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ENGLISH EDUCATION MASTER STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON ONLINE LEARNING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

ELT enterprises are always ever-changing in these recent years due to the learners' learning needs, preferences, interests, and proficiency. This progressive change is noticeable during this covid-19 pandemic where all educational institutions are commissioned their learners to study from home with the support of technological interfaces. This current small-scale qualitative study was an attempt to discover the specific perspectives upheld by English Education Master Students concerning the internalization of online EFL learning activities during these recent 2 year periods. To fulfill this research objectivity, the narrative inquiry was employed to fully attain the authentic data derived from the research participants manifested in the form of stories. In the short-term data gathering processes, 5 open-ended written narrative inquiry questions were distributed to 2 English Education Master Students of Sanata Dharma University, batch 2020. Anchored on the obtained research results, online EFL learning activities are quite beneficial in promoting more fruitful learning outcomes and embracing learners' learning pace in absorbing the imparted learning materials. Hence, it is worth highlighting that this learning method is appropriately suitable for nowadays target language learning venture due to its practicality and feasibility. Some specific suggestions were also depicted in the last section.

Keywords: covid-19 pandemic, graduate students, online learning

Introduction

It is still fresh in our mind that the covid-19 outbreak forced all people to not have direct interactions with others due to the precarious impacts imparted by this virus. As an effective solution, governments all over the world require employees to work from home to prevent the massive transmission of this virus. Without exception, education sectors simultaneously commissioned teachers and learners to utilize an online learning method from their homes. This phenomenon had cast a higher level of anxiety and shock since meaningful learning encounters heavily depend on the quality of internet connectivity, specific teaching-learning instructions, and technological mastery. Anwar and Wahid (2021) revealed that the majority of university EFL learners experienced frustrating, boring, and taxing

learning dynamics due to the limited internet connection and low quality of teaching-learning engagement in online learning sessions. Regarding its definition, online learning is a learning mode in which learning community members are equipped with stable internet connectivity and qualified technological platforms to endure such meaningful learning enterprises in the light of a particular distance. Sahoo (2020) clearly defines online learning as one of the effective distant approaches where teachers and learners can work hand-in-hand to expand their targeted subject knowledge more constantly. More specifically, there are 2 types of online learning worthwhile to be incorporated during the covid-19 pandemic namely synchronous and asynchronous.

In the synchronous mode, all learners are required to enter the meeting by utilizing a particular meeting ID or codes shared by the host. While in an asynchronous mode, all learners are allowed to open and download the uploaded learning materials anytime without being restricted by the formal learning period. These above-explained conceptions are closely correlated with an online learning theory propounded by Setyowati et al., (2021) mentioning that educators all around the globe have to be able to make use of both synchronous and asynchronous online learning modes to allow learners to undergo mutual interactions with teachers as well as other learning companions. While, at the same time, forge their autonomous learning behavior outside of the daily routine online classroom sessions.

In the EFL learning realm, the internalization of an online learning mode during the covid-19 pandemic has also brought about a vast range of positive influences. With the support of online EFL learning enterprises, learners are more capable of fostering their target language competencies into the utmost levels since unlimited information can be intensively accessed by them. As such, they have progressively improved their communicative competencies, even without the continual guidance addressed by their teachers. This first advantageous value is tightly interwoven with the finding of Rahmawati (2016) discovering that an online EFL learning venture has fully offered a learner-oriented learning environment, which eventually resulted in better-facilitated English learning processes.

Other than that, an online EFL learning approach can enable all learners to fully comprehend the imparted teaching materials delivered by their teachers due to the daily classroom recordings posted on the designated learning platforms. This second advantage is mutually interlinked with an online learning theory adduced by Mahyoob (2020) theorized that EFL learners have thoroughly gained a more exhaustive understanding of the learning materials addressed by their teachers with the presence of an online learning mode since they can watch the classroom recordings repeatedly and independently after the classroom time. Moreover, online EFL learning activities have terrifically elevated learners' critical thinking, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills as they are continually commissioned to review the uploaded learning materials autonomously with minimum assistance from their teachers and learning counterparts. In accord with the above-mentioned benefit, Hazaymeh (2021) unveiled that EFL learners had progressively transfigured into more competent, self-reliant, and mature academicians through online learning enterprises since they felt urgent to comprehend all the learning materials entirely.

