

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD ONLINE LEARNING IN EFL SPEAKING

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Abstract: Although there have been numerous studies on online learning in language classes, fewer studies focus on EFL speaking. This qualitative case study aimed at describing students' perceptions toward the implementation of online learning in speaking classes. The participants were EFL students taking a speaking course in an Indonesian university. Open-response questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed. The results showed that students had positive attitudes toward online learning through a Zoom application. It was also found that some challenges arose toward the implementation of online learning. It is suggested that the lecturers should emphasize more on collaborative and blended learning in teaching EFL speaking.

Keywords: *students' perceptions, online learning, EFL speaking*

INTRODUCTION

In language learning, speaking is an important part, since becoming able to speak in a foreign language shows that one is educated (Riadil, 2020). It happens because humans need to talk in order to connect with others. Speaking is the act of conveying or sending a message from one speaker to the other speakers (Nuraini, 2016). The first speaker acts as a speaker, while the second speaker acts as a listener. Otherwise, speaking is an essential mechanism of meaning creation that includes knowledge development, acquisition, and processing (Baron, 2020). As a consequence, it can be inferred that speaking, along with the language used in specific areas, plays an important role in exchanging information, developing, and processing.

The problems of speaking skill faced by the student during online learning are very complex. Poor reading habits, unequal involvement and practice of English both within and outside of the classroom, and uncertainty in the implementation of grammar rules are some factors that trigger difficulties when speaking to students (Sayuri, 2016). Students with low grammar skills have a more difficult time absorbing the words used. Reading will strengthen their comprehension and ability to guess the meanings of words based on context, which will improve their speaking performance (Mart, 2012). In addition, linguistic difficulty, native tongue use, and avoidance are the three main speech problems that students face (Hosni, 2014). Most students want to speak, but have they problems with the meaning. Students are often embarrassed to speak because they feel the language is not their native language.

During Covid-19 pandemic, an online learning system has become famous for language teachers and students. Students are required to understand the material being distributed. Despite its importance, the implementation of online learning faces several issues. The disadvantages of using online learning come directly from technological constraints

associated with computers and the Internet itself (Jolliffe, Jonathan & Stevens, 2001; Sung & Yeh, 2012). The different abilities of students in grasping the lecturer's intent are a problem in online learning. Lack of attention to management problems is an important factor, whereas prioritizing factors affecting online learning, interference between class and working hours can undermine the nature of virtual education and entry conditions (Sarvestani, Mohammadi, Afshin & Raeisy, 2019). The absence of group work makes it difficult for students to develop their speaking skills. Group work is an important part of education because it helps in the management of advanced interpersonal and transferable employable skills, and there are a growing array of possible barriers to achievement (Gilet-Swan, 2017).

Online learning is learning that is carried out over long distances through certain intermediaries. Online learning is a method of learning and teaching that provides the use of an internet device and learning platforms (Fitriani, Bandung & Kadri, 2020). Currently, online learning is important to support accessibility during pandemics. To reduce the threat of covid-19, the government adopted online learning policies that forbade physical contact. Because of connecting the transfer of knowledge from teachers to students, the success of online learning enables students to recognize their learning whenever and wherever they choose. Online learning also promises to facilitate justice by providing students with access to learning that would otherwise be unavailable, such as accelerated courses in remote rural areas (Hamid, Sentryo & Hasan, 2020).

Online learning affects students' understanding. Finding the right platform will improve the learning process. Teachers also struggle to work with students who do not understand. Furthermore, delivering theory and honing students' speaking skills would be difficult if contact between teachers and students is limited to voice media, short messages, or text. To anticipate this problem, the role of zoom as an online learning medium is appropriate. It uses different methods such as active participation, interactive views, and ppt explanations. The aim of this study is to describe students' perceptions of the use of Zoom in EFL speaking classes. Especially, English teachers use Zoom as their preferred platform to design due to more appealing and target-oriented lessons. Also, students perceive some benefits: 1) understanding and mastering new literacy skills; 2) developing a special kind of online wisdom acquired on the Internet; 3) embracing new positions in a modern era that requires learners to engage and contribute actively, and 4) developing positive attitudes toward using the Internet (Coiro, 2014).

