

UniKL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING USING ICT AS LEARNING TOOLS TO LEARN ENGLISH

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Abstract

Blended synchronous learning is not new and higher education is not exceptional. It has been used widely by teachers all over the world. However, recently, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, teachers and educators are forced to fully use synchronous learning and e-learning to continue teaching and learning process, including Universiti of Kuala Lumpur (UniKL). Nonetheless, it is important to know the students' perception on the use of ICT learning tools such as Zoom Cloud Meeting, Microsoft Teams and VLE as a medium to conduct synchronous learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study us to investigate the students' perception on synchronous learning using ICT tools to learn English. 250 students were selected to participate in this study. The findings indicate that students perceive online learning using ICT tools as beneficial. However, the students also believe that online synchronous learning is not as effective as traditional classes.

Keywords ---blended learning, synchronous learning, students' perception

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INTRODUCTION

Synchronous learning and online learning is not a new coined term. In fact, the term has been used again and again for the past decade. Synchronous learning and online learning has been widely used not just in tertiary education but also secondary education in Malaysia as well. However, classes are still being done in face to face traditional mode. Only 40% of the lesson is being done online. Since the world was affected with Covid19 pandemic, the educational field was also hit hard as classes cannot be conducted via face to face mode. Hence, educational institutions are forced to conduct classes and assessments online via mediums namely Zoom Cloud Meeting, Virtual Learning environment, Microsoft Teams and some other tools. Synchronous learning using tools provides flexibility in this kind of situation where classes have to continue regardless of the situation. This is also vouched by Mansor & Ismail(2012), "online learning provides flexibility in learning and accessing materials according to student needs in terms of time and techniques."

Regardless of all the flexibilities, there might be challenges in fulfilling the needs of the students in terms of their practical assessment, students' learning strategies and also their learning perception especially the students who have lower competency or proficiency. Therefore, it is vital to examine students' perception on synchronous learning as English is supposed to be fun, enhances students' creativity and benefits the students in many ways. This was also supported by Farah et al.(2008), English can be attractive with the use of E-learning as lecturers are able to provide materials like videos to facilitate weak students to better understand the topics. However, there are also constraints when it comes to synchronous learning which this study is trying to highlight.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Due to the government's effort to contain the Covid 19 Pandemic from infecting more Malaysians, certain operations had to be shut down throughout the Restriction Movement Order (RMO). Among the sectors that are affected by the closure is educational sector including tertiary education. As a result, the management as well as the lecturers have to think of ways to continue the lesson online using synchronous learning tools such as Zoom

Cloud Meeting, Moodle, and Microsoft Teams to name a few. Among the problems faced by educators in switching to online mode are ways to make the assessment online, conduct lab through synchronous learning and prepare for online final examination. Besides, it is also important for the students to have a strong internet connection from wherever they are to join the synchronous learning, ergo, students should have a positive perception about synchronous learning to make it effective and all these factors will affect students' performance and acceptance of knowledge through synchronous learning. Therefore, it is important to study the students' perception on synchronous learning.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To study UniKL students' perception towards synchronous learning in learning English.
2. To determine students' perception on the effectiveness of learning English synchronously.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is conducted only on students of Universiti Kuala Lumpur Malaysian Institute of Industrial Technology. Therefore, the findings of this survey cannot be generalized to all higher institute students nor can it be generalized to other UniKL students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Synchronous Learning

The advancement of technology and ICT tools in learning has allowed learning to take place anytime and anywhere. There are two types of blended classroom namely blended synchronous learning, blended asynchronous learning. According to Yang, Yu, & Chen(2019), Blended Synchronous Learning (BSL) is when a classroom can connect a teacher and students from a remote classroom in a real-time class. Synchronous learning was also defined by Bhowmick, Khasawneh, Bowling, Gramopadhye, & Melloy (2007) as learning "with all the students in a course meeting at the same place at the same time". The same place in blended learning indicate the same medium of learning at the same time. As cited by Holenko Dlab, Boticki, Hoic-Bozic, & Looi

(2020), it is further explained that synchronous learning “occurs when learners engage in learning in a specific time-frame, but can, depending on the technology, be positioned at various locations”.