Apart from those above-explicated advantageous values, online EFL learning systems are not without shortcomings. Firstly, intimate, warm, and friendly learning atmospheres are sparse in online learning sessions gradually diminishing learners' social together with collaborative skills that they can easily hone in face-to-face classroom activities. Ho et al., (2017) highly recommend that educational stakeholders, educators, and policymakers establish more collaborative networking with each other to devise more effective pedagogical approaches, which correspond to the online EFL classroom interfaces undergone by learners. In the same vein, online EFL learning activities are also deemed as a premature knowledge-construction process where there is a void of authentic target language learning experience. It can be rephrased that learners can potentially encounter various target language impediments with the minimum moral, cognitive, and psychological supports from teachers that may result in learning disengagement. In agreement with the view expressed above, Ahmad (2016) concurred that the inducement of meaningful online EFL learning processes highly required continuous practices, intensive training, and richer experiences unless this learning type would probably hinder learners' motivation, resilient, and target language competencies development since they dealt with a pile of learning obstructions individually. Interestingly though, those 2 aforementioned issues do not halt there.

As the majority of EFL learners have difficulties in obtaining decent technological devices for their everyday online learning sessions, they are more likely to skip the classes. This arising hurdle is in conjunction with the finding of Wahab and Iskandar (2020) unfolding that a considerable number of Indonesian EFL learners are demotivated to attend their daily classes since they do not possess gadgets that can fully support their learning processes. The ultimate hindrance deals with the presence of internet connectivity. For meaningful online EFL learners, it is undeniable for all learners to connect their electronic devices with a stable internet connection. EFL learners dwelling in rural areas are not able to attend their learning activities due to the internet connection problem. In a profound investigation of online EFL learning conducted in Indonesia, Nashruddin, Alam, and Tanasy (2020) unveiled that poor internet connection was ascribed as one of the serious obstacles for EFL learners residing in rural areas. Thus, they advocated for the government to set up a more solid collaborative networking with all educational stakeholders to provide steady internet connectivity for them to undergo more meaningful learning enterprises.

Before the researcher explained the noticeable gap and the significance of this current study, it is worth mentioning that 5 relevant prior studies concerning online EFL learning during the covid-19 pandemic had been run in Indonesian educational contexts. The first study was conducted by Rahayu and Wirza (2020) discovering that the majority of Indonesian EFL teachers had valued the effectiveness of online learning since it successfully preserved their valuable time to accomplish other indispensable administrative works. In the second identical investigation, Syauqi, Munadi, and Triyono (2020) reported that most university EFL learners appreciated the implementation of online learning due to its practicality, flexibility, and accessibility. However, they sanctioned that the teachers' teaching materials were incongruent with their particular learning needs, interest, and preferences. Rinekso and Muslim (2020) unearthed that a considerable number of university EFL learners

were appreciative of the incorporation of online learning since they had progressively transformed into more critical, proficient, and independent target language academicians. While the poor internet connectivity that occurred in their institutions remained unsolved. Tanjung and Utomo (2021) found out that Indonesian university EFL learners were capable of improving their target language skills more significantly after being exposed to online learning activities. On the other hand, they also believed that it is urgently needed for educational stakeholders along with experts to design more suitable pedagogical approaches that best suit specific online learning dynamics to promote a higher degree of proactive learning engagement in the upcoming events.

