ONLINE VS OFFLINE READING CLASSES: THE EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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A B S T R A C T

This qualitative study was conducted to identify the EFL university students' perspectives on online and offline reading classes. This study involved ten English students of the seventh semester, from one of the private universities in Malang who have excellent scores in English reading classes. Using a semi-structured interview, the students were asked about problems, difficulties, advantages, and reading understanding in online and offline classes. The data were analyzed using content analysis. The investigation triangulation was performed by involving two data analysts to triangulate the data. The result found in this study are students frequently experience problems with unstable internet connections, communication difficulties with lecturers, textbook download troubles, and eyestrain from reading online content. Whereas, the advantages are students have more reading sources, have time and reading topics flexibility, and are cost-effective. Moreover, EFL university students' problems or difficulties in offline reading classes are more cost, limitation of reading time and topics, and few reading resources. While the advantages of offline reading classes are enjoyable, interactive, and communicative.

Introduction

EFL reading classes in Indonesian education are often conducted in classrooms, but COVID-19 has transformed it. Early in 2020, the existence of the Corona virus, also known as COVID-19 has immobilized the entire world. The COVID-19 virus has had an impact on education in Indonesia, where the education minister implemented a policy to conduct teaching and learning activities online. The government is developing guidelines for keeping a distance in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19. These rules encourage people to stay at home, avoid crowd activities, and interact with many people. Then implemented work from home, allowing individuals to do both their work and their schooling from home. The students switch from offline reading activities to online reading activities.

After around two and a half years of online education, it has gradually become possible to engage in activities away from the house. The community begins to work, as students slowly begin to return to class. English learning has also started face-to-face, as well as reading classes. Well known, reading is one of the key components of learning English. As stated by Hung and Ngan (2015), vocabulary, writing, fluency, and speaking are all improved by having a good reading framework. This means the more the students read, the more new information they will also learn.

Perspective played a significant part in this study since it was used to gather information from EFL university students on their perspective of online Vs offline reading classes. In light of this, students' perspective is crucial, especially for lecturers or educators. The way that students perceive learning a foreign language has significant implications for how learning and teaching go on in the future (Hromova, 2019). The

teacher can better understand the needs of each student in terms of learning by knowing about their perceptions.

The main difference between face-to-face learning and online learning is that learners and teachers do not physically interact. Furthermore, the techniques and difficulties varied. Online reading lessons are usually delivered via several platforms, such as Google Classroom, which, according to Asma Ul Husna, Apriliaswati, and Surmiyati's research (2022), Google Classroom provides practical features, enjoyable activities, and affordability. Cakrawati (2017) found that since it saves time and effort, students believe that adopting online learning platforms in the learning process is effective. As stated by Sari and Sulistyo (2021), providing flexible access to content and teaching at any time, from any location conveniently, digital tools in an English language classroom can support students' learning in a more collaborative and engaging atmosphere. Additionally, they believe that online education is environmentally friendly because it might reduce the amount of paper needed for tasks. Related online and offline, especially reading classes have previously been the topics of earlier studies. Regarding the research provided by Untari (2020), the study's results support two assumptions: first, that the benefits of online reading have had a significant impact on learners' vocabulary understanding; and second, that students have been highly engaged in the educational reading evaluation they have been reading throughout semester.

Offline learning is an education that takes place in the classroom. Students who preferred the offline lesson, who were somewhat more numerous than those who preferred the online lesson, frequently mentioned better understanding as the reason for their decision (Wright, 2017). Online learning is less efficient than offline learning. The reason why students prefer offline learning is that it is easier for them to communicate, concentrate, be active, and enjoy the course more during offline learning (Rachmah, 2020). According to Wright (2017) in offline classrooms, EFL students learn the content more thoroughly in a classroom setting and have the opportunity to communicate with the professor or other students to further explain concepts. Besides, according to Riadil (2020), offline reading classes have several issues. The issues are that they sometimes find it challenging to understand the texts, learn how to pronounce words correctly, master the vocabulary, connect word ideas, and understand the topics of the texts that serve different cultures. They also have problems inferring the information and separating the main ideas from the supporting ideas in the texts, as well as coming up with methods to find related topics based on their knowledge or experience. Moreover, students should also read material on a computer screen or in hypertext in online reading classes. Despite the fact that a study conducted by Kazazoğlu (2020) showed that students who read digital texts more frequently did not perform any better on the reading comprehension exams. Furthermore, research combining online and offline reading classes, described as reading using blended instruction, was carried out by Akut et al. (2020) and shown to be effective in improving reading comprehension.

Understanding the perspectives of students in both online and offline reading classrooms can be beneficial. As study by Racmah (2020), students prefer offline learning to online learning. Hence, the purpose of this study is to identify students' perspectives on both online and offline classes that focus on reading skills. The teachers or lecturers can modify what students dislike and enhance what they find appealing after learning how they see things, whether it be in regards to how to educate or how to present material to students. It also can help English teachers or lecturers in determining

whether to conduct online or offline reading classes based on students' perspectives. This study is also intended to serve as a resource for both students who originally enrolled in offline reading classes before switching to online reading classes programs and students who enroll in online reading classes before switching to offline reading classes. The objectives of this study are to investigate the perspectives of EFL university students about offline reading classes as well as online reading classes.

