



EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF EFL STUDENTS ENGAGED IN ASYNCHRONOUS E-LEARNING

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Abstract

Asynchronous e-learning is receiving growing attention because it encompasses learner-oriented approach which emphasizes on the development of learners' knowledge and skills. Henceforth it is imperative to explore students' experience on asynchronous e-learning. This study aims to delineate the experience of senior high school students in learning English through asynchronous e-learning. This is a qualitative descriptive study in nature and the data collected were analysed using thematic analysis by incorporating interpretive description approach. The participants of study were senior high school students from Lemahwungkuk sub-district, Cirebon, Indonesia. The results revealed that in undergoing asynchronous e-learning, the participants have to implement self-access learning and additionally they have to adapt with technology setting which may appear to be challenging due to limited technical support they have; moreover they still have to discover the knowledge by themselves inasmuch as they experience limited interaction with their English teachers throughout the process of learning.

Keywords: Students' Experience, Asynchronous e-learning, Technology adaptation

INTRODUCTION

With the recognition of the importance of distance learning due to covid-19 pandemic, the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture has supported the regulations in March 2020, by deactivating educational activities from early age education to higher education and replacing conventional learning method into e-learning (Mulyanti, Purnama, and Pawinanto, 2020). E-learning is considered as a helpful device in the continuity of learning during this pandemic situation. It has been a profound innovation in the world of education for decades due to the fairly fast integration of technology; in which, it allows teacher and students to stay connected even though face-to-face learning is not performed (Król, 2016). The growth of online learning has indeed given effective benefits to higher education where flexibility and convenience has become main reason to adapt with this new setting of learning (Delahunty, 2018). The implementation of e-learning in English language learning has emerged some positive impacts such as flexibility of time and place, extensive learning resources, easy management, and moreover it helps students become more independent, and responsible in gaining knowledge as students are expected to be involved in the learning process (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015; Mather & Sarkans, 2018;

Rahmawati, 2016). In current learning environment, the English teachers typically use one of two methods of e-learning: Asynchronous and Synchronous. However based on preliminary observation at senior high schools in Lemahwungkuk sub-district, Cirebon City, it was discovered that the schools preferred to implement Asynchronous e-learning especially in English teaching. Daniel (2020) defined Asynchronous e-learning as a simple approach for teachers to be applied due to this situation. Asynchronous e-learning is method where the students and the teachers can do even when they are offline.

In this method, the students usually completed their own lessons as the material and communication delivered through the use of Learning Management System (Moorhouse, 2020). Learning Management System (LMS) is a network used specifically to manage e-learning which enables teachers and students to save and hand out material as quickly as possible (Adzharuddin, 2013; Joel, 2015). Google Classroom, Moodle, Quipper, Edmodo, WhatsApp and so forth, are indeed some LMS applications that are commonly used by English teachers in asynchronous e-learning. Hence it is very important for both teachers and students to be able to operate the learning application so that e-learning can be carried out properly (Cakrawati, 2017). As the study conducted by Famulasih (2020) on students' experience in e-learning, she emphasized that the availability of learning application at this point of time is sufficient for the continuity of e-learning. Henceforth, Malik et al. (2017) in their study on e-learning method examined that asynchronous e-learning could be an effective method to promote students' learning independence.

However, the shift in the learning methods seems to be a wave of changes to students in learning, especially in English language learning. Generally, in English language learning there are four basic competencies that must be enhanced by the students such as listening, reading, speaking and writing. In English language learning process, interaction and communication between the students and their environment is necessitated because it an imperative element to embody the language (Studies, 2017). As English language learner may know that the fundamental of learning a language is to use it as tool both in spoken and in written for the purpose of communication (Noprianto & Purnawarman, 2019) Therefore it is important for the English teachers to provide directed teaching instructions to help students to enhance their vocabulary knowledge so that they will be able use the language (Subon, 2016). As a matter of fact, the ability to use English language will not gradually increase if intensive interaction with others does not happen in language setting because class interaction in the English learning process is vital factor to encourage students to use English language as means of communication; in other words language production will occur when interaction happens (Sundari, 2017).

