

Unveiling Online English Learning During the Covid-19 Era: An Analysis of Maejo University Students' Perceptions and Achievement in Fundamental English 2 Online Learning

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Abstract

With the outbreak of Covid-19, online learning has become an important tool for education at all levels, including higher education. This research; therefore, aims to study Maejo University students' perceptions towards English language online learning, and to investigate if there is a significant difference in students' achievement between online and traditional classroom learning. The sample group was 856 students who enrolled in the Fundamental English 2 course in the first semester of 2020. Questionnaires and achievement tests were used to collect the data. The results of the statistical analysis showed that students' perceptions were mostly neutral about English language online learning. As for their learning achievement, a significant difference between the two ways of learning was found. Students' language learning achievement was better when they studied in the traditional classroom than when they studied online.

Keywords: English Learning, online learning, learners' perceptions, language learning achievement

Introduction

With the development of computer technology, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has greatly influenced the pattern of language learning and teaching. Over 30 years, a lot of research has been done in the areas of technology and

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language teaching. Kizil (2017) states that “most research in this line, essentially, has pointed out that integration of ICT (tools into language education) should play a prominent role catering to students.” Moreover, learners in this new generation are often called the net generation or digital natives, and they are claimed to have skills and experience with the new technologies (Prensky, 2001). Learners can access authentic language use on the internet and through any media provided. They can download applications to practice their learning at any time and any place they want. With this notion, it has become an educational movement to integrate the use of technology into modern education. As a consequence, instructors require technology knowledge to respond to this new generation (Mcpherson and Nunes, 2004).

Even though teachers were informed about the potential benefits of online teaching, there was no real online teaching in the university. Nevertheless, after the Covid-19 pandemic at the end of 2019, most of the academic institutions were legally mandated to suspend their onsite teaching in order to protect against the spread of the disease. Accordingly, online learning became one of the choices for educators and learners worldwide. Maejo University also implemented online teaching via the program MS Teams. MS Teams was first introduced to lecturers and students for a few months before the beginning of the first semester of the academic year 2020. MS Teams was quite new for both learners and lecturers; for this reason, the university offered several workshops before the online learning took place. With the advancement in technology and aids for learning language, the online classes seemed to be possible.

Despite the belief that online learning can be beneficial for language learning, previous research has shown that both students and instructors have mixed feelings towards the online language classroom (La Piana, 2014). There are a lot of factors influencing the success of language learning online. Some of the key components are students’ satisfaction, proper preparation and students’ readiness (Chen and Adesope, 2016). Moreover, in the context of online learning, learning should be interactive (Kurt, 2020). According to Vygotsky’s theory of learning, students can learn best when they engage in social interactions and share their experiences (Daniels, 2007). In addition, students’ perceptions are crucial in learners’ success in online classes (Sun et al., 2008). Recent research shows student satisfaction is related to teamwork, team performance and collaborative learning (Topala and Tomozii, 2014). Moreover, students who have positive perceptions about their

learning tend to focus and interact more in the class, and thus they appear to have higher achievement compared to those who have negative perceptions about their learning.

Although previous research has been conducted on online learning, a lot of studies were not in the context of learning language online. Previous research tends to focus only on perceptions of students or instructors. So far, however, there has been little discussion about e-learners' perceptions in conjunction with learners' achievement. It is not evident whether students study better in online classes than in traditional classrooms. So, this study aimed to explore whether or not students perform better in an online classroom by assessing their achievements as well as their perceptions towards language learning online.

Research Questions

1. What are the students' perceptions towards learning English language in an online classroom?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in students' achievement between learning English language through online classrooms and traditional classrooms?

