Students' Attitudes, Perceptions and Preferences Towards Online Learning During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. The study was conducted in qualitative descriptive perspective. It attempts to identify and determine learning experiences, attitudes, perceptions, preferences and pedagogical expectations that the students have when involving in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were thirty 4th-semester students at the English Education Department of the University of Mataram. The data were collected by using questionnaires and interviews. The result shows the experiences that students obtained in online learning during this pandemic led students to have positive attitudes and perceptions toward online learning. The students are also able to provide information on their preferences for various methods of online learning, the students' preferences both synchronous and asynchronous learning perceived was fine. For the course material template, they preferred modular one. While, they preferred writing paper as the final requirement. They also put high expectations on the institution, lecturers, and themselves in order to obtain effective online learning. The expectation includes how the lecturers need to be clear in every instruction, objective, and material and how the institutions provide them with any facilities which can support the learning process including having stable internet.

Keywords: Online Learning · Learning Experiences · Attitudes · Perceptions · Preferences · Expectations

1 Introduction

During COVID-19 Pandemic, most of all the educational institutions all over the world are closed. It is one of the UNESCO strategies to prevent and control virus transmissions. This closure starts in Wuhan, China, in February 2020. Such closure was also conducted in other countries due to the proliferating virus contamination. Not only closing educational institutions, governments of the world have also carried out lockdown and social distancing as strategies to decelerate the spread of the virus. Due to the closedown of schools, students will have significant differences and face the potential loss of learning, school withdrawal, and potential dropouts, and lack of sustained involvement in learning.

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In Indonesia, the closure of schools and colleges started in mid-March 2020. This effort helped reduce and break the transmission chain of the virus. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has closed more than six hundred thousand educational institutions and forced almost seventy million students to learn and more than 4 million teachers to teach on line from home. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture survey in April 2020, 98% of schools conducted learning from home, and only 2% of them could conduct education activities at the institutions. The epidemic of the COVID-19 pandemic has also transformed the way learning systems operate, which previously relied on the classic (face-to-face) approach to the digital media distance learning approach (PJJ) [1].

Nonetheless, COVID-19 has prompted educational institutions around the world to pursue a creative approach in a relatively short period of time. To alleviate learning loss and school withdrawal, schools and other educational systems have established alternatives to keep students the opportunity to continue distance learning. These included the use of technologies and resources ranging from radio and television to online learning. During this time, most educational levels, especially universities, have moved the teaching and learning process into online mode using many online platforms such as Google Meets, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram.

Teachers need to design interactive and interesting online learning media to continue the learning process, learning innovation with online media is needed. Online learning seeks to find appropriate patterns to address the challenges of educational life development during this pandemic. This is because the implementation of the distance learning model, which is the biggest challenge for unfamiliar scholars, involves new instructor and student habits to use blended learning or fully online learning. The use of learning technologies that support online education and learning activities is a major concern in maintaining the quality of learning.

Thus, this study examines the 4th-semester students' attitudes, perceptions, and preferences toward online learning and other traits that could establish more effective and successful online learning. The 4th semester students are those who graduated from senior high school, enrolled to the university and become freshmen students in 2020 are expecting to have normal face-to-face classes and also interaction in university. This outbreak pandemic suddenly changes the expectation of their university class and interaction, not having classic classes, but having online-learning classes.

Based on the background of the study, there are several research questions has been formulated as follow: (1) What are the students' attitudes, perceptions, and preferences towards online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) What pedagogical expectations do the students expect from online English language learning classes?

2 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Students' Attitudes, Perceptions and Preference

In Ajzen [2], attitude is the tendency to react favorably or unfavorably to a person, thing, event, or institution. Most modern social psychologists agree that the characteristic attributes of attitude are of an evaluative (pro-con, pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative) nature. This perspective is reinforced by the fact that virtually all standard attitude scaling techniques provide personally identifiable scores for attitude objects in the evaluation dimension. Attitude is also a composition of the hypothesis that direct observation is not accessible and should be inferred from measurable reactions. Given the nature of the composition, these responses should reflect a positive or negative evaluation of the attitude object. However, beyond this requirement, there is virtually no limit to the types of responses that can be considered. It is useful to classify attitude-related responses into different subgroups to simplify the problem. Therefore, it is possible to distinguish between a reaction directed at another person and a reaction directed at oneself, an action performed in a public place and an action performed in a private place, or an action and a reaction. However, the most common classification system distinguishes between three categories of responses, at least back to Plato, and differentiates between responses in three categories: cognition, affect, and conation.