To address this issue above, this study focuses on EFL students' experiences in undergoing the process of asynchronous e-learning especially in learning English subject as well as finding out the challenges that students encounter through this concept of learning. This study is viewed through the lens of empiricism in which some experts stated that knowledge comes only or primarily from sensory experience (Nassaji, 2015). Thus this study can be a reference for English teachers in planning their e-learning classes (Blackmon & Major, 2012).

METHOD

This is a qualitative descriptive study which presents a description of a phenomenon and intended to explore and explain the events in the social environment (Nassaji, 2015). Particularly, this study aims to explore participants' experience in learning English through

asynchronous e-learning during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. Thus to perform the aim of the study, the researcher performed three stages. *In the first stage*, the researchers selected two schools, located in Lemahwungkuk sub-district, Cirebon, which implemented asynchronous e-learning in teaching English. *In the second stage*, the researchers selected the participants by performing purposive sampling and ensuring that they would willingly participate without any coercion. The recruitment of participants were based on particular criteria that were aligned with the research problem. *In the last stage*, the researchers interviewed each of the participants more than once to establish accuracy in collecting the data.

The data for this study were collected from interviews using a semi-structured interview as the interview guide. The researchers did not strictly follow a formalized list of questions. The interview protocol included open-ended questions, allowing for engagement between the interviewer and the participants as well as giving the freedom to the participants to express their opinions related to the topic. All interview questions and prompts were added based on the pilot interview. This interview was conducted in two languages English and Indonesian to help the participants understand the questions and they would be able to give complete, accurate and strong answers toward every given question.

In collecting the data, the researchers ensured that this study follows specific guidelines and techniques. After collecting the data, the researchers transcribed the data and then analysed them through thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (cited in Nowell et al., 2017) stated that this analysis is obtainable and convenient in analysing qualitative data as it provides a highly flexible approach and complex account of data. The analysis is composed of several procedures, such as familiarization of the original data and continued by giving initial code to the statement that describe the main point of the interviews (Saldaña, 2013). In order to support the validity of this study, the researchers conducted member-check activity by clarifying the emerging themes found in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents results and discussions on students' experiences in asynchronous e-learning. The table below is the demographics of participants. There are eleven participants who were involved in the study.

Table 1
Demographics of Participants

Participant's ID	Age	Gender	Level
P1	16	Female	Grade 11
P2	16	Female	Grade 11
P3	17	Male	Grade 12
P4	17	Female	Grade 12
P5	16	Male	Grade 11
P6	16	Female	Grade 11
P7	17	Male	Grade 12
P8	17	Male	Grade 12
P8	17	Female	Grade 12
P9	17	Female	Grade 11
P10	16	Female	Grade 11
P11	16	Female	Grade 11

The results of the study are provided under the two research questions and it was segmented into four themes which were seen through a critical incident lens. In this lens, vivid happenings provide a framework for better analyzing and understanding (Getrich et al. 2016).

1. How do students undergo the process of asynchronous e-learning as they learn English lessons?

Based on the data gained from the interviews, the researchers found out that each participant had similar experience in undergoing the process of learning English through asynchronous e-learning. The researchers then composed participants' experience into two emerging themes:

1.1 Self-Access Learning

In English asynchronous e-learning, the students are given the freedom to discover knowledge for themselves. This opportunity is, of course, used by the students to search and find knowledge that they did not have before. The participants made the initiative to search for word meanings through online dictionary application to help them learn the given materials, as stated in the following excerpts:

"E-learning requires me to do everything by myself. I also learned to understand the material provided by my English teacher, more precisely, I had to study on my own or self-taught and I learn to search for additional material from the internet so that I can be better to understand the lesson." (P2)