Speaking is the primary way of communication. To be a great communicator, one must interact competently and fluently, using correct grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, and recommending suitable social and cultural courtesies to the situation (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Mounika & Thamarana, 2018). Language learners can compare their advancement in language learning by how well they have advanced in their spoken language capacity (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Improving one's speaking skills online is a significant challenge for language students. In general, lack of faith is a challenge for students learning to speak a foreign language. The expectations of regular lessons and oral tasks are the disparity between online and face-to-face classes. Some teachers do not have opportunities for real practice in speaking in daily activities (Derakhshan, Tahery & Mirarab, 2015). Online learning

need to be accompanied by appropriate equipments. The success of online learning cannot be isolated from the availability of supporting learning infrastructure such as secure internet access, access devices with the new tech, internet access devices, and the presence of students who live in locations where there is no electricity network, finding practical online learning challenging to implement (Hamid, SENTRYO & HASAN, 2020).

In the pandemic situation, students continue their learning from home using an online learning system (Destianingsih & Satria, 2020). Each student, however, has unique abilities. Acknowledging the material, especially for language learners, requires special attention. During the covid-19 era, student frustration with online learning was relatively high (Hamid, SENTRYO & HASAN, 2020). This indicates that students experience various unsupportive situations during online learning. Some students' concerns relate to class processes, such as trouble opening files, Mac compatibility problems, discrepancies with multiple websites, and confusion with the course management system (Huss & Eastep, 2013). Also, technical constraints become a fundamental problem in online learning. On the other hand, students agree that teachers should use both traditional and online learning methods during the teaching and learning process (Cakrawati, 2017). Technology improves learners' learning by making it more fascinating and accessible, as well as strengthening their motivation, social contacts, and engagement (Ahmadi, 2018). Otherwise, students need tools during online learning that make it easier for them to be more developed and able to understand each material presented.

There have been several studies on student's views of the use of online learning in EFL language classes (Paker & Erarslan, 2015; Riadil, 2020). However, there is a limited study focusing on perceptions within implementation, problems, and its solutions in EFL speaking. Therefore, the objective of this study is to know students' attitudes, problems, and solutions on the use of Zoom in speaking class.

This study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes toward online learning in EFL speaking classes?
2. What are the perceived problems toward online learning in EFL speaking class?
3. What are the proposed solutions to overcome the problems of online learning in EFL speaking classes?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

A qualitative case study was employed to find the students' attitudes, challenges, and solutions toward online learning in speaking classes. This study employed twenty sophomores at the age of 19-21 majoring in an English Education Program. The research was conducted at the English Department in a private university, Indonesia. The students had previously used the Zoom application as a learning medium for one semester in a speaking course.

Instruments

The instruments of this study were open-response questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The instruments consisted of three main indicators: attitudes, problems, and solutions. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted through online applications to get more detailed descriptions. The instruments were constructed with a students' native language to minimize language barriers during data collections.

Procedures

All respondents were initially asked about informed consent. After having participants' consent, the researchers collected the data using qualitative methods. After that, students were interviewed for twenty minutes about their perception on learning in speaking class using zoom. This procedure was conducted to gain further into the issues that students face when learning to talk online. Students were given three main questions during the interviews. Data collections were assisted with a WhatsApp application.

Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the data using thematic analysis. The students' responses were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded to answer the research objectives. The students' excerpts were categorized based on indicators and themes of the study. This qualitative study was deemed appropriate for gaining a thorough understanding of students' experiences during online learning using the Zoom application in the speaking class.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Through the qualitative analysis method, several facts and findings were obtained during online speaking through zoom. THE researchers classified perceptions based on attitudes, problems, and solutions. These findings were explained in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Student's perceptions of the use of Zoom in EFL speaking class

Perceptions	Coding results
Attitudes	Speaking improvement Learning interest
Problems	Connectivity issues Misunderstanding Application error
Solutions	Internet expenses Additional installment Blended Learning

Table 2. Examples of student’s responses toward the use of Zoom in EFL speaking class

Perceptions	Coding results	Examples of statement
Attitudes	Speaking improvement	“I thought the zoom application was the most effective for the speaking class.” “Zoom application could improve student speaking skills.”
	Learning interest	“I was more excited about learning speaking when using the zoom application.” “Because used zoom could receive feedback directly.”
Problems	Connectivity issues	“The most common issue I encountered was network issues.” “My home was located far from the city center, so it was difficult to get a signal.”
	Misunderstanding	“I think the speech signal was hazier” “If speaking while application zoom in was not clear.”
	Application error	“If the signal was lost, the zoom application disappeared.” “There were common distractions when using Zoom, such as the application exiting itself.”
Solutions	Internet expenses	“I spent much money for internet connections.”
	Additional installment	“I downloaded the VPN app to ensure that my connection was stable.”
	Blended learning	“Perhaps some of the meetings were held offline, in my opinion.” “Speaking was easier doing offline, due to self-confidence training.”

