



SKYPE AS A SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE PLATFORM IN EFL CLASS

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on various fields including education. The learning process shifted from face-to-face learning to distance learning. Skype is one of the platforms that is used in one of the universities in Indonesia as a medium for online learning during a pandemic situation. Therefore, this study investigated students' perceptions of the use of Skype as a platform for synchronous online learning because. To collect the data, this study conducted interviews with three participants from the English Education Department in one of the universities in Indonesia that use Skype as a medium for online learning during the pandemic situation one semester. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006). Underpinning Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework, this qualitative research documented positive perceptions toward the use of Skype based on two factors: perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. The findings reported that there are two big themes in this research: Skype facilitates users to adapt easily and the Effectiveness of Skype application as an online learning tool.

Keywords: EFL class, online platform, skype, synchronous.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 virus in 2020 has opened wider opportunities for online learning to mushroom in the educational arena. It has shifted the traditional meeting into virtual since UNESCO recommends online learning supporting social distancing to implement (United Nation, 2020). In this respect, many teachers utilized two types of online learning; asynchronous and synchronous (Ghazal, Samsudin & Aldowah., 2015). Asynchronous online learning is learning where students do not need to come to the classroom, but they learn individually or in groups about the material that teachers have given for their students on Learning Management System (LMS) and they are not communicating in real-time (Blaine, 2019). Meanwhile, synchronous online learning is completely real-time learning; in which students and teachers can communicate and do all activities such as lecturing, asking some questions and answering directly without coming to the classroom (Martin, Parker & Deale, 2012).

In the teaching and learning process, the selection of media is crucial, including for the synchronous online teaching and learning process because it can make communication and interaction between students and teachers during the teaching and learning process more effective (Ramdhani & Muhammadiyah, 2015). There are several media that can be used to support teaching and learning processes in this current situation, one of them is Skype. Skype is an Internet-based communication program that allows users to make audio and video conferences. Skype also provides a computer-to-landline calling service for both

domestic and international calls (Eaton, 2010). Therefore, Skype is suitable for distance learning in this pandemic situation because Skype can overcome the distance.

Skype has been utilized as an online teaching and learning platform in the English Education Department of a university in West Java, Indonesia. In the research proposal class, Skype is used as a communication medium between lecturer and students during the teaching and learning process. With various features available on Skype such as screen sharing, video calls and chatting, the lecturer delivered materials, discussed with students, listened to students' presentations, and provided direct feedback on students' assignments through real-time online learning. In short, teachers and students can continue the teaching and learning process using the application even though they do not meet face to face in a classroom due to the pandemic situation that required us to stay at home.

Based on the phenomenon above, the researcher is interested to investigate Indonesian EFL students' perceptions about the use of skype as a media for synchronous online learning during pandemic covid-19 using Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in terms of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Earlier studies had applied the TAM model with different applications for example: BlackBoard (Landry, Griffeth & Hartman, 2006), Wikis (Liu, 2010) and Zoom. However, the TAM framework has not been used for the Skype application and the previous studies using quantitative study. Therefore, this study investigated students' perceptions on synchronous online learning using Skype during a pandemic with adapting the theory of TAM, especially in terms of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use with qualitative study.

METHODS

This study utilized descriptive case study as the design. Descriptive case study is a method which is set to describe natural phenomena in real life context (Yin, 2017). The method selected because with a case study, the researcher can examine a phenomenon in depth (Patton, 1987; Noor, 2008). In this case, the phenomenon in this research is the use of media such as Skype for synchronous online learning during the pandemic based on TAM framework in one of universities in Indonesia.

Three participants were chosen for this study because the researcher needed a lot of information from various people who were believed to be able to provide information related to the research needs. Additionally, participants are chosen depending on who can best answer the research question and gain information of the phenomena under investigation (Sargeant, 2012). Based on the statement, the researcher chose participants with the following criteria: (1) They are Indonesian EFL students; (2) They have used Skype as a medium for online learning in pandemic covid-19 situation. Therefore, the research took place in the English Education department in one of universities in West Java, Indonesia. Specifically, one of the classes of Research Proposal Class 2020 because this class has used Skype as a media for online learning during the pandemic. In total, there were three participants who participated in this study and it was recruited based on their achievements in Research Proposal Class. One participant with higher achiever, one participant with middle achiever, and another one with low achiever. High, middle and lower achiever determined based on the final score on Research Proposal class. Moreover, these participants were chosen because of their accessibility, willingness to communicate and also recommendation from the lecturer because they have different characteristics so that the researcher can get various points of view to obtain more information from participants. The participants' ages range from 22-24 years old. They were chosen to explain their perceptions on synchronous online learning using Skype during the pandemic because the researcher believed they have different perceptions.

