

Are they Struggling with an Online Learning Environment? Unpacking Indonesian University Students' Perception

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Abstract

Combining in-person and online learning is becoming a new trend for Indonesian universities in the aftermath of the pandemic, as it provides flexibility and fosters autonomous learning. This paper employed a mixed method using close-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as data collection. This research aimed to explore EFL students' preferences for digital platforms and their perceptions of online courses by distributing closed-ended questionnaires (N=105) as well as semi-structured interviews (N=10). The results revealed that students prefer synchronous online learning platforms (i.e., Zoom) to asynchronous online learning platforms (i.e., Google Classroom). Regarding perceived usefulness, this present study displayed that enacting digital tools (i.e., Zoom as a synchronous online learning platform) provides live interaction and direct feedback. The learners were also engaged and comfortable interacting with their classmates during Zoom sessions. Regarding perceived ease of use, the learners can easily learn course materials and submit assignments at any place and anytime. These findings contribute to pedagogical improvements by guiding faculty in selecting online learning platforms that provide learners with engaging online activities.

Keywords: digital platforms; online learning; perceptions; technology acceptance model; tool interactivity

Introduction

Indonesian universities have been migrating experiences hugely from in-person to online instruction due to pandemics. This online mode started in March 2020 in most

Indonesian schools, colleges, and universities. Hence, the students start staying at home safely and taking courses online by exploiting learning tools through the internet. The education world nowadays has adopted online instruction mode. The execution of online or blended education is an attempt to provide flexibility (Almahasees et al., 2021; Wright, 2017) and foster autonomous learning (Ardi, 2017; Kumar et al., 2020). However, faculty members face challenges in online learning because they need familiarity with technology and extra training to organize, execute, and assess the performance of learners. By having extra preparations or online training in exploiting digital platforms, faculty members could manage successful online instruction (Toquero, 2020). They may take advantage of the accessibility of numerous innovative learning applications to assist learners with a wide range of educational needs. The faculty is responsible for designing an engaging online environment, adopting digital applications, and developing learning objectives and appropriate materials (Rojabi et al., 2022), and learning outcomes should be highlighted as an important aspect of online courses (Ortiz, 2020).

Several investigations have been carried out to scrutinize students' preferences for digital platforms and faculty and learners' perceptions regarding online learning (Almahasees et al., 2021; Muthuprasad et al., 2021). Muthuprasad et al. (2021) used the theory of readiness for online learning by Warner et al. (1998), their findings demonstrated that video-recorded content uploaded to university websites has become a favorite for learners and instructors should design interactive sessions with quizzes to improve students' online learning experience. Their findings contribute to the education context in several ways. First, the widespread adoption of various digital tools was used by instructors and students' educational experiences have become richer and more authentic. Second, despite the fact that the pandemic is over, the persistence of online instruction is inevitable and become an accepted norm since it has been shown to promote accessibility and flexibility. Thus, the world of education should prepare for online and blended learning by implementing e-learning platforms. Almahasees et al. (2021) also explored the perceptions of Jordanian instructors and learners by distributing a survey. Their findings reported that online learning has advantages during the pandemic, such as increased learning autonomy, convenience, and low costs, However, it is not as successful as in-person instruction. They also reported difficulties when learning online, particularly for students with disabilities who experienced hearing impairments, limited engagement, and unreliable internet connectivity. However, this study does not fully clarify the theoretical basis used.

Prior research used questionnaires to assess students' preferences for digital tools and perceptions of online learning in the context of EFL or ESL, but some lacked theoretical foundations and evidence due to limited data. However, after reading several articles, I discovered that, while many studies focus on online platforms and EFL students' perceptions of online learning, none of them address Indonesian EFL culture during online courses. Thus, this study attempted to explore Indonesian EFL learners' perceptions concerning online learning and their preferences for synchronous or asynchronous online learning.

Theoretical framework

To examine the acceptability of technological innovations, different information system (IS) concepts have been established. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989) has been adopted as the theoretical framework for online learning. TAM was founded on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Davis focuses on two key ideas that influence students' behavioral intentions to use digital platforms: perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Perceived usefulness is the extent to which a user believes that employing a particular piece of technology will increase productivity, whereas perceived ease of use is the extent to which a user believes that employing a particular piece of technology will be simple.

