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To Use It or Reject It?
EFL Students' Perceptions and Constraints of Using E-Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of e-learning as a tool to teach students has increased significantly. It forced the students to use e-learning to conduct learning activities. The sudden shift to using e-learning has brought several challenges to students. Therefore, this study explores the English Foreign Language (EFL) students' perceptions toward the use of e-learning to study during the COVID-19 pandemic and its constraint by adapting the technology acceptance model (TAM) framework. A descriptive case study is carried out, with data gathered through questionnaires and interviews. The participants are EFL students from a university in a rural area in Indonesia. The data show that EFL students consider e-learning as a suitable approach to continue learning activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and decide to use e-learning for studying purposes. Students, however, face various challenges, including equipment that does not support remote learning, an unsupportive environment, and difficulties understanding courses. The result can be used as a reference for the institution staff or lecturers to create a better curriculum for distance learning. However, this research is limited by the number of participants. Other researchers are expected to cover wider participants from different areas in Indonesia. Several suggestions are proposed within this article, implications for practice and further research are also discussed.

Keywords: COVID-19, distance learning, e-learning, EFL students

Introduction,

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world has caused a massive use of e-learning as a tool to teach in every education sector, including English language teaching. Both the teachers and students are suddenly forced to fully dive into distance learning. This is done to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Yulia, 2020). As a consequence of the sudden shifting, they experienced many struggles to adapt to the new teaching and learning. In Indonesia, while some teachers and staff had prior experience in teaching online, many students had to make a transition for the first time. Subsequently, a study on student perceptions on the usage of e-learning during COVID-19 is required, particularly in rural areas of Indonesia, to facilitate or respond to any issues that may arise.

Some research had been investigated about the sudden shifting to distance learning which affected the students. The research conducted by Lemay et al. (2021) in French regarding the transition to online learning during COVID-19 has revealed that there is immense pressure, workload, and difficulty concentrating in the course as a result of entirely online learning. Other challenges have been found by Oyedotun (2020) who evaluated the sudden change of learning during the pandemic. This finding highlights the students. They were confronting several problems, ranging from mental

health to home distractions and students' instability. Al-Mawee et al. (2021) completed research at Western Michigan University to discover students' attitudes on distant learning. According to reports, students have had negative experiences such as a lack of contact. Despite the lack of contact, the students had good attitudes toward time and location flexibility.

At the same time, the students witness good outcomes from the sudden shift in learning activities. Stevanović et al. (2021) performed research and discovered that students were able to study in a relaxing environment, revisit topics, and save time to travel to the classroom. Students have felt all of this when e-learning was implemented during COVID-19. Moreover, e-learning could lead to future learning where the barrier of time and place can be overcome with having a good curriculum (Rajeh et al., 2021).

Based on the previous findings, the use of e-learning during COVID-19 provided students with both good experiences and difficulties. But this is a good start for the creation of even better distance learning. Thus, research that focuses on students' perceptions of the use of technology must continue to be carried out so that all problems can be found with the best solutions. Moreover, the significance of this research is that it displays a collaboration with qualitative methodologies while adopting the TAM framework. Moreover, there is a lot of study concerning the abrupt change to online learning, but there are only a few studies that focus on rural areas in Indonesia, and they lack the depth of perspectives. This study also looks at perceptions and constraints from the perspective of EFL students. Therefore, it will improve our understanding and provide fresh insights into EFL students' perspectives and constraints.

Research Methodology

The descriptive case study technique was employed in this study to acquire a detailed analysis and a deeper knowledge of the problem in a real-world context and to portray reality (Yin, 2018). To obtain data, a survey was done using a questionnaire and an interview with EFL students. Furthermore, the researchers have investigated a variety of relevant studies connected to the issue to have a better understanding of how this research would go.

An open-ended questionnaire was selected to collect EFL students' perspectives and to describe the constraints that they faced during online learning activities. An open-ended questionnaire was used so that participants may respond with their ideas rather than being limited by the options. Furthermore, it allowed the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding and unique perspective based on the personal experiences of participants (Allen, 2017). In addition, a semi-structured interview was also used to collect the data from the participants and to triangulate the data. The interview was done after the collection of questionnaire data to obtain more specific information from the participants. The interview was conducted until the analysis generated no discoveries and the data was cross-checked.