For collecting the data, the researcher used a semi-structured interview. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher asked some questions to collect the data. However, the researcher can ask additional questions or develop them during the

interview process as long as they do not leave out the predetermined topic (Young, Rose, Mumby *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, the questions related to students' perceptions during synchronous online learning using Skype are based on the theory of adoption from TAM theory framework which are perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Each participant has interviewed around 15-35 minutes via Skype and WhatsApp.

All of the data analyzed using Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within the data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (p.79).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter delivers the findings and discussion to answer the research questions that have been delivered in the first chapter. The data collected from the interview and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed two themes: 1) Skype facilitates users to adapt easily, and 2) Effectiveness of Skype application as an online learning tool.

Skype Facilitates Users to Adapt Easily

When users quickly comprehend and learn the information and what is in the program, this is an example of good application use. This is aligned with Romney's belief (2004) that the format in which information is presented must be easy to comprehend. The information referred in this study is presented in the form of the Skype software. The results revealed that this application is easy to learn for several reasons.

Excerpt 1

This application is **very adaptive** because this application is **like other social media** such as WA, telegram, and several similar applications which is Skype was also intended previously for ordinary social media. But it was developed, because of the pandemic maybe... competing with zoom which was earlier familiar for video conferencing use like this. So, it's **very adaptive**, especially for me. Beside the setting of this application with social media mode, **I have also used several similar applications**. So, it's not so strange because it's almost similar. **(Student 1)**

(Interview script on September 5th, 2020)

When I used it for the first time, I was a bit confused about adjusting or looking for icons that I'm used to finding in similar applications like Zoom. **But once you get used to it, it's easy to use**. The point is that **as long as we want to explore the application**, we look for the icon, its functions, so it's easy. **(Student 2)**

(Interview script on September 1st, 2020)

It's easy, the features are easy to learn, because the icons clearly show the function, like a microphone icon for talking. For on and off sound, just click on the icon, it helps too. **(Student 2)**

(Interview script on September 1st, 2020)

This application is quite easy to learn when I use it for the first time because it can be seen from the various components or features contained in the application, it is quite clear and detailed, the icons are clear too, not too confused when first time using it. **(Student 3)**

(Interview script on Script on August 27th, 2020)

Based on the statements above, when they initially started using Skype, the participants said they were easy to comprehend the software. Student 2 stated that the icons

for the features on Skype were clear and matched to their functions, making them easier to understand and it is quite similar to the statement of student 3. Although for the first-time student 2 felt a bit confused because the interface was different from other applications that she used before, as long as she learned and explored about the Skype application, it became easy to use. Moreover, student 1 commented that this program is very adaptable because the model is similar to social media in general. Furthermore, he has already used several similar applications, therefore he was quite familiar with this Skype application the first time he used it.

Besides, participants believed that this software is easy to use as an online learning medium for their own reasons.

Excerpt 2

It's **easy to use** since **the features and interface are quite clear**, like the icons and it's easy to use. When we want to turn off the sound of our voice, for example, if someone is talking or a lecturer is talking and we don't want to bother them, we just click the 'mute' button, which looks like a microphone. So... the sound of our activities is not audible and does not bother everyone who were speaking in class. The second is that when we want to make a video call, the logo is pretty visible; **all we have to do is click it** and our faces will be clear. **(Student 3)**

(Interview transcript on August 27th, 2020)

When I used it for the first time, I was a bit confused about adjusting or looking for icons that I'm used to finding in similar applications like Zoom. **But once you get used to it, it's easy to use.** The point is that **as long as we want to explore the application**, we look for the icon, its functions, so it's easy. **(Student 2)**

(Interview transcript on September 1st, 2020)

It's very easy to use, because this Skype application **not only supports PCs, but also mobile phones.** **(Student 1)**

(Interview transcript on September 5th, 2020)

From the excerpt above, the participants have positive perceptions toward the use of skype in perceived ease of practice term. Two participants said that the application is easy to use. From student 3, we can see that it was easy to use because the interface of the application is clear and users can use Skype's features during online learning by simply clicking on the feature icons as desired. Then, student 1 said it is easy to use because this application can be used not only for a PCs or laptop, but also with a smartphone. It is related to one of the aims of making a technological system is to give convenience to its users (Fahlevi & Dewi, 2019). Therefore, students who do not have a PC's or laptop can use this application on their smartphone as long as their smartphone is supported for installing this application.