Davis (1989) demonstrated that perceived ease of use (PEOU) has an impact on behavioral intention by means of perceived usefulness (PU). Perceived usefulness (PU) directly affects the intention to use, whereas perceived ease of use (PEOU) indirectly influences the intention to use through attitude. The attitude focused on the user's assessment of the acceptability of using a specific digital application. Furthermore, behavioral intention served as the metric for assessing the probability of an individual utilizing the application.

Several academics have used the TAM to examine technology acceptance and usage. It has, for example, been effectively implemented in similar situations such as E-learning (Almarabeh, 2014) and M-learning (Al-Emran et al., 2016). This study adopts the TAM (Davis, 1989) to evaluate students' adoption of learning platforms in their learning activities. TAM provides a proper foundation for a new technology's effectiveness. Furthermore, According to TAM, when learners are confronted with technological innovation, numerous factors can affect their decision to adopt it.

Thus, this current study highlights perceived ease of use as a determinant that impacts students' attitudes toward adopting online instruction as an innovative educational platform. It means that if learners perceive that the platform is simple to use, the platform will be beneficial to them. Meanwhile, perceived usefulness can influence students' readiness to engage with a new platform and, as a result, acceptance of online instruction.

Literature review

Online learning is defined as technology-based instruction in which students attempt to adapt to the Internet delivery of courses (Nguyen, 2015). The most distinguishing feature of online education is that it enables instructors and students to determine online study schedules regardless of their physical location (Hoi et al., 2018; Landrum et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2015). To maximize the online learning environment, teachers should exploit various online learning platforms based on the learners' characteristics and learners' needs.

Apps, websites, social networks, and learning management systems (LMS) are all examples. Teachers and learners can exploit LMS to share the materials, give tasks, give feedback, and do assessments. This facilitates the learners' engagement and boosts the creativity of teachers in exploring online learning platforms. Besides, LMS provides an online course that can easily be accessed due to its flexibility (Gunawan et al., 2020; Rojabi, 2021). Some videoconferencing apps also allow for real-time interactions, which boosts student engagement in online courses (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021; Kennedy & Do, 2020; Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020; Rojabi & Femilia, 2023).

Prior studies have already discussed the potential and digital applications in online teaching. Some of the most significant are its usefulness in educating students, and its cost-effectiveness in reducing the costs of education for anyone with a broadband connection (Smith et al., 2019). Moreover, it has been a significant possibility that online learning can provide global education to everyone, anywhere, and anytime over internet access (Nguyen, 2015). Empirical studies also examined the benefits of technology; it positively influences student engagement and interaction among peers and interaction between learners and faculty (Bailey et al., 2022; Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020; Rojabi et al., 2022; Rojabi et al., 2022). Asynchronous learning platforms facilitate students' needs and promote collaborative learning (Thurmond & Wambach, 2004). It also helps students reflect on activities and directs them to critical thinking (Robinson & Hullinger, 2008).

Instructors can exploit several digital applications of either synchronous, asynchronous, or combined synchronous and asynchronous during online sessions. Online synchronous sessions can facilitate real-time student collaboration as what happens in a person-to-person setting where students and faculty can interact and communicate in the classroom (Oztok et al., 2013). However, if it is carried out in large classes, the teacher will find it difficult to control the class and provide direct feedback. Furthermore, poor internet connectivity has an impact on the quality of communication in online classes. While asynchronous online sessions are more flexible and build autonomous learning (Lim, 2017). Asynchronous classroom sessions provide more access time, so they can review course materials provided on online learning platforms. Students can discuss topics in discussion forums for a longer duration of time and they can access and copy information according to the topics provided on the internet. However, some students cannot gain immediate comments from the faculty during asynchronous learning, which impacts their participation in virtual sessions and they are less disciplined in submitting their tasks. Concerning the disadvantages of online learning, a brief discussion of students' responses to social media was provided. However, they keep struggling with an insufficiency of a positive learning mindset. Students are experiencing a low level of self-discipline, a provision of learning resources, or an absence of effective learning environments as a result of self-isolation (Bao, 2020).

Empirical studies on tool interactivity and satisfaction in virtual courses have already been conducted. Kuo et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of improving the interaction

between learners and content as it has the potential to foster student satisfaction in online instruction. When students engage more frequently with their classmates, instructors, and course materials, online education could be advantageous (Watson et al., 2017). The role of technology in online education can be pivotal. Asad et al. (2020) reported that incorporating technology in online courses facilitated the learners with an effective online environment and technology has facilitated the learners and faculty with an interactive classroom.

