




## The implementation of EFL online learning: how do the non-English department students perceive it?

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak influences nearly all facets of life, including education. This study conducted survey investigations to detect non-English students' views on the implementation of EFL online learning. This study used cross-sectional survey research designs employing questionnaires and interviews as data-gathering devices and procedures. The population of this study was all the first-graders of the Islamic Education Program of a State Institute for Islamic Studies situated in Central Java, Indonesia, in the academic year of 2020/2021. A number of 135 students took part as the sample of this study. The results of the study showed that there are three main phases of EFL online learning. First, at the preparation phase, they had high optimism of EFL online learning. Second, it turned into caution and forbearance at the implementation phase. At last, their optimistic level was increasing at the end (evaluation phase). This study means that it is not simple to retain the enthusiasm and optimism of students through EFL online study, particularly in non-English department classrooms. Teachers should be innovative in delivering instructions for learning, offering learning equipment, and selecting appropriate learning platforms. Teachers should also be able to comprehend pupils' psychological state to prevent boredom in online learning.

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## Introduction

Online learning (e-learning) is a method of instruction that does not require face-to-face contact and does not take place in a traditional classroom setting. Instead, it takes place in certain virtual rooms and interacts digitally over the internet network. Ramadhan, Chaeruman, and Kustandi (2018) claimed online learning reduces distance and time, and e-learning is an online learning process that may be synchronous or asynchronous. In keeping with the perspective of Mahendra (2018), there is a material in digital communication that

investigates synchronous and asynchronous communication. This learning method is a partnership between technology improvements and a learning method termed e-learning. Optimizing planning and using this strategy will considerably enhance the education globe. E-learning is optimizing learning experiences using proper information and communication technologies (Ifeakor & Okoli, 2014).

The convergence of technology developments and education is the product of online learning or e-learning. Ramadhan et al. (2018) stated that cooperation between technical progress and the learning process leads to learning called e-learning. This learning method can be used as a solution where distance and time become obstacles in the course of learning. A well-designed implementation using this approach will make this learning method a supporting factor in the advancement of technology in education.

It is one of the government's responses to the virus that is spreading worldwide, COVID-19. COVID-19 is a virus accused of originating in Wuhan, China. This virus triggers mild respiratory infections with acute pneumonia that can kill. Many infected with this virus usually have initial signs, such as fever and cough, but the symptoms are followed by shortness of breath in a more severe period (Kumar et al., 2021). The transmitting mechanism is high-speed, and often such signs do not occur (Harapan et al., 2020; Shereen et al., 2020; Wiersinga et al., 2020). The government has made many attempts to reduce the spread of COVID-19, including social distance, school from home (SFH), and work from home (WFH). This approach leads to limited physical and social contact. This obstructs the different things that society usually carries out in public areas, one of which is teaching and studying.

This has caused numerous deaths and has had a significant effect on many industries worldwide, including education. Most teaching and learning activities have been temporarily suspended from kindergarten to institutions that require direct physical contact in any educational institution (Abidah et al., 2020; Allain-Dupré et al., 2020). The condition triggers improvements to the learning environment, where each pupil also has to acquire experience, but the distance and time are constrained.

Online education is the most widely used at the college level (Abidah et al., 2020). This practice is conducted remotely and is accessible to lecturers and students at any time and from any location with an internet connection. Even if the pandemic is currently underway, it is possible to conduct a learning loop through this online portal. It simplifies communication between lecturers and students (Bailey & Lee, 2020). The implementation of this online approach elicited a response as evidenced by students' perceptions. Furthermore, studying through online platforms also has a beneficial influence on the use of technology. The diversity of media used by the lecturers makes the students better know and more comfortable using online learning platforms employed in everyday activities. Students' issues in studying through this online platform are the volatility of internet connection and the power of outages in their locality.

