they are not in the same room. Moreover, the online learning platform has some advantages for online learning during the pandemic which is the whole learning process full online (Bagata et al, 2020). However, there are very limited studies that see how students' perception towards the use of online learning media in EFL instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic at the secondary level. Online learning media affects students' academic performance (Lumadi. 2013; Alameri et al, 2020; Shahibi and Rusli, 2017; Boahene et al, 2019; Surayatika, 2019; Shuja et al, 2019; Malik et al, 2020), makes learning process more fun, enjoy and interesting (Ridho et al, 2019) and enhances students' learning motivation (Mulyadi, 2018).

²⁴This study is then intended to portray the perception of the EFL students at the secondary level towards the use of online learning media in EFL instruction. This paper is based on the argument that the use of online learning media during Covid-19 is unavoidable. So, students must train themselves to learn to use online learning media to support their learning process. Appropriate media can help students to achieve their academic achievements (Ekayani, 2017; Kobayashi, 2017; Suprihatien et al, 2019; Apriliani et al, 2019; Ahmad et al, 2012; Nasution, 2019; Febrianto and Megasari, 2020)). Several aspects are considered to be discovered in the use of online learning media such as student's positive perception towards the use of online learning media in EFL instruction, student's negative perception towards the use of online learning media in EFL instruction, and the challenges of the use of online learning media in EFL instruction.

Furthermore, this study complements the shortcomings of existing studies by mapping students' perceptions towards the use of online learning media in EFL instruction. It aims to discover whether or not the use of online learning media has an impact on learners in learning English. The use of online media during the Covid-19 pandemic may have both positive and negative impacts on students. Each student may have different perceptions about the use of online learning media during Covid-19. They may positively perceive the use of online learning media. Also, they may negatively perceive the use of online learning media.

ONLINE LEARNING MEDIA IN EFL INSTRUCTION

The use of technology, such as gamification, applications, and devices, in language classes, is not new. Digital tools, social media, and virtual environments have been used widely in facilitating language teaching and learning (Amin & Sundari, 2020). In the last decade, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is more commonly used in language learning and teaching. ICT refers to both computer-based and internet-based technologies, which are used to create, store, display, and share information (Al Arif, 2019). In the context of EFL, ICT can provide opportunities for English learners to interact with native speakers through ICT tools such as email, social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and video-based communication such as Skype (Annamalai, 2017). Thus, it is necessary that learners are aware of their needs in response to the development of technology in education (Puspitasari et al, 2019).

Current technological advances allow us to integrate various media into online learning (Kobayashi, 2017). One of the ICT is online learning media. It can be used as an option. Online learning is currently being done in the context of physical distancing. The goal is to keep a distance from other people to avoid transmission of the Covid-19. Advances in technology like today can make studying at home effective by using online learning media. Nasution (2019) defines media as one of the tools that can help the teacher in the teaching and learning process in a class, especially in EFL classrooms. Online learning media is a set of integrated, interactive online services that provide information, tools, and resources to teachers, students, and others involved in education to support and improve education delivery and management. Online learning processes that can be used as online media include, Google Classroom, Schology, Google Form, YouTube, WhatsApp, Zoom, Google Meet and other media (Mustakim, 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning media has an important role in the online learning process. Various online learning media are tried and used in English Instruction. Students' understanding of the material depends on the media used by teachers (Mawarni et al, 2020). The use of online learning media is one solution to make students able to understand the subject matter well (Mustakim, 2020). The use of inappropriate or ineffective media hinders the delivery of learning material. Therefore, choosing the right media is the key to successful online learning (Kobayashi, 2017).

STUDENT'S POSITIVE PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE USE OF ONLINE LEARNING MEDIA IN EFL INSTRUCTION

Online Learning Media Add Flexibility and Convenience in EFL Instruction

Online learning media has some advantages, such as flexibility (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Hasan and Khan, 2020; Alqudah et al, 2020; Nadeak, 2020; Serhan, 2020; Baczek et al, 2020; Dost et al, 2020; Sheth et, al 2020; Febrianto and Megasari, 2020; Mukhtar, 2020), and self-paced learning (Amer, 2007). Flexibility referred to the ease of access to which students could access at any time and from anywhere (Rahmawati, 2016). The flexibility of online learning media provides opportunities for students to learn while still working and developing professionally. It allows them to more easily balance work, life, and school. Through online learning media, students can revisit previous material. They can work through the lesson plan at their own pace to make sure they really master the material before

moving on to the next section. This added flexibility allows online learners to move through the course work at their own speed and get maximum results.