Students' success with computer-based learning is indicative of their satisfaction with virtual learning (Rahman et al., 2017; Yunusa & Umar, 2021). A person's emotional reaction to and feelings about an experience are defined as satisfaction. Empirically, prior studies reported that learner satisfaction in participating in a distance learning program is strongly associated with the course's perceived usefulness as well as learners' preferences for delivery mode either synchronous or asynchronous (Chen & Tat Yao, 2016; Zhu, 2017). Chen and Tat Yao (2016) found that learner satisfaction with blended learning determined its effectiveness. Zhu (2017) noted that learner satisfaction and self-efficacy with blended instruction are related to prior educational experiences, individual preferences, as well as other trainee and instructor factors. Pozón-López et al. (2021) investigated participant satisfaction and potential online course use. The findings demonstrated a link between participant satisfaction and motivation to exploit technology tools. The findings also unraveled that the quality, production value, and effectiveness of the course affect perceived satisfaction.

Imsa-ard (2020) investigated undergraduate learners' views of online teaching sessions amidst the pandemic. 315 students were recruited to complete a questionnaire, and 15 learners were considered acceptable to provide their views in interview protocols. The results indicated that almost half of them preferred in-person instruction over virtual courses. Interestingly, none of the students expressed a preference to study fully online in the future. Nonetheless, they believed that their tutors were eager to accommodate and provide invaluable feedback during these online sessions.

A further study was undertaken to denote the viewpoints of EFL students on online instruction (Sukman & Mhunkongdee, 2021). Thirty undergraduates provided qualitative data through written reflections, and five of them were purposefully selected to participate in a semi-structured interview. The findings revealed that learners voiced positive attitudes toward online learning as it was seen as appropriate amid a pandemic, yet they expressed their preferences for in-person rather than virtual sessions. Furthermore, a published paper also discusses the adoption of a closed-class Facebook group as an online session assistance tool. 33 EFL learners were recruited to provide their experiences and perspectives. The data was gathered by questionnaires as well as interviews. Based on the notion of connectivism, results indicate that, despite challenges like insufficient internet access, issues with concentration, and an absence of family support, students had positive views about transferring to an online course on Facebook. Participants argued that Facebook provided a

more convenient means of communicating with other learners and that this application could motivate them in engaging distance learning programs (Ulla & Perales, 2021).

Almahasees et al. (2021) investigated the voices of faculty and students during virtual sessions using two surveys. Randomly picking faculty members and students in Jordan, researchers looked into how well online education works, what problems it faces, and what its benefits are. Based on the analysis, Zoom, Microsoft Teams for real-time courses, and WhatsApp for communicating with students outside of class were the most popular online platforms. Findings showed that participants provided positive comments concerning the benefits of virtual sessions amidst the pandemic.

A number of investigations have already been undertaken to scrutinize EFL and ESL students' views of online learning, with some articles lacking the theoretical lens used and having limited data collection since they simply utilized questionnaires to capture students' preferences for online learning. However, after a thorough examination of several publications. Less is known about how students express their preferences for synchronous or asynchronous online learning, as well as their perceptions of online learning, particularly in the context of Indonesian higher education. Furthermore, few studies have focused on EFL Indonesian culture in online learning.

Research questions

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are Indonesian university students' preferences for online learning platforms?
2. What are Indonesian university students' perceptions of online learning in terms of perceived usefulness?
3. What are Indonesian university students' perceptions of online learning in terms of perceived ease of use?

Methodology

Research design and data collection

To unveil the preferences and perceptions of EFL students at an Indonesian university regarding online learning during the pandemic, we used a mixed method in a single study with a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews as instruments. This mixed-method approach provides an in-depth overview of the occurrence and validates the triangulations derived from the study's findings. Two experts from a public university in Jember, Indonesia, assessed the instruments to determine their content validity. To strengthen the data from close-ended questionnaires, we further distributed semi-structured interviews to obtain misinformation. The time for conducting semi-structured interviews was

determined based on each student's availability and regular schedule. Students were encouraged to voice their opinions and experiences explicitly by employing a variety of problem-solving techniques. The researchers closed the interview by asking the students whether they had additional information to add. Semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. No rewards or incentives were provided for participation.

