

ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORMS IN INDONESIAN EFL CLASSROOMS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRAK

Studi tentang metode campuran ini menjajaki peluang dan kelemahan platform pembelajaran daring dari perspektif 34 siswa kelas delapan EFL SMP Negeri 7 Kuningan, Indonesia. Hasil survei kuantitatif dengan sampel 34 responden menunjukkan bahwa meskipun siswa menikmati keluasaan akses informasi (73,5%), para siswa menghadapi kesulitan teknis yang signifikan, seperti ketidakstabilan internet (70,6%) dan keterbatasan perangkat (64,7%). Temuan kualitatif menunjukkan dualisme psikologis siswa, yang merasa kurang cemas secara eksternal dalam lingkungan daring tetapi masih mengalami kecemasan internal terkait bahasa. Studi ini juga mengungkapkan "paradoks fleksibilitas," di mana fleksibilitas struktural tidak selalu mengarah pada manajemen waktu dan pengaturan diri yang lebih baik. Temuan ini memiliki implikasi praktis yang penting bagi perancang, pendidik, dan pembuat kebijakan yang bertujuan untuk mengoptimalkan pembelajaran bahasa daring dalam konteks serupa.

Kata kunci: digital storytelling, EFL, keterampilan membaca, persepsi siswa

ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study investigates the opportunities and challenges of online learning platforms from the point of view of 34 eighth-grade EFL learners in SMP Negeri 7 Kuningan, Indonesia. The quantitative survey results (n=34) show that although the learners appreciate the flexible access to the materials (73.5%), they face considerable technical difficulties such as internet instability (70.6%) and device limitations (64.7%). The qualitative findings show the psychological dualism of the learners, who feel less external anxiety in online settings but still experience internal language-related anxiety. The study also reveals the "flexibility paradox," where structural flexibility does not necessarily lead to better time management and self-regulation. These findings have important practical implications for designers, educators, and policymakers aiming to optimize online language learning in similar contexts.

Keyword: Online Language Learning, Learner Perceptions, Language Anxiety, Educational Technology, EFL Classroom

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of online education has changed the way teaching is delivered and how students engage. While previous research highlights the convenience and flexibility of online platforms (Castro & Tumibay, 2021; Liu et al., 2020), new studies also point out significant challenges, including digital divides (Aldulaimi et al., 2021), learner isolation (Bailey & Lee, 2020), and the need for stronger self-regulation (Broadbent & Poon, 2015). In language learning, the role of interaction and anxiety in digital settings

is still debated (Tarrayo et al., 2023; Isma, 2023a). However, most studies focus on broader or international contexts, creating a gap in understanding how these issues appear in specific developing-world settings like Indonesia. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the experiences of Indonesian EFL learners. It will provide insights into the opportunities and challenges of online language learning in this context.

This study aims to look into the challenges and opportunities that students face in online

learning. The main objectives are twofold. First, it seeks to identify and list the common obstacles and advantages that EFL students in Grade 8 at SMP Negeri 7 Kuningan, Indonesia encounter while engaging in online learning. Second, it aims to discover the expectations and suggestions of these students regarding online education. The importance of this research lies in its potential to improve the quality of online education. As the education system changes, it is crucial to understand the views of students who are driving this change. This study aims to offer an in-depth look at the challenges and benefits online learners experience, helping educators and institutions adjust their methods to meet current student needs. Additionally, by highlighting students' expectations and suggestions, this study can guide practical improvements, ensuring that online education remains a valuable and effective way of learning now and in the future.

Different from the previous researches that largely focus on the use of online learning at an international or more general level, this study is set in the context of a local Indonesian EFL learning environment, thus, it offers a deep and detailed understanding of the students' actual experiences in the higher education system of a developing country. Such a perspective is of the locally grown kind and thus it has led to the identification of some overlooked issues.

in the literature. These were primarily students' insights into, their difficulties with, and their recommendations for online learning through the prism of the local situation. The research questions below were the ones that guided the research:

(1) How do learners perceive which language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) have been most influenced by the use of online platforms? (2) What is the relationship between the flexibility of online learning platforms and the learners time management and self-regulated learning behaviors? (3) What is the effect of diminished social interaction in the online setting on the students language acquisition and communicative competence?

METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This research followed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The design was carried out in two stages:

- Phase 1 (Quantitative): Online survey which used 5-point Likert scale to measure students' perception towards online English learning platform.
- Phase 2 (Qualitative): Open item questions to further understand students' experiences, obstacles, and perceived learning value.

Analysis of data from these two phases was combined to enable the authors to address their research question on all angles.

2.2 Participants

The participants of the current study were 34 eighth, grade English language learners (age 13, 15) from SMP Negeri 7 Kuningan, Indonesia. Participants had been exposed to online platforms for English learning for at least one semester. For participant recruitment, convenience sampling was employed since they were accessible during the research period. Even though this method made data collection easier, the findings cannot be generalized extensively and thus, are only applicable to similar educational and socioeconomic contexts. To maintain ethics in research and to encourage honest response, the data was collected in an anonymous manner.

