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Exploring Teachers' and Students' Attitudes on Non-Formal Online English Learning: A Case Study from EYL Papua Students

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.24090/celti.2025.1319>

Pages:

293-302

Abstract: This study investigates the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the use of virtual classrooms to support English as a Foreign Language (EFL) proficiency, particularly among young learners in Papua. It aims to identify both the benefits and challenges of online learning in a non-formal education context that offers a fully digital learning environment. The research involved two teachers and two students, with data gathered through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. A qualitative descriptive approach was used to analyze the participants' responses. The results reveal generally positive attitudes from both teachers and students toward virtual classrooms as effective tools for facilitating the teaching and learning of English. However, the study also highlights significant obstacles, particularly related to unstable internet connections and limited access to appropriate digital devices. These technical difficulties posed challenges for both parties in maintaining smooth interaction and instructional flow. Despite these setbacks, the study underscores the potential of virtual classrooms in enhancing English language education in remote areas like Papua. By examining key components such as technology use, instructional methods, teaching media, and assessment strategies, the research offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to improve the quality and accessibility of online English instruction. It also emphasizes the importance of fostering digital literacy as part of broader educational development efforts in under-resourced regions.

Keywords: *online classrooms; english for young learners (EYL); non-formal education*

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Introduction

The 21st century has brought substantial shifts in educational paradigms due to technological advancements. According to Todo & Budiarta (2018), with the advancement of information and communication technology, education has shifted from face-to-face to online learning (Cited in Ersani, 2021). This allows students to engage in language learning remotely, overcoming geographical and time zone barriers. Research has shown that online learning can enhance students' learning outcomes when effectively supported by technology, instructional design, and teacher-student interactions (Volery & Lord, 2000; Alberth, 2011). Consequently, numerous online courses are now accessible, provided by a range of educational institutions, both formal and non-formal.

G. Siemens (2005) explains that the growing emphasis on informal and non-formal learning aligns with the "lifelong learning" approach which allows individuals to continually adapt and enhance their professional skills in response to the rapid evolution of technology and job markets (Melnik, 2023). Non-formal education can be categorized into various groups, including courses, training centers, learning groups, centers for residents' learning activities, and other non-formal institutions (Sudjana, 2001; ISCED, 2011). It aims as a complement or substitute for formal education in order to ensure universal access to education across all age groups (Sudjana, 2001; Moghal et al, 2020). These roles collectively endorse the concept of lifelong education. Now with the advancement of technology, those aims can be executed online.

Online learning refers to the utilization of diverse technological tools that operate through the web for educational purposes (Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020). Researchers highlight several key factors to support them: effectiveness, technology, instructor-student characteristics, student and teacher characteristics, instructional design, digital literacy, and language skills. (Alberth, 2011; Volery and Lord, 2000; Williams and Deci, 1996). However, Iftanti et al. (2023) listed several demotivational aspects in online learning, including technology, teacher behaviors, student attitudes, and other external factors.

In the Papua context, online learning is a new teaching and learning approach since there is not much research conducted yet. Previous research revealed that Papuan students faced challenges in enhancing their English-speaking skill (Sahib et al, 2022). In another research, teachers faced challenges such as poor internet connection, free-riders and unfamiliarity with technology (Butarbutar et al, 2023). Regarding internet connection as one of the crucial things in an online learning environment, the ICT Development Index (IP-TIK) of Papua in 2019 was only 3.33 which put Papua on bottom rank. This shows that the challenges of online learning in terms of availability and ease of internet access would be the biggest issue.

Nonetheless, as one of the regions whose Digital Literacy Index is in 12th rank in Indonesia, it has shown that there is a hope for the development of ICT-based learning in Papua. However, there is currently a lack of research examining it, specifically in Papuan context. This study aims to explore online teachers' and Papuan learners' perceptions in the use of technology, along with its instruments such as, syllabus, teaching strategies, media and assessment, within a non-formal online English learning environment. Furthermore, the findings of the study are expected to provide recommendations for improvement in those aspects. The study addresses the objectives by investigating the following research questions:

1. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of non-formal online English learning in terms of technology, teaching strategies, media and assessment?
2. What challenges do they face, and how do these affect their experiences?