The key questions for semi-structured interviews were: (1) *How do you feel about taking an online course? Is a peer group in a forum discussion beneficial to you? Why?* (2) *Do you prefer synchronous online courses (e.g., Zoom) or asynchronous online courses (e.g., Google Classroom)? Why?* (3) *Do you always turn on your camera during a synchronous online course (e.g., during a Zoom class)?* (4) *Do online courses offer students options for what, how, and what they learn? Why?* (5) *Is the course's commencement and completion date flexible? Does it build your autonomy in learning? Why?* (6) *Does the online course provide the materials needed, self-monitoring, and peer and instructor feedback? Why?*

The researchers developed the instrument concerning the theoretical framework of technology acceptance models. Thus, Google Forms were used to capture demographic information in preparation for the interview regarding participants' gender, educational background, and students' perceptions regarding online learning (closed-ended questionnaires). In addition, to complete some missing information from closed-ended questionnaires, we conducted semi-structured interviews through WhatsApp to capture their perceptions. The information obtained from the semi-structured interviews is displayed in the form of excerpts while data from close-ended questionnaires is displayed in the form of tables of descriptive statistics.

Context and participants

One hundred and five EFL students were recruited as participants for the study (20 males, 85 females, 103 participants aged 17-25, and 2 participants aged 26-30) in the English study program at one of the public universities in Jember, Indonesia. The University institutional review board provided us with ethical approval to conduct our study. All participants explicitly gave their written and verbal consent to voluntarily participate in the study, have their interviews recorded, and allow excerpts to be displayed. Participants were asked for their information and permission to fill out a Google Form that showed they were interested in the study. The researchers elucidated the objective of the study and the research methods. To secure the confidentiality of the participants, the researchers refrained from revealing their complete identities. Furthermore, to reduce miscommunication, the questions on the Google Form were delivered in bilinguals (English and Bahasa Indonesia).

Data analysis

Before distributing an instrument to students, its content was validated using expert judgment. Concerning the questionnaires, 14 questionnaires were using the Five-Point Likert Scale that measured two parameters; perceived usefulness (7 items) and perceived ease of use (7 items). A student receives 5 points for selecting "strongly agree," 4 points for selecting "agree," 3 points for selecting "neutral," 2 points for selecting "disagree," and 1 point for selecting "strongly disagree." This current study used an adaptation of the closed-ended questionnaire from Alfadda and Mahdi (2021) where they also modified the questionnaires from Yang and Wang (2019). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the questionnaire's reliability. The reliability of the questionnaires was .93, indicating that they were reliable. The participants (N=10) took part in 15–20-minute semi-structured interviews via WhatsApp. Thematic coding was used to analyze the qualitative data. Thematic analysis decodes participant dialogues and reveals learners' perspectives and experiences. The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed for meaning and discourse, then coded for potential themes and subthemes and presented as excerpts. Quantitative results were analyzed through descriptive analysis and presented as mean and standard deviation. Hence, to verify the validity of the data in this study, the researchers utilized triangulation of methods and data sources. Upon collecting data from closed-ended questionnaires, the researchers verified it with the findings derived from semi-structured interviews.

