

A Study on ESL Learners' Perceptions of Using One to One Online Support and Learning

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to find the ESL learners' perceptions of the challenges of using online learning amidst covid-19. It also intends to find out their perceptions about the efficiency of using online classes to improve their English language soft skills. For this, the researchers have designed a survey incorporating two questionnaires using Five-point Likert scales. The first questionnaire is related to the challenges of online learning, and the second is connected to English language soft skills. They were distributed to 30 postgraduate ESL students from the department of English, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). The findings reveal mixed perceptions (positive and negative). The subjects have shown positive perceptions regarding the challenges in online classes and doing assignments depending on online sources. They have also revealed positive perceptions about the interactive and proper discipline of the classroom in offline mode. In contrast, they have shown negative perceptions regarding comparing offline and online study modes and about the methodological challenges of learning in online classes and doing online assignments. In terms of improving their soft English skills, the subjects have shown positive perceptions regarding the efficiency of online classes in enhancing their reading, speaking and listening skills and negative perceptions regarding writing skills.

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Online Learning, Perceptions, Language Learning, Soft Skills, Language Teaching

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1. Introduction

A shift from an offline mode of study to an online mode is a result of the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic. Online learning considers a new phenomenon, and most learners are unfamiliar with it. Despite the positive sides of online learning, especially in covid-19, the learners face challenges. A spate of studies has been carried out to determine the learners' perceptions of using the online language learning websites, technical issues using the online learning, and other issues during the covid-19 pandemic (Rahmt Allah & Mohamedahmed, 2021; Rifiyanti, 2020; Hendrawaty & Retnomurti, 2021).

Technology has been integrated into different scopes, one of which is education. Integrating technology into the education system is one of the significant steps toward enhancing the higher education level. The covid-19 pandemic has undeniably changed the reality of the education system across the globe. Online learning is familiar to every learner and has become more familiar since the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic fear and ongoing spread of virus, most governments imposed a lockdown on the affected educational institutions as well. Teachers have started utilising different technological means such as zoom, google meetings, and others to present their classes and enable the students to find the study material related to their subjects.

Using online learning amid the covid-19 crisis has shown ostensible importance in English language learning. It helps the teacher motivate their students to learn a second/foreign language. Furthermore, the facilities of online classes help the learners improve their listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills. On the other hand, it has an active role in assisting the learners in acquiring vocabulary and enhancing pronunciation. At the same time, covid-19 has shown the real significance of online learning and teaching. The facilities of the technological means have enabled teachers to do online examinations in most schools and universities. Online teaching and learning should not be underestimated during the covid-19 as it has also positively affected the students' education despite many formidable challenges. It has shifted the world to alternative teaching and learning methods to continue education under lockdown conditions. At the same, there are a set of barriers faced by the learners in the offline mode; for instance, the learners have not even received most

of their readings. The learning has not happened at the level that would allow them to have physical classes and examinations. Moreover, the lack of online material or the unavailability of a device is another major problem for the learners in offline mode.

Based on two surveys, the first was conducted in March 2021 by the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) in 24 rural districts of Karnataka to estimate the learning loss and understand the current learning status. Nearly 18 000 children between the ages of 3 and 16 were assessed for their reading and arithmetic levels. And the second was conducted in August 2021 by School Children's Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL). It covered 1362 underprivileged children across 15 states. It has been focused on children in rural hamlets and urban 'bastis' who generally attend governmental school. 60 % of them are residents in rural areas, and nearly 60% belong to Dalit and Adivasi communities. It has been found that only 8 % of the children in rural areas and 25 % of children in urban areas study online regularly. Many found it difficult to follow the curriculum and had connectivity issues among them.(Sathyamoorthy, 2021).

To sum up, education is more than completing the syllabus and preparing the learners to face the examinations; it is about the knowledge and how to enable them to acquire it. Most of the learners were not much familiar with online learning, and switching to the online mode was little more than a myth. The outbreak of covid-19 has forced the governments to lockdown the educational institutions, and the online mode of study was the only option attempts to keep education going.