"Every time I get new vocabulary and I don't know the meaning, I just open online dictionary and it helps me gain some new English words." (P7)

"I like to translate some English words that I don't know the meaning by using Google Translate or U-Dictionary." (P9)

It is implied that the way students learn in face-to-face and English asynchronous e-learning lead to different learning behavior. This finding supports a study by Li et al. (2014) who stated that the students' learning behavior is engaged with the learning environment. Indirectly, the participants conducted self-access learning in asynchronous e-learning. The participants also revealed that they often seek additional learning materials in order to help them obtain more understanding as stated by the following respondents:

"I try to understand the material by myself, then if I still don't understand it, then I can look for additional material."(P3)

"If there is a topic that I still don't understand, then I look for additional material."(P4)

The researcher assumed that this habit is definitely leads the participants to be independent learners, as asynchronous e-learning orient participants to be the center in the learning process. Certainly, this has to do along with their readiness in e-learning. In line with that, Ngampornchai and Adams (2016) in their study pointed out that the students readiness in e-learning process produced creative and

independent students. Aside from that, English asynchronous e-learning has also given some benefits to the students. It can be seen from the excerpts below:

“I think that my vocabulary has improved a little bit because if I don’t understand the word, then I just open Google translate and find the meaning.” (P2)

“I become more independent because my English teacher doesn’t provide any explanation, so I have to understand it by myself” (P6)

“For me, e-learning has made me to be more active in learning in order to understand the English lesson. I also think that e-learning makes me to be more flexible in learning” (P8)

From the excerpts above, it is shown that through the implementation of English asynchronous e-learning, the participants experienced some positive impacts in their learning process such as flexibility in learning, slightly improved vocabulary and activity in learning. In line with that, Guragain (2016) also stated some advantages from asynchronous e-learning in which it is practical to be applied, as the learning material can be easily downloaded or saved on gadgets, moreover it provides flexibility for both teachers and students.

The participants are privileged to be able to explore various resources available for self-access learning. Thus, they chose their own way of learning as this learning approach centred on the students’ autonomy. All learning processes in self-access learning focused on the responsibility of each student to be able to actively participate. Hobbs and Dofs (2017) proposed that self-access learning embrace students to develop their learning strategies in which assist students to elect and execute appropriate learning content. Nevertheless, the self-access learning cannot be implemented properly if the students have low motivation to learn; Samir About El-Seoud et al. (2014) added that the success and failure of students in e-learning does not depend on their own learning strategies but depend on their respective motivations.

1.2 Technology Adaptation

In English asynchronous e-learning, learners are required to employ certain applications to support the learning process. Basically, these applications have been discussed previously and chosen for specific reason. The applications used by the participants are certainly based on the implementation of learning management system as the medium of online communication. In the excerpts below, the participants shared their experiences about what web-based platforms they used in learning English:

“I use Google classroom and WhatsApp. Google classroom is usually used to submit assignment given by the teacher.” (P2)

“My English teacher requires me to use Whatsapp only. So my friend and I have a special Whatsapp group for English class.” (P4)

“I use Google classroom and WhatsApp for English e-learning. Besides that, I also download another application such as Cake and U-Dictionary as an additional learning platforms.” (P8)

Almost all the participants applied Google Classroom and WhatsApp in learning English and they also used other learning platforms independently such as google translate, Cake and U-Dictionary to dive into word meanings, in which some words may be difficult to comprehend. The use of WhatsApp and Google Classroom as supporting applications in e-learning is defined to be more efficient as the teacher guide the students to improve their learning ability and skills (Alim et al., 2019; Gon & Rawekar, 2017). Furthermore, Sujarwo et al. (2020) in his study found out that mostly students used Google Classroom and WhatsApp in e-learning during this pandemic. To use the web-based platforms, the participants should certainly own particular gadget to use them. The usage of the gadget are presented in the following excerpts:

“I use my cell phone. The reason is because my English class uses Whatsapp, and I save existing documents on my cell phone. In the case of doing my assignment, sometimes I use my laptop because the screen is bigger and there is keyboard in it, so it makes me easier to type the read the question and type the answer.” (P4)

“I only use my cell phone even though I have a laptop. For me cell phone is easier to be used.” (P9)

From the data interview, it can be seen that most of the participants used their cell phone for English asynchronous e-learning for some reasons cell phone is easy to use and applications can be easily accessed through it. However, very few used laptop in this e-learning because not everyone seems to own a laptop to do their assignments.