This study's participants are 89 EFL students in Indonesia who have used e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic via an online platform. The participants were selected using the convenience sampling approach. Convenience sampling was used since it was difficult to find participants during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus it was determined to recruit participants who were easy to find or contact (Edgar & Manz, 2017). Following that, the participants were contacted to obtain informed consent and the research was resumed when they consented to be responders.

The data which had been collected was then analyzed by using interactive model analysis from Miles et al. (2014). The data analysis has aimed to extract the information from the data collected through questionnaires and interviews. The data analysis was done in three phases, (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) drawing conclusion. The data obtained by participants was simplified in the first step, and relevant data were picked from the data that had been collected. After the data has been simplified, it is ready for coding. The data were then displayed in such a way that they could be easily interpreted to gain a detailed grasp of the problem as the process progressed to the second phase. The data displayed might be in the form of a table, diagram, or graph to assist the researcher in extracting themes from data analysis. The final phase was to form a conclusion. Researchers attempt to take a unifying theme and turn it into a unique result to answer the research topic. The researcher also looked back at the data collecting, data condensation, and data display before drawing findings to avoid the occurrence of missing/wrong data in reaching conclusions.

Findings and Discussion,

Findings

This section will convey two main concepts including EFL students' perceptions of using e-learning and the constraints that they face during the use. For each of the concepts, the most representative excerpts from the participants' responses are chosen.

EFL Students Perceptions of Using E-Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic

During this research, the participants have experienced online learning for almost one year. Thus, they have been going up and down in using e-learning. They have been introduced to many kinds of the online platform that can be used to teach or conduct learning activities. The experience of using e-learning has created a unique perception for each of the respondents. Furthermore, this study tried to reveal those perceptions to become an insight for other students and teachers. It resulted in three sub-categories, as follows:

Effectiveness of E-Learning: Time-Saving and Improve Performance

The participants perceived the use of e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to be an effective strategy to connect students and teachers. The use of e-learning also increases the efficiency of learning. The participants felt that they can use e-learning to finish the work faster and more effectively. They can finish homework by searching on the internet to find relevant information and references without having to go to the library or spending too much time looking for the book. EFL students might use their remaining time for additional courses that will help them improve their abilities.

> *"... by using technology, I can finish homework faster. I can save more time and use the remaining time to learn more skills and knowledge"* (Int/An/2021)

> *"By using e-learning technology I can do my assignments faster because I can find references on the internet for free. E-learning also allows me to work on assignments in groups without having to meet in person"* (Int/Br/2021)

Aside from saving time in completing homework, e-learning also helps EFL students to learn the content and checkup references. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the usage of e-learning can increase student learning performance. EFL students believe that learning becomes efficient and possible because of e-learning. They said that even when employing an e-learning platform, it might allow students and teachers to work together to accomplish assignments. Indirectly, the usage of e-learning can promote teamwork and critical thinking abilities.

> *"The use of e-learning during the pandemic made me still able to do my assignments in groups. One of them is by using Microsoft Teams, I can complete tasks together with friends, discuss, and also give each other input"* (Int/De/2021)

> *"I like to use e-learning during a pandemic because I can still do assignments together with friends and also discuss with teachers. During a pandemic, I cannot meet face-to-face, e-learning is the best solution for online learning"* (Int/Sr/2021)

Based on the data collected, it can be stated that the availability of e-learning benefits EFL students, which can eventually sustain the continuity of learning. Moreover, e-learning has the potential to boost the efficacy of learning during a pandemic by saving time to do homework and enhancing learning performance.

Redefining Attitude: Positive or Negative

The usage of e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic had a good influence not just in terms of enhancing learning effectiveness, but also impacted students' attitudes. In this study, EFL students indicated that when using e-learning, it had both a good and negative influence. Students enjoy the simplicity with which e-learning allows them to find references or information related to the content being studied. Furthermore, only through the use of e-learning will students be able to continue studying as normally as possible throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

> *"I prefer to use e-learning to study because I can get references from the internet. In the past, I had to go to the library, but now I just need to stay at home and search on the internet. I have become better to search for other references and information through the internet"* (Int/Aa/2021)

> *"The use of e-learning during a pandemic is very helpful because I don't have to leave the house to look for references. I just need to stay in my room and can complete the task easily"* (Int/De/2021)

Despite the numerous benefits of using e-learning, many EFL students exploit it. Students' negative attitudes include browsing social media while learning, ditching class, and playing online games. They can do so because distance learning permits them to take another activity, and the teacher does not have complete control over what the students do.