Methods

This data was investigated in a non-formal English online learning in Indonesia which offers online teaching and learning processes. To ensure the research, the writer involved two teachers and two Papuan students by using semi-structured interview questions which were conducted online. Local students were chosen because the writer wanted to explore their experiences and thoughts on non-formal online learning. The questions were limited on technology use, teaching strategies, and assessment.

The data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach. The researcher transcribed the interviews and carefully examined the responses to identify recurring themes related to technology use, teaching strategies, and assessment in the virtual learning environment. An inductive coding process was also used, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the participants' answers. Furthermore, the researcher used member checking by asking participants to review their responses and confirm their accuracy in order to ensure the credibility of the findings.

Results & discussion

1. Learners' perspectives

The findings from student interviews revealed several key insights regarding online learning experiences. Here are several major findings which were collected from the semi-structured interviews.

a. Use of Technology

In terms of technology and internet support, students expressed a reliance on certain applications such as Google Meet for online courses. Additionally, they found online learning comfortable due to its simplicity and the convenience offered by technology. This was based on the results of interviews conducted with A and D, who were active students in one of online platform in Indonesia.

'I find online learning is enjoyable. I've been in the Superstar class for six months, and I'm content with how we learn online.'

This result aligns with Hastomo & Zulianti (2021); Al Faruq et al. (2022); Purwoko et al. (2022); Pham & Ly (2024), who found that students perceived synchronous online learning through Google Meet as effective, high engagement and creativity, time-saving, and comfortable. In short, according to these studies, well-structured, accessible technology improves the comfort, autonomy, and overall learning experience of students who learn online.

However, challenges include dependence on internet quality and the need for device preparation before classes, indicating potential barriers. Students also highlight occasional issues with speakers in their devices but note that these are quickly resolved. Previous research, Vietnamese EFL Learners' Perspectives on Learning English Online and Employability, Huynh et. Al (2023), also showed that there were various factors encouraging participants to select online English courses, such as time flexibility, teacher-student interaction, cost-saving, teaching materials, and teaching methods. They also faced some challenges when studying English online in terms of practicality issues and professional competence of online instructors.

b. Use of Teaching Equipment and Strategies

Secondly, concerning syllabus and books, on the other hand, students mentioned the use of certain books in this online course, such as *Cambridge* books to support the learning goals. On the other hand, they shared varied perspectives on the importance of learning objectives. A correspondent considered them as a crucial part for guiding their studies.

While the other found them less significant since she prioritized on the understanding of the lessons. This divergence aligns with Ludy et al. (2016), who found that while some students were motivated by clearly defined objectives, others were more focused on the practical grasp of course material over formal learning goals.

c. Use of Teaching Media

Furthermore, in terms of teaching and learning activities, students expressed enjoyment in activities like quizzes, particularly those related to the day's topic. Additionally, activities that involved playing while learning, such as using applications like Bamboozle, were perceived as interesting and effective. In line with teaching activities, teaching media, including YouTube and images, were acknowledged as interesting and beneficial for learning. Therefore, the result showed that the learning process seems interactive and engaging. It aligns with the previous research, *The Use of Interactive Learning Technology in Institutions of Higher Learning*, conducted by Abykanovaa et. al (2016). The result revealed that interactive learning systems help improve the overall structure of the learning process and boost student progress.

d. Use of Assessment

Lastly, regarding assessment, correspondents mention various assessment methods, including listening, writing, and regular exams covering all four language skills. The use of technology, such as *Liveworksheet*, was highlighted as a method for conducting assessments efficiently. The use of such enjoyable and interesting assessments have impacted significant progress in their English language skills, including writing, listening, speaking, and reading. Thus, the results of exams and rankings also indicated positive academic advancements.

The responses were summarized as follows:

Table 1. Perceptions of Students' Respondents Regarding the Use of Technology, Teaching Equipment and Strategies, Teaching Media and Assessment in an online English platform.