In the last study, Pasaribu and Dewi (2021) unfolded that a great number of Indonesian university EFL learners had gradually become more reflective, self-reliant, and active learning participants while participating in a wide array of online learning sessions with the constant support of decent technological devices as well as appropriate teaching-learning activities creatively designed by the teachers. In line with the above-explicated studies done by the previous researchers, it is worth noting that there is still infrequent literature investigating graduate university EFL learners' perceptions toward the utilization of online learning during the covid-19 pandemic. Based on the researcher's framework, it is also of crucial importance to explore graduate university EFL learners' perceptions on online learning mode amid the covid-19 outbreak to offer richer perspectives for our educational stakeholders, experts, practitioners, and policy-makers concerning the suitable implementation of pedagogical approaches, learning activities, and teaching materials rewarding for the advancement of future online learning enterprises.

Anchored on this research objectivity, the researcher expectantly hoped that this small-scale qualitative study can consolidate our knowledge, perspectives, and beliefs of online EFL learning enterprises during this ever-changing situation in the hope that our educational basis will not merely heed severe attention toward traditional teaching-learning venture after the post-pandemic era, yet make us realize that online learning, when combined with onsite learning approaches, can potentially bring about more impactful influences for the progression educational systems. This central concern of this present investigation was manifested in this single research problem: (1) what are the specific perceptions held by English Education Master Students regarding the implementation of online learning during the covid-19 pandemic?

Method

This qualitative study was run with the help of narrative inquiry to obtain more authentic data from the truth told by the research participants. Ary et al., (2018) adduce that narrative inquiry can potentially provide a sound basis for the researchers to obtain more robust research finding it is consolidated by the apparent stories disseminated by research participants. Concerning the aforesaid nature of this current study, the researcher planned to distribute 5 open-ended written narrative inquiry questions to 2 invited interviewees. These 2 randomly-chosen research participants were English Education Master Students batch 2020 of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta.

The researcher held a strong belief that reliable data would be attained from these research participants since they have been engaging in online learning processes at the onset of their new academic entrance until this present moment. It indicated that they have experienced online EFL learning activities for 1.5 years approaching their last semester in this new academic year. Since they are still engaging in English Education Master Study Program, the researcher aimed to conduct the data gathering processes shortly before they graduate to thoroughly offer renewed as well as credible findings based on their perception concerning online EFL learning enterprises. In analyzing the data, the researcher attempted to subdivide the frequently-appeared findings into some specific themes. After accomplishing this first process, the researcher delineated the obtained findings argumentatively with the accompaniment of pertinent prior findings and theories to generate more robust research results contextual to be internalized in present as well as future online EFL learning enterprises.

Findings and Discussion

This following part attempted to heed more profound attention of argumentatively explicating 2 major obtained findings derived from the invited interviewees. Those 2 major themes are (1) Online EFL learning improved the desired learning outcomes and (2) Online EFL learning activities enabled learners to learn at their own pace.

Theme 1: Online EFL Learning Improved the Desired Learning Outcomes

Apart from the contradictory theories and findings depicted in the prior subsection, the first interviewee frankly confessed that the internalization of online EFL learning enterprises had progressively brought about more fruitful learning outcomes for her. This indispensable learning reward is predominantly caused by the independent nature of online EFL learning where all learners are individually commissioned to possess a higher level of understanding of the shared learning materials. More importantly, the first interviewee simultaneously mentioned that the incorporation of online EFL learning is highly beneficial for learners who are easily get distracted by other irrelevant matters occurring in the physical classroom circumstances resulted in the full attainment of fruitful learning outcomes. All these above-recited personalized online EFL learning experiences are closely associated with the prior finding of Allo (2020) finding out that there was a higher degree of intention consented by both university teachers and learners to constantly harness online learning approaches during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the significant escalation of learning autonomy and concentration. In another identical study, Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) unfolded that online EFL learning activities, only if taken with great care, could bring learners closer to achieving more holistic target language learning outcomes. The subsequent interviewee 1 excerpts are also congruent with the above-mentioned conceptions.

