

SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING IN SPEAKING CLASS: ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS' VOICES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study aimed to investigate EFL learners' perceptions of synchronous learning in EFL speaking classes. Although numerous studies have been on synchronous learning, only a few pieces of literature focused on learners' perceptions in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings. This research was conducted in a speaking course at a private university in Indonesia. Seven undergraduate learners majoring in English education program participated in this research. This research employed semi-structured interviews to gain participants' views on their attitudes and benefits during distance education. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze learners' perspectives and answer the research questions. The research's findings reveal that learners are satisfied with synchronous applications. Synchronous learning improves learners' motivation and develops confidence in class. However, EFL learners experience language learning boredom while they are joining a synchronous mode of learning. The perceived benefits of synchronous learning cover free learning resources, flexibility, accessibility, and task completion. The findings highlight that synchronous language learning can be an alternative for teaching speaking skills. English teachers need to implement a well-planned and well-executed synchronous learning strategy in teaching EFL speaking.

Keywords: *synchronous learning, speaking class, EFL learners' voices*

INTRODUCTION

Due to the increasing number of learning tools, various websites and English technologies are available today for learners and teachers. Thus, this allows English learners to exercise English skills outside the classroom or even makes it easier to find answers to grammar and vocabulary questions. Technology is commonly used in this modern era and gives them opportunities to improve education effortlessly and be fun (Sari, 2016). Correspondingly, differentiated instruction is not limited to the confines of an indoor classroom; instead, it allows learners to engage in more extensive learning exploration (Rerung, 2018). This is the stage at which online learning is incorporated into learners' learning experiences. As a result, there is a way of learning English without spending much time and energy by using online learning platforms to

enhance learners' speaking skills.

Throughout the internet advancement, technology is constantly becoming more and more significant in a global society, and advanced technology is now a part of daily life. According to Rodrigues and Vethamani (2015), online learning is beneficial in language learning because it makes everything more manageable for the learners to alter how they communicate and process information, especially language communication. Therefore, the way learners gain knowledge changes indefinitely under the influence of online learning.

Furthermore, better online learning is becoming beneficial to those learning productive skills. Learners tend to search for more opportunities to improve their oral skills assisted with internet technology. It is demonstrated that learners can use the internet to undertake autonomous self-study, locate online

platforms to meet and chat with native speakers, and build up the essential vocabulary in communicational skills. According to Bawanti and Afriani (2021) on the use of Zoom in English speaking classes, they have found that when learning on their own, learners feel more secure and dare to answer questions in English asked by the teacher. Also, learners can absorb learning materials delivered by the teachers through the Zoom application. Thus, information technology crosses the boundaries of communicative competence by making learner engagement more efficient, adding value to class time, or increasing the visibility of language education.

The synchronous mode of communication comprises immediate and real-time communication between teachers and learners in classroom discussion (Salmon, 2013). Teachers could deliver and explain learning material directly to the learners. Similarly, teachers' corrective feedback and suggestions are straightforwardly given after learners perform their tasks in online classrooms. All learners may give their comments to their peers. The classroom atmospheres are alive and motivating due to learners' enthusiasm for learning. Synchronous learning helps learners develop learning interaction and increases learning motivation by communicating with their teachers and peers through technology (Yamagata-Lynch, 2014).

For many years, synchronous learning has attracted many researchers to investigate in language learning (Nejad, Golshan, & Naeimi, 2016). The previous literature reveals that synchronous learning could improve learners' language achievement. While numerous studies have focused on the impact of synchronous learning on learners' language skills, that remains a gap in investigating online learning practices from the learners' views.

In synchronous learning, there are many challenges that both teachers and learners face when implementing online classes, particularly those who live in remote areas. Many learners also struggle to learn without direct instruction from their teachers. Learners feel uncomfortable studying synchronous learning because of the inadequate support of the necessary infrastructure and feel frustrated whenever they have a slow response from the teachers (Wibowo & Khairunas, 2020). Learners need more time and opportunities for indirect learning than online (Muslem, Zulfikar, & Astila, 2017). They need a real environment and the natural feeling of using speaking skills in life. In other words, learners feel the urgency to have a lot more opportunities for speaking indirect learning. Hence, learners will have more opportunities to practice speaking as a tool for learning. During the classes, they learn about English and how to use it naturally (Walsh & Risquez, 2020).

