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Hybrid Synchronous and Asynchronous Language Learning in Writing Class: The Learners' Psychosocial Perspectives in Indonesia

Abstract

Hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning remains under-explored in writing class. The purpose of this study is to describe learners' perceptions toward hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning model in EFL writing. A qualitative case study was employed. The respondents were undergraduate learners in English major. The research instruments were close-response questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in the academic writing course. Findings showed that psychological and social factors were crucial in the learners' online writing. It revealed that teachers needed to provide comprehensible input, challenging group-work activity, and constructive feedback during online writing. Hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning enhanced writing competence, but it encountered a problem with internet connectivity. The study discloses that hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning has the potential to teach EFL writing.

Key words: *Hybrid learning, synchronous and asynchronous language learning, writing class, learners' perspectives*

Introduction

Synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid synchronous and asynchronous are regarded as forms of online learning environments. Synchronous sessions on learners' learning are good ways to minimize distance education gaps (Sun &

Chen, 2016). Synchronous learning environments include interactive interaction in real-time, including online interactions (Salmon, 2013). Synchronous learning is effective for language learning achievement (Rinekso & Muslim, 2020). Simultaneous student-teacher presence is needed for synchronous learning. Learners feel stronger connections with their peers and teacher during a synchronous environment (Yamagata-Lynch, 2014). However, the spontaneity of expression and shyness due to the online mode alleviate the teacher's concerns (Racheva, 2018). High demand for real-time experiences and technical issues such as low speed and connectivity are other concerns (O'Rourke & Stickler, 2017). The perceived barriers of synchronous environment push teachers to make use of another mode of online learning.

Asynchronous learning provides another choice for online learning. Asynchronous environments are flexible in time, and learners can use their leisure and their own pace to work on tasks. The opportunity of delayed answer helps them use their critical thinking skills as they may continue to think about a topic for a prolonged period and enhance different thinking. Hence, asynchronous learning can also apply learners' previous experience with new ideas (Lin & Lawrenz, 2012). Less dependency on notes and more chances of peer-group discussions help build critical thinking and creativity. Although online forum discussions make learners active, they can be distracted by going off topics. Another frustrating factor can be delayed feedback (Huang & Hsiao, 2012). In addition, socializing opportunities are inadequate, and students have to search for ways of interacting themselves. Accordingly, teachers need to find solutions to these learning obstacles during the asynchronous mode.

A hybrid language learning incorporates synchronous modes with an asynchronous range of learning paces. This type of online learning can be an alternative to solve the perceived problems during synchronous and asynchronous learning. Hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language teaching combines simultaneity with non-simultaneity modes of learning. Hybrid space contributes to a student-centered, self-paced, and independent learning (Murphy, Rodríguez-Manzanares & Barbour, 2011). Furthermore, self-paced learning is where learners need to stay involved in online classroom discussions (Ene & Upton, 2018). Hybrid learning also keeps students engaged and motivated to build confidence for maximizing class participation.

In distance education, synchronous and asynchronous language learning needs to consider learners' factors that influence learning potential. Psychosocial variables cover various aspects of the individual's psychological condition and social atmosphere (Long & Cumming, 2013). Therefore, such variables play crucial roles

in language learning performance. Several scholars (Montore, Chaves & Alvarado, 2014) have different psychosocial variables in language learning. However, many agree that psychological factors cover anxiety, attitude, aptitude, and motivation, while social factors comprise age, gender, social class, and ethnic identity.

Today, many English teachers make use of various learning platforms in teaching writing. Most writing courses focus on academic writing at university levels, i.e. writing research proposals and research-based articles. Writing activities cover several steps, namely prewriting, drafting, revising, and publishing (Keen, 2017) through online learning tools. Unfortunately, EFL learners face a lot of writing problems in an online learning environment. Most studies in online writing investigate the use of synchronous and asynchronous learning separately (Omar, Embi & Yunus, 2012; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010). Several researchers (Perveen, 2016) have investigated hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning. However, only a few researchers examine the use of hybrid synchronous and asynchronous learning in EFL writing contexts (Shahabadi & Uplane, 2015).

Problem of Research

This study aims to describe learners' perceptions toward hybrid synchronous and asynchronous learning model in EFL writing based on psychosocial perspectives. The research questions of this study are the following:

1. What are the learners' psychosocial views of hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning in EFL writing?
2. What are the learners' expectations of good teachers in the online writing process?
3. What are the perceived benefits and barriers of online writing practices?