Online learning media provides flexibility in learning is supported by Rahmawati (2016) who argued that there are some strong points regarding the flexibility in online learning media. First, online learning media was not limited to space and time. Second, by having online learning media, students could learn from any place, not only from the classroom. The last, to be able to access online learning media, a reliable internet connection was imperative. Febrianto and Megasari (2020) have noted that online learning media is more flexible despite the limited supporting facilities. The teachers and students are not bound by time and place when it comes to discussing the lessons. Although they do not meet using live streaming, the teachers can share explanatory videos or study materials in the form of text through e-mails or other applications. Online learning media makes it easy for the teachers to send material anywhere at any time, and the students can also follow the learning process anywhere and at any time while connected to the internet (Wardoyo, 2016; Bourne, Harris, & Mayadas, 2005).

In general, students feel satisfied with the flexibility of using online learning. Students are not pressed by time because they can set their own schedule and place where they want to attend online learning. Through online learning, teachers can teach through online learning media that can be accessed anywhere and anytime. This allows students to freely choose which subjects to attend and assignments that must be done first (Nadeak, 2020). The flexibility of time, location, and online learning methods affect student satisfaction with learning (Milman, 2015).

The other advantage of using the e-learning tool as reported by Alqudah et al (2020) was the convenience and flexibility to time and place in the use of this platform. This is in keeping with findings from many studies reporting advantages of e-learning tool including ease and fast access, the ability for quick revisions and updates of the material compared to textbooks and other modes of learning, the possibility of serving a large number of students with relatively low cost and the ability of e-learning tool to potentially overcome differences between learners.

Convenience is often considered an important advantage of online learning media (Hussein, 2016) since it has the potential to provide “a world-class education to anyone, anywhere, and anytime as long as they have access to the Internet” (Nguyen, 2015).

Convenience in this context was also linked to accessibility to class material. Students appreciated the fact that they were able to access the recordings of classes at their convenience while two respondents enjoyed taking classes in bed without having to worry about their dress. Interestingly, for a female respondent, convenience meant having control over her “visibility” to instructors and colleagues (Hussein et al, 2020). Datuk and Ali (2008 in Al-Maqtri, 2014) mention a number of benefits of E-learning tool such as flexibility, accessibility, and convenience that can enable learners to access material at any place and study at their own pace and place. They think that E-learning content is inexpensive to access. E-learning promotes collaborative learning and therefore it results in more engaging and enriching experiences of learning.

Online Learning Media can Improve Independent Learning in EFL Instruction

Online learning using online learning media is also able to foster student learning independence (Nadeak, 2020; Febrianto and Megasari, 2020). Students can learn independently by accessing information or subject matter online through online learning media. The teacher provides learning resources, either in text-based content such as pdf, ppt, doc, or the like or in multimedia formats (multimedia-based content) such as streaming video, animation, games, and others. Students can study it anytime, any material that suits their interests, anywhere (not necessarily in class, which clearly can access the online learning media) individually (Juanim, 2008).

The online learning media are also used as a supplementary tool to promote independent learning. It facilitates students with the features allowing them to work independently yet share their thoughts through group discussion (Cakrawati, 2017). Online learning using social media as learning media is also able to foster student learning independence. Learning without direct guidance from teachers makes students independently look for information about course material and assignments given to them. Some of the activities carried out are reading reference books, online articles, scientific journals, or discussing with peers through instant messaging applications (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). Moreover, the online platforms promote both inquiry-based learning and independent learning since the online platforms facilitate interactions between teacher and students although they are not in the same room (Cakrawati, 2017).