In addition, most learners have a hard time applying English speaking skills naturally when facing online learning. As a result, it is vital to further investigate the use of online applications for learners whenever they have online learning, especially in EFL speaking classes. Although many studies have

investigated the use of synchronous learning in language abilities (Tusino et al., 2021), only a few focus on EFL speaking skills. This research describes learners' views of synchronous learning in EFL speaking classes. The research results can also provide language professionals with the vital requirements to prepare learners for synchronous learning in EFL speaking classes. Through online platform meetings, the synchronous learning environment lets learners socialize with their classmates and college teachers (Truong, 2021). Therefore, this research aims to explain EFL learners' attitudes and perceived benefits toward synchronous learning in EFL speaking class.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative case study in EFL speaking classes with participating seven undergraduate English Education learners from 19 to 21 years old. This research is conducted at a private university in Central Java Province, Indonesia. Data are gathered through online interviews. All learners have participated in online learning courses with Zoom and Google Classroom applications as synchronous modes in a speaking course in the fall semester of 2021.

For data collection, semi-structured interviews are employed about learners' perspectives on Zoom and Google Classroom implementation in EFL speaking classes. The interviews are constructed to gather data related to the following themes: (1) learners' attitudes toward synchronous learning; and (2) the benefits of using synchronous education and Zoom and Google Classroom applications. Five questions about synchronous learning practices through Zoom and Google Classroom are formulated as interview guidelines.

Furthermore, the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews is used to accumulate scientific data. The observations are also carried out in seven sessions, specifically by using a discord messenger for data triangulation. For data collection, the participants are interviewed about their perspectives on online learning activities in an EFL speaking class. The representatives are selected depending on their engagement in online classroom discussions. Each participant is provided fifteen minutes to express their thoughts on their attitudes and benefits of learning to speak with a zoom meeting. The interviews are digitally recorded to collect additional data.

For data analysis, a thematic analysis is employed to comprehend learners' assumptions. The participants' responses are recorded and coded based on the themes and indicators in the statements. Furthermore, all collected data are analyzed to answer the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The present research investigates EFL learners' views of synchronous learning in speaking classes.

After data collection, a descriptive qualitative analysis is used to interpret learners' responses to the interviews. Furthermore, multiple thematic data are coded according to the specific conceptual framework of perceptions, particularly regarding attitudes and benefits.

EFL learners' attitudes toward synchronous learning cover four themes: motivational improvement, confidence building, boredom issues, and speaking embarrassment. The obtained data are categorized into four categories, which are explored in detail.

Synchronous learning improves learners' motivation for participating actively in online discussions. EFL learners have reported that synchronous learning platforms make speaking activities enjoyable. Most learners are engaged during learning processes through Zoom platforms. It reveals that high motivation activated the learners to take part enthusiastically during speaking lessons.

"I am interested since there are many choices of online media that are quite interesting to use when learning speaking so that I do not get bored easily. I am motivated to join the speaking course in every meeting. Furthermore, I take part actively while having an online discussion." (Interview, EFL Learner 1)

Also, synchronous learning builds learners' confidence in presenting their dialogues virtually. Speaking online makes learners more confident because their friends do not see their performance. The finding shows that online speaking performance could lessen EFL learners' anxiety. College teachers need to maximize online tools in speaking tasks to develop their learners' confidence.

"I am interested and confident because I can talk without having to be in front of friends because I am nervous. I am more confident speaking in front of my friends indirectly through laptops. I can decrease my anxiety when I have to present dialogues or perform in front of my friends and teacher." (Interview, EFL Learner 2)

Despite improving learners' motivation and developing confidence, boredom appears while college teachers are implementing synchronous learning. EFL learners explain that online activities make interesting classes; however, monotonous activities also create boredom. It seems that synchronous learning creates language boredom when the teacher does not vary the tasks and activities.