Objectives

1. To explore students' perceptions toward language learning online
2. To compare students' achievement between learning English online and learning English in the traditional classroom

Literature Review

Online learning

Online learning is a medium in which instructors can interact and educate their learners via the internet (Anderson, 2011). This learning method teaches learners through computers by providing the study and course materials (Carliner, 2004). Online learning is also known as "web-based learning," "cyber learning" or "e-learning." These jargons always refer to the interaction via the internet between the learners and content or people who are willing to gain knowledge (Means, Bakie, and Murphy, 2014). Kearsley (2005) also mentions that there are varieties of lessons which noticeably serve the requirement of the educators supported by developments in technologies and instructional methods. This means the instructors

not only have expertise in the body of teaching knowledge, but they are also good at IT and technology skills in teaching (Mcpherson and Nunes, 2004). In summary, online learning can be defined as a distance learning via the internet aiming to share a body of knowledge where the educators require knowledge of the lesson together with the skills about technology to educate their learners.

Vygotsky's theory of Learning

This part discusses the theory of learning of Vygotsky who has had great influence on teaching and learning. His ideas can give the pedagogic implications of how to teach language and the design of the online language class.

According to Vygotsky, knowledge is thought of as a product of socialization. The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in learning, and an educational process should be an active one. The student is active; the teacher is active; and the environment between them is active. Moreover, social interaction plays a major role in the classroom as it helps develop cognitive development and language. Daniels (2007) states that "For Vygotsky, cooperation and collaboration are crucial features of effective learning." Interaction of thinking and speech is considered crucial for students' learning process. There is an explanation to support the social interaction in language learning. In Vygotsky's perspective, all higher mental activity processes appear twice: first on the intermental plane and then on the intramental plane. First, we use language to share thoughts or concepts with friends or other people; for example, when people read something, they share their understanding with their peers. Thus, in an intermental process, the notion of social cooperation with others is very important. As we interact with others, we are using our cultural/historical tools of language. We think about the ideas and experiences we have. Later on, the process moves to the intramental plane in which the individual internalizes the knowledge they have from the interaction. In short, cognitive development occurs first in social interaction, then within the individual (Wink and Putney, 2002). Accordingly, language classrooms should be designed to promote interaction and collaboration between learners-learners and learners-instructors.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding.

Vygotsky supports the importance of social interaction. The ZPD is a development beyond the learner's actual developmental level. The concept of this is that any developments that children have are socially embedded, and that the children learn from cooperation with adults in a cultural and societal context. Vygotsky

(1986) explained the zone of proximal development as follows: “What the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow. Therefore, the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it”. A child can learn better with their friends’ assistance, as Vygotsky stated: “With assistance, every child can do more than he can by himself - though only within the limits set by the state of his development. (Vygotsky, 1986) Interacting with their peers and their teacher, children can go beyond their actual mental age and the level they are in.”

In online language settings, it is challenging for teachers to design classroom activities that enhance social interaction. However, it is worth it for teachers to follow his ideas for the best learning of students.

Learners’ Perceptions

It has become evident that computers and technology have become tools for knowledge learning; however, learning language online is not always a positive experience for language learners as it involves a lot of factors. Asoodar, Vaezi, and Izanloo (2016) state that learning through technology requires students to be tolerant towards its ambiguities and difficulties, and it is a teacher’s duty to create a more positive attitude. Students’ attitudes have an influence on learners’ success because a person’s perceptions can influence their decisions and behaviors (Otter et al., 2013). Therefore, e-learner satisfaction is one of the important factors in successful e-learning implementation. (Shih et al., 2013) Understanding the factors influencing users’ satisfaction with online courses is a critical issue for researchers and practitioners to help improve the quality of e-learning. There are quite a lot of factors involving e-learners’ satisfaction. Some studies have shown that maturity, motivation, technology comfort, technology attitudes, computer anxiety, and epistemic beliefs, technology control, teaching styles, self-efficacy, availability, objectivist and constructivist, quality, reliability, availability, pace, sequence, control, factual knowledge, procedural knowledge, conceptual knowledge, timing, frequency, and quality are the main factors that influence learner’s attitudes towards online learning (Asoodar, Vaezi, and Izanloo, 2016). Isik (2006) conducted a study to determine key factors influencing e-learner satisfaction. The results of that study revealed that perceived usability, perceived value and computer self-efficacy are significant factors of online course satisfaction. Perceived usability is mainly about usefulness, ease of use, and compatibility. Students’ satisfaction is also directly related to perceived value and computer self-efficacy. Perceived value is a term

that is often used in marketing. It means “the customers' evaluation of the merits of a product or service, and its ability to meet their needs and expectations” (Kopp, 2020). Self-efficacy refers to a person’s self-evaluation of his own capabilities.