Furthermore, online learning media provides opportunities for students to explore more knowledge independently. This can be seen from Febrianto and Megasari (2020) who

stated that online learning provides freedom in learning and the students find it easy to access learning. They stated that their learning is efficient because it is not obstructed by place and time, which means that the students could more freely participate in learning. Online learning is more student-centred so that it can bring up the responsibility and autonomy of students in learning. Online learning media requires students to prepare their own learning, organize and evaluate, and simultaneously maintain motivation to learn (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). In a nutshell, the use of e-learning media during online learning triggers learners to be more independent.

Online Learning Media can Establish New Technical Skills in EFL Instruction

Online learners need basic technical skills to succeed. These include the ability to create new documents, use a word processing program, navigate the Internet, and download software. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, most students rarely used their technical skills in learning. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic students are required to use their technical skills to operate technology such as the use of online learning media. Besides, the use of technology is very advantageous for increasing the digital literacy level of students. Overall students get aware of new technological and individual potentialities.

Furthermore, students get more details into the perceived increase of digital skills such as an increase in the abilities to take part in virtual classes, digital communication, using digital tools to download, organize and share digital contents, using a collaborative working environment, critical analysis and filtering of digital resources, production of digital content, video making and photo elaboration, knowledge representation, managing personal spaces on the web, data treatment, process planning, evaluation, use of online tools for personal productivity, and so on (Giovannella, 2020).

STUDENT'S NEGATIVE PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE USE OF ONLINE LEARNING MEDIA IN EFL INSTRUCTION

The Excessive Use of Smartphones and Laptops can Result in Sore Eyes

The use of smartphones with too long duration and too frequent intensity because they are used to do tasks and open social media causes them to experience physical complaints, mostly in the form of eye fatigue (Mustakim, 2020). This physical complaint is the impact of excessive gadget use. The results of this study are following the results of research previously conducted by Sidabutar et al. (2019) who show that using gadgets can cause headaches and eye irritation. According to Ilyas in Bawelle et al (2016), eye fatigue can

occur if the eye focuses on a close-up object for a long time and the eye muscles work harder to see the object, especially when accompanied by blinding lighting.

Excessive use of smartphones and laptops can cause eye pain. The reason is, smartphone and laptop screens emit radiation that is not good for eye health and our health. Students and teachers experience fatigue when staring at a smartphone or laptop screen for a long time. This is because the radiation effect of a smartphone or laptop is not good for the eyes if used for a long time (Atmojo and Nugroho, 2020).

Unavailable Technical Support from Instructor in Using Online Learning Media

Technical support is indispensable both for the teachers and students (Sirkemaa, 2001). For teachers, technical support is needed to ensure that teachers have the resources and skills necessary for technology-integration into the class practices. For students, technical support helps in the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill their unique curriculum requirements (Valdez et al, 2011). Although there is assistance from the IT center, most problems need to be resolved at the teachers' or students' level, such as how to operate or use online learning media during the Covid-19 pandemic. Student survival in the digital age appears to depend on how well one knows people who can help with various problems. Because support for the use of online learning media does not only refer to bridging hardware differences but must assist users in gaining knowledge, skills, and consistent support from organizational structures to achieve learning goals. Technical support is an important part of ICT implementation and integration in education, but it is often not available which requires teachers and students to master some basic problem-solving skills (Nawaz and Khan, 2012).

According to Hussein et al (2020), inadequate support from instructors and colleagues was mentioned by four respondents. These views are confirmed by recent research which illustrates that communication with instructors and peers and timely feedback from the instructor improve students' sense of self-efficacy and increase their motivation and level of engagement (Craig et al., 2020; Daoud, Alrabaiah, & Zaitoun, 2019; Quintana & Quintana, 2020). To alleviate students' frustration over inadequate support and interaction with instructors and peers, Craig et al. (2020) propose the use of network tools, such as the Net. Create, to bring students closer together and make learning more efficient and enjoyable during challenging times.

The Students Have Difficulty to Understand the Material on Online Learning Media

The existence of the Covid-19 pandemic makes students determine the spirit of learning in students themselves. Students are required to be independent in understanding the material. The teacher only submits or shares material files to WhatsApp, students are told to learn and understand the material themselves after it. If there are difficulties, students are allowed to ask via WhatsApp. Although they are welcome to ask questions, in reality, there are still many students who do not dare to ask directly to the teachers. The independence of these students makes students' understanding different. The students felt the theory was easily understood but could not understand the practicum. Teachers must be able to stimulate students so that students' way of thinking can understand correctly when doing practicum because the process of thinking cannot be obtained by online learning (Mawarni et al, 2020).