“I was born from a low-income family where my parents could only afford a cell phone not a laptop.”(P5)

“Actually I really want to use laptop for e-learning, if I have one.”(P11)

Gadget in e-learning played an important role as the supporting tool during the learning process. This is evidenced by the study of Ratnasari and Haryanto (2019) who stated that gadget promoted students' learning quality as a result of the innovative learning. The students who do not have an adequate gadget could face difficulties in their e-learning process. Henceforth, the way the students do their e-learning assignment is stated on the excerpts below:

“Usually I look at the type of assignment given. For example; the type is multiple choice, then I read the question and do it on paper. For summarization, I read the reading material first, then translate it in Google translate and then I summarize it on my notebook. After I have already finished my assignment, I photograph it and send it back to Google classroom.” (P2).

“If I get an assignment, for example; completing a paragraph, I usually do my assignment through Microsoft Word on my cell phone so that I don’t have to write the paragraph again in my notebook. After that, I submit it to Google classroom or if I’m lazy to type on my cell phone, I use the traditional way. Just like write the questions as well as the answers in my English note book, then I capture it and submit it to Google Classroom.” (P5)

”First, I write it down on my notebook, after that I translate it which means I translate words that I don’t know the meaning. Then, I do my assignment based on the type such as making dialogue about one topic, I usually think about what should I write first and then I look up some words from Google Translate. After I get the idea, I write it on my notebook. Last, I capture my notebook and send it to Google classroom” (P9)

Each student weaved their own way of doing their English e-learning assignments. Evidently from the excerpts above, students adapting the technology in a traditional process as they still carry the routine of face-to-face learning. By all means, the concept of e-learning which integrate entirely with the use of technology has not been completely adapted. This finding confirmed by Kearns (2012) who accentuated that many students are still unfamiliar with e-learning assessments especially when the students do written assignments using technology as the impact of physical distance between the students and the teacher.

Based on all aforementioned excerpt about participants’ experience in adapting with the technology during e-learning, it is shown that actually the participants have already used the technology for quite long to support their learning process. Nevertheless, they still took pictures of the assignments which somehow may be considered as conventional way of doing a task. This is something that needs to be considered by educators; they have to guide their students to form all learning procedures through the use of technology. This finding is in line with Chokri (2012) who discovered that students should fully implement technology in the process of learning.

2. What are the challenges that the students encounter in learning English through asynchronous e-learning?

When transitioning to a new setting of learning, students certainly face challenges. Through the interview, participants shared their experience on learning challenges they encountered in asynchronous e-learning. There are two emerging themes appear on students’ challenges:

2.1 Web-Based Learning Support System

The participants acknowledged that in English asynchronous e-learning, they received elaboration from a learning media sent by the teachers, instead of listening directly to teacher’s elaboration like the way they had it during face-to-face learning. Their English teachers provided the learning materials and expect the participants to learn at their own pace. It can be seen in the following excerpts:

“At the moment, there is no material elaboration from my English teacher. Usually, my English teacher sends a link of an English learning video from YouTube that she sends via Google Classroom or sometimes via Whatsapp.” (P3)

“Based on my experience, my English teacher doesn’t elaborate the material just like in the classroom. She usually gives learning videos from YouTube to be watched and shares today’s material in Google Classroom to be read.” (P5)

The learning media that teachers utilized to provide explanation on a particular topic in English lessons is YouTube videos. Participants made efforts to comprehend the topic through the instructional videos provided by their English teachers.