Discussion

The results showed that the use of the Zoom application during online learning in the speaking class was considered as improving the students' speaking skills. The majority of students reported that they liked Zoom because it improved their self-confidence, provided immediate feedback, allowed them to speak fluently, and was simple to use. This finding supported a previous study about the benefits of Zoom. The use of conference video application media like Zoom improves students' speaking ability and motivation (Tusino, Sukarni & Rokhayati, 2021).

It was also found that students enjoyed and were motivated by online learning. The majority of them mentioned that they preferred Zoom because it allowed them to meet face to face and received input from lecturers. Other students said that Zoom made them excited about online learning. This result indicated that there was a positive effect of using Zoom on students' interest and motivation. This finding was on the contrary with prior literature (Serhan, 2020),

explaining that students believed that Zoom had a negative effect on their academic performance and did not increase their online participation on any levels.

The second finding of the study depicted that several challenges appeared during online learning. The first problem faced by the students during speaking activities using Zoom application was the signal issue. These findings supported previous research (Rodrigues & Vethamani, 2015) which reported that the internet connection was problematic for some participants due to an unstable connection on campus (hostel area). Therefore, some participants changed the venue to overcome the problems of online lessons. It showed that the location where students study influenced the internet connectivity. They were also uncomfortable because of having to move around looking for connections, which hampered their speaking performance.

Besides, misunderstanding and application errors were faced by students in online learning. Most students thought that they often got misunderstanding. This was influenced by unclear voices and network issues. Therefore, they did not understand what was the lecturer said during online learning. This was in line with the previous research (Sajaril, Rahmatia, & Syahira, 2020). Some students recognized that using Zoom has many challenges with zooming itself, such as producing images, which often experienced congestion due to an inadequate network, and sporadic sound, so that students who participated in these activities did not thoroughly experience enhancement.

Another problem with the Zoom application was students' dissatisfaction. They argued it was more expensive to learn online and that they did not have many resources due to the pandemic. This means that zoom necessitates large data packets during online learning, putting students at a disadvantage. However, this result was different from the previous study (Baron, 2020) exploring students' perception on an online application in speaking skills. Students considered that Google Hangouts Meet and Zoom Cloud Meetings were convenient and that the allocation requirement was not onerous.

Further challenges during online classes were internet connectivity. Some students attempted to boost the signal by downloading various applications. VPN applications were a solution to their problems. This problem was in line with a prior study (Bawanti & Arifani, 2021) which reported that typical technological difficulties included inadequate internet speed, obsolete hardware, and/or restricted webcams and/or microphones. This incident occurred as a result of an unstable internet link or the use of a mobile device, resulting in disconnected calls, missed call links, and latency.

This finding also revealed that some solutions were proposed by the EFL students. During the online speaking class, the majority of the students experienced difficulties. They claimed that online courses were ineffective on their own. Since it was believed that they also need some face-to-face guidance to help their learning. This indicated that there was a need for collaboration between online speaking classes and offline assignments or assignments that support their abilities. This idea was in line with a study about prospects and possibilities teaching speaking skills online (Mounika & Thamarana, 2018). Students reported that they

preferred having online and offline classes in the speaking course. These two approaches can be combined to improve the learning effectiveness.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research demonstrates that students feel motivated to learn speaking through online learning. Students also face several challenges during online classes. The issues are difficulty in understanding materials and poor connectivity as a result of a lack of learning support tools. Furthermore, language teachers need to change a teaching strategy by implementing a blended learning system to overcome such problems. The educational leaders should upgrade the school facilities when learning processes are in an online mode of learning. Because this study only employs one university, future researchers may investigate similar studies with larger participants to obtain more comprehensive results.

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