2. Review of Literature

Due to the unprecedented conditions caused by the covid-19 pandemic, the effect on education in general became a subject of great interest for researchers, educators, and administrations, especially in investigating the students' perceptions of online learning amid the covid-19 pandemic. Generally, most learners had a positive attitude toward online learning. They have been considered valuable and helpful in the time of the pandemic and mimic the same efficiency of offline learning mode.

Raheem & Khan (2020) claim that the concept of online learning has become widely known in the time of the covid-19 pandemic. It has shown a significant role in academic purposes, not only in English language learning and teaching. They indicate that using applications such as Zoom, Teams, Veev, Google classroom, and other means helps students study at home in covid-19 crisis.

Hafizah Rifiyanti (2020) aims to find the learners' perceptions of online English learning during the covid-19 pandemic. A descriptive method was used by surveying 108 students from the management and informatics programs of Institut Bisnis & Informatika Kosgoro 1957 (IBI K57). The obtained results have indicated that shifting offline learning to online learning, particularly for English classes, is considered adequate amid the covid-19 crisis. The participants have positively assumed that most teachers know how to teach English online using the online platforms IBI K57. It is worth mentioning that the learners perceived that the listening section is the most challenging skill to learn in online English class.

Khanum & Alam (2021) aim to find the perceptions of the tertiary level learners learning English online in Bangladesh amid the covid-19 pandemic. The findings have shown a mixed perception regarding various statements in the questionnaire. The obtained data have demonstrated that the subjects prefer the teachers' use of English and Bangla in the class, using images and videos to understand the English language better. On the other hand, they have a negative attitude toward developing speaking, reading, and writing skills through an online class, whereas they were highly positive in achieving listening skills.

Rahmt Allah & Mohamedahmed (2021) aim to understand better EFL learners' perceptions of using online language learning websites among the EFL female Saudi learners at the college of sciences and arts, Unizah, Qassim University amid covid-19 pandemic. This study intended to elicit learners' perceptions about improving their language through online language learning websites. The finding of this study has shown a positive perception of using online language learning websites.

Hendrawaty et al. (2021) aim to investigate EFL undergraduate students' perceptions of using the online learning application amid the covid-19 pandemic. The findings have shown a positive attitude toward online learning. The subjects preferred using WhatsApp group, email, google classroom and YouTube for online learning.

Tanjung & Utomo (2021) investigated the students' perception of implementing a fully online learning mode in English classrooms. The findings show that the subjects have a different level of familiarity using the search engine, e-

resources, and social media that aid them in comprehending the learning content. It has shown different impacts on the subjects' perceptions of learning effectiveness using social media and e-resources. The subjects have shown a positive attitude to using learning applications or other online-based platforms to learn the course material and improve their language skills. The present study aims to find out the ESL learners' perceptions regarding the challenges of using online learning and the efficiency of the online classes in improving the English language's soft skills.

3. Methodology

The present study deals with the ESL postgraduate learners' perceptions of the efficiency of using online mode in English language learning amid the covid-19 pandemic. 30 postgraduate students from the Department of English, AMU, were the study subjects. They are all from the 2020 batch. The reason for choosing them is because they still have online classes. A questionnaire formatted in Google Form (GF) was used to collect the data. Five-point Likert scales, which are SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), N (Neutral), D (Disagree), and SD (Strongly Disagree), was used to show the extent of agreeing or disagreeing of the subjects with each mentioned statement. The designed questionnaire consists of two types of questions. The first question includes five statements related to the challenges of online learning and the second question has four statements related to English language soft skills, as shown in the coming part.

4. Result and Discussion

This part is devoted to presenting the results of the subjects' perceptions regarding the challenges of online learning. The data of each statement will be examined and discussed as follows:

4.1. The Challenges of Online Learning

The first question is concerned with the challenges of online learning. The following are the statements that have been used to answer this question:

- a. The challenges of learning in online classes and doing assignments are that we have to
- b. depend on online sources.
- c. The offline mode of study cannot be ever compared to the online mode of study.
- d. There are methodological challenges to learning in online classes and doing assignments online.
- e. The offline class is much more interactive, and proper discipline of the classroom is followed.