Methodology of Research

Sample of Research

A qualitative case study with seventy-eight undergraduate learners was employed. This study was conducted in a private university in Central Java Province, Indonesia. The fourth-semester learners majoring English program took part as research participants. The respondents were sixty females (77%) and eighteen males (23%) at 19–22. They came from various cities with different family backgrounds. The English teacher (the first author) taught academic writing through

online learning tools simultaneously: Google Meet and Google Classroom. The learners joined the academic writing course in one semester from March to June 2021.

Instruments and Procedures

Research instruments were online close-response questionnaires and semi-structured interviews conducted in the writing class. Learners' perceptions were measured by the psychosocial scale (Long & Cumming, 2013), learners' expectations of teachers' roles during the writing process (Keen, 2017), and benefits and barriers of online writing practices (Perveen, 2016). Writing-embedded online questionnaires employed a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*); meanwhile, in-depth interviews were used to strengthen the data sources from the questionnaires. The questionnaires consisted of sixteen items, and the interview guidelines comprised five main questions. Learners' perceptions were related to psychological variables (anxiety, attitude, aptitude, and motivation), social variables (age, gender, social class, and ethnic identity), their expectations of teachers' roles in online writing activities, benefits and barriers of hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning practices.

In the academic writing course, the learners learnt and practiced writing through online learning platforms. Google Meet was used in the prewriting and publishing stages, while Google Classroom was employed in the revising and editing steps. The learners experienced learning online writing in one semester for sixteen meetings. Data collections with questionnaires and interviews were conducted through online tools. Furthermore, participants' informed consents were obtained before collecting the data. Online close-response questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were administered in the last meeting of the writing course. The learners were asked to describe their perspectives of hybrid practices in EFL writing. All learners were asked to fill in the online questionnaires through Google Form. After completing the questionnaires, twelve respondents had online interviews to describe their perceptions individually within thirty minutes each.

Data Analysis

In this qualitative case study, a thematic analysis was employed to answer the research objectives. This study employed multiple data sources with close-response questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Learners' responses toward online questionnaires were analyzed to find out averages of each perceptions' indicator. Meanwhile, the interview results were transcribed and coded, referring

to the themes and units of analysis. Next, the data reduction was conducted for the learners' responses which were not relevant and separate from the themes discussed. Learners' responses were then categorized and summarized to find out research results based on indicators of the perceptions, namely psychosocial variables, learners' expectations, benefits, and barriers toward hybrid synchronous and asynchronous learning model.

Results of Research

After analyzing the obtained data, the results of the learners' perspectives on the implementation of hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning model could be seen from the following tables.

Table 1. Learners' psychosocial perspectives

Perceptions	Statement Items	Mean
Psychological variables	1. Learners with low anxiety write English better.	3.65
	2. Learners with a positive attitude produce writing better.	2.89
	3. Learners with a good talent for writing write English better.	3.14
	4. Learners with high motivation for learning produce better writing.	3.76
Social variables	5. The older learners write English better.	2.54
	6. Female learners produce better writing than males.	2.75
	7. Learners from high social family background write English better.	2.74
	8. Learners from big cities produce comprehensive writing.	2.86
Learners' expectations	9. Teachers need to provide meaningful learning materials.	3.25
	10. Teachers are required to create interesting writing activities.	3.88
	11. Teachers have to give clear corrections on organization and content.	3.43
	12. Teachers help learners edit misspelling and grammatical errors.	3.58
Benefit	13. Hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning enhances writing quality.	2.98
	14. Hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning makes us familiar with learning technologies.	3.76
Barrier	15. Hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning hinders to comprehension of materials given by the teacher.	3.22
	16. Hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning has problems with internet connections.	3.85

Table 1 revealed that the averages of psychological variables were higher than those of social variables. Age and ethnic identity became the foremost psychosocial factors in EFL writing. Also, learners put engaging writing activities as the most expected teacher's roles during online writing. Technology familiarity was seen as the main benefit, while internet connectivity was considered the dominant obstacle faced by EFL learners.

The following table exemplified learners' responses after participating in the online interviews through online tools respectively. The respondents' excerpts were obtained from interview results with the assistance of WhatsApp application.

Table 2. The learners' psychosocial perspectives

Perceptions	Category	Examples of learners' responses
Psychological variables	Anxiety level	"When I am nervous, I cannot concentrate on my writing process."
	Interest and learning participation	"Hybrid learning makes me always stay on tasks.
	Language learning potential	"I consider that I have no talent for writing, so I produce poor writing compared my classmates".
	Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation	"I need to acquire academic writing skills for my final projects in this university."
Social variables	Age	"I can produce better writing at university than writing at secondary school."
	Gender differences	"There is only a little difference in online writing production between males and females."
	Social family background	"Social background results in more adapted tasks.
	Language practice and belief	"Since I come from big cities and have known more technologies, I can produce online writing better."