Findings

Indonesian university students' preferences for online learning platforms

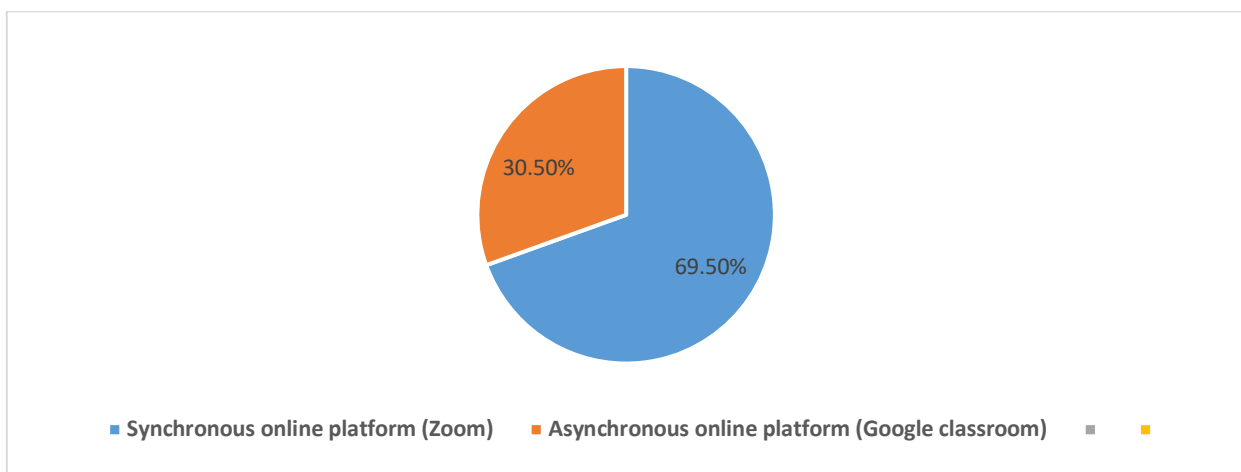


Fig. 1 *Indonesian university students' preferences in digital platforms*

In Figure 1, the synchronous online platform (Zoom) has the first rank (69.50%), and Google Classroom has the second rank (30.50%) for students' preferences in the digital platform. The students asserted that Zoom is appropriate for students as it offers live interaction, video conferencing, and direct feedback. The following are excerpts from the students' interviews. The majority of learners agreed that seeing each other's faces could encourage connection and a sense of belonging. As a result, when it comes to virtual classes, Zoom is the best option for learners.

“Zoom is the best; I can see my friends' faces virtually.” (S2)

“Well, Zoom is simpler than other platforms to communicate directly with other friends and teachers.” (S5)

Others chose Google Classroom as it enables them to review the course materials and submit their assignments easily. The majority of students reported that asynchronous learning (via Google Classroom) enhanced their capacity to plan and organize their time when reviewing and completing assignments.

“I like Google Classroom; I know the teacher gives us a lot of tasks but it's alright we do not have to submit it directly. Sometimes the deadline for submission is within a week.” (S9)

I choose Google Classroom because I can repeat the material anytime (S6)

Indonesian university students' perceptions of online learning in terms of perceived usefulness

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of perceived usefulness

No	Items	Mean	SD	Order	Description
1	An online learning environment helps me to learn more efficiently	3.29	.78	5	Moderate
2	My academic performance has improved as a result of the atmosphere of learning online	2.98	.65	7	Moderate
3	It is beneficial to learn English utilizing platforms that allow for online instruction	3.29	.76	6	Moderate

4	The performance of online learning platforms (for example, audio sound and Zoom's camera) contributes to the realness of educational experiences	3.72	.73	1	High
5	Online educational tools make it simpler for learners to learn English in higher education	3.32	.86	3	Moderate
6	I have more authority over my educational experiences due to an online learning platform	3.30	.73	4	Moderate
7	The online educational atmosphere is beneficial for students to learn English	3.35	.75	2	Moderate
	Total	3.32	.78		Moderate

Table 1 displays that item 4 (The performance of online learning platforms (for example, audio sound and Zoom's camera) contributes to the realness of educational experiences) and adds to the authenticity of learning) was ranked first based on the mean value ($3.72 \pm .73$) and item 7 (The online educational atmosphere is beneficial for students to learn English) was ranked second ($3.35 \pm .75$). However, the mean score of item 2 (My academic performance has improved as a result of the atmosphere for learning online) was rated as the lowest ($2.98 \pm .65$). These results indicate that the overall mean score of the students' responses was $3.32 \pm .78$. Overall, learners exhibited a positive attitude toward perceived usefulness. Following a rating system based on Likert scales, responses are categorized as very little (1.00-1.80), little (1.81-2.60), moderate (2.61-3.40), high (3.41-4.20), and very high (4.21-5.0) (Eltahir et al., 2021).

We identified three themes regarding EFL students' perceptions of online learning in terms of perceived usefulness based on thematic analysis: (1) Promoting an engaging learning environment (2) Encouraging live interaction, and (3) Promoting learner autonomy.

Theme one: Promoting an engaging learning environment

Students express their feelings concerning online learning via Zoom videoconferencing. Some students were more excited to take an online course than in a traditional setting. Peer groups on discussion forums can engage and build their confidence to share ideas. When some introverted students are involved in online courses, for instance in a Zoom session, some of them feel encouraged to convey ideas directly, yet others actively contribute to a discussion forum by using a chat box. Some views of learners are as follows:

“The online class is more exciting and challenging.” (S2)

“I feel more self-confident to say something on a forum discussion.” (S9)

“I feel more comfortable having a forum discussion on Zoom.” (S7)

Some learners mentioned that the online educational setting encouraged them to be creative and engaged in exploring information on the topics assigned. They could browse some information on the internet if they did not understand the materials given by the lecturer. Besides, students reported that they could easily communicate via forum discussions with lecturers if they needed more explanations regarding the difficult materials. Group work activities between students also became more effective and simpler because they could still collaborate during distance learning, as expressed by the following two learners.