Table 1. The learners' perceptions of statement 1

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
SA	0	0	6
A	18	60%	
N	6	20%	
D	6	20 %	
SD	0	0	

As mentioned earlier that the first question contains four statements. The first statement is related to the challenges of learning in online classes and doing assignments. Based on the obtained results, 60 % of the responses show an Agree (A), 20% Neutral (N), and 20% Disagree (D). The mean score is 6, which shows a **positive** response. It can be drawn that the subjects believe there are challenges in learning in online classes and doing assignments.

Table 2. The learners' perceptions of statement 2

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
SA	0	0	4.8
A	6	20%	
N	6	20%	
D	6	20%	
SD	6	20%	

As shown in the table above, the learners' perceptions hindered comparing the study online and offline. The obtained results have shown that the 20 % of the subjects showed Agree (A), Neutral(N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The mean is 4.8, which is a negative indication of online study.

Table 3. The learners' perceptions of statement 3

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
SA	0	0	4.8
A	6	20%	
N	18	60%	
D	0	0%	
SD	0	0%	

Statement 3 is concerned with the methodological challenges of learning in online classes and doing assignments online. The results show that 60% of respondents were Neutral, and 20% Agreed. The score is 4.8, which refers to the negative perceptions regarding the methodological challenges of learning in online classes and doing assignments.

Table 4. The learners' perceptions of statement 4

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
SA	0	0	4.8
A	18	60%	
N	6	20%	
D	0	0%	
SD	0	0%	

Table 4 shows the subjects' perceptions of the offline class as more interactive and a proper classroom discipline. Based on the obtained results, 60 % of the responses show an Agree (A), and 20% Neutral (N). The mean score is 4.8, which shows a positive response. It can be drawn that the subjects believe that the offline class is much more interactive and a proper discipline of the classroom.

4.2. English Language Skills

This part is devoted to presenting the results of the subjects' perceptions regarding soft skills improvement using the online learning mode. The data of each statement will be examined and discussed as follows:

- The English reading skills can be improved through online classes with the same efficiency as offline mode.
- The English speaking skills can be improved through online classes with the same efficiency as offline mode.
- The English listening skills can be improved through online classes with the same efficiency as in the offline mode.
- The English writing skills can be improved through online classes with the same efficiency as offline mode.

Table 5 The learners' perceptions of statement 1

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
SA	0	0%	6
A	12	40%	
N	10	33.33%	
D	8	26.66%	
SD	0	0%	

Statement 1 is meant to determine the subjects' perceptions of improving reading skills through online classes with the same efficiency as offline mode. The results show that most subjects Agree(40%) that online learning can improve reading skills. Moreover, 33.33% of responses show Neutral (N), and 26.66% Disagree(A). The subjects' perceptions indicate a **positive** attitude toward using online learning mode to improve reading skills.

Table 6 The learners' perceptions of statement 2

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
SA	0	0%	6
A	15	50%	
N	5	16.66%	
D	10	33.33%	
SD	0	0%	

Statement 2 is devoted to finding out the subjects' perceptions regarding improving their speaking skills through online learning. The obtained results have shown that 50% of the responses are Agree, 33.33% are Disagree, and 16.66 are Neutral, which indicates a **positive** attitude toward using online learning mode to improve speaking skills.

Table 7 The learners' perceptions of statement 3

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
SA	7	23.33%	6
A	13	43.33%	
N	3	10%	
D	7	23.33%	
SD	0	0%	

The table above presents the results of the subjects' perception of improving their listening skills in online learning. The table above shows that 23.33% of the responses show a Strongly Agree (SA) and 43.33% Agree (A). Moreover, 10% of the subjects' perceptions were Neutral (N), and 23.33% Disagreed (D), which shows a **negative** attitude toward using online learning to improve listening skills.