Tafazoli et al. (2018) also state that student satisfaction is related to three components: (1) cognitive, (2) behavioral, and (3) affective components. In his study, he compared the attitude of Iranian and non-Iranian English language students’ attitudes towards Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Furthermore, the relations of gender, education level, and age to their attitude were investigated. The findings of the study revealed that there was no difference between the attitudes of Iranian and non-Iranian students towards CALL.

In Thailand, Gyamfi and Sukseemuang (2018) investigated EFL learners’ satisfaction with the asynchronous online learning program Tell Me More (TMM). The findings showed that the learners were highly satisfied with the vocabulary, reading and listening materials in the program.

To conclude, e-learning instruction has been widely adopted because it can reduce or solve the limitations of time and place that are associated with the traditional classroom. Some research studies have been done to investigate learners’ perceptions. This study seeks to investigate Maejo University students’ perceptions toward language learning online and their achievement after they studied English language online.

Research Methodology

Research setting

According to an announcement, signed by the Education Minister, educational institutions across Thailand had to be closed from 18 March 2020 until further notice (Ministry of Education Thailand). This policy was effective a few months before the first semester of 2020. Due to this, the teachers decided to carry out online learning during the closure. This study was conducted during the first semester of 2020. The data collection was split into 2 parts for 2 months in each section: before midterm (online learning) and after midterm (traditional classroom).

The online learning tool for the learners and the teachers to use was MS Teams. It is the major channel for learning and communication between instructors and students. There were 13 different sections of Fundamental English 2 in the first semester of 2020. When the students enrolled in the course, they were grouped

into each instructor's team according to their sections. With MS Teams, students could send messages to the instructors when they had questions. MS Teams was also the platform for instructors to make announcements and students could also send their assignments via the Microsoft team.

Description of the online Fundamental English 2 course

The Fundamental English 2 course was designed for low-intermediate EFL Maejo students to develop their vocabulary and language skills, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The textbook used in this semester was World English 1, featuring content from National Geographic and TED. The publisher provided the classroom presentation tool, or digital book for the instructors, so it was used as the tool for the online class. Midterm and final examinations were conducted in written form during face-to-face sessions.

Sample group

A total of 856 undergraduate students who enrolled in Fundamental English 2 were designated to take a 2-month online course before the midterm examination and another 2-month traditional course before the final examination. However, the overall response rate from the questionnaire was 84.81% (726 students). The 726 participants included students from various majors and faculties as shown in table 1.

Table 1 Students' Faculty

Faculty	No.	Percentage
Faculty of Agricultural Production	207	28.51
Faculty of Animal Science and Technology	126	17.36
Faculty of Architecture and Environmental Design	46	6.34
Faculty of Business Administration	126	17.36
Faculty of Economics	41	5.65
Faculty of Engineering and Agro-Industry	3	0.41
Faculty of Fisheries Technology and Aquatic Resources	21	2.89
Faculty of Information and Communication	5	0.69
Faculty of Liberal Arts	4	0.55

Faculty	No.	Percentage
Faculty of Science	2	0.28
School of Administrative Studies	104	14.33
School of Renewable Energy	39	5.37
School of Tourism Development	2	0.28
Total	726	100

From the total of 726 students, students from the Faculty of Agricultural Production were the largest group (28.51%). The number of the students from the Faculty of Animal Science and Technology and the Faculty of Business Administration were equal and both groups accounted for 17.26%. The third largest group of the students was from the School of Administrative Studies (14.33%). The rest of the students were from nine other faculties.