[Interviewee 1: *Of course, being able to learn more independently, being able to access many learning resources, and being able to explore various learning-enhancing software.*]

[Interviewee 1: *I think this online learning is very helpful for individuals who are easily distracted like me because I can focus on the material, assignments, and lecturers' explanations without having to be distracted by the business of my friends in class.*]

Furthermore, this meaningful learning did not solely emerge without a presence of foundational efforts. As already alluded by the first interviewee, it is undeniably important for EFL learners to establish, preserve, and elevate their self-motivation amid a vast array of endless challenges during online learning sessions. One of the valuable actions that need to be taken into account by global university EFL learners is to constantly stick to the designated learning objectivities. By sticking tightly to the specific learning goals, these learners can potentially transform into more highly-motivated academicians. When they have transfigured into more desirous knowledge seekers, these learners will be more capable of devising plenty of efficient strategies corresponding with their learning contexts. These contentions are tightly interwoven with the finding of Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2020) unearthing that in the light of online EFL learning activities, learners will be more able to become more thoughtful, strategic, and resilient academicians adept in overcoming the particular learning obstructions. Concerning the aforesaid findings, Farrah and Al-Bakry (2020) theorized that the consistent support imparted by the decent technological tools, teachers, and educational stakeholders, would gradually enable university EFL learners to strategize the chosen learning strategies to accomplish the specific learning obstacles that may potentially hinder their learning endeavor. Almusharraf and Khahro (2020) unveiled that the appropriate online EFL teaching-learning materials, instructions, regulations, and programs could terrifically allow university learners to transfigure into more effective problem-solvers as well as judicious strategy-makers since they are all armed with the hands-on learning enterprises in each session. These perspectives shared common ground with these interview excerpts obtained from the first teacher.

[Interviewee 1: *So to understand each class requires me to apply a different strategy. Like in the Teaching Practicum class where the lecturer gives a lot of instructions, then I will take a lot of notes.*]

[Interviewee 1: *As a student, in an effort to maintain engagement in class is to maintain my motivation and learning goals. I try to wait for explanations and understandings that will come side by side with the limited support from lecturers in teaching in class. Like thinking "what will I get today?"*]

Irrespective of the advantageous online EFL learning benefits mentioned before, it is also thoughtful and useful for global EFL teachers, learners, and practitioners to advance future online learning practices for the betterment of our educational journeys. This belief is mutually aligned with the first interviewee's learning experience. She forthrightly acknowledged that online EFL learning events she is had undergone offered a wide range of challenges. The first challenge deals with the absence of mutual learning communities.

As noted previously, both EFL teachers and learners experience taxing moments to establish more intimate rapport with each other through online learning activities. This matter occurred since the interactions by them are strictly confined by the technological interface disabling them to precisely know their current feelings, emotions, and learning difficulties. Another strenuous matter that worsens this distant learning situation is the scarcity of intensive social interactions. According to the first interviewee, since the university teachers and learners can merely assemble in one particular technological platform, it is extremely challenging for them to collaboratively promote meaningful, intimate, and effective learning encounters as they previously did in their face-to-face classroom surroundings. As an effect, learners will feel reluctant to proactively disseminate their ideas, thoughts, and opinions due to the obscure facial expressions displayed by their teachers.

It can also be phrased that learners are gradually demotivated to spread the diverse fields of knowledge when they are not able to discern the positive interactions showcased by their teachers. Efriana (2021) remarked that worldwide EFL teachers should be equipped with intensive online teaching-learning training to suffice their learners' cognitive, emotional, and psychological needs thoroughly, which in turn, is impactful to transform them into more highly-desirous knowledge discoverers. Similarly, Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020) averred that it is increasingly essential for nowadays ELT experts, practitioners, and educators to establish more mutual collaborative networking in providing a more interactive online EFL learning venture in which all learners can endure a more pleasurable learning atmosphere. Ultimately, Hazaymeh (2021) revealed that a considerable number of university EFL learners are easily feeling alienated without the adequate exposure of intimate, positive, and mutual interactions as they oftentimes experienced in their onsite learning events. This negative learning experience may hazardously result in demotivated feelings. All these above-explicated findings are favorably corroborated by the first interviewee's excerpts in these subsequent lines.