Even in understanding the material students find it difficult because students are required to be independent. Whereas the teacher only shares material files on WhatsApp. If there are difficulties students are allowed to ask via WhatsApp. But in reality, only a few students dare to ask the teacher, as a result, students who do not ask the student does not understand the material (Mawarni et al, 2020). Alawamleh et al (2020) revealed that half of the students also explained that their understanding of the material being taught online has gotten worse.

According to Nadeak (2020), many students had difficulty in understanding course material provided online. In line with this, Agung et al (2020) said students could hardly understand the direction and materials provided in the assignments. The lecture material which is mostly in the form of reading material cannot be understood thoroughly by students. Students assume that reading the material and doing the assignments is not enough, they need verbal explanation directly from the lecturer about some complex material. Communication with lecturers through the application of instant messages or in the discussion column provided by the application of virtual classes is not able to provide a thorough explanation of the material being discussed (Nadeak, 2020). In the class where the involvement of lecturers is very small, it does not show the existence of deep and meaningful learning (Garrison and Innes, 2005). Interaction with lecturers becomes very important in online learning because it can reduce psychological distance which in turn will lead to better learning (Swan, 2002).

THE CHALLENGES ² OF THE USE OF ONLINE LEARNING MEDIA IN EFL INSTRUCTION

The Students' Unstable Internet Connection on the Use of Online Learning Media ⁴

The Internet is considered the source of needed materials to achieve the goals of teaching and learning (Surtikanti, 2020). However, some regions with poor internet signal might face many problems in conducting online learning. The main issue of this condition was the internet connection ³⁹ (Nuraeni et al, 2020; Abbasi et al, 2020). Such conditions were common in the least developed region because of its limited infrastructures and public facilities (Agung, 2019). They had to go miles from their house or even village to locate the signal. Some of them went to their relatives to access the internet there while some of them had to go to the highest hill to find the availability of the internet signal. Good and stable signal strength during online learning was a lucky draw (Agung et al, 2020). Network interaction can also present considerable challenges to both teachers and students (Peyton in Egbert & Smith, 1999). Referring to this theory, the absence of internet connection leads to bigger challenges because the presence of the interaction between lecturers and students failed to be accomplished (Agung et al, 2020).

In line with Agung et al (2020), Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) revealed an ³⁴ unstable internet connection is one of the challenges of the use of online learning media (Rahmawati, 2016; Cakrawati, 2017; Mulyadi, 2018; Ismail et al, 2018; Febrianto and Megasari, 2020; Adnan and Anwar, 2020; Mustakim, 2020; Kapasia et al, 2020; Mawarni et al, 2020; Hussein et al 2020; Atsani, 2020; Surani and Hamidah, 2020). The cellular signal and internet coverage still become a problem in remote and rural areas. In fact, some students live in remote, rural, and mountainous areas. Moreover, most of the students choose to go back to their hometowns and leave their rented house in the campus environment. While they can access Wi-Fi and a fast internet network in the campus environment and rented houses, it is different when they return to their homes that are often located in rural areas. Apart from having to buy an internet quota, internet access in some of the applications requires a large quota. Therefore these factors inhibit the students from accessing e-learning, especially those who come from lower-middle-income families (Febrianto and Megasari, 2020).

The availability of internet access is very necessary for online ¹ learning because the characteristics of this learning always use and utilize the internet network (Hendrastomo, as cited in Mustakim, 2020). In general, the speed of internet network access in Indonesia is relatively slow, the availability of the internet network is still limited and the price for

accessing the internet is relatively expensive, thus becoming obstacles to access online learning media (Mustakim, 2020). Meanwhile, online learning media requires internet access or connection. Internet connection becomes one of the crucial elements in online learning media (Mustakim, 2020; Kapasia et al., 2020; Mawarni et al., 2020; Atsani, 2020). Limited access became a problem, especially when students were having fun activities in online learning media, then suddenly the connection was troubled. No signal meant it could be the end (Rahmawati, 2016).