"At first, I was interested, but gradually I felt bored. Online lessons are very flexible and fun, but there are many tasks that are very inconvenient. Not overly interested, but not too averse. It is just that maybe I will be very passive when the learning takes place. Only a few students who are enthusiastic about joining

the course after the mid-semester classes." (Interview, EFL Learner 3)

Indeed, some learners feel embarrassed about speaking in front of their peers. Synchronous learning in large crowds makes learners feel nervous. Many learners tend to keep listening to their peers' presentations. This condition is due to online class discussions dominated by some active learners. Teachers are required to motivate their learners who are not willing to speak up due to their inferiority.

"I have no confidence to speak, so when speaking with Zoom, I focus on listening to what my friends are talking about. I like speaking, but I have low confidence because of being seen by many people on the screen. Some of my friends really dominated the class discussion in daily meetings. This makes me inferior for expressing my ideas orally." (Interview, EFL Learner 4)

The results show that EFL learners perceived benefits toward synchronous learning: free learning resources, time flexibility, ease of accessibility, and task completion. The data are then divided into four categories with the following excerpts. Synchronous learning assists with internet facilities providing free learning resources for the learners in class. EFL learners have stated that they could find abundant references on the internet. When learners are working with the Zoom meeting, they browse information by searching online. The internet seems to provide learners with many opportunities to obtain materials quickly and effortlessly.

"We can freely search for learning resources to complete assignments on the internet. We can find and download references easily as we want. I like learning through internet devices because I can get information easily by only clicking sources on my mobiles." (Interview, EFL Learner 5)

Also, synchronous learning creates time flexibility in handling the tasks given by the teacher. Online tools make flexible learning activities. Learners could work on the tasks and turn them without considering the place and time.

"Yes, of course. It is flexible with online learning on time management, and we can also do assignments anywhere. We can set the time to do the assignments according to our wishes. Also, there is a notification about the due date for submitting tasks from the teacher." (Interview, EFL Learner 6)

Synchronous learning facilitates material accessibility and task submission for the learners. EFL learners have said that submitting the assignments could be conducted efficiently. The paperless submissions

are also motivating for the learners. This reveals that learners prefer submitting tasks through online tools to handling assignments through handwriting.

“With online learning, we can do assignments anywhere and anytime, and no need to copy them on paper by handwriting. The online system is easy to submit assignments and not complicated. With internet connections, I can do homework or assignment easily while I am doing other activities.” (Interview, EFL Learner 7)

Furthermore, synchronous learning assists the learners in task completion. Today, the ease of internet access helps learners complete the tasks given by their college teachers. This condition motivates learners to study in online classes rather than traditional classes. It seems that this synchronous learning mode develops EFL learners’ academic tasks, particularly for task submission. They can submit the assignments wherever and whenever they have finished their works.

“I think the online system tasks can be quickly completed because we can find references to complete assignments on the internet. In my opinion, through online, I can complete tasks more easily and briefly. Then, I am faster at completing assignments because students are not pressured to do assignments.” (Interview, EFL Learner 2)

The research results reveal that learners are delighted to have synchronous learning in their study of English spoken skills. Various media and resources improve their motivational necessities further to improve their English speaking as a foreign language. This research is in line with previous literature (Rerung, 2018; Sun & Yang, 2015) exploring learners’ perception of blended learning and Web 2.0 service in an EFL speaking class. It reveals that EFL learners are proven to be more conservative and innovative in using online media and various resources to improve their English skills.

Moreover, the Zoom application has supported the learners, specifically to build up confidence whenever they have the chance to speak English. Learners tend to be more active in delivering responses, opinions, and even questions. This fact is backed up by the symptom, “We do not have to reveal our faces in front of many people,” which is ironic and reassuring. This finding supports several previous studies (Bawanti & Arifani, 2021; Safitri & Khoiriyah, 2017), explaining that learners do not feel nervous or afraid to prove their existence in the course because of the absence of stage pressure.