“We can browse some information on Google during online learning. Besides, we can have more discussions through Zoom for unclear explanations.” (S2)

“If I get difficulty with the tasks, I can simply chat or video call my friend.” (S4)

Theme two: Encouraging real-time interaction

Students reported their satisfaction regarding Zoom videoconferencing as it provides real-time interaction. They feel closer to interacting with their classmates during a pandemic, and they are more confident communicating with one another during online sessions, allowing students to remain comfortably close to one another since they can still see each other's faces virtually. Several students voiced their views on real-time interaction as follows:

“Zoom is easy and we can have live interaction.” (S3)

“I am happy to see their faces on Zoom, it feels like I am not alone in an online class.” (S4)

“It’s fun to see each other on Zoom.” (S1)

“I am pleased with my participation in the Zoom session. Interactions of student-student and students-teachers are more communicative.” (S10)

Students are motivated to turn their cameras on as the faculty member always turns his camera on. When there is a sense of intimacy and presence among participants in an online community, courses mediated by Zoom can create an engaging and dynamic environment. hence, it becomes crucial for instructors to design engaging classes and foster a sense of belonging in an online community.

“During online courses via Zoom, the lecturer always turns on the camera to maximize live interaction, and students are encouraged to do the same.” (S7)

Some students confirmed that they could directly discuss in synchronous online learning, Others stated that they found it easier to post queries and respond to queries in the comment section during online learning. Some students prefer direct discussions via Zoom because it is more convenient and allows them to receive direct comments or feedback from the teacher.

“I prefer Zoom, I can ask something directly to the teacher. The teacher can directly provide comments too.” (S5)

Theme three: Promoting learner autonomy

Students also argued that online courses mediated by digital platforms can promote their learning autonomy. Students have greater authority over their time and learning experiences. In this case, when students are required to access a website to read several references and complete assignments online, or when they are required to present a presentation via Zoom, they can prepare their material for the presentation by accessing several websites that offer resources relevant to their topics. The following two students share their thoughts on learning autonomy in online classes:

“I feel more at ease reading material on the website and preparing homework at home during online learning. This experience has increased my learning autonomy.” (S6)

Because by using Zoom in the learning process, can wake my spirit up to be better and prepare me to face the course, that we can meet face-to-face with lecturers and other friends who can be directly monitored by the lecturer (S3)

Indonesian university students’ perceptions of online learning in terms of perceived ease of use

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of perceived ease of use

No	Items	Mean	SD	Order	Description
1	It is simple for me to learn English through online learning platforms	3.35	.86	6	Moderate
2	I have access to English courses online at any time and from any location	3.90	.77	1	High

3	Logging in and out of online learning platforms (such as Zoom) is simple and fast	3.58	.73	4	High
4	Online learning platforms make it simple to access course materials	3.59	.81	3	High
5	I can get an immediate reply or immediate feedback from the instructor and peers through an online learning platform (e.g., Zoom)	3.18	.81	7	Moderate
6	For higher educational institutions, an online educational setting seems recommended	3.36	.75	5	Moderate
7	All in all, I believe that utilizing an online learning platform (such as Zoom) in online sessions is easy	3.68	.69	2	High
	Total	3.52	.80		High

Table 2 indicates that item 2 (I have access to English courses online at any time and from any location) was ranked first based on the mean value ($3.90 \pm .77$) and item 7 (All in all, I believe that utilizing an online learning platform (such as Zoom) in online sessions is easy) was ranked as the second ($3.68 \pm .69$). However, the mean score of items 5 (I can get an immediate reply or immediate feedback from the instructor and peers through an online learning platform (e.g., Zoom)) was ranked as the least ($3.18 \pm .81$). These results indicate that the overall mean score of the students' responses was $3.52 \pm .80$. Overall, learners exhibited a positive attitude toward perceived ease of use.

We also identified three themes regarding EFL students' perceptions of online learning in terms of perceived ease of use based on thematic analysis: (1) *Easiness* (2) Flexibility, and (3) Accessibility.