The Students' Low Digital Literacy on the Use of Online Learning Media

It is often found that either teachers or students are of struggling digital literacy. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) reveal that many students have low digital literacy. They find difficulties in operating the applications and platforms used for online learning. The logical reasoning behind this is that the students did not use to learn through online learning and interact with those applications and platforms. At first, students do not know how to copy-paste and edit the text in the WhatsApp group to fill in the attendance list. A lot of students also find difficulties in operating Google Classroom since they have never tried this application before. It makes teachers create some tutorial videos on the use of Google Classroom to help them understand the way to operate it and how to copy-paste and edit the text in the WhatsApp group.

Besides having low digital literacy, some students also have low literacy in general. They cannot understand the teacher's instruction well although it has been written clearly. It is usually because they do not carefully read the teacher's instruction and lazy to read the teacher's instruction. Sometimes, they skip the instruction if the words are too many for them. Teachers must repeatedly give the same information to students simply because they are not careful enough to read the information. Their literacy is not good (Atmojo and Nugroho, 2020).

Furthermore, although students are generally tech-savvy, and thus able to manage computers well, lack of computer literacy is a major issue among students today. Many of them cannot operate basic programs such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint and therefore are not able to handle their files. Furthermore, many students find fixing basic computer problems troublesome, as they do not know this area. However, technological proficiency is a must for following online courses, as it enables students to manage their assignments and

courseware in an organized manner without struggling. Basic courses in computer literacy enhance students' knowledge in the field, having a fundamental knowledge of computer hardware would help them participate in online classes without interruptions and hindrances (Mohalik and Sahoo, 2020).

The Students Have a Limited Internet Quota on the Use of Online Learning Media

The next challenge that is often encountered is the students do not have a quota or a limited quota (Atsani, 2020; Atmojo and Nugroho, 2020; Mustakim, 2020). The financial condition of the students and their family also generate another problem. One of them is the inability to afford a sufficient internet quota for online learning. They can only afford a small internet quota that is not enough to take part in online learning comfortably. Sometimes, students do not have an internet quota so they cannot access the internet and participate in online learning. This problem happens because the income is not equally distributed to all inhabitants. Not all students come from a family of high or medium-income which can afford decent livelihoods (Atmojo and Nugroho, 2020).

This of course must be a concern, because not all students have sufficient economic conditions to buy internet quota. In this case, the institution must be able to implement strategic steps such as preparing low-quota online learning applications. In a study conducted by Jamaluddin et al (2020) the most effective way of reducing quota is by setting up and providing low-quota applications such as providing applications that don't require a large quota to access them. Besides, there are services in the form of a free quota of tens of Gigabytes (GB) by collaborating with providers to access educational services (Zuriati and Briando, 2020).

CONCLUSION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, technological advances allow us to integrate various media into online learning. As one of the central elements of the learning process, online learning media needs special attention in an EFL context. The present research gives contributions to the literature on online learning media in the EFL context from students' perspectives. In short, this study revealed that some students may have different points of view regarding the use of online learning media. On one hand, the use of online learning media can enhance independent learning, add flexibility and convenience in EFL instruction, and can establish new technical skills. On the other hand, the students have difficulty

understanding the material on online learning media, the excessive use of smartphones and laptops can result in sore eyes, and unavailable technical support from the instructor in using online learning media. Besides, there are some challenges in the use of online learning media in EFL instruction such as the students' unstable internet connection, the students' low digital literacy, and the students have a limited internet quota.

The writer has attempted to review the secondary ²students' perception towards the use of online learning media in EFL instruction. The review indicates that ²the use of online learning media has various impressions on EFL learners. Therefore, ⁴the use of online learning media affects students' academic performance, makes the learning process more fun, enjoyable, interesting, and enhances students' learning motivation. However, it does not run well if it lacks preparation and ³⁵planning.

Future teachers must include ³⁵the integration of technology in language learning, information, and communication technology in language learning, and online learning media in their teaching-learning process since the need for technology integration in language learning is unavoidable. More researches are encouraged to investigate the practices of online learning media in EFL instruction in a low technology context and the needs of students on technology integration in language learning.

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