Besides the faculty, this study also asked students for information about their gender, age, and university year. The questionnaire revealed students' information as summarized in table 2.

Table 2 Students' demographic information.

Students general information		No.	Percentage
Gender	male	239	32.92
	female	487	67.08
	Total	726	100
Age	18 - 20	618	85.12
	21 - 23	101	13.91
	More than 24	7	0.96
	Total	726	100

Students general information		No.	Percentage
University Year	1	3	0.41
	2	669	92.15
	3	38	5.23
	4	14	1.93
	Etc.	2	0.28
	Total	726	100

The participants in this study were 67.08% female and 32.92% male. 85.12% were between 18-20 years old, 13.91% were between 21-23, and only 0.96% were more than 24 years old. Almost all of the participants were second-year students (92.15%). 7.16% were juniors (5.23%) and seniors (1.93%). Freshmen were only 0.41% and 0.28% were the students who might be in the university for more than 4 years.

The participants were also asked about their experiences with English language learning to know their background in English language study. Table 3 shows that the majority had studied English for more than 10 years: 46.28% had studied English for 11-15 years, and 44.35% had studied English for 16-20 years respectively. This questionnaire also asked the students their grade from their previous Fundamental English course 1 (GE141). This is to see their English competence, and the results showed that their grades in this course were approximately evenly distributed. When they were asked which tools, they used for their online learning, 51.93% stated that they used their smartphones. 21.76% used their laptop computers, and 16.39% used their PC computers.

Table 3 Respondents' experiences with English language learning

Respondents' experiences with English language learning		No.	Percentage
Years of studying English	1-5 years	12	1.65
	6-10 years	55	7.58
	11-15 years	336	46.28
	16-20 years	322	44.35
	> 20 years	1	0.14
	Total	726	100
GE141 Fundamental English 1 grade	A	93	12.81
	B+	71	9.78
	B	90	12.40
	C+	112	15.43
	C	95	13.09
	D+	96	13.22
	Total	726	100
Tools for online English language learning	Computer	119	16.39
	Laptop	158	21.76
	smartphone	377	51.93
	tablet	72	9.92
	Total	726	100

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study: a questionnaire and achievement tests. The questionnaire was used to collect data about the perceptions of students who studied English language online. It was adapted from Chen (2014). The questionnaire was classified into two sections. The first section of the questionnaire was designed to gather data about participants' demographic information: gender, current studying level, age, faculty, number of years the students had studied English, and the tools they used for online learning. The second section of the

questionnaire investigated students' attitudes and their perceptions towards English language online learning. This section comprised 21 5-point Likert-scale items that ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), and it was divided into 3 topics including students' perceptions towards tools and other resources, students' needs satisfaction and preferences, and their online learning perceptions. All the questions in the questionnaire were translated into Thai. Before the instrument was administered to the participants, three experienced English teachers were invited to judge the comprehensibility and ambiguity of the translation and to suggest changes to improve the items where needed. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to find content validity and the content validity of the questionnaire was 1.00. Then, the questionnaire was piloted with a group of 30 students to identify the language, readability, and the format. After the pilot, researchers changed the wording of some items to make it clearer to the students. Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire in this study was .768 for the first topic, .794 for the second topic, and .930 for the third topic. For the overall items, the Cronbach's alpha was .895, which indicated a high degree of internal consistency. Finally, the online questionnaire was administered through Google Forms.

Another research instrument included two achievement tests: midterm and final tests. The midterm test was used to evaluate students' achievement after two months of learning English online, and the final test was used to evaluate students' achievement after two months of learning English in the traditional classroom. Both tests had the same format and number of items. The tests were used in the previous academic year, and they were developed by experienced teachers who taught this subject. Each test consisted of 60 items which were divided into 3 parts; vocabulary, grammar, and reading. The contents of the tests were from the textbook. The three experienced teachers rated the content validity and adjustments were made according to the suggestions. The reliability of the midterm test and the final test was .915, and .910 respectively. Students took both tests in the actual classroom setting.