Theme one: Easiness

Students felt satisfied with their online classroom atmosphere. The majority of students claimed that an online learning environment created a more enjoyable and comfortable classroom environment because they could communicate in both synchronous and asynchronous online classes. Some students reported that they felt more at ease when presenting a group paper or recording their performance on speaking tests. Two students voiced their views on easiness during an online learning environment as follows:

"I like to have a paper discussion on Zoom because it is simple." (S3)

“I prefer recording my speaking performance and then I submit it to Google Classroom or WhatsApp group. We can just share our video of a group presentation on WhatsApp as it is simpler.” (S6)

Theme two: Flexibility

Students agreed that they could confidently complete their assignments at any place and anytime. Some students felt enjoyable when they could do their tasks at home even when they were visiting friends. Some reasons why they were interested in completing their tasks were the duration of completing the tasks, and the deadline for submission was normally within a week on Learning Management System (LMS). Hence, by managing their time well, they could access the internet and discuss their project with friends. Some views of learners are as follows:

“I can submit the tasks even though I am visiting my friend’s house and it’s easy.” (S8)

“As long as I have a good internet connection, I can submit my tasks on LMS before the deadline.” (S4)

“Online learning is flexible; I learn English while I am watching Korean movies at home.” (S1)

“I believe I have more time to study now. Online learning gives me greater flexibility, and I can go over the subject again and again.” (S 10)

Theme three: Accessibility

Students agreed that the course content in an online course satisfies them. The contents of an online course encourage them to be more engaged and to concentrate on deep learning. Several students indicated that they encountered no difficulties in accessing the exercises in the online learning sessions offered. Nowadays, students spend their time in front of their devices, accessing any material and social media. Some students reported their belief that they could quickly access and download information from websites to assist them in completing their tasks, particularly while writing essays. Students have access to the internet to discover more about the assigned topic, to help them write, to identify synonyms, and to develop their ideas, as expressed by the following two learners.

“It’s like 24 hours for me in front of my phone, accessing social media, and finishing writing tasks on LMS.” (S3)

“I can easily download the materials on the internet.” (S5)

One student, however, confirmed that the ease of technology allowed them to easily copy and paste some ideas from the internet. The ease of accessing information from the internet proves to be a barrier as students fail to manage their sense of responsibility to be truthful since they plagiarize their assignments.

“By doing the tasks at home, we can easily access some information from the internet. However, some of us just copy and paste ideas from the websites.” (S6)

Discussion

This study aimed to explore EFL students' preferences for online learning platforms and their perceptions of online courses in terms of perceived usefulness as well as perceived ease of use. This current study demonstrated that undergraduate learners in Indonesia prefer synchronous online learning platforms (Zoom) to asynchronous online learning platforms (Google Classroom). The students asserted that Zoom is appropriate for them as it offers ease of use and live interactions or video conferencing, allowing them to communicate directly. Corroborating these findings, prior studies also discuss that Zoom provides satisfaction to users due to rapport, convenience, and simplicity (Archibald et al., 2019), Zoom was used as a substitute for face-to-face lectures (Cheung, 2021). Others chose Google Classroom as it provides flexibility (Heggart & Yoo, 2018), usefulness, and easiness (Kumar et al., 2020).

The technology acceptance model (TAM) was adopted in this current study to obtain participants' responses to language technology-based instruction. These findings confirmed that learners provided positive responses regarding perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. By adopting the TAM framework, there is a significant positive correlation between Zoom's actual use, learners' attitudes, as well as behavioral intentions (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021), perceived ease of use and usefulness, have a significant impact on behavioral intention, thus it finally impacts to the actual use of Google classrooms (Al-Marroof & Al-Emran, 2018), and perceived ease of use and usefulness directly impact learner attitude ((Almarabeh, 2014).

This current study unpacked the students' positive responses dealing with perceived ease of use, they can easily learn course materials and submit assignments any place and anytime. This conclusion is supported by prior studies, presenting the attributes of mobile learning; spontaneous, personal, informal, contextual, portable, ubiquitous, and pervasive (Mikic et al., 2007; Traxler & Kukulska-Hulme, 2016). Some students argued that the online learning environment improves their self-confidence, thus it promotes their creativity in accessing some information at their own pace. This finding is in line with Malureanu et al. (2021) highlighting that the self-confidence variable had a big effect on how easy digital

platforms were thought to be to use. The ease of use, resulting in self-confidence, had substantial consequences on effectiveness.

Regarding perceived usefulness, this present study displayed that enacting digital tools (i.e., Zoom as a synchronous online learning platform) provides live interaction and direct feedback. The learners were also engaged and comfortable interacting with their classmates during Zoom sessions. Moreover, the interaction between students and lecturers became closer since the learners could immediately ask questions for course materials and faculty members could provide direct feedback. When it comes to online lectures, EFL Indonesians prefer synchronous or real-time classes or videoconferencing since they can interact with other students or teachers directly, just like in face-to-face instructions, and this has become the culture of Indonesian EFL students. However, this current study showed some female Muslim students have a culture of turning off their cameras to demonstrate politeness and fear when their faces are screenshotted by other friends. Some students also confirmed that they enjoyed joining the courses via Zoom as synchronous online learning. They had more self-confidence to communicate and discuss some issues on the discussion forum, they can also ask questions in messages or chatbox provided during online meetings. These findings bolster prior investigations arguing the significance of interaction in online classes. Interaction has been identified as one of the most influential factors influencing student engagement. Interaction among students and student-to-faculty is essential in online course activities to support the teaching and learning experiences (Gleason, 2020; Lin & Lin, 2015; Purarjomandlangrudi et al., 2016; Rojabi, 2020).