Several studies investigate the students' perceptions of the implementation of online learning. Numerous scholars have undertaken a study on students' perspectives of online learning (Adnan, 2017; Farrah, 2015; Mulyadi, 2019; Muthuprasad et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2018; Ogden, 2015; Patricia Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Thongsri et al., 2019; Wei & Chou, 2020; Yunita & Maisarah, 2020). Nguyen (2018) explores the impact of the flipped approach on the skills development of English learners at the college level. The results demonstrated a considerable increase in pupils' language skills through an open survey and a semi-structured

interview. Adnan (2017) explores and compares flipped classrooms' effects to traditional classes to contribute to the increasing field of knowledge on flipped teaching by examining academic outcomes and students' impressions of their learning experience for both modalities. The results show outstanding evaluations and satisfactory learning experiences. Yunita and Maisarah (2020) set forth perspectives for students on implementing the learning process during the COVID-19 epidemic at the Bengkulu University Graduate Program of English Education. The findings show that students' impressions of online learning are in a positive category. Meanwhile, the pandemic of COVID-19 prompted (Muthuprasad et al., 2021) to study how Indian students perceived and preferred online learning. The results showed that most respondents (70%) were willing to use online classes to handle the curriculum throughout the pandemic. The majority of students favored online learning through smartphone. Using content analysis, they discovered that students prefer recorded lessons with a quiz at the end. Another study was also conducted by Wei and Chou (2020). They studied whether students' online learning perspectives and preparation impact their performance and course satisfaction. The findings show that online learning perceptions and course satisfaction were shown to be influenced by students' computer/Internet self-efficacy for online learning preparation.

From the previous studies mentioned before, it was found that a study focusing on non-English department students' perceptions on the implementation of EFL online learning is still scarce. For this reason, this study was initiated by the researcher to fulfill the gaps. This study focuses on revealing students' perceptions on the implementation of fully online learning, including preparation, implementation, evaluation, and the platform used as well. Besides, this study is also focused on teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in non-English department classes. The research problem proposed in this study was: How is the perception of non-English Department students on the implementation of EFL online learning viewed from the phases of preparation, implementation, and evaluation?

## **Method**

### ***Research design***

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design. A cross-sectional survey captures data at a single moment in time (Creswell, 2012; Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). In quantitative research, survey research designs are processes in which investigators give a survey to a sample of the total population of individuals to ascertain their views, beliefs, behaviors, or attributes (Creswell, 2012). Using questionnaires and interviews, survey researcher collects quantitative, numerical data and statistically analyzes them to characterize trends in answering questions and evaluating research questions or hypotheses. Additionally, the researcher analyzes the data by linking the findings of the statistical test to previous research papers.

### ***Research participants***

The first step in conducting a survey is to determine the target audience. This stage entails defining the population, calculating the number of persons in it, and deciding if a list of candidates (i.e., the sample size) can be obtained for the sample. Also, before sampling, the population may need to be stratified such that specific features of the population (for

example, men and women) are represented in the sample (Creswell, 2012; Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). Dealing with this study, the population involves all the first-graders of the Islamic Education Program of a State Institute for Islamic Studies situated in Central Java, Indonesia, in the academic year of 2020/2021. The total population is about 280 students. Then, to choose the sample, the cluster random sampling technique was employed. It resulted in a number of 135 students who participated in this survey. Then, the selected samples were given an online questionnaire through Google Form and were interviewed in the group online through the Google Meet platform. The research participants' demographic data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research participants' data

Sex	Number (N)	Age(s)	Department
Male	40	Between 18-20	Islamic Education
Female	95	Between 18-20	Islamic Education

### ***Research instruments and data collection***

The instruments used in this study were questionnaires and interview protocol. Both the questionnaire and interview were delivered online. The questionnaire was in the form of 8 items distributed to 135 students through Google Form. The 8 items had five answer options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. All respondents (a number of 135 students) who were given a questionnaire responded within one to seven days after receiving it.