Table 8 The learners' perceptions of statement 4

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
SA	0	0%	6
A	5	16.66%	
N	10	33.33%	
D	15	50%	
SD	0	0%	

Statement 4 is concerned with subjects' perceptions regarding improving their writing skills in online learning. The results have shown that 16.66 % of the responses show an Agree (A), 33.33% Neutral (N) and 50% Disagree (D). The mean score is 6, which shows a **negative** response.

It has been already mentioned that the questionnaire consists of two parts. The obtained results of the first part have revealed different perceptions regarding the challenges of using online learning amidst the covid-19 pandemic. It has been reported that the subjects have varied perceptions (positive and negative) perceptions regarding online learning; for instance, 60 % of the subjects indicate that they face challenges in online classes and doing assignments.

In terms of comparing the offline mode to the online mode of study, the obtained results have shown that the 20 % of the subjects showed Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD), which is a **negative** indication of using the online learning mode.

Moreover, it has been reported that the subjects were hesitant regarding the methodological challenges of learning in online classes and doing assignments online. The findings show that 60% of respondents were Neutral, and 20% Agreed, which reveals a **negative** perception regarding the methodological challenges of learning in online classes and doing assignments.

Further, the subjects' perceptions of the offline class as more interactive and a proper classroom discipline; the results show that 60 % of the responses Agree (A), and 20% are Neutral (N), which shows a **positive** response. The subjects believe that the offline class is much more interactive and a proper discipline of the classroom.

The second part of the used questionnaire in the present study was about the subjects' perception of using online learning to improve their soft skills. The first statement is meant to find the subjects' perceptions regarding improving their reading skills through online classes with the same efficiency as offline mode. The findings have revealed that most subjects (40%) believe that online learning can improve their reading skills. It has also been observed that the subjects' perceptions regarding enhancing their speaking skills through online learning showed that 50% of the responses are Agree, 33.33% are Disagree, and 16.66 are Neutral, which indicates a positive attitude.

On the other hand, the subjects' perceptions of improving the listening skills in online learning show that 23.33% of the responses show a Strongly Agree (SA) and 43.33% Agree (A), which consider a positive response. The last statement is concerned with subjects' perceptions regarding improving their writing skills in online learning. The findings have revealed that 16.66 % of the responses show an Agree (A), 33.33% Neutral (N), and 50% Disagree (D), which shows a **negative** response.

The present study reveals the ESL postgraduate perceptions, whether in the challenges of using the online learning mode amidst the covid-19 crisis or regarding improving English soft skills using the online learning mode. The study's findings are in line with studies conducted by Akuratiya & Meddage (2020), Khanum & Alam (2021) and Tanjung & Utomo (2021).

5. Conclusion

Shifting the teaching and learning process from a combination of face-to-face and online learning to fully online learning is the result of the covid-19 pandemic. The world has witnessed a wide use of online learning due to the lockdown of educational institutions. Despite the different opinions and considerations regarding the effectiveness of online learning and teaching amid the covid-19 crisis, in the end, online learning has shown an essential and underestimated role in academic purposes. The findings have revealed a mix of perceptions (positive and negative) regarding online learning amid covid-19. The subjects have shown negative perceptions regarding online classes and doing assignments. It has been observed that there is a disparity in subjects' perceptions when it comes to comparing the offline mode to the online mode of study, which is a negative indication of using the online learning mode. Moreover, it has been found that the subjects were doubtful regarding the methodological challenges of learning in online classes and doing assignments online. The obtained results reveal a negative perception regarding the methodological challenges of learning in online classes and doing assignments. Additional, the subjects' perception of the offline class is much more interactive and a proper classroom discipline; the results show a positive response, indicating that subjects believe that the offline class is much more interactive and a proper discipline in the classroom. It has been reported that most subjects believe that online learning can improve their soft skills. positive perceptions have also been reported regarding enhancing their reading, speaking, and listening skills through online learning. On the other hand, the subjects' perceptions of improving their writing skills in online learning negatively.

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