In short, favorable or unfavorable of an individual's attitude towards an object, event, or institution can be implied from the verbal or non-verbal responses. It can be said that from these responses, cognitive properties are about the beliefs, reflection, and perception of the object. While these responses in an affective nature is reflecting the person's reputation and emotions. And also the responses can be of a conative nature that shows how a person does, behaves, or would act with respect to an object.

In Encyclopedia of the Science of Learning book by Seel [3], perception is the process by which information from the environment is detected by the senses and transformed into meaningful experiences in the brain. Perception, which is a dynamic search for useful patterns rather than passive recording, is the interpretation of events and involves the breakdown of sensory data and the collection of information at both the conscious and unconscious levels. Therefore, students' perceptions of online learning, good education, independence in learning, assessment, and quality of workload have been shown to influence learning approaches. In addition, in the arts/social sciences and science fields, good education and recognition of independence in learning usually support the development of a deep approach to learning. Students' perceptions of heavy workloads lead to negative attitudes and superficial approaches to learning. Because it is closely related to workload requirements, the assessment method also influences the approach students take when completing tasks.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English [4], "preference" is defined as "a greater interest in or desire for somebody/something than somebody/something else" (p. 909). Thus, students' preferences can be referred to as students' liking for the learning element, and the chosen method of interaction with the learning element. Yang & Chen [5] refers students' preferences serve as predictors of a student's ability to engage in a particular form of the learning environment and as an indicator of how students can approach and process the information and materials they gain. It is a

fact that different students learn differently. Some students tend to learn by doing, while others tend to learn concepts. Some students like written texts and verbal explanations, while others prefer to learn with visual information (photos, diagrams, etc.). On the other hand, different learning resources can explain the same concept by implementing different learning activities in different multimedia formats.

2.2 Online Learning

Online learning or e-learning can be interpreted as an instructional process that utilizes information and communication technology (ICT). The incorporation of innovative educational strategies and technological resources has transformed the process of teaching and learning into a new model.

In Hrastinski [6], learning process can be transitioned to online learning through synchronous and asynchronous practices using basic educational tools and a learning management system. *Synchronous e-learning*, commonly supported in media such as video conferences and chat, may support e-learners in the development of learning communities. Learners and teachers experience synchronous e-learning as more social and avoid frustration by asking and answering questions in real time. Synchronized sessions help e-learners feel like participants. The most common way to provide remote instruction to students in audio and video conferencing is to use some applications and platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom and Skype. Since the lockdown of COVID-19, it is important for faculty and staff to present content in multiple ways and formats for the use of audio and video conferencing. *Asynchronous e-learning* is commonly facilitated by media such as email and discussion boards to support work relationships between learners and teachers, even if participants cannot be online at the same time. This is one of an important component of flexible e-learning. In fact, many people take online courses because of the asynchrony that combines education with work, family, and other efforts. Asynchronous e-learning allows learners to log on to the e-learning environment at any time to download documents and send messages to teachers and colleagues. Students may spend more time refining contributions that are generally considered more thoughtful compared to synchronous communications.

2.3 Students' Expectation

The presence of student expectations helps in effective learning. Students' expectations about how educational institutions and lecturers help them need to be explored and noted. One of the survey about students' expectation of online learning was developed and conducted by Harris et al. [7]. There are six themes related to student expectations for online courses: proficiency in using technology, expectations of the course instructor, expectations of the course content, expectations for course organization, expectations for social interaction, and other personal variables. Most of their lessons require basic computer applications for word processing, presentation and reporting, basic computing applications, and web-based mailing. There are many academic factors that students expect to be satisfied with when conducting online learning. Instructors who teach courses and manage learning platforms are expected to be knowledgeable. They have a good level of classroom management applied in virtual settings. They also provide various type of

learning activities including class activities, assignments, and quiz in order to be engaged with students and create effective learning condition.

3 Methods

3.1 Research Design and Participants

This study use a qualitative descriptive approach that focus on the survey to identify the students' attitudes, perceptions, and preferences regarding online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some English education students were chosen as the respondents of this study. The surveys intent for the university students in the fourth semester of 2020/2021 academic year, representing the participants of this study.