> *"... For example, if someone uses e-learning while studying, it becomes an opportunity to open social media, and some even play games. Because they are not required to open the camera, so they can do other activities without being caught."* (Int/Ce/2021)

> *"Sometimes I open social media while studying online. It's hard not to open it because we are in front of the laptop from morning to evening, so we are bored and need entertainment. So I open social media because I'm tired of listening to the teacher's explanation from the morning."* (Int/Ba/2021)

It is possible to conclude that the usage of e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced EFL students' positive or negative actions. Students' positive attitudes greatly assist them in completing homework and collaborating with other students. While the negative attitude displayed is primarily a result of boredom among students who use e-learning to study for too long from dawn to evening.

The Willingness of Using E-Learning: Support Learning and Keep Up with Technology

EFL students have used various types of e-learning after experiencing full online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and based on their experiences, the students chose to continue using e-learning for studying and teaching in the future. When asked why they continued to utilize e-learning, the majority of them stated that it could help learning activities. It is feasible to continue distance learning activities.

> *"I will use e-learning to study in the future because it can support my learning activities, make it easier to find references, and help me to do group assignments."* (Int/Fe/2021)

> *"I will use e-learning to teach my students later when I become a teacher. Many benefits are provided not only for teachers but also for students such as providing an interesting learning experience and being able to bring authentic learning into the classroom."* (Int/Be/2021)

Students' learning experiences can offer them insights into global technology advances. Students grow more receptive to the use of technology, and they develop into people who are not as tough to learn or apply new technologies. Using technology in the classroom can also boost students' self-efficacy, making them more confident in their abilities to use technology in the classroom. Because students have high self-efficacy, this is an excellent provision for them if they decide to continue their education.

The Constraints that EFL Students' Feel during the Use of E-learning

Using e-learning to its best potential during the COVID-19 pandemic poses its own set of problems for students. Distance learning from home has an influence on students' learning processes without a doubt. This study discovered the obstacles experienced by EFL students while using e-learning to facilitate distance learning during the pandemic.

Unsupported Devices

Distance learning cannot be separated from the use of the device to access apps used by teachers in the classroom. This necessitates students to have access to a device that can assist learning activities. However, several of the participants reported that their gadgets were incapable of supporting learning activities and that they were compelled to replace them with new ones. Students have issues such as gadgets that are too old, slow to respond, and storage capacity concerns that run out quickly since they are required to install multiple programs for learning when using e-learning during a pandemic.

> *" I have a problem when using e-learning because my cellphone is too old. I mean my cellphone sometimes doesn't respond or even takes a long time to open the application. My cellphone is an old model, so sometimes it doesn't support the application that I want to use." (Int/An/2021)*

> *"... the problem I'm facing is more of my handphone. My cellphone no longer supports distance learning, for example, when I open zoom, it takes a long time to join. Not to mention the problem of internet quotas because all learning uses the internet..."* (Int/Be/2021)

Aside from unsupported gadgets, factors like internet quotas that run out fast and areas with poor signal strength are also an issue during this pandemic (Hamid et al., 2020). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all learning is done from home using online platforms, video conferencing, and other sorts of online learning technologies, forcing learning to be heavily reliant on internet signals. According to the findings of this study, students face issues such as quotas that run out quickly and poor internet connection.

Unsupportive Environment

During the pandemic, distance learning is most often conducted from each student's home. However, not all students who learn at home can study properly. The environment at home is largely unpredictable by teachers and students, thus some interruptions occur when learning is taking place, for example, many participants indicated that when they were doing distance learning, their parents called, or their siblings interfered while they were studying. There are also external distractions that students cannot control, such as noises of the vehicle outside.

> *"... I also have problems when doing online learning at home. Sometimes when I was studying, I was asked to go to the shop or my sister even cried in the room which was very disturbing. The point is studying at home is not very supportive because there are many distractions. Sometimes I have to go elsewhere if I want to study." (Int/De/2021)*

> *"The environment at home is quite difficult to manage. My parents called me when I was studying, and I was on the open mic at the time. I was embarrassed since my friends had overheard it. I was sometimes asked to clean the home even though it is still time for study (online learning), so I need to clean first."* (Int/Ki/2021)

There are so many disruptions that occur with remote studying at home; an unsupportive learning environment is an issue that students cannot ignore. Parents and teachers must work together to be able to plan study hours at home. Students may thus study during school hours and not be bothered at home.