Then, to guarantee the validity of the questionnaire results, a triangulation technique by conducting the interview was also performed. It was completed in the group through the Google Meet platform. There were three parts of this group interview. Each part of group interviews was based on the class of each respondent in order to enable group division. There were 45 interviewees and 1 interviewer in each part. Question and answer sessions were conducted with an interviewer posing the questions, followed by participants answering the interviewer's questions. However, this method has drawbacks, such as respondents who are unwilling to answer questions. Before drawing any conclusions from a question, the interviewer first gave a summary of the participants' answers and asks all participants if they agree or disagree with it. This is how the drawback was anticipated.

### ***Research procedure***

The research was conducted as follows: initially, the researchers developed the research tools (questionnaire and interview protocol). The researcher next had the participants complete a previously accessible Google Form. Next, the researcher utilized Google Meet for an in-person group interview. After that, questionnaires and interviews were taken out, and their findings were examined. Finally, the outcomes of the investigation were being used to draw conclusions.

### **Data analysis**

The data yielded from the questionnaire were examined quantitatively. Meanwhile, qualitative data generated from interviews were evaluated qualitatively by utilizing Miles and Huberman's (1994) data reduction, data visualization, and conclusion drawing/verification. At the data reduction step, the researcher read the data from interviewees and annotated these replies. The researcher presented the data received from interviews in the form of words that corroborate the data acquired from the questionnaire, thereby appearing to show that the findings of the questionnaire and the findings of the interviews are directly proportionate. The researcher summarized the results of the written interview in the last step.

### **Findings and discussion**

The questionnaires distributed to all participants revealed that there are three perceptions of non-English department students concerning the implementation of EFL online learning viewed from the phases of preparation, implementation, and evaluation. They perceived that in the preparation phase, they had high optimism; then, it turned into caution and forbearance in the middle of implementation; and finally, their optimistic level was increasing at the end of learning (evaluation phase). Table 2 summarizes the mean and standard deviation from the survey questions dealing with non-English department students' perceptions of EFL online learning implementation.

Table 2. The students' views on EFL online learning

Questions	N	Mean	SD
EFL online learning is easy to follow for students.	135	3.64	0.73
At the beginning (preparation phase), I feel optimistic about EFL online learning.	135	4.17	0.91
After several meetings of EFL online learning (implementation phase), I feel bored, demotivated, and my optimistic level is decreasing.	135	4.08	0.27
When I get used to EFL online learning, my optimistic level is becoming raise, and I feel more motivated.	135	4.10	0.30
After the evaluation phase, I feel more motivated and more optimistic.	135	4.10	0.30
EFL online learning makes the students easy to evaluate their learning progress.	135	2.81	0.40
Through EFL online learning, the students are easy to get feedback from the teacher dealing with their works.	135	3.19	0.40
The EFL online learning platform used by the teacher is interesting for students and can motivate them to learn.	135	4.10	0.30

Table 2 illustrates three perceptions of non-English department students concerning the implementation of EFL online learning viewed from the phases of preparation, implementation, and evaluation. They perceived that in the preparation phase, they had high optimism; then, it turned into caution and forbearance in the middle of implementation; and finally, their optimistic level was increasing at the end of learning (evaluation phase). Numerous studies demonstrate that online learning has a favorable perception and may have

a beneficial influence on students' performance, which may inspire instructors' and students' optimism to apply the flipped teaching technique (Alvarez et al., 2012; Guasch et al., 2013; Niess, 2010; Şendağ & Ferhan Odabaşı, 2009). The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perceptions about EFL online learning implementation. According to the findings of this study, students were initially optimistic about the viability of online learning in their EFL classes. As a result, the students' view of the situation altered from one of optimism to caution. This is because of several difficulties encountered by students throughout the course's execution.