Categories	Student Number and Statements	
	Student 1	Student 2
USE OF TECHNOLOGY	"Online learning is convenient since I don't need extensive preparation like regular school, and technology streamlines everything. However, a challenge is relying on a stable internet connection; poor connectivity can lead to canceled classes. Additionally, I must set up my devices 30 minutes before the class, as my laptop can be slow"	"I find online learning is enjoyable. I've been in the <i>Superstar</i> class for six months, and I'm content with how we learn online. It's comfortable as I can use my phone instead of going somewhere. The only issue is the phone speaker, which can be annoying with sudden sound issues, but it's easily fixed by adjusting the volume button."
TEACHING STRATEGIES	"The most interesting activity is when I play while learning. Like, there's an app called Bamboozle, where you get questions, and if you answer them, you get points. Also, I kinda enjoy doing the exercises the teacher gives us."	"I enjoy playing quizzes in class, especially on the current topic. It helps me understand and reinforce what we learned that day. Succeeding in the <i>Quizizz</i> makes me feel like I've grasped the topic well."

Categories	Student Number and Statements	
	Student 1	Student 2
TEACHING MEDIA	"The media used is interesting. Like, for example, my teacher uses YouTube or images when explaining the material."	"I find it fascinating to learn new things from what she shows us. Last time, we explored the topic of planets, including our galaxy, the Milky Way. It was so interesting"
ASSESSMENT	"My teacher regularly conducts those exams. The tests usually cover the four skills: listening, speaking, writing, and reading. My teacher uses existing technology, like LiveWorksheet."	"So, there will be various things, starting from listening, then writing, and there's also, like, speaking, but I guess it's not there, just writing and listening. Later, there will be around five questions and then submit them to her email."

Overall, the findings suggested a generally positive outlook on online learning experiences. Students' appreciations on the benefits of technology, engaging learning activities, and improvements in language skills are highlighted as key findings. However, challenges related to technology and internet access were also acknowledged as areas that might impact the learning experiences.

2. Teachers' perspectives

The writer involved herself as one of the respondents in this study. Another one was a teacher who has been teaching online in for almost a year. This aimed as a reflection for improving teaching practices. As mentioned by Schön (1992), reflective practice is crucial for teachers to engage in continuous learning and to adapt their teaching strategies based on real-world experiences. By reflecting on their teaching, educators can identify areas for growth, better understand their students' needs, and make informed decisions to enhance the learning process.

Here are some key findings from teachers' interviews which will provide valuable insights into the experiences of educators in the context of online teaching.

a. Use of Technology

Teachers indicated the use of Google Meet for online courses, emphasizing the crucial role of applications in supporting virtual classrooms. Additionally, positive feelings were noted in teaching online, with a sense of ease and fulfillment derived from observing students' improvements. Furthermore, parental support was needed in lower-level classes which contributes significantly to the learning process. This aligns with the previous research which stated that technology is one of the key factors to support online learning (Alberth, 2011).

However, the main difficulties faced were internet connectivity and the functionality of students' devices. Teachers observe situations where resolving issues with devices may result in delays to the teaching timetable. Moreover, common challenges include sustaining student concentration in certain stages of learning, especially lower level, where parental support was needed. Kamilah (2023) stated that poor internet connectivity and parents' assistance are two main challenges in online learning to EYL. Thus, it cannot be denied that

the reliance of technology, internet connectivity and parental support are still faced by both students and teachers.

b. Use of Teaching Equipment and Strategies

Based on the interview, educators adapted materials and books downloaded from *BBC.com* which are later modified according to the English proficiency levels and learning goals of the students. The formulation of learning goals, however, was not clearly explained to the upper level of students. The lower level of students, on the other hand, would get their learning objectives explicitly. In contrast, Locke and Latham (2020) mentioned that it is crucial for teachers to set the learning targets and explain them in order to create clear directions in the learning process.