The participants were thirty 4th-semester students at the English Education Department of the University of Mataram who are enrolled in colleges in 2020/2021 academic year which coincides with the same year of outbreak start in most of the countries across the world. They enrolled in the university and have online classes from the first semester, including all those admissions of new students' prerequisites such as study orientation and also most all of learning processes in classes using online until they are in fourth semester.

3.2 Data Collection and Instruments

The data were collected by using questionnaires and interviews. Thirty respondents from the 4th-semester students of the English education program were asked to fill out the questionnaires. The instruments were distributed into separate links on Google Form. To double-check the quality of the questionnaire, a consultation with a lecturer in the field of English Education was conducted. The Google Form's URL were distributed via email, WhatsApp, Twitter, and other social media platforms. The links were circulated and available for certain days. They were asked to respond to 40 questions on a scale of 1–4. Scale 1 was used as the lowest point which indicated as Strongly Disagree, meanwhile scale 4 is the highest point which indicated as Strongly Agree.

3.3 Data Analysis

First, the data was identified by each attribute in the study, those are students' attitudes, perceptions, and preferences towards online learning. Next, the data was classified into each type of the main problems of the study. After classifying the data into their categories, the details of the data was described. A thorough review of literature analysis, integration, and comparison types focusing on various aspects of verbal analysis has been performed and explained in the study.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Students' Attitudes

See Table 1.

Table 2 shows the 30 respondents answer to the Attitude question variable from Statement 1 to Statement 9, it can be seen that the value ranges from 2.53 to 3.4 and the mean is 2.87, which indicates that the majority of respondents attitude lead to the criteria of "Positive". The data shows that students were satisfied with the course provided via online-learning, they are much more comfortable expressing the problems faced in online learning in the lectures than face-to-face. They also intend to continue using a computer during their English classes. The students also agree that online learning encourages them to explore new apps and platforms of learning. The interviews revealed students' responses that they always join online learning and it proves how they are committed to the schedule of their online classes. They also stated that they always stand by 15 min before the classes. By having most of the students agree with the attitude attributes, it can be concluded that the students showed positive attitude toward online learning during COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Interval criteria of Students' Attitudes toward Online Learning

No	Interval range	Criteria
1	3,25–4,00	Very Positive
2	2,50–3,24	Positive
3	1,75–2,49	Negative
4	1,00–1,74	Very Negative

Table 2. Analysis of students' attitudes toward online learning

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Statements_1	30	1	4	76	2.53	.860
Statements_2	30	2	4	87	2.90	.759
Statements_3	30	2	4	103	3.43	.568
Statements_4	30	1	4	78	2.60	.855
Statements_5	30	1	4	83	2.77	.774
Statements_6	30	1	4	81	2.70	.750
Statements_7	30	1	4	84	2.80	.805
Statements_8	30	1	4	88	2.93	.691
Statements_9	30	2	4	102	3.40	.621
Valid N (listwise)	30					
Mean					2.87	

4.2 Students' Perceptions

See Table 3.

As seen in Table 4 there are eleven items responded to by the students to describe their perceptions of online learning. The data obtained in the questionnaire showed the value ranges from 2.73 to 3.27 and the mean is 3.037 which indicates that the majority of respondents lead to perception criteria of "Positive". The students perceive online learning classes are working and running well. Moreover, the lecturers are very helpful during online courses. The students show positive responses because they are experiencing satisfying online learning since their lecture put the time into commenting on students' work, and the students agree that the comment becomes very helpful feedback during online learning.

Based on the workload during the online learning mode, half of the students agree that the workload was too heavy. As students, they also tend to have pressure in the course during online learning. However, they were generally given enough time to understand

Table 3. Interval criteria of Students' Perceptions toward Online Learning

No	Interval range	Criteria
1	3,25–4,00	Very Positive
2	2,50–3,24	Positive
3	1,75–2,49	Negative
4	1,00–1,74	Very Negative

Table 4. Analysis of students' perceptions toward online learning

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Statements_10	30	1	4	87	2.90	.923
Statements_11	30	1	4	86	2.87	.776
Statements_12	30	1	4	89	2.97	.809
Statements_13	30	1	4	90	3.00	.830
Statements_14	30	1	4	82	2.73	.740
Statements_15	30	2	4	94	3.13	.571
Statements_16	30	1	4	91	3.03	.964
Statements_17	30	1	4	93	3.10	.803
Statements_18	30	2	4	98	3.27	.583
Statements_19	30	2	4	92	3.07	.740
Statements_20	30	2	4	96	3.20	.714
Valid N (listwise)	30					
Mean					3.037	

the things they had to learn. As a result of their online courses, the students also feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems which also helped them develop the ability to plan their own work creatively and innovatively.