We take a deeper look at the potential of an online learning environment. This online teaching mode facilitated the learners to better understand the materials and provided an interesting online atmosphere so that they could easily and creatively access information dealing with the topics given on the internet. All in all, it can be discussed that the instructor can help to improve the quality of the online learning environment by providing instructions and online materials that meet the needs and learning styles of the students. It is aligned with prior studies confirming that the learning environment is an extremely important part of making students more excited to engage and participate in the classroom. This learning environment should create an impressive atmosphere and enable students to obtain their learning goals (Radovan & Makovec, 2015; Rojabi, 2020). Furthermore, The efficacy of the online learning environment can be strengthened by encouraging numerous aspects of increasing student interaction and collaboration, promoting effective assistance, developing evaluation methods, and implementing programs for faculty development (Oncu & Cakir, 2011).

Satisfied students gave positive responses dealing with the course content of online learning platforms and interactions between learners and teachers, and they were motivated and easily adapted to online learning platforms. This conclusion is also discussed by prior studies (Hamdan et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2013), confirming that learner-instructor interaction, learner-content interaction, and the effectiveness of technology are all positive determinants

of student satisfaction. Furthermore, this study revealed that students felt more confident to express themselves in an online course. Similarly, Kim and Frick (2011) argue that the convenience and flexibility of online learning affect the learner's motivation. One of the factors influencing the learners' motivation and satisfaction is their readiness of the learners in terms of e-learning (Alsancak Sirakaya & Ozdemir, 2018). Therefore, students need to develop their self-efficacy regarding technology, time management, independent learning, and communication skills (Hao, 2016). When students believe in their abilities, they are motivated to work hard and accomplish their goals.

Conclusion

The purpose of this present study is to explore EFL students' preferences for digital platforms as well as their perceptions of online learning. Regarding preferences, students prefer Zoom for synchronous learning in one of the Indonesian universities as it provides video conferencing and direct feedback, so it is easy for them to communicate in a live interaction. Google Classroom has been another option for asynchronous learning as it offers accessibility and flexibility. However, barriers in online courses still become a major issue, it is due to poor connection and students' anxiety about turning their cameras on in synchronous sessions. Some limitations, however, were covered in this current research. The number of participants who took part in this study was limited. This current study found that the existing TAM theory influenced university students' intentions to enact both synchronous and asynchronous platforms, particularly for language learning. As a result, there is a chance for practical implementation in the advancement of digital platforms (such as Zoom and Google Classroom) in higher education institutions. Faculty should strive to enhance learners' competence to exploit online language learning platforms effectively. It is suggested that similar studies be conducted with a larger number of participants in the future. This present study only focused on semi-structured interviews and close-ended questionnaires, by doing so, multiple data collection instruments such as focus group responses or written reflections are required for further investigation to provide a deeper knowledge of this topic. Furthermore, considering that the university level in Indonesia will preserve the policy of online or hybrid courses, Future research should focus on the effectiveness of each digital tool in terms of specific learning skills and can be undertaken in either a qualitative or quantitative approach. Faculty members should continue to identify students' preferences as well as their perceptions regarding digital platforms. Thus, this present study contributes theoretically as it provides a piece of insightful information for future virtual courses of English in a higher education context by implementing engaging digital platforms that meet the needs and preferences of students. In addition, it is still necessary to investigate how the future adoption of online learning will have a more positive impact on the education sector. The quality of online learning should be comparable to that of traditional learning. Students

and faculty gain knowledge regarding the effectiveness of digital platforms for online instruction, and if they have a positive learning experience with the platform, they gain satisfaction and increase their participation in the online learning experience. These findings contribute to pedagogical improvements by guiding faculty in selecting online learning platforms that provide learners with engaging online activities. This study also advises developers to concentrate on features that are compatible with students' learning styles, making digital platforms more engaging. Students' learning outcomes and learning experiences improved as a result.

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