### ***Online learning is simple and easy to follow, but it can cause lack of motivation***

The use of users' friendly platform in online learning, such as Moodle, Google Classroom, and Schoology makes online learning easy to follow by the students. It is because they are familiar with those platforms. They have understood how to operate those platforms for synchronous online learning. Meanwhile, for the synchronous online learning, the platforms used were Google Meet and Zoom Meeting. These two platforms are also well-known for the students. They do not need much time to learn how to use it. The interview with students reveals that EFL online learning is easy to follow in terms of the operating system. Most of them have been familiar with the platform used in EFL online learning. However, the bad things that frequently occurred during the learning process, such as the low signal and limited internet data, cause a lack of motivation.

Frankly speaking, the EFL online learning is easy to follow for us. We've been familiar with the application used. Therefore, there is no significant problem dealing with how to operate the application. But some things sometimes make us feel demotivated. Not all of us are living in places with strong internet signals. Therefore, it is serious if it deals with internet connection. Further, some of us are also from middle-lower families. Internet data is also a serious problem for us because almost all courses in this semester are presented online (MA, Group 1, Interview).

For me, actually the online learning is very easy to follow. The students have been familiar and know well how to use the platforms used, such as Moodle, Google Classroom, and Schoology. We also use Google Meet and Zoom for a virtual meeting. So, we don't need much time to adapt with those platforms. But, one thing that sometimes demotivates me during online learning, it's internet data (FNZ, Group 2, Interview).

Personally, I like online learning because it is really simple and easy to follow the instruction there. Yet, the trouble with signals is very annoying, sometimes (RF, Group 3, Interview).

While some studies indicate that students have favorable attitudes about online learning, there are still certain disadvantages worth highlighting. Most students felt that technical and Internet connectivity issues prohibit them from fully engaging with their instructor and other students to properly finish their assignments. As Altunay (2019) and Zamari et al. (2012) assert in their studies that the majority of students were unable to attend online classes due to technical difficulties and internet connection issues.

### ***Students' up-and-down motivation during the online learning process***

Other facts revealed from the interview results are (1) the students feel optimistic when preparing the EFL online learning because of the challenges given by EFL online learning. They were curious about learning English presented in a new version, which is by online. It will make them learn not only English but also technology. (2) The students' optimistic level

starts decreasing after several meetings. They feel bored with the monotonous activity during EFL online learning. The learning activity is almost similar day-by-day, i.e., watching the video of material explanation given by the teacher, reading PowerPoint slides or PDF forms of material, and doing daily assignments. (3) The students' optimistic level increases once they get used to the learning rhythm.

We were facing up-and-down motivation during online learning. Most of us were optimistic at the beginning of semester. However, after facing several meetings of online learning, we felt bored and demotivated due to the monotonous learning activities. Fortunately, the teacher realized this condition. He tried to give different challenges in learning. And finally, we were optimistic again after being able to adapt the situation (MKF, Group 1, Interview).

At first, we were so optimistic with this EFL online learning. It will challenge us with different learning activities. Besides, we will also learn both the English language and technology. However, our optimistic level is becoming lower and lower after several meetings. We feel bored with the monotonous activity given by the teacher. We were only asked to watch the video of material explanation, reading materials from PPT slides or PDF, and then, we were asked to do the task. We do not have two-way communication for questions and answers of what we have been understood or not. The daily task that we have done is not graded or evaluated directly, so we do not get feedback. Fortunately, this does not happen longer. The teacher started to change the way of his teaching. He gave more various activity, such as synchronous learning activity for sharing and discussion, giving feedbacks to students' work quickly, and evaluated the students' works as soon as possible after the quiz or task was finished (R, Group 2, Interview).

At first, we were curious and eager to learn online. Then, our motivation became lower when we realized that we have monotonous activities. But then, our motivation raised when we could adapt the situation until the end of semester (FA, Group 3, Interview).