Based on interviews, the student show that the online learning during this COVID-19 perceive was fine. The classes are working and running well. Moreover, the lecturers are very helpful during online classes.

4.3 Students' Preferences

From the Tables 5 and 6, the data for the statement variables from Statement 30 to Statement 40, it can be seen that the value ranges from 3.33 to 3.70 and mean is 3.055555556, which indicates that the majority of respondents lead to the preference criteria of "Like". Some students preferred the synchronous mode, while other students also preferred the asynchronous online learning mode. During the online learning mode, the students also reveal their preferences of the lesson structure. For the template of material, the highest frequency of the students prefer the lesson given by modular style template. Moreover,

Table 5. Interval criteria of Students' Preferences toward Online Learning

No	Interval range	Criteria
1	3,25–4,00	Very Like
2	2,50–3,24	Like
3	1,75–2,49	Dislike
4	1,00–1,74	Very Dislike

Table 6. Analysis of Students' Preferences toward Online Learning

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Statements_21	30	2	4	94	3.13	.681
Statements_22	30	1	4	90	3.00	.643
Statements_23	30	2	4	96	3.20	.761
Statements_24	30	1	4	92	3.07	.583
Statements_25	30	1	4	93	3.10	.803
Statements_26	30	1	4	85	2.83	.950
Statements_27	30	1	4	91	3.03	.809
Statements_28	30	2	4	95	3.17	.747
Statements_29	30	1	4	89	2.97	.850
Valid N (listwise)	30					
Mean					3.055555556	

for the examination forms, students agree to prefer writing a paper as their final exam. Meanwhile, less than half of the students choose multiple choice essays as their final examination. In online learning, communication between lecturers and students is necessary, the students agree that they preferred sending texts after an online-learning class via WhatsApp to the lecturer if they have any queries to clarify. In the interview and, the students stated that if there are any necessary queries that need to be asked, the text will be sent by the representative of the class, the class captain. However, there is still a chance that other students will send a text to the lecturers, especially when they have communicated in a group chat. Therefore, it can be concluded that students' preferences toward online learning shows positive favorable on several items such as both synchronous and asynchronous was fine, the preference of modular template, writing paper as the final examination, and preference of communication way with lecturers.

4.4 Students' Expectations

See Table 7.

Table 8 shows the statement variables from Statement 30 to Statement 40, it can be seen that the value ranges of the response from 3.33 to 3.70 which indicates that the majority of respondents lead to the expectation criteria of "Very High". It shows that, they are proficient in using a computer on their own and agree they are proficient in doing internet searches. They also hope their computer skill will improve by having this online learning method during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The students expect the online learning materials, the course instructions, and the material needs to be clearly stated and easy to locate. In the dimensions of students' expectations of the lecturers, the students also agree that they expect their lecturers need to be clear in communicating the objectives of the course, responsive to students' online tone in all communication formats, and promote a supportive online learning environment.

Students also put some expectations on the teaching and learning method. They expect this online-learning need to be as precise as face-to-face courses and provide them with opportunities for active learning and self-reflection. The interviews revealed that students were given the PowerPoint presentation by the lecturers every time the classes are over. However, they still hope for recorded lecturers that can help students to understand the lessons. The material can be used as self-reflection resources by the students.

Table 7. Interval criteria of Students' Expectations toward Online Learning

No	Interval range	Criteria
1	3,25–4,00	Very High
2	2,50–3,24	High
3	1,75–2,49	Low
4	1,00–1,74	Very Low

Table 8. Analysis of Students' Expectations toward Online Learning

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Statements_30	30	3	4	111	3.70	.466
Statements_31	30	3	4	100	3.33	.479
Statements_32	30	2	4	108	3.60	.563
Statements_33	30	3	4	102	3.40	.498
Statements_34	30	2	4	103	3.43	.568
Statements_35	30	3	4	102	3.40	.498
Statements_36	30	2	4	103	3.43	.728
Statements_37	30	3	4	103	3.43	.504
Statements_38	30	3	4	100	3.33	.479
Statements_39	30	3	4	102	3.40	.498
Statements_40	30	2	4	102	3.40	.563
Valid N (listwise)	30					
Mean					3.440909091	

