



The Controversy of Online Learning in English Education

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss the controversy of implementing online learning in English education, focusing on the challenges and impacts on student engagement and the effectiveness of language skills acquisition. This study used qualitative and quantitative methods involving 75 participants, consisting of 70 students and 5 English teachers from public schools in the Banyuwangi area. Data were obtained through questionnaires administered directly that explored experiences, perceptions, and challenges during online learning, as well as in-depth interviews with English teachers to obtain a more comprehensive picture of strategies and obstacles in the teaching process. The results showed that 70% of students had been participating in online learning for more than a year, but 55% of them came from areas with limited internet access. The main findings showed that students' active engagement was greatly influenced by external factors such as parental support, internet network quality, and teachers' ability to use interactive media. Teachers who utilize visual platforms and project-based exercises tend to be more successful in retaining students' attention. However, challenges remain, especially in accurately assessing speaking skills, due to the limited real-time two-way interaction. The implications of these findings suggest that teacher training in technology-based interactive learning design is critical. In addition, there needs to be collaboration between schools and parents to create a conducive online learning environment. In the long term, education policies need to consider the integration of blended learning approaches so that digital flexibility can be balanced with the effectiveness of direct supervision and interaction.

Keywords: *Online learning, English language education, Student engagement, Social interaction, Educational technology*

Introduction

Online learning has become the primary solution to ensure the continuity of education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it provides flexibility and easy access to digital learning resources, its implementation in English language education poses its own challenges (Benjamin-Ohwodede et al., 2024) . English subjects rely heavily on direct interaction, language practice, and active student involvement in learning activities. In the context of online learning, many students have difficulty maintaining participation and concentration due to limited two-way interaction, weak teacher supervision, and low learning motivation (González et al., 2023)

On the other hand, although various studies have examined the effectiveness of online learning in general, there are still limitations in the literature that specifically discuss the dynamics of online English learning, especially in areas with limited digital infrastructure. (Aroonsrimarakot et al., 2023) , (Cavanaugh et al., 2023) . Lack of attention to aspects such as parental support, connectivity quality, teachers' interactive media usage strategies, and students' social conditions lead to a lack of comprehensive understanding of barriers to student engagement and the effectiveness of online teaching and learning processes (Króliczewska et al., 2023) , (Xiong & Tang, 2021) .

Seeing this gap, research is needed that can provide a more comprehensive mapping of the experiences of English students and teachers during online learning. (van Der Stap et al., 2024) . This research is important because it can provide a basis for the development of more contextual learning strategies, especially in areas with limited internet access. In addition, the results of this study are expected to encourage the adoption of more adaptive and flexible learning approaches such as blended learning, in order to overcome the limitations of fully online learning.

This study aims to critically examine the controversy in the implementation of online learning in English language education. This study uses a mixed approach with data collected through questionnaires to students and in-depth interviews with teachers in the Banyuwangi area. The main focus is to understand the extent to which student engagement is influenced by various external factors, as well as identifying the challenges faced by teachers in designing and implementing online learning effectively.

Based on the background and formulation, this research is focused on answering the following questions:

1. How are students' experiences in taking part in online English learning, especially in terms of engagement and motivation to learn?
2. What are the main challenges faced by teachers in implementing online English learning?
3. What external factors influence the effectiveness of online learning in areas with limited internet access?
4. How can a blended learning approach be applied as a solution to improve the effectiveness of English learning in the future?

Method

This study uses a mixed method approach, namely combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The aim is to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of students' and teachers' experiences in online English learning, especially in areas with limited internet access. England (Uygun & Cesur, 2024), (Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2021), (Oraif & Elyas, 2021).

Research Participants and Demographic Information

This study involved 75 participants, consisting of:

1. 70 grade X high school students from public schools in the Banyuwangi area.
 - 1) Age range: 15–17 years
 - 2) Gender: 39 female, 31 males
 - 3) Internet access: 55% come from areas with low to medium internet access
 - 4) Duration of online learning: 70% of students have been studying online for more than 1 year
2. 5 English teachers, all of whom have at least a bachelor's degree and have more than 5 years of teaching experience. Three of them teach in schools with medium technology facilities, and two others in schools with limited digital access.

Data collection technique

The questionnaire was given directly to students in printed form, consisting of 20 question items using a Likert scale of 1–5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree), covering the topics:

- 1) Level of engagement and motivation in online classes
- 2) Difficulty in understanding the material
- 3) Frequency of use of interactive learning media
- 4) Parental support and home learning environment

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 English teachers, with each interview lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. The interview guide covered the following topics:

- 1) Strategies used during online learning
- 2) Obstacles faced (technical, pedagogical, and social)
- 3) Observation of student engagement
- 4) Assessment of students' language skills during online learning
- 5) Opinions on the potential for implementing blended learning

Ethics and Participant Consent

This study has obtained approval from the school as the educational organizing authority. Before data collection, all participants were given a written informed consent sheet explaining the purpose, benefits, and rights of participants including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. The identities of all respondents are guaranteed confidentiality using codes (eg: G1, S1, etc.), and the data is used only for academic purposes.

Data Trust and Credibility

To maintain data validity and credibility:

- 1) Data triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of student questionnaires and teacher interviews.
- 2) Member checking was conducted by confirming interview quotes and interpretations with the two teachers interviewed.
- 3) Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, with manual coding to identify key patterns and themes.

Data Saturation Strategy

Data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged from the fifth interview. The last two interviews showed the same pattern as the previous interviews, so they are considered to be quite representative of the target

population in the context of this study.