“At the moment, there is no material elaboration from my English teacher. Usually, my English teacher sends a link of an English learning video from YouTube that she sends via Google Classroom or sometimes via Whatsapp.” (P3)

“Based on my experience, my English teacher doesn’t elaborate the material just like in the classroom. She usually gives learning videos from YouTube to be watched and shares today’s material in Google Classroom to be read.” (P5)

In teaching and learning, the way English teachers transfer their knowledge becomes the crucial thing in the asynchronous learning process. Unfortunately, from the excerpts above, it can be concluded that their English teachers do not provide material elaboration in asynchronous e-learning. Additionally, participants may have different background knowledge, ability and skills, in which some need more repeated explanation than other students (Fan & Yao, 2016). However, this can be assumed as the biggest challenge during asynchronous e-learning. Furthermore, participants encountered another challenge in learning English. It was language interaction—between the teachers and also with peers. Without interaction with others, the process of discovering knowledge of the language will be affected (Kim & Frick, 2011). Whereas, interaction is vital in EFL learning. The shift in the learning process had also changed the way students interact with their friends. It can be seen from the following excerpts:

“During e-learning, I find it difficult to interact with my friends because our interaction can only be done via WhatsApp.” (P1)

“During the e-learning, my friends and I don’t have much interaction just like we did in face-to-face learning.” (P7)

“For me, it is hard to interact with my friends during the e-learning. It because we can only interact indirectly via WhatsApp chat or call. So, the interaction between me and my friends takes place without any physical contact as in face-to-face learning.” (P9)

From the previous excerpts, interaction during English asynchronous e-learning only takes place on WhatsApp. The absence of physical interaction carried out in asynchronous learning made it difficult for them to interact with each other. The participants could only maximize their interaction via WhatsApp chat or call. This finding is different with a study conducted by Mendis & Dharmawan (2019); they found out that web-based learning promoted the interaction between student-student and student-teacher.

Even though participants had hard time to interact with their teachers and students; they still had the enthusiasm for learning English with their peers through. They could still share information and discuss the topic together by utilizing WhatsApp application. This is shown in the following excerpts:

“I interact with my friends through WhatsApp chat or call. Usually my friend and I interact a lot if there is a need, such as discussing assignments or material.” (P2)

“Usually, in our WhatsApp group, we discuss about many things but more often is about assignment.” (P8)

“Usually, we communicate to talk about assignments or to discuss learning material that we still don’t understand. Sometimes, we share information also, more precisely, share answers when my friend has completed the assignment first.” (P9)

Evidently, from the aforementioned excerpts, the participants mostly interact to discuss about their e-learning assignment or e-learning materials. In other words, the students do collaborative e-learning to discover and share knowledge with peers. This finding is related to the study by Borup et al. (2020) who revealed that students-students interactions enabled them to promote friendship, motivate them in study and collaborate effectively with others. Henceforth, the researcher concerned on the student responses in carrying out and performing task during e-learning. The excerpt is given as follows:

“Deadline is the most challenging for me because I need to do it fast and it is much occupied.” (P3)

“Honestly I feel that since the implementation of e-learning, I feel that it is a little bit hard to understand the English lesson because my English teacher doesn’t explain the lesson.” (P5)

“I feel that learning English through e-learning is uncomfortable because I can’t get any elaboration from my English teacher.” (P7)

The excerpts above can be implied that the participants had hard time to manage their time in catching up with deadlines. As they are compelled to do their e-learning tasks in a short time with predetermined deadlines from their English teachers. In addition, time management during e-learning is related to the students’ performance as the study by Goodson et al. (2016) found that managing time during e-learning to do assessment or even self-learning helps students to be productive and also promotes learning achievement.

Conclusively, it is discovered that the students deal with some challenges, such as not much of an interaction as well as no physical interaction; the students also have difficulty in understanding the given materials without direct elaboration from the English teachers. This finding is in line with Jayalath et al. (2020) who stated that e-learning without being blended with face-to-face learning was not effective.