[Interviewee 1: The limitations of real face-to-face space which causes us to not be able to understand the character and mood of lecturers and students. This makes us reluctant to ask questions, especially when we encounter assignments, especially from new lecturers we don't know.]

[Interviewee 1: In the end, I had trouble doing my homework. Then because online classes make interpersonal relationships not good so I am not able to get to know other friends so it feels awkward when doing group assignments.]

Theme 2: Online EFL Learning Activities Enabled Learners to Learn at Their own Pace

Concerning the above-depicted theme, it can be parsed that the internalization of online EFL learners successfully allowed learners to learn all the targeted subject materials at their own pace. Congruent with this theme, the second interviewee openly avowed that she enjoyed online EFL learning for almost 2 years on her campus due to the gradual emersion of better-facilitated target language classes. In

this regard, better-facilitated target language classroom contexts refer to the full acknowledgment of individual differences in which each learner can markedly elevate their target language competencies in harmony with their learning proficiency. Admittedly, this thorough acceptance is believed to not only enhance their language skills but also promote a wide array of positive learning behaviors such as durable motivation, a higher level of focus, and a strong willingness to understand the addressed learning materials more comprehensively.

Furthermore, the second interviewee also supported further implementation of online EFL learning enterprises since more pleasurable, interactive, and engaging learning activities can potentially be wholly experienced by all learning community members. All these rewarding learning benefits took place since there are a vast array of sophisticated learning platforms that maintain learners' learning interests such as Worldwall, Quizziz, Kahoot, Bamboozle, and Quizlet. As the exhaustive attention of our target language learning venture has gradually been shifted into student-centered modes wherein all learners have the equal chances to forge the 4 integral skills of English; reading, writing, listening, and speaking, it is doubtless to say that the advancement of online EFL learning dynamics will be of great significance to supportively assist all teachers as well as learners to achieve more holistic educational objectivities in the long run. All these above-explained findings are closely interlocked with the finding of Rinekso and Muslim (2020) discovering that a great number of university EFL learners encouraged the continuity of online EFL learning in future events since they were capable of maximizing the target language competencies in the light of enjoyable and safe learning environments. Akhter (2020) also advocated worldwide for EFL teachers to offer more flexible, innovative, and favorable target language learning enterprises through online learning sessions to entirely allow learners to enjoy those ongoing virtual learning processes. In the same vein, Khatoon and Nezhadmehr (2020) propelled all globalized ELT experts, practitioners, and educators to invent more interactive, dynamic, and creative online EFL learning dynamics for the learners to become more proactive academicians highly desirous of discovering a wider array of facts throughout their lives. In accord with these above-cited findings, the second interviewee's interview excerpts are also worth observing in these following lines.

[The second interviewee: *I also believe that online learning using some online platforms might encourage students' concentration to pay attention to the particular materials or explanations of the lecturers. It is also worth recognizing in this section that the stronger establishment of self-regulation allowed EFL teachers to be more professional educators.*]

[The second interviewee: *Online learning also allows self-paced learning for each student. In online learning, the students learn at their own pace without feeling worried about other students' learning pace.*]

[The second interviewee: *Since today's learning activities take full advantage of the current technology using platform variations, the courses are more interactive, interesting, and engaging.*]

To better facilitate the ongoing online EFL learning processes, the second interviewee strategized a vast range of effective strategies to overcome various learning barriers that may hinder her learning motivation. The first strategy she oftentimes utilized was to understand all the essential technical matters related to technology. It is inevitably pivotal for digital native learners in this modern age to completely gain a higher level of comprehension toward the technological platforms applied in their classroom learning circumstances. By doing so, they will not only undergo such a meaningful target language learning encounter but also master the technological matters beneficial for their future working places in the future. Zou et al., (2021) strongly encouraged all EFL learners to possess a more comprehensive understanding of the technological tools they frequently harness in the classroom learning surroundings to ease their personalized learning encounters and transform them into more technological-literate academicians. Ngo (2021) outspokenly postulated that it is extremely crucial for EFL teachers to firstly become good role models in making use of technological devices in the presence of their learners to constantly prompt them to vehemently explore these supportive online platforms.