Effectiveness of Skype Application as Online Learning Tool

Students need to use effective media to facilitate distance learning in this pandemic condition. The effectiveness of a medium is essential in contributing to the attainment of the learning objectives that have been set. This theme shows the participants' perceptions of Skype's effectiveness for online learning in terms of interactivity, accessibility, flexibility, efficiency, engagement, and impact on learning performance.

Excerpt 3

When compared to other applications, well, this Skype application is indeed more **effective**. Why? because it was **supported by features** like together mode, change scene, then background, and so on, **which are facilitative, adaptive, and enjoyable**. These features certainly affect the effectiveness of learning. One of them is that in the learning process, there must be **engagement**. So, **when someone is already engaged, learning becomes effective**. As a result, these features become one of the factors that impact the learning process. **(Student 1)**

(Interview transcript on September 5th, 2020)

With the together mode, the teacher can manage the class as interesting as possible like in the 'real' class. For example, the setting (background) is in the classroom, and we can really feel the learning vibes like in the 'real' class. Conversation between A and B can be carried out because we can see the sitting position of other students in together mode. It's very helpful, it affects the learning process, learning activities, engagement, because psychologically it's very important. **(Student 1)**

(Interview transcript on September 23rd, 2020)

From the excerpt, student 1 said that Skype is effective because those features can help the process of engagement in online class due to the facilitative, adaptive, and enjoyable features like together mode, change scene, reaction features and others. Beside that, student 1 also emphasizes that together mode is a good feature and different from other applications that made the teaching and learning process interesting and more engaging to the course. According to Martin and Bolliger (2018), engagement is important for students' satisfaction in online learning courses. Students' engagement refers to "interest, curiosity, and passion shown by the students in the teaching and learning process" (Mulia, 2020). To support this, a study by Little, Passmore and Schullo (2006) revealed that the majority of students in their study evaluated the synchronous platform positively. The research underlined that those students favored several features such as emoticons, hand raising, a shared whiteboard, polling, and application sharing as points of personal engagement. Students mentioned a better learning experience, better communication, high levels of course satisfaction, and strong group cohesiveness.

Excerpt 4

It is effective, in my opinion, because we **may schedule learning meetings on the agreed-upon schedule and it's good for time management and adjusting with other daily activities**. Then, **if (the learning process) is recorded**, for example, if there is something we missed during the class, we can re-play what we didn't understand or missed during the lesson, whether it was recorded by the lecturer or by us. Besides, **the room can accommodate dozens of people** and it is like usual study, the difference is using the media. I think that's how effective it is. **(Student 2)**

(Interview transcript on September 1st, 2020)

...the benefits of skype in learning make it easier for us to carry out distance learning activities because this skype application is **flexible like it facilitates us to learn anywhere**. **(Student 3)**

(Interview transcript on August 27th, 2020).

From the excerpt, by using skype as a learning media, participants can schedule their learning meetings on the agreed-upon schedule before learning meetings start and it is good

for managing time. In line with the statement by Yıldız et al., (2015) that synchronous tools are useful for supporting their time management and effective learning. Besides, Skype also can accommodate dozens of people in the meetings and also flexible because it can facilitate students to learn anywhere. Aligned with Smith, Hoderi and Mcdermott (2019) that these things related to efficiency are one of important aspects in the effectiveness of the learning process. Efficiency means the ability to do something without wasting materials, time or energy. A media that meets the efficiency aspect will have an impact on the effectiveness of a learning process in supporting the achievement of student learning processes.

Excerpt 5

...The second benefit is **real-time learning**. Then... you can actually follow the lesson, even if you don't meet face-to-face because **you can face-to-face with a camera. (Student 2)**

(Interview transcript on September 1st, 2020)

The effectiveness in utilizing Skype that I felt during online learning from the research proposal class... is already effective, **we may utilize a guest account if we don't have an account**. Then, the **features like video call and share-screen is also effective** because it **can be used for learning activities**, such as **presentations and discussions. (Student 3)**.

...when we **receive the link**, we just **click it to enter the online classroom. (Student 3)**

(Interview transcript on August 27th, 2020).