Research Findings

From a total of 856 students participating in the study, the overall response rate was 84.81% (726 students). The following table reveals the results of the student perceptions towards tools and other resources.

Table 4 Students' perceptions towards tool and other resources

No.	Item list	\bar{X}	SD	Strongly agree (%)	agree (%)	Neutral (%)	disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
1	Internet system The internet system is stable and easy to access while learning online class.	3.10	0.08	5.10	18.46	61.57	11.16	3.72
2	MS Teams MS Teams program is easy and suitable to use.	3.55	0.85	12.26	38.71	42.70	3.99	2.34
3	IT Tools I have sufficient and appropriate tools for my online learning.	3.27	0.89	8.68	28.37	46.69	13.77	2.48
4	Digital book The teaching book program is easy and suitable to understand while learning online.	3.51	0.87	11.29	40.22	38.29	8.13	2.07

The first part of the questionnaire asked students for their opinions towards tools and resources for their language learning online. As shown in Table 4, when the students were asked if the internet system was stable and easy to access, the majority had neutral opinions. As for students' satisfaction towards MS Teams, they agreed that the MS Teams program was easy and suitable to use (Mean=3.55). However, the majority were not sure if they had sufficient and appropriate tools for their online learning (Mean=3.27). As for students' satisfaction towards the digital book, students agreed that it was easy and suitable to understand (Mean=3.51).

The average of the first part of the questionnaire revealed that students were satisfied most with MS Teams (3.55), and the second most satisfying tool was the digital teaching book (3.51).

Table 5 students' needs satisfaction and preferences

No.	Item list	\bar{X}	SD	Strongly agree (%)	agree (%)	Neutral (%)	disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
5	When I engage in online learning activity, I have a high level of concentration.	2.69	1.04	5.92	11.16	43.39	25.21	14.33
6	When I engage in online learning activity, I feel fully involved	2.94	0.96	5.37	20.11	45.18	22.04	7.30
7	I have to force myself to do the learning activity online.	3.13	0.85	5.51	23.83	52.62	14.60	3.44
8	I have freedom of action while learning online for example sitting, lying, walking.	3.66	1.01	23.69	31.40	35.54	5.92	3.44
9	In online learning, I can freely decide where I want to study.	3.76	0.95	25.90	33.20	34.02	5.23	1.65
10	I have choices in what I want to do while learning online for example riding a motorcycle, eating food, drinking water, and taking a bus	3.23	1.09	13.50	25.07	39.94	13.91	7.58
11	I think I am good at learning English via online class.	2.82	0.99	5.51	13.22	50.14	19.56	11.57
12	I am satisfied with my performance in online English class.	2.86	0.90	3.99	15.01	52.20	20.94	7.85
13	After I have participated in learning English online, I feel more competent.	2.57	0.91	2.34	7.99	48.62	26.72	14.33
14	I can learn English online very well.	2.78	0.89	2.62	13.77	51.52	22.73	9.37

The second part of the questionnaire investigated the students' needs satisfaction and preferences. The overall mean score of all aspects is in the high level at 3.04, and it means that students had neutral opinions on most of the items. The factors in which the students were satisfied at high levels are the freedom to decide the place to study (3.76) and the students have freedom in action while learning (3.66) respectively. Participants expressed neutral opinions in most of the following items: choices of activities while studying online (3.23), forcing themselves to study online (3.13), feeling fully involved while learning, online (2.94), their performance online (2.86), being good at online class (2.82) and learning English online very well (2.78). Interestingly, when asked if they felt more competent after studying English online, the mean for this item was quite low (Mean = 2.57). 10.33% of the participants showed that they agreed or mostly agreed with this item while 41.05% showed their disagreement. Also, when students were asked if they had a high level of concentration while learning online, 43.39% showed a neutral opinion. However, 39.54% stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed while only 17.08% stated that they agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 6 Online learning perceptions