Table 3. The learners' expectations, benefits, and barriers

Perceptions	Category	Examples of learners' responses
Learners' expectations	Meaningful input	"I need more explanation with videos as the teacher teaches through Google Classroom."
	Group-work activity	"I feel more confident and motivated to have peer draft and revision during online writing."
	Constructive feedback	"I always need to get oral and written feedback from the teacher through Google Meet and Google Classroom."
	Language correction	"Teacher needs to give comments on the vocabulary choices for writing scientific papers.

Perceptions	Category	Examples of learners' responses
Benefit	Writing improvement	"Writing enhancement is due to paperless activities and facilities provided by language tools."
	Technology familiarity	"During online writing class, I can be more familiar with technology for learning."
Barrier	Material comprehension	"Explanation with the use of Google Meet makes me confused and difficult to comprehend the learning materials."
	Internet connectivity	"Electricity and technology applications used to be my frequent problems in online writing."

Discussion

This study explored learners' views of hybrid synchronous and asynchronous learning in academic writing classes. The study revealed that psychosocial factors affected EFL learners' writing, namely for the writing process and writing achievement. Psychological factors were related to anxiety level, interest and learning participation, language learning potential, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Learners with low anxiety and high interest were able to participate actively in online classes. Similarly, those who had good language learning potential and motivation had resulted in better writing quality (Ariyanti, 2016; Habibian, Roslan, Idris & Othman, 2015). Accordingly, English teachers are required to pay attention to their learners' psychology in the online writing process.

Another finding also showed that social factors had big impact on writing. Such social factors comprised age, gender differences, social family background, and language practice and belief. Many learners believed that the age of maturity and gender differences had a great impact on writing performance. Also, social class and language practice were crucial to the learners' writing process. The four social indicators, therefore, need to be considered as the learning focus in EFL writing (Hu, 2016; Kwak, 2017).

It was also found out that learners expected teachers to provide comprehensible inputs, motivating learning paces, and constructive feedback during an online writing environment. The English teacher might use various language exposures with presentation slides, videos, diagrams, or pictures. During hybrid learning, many learners were active and engaged when asked to work on tasks with peers or small groups. Working in online groups could build up their confidence and lessen their stress and burden with the tasks. Also, learners needed direct or indirect language feedback mainly for vocabulary and grammatical errors. This finding supported prior research (Abe, 2020; Carolan & Kyppö, 2015) looking for ways

of the teaching writing process in an online environment. As constructing online writing activities, teachers should play their roles to optimize student-writers potential to produce better writing products.

The third finding revealed that learners perceived benefits and barriers of hybrid learning practices. The benefits covered writing enhancement and technology familiarity in the hybrid synchronous and asynchronous learning tools like Google Meet and Google Classroom. Learners could enhance their writing skills due to online feedback and corrections from their peers and teachers. In a synchronous mode, such feedback and suggestions were directly provided through an oral explanation. Meanwhile, in an asynchronous setting, the teacher used the comment facility, and learners responded to the corrections in a Google Classroom tool. This proves that hybrid synchronous and asynchronous language learning is a good strategy for teaching writing in EFL settings (Amiti, 2015; Williams & Lahman, 2011).

The challenges of hybrid mode in EFL writing were lack of material comprehension and internet connection. Many learners argue that they got difficulty in understanding the materials because of the absence of teachers in class. Learners also faced a lot of barriers with connectivity, especially for synchronous learning with audiovisual interactions. Since many stayed in rural areas, they were struggling for finding connections supplied by suitable technological supports (Abbasi Kasani, Shams Mourkani, Seraji, Rezaeizadeh & Abedi, 2020; Wang, Quek & Hu, 2017). These obstacles need to be overcome by language teachers so that online writing processes can run smoothly to achieve learning goals.

Conclusion and Future Research

Findings underline that psychological and social variables play vital roles in online writing environments. Furthermore, English teachers need to provide meaningful material exposures, engaging writing activities, and positive corrections during online writing. Although hybrid synchronous and asynchronous learning models have major connectivity problems, it could develop learners' writing process. The results indicate that hybrid synchronous and asynchronous model can be an alternative in teaching writing for higher education. This study employs two classes in one university during online writing classes for data collections. Further research with larger samples needs to be conducted for deeper investigations by considering other manipulating variables (affective, linguistic, and cognitive aspects) involved in language learning.

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