Hard to Understand the Materials

Another problem presented by students was their inability to comprehend the content delivered by the teachers. EFL students believe that during the pandemic in which all learning is done online, many teachers merely offer homework, explain the content quickly, and there is a lack of communication between teachers and students. Students stated that it was quite different when teachers taught face-to-face and that online education made it more difficult for students to grasp what the teachers were saying.

> *"I have difficulty in understanding the lessons delivered by my teacher. Plus, during COVID-19, teachers gave more assignments and minimal explanations. I feel less able to ask questions when I don't understand." (Int/Ai/2021)*

> *"I am a bit slow to understand what the teacher is explaining. In the past, when I didn't know, I could still ask my friends, but because it's online, it's difficult to ask friends. If you ask via WA (WhatsApp), the explanation is still lacking. Anyway, I have more difficulty learning full online like this."* (Int/Bd/2021)

Almost all participants found it difficult to grasp the materials, suggesting that teachers' delivery of information during the COVID-19 pandemic should be reviewed. Because students have been studying online all day, teachers must modernize themselves to deliver engaging learning to students during the pandemic.

Discussion

This study aims to dig deeply into EFL students' acceptance of e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in higher education in a rural area in Indonesia. In general, many EFL students have good views on the usage of e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic because they are fully aware that learning can only occur through e-learning. The findings of this study revealed that the effectiveness of e-learning was critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. E-learning can boost student learning (Kratochvil, 2014), particularly amid the present pandemic. This is acceptable given the COVID-19 pandemic made all learning has been relocated online. This study discovered the same thing: e-learning helps keep learning activities ongoing and also helps students accomplish assignments more effectively. There are slight differences in the findings in the research conducted by Cakır & Solak (2015) who measured EFL learners' attitudes using TAM found that EFL learners have a positive attitude toward the use of e-learning. However, this study discovered not only a positive but also a negative attitude. In this study, it was discovered that some students exploited the usage of e-learning during the COVID-19 time, such as cheating, seeking answers on the internet, and opening social media. Although e-learning facilitates EFL students in learning and looking for resources, it also demands EFL students' management to sustain a study habit. Unfortunately, the majority of participants are unaware of this. As a result, to avoid e-learning misuse, parents and teachers must pay attention to this.

Moreover, the experience that has been felt by EFL students is one of the reasons for them to continue to use e-learning in the future. A previous study by Chung et al. (2015) also said that EFL students had a high positive interest in continuing using technology to study because of the effect acquired from using technology, convenience, and increased self-confidence. However, instructors and policymakers should be aware that during the COVID-19 pandemic, EFL students find it challenging to use e-learning. Efriana (2021) claimed that Students' problems include laziness while learning, a lack of supporting gadgets, and poor internet connectivity. Similar findings were discovered in this study, in which students claimed that the gadgets they possessed did not help their learning activities. Not only that, but the non-conducive home atmosphere hinders learning activities. In line with Sadeghi (2019) who finds the same difficulties experienced by online learners. They are easily distracted, lose concentration, and also open applications that are not in accordance with learning objectives. Another problem faced by EFL students is their difficulty in understanding the material taught by the teacher. The same thing was found by Shrestha et al. (2021) that most teachers

say that in online learning most students are passive in online classes and have difficulty capturing teaching materials.

Conclusion and Suggestion

This study added to the knowledge of the technology acceptance model by analyzing EFL students' perspectives and constraints in the Indonesian setting. This study further contributed to the technology acceptance model by offering insight into EFL students' perspectives and constraints as shown by questionnaire and interview data. Initially, e-learning was ignored, particularly in undeveloped nations. The current COVID-19 pandemic, however, has forced the whole country to rely on it for learning. In the current survey, the majority of participants agree that e-learning may be used as an educational tool. The data obtained in this study resulted in 3 themes: effectiveness; redefining attitude; and willingness to use e-learning. Moreover, the students still face some constraints when conducting learning at home. The result can be used as a reference for the institution staff or lecturers to create a better curriculum for distance learning. However, this research is limited by the number of participants. Other researchers are expected to cover wider participants from different areas in Indonesia.

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