Students' Perception towards Synchronous Learning

Different students have different learning styles that results in them having different perspective on online learning using ICT tools hence different commitment towards online learning (Mohd Salman & Aziah, 2012). Mohd Salman & Aziah (2012) in their study further discuss that not all students prefer learning online especially those learning engineering. However, it is still possible to have online interactive lesson and materials.

Phillips (2015) also mentions in her article that “internet-based education was more likely to be accepted by students if they perceived that it offered an advantage over traditional alternatives, was technically easy to use, and was compatible with their values/norms”. Phillips (2015) added that online learning will be more effective if feedbacks are able to be communicated, thus, online learning becomes more interactive.

Advantages of Synchronous Learning

Blended synchronous learning is deemed to be a useful tool to bridge the gap between online learning and traditional learning. This is also supported by Mohd Salman & Aziah (2012) where both authors discussed about the advantages of blended synchronous learning. One of it is it is flexible and its flexibility offers students the accessibility on teaching materials and the lesson anytime, anywhere and in any way.

It provides the students with the freedom to determine the way they want to study. Additionally, Yang et al.(2019) also supported Mohd Salman (2012) that blended synchronous learning offers students better learning experience and wider access to information.

Apart from accessibility, Yang et al. (2019) blended synchronous learning allows students to get prompt feedback from the lecturer during the lesson just like how they are able to do so in face-to-face classroom. Yang et al. (2019) also cited that “students can carry out higher- order cognitive activities in BSL, including mathematical problem solving and language learning, and the effect is the same as the face-to-face physical classroom”.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research uses structured online questionnaire that was developed based on research objectives. The survey was adapted from a research entitled “Student perception on online learning using heutagogy approach in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia” by R. Rusliet. al (2020). The survey was adapted to fit the purpose of this study.

Sample of Study

The study was conducted on 250 students of MITEC who are taking English courses this semester to study their perception on the execution of online classes for English courses during the period of RMO. The samples were selected using the purposive sampling. Only students who are taking English this semesters were asked to fill in the survey to gather their insights on learning English online using ICT tools.

Data Collection

Students were informed on the purpose of the survey. Due to the Restriction Movement Order, the survey was conducted online using google forms. The link was shared with the students of UniKL MITEC. The survey took about 5 days to be completed by the students. The link was sent to 250 students. However, only 226 responded to the survey.

Data Analysis

The data collected will be analysed manually and presented in the form of percentage. Each item in the survey will be analysed to investigate the students' perception of synchronous learning.

FINDINGS

Overall Findings

Based on the students' responses, it can be summarised that almost half of the students do not prefer online classes. The analysis revealed that students prefer face to face class as compared to online classes. The results shed light to the two main objectives which are:

1. UniKL students' perception on synchronous learning in learning English.
2. UniKL students' perception on the effectiveness of learning English synchronously.

UniKL students' perception on synchronous learning in learning English.

The students' perception on learning English using the synchronous learning were revealed in the completed survey. Table 1 clearly depicts students' response on their perception on learning English synchronously.

Table 1. Students' Perception on Learning English Synchronously

Item	SA	A	D	SD
I am more interested in learning synchronously using ICT.	7.5 %	52.9%	30.4%	9.3%
I believe that learning synchronously using ICT saves teachers' and students' time.	13.7%	62.1%	20.3%	4%
I believe that learning synchronously using ICT is easier.	7%	47.6%	34.8%	10.6%
I believe that learning becomes more real by utilizing ICT.	4.8%	49.8%	38.8%	6.6%
I believe that I can access information synchronously without being limited by distance, space, time, anywhere and anytime with ICT.	18.5%	60.4%	16.7%	4.4%
I believe that the use of synchronous learning using ICTs in learning attracts my attention.	7.5%	52%	34.8%	5.7%
I believe that synchronous learning using ICT promotes learning motivation.	4%	50.2%	37%	8.8%
I believe that the synchronous learning process using ICT is fun.	10.6%	54.6%	26.4%	8.4%
I believe that the synchronous learning using ICT can increase my creativity.	6.2%	52.4%	34.8%	6.6%

The result of the survey shows that most of the students are of the opinion that learning English online using ICT tools benefits both teachers and students and that they are interested in using the ICT tools to learn. Among the prominent positive responses that were supported widely by the students are learning English synchronously saves teachers' and students' time with 13.7%

students strongly agree on the statement and 62.1% agree with the statement. Another significant finding is 18.5% of the students strongly agree and 60.4% of the students agree that it is easy for them to access any information related to the course and the class regardless of where they are, distance and time. Another important findings of this survey is that students perceive synchronous learning using ICT is fun with 10.6% of students strongly agree with the statement and another 54.6% supported the statement.