2.3 Instruments

- Quantitative Instrument: A 10, item survey that used a 5, point Likert scale with the anchors at Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (5). Items were about technical access, flexibility, interaction, digital literacy, and psychological factors.
- Qualitative Instrument: The three open, ended questions were:
 1. How platforms help improve English skills
 2. Additional challenges faced

3. Other benefits experienced

2.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through one online administration only. In order to keep the same participant context and mood, both, quantitative and qualitative responses, were obtained at the same time.

- Quantitative Analysis: Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarize Likert, scale responses.
- Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to recognize, analyze, and describe patterns in the responses to the open questions.
- Integration of Findings: Data from the two sources were brought together and combined to identify the points of convergence, complementarity, and contradiction.

2.5 Validity and Reliability

- Content Validity: Experts in the educational technology field reviewed the survey instrument (CVI = 0.87).
- Reliability: The internal consistency of the quantitative instrument was satisfactory (Cronbach's = 0.72)., Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data: Credibility was established through plenty of, word, for, word responses; the themes were obtained in a logical manner to back up dependability and confirmability.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study complied with ethical research standards in that the decision to participate was left to the individual, the data were anonymized, and no personal data were collected..

FINDINGS

Quantitative data showed that 79.5% of the students considered the communication tools on the platforms to be poor. This limitation in the use of technology was expressed in the qualitative

responses, too, where students talked about the difficulties of real time interaction and said that "voice chats often lag or disconnect".

However, even if there were these barriers to communication, 79.4% stated that they did not feel very lonely, thus the learners could have been using other ways to get around the problem. The qualitative data also showed the use of social media or instant messaging to obtain peer support as a kind of adaptation, thus interaction during online learning seems to have been redefined.

3.1 Emergent Benefits

Alleviated Learning Anxiety: Several respondents highlighted "lingkungan belajar yang kurang intimidasi" (a less intimidating learning environment) as one of the advantages. **Direct Interaction with Authentic Materials:** Learners emphasized the value of real, life content. "menonton film dalam berbahasa inggris" (watching English, language films) was one of the activities listed. **Particular Benefit to Certain Skills:** The listening and speaking abilities received the highest praise from audi features. "dapat mendengarkan audio secara langsung" (can listen to audio directly) was the advantage mentioned.

3.1.1 Ongoing Problems

Psychological Issues:

Language anxiety was highlighted on several occasions: "aku takut berbicara dalam bahasa inggris" (I'm afraid to speak English). **Economic Issues:** The discovery of extra costs in freemium models resulted in barriers: "platform yang mengharuskan pembayaran" (platforms requiring payment). **Decline in Motivation:** Difficulties in self, direction: "kurangnya motivasi mandiri" (lack of self, motivation).

3.1.2 Learner Strategies

Students figured out ways of working around the problems mostly by utilizing more than one platform at the same time, and also by watching films, listening to podcasts etc., i.e. informal resources to complement the formal materials.

DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

- 3.1.1 The Paradox of Flexibility The biggest revelation was the "gap between structural flexibility and practical utility". Although 73.5% liked flexible access, 91.2% rejected the idea that platforms gave them scheduling flexibility. It means that just giving people the possibility to choose when and where to be flexible does not necessarily result in a better time management experience. One learner even pointed out that the very thing that should be a source of learning power, i.e., flexibility, "requires strong self, management skills" which most learners do not have. This is consistent with recent criticisms of online learning which emphasize the necessity of providing students with explicit support in self, regulated learning (Broadbent & Poon, 2015).
- 3.1.2 Technical Barriers as Multilayered Challenges The information gathered shows that technical barriers are not limited to basic internet connectivity but rather: 1. Application problems in terms of quality (bugs, confusing interfaces) 2. Trouble with the management of devices (battery life, storage) 3. Financial issues (data costs, premium features) This multilayered nature of technical barriers explains why solutions focusing solely on internet infrastructure may be insufficient.
- 3.1.3 Psychological Duality Less External but Still Internal Anxiety Our results seem to corroborate a version of what could be called the "anxiety transfer hypothesis" in the context of online language learning. Learners are less anxious about peer and teacher judgments (as proved by 79.4% not feeling isolated) but they still have internal anxiety about language

accuracy. One respondent poignantly expressed this: "aku minder liat nya" (I feel inferior looking at them). This suggests that online environments may change but do not eliminate anxiety, merely shifting it from social to individual dimensions.

4.2 Theoretical Implications

4.2.1 Challenging Assumptions about Digital Literacy

The difference in digital literacy improvement between qualitative research showing significant improvement and quantitative data showing only minimal gains (only 11.8% agreement) brings into question the simplistic assumption that using technology automatically improves digital skills. It seems that learners might only develop "platform, specific procedural knowledge" without really acquiring "transferable digital competencies". This differentiation is essentially consistent with the framework by Helsper and Eynon (2013) where they differentiate between narrow technical skills and broad digital engagement.