2.2 Technical Support

The implementation of e-learning system in the educational institution has a number of obstacles. This problem does not only occur in the countryside, but also occurs in the urban. One of the various obstacles that arises is technical issue, such as network problems. As seen in the following excerpts:

“The obstacles that I usually face is internet data because I have to set aside my pocket money to buy Internet data, but fortunately I got internet data from my school and I heard that the government will give internet data also.” (P1)

“Signal and Internet data are the challenge in e-learning. I should always have an internet data for e-learning... when my signal is error, chats from my English teacher or my friends can't be received to my Whatsapp and it makes me miss some information” (P4)

“The challenge is my cell phone because my cell phone is an old version, sometimes it's run out of memory, and then sometimes my cell phone immediately low battery.” (P11)

Although e-learning has some benefits for both the teachers and the students, it does not guarantee that everything could go perfectly. One of the weaknesses of e-learning is technical issue that may arise from various factors and it is related on the students learning process. This finding supports a study conducted by Sitzmann et al. (2010) who found out that technical issues could impact students e-learning process. The obstacles that occur during English asynchronous e-learning are not only from the technical support such as signal and internet data but also from a deadline of task submission.

From all the findings above, it is revealed the students' experience in learning English through asynchronous e-learning. Regarding the first question about how the students undergo their English asynchronous e-learning, the researchers found that the students are welcome to study and explore the English material through self-access learning as their English teachers only provided the e-materials through Google Classroom and WhatsApp and used YouTube videos for the topic explanation. Of course, this experience naturally forms some new habits of students in learning English. First, the students were no longer completely dependent on their English teacher and this trained their self-discipline in learning. Second, the students build their critical and creative thinking in order to understand the material as they could access learning platforms on the internet. Last, the students improved their English skills as they can learn at their own pace. Throughout the asynchronous e-learning process, the students are utilized every technology that was available to support their learning process and this new setting of learning from home was somehow convenient to them. Nevertheless, their learning behaviour on face-to-face learning practice has not been changed. The students still carried out a conventional way of

doing the assignment by taking pictures of their assignment on their notebooks, instead of typing them and form them into soft copies that could be stored in web-based platforms. Obviously, the use of technology has not been fully adapted and this is related to the next finding which is discussed about challenges that the students' encounter during the implementation of asynchronous e-learning. The data interview revealed that the students do not have adequate electronic facilities to undergo the learning process. This happened due to some factors such as family economic factors. The students also experienced unstable internet signals or network issues during asynchronous e-learning; it will somehow inhibit them to download learning materials as well as submitting their assignments. In addition, as e-learning used the internet network to be done, the students are required to have sufficient internet data or quota and this is required them to spend more money to buy it. Furthermore, the students' interaction during e-learning is limited to exchanging messages and making calls from WhatsApp without physical contact. In spite of facing several challenges in asynchronous e-learning, the students still harnessed their interactions to carry out e-group discussion. The findings of this study are in harmony with the study conducted by Setyawan et al. (2020) who investigated that students are still struggling to get used to the learning transition from face-to-face learning to e-learning such as the availability, sustainability, accessibility, and compatibility of their own learning facilities.

CONCLUSION

As an overall summary, the participants' experience in undergoing the process of asynchronous e-learning in their English learning encourages some changes to be made in the way English teachers teach as well as the way EFL students learn. Furthermore, the students also confronts some challenges, such as difficult interaction, deadline and network connectivity. Based on the analysis result and conclusion, it is suggested that English teachers should provide material elaboration by incorporating synchronous e-learning into the process to help students understand the topics, such as Zoom and Google Meet in order for the students to experience virtual interaction with their teachers. In the future, it is hoped that there will be more research on exploring the students' experience and perspective in English asynchronous e-learning. More data are needed from different levels of education for the struggles are here to stay and the adjustment has not been fully obtained by some schools.

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