Students were astonished to discover certain unforeseen situations, which prompted concern about the teaching and learning process since it was not carried out as ideally as possible. Luckily, once the students repeatedly repeated the online learning, their opinion of it changed to be more positive. As mentioned above in the findings, the teacher should carefully prepare the learning activities for students for each meeting. Various activities are needed to avoid students' boredom. Maintaining students' psychological conditions, such as learning motivation, is urgently needed in online learning. This is because one of the main targets of online learning is enhancing learner autonomy. Meanwhile, learner autonomy is nothing without motivation (Benosa, 2014; Gavranović, 2017; Toyoda, 2001). The teachers had realized the difficulties that would arise due to their teaching and learning process and hence were well prepared for the impacts. This, then, means that all bad possibilities might be predicted and solved. These findings align with Chao & Lo (2011), Perveen (2016), and Rahimi (2011). Further, Deutsch (2010) notes that teachers too experience an up-and-down degree of optimistic hope in online learning as well as students. They are dealing with frustration, the facilitation of education and learning, and social connectivity.

### ***Students' difficulties in evaluating their learning progress***

Another fact revealed after the group interview is the students' difficulties in evaluating their learning progress during the online learning process. The students stated that they get difficulties in evaluating their learning progress in EFL online learning due to the teacher's factor. The teacher does not directly assess the students' tasks. Further, they also do not get the feedback of what they have been done directly from teachers because the teachers mostly used asynchronous learning.

During online learning, we didn't know our learning progress comprehensively. The teacher didn't directly correct students' tasks probably it's because we mostly used asynchronous learning through Moodle. The teacher just graded our tasks before mid-semester and final semester tests. However, He didn't grade all tasks, only a few of them (MM, Group 1, Interview).

We could not see our tasks scores directly after each meeting. We could see it before the mid-semester test and before the final semester test. Moreover, we could only see some of our task's scores because the teacher grades not all tasks. So that we could not see our progress of learning totally (SFU, Group 2, Interview).

To be honest, we were getting difficulties evaluating our learning progress. The teacher does not grade our tasks directly. Besides, we also do not receive direct feedback from teachers because we frequently use asynchronous learning activities. However, dealing with the learning platform used, we think that it is interesting enough. We can operate it easily. The features of the application are also users' friendly (MSA, Group 3, Interview).

Another drawback of EFL online learning is the lack of two-way communication between teachers and students so that it causes the difficulty for teachers to give direct feedback to students' learning progress. English is a language. To achieve it optimally, EFL learning should be designed as naturally as possible. Teachers should facilitate their students to use their English in classroom settings. Therefore, the students will get feedback on what they have communicated, both oral and written. This becomes a severe problem if the class is in the form of online setting. Therefore, teachers should carefully design a good proportion between synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. This should allow students to practice their language skills, especially speaking skills (Chen, 2016; Tseng et al., 2018; Wang, 2019).

## Conclusion

This study set out to find the viewpoints of non-English students on the implementation of EFL online learning by conducting survey inquiries. Based on the results of the study, it appears that there are three distinct periods of online English learning. During the preparation period, individuals exhibited an unusually high level of optimism for EFL online learning. Following that, there was a change in behavior from the implementation phase forward; it was now turned into caution. After a long period of being stuck at the same optimistic level, it started rising again (in the evaluation phase). This study shows that it is not easy to maintain students' excitement and optimism concerning online English coursework, especially in non-English department classrooms. Teachers should experiment with instructional methods to provide their students cutting-edge ideas on learning and using teaching tools and equipment. Teachers must grasp students' psychological conditions to minimize the onset of boredom when using online learning platforms.

This study, empirically, contributes to the research in ELT fields, especially with students' perception of EFL online learning in Indonesia. Practically, this study can be used as a reference by EFL teachers to set out planning to conduct EFL online learning to provide meaningful learning for their students. However, some limitations of this study are worth-highlighted. The results of this study might not be generalized especially when it deals with the results of group interviews, since not all students speak up their mind to express their perceptions on EFL online learning. In addition, the research participants are limited to Islamic Education Program, in which it does not reflect completely to non-English department students. Future studies exploring learners' motivation, learner autonomy, and



other psychological factors in EFL online learning for non-English department classes should be investigated. The context might not be limited to only Islamic Education majors. Therefore, the research findings could be generalized in a broader context and situation.

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