Again, the efficient utilization of technological platforms in an online EFL learning venture is not without its drawbacks. The second interviewee specifically marked that since online EFL learning processes heavily depend on the quality of internet connection, she sometimes was not capable of undergoing meaningful learning encounters as she intended for. As such, she underwent an arduous learning period while attempting to comprehend all the learned learning materials independently. Acknowledging this common learning issue, the second interviewee still ingrained such a robust learning endeavor outside of the online classroom vicinities by creating a group of supportive learning communities in which all learning members can continuously provide intensive cognitive, moral, and psychological supports to each other.

These proactive learning actions are commendable and worthwhile to be incorporated during the taxing online learning hurdles due to the potent learning supports that can potentially trigger university EFL learners' learning motivation. In the same stratum, Oraif and Elyas (2021) highly recommended globalized university EFL learners to generate more readily-established personalized learning objectivities during, whilst, and after engaging in online learning enterprises to anticipate the potential upcoming hindrances that may reduce their robust learning motivation. In conjunction with these findings, Han et al. (2021) adduced that it is of great importance for worldwide university EFL learners to heed their higher level of attention toward the personalized learning agenda they already set up beforehand by forming sustainable learning communities wherein all learning members can address continual support amid inconvenient online EFL learning events. With an eye to the above-explained findings, the second interviewee also shared an identical notion as follows.

[Interviewee 2: Some online learning classes live through zoom meeting and videoconferencing could not run well and I need to suddenly shut down or restart

the computer device. There is also a difficult moment for me when I get a blackout and my Wi-Fi is getting down.]

[Interviewee 2: Yes, of course, I utilize the particular strategies while participating the online learning. Some suitable strategies were utilized to help me deal with some language issues during the online learning. Since I do not master the technology operation, I learned more technical knowledge about the ways how to operate each online learning platform.]

[Interviewee 2: It is good to have an online group discussion. An online group discussion might build a sense of comfort and develop a community of learners. Through this group, I can also share my feelings about today's teaching and learning activities. In addition, it can encourage students to share information concerning the materials that they did not understand yet.]

Conclusion

Overall speaking, the generated research findings of this current study lead to a tentative conclusion that online EFL learning enterprises are worthy suitable to be internalized in the upcoming ELT enterprises due to the practicality, feasibility, and applicability. To that end, those aforesaid benefits can potentially lead our modern EFL academicians to get closer to the target language outcomes attainment since they have progressively mastered complex technological tools, gradually transformed into more self-reliant knowledge discoverers, and managed their personalized learning activities well. For these holistic learning outcomes to fully take place, nowadays ELT experts, practitioners, policy-makers, and educators are concomitantly propelled to work hand-in-hand to better facilitate the future online EFL learning encounters in the presence of diverse learners. Linking with this suggestive advice, worldwide educational institutions may start to expose EFL teachers to conduct more intensive professional development training concerning the nature, approaches, and technicalities in internalizing online learning activities through their daily-based classroom circumstances.

Reversely, there were 2 major shortcomings unearthed in this present small-scale qualitative study. As this investigation solely relied on open-ended written narrative inquiry questions, it will be haphazard when we generalize those findings into the other online EFL learning contexts taking place in distinctive educational institutions. Lastly, since this present study gathered the data for a short period, a more longitudinal investigation is remarkably needed in the future to yield more robust research results appropriately applicable for the wider scope of online EFL learning implementations. Despite those all aforementioned limitations, this study can potentially provide more insightful views into a vast range of advantageous values of conducting online EFL learning dynamics amid the spreading of covid-19 pandemic during these 2 years, which in turn, giving a gently tap for educational stakeholders to begin inculcating a renewable perspective that online EFL learning activities can bring about plenty of meritorious values if applied in a well-planned manner.

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