Researcher Background and Potential Bias

The researcher has a background as an English Language Student at KH. Mukhtar Syafa'at University with online learning experience during the pandemic. This provides closeness to the context, but can also give rise to interpretive bias. To reduce bias, the researcher maintains a reflective position (reflexivity), records personal assumptions in field notes, and involves the Supervisor in the thematic validation process.

Handling Differences in Interpretation

To address differences in data interpretation, analysis was conducted with one colleague (peer debriefing). If there were differences in interpretation of emerging themes, discussions were conducted with reference to the original transcript and the context of the interview. Only themes that were mutually agreed upon were included in the final analysis results.

Findings and Discussion

1. Level of Student Engagement and Motivation in Online Learning

Based on the results of the questionnaire on 70 students, it was found that 58% of respondents chose neutral to disagree answers to the statement "I feel motivated during online English learning." Only 24% agreed or strongly agreed. The following bar graph shows the distribution of student responses to the level of engagement:

Figure 1. Distribution of Student Engagement Levels in Online Learning

One student (1) stated, "I often feel bored because the teacher only sends assignments, there is no direct interaction." This highlights the importance of an interactive approach in online learning. This finding is in line with studies that state that low engagement often occurs in online classes without active two-way communication (Alamer et al., 2023), (Ciloglu & Ustun, 2023), (Gumasing & Castro, 2023).

2. Difficulty in Understanding English Material Online

As many as 64% of students stated that they had difficulty understanding the material given online. G1 said, "Bad connections mean we can't use videos or interactive media. We can only send PDFs." Reliance on static materials reduces the quality of learning. This finding supports the research results stating that technological limitations have a significant effect on the effectiveness of online learning (Lockee, 2021), (Said, 2023), (Amponsah & Bekele, 2023), (Aljedaani et al., 2023), (He et al., 2023), (Kocdar & Bozkurt, 2023), (Baena-Perez et al., 2024), (Othman et al., 2024), (Sein-Echaluze et al., 2024), (Laamanen et al., 2024), (Królak & Zajac, 2024), (Seymour, 2024), (Martins et al., 2024) .

3. Teacher Strategies and Obstacles During Online Learning

From interviews with five teachers, three main themes emerged: (1) technical limitations, (2) difficulty monitoring students, and (3) lack of family support. G2 stated, "Students' parents often do not accompany them because they have to work." Meanwhile, G3 stated, "I use WhatsApp Voice Note to provide explanations because students do not have enough video call quota."

Table 1. Summary of Teacher Strategies in Online Learning:

Teacher	Media Used	Main Obstacles	Special Strategy
G1	WhatsApp, PDF	Network	Voice Note, self-practice
G2	Google Form, WA	Parental support	Daily Reminder
G3	WA and phone	Low interaction	Oral assessment via telephone

This strategy reflects adaptation to local realities and demonstrates the importance of flexibility in online learning approaches.

4. Comparison with Previous Studies and Contradictory Findings

Some teachers stated that students were more active in asking questions via online messages than in face-to-face classes. This is contrary to the general literature which states that students tend to be passive online (Lei & Medwell, 2021) , (Shrestha et al., 2022) , (Kwon et al., 2021) , (Lei & Medwell, 2021) . A possible explanation is that students' shyness is reduced when asking questions via text messages. This suggests that proper online system design can increase participation.

5. Implications for Stakeholders and Practical Recommendations

For teachers, these findings suggest the need for specialized training in online teaching based on technological limitations. Schools need to provide simple and flexible technical support. For policymakers, it is important to provide quota subsidies and cheap internet access, especially for areas with difficult internet access. Meanwhile, students and parents need to be encouraged to create stable learning routines at home.

Technology recommendations include:

- 1) Use of lightweight platforms such as Telegram or WA EduBot.
- 2) Integration of audio and text-based content, not just video.
- 3) Creating hybrid print and digital modules for students without stable internet access.

6. Limitations and Transferability of Findings

The findings are limited to 10th graders in one district and only five teachers. Because it is not longitudinal, long-term dynamics are not detected. However, the patterns that emerge are transferable to similar contexts with technologically limited districts and students from low-middle income families.

Further research is recommended to:

- 1) Examining online learning strategies in the Banyuwangi region with quantitative comparison.
- 2) Developing online modules based on local content.
- 3) Measuring the long-term impact of online learning on English language learning outcomes.

With an adaptive and needs-based approach, online learning systems can remain relevant and inclusive in the future.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complexity of online English learning from the perspective of students and teachers. Student engagement declined due to technical and social constraints. Teachers showed adaptation through interactive media, but were still limited by infrastructure and time. Evaluation of learning remains a major challenge.

The theoretical contribution of this study is to broaden the understanding of contextual factors that influence online learning in areas with disabilities. Practically, these findings indicate the need for:

- 1) Teacher training in digital pedagogy
- 2) Provision of quota and device subsidies
- 3) Active role of parents

Policy and Practice Recommendations

- 1) For Schools: Implement blended learning with adaptive modules.
- 2) For Government: Develop digital infrastructure funding policies for public schools in the regions.
- 3) For Teachers: Use project-based approaches and online formative assessments.

Research Limitations

This study is cross-sectional and does not include longitudinal aspects. Validation through triangulation has been done, but not all teachers were interviewed in depth.

Further Research Directions

- 1) Longitudinal study to observe changes in student motivation.
- 2) Experiments on the effectiveness of blended learning approaches.
- 3) Comparative study between regions

Final Reflection

The controversy over online learning is not just about technology, but also about system readiness, social relations, and pedagogical capacity. Future learning must be more humane, flexible, and contextual.

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