No.	Item list	\bar{X}	SD	Strongly agree (%)	agree (%)	Neutral (%)	disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
15	I would gladly take another online English course if I had an opportunity.	2.77	1.01	5.51	12.67	48.07	21.21	12.53
16	I prefer to study English online.	2.78	1.00	5.10	14.05	46.28	22.59	11.98
17	I feel that this online English course served my needs well.	2.74	0.93	4.13	11.43	48.35	26.58	9.50
18	Conducting the online English course improved the quality of the course.	2.81	0.88	3.72	11.57	54.41	22.45	7.85
19	I feel the quality of the online English course I took would largely be effective.	2.81	0.87	3.72	11.85	52.48	25.21	6.75

No.	Item list	\bar{X}	SD	Strongly agree (%)	agree (%)	Neutral (%)	disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
20	I feel that study online English course is easier than learning in class.	2.78	0.95	4.41	13.22	48.90	23.00	10.47
21	I do not have stress while learning online.	3.20	0.97	11.02	20.66	50.83	12.12	5.37

Table 6 shows participants' perceptions about online learning. The overall mean score about the students' perceptions towards online learning is 2.84, and it means that they mostly gave neutral responses. Although students expressed neutral perceptions in every item, the number of the participants who expressed "disagree" outnumbered the groups of the participants who answered the questionnaires as "agree."

From the questionnaire, students did not support the notion that the online English course could serve their needs. 30.30% did not agree that conducting the online English course improved the quality of the course while only 15.29% agreed or strongly agreed. When they were questioned about the effectiveness of the online English course, 31.96% showed that they disagreed or strongly disagreed while 15.57% stated that they agreed or strongly agreed. When they were asked if the online English course was easier than learning in class, 33.47% chose "disagree" or "strongly disagree." Meanwhile only 17.63% showed that they agreed or strongly agreed.

On the contrary, the question with negative meaning (Learners do not have stress while learning online.) has the percentage of "strongly agree" and "agree" more than negative opinions. The result conveys that the learners do not have positive perceptions towards online learning and if they have a chance to choose, they prefer to choose traditional learning and they are more likely to have more stress while studying online.

Table 7 Comparison of examination scores between mid-term (after two-month online learning) and final examination (after two-month traditional classroom learning)

ITEM	Examination Score	Mean different	T-value	P-value
Mid Team	21.1819	-6.93779	-29.010	0.000**
Final	28.1196			

Legend: ** Highly Significant ($p \leq 0.01$)

The initial sample consisted of 856 students, 45 of whom did not complete all of the tests. Only 811 students completed both midterm and final exams. Thus, 45 students who missed one of the tests were removed from the calculation. From 811 students, the t-test revealed a significant difference in students' achievement between studying in the online class and studying in traditional classes, $t(63) = 2.76$, $p = .008$, $d = .78$. From the total scores of 60, the student mean for the midterm test was 21.1819 while the mean for the final test was 28.1196. The mean difference between the two tests was -6.93779.

Discussion and conclusion

Online courses are growing in higher education, and students' perceptions are an important factor in determining the success of the course; however, they have not been studied thoroughly. The results from the questionnaire asking about students' perceptions towards the online class revealed that the majority were neutral towards the online class. Moreover, results from students' achievement as shown in the achievement test showed that they did better when they studied in the traditional classroom than when they studied in the online class. These might result from the following factors.

Tools and resources

The first part of the questionnaire asked students about the tools they used when they studied online. Half of the students (51.93%) used smartphones for their online learning, 21.76% used laptops, and 16.39% used PC computers. Smartphones were used because it was convenient for students. Nonetheless, the study by Albó et al. (2019) indicates that the use of laptops has provided better results in terms of student engagement with their learning, their collaborative behavior and satisfaction with the device compared to the use of smartphones. Similarly,

Oulasvirta et al. (2012) found out that students spent twice as much time per day on their phones as on their laptops, but the duration they spent on their phones was short. The authors call this type of phone use a “checking habit.” It shows that students cannot fully concentrate on their studies when they use smartphones, and this is in accordance with the findings from the questionnaire. The majority were neutral with this item “When I engage in online learning activity, I have a high level of concentration.” Less than 20% chose to say that they agreed. Therefore, the tools or devices that students use can affect their learning.