From the excerpt above, it is reported that participants got some benefits from utilizing the Skype software for online learning such as real-time learning, face-to-face meeting whether with lecturer or other students through the camera, also doing presentations and discussions with share-screen and video call features. In this respect, McBrien and Jones (2009) mentioned that with synchronous online platforms, it offered instructors and the students into the potential for meaningful real-time interactions and communication at geographical distance. It is aligned with Sandiwarno (2016) that the learning process ideally involves interactivity between educators and students, even if they are not in the same location, video conferencing will help the learning process because instructors will be actively connected with students. Moreover, one participant also talked about the ease in accessing online learning using Skype because students can access the online learning class with just clicking the link that students received from the instructor and if students do not have an account, they can use a guest account and it will directly enter the room. Aligned with that, according to Sadikin & Hamidah (2020) one of the criteria that must be considered during the online learning process is accessibility because if the learning media is difficult to access, the learning process becomes ineffective.

The use of Skype application also has some impacts to participants with the statements below:

Excerpt 6

"Yeah, I felt excited (to join the learning process) at that time because I used a new technology for learning and we can do a face-to-face interaction through the video conferences although we can't come to the classroom." **(Student 2)**

"...In Skype, there is a screen recorder feature. With that feature, I can review the material that has been explained by the lecturer, whether there's some materials that I didn't understand or missed during the lesson, so that I can get a better understanding about the material." **(Student 2)**

(Interview transcript on December 29th, 2020)

“In terms of media maximization, using Skype is more likely to be understood about material more easily than other applications because there are visual aids, such as classroom conditions, communicative features like commenting, and then screen recording that can be saved by everyone, and so on. It's more helpful for catching material compared to other apps.”

(Student 1)

(Interview transcript on December 23th, 2020)

“...I found that this synchronous online learning is helpful. I became confident to ask some questions to the lecturer because I did not meet in person. **(Student 3)**”

(Interview transcript on December 30th, 2020).

Based on the excerpt above, participants felt that Skype had impacts on their learning performance. Student 2 said that she felt excited when she used Skype as a new technology for learning. In line with this, Kaklamanou, Pearce and Nelson (2012) stated that as a digital online learning platform, they believed that Skype can increase students' learning interest. In other words, Skype as a medium for synchronous online learning can increase students' learning motivation. Moreover, student 1 said that with maximization features that are available on Skype, it will help students in catching materials. Ogden (2015) reported that features available on Skype that can be used to provide examples, concepts and skills, assess immediate understanding, and engage in constructive dialogue, teachers perceived Skype application as an easy tool for students in acquiring knowledge. In addition, a screen recorder on Skype is useful for reviewing materials that participants didn't understand or missed during the lesson and participant can understand the material better. This statement aligned with Martin and Parker's study (2014) that students can review content asynchronously with accessible recorded courses, which improve their understanding and learning. This statement aligned with Atwarter, Borup, Baker and West (2017) that Skype calls helped students to form relationships with their instructor and boost their confidence in the course.

In conclusion, there are two big themes from their perceptions about the use of Skype as an online learning tool, those are: (1) Skype facilitates users to adapt easily; (2) Effectiveness of the Skype application as an online learning tool. Participants perceived that Skype is easy to learn for users for the first time and also easy to use. However, a possible novelty effect may have an impact on the outcomes since individuals are interested in the new technology. It should be considered that when students become more familiar with the technology, their interest in learning is possible to decrease. Therefore, it is important for teachers to apply appropriate learning methods when using technology so that the teaching and learning process could be more effective.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to investigate students' perceptions on synchronous online learning using Skype during pandemic Covid-19. This research revealed students' perceptions about synchronous online learning using skype during pandemic situations. Based on the research conducted, the data shows that students have positive perceptions about the use of skype for synchronous online learning. There are two themes that were revealed in this research: (1) Skype facilitates users to adapt easily; (2) Effectiveness of Skype application as an online learning tool. From the first theme, they believed that Skype is easy to learn and it can be used both on PC's or smartphones. In the second theme, participants believed that

Skype application is effective for online learning because various features on Skype can help the process of engagement. Then, Skype is also efficient. It can facilitate learning anywhere with gathering a lot of people and is effective for time management, interactive for discussion, accessible, and have a good impact for their learning performance. In conclusion, the students agreed to use Skype as a medium for synchronous online learning during the covid-19 pandemic.

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