4.2.2 Reconsidering Interaction in Online Language Learning

The present research questions whether the direct application of traditional interactionist theories (Long, 1996) to digital language learning settings is appropriate. Interaction plays a key role in face, to, face language acquisition; however, our results indicate that online environments allow learners to separate *technical interaction* (e.g., using platform chat features) from *social, emotional connection*. The fact that there is a lack of good communication tools and at the same time very little reported isolation suggests that learners either lower their standards for interaction or meet their social

and linguistic needs through external digital ecosystems (e.g., social media, messaging apps). Accordingly, the concept of *distributed interaction* is being developed in digital learning, which means that interaction is not limited to the formal platform but rather is spread out over a personal technology environment of the learner or that they have created new language input strategies that do not require peer, to, peer exchange.

4.3 Practical Implications

4.3.1 For Platform Developers

1. Design for Psychological Needs: Provide "safe failure" spaces with elements such as anonymous practice sessions and supportive, error-forgiving feedback.
2. Close the Flexibility Gap: Incorporate time management support, scheduling assistants, and goal-setting functionalities instead of relying on the learner to do so themselves.
3. Optimize for Real-World Settings: Prioritize offline capabilities, low-bandwidth operation, and data-savvy content delivery.

4.3.2 For Educators

1. Teach Online Learning Skills Explicitly: Incorporate curriculum components on time management, self-motivation, and online organization for online language courses.
2. Target Anxiety Directly: Normalize error in online settings and provide structured opportunities for low-stakes practice.
3. Close the Physical-Digital Divide: Teach learners to apply successful offline strategies to online learning.

4.3.3 For Policymakers

1. Holistic Digital Inclusion: Expand beyond device donation to include internet subsidies, digital literacy education, and technical assistance.
2. Quality Guidelines for Educational Platforms: Develop standards for pedagogical efficacy, not merely technical feasibility.
3. Support for Teacher Training: Fund professional development for online language teaching.

4.4 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The mixed-methods approach revealed several significant areas of convergence and divergence:

4.4.1 Convergent Findings

The results of both approaches point to internet connectivity as a major hindrance and flexibility as a valued but difficult feature. The convergence of both approaches enhances the reliability of these core results.

4.4.2 Divergent Findings

The most significant divergence was observed in the results for digital literacy; qualitative results showed improvement, but the quantitative results did not. This could be due to:

- Social desirability bias
- Different definitions of digital literacy
- Non-linear development

4.4.3 Complementary Insights

The qualitative results offered a deeper understanding of the results obtained with the quantitative approach. For example, the qualitative results on anxiety helped explain why learners valued certain features of the platform, such as the repetition of audio, which was not directly assessed in the study.

4.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions

4.5.1 Study Limitations

1. Sample size and diversity - With 34 participants, it might not be representative of a larger population.
 2. Self-report bias - All results were based on learner self-reporting and not objective measures of learners' proficiency or usage of the platform.
 3. Cross-sectional design -The study only captures a single point in time, which does not offer a great deal of insight into developmental patterns.
- 4.5.2 Future Research Directions
1. Longitudinal studies to examine how perceptions and strategies change with increased experience on the platform.
 2. Experimental studies to examine the effects of particular interventions, such as time management aids, anxiety reduction aids, etc.
 3. Cross-platform studies to examine the effects of different platform designs, e.g., gamification, synchronous vs. asynchronous, etc.
 4. Learning analytics – to integrate self-report with usage metrics.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that online English learning platforms are complex socio-technical systems in which structural advantages such as flexibility do not automatically translate to pedagogical advantages. The “flexibility paradox” and the psychological duality of anxiety highlighted in this study make it clear that there is a need for more learner-focused platform design that takes an explicit metacognitive and self-regulatory approach. In order for online language learning to live up to its transformative potential in a country such as Indonesia, it is necessary that all stakeholders involved in online language learning move beyond the infrastructural focus of platform development and address the cognitive, affective, and motivational aspects of the learning experience. Future studies should take a

longitudinal and experimental approach to designing interventions that can close the gap between platform potential and learner empowerment.

To achieve success in online language learning, it is necessary that all stakeholders involved move beyond the “delivery model” of education and work towards the creation of comprehensive learning ecosystems that address the whole learner. This entails not only offering high-quality content and user-friendly interfaces but also developing the metacognitive and self-regulatory skills necessary for success in flexible learning environments.

As online language learning continues to grow, Our results indicate that the most significant opportunities will not arise from refinements to current platforms, but from new ways of thinking about how technology might augment the psychological aspects of language learning. Future platforms that overcome the practical and psychological challenges identified in our research will have the greatest chance of unlocking the full promise of online language learning.

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