4.5 Discussion

This study intent to investigate students' attitudes, perceptions, and preferences toward online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. To answer the questions, the questionnaires were distributed to the 30 4th-semester students of the English Education program at the university level. Questionnaire statements consist of four attributes, those are attitudes, perceptions, preferences, and students' expectations. Each attribute is divided into several categories, and attitudes are divided into three those are cognitive, affect, and conation. Next, perceptions attributes are divided into four categories, namely, good teaching, clear goals, workload, and generic skills. Preferences are also divided into four categories, those are delivery type, template, final requirement, and communication platform. Last, students' expectations are divided into three categories, namely, technology proficiency, course instructor, and course content.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affects many fields, especially the education field. This affects how teachers and students conduct their teaching and learning process, most of them were moved into online mode by using any digital platforms. The transmission of education gives both teacher and students new experiences due to their teaching and learning by using online mode. This study focuses on the experiences obtained by the students. Fully using technology in conducting learning is one of the experiences that students obtained. The learning process during the COVID-19 Pandemic lead them to fully access technology all the time for online learning. It helps students to learn and explore any apps or platforms of online learning that they never had before. The students also were given different types of tasks and homework which should be done online. These experiences lead students to improve their ability in using technology and any digital platforms.

After having students' experiences, they tend to have their attitudes, perceptions, and preferences towards online learning based on their experience. Investigating them is very necessary in order to obtain and implement effective learning.

As seen in Table 2, the item of students' attitude expresses students have a positive attitude toward online learning, this can be convinced by the students' responses. The students reveal they are more comfortable expressing the problems faced in online learning instead of face to face. They also reveal the excitement for joining online-learning classes, as the data interview presents. They also agree to continue using technology or any digital platforms in their English class in the future, not only during COVID-19 Pandemic. A positive attitude can be one of the supports for having an effective learning process.

Besides the students' attitudes, students' perceptions also affect the learning process. The students express that they are experiencing satisfying online learning since their lecture put the time into commenting on students' work and the students agree that the comment becomes very helpful feedback during online learning. The students also reveal that the lecturers were extremely good at explaining things in online-learning classes and lead students to have a clear idea about how and what they will do in online learning since the lecturers made the instructions clear from the beginning of the class. However, the students express that the workload or task in online learning was too heavy, and they have plenty to do. This plenty of workload put pressure on the students. But they were given enough time to understand and do the work during online-learning class. The students remarked that all the experience they obtained during online learning can help them to develop their ability to plan their own work in creative and innovative ways. It also builds their confidence to tackle unfamiliar problems.

Next, the investigation related to the students' preferences. They tend to have online learning which allows students to learn even if they cannot be online, but they still have the material and study. However, some of the students also agree to use synchronous online which allows them to have more social and can be asking and answering questions with the lecturers or other students.

In the aspect of course templates, students agree that they preferred modular style templates. They preferred to have modules given by the lecturers so that they can study wherever and whenever they want, not only during the real-time online class. For the final exam, the students agree to prefer writing a paper as the exam. For the communication form, half of the students agree that they prefer to send a text to the lecturers for clarifying queries.

Finally, after investigating all the three attributes above, the students were asked to respond to the questionnaire related to their expectations of online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The expectation may consist of expectations of institutions, lecturers, and students as well. In the aspect of technology, students strongly agree that they are proficient in using computers and doing internet searches. Furthermore, they strongly agree that as a result of online learning, their computer skills will improve. Also, this online learning will provide them with opportunities for students' self-reflection and to be active learning students. In order to obtain effective online learning, students also expected the lecturers to be clear in communicating the objective of the course, responsive to students, and promote a supportive online learning environment.

5 Conclusion

Based on the result of the study, it can be concluded that the students acquired new technological skills during this online learning process that able to be integrated with their previous knowledge. They started to be able to solve some technical problems during online learning that they never faced before. The experiences that students obtained in online learning during this pandemic led students to have positive responses in attitudes and perceptions toward online learning. The students are also able to provide information on their preferences for various methods of online learning, the students' preferences both synchronous and asynchronous learning perceived was fine. For the course material template, they preferred modular one. While, they preferred writing paper as the final requirement. For students' expectations, they put high expectations on the institution, lecturers, and themselves in order to obtain effective online learning. The expectation may include how the lecturers need to be clear in every instruction, objective, and material and how the institutions provide them with any facilities which can support the learning process including having stable internet.

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