Conclusively, more than half of the respondent agreed that synchronous learning for English using different ICT tools is actually fun and attractive. Respondents also believe that accessibility of information is better with online learning and it is economical as it saves time and space. There are, however, a portion of respondents who disagree with the statements even though it is deemed that students nowadays are technology savvy. Albeit, most of the respondents still believe that synchronous learning via ICT tools are beneficial.

UniKL students' perception on the effectiveness of learning English synchronously.

The second part of the survey unravels students' perception on the effectiveness of learning English synchronously using ICT tools. Table 2 below shows the respondents' responses on the survey.

Table 2. Students' Perception on the Effectiveness of Learning English Synchronously

Item	SA	A	D	SD
I believe that I understand the lesson better through synchronous learning with ICT.	2.2%	33%	48%	16.7%
I believe that I can focus more on the lesson when it is done synchronously.	3.1%	33%	48.5%	15.4%
I believe that I can get better feedback when learning synchronously using ICT.	4.4%	49.3%	40.1%	6.2%
I believe that I can improve my language skills when learning synchronously through ICT.	6.2%	57.3%	31.7%	4.8%
I believe that learning synchronously using ICT is as effective as face to face learning.	2.2%	32.2%	45.8%	19.8%

Based on the study, it can be seen that the respondents agree to certain part of the survey. Half of the students perceive synchronous learning as a medium where they receive better feedback. Slightly more than half respondents believe that they can improve their language skills even if the class is conducted via synchronous learning with 6.2% of strongly agree with the statement and a hefty 57.3% of the respondents agreeing to the statement.

Conversely, more than half of the respondents disagree with three of the items in the survey. An amount of 16.7% strongly disagree that they would understand a lesson better through synchronous learning and another 48% supported the disagreement. Additionally, 48.5% respondents disagree and 15.4% respondents strongly disagree that they are able to focus more on the lesson when it is done synchronously. Lastly, 45.8% of respondents disagree and 19.8% strongly disagree that synchronous learning is as effective as face to face learning.

In general, it is clearly depicted in this survey that although the respondents perceive online learning and synchronous learning as fun and economical, it has its own drawbacks. The respondents believe that it is hard for them to pay attention to the lesson and it is more difficult to understand the lessons taught online. Most of the respondents also disagree that online synchronous learning is as effective as face to face classroom. Therefore, UniKL students still prefer the traditional face to face learning method for a more effective learning.

CONCLUSION

Online synchronous learning can be a very powerful tool and a helpful one too in situations like what the world is facing now where people are forced to work from home and the students are not in campus. It could benefit not just the teacher but also the students. Additionally, it contributes to self-regulatory learning where it promotes independent learning.

However, in this scenario, not all students are able to access the internet from where they are. Due to the weak internet connection, students may not be able pay attention to the lesson and, teaching and learning part becomes ineffective because of the challenges faced by the student. In order to achieve the full benefits of synchronous learning, the foundation needs to be established beforehand such as the internet connection, proper facilities, appropriate teaching materials, teachers' and students' readiness to implement synchronous learning.

Therefore, in order for all parties to benefit from synchronous learning, everybody from the academicians, the students, the management even the administrators plays a pivotal role to make it a success. Teachers need to be prepared in terms of the teaching materials and teaching content to ensure the quality of the lesson. Students need to be ready in terms of their connection, mental readiness and also their perception prior to having online classes. Management and administrators need to be supportive in providing better facilities and a stable internet connection or conduct training for staff and students on the possible ICT learning tools if needed so that online classes in campus can be made successful.

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