Although many internal aspects support learners while learning, it cannot be denied that online learning also overburdens them, making it feel boring and unsatisfactory. These boredom issues become apparent as a result of unregulated continuous assignments. Consistent with previous literature (Nazara, 2011;

Rodrigues & Vethamani, 2015), college teachers overuse the convenience of assigning tasks and projects without considering learners’ psychological conditions. This condition leads various learners to be pressured on the timeline of submitting many assignments simultaneously.

Also, online learning and various online media have their strengths to support learners’ necessities in achieving better results on speaking skills. However, not all learners can do so because they are still embarrassed to speak. This finding supports previous studies (Encalada & Sarmiento, 2019; Wibowo & Khairunas, 2020) on exploring learners’ perceptions of online learning. This research has found that learners are afraid to make mistakes due to a lack of grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. They feel embarrassed to make errors whenever they try to speak because they lack experience and knowledge, as English is not their native language (Racheva, 2018).

It is also found that learners feel free to choose learning resources. Learners are interested in searching materials on various websites, which help them support their progress in the course. This finding is in line with previous literature by Ningias and Indriani (2021) on exploring learners’ self-efficacy towards their speaking skills in online learning. It reveals that learners are actively searching for materials to study; access to online websites provides them with much information regarding their specific learning requirements in the course.

The efficiency of time management of online learning is proven to be very flexible. These EFL practitioners have found that online education could be done anywhere, anytime, at their convenience. This finding is in line with previous literature by Bezzazi (2019); and Ginaya, Rejeki, and Astuti (2018) on exploring the effect of blended learning on learners and utilizing technology to further improve their public speaking skills. Due to the ease with which learners can access the media used in class, it has been discovered that learners feel less inconvenient when class is in session. They are delighted with online learning because they have the freedom to choose where and when they want to learn.

Furthermore, synchronous learning is easy to handle, access, and use. This finding is supported by prior literature (Chien, Hwang, & Jong, 2020) investigating the impact of peer assessment on EFL learners’ speaking performance and learning perspectives in the setting of spherical video-based virtual reality. To date, learners have the required knowledge to use technology, leading them to have no difficulties accessing any media or platform used in the course. Regardless learners use advanced smartphones or computers, they are by no means having a hard time with the technological advancement.

Distance education is beneficial to learners to achieve better results and progress. Learners can access a wealth of information to complete their assignments thanks to the conveniences that online learning provides. Learners could finish and submit

assignments effortlessly. This finding is in line with the previous study (Putri, & Rahmani, 2019; Qutob, 2018) on exploring the impact of online learning on the development of learners' speaking skills. It has been discovered that learners are satisfied with the efficiency of synchronous learning to submit assignments. The availability of numerous information encourages learners to seek solutions to the tasks at hand.

CONCLUSIONS

This research shows that EFL learners feel comfortable using synchronous learning media, particularly the Zoom application. Learners believe synchronous learning is motivating because they can express themselves more openly and innovatively in their delivery. Synchronous learning is beneficial for learners in fostering self-confidence because they do not have to deal with other people directly, which can make them feel nervous, insecure, and inadequate. On the contrary, although synchronous learning is convenient, this mode could make the learners feel burdened and bored.

As a result, a hybrid learning strategy that combines synchronous and asynchronous learning could be applied to improve learners' ability, particularly in English speaking. This research only focuses on the learners' views of synchronous language learning by employing one class in a university. Future studies need to be conducted by investigating the implications of online learning tools with larger participants. Moreover, further researchers could conduct studies on discussing synchronous and asynchronous learning to increase EFL learners' language skills. English teachers may apply a synchronous learning mode by considering learners' characteristics and individual differences in learning. Also, teachers must be mindful of appropriate topics and time constraints when assigning online tasks to learners.

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