Student Perceptions

The questionnaire results reveal that students had mixed feelings with studying language online. Even though the majority of students showed neutral opinions, less than 20% of the students chose to say that they agree or strongly agree when asked if they preferred to study online. When asked if they felt more competent after studying English online, the mean for this item was 2.57, and it means that they did not agree with this statement. Students’ perceptions, nevertheless, influence students’ performance. Research found that positive perceptions can lead to positive performance (Otter et al., 2013). The questionnaire results reveal that less than 10% of the students agreed that they felt more competent after they had participated in learning English online. Less than 20% agreed that they were satisfied with their performance in online English classes. This showed that students were not really positive regarding their English language online learning.

Learning context/ environment

Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding

Online learning can be an option for learning and teaching especially during the Covid-19 era, but it is a kind of learning in which students interact with teachers and peers through a computer. If teachers and learners are not familiar with using the program, they struggle with the interaction in the virtual classroom. One common problem that occurred during online learning was that students kept silent. They did not interact much with the instructors, and mostly students were alone in their room. Therefore, they did not really interact with their peers. Moreover, as seen from the results of the questionnaire, students did not think that they could highly concentrate on their studies, and with the use of smartphones, they might very easily check on something else while learning. Vygotsky’s theory, however, concerns the notion that social interaction is critical to cognitive development.

Students can learn best when they actively engage with their teacher and with each other. This is the idea of scaffolding which is a tool for growth. Learning will be successful when learning occurs through purposeful, meaningful interactions with others. The idea is that learners' cognitive development is built on social interaction. Nevertheless, online learning or remote learning seems to be inconsistent with Vygotsky's theory, and instructors need to evaluate the attention required for students when they teach online (Kurt, 2020). The results from students' achievement tests clearly show that students did better in the traditional classroom where they could interact face-to-face with their teachers and peers. Therefore, lack of interaction in the online setting might affect students' perceptions as well as their performance.

Students' motivation and maturation

Students' motivation and maturation also affect students' perceptions and achievement. Students have to control themselves to focus on their learning. If they are not highly motivated, they can be distracted easily. This was the first time for students to study online because of the Covid-19 situation. They were not ready for the isolation from teachers. Without the presence of teachers in front of them, students need to have discipline to do the activities or work independently. The majority of the participants in this study expressed neutral opinions concerning their satisfaction with online learning. This shows that they were not certain whether or how they benefited from online learning.

In conclusion, the present study found out that students' perceptions were mostly neutral about online learning. They expressed their disagreement about some items. The achievement tests also revealed a statistically significant difference in students' achievement between learning English language through the online classroom and the traditional classroom. As this online English language course was abruptly implemented because of the spread of Covid-19, students as well as instructors were mostly new to this type of learning. There were some limitations such as the quality of tools and the internet connection, or the readiness of the students. So, it might affect students' perceptions and their learning achievement. As stated above, some key factors were involved in the results. The first one was the tools. The majority of students in this study used smartphones for their online learning, and it might affect their attention on the lessons due to the small screen and the phones' functions. Furthermore, the online classroom was planned similarly to the traditional classroom, but in the online classroom there was little

interaction between students or between students and instructors. In the traditional classroom, students had face-to-face interactions with their peers and instructors, so they had more social interaction. Students chose to stay silent during their online learning, and it could affect their learning achievement. Besides, sample students might lack motivation and they were not ready for this online learning. Therefore, more research needs to be done to determine the effectiveness of the online English language course. There should be more studies about the interactions of students in online classrooms, about curriculum design which can engage students more with their peers and instructors, and about suitable pedagogy for language learning online. In addition, qualitative research on students' perceptions towards online language learning can provide more insightful information on this topic.

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