Meanwhile, teachers utilized a collection of stored materials and several teaching methods, then customize them based on the proficiency levels of students, to achieve the learning targets. Additionally, they tended to use non-monotony teaching methods in order to avoid boredom in class. Lastly, repetitive subjects were sometimes needed due to students' lack of understanding, specifically to lower level of learners.

c. Use of Teaching Media

In line with the chapter, teachers used several teaching media to prevent boredom in the learning process. It can be seen from how the two respondents used such media to support the teaching and learning in class, such as the use of online educational games, YouTube, and Canva. Rahman (2023) in his research reported that there is a significant outcome between students who received instruction without the use of interactive learning media and the ones who received instruction with interactive learning media. Students who received instruction with interactive learning media showed positive impacts to their performance in class.

d. Use of Assessment

There were two categories of assessments discussed. Monthly test was aimed to review unit materials in order to measure learners' understanding on particular topics. The other test was conducted every four months which aims to evaluate students' improvement. Furthermore, the inclusion of parents in discussions about progress is emphasized as a component of the assessment process. Those assessments were completely held online by using a website, called Liveworksheet, which students can access by simply clicking the link and then submit it directly to the teacher. According to Gedil & Aydin (2023), online testing and assessment is a rather new phenomenon and fits well into the 21st-century language teaching context since it is the natural outcome of changing and evolving education systems with improving technology.

In short, the responses are summarized as follows:

Table 1. The Perceptions of Teachers' Respondents Regarding the Use of Technology, Teaching Equipment & Strategies, Teaching Media and Assessment in an online English platform.

Categories	Student Number and Statements	
	Respondent 1	Respondent 2
USE OF TECHNOLOGY	"I usually use Google Meet for teaching, and it has been comfortable so far. Teaching online, especially elementary school classes, is less challenging than I thought. Parents' support is crucial and greatly aids the learning process. Challenges typically involve network issues and occasional student focus lapses. If there's a connectivity problem, parents are promptly informed through <i>WhatsApp</i> ."	"We use Google Meet for this course. I find it comfortable since I observed notable progress in students. Yet, challenges mainly faced are the internet and students' devices. Device issues occasionally cause delays in teaching due to necessary troubleshooting."
TEACHING STRATEGIES	"There are many things that need to be improved in the way of teaching for now because I often feel that what I convey may not be understood by the students, so I have to repeat to explain."	"With my extensive teaching experience, I have a wealth of stored materials, then later easily adjusted to students' levels. However, there's room for improvement; upgrading my device would enhance optimal teaching without glitches."
TEACHING MEDIA	"I usually use YouTube, or learn through playing games related to the material, and create PowerPoint presentations as interesting as possible."	"I tend to avoid monotony in learning by creating engaging materials, such as explaining topics through educational games. Additionally, I utilize apps like <i>YouTube</i> , <i>Canva</i> , and others for varied learning experiences."
ASSESSMENT	"The assessment is done by reviewing the material they have learned. For example, at each final meeting, we review and then provide monthly tests."	"We use two test types: monthly tests for unit material review and a test every four months to gauge students' progress. Following the progress test, there's a meeting with parents to discuss the outcomes of the past four months' learning."

In summary, based on the interviews, the result highlighted the dual role of technology as both a facilitator and a source of challenges in online teaching, such as unstable internet connection and unsupported devices. Additionally, the utilization of certain books and interactive teaching aid was one of the indicators that supports the learning goals. Lastly, the use of online assessments was also necessary in order to measure the progress of students.

Conlusions and recommendation

This study examined the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding non-formal online English learning, with a focus on the use of technology, teaching strategies, media, and assessment. By analyzing the experiences of two teachers and two students in Papua, the research revealed generally positive attitudes towards online learning. Digital tools such as Google Meet and YouTube have made learning more interactive and engaging, which aligns with Huynh et al. (2023), who noted that EFL learners benefited from the flexibility and engagement provided by online platforms. The study also showed improvements in students' English skills, as learners mentioned progress due to varied assessment methods like quizzes and online exercises, aligning with the work of Gedil & Aydin (2023), who emphasized the role of online assessments in language improvement.

Despite these positive outcomes, both teachers and students faced challenges related to internet connectivity and device functionality, which disrupted the learning process. These technical difficulties are common in underdeveloped regions like Papua, where poor infrastructure exacerbates the challenges of online learning, as supported by research from Iftanti et al. (2023) and Sahib et al. (2022). To improve the effectiveness of ICT-based learning in such areas, it is crucial for the government and educational stakeholders to invest in better infrastructure. Alberth (2011) and Volery & Lord (2000) highlight that when reliable infrastructure is in place, online learning can help bridge educational gaps in remote areas. Further research should use involve larger sample sizes since we have seen the potential of mobile-assisted learning usage in Papua.

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