Due to the aforementioned issues, the researcher decides to perform a study to find out how EFL university students perceive online and offline reading classes. Every student will develop a perspective as a result of their experiences in both online and offline classroom settings, whether it be knowledge gained or the learning environment. The participants' previous experiences influenced how the lecturer evaluated the circumstances surrounding the online and offline learning processes.

Research Method

To address the research problem and understand how EFL students perceive online and offline reading classes, this study used a qualitative methodology. Based on the students' experiences taking offline reading classes in the 1st semester, followed by online reading classes in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th semesters, ten EFL students in the seventh semester of one of Malang's private universities participated in this study.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. The self-construct interview question is the instrument that was employed in this study. This study takes data from 9 interview questions which asked about the EFL university students' perspectives on online and offline reading classes. The questions include some opening questions, students' problems, difficulties, advantages, and reading understanding. The interview questions used by the researcher were based on the problems and examples from previous research by Untari (2020) to obtain the necessary reliable data.

Before doing the interview, the ten EFL university students are asked about their agreement to be interviewed. Then, after the subjects have agreed to be the participant in this study, the ten students are being interviewed by face-to-face interviews. 9 interview questions were asked one by one to the subject interview and then continued by follow-up questions to obtain further information during an interview. To answer the interview questions, the subject interview needs the time approximately 45 minutes. The interview time was used maximally to get the maximal information. After collecting the data, the participant was asked to read the collecting data outcome to make sure each notion was the same as their thought. Then, the data were analyzed using content analysis.

Result and Discussion

According to the semi-structured interview that the ten EFL university students completed in which they responded to the 9 interview questions, they have both similar and diverse perspectives regarding the online and offline reading classes. Students' problems or difficulties, advantages, and reading understanding are the subjects of the interview questions. Most of the EFL university students in this study encountered problems or difficulties with their internet connection during online reading classes. They typically have signal issues when taking online reading classes from their homes or their respective locations. This study discovered that EFL university students' performance in their reading lessons is impacted by their internet connection. Moreover,

some students mentioned that it looks like there is less effective communication between students and lecturers in online reading classes.

Student 5
I need a stable internet connection... otherwise, it will be difficult for me to find reading materials and download textbooks provided by the lecturer.

Student 2
...To participate in these online reading classes, we require a substantial amount of internet quota...

Student 9
Connection issues were a challenge for me, and it consumed a significant amount of internet quota...

Student 3
Since taking online reading classes, communication between the students and the lecturers is constricted; occasionally, we want to ask a question but are constrained by unstable connections.

Those perspectives were related to a survey by Gilbert (2015) which revealed that some students found it difficult to access stable internet at home. Ineffective communication in these online reading classes occurred between students and lecturers. It was also being students' major issue in Purwadi et al. study (2020). Additionally, according to Nasution and Ahmad (2020), the findings indicated that students did not have positive opinions of online learning, this was due to several issues, including poor internet access, burdensome internet quotas, and difficulty communicating with lecturers. As a result, students were not prepared to use applications when online learning was conducted. Nonetheless, in this study, those difficulties had an impact on students' reading comprehension.

Hence, locating reading materials and downloading textbooks require a steady internet connection as the textbooks are utilized to follow online reading classes. Still referring to textbooks, sometimes locating the required text sources for online reading programs gives students several challenges. Such as sometimes purchased textbooks that are unavailable for access and textbooks whose contents are accessible but incomplete. This has grown to be a significant students' obstacle for online reading classes.

Student 4
I frequently run into difficulties when looking for reading materials. such as access-restricted, paid-for e-books. Then again, some books are available for free and can be viewed, but they lack sufficient information or are incomplete.

It should be emphasized that online reading classes have changed the way that students read who initially read using printed text, then changed to online text. Some students become less motivated to read as a consequence of this.

Student 1

I have to read by staring at the screen of my phone or laptop, and it wears my eyes out... especially if there is a lot of text to read. I also can not highlight or give notes on my books. Moreover, I get lazy in reading because the media I read does not come in the form of printed text.

Student 8

Online reading classes, in my opinion, are less effective because we are required to stare at a screen all the time. Reading becomes limited due to worn eyes and I'm too lazy to read.

This was confirmed by student 1 and 8 who felt their eyes were worn out when reading through a phone or laptop screen. With this, they can no longer read lengthy paragraphs online, and their comprehension suffered. Students also stated that when reading textbooks they can not highlight or note their reading books. According to Tseng (2010), the results of his study also indicated that students disliked reading from computer screens. Eye strain and the inability to take notes or underline text were the main issues.

In addition to any difficulties or problems, online reading classes do offer some advantages, according to the research subject. It has been discovered that students are able to access more reading resources and increase their reading intensity while taking online reading classes. They also stated that they have flexibility in choosing reading topics to read.

Student 3

... I can access more of the reading resources I want to access for my online reading course.

Student 5

I can read more because I have more flexibility to choose the reading material I want and like.

Student 9

By taking online reading classes, I can access a variety of reading resources without being limited to a single reading source.

The benefits of online reading classes, according to some respondents are also financially advantageous. There is no need for the students to purchase or print reading materials. Additionally, some students stated that online reading classes are flexible, practical, and enjoyable. They realized this since they can participate in online reading classes from any location without having to physically attend class. These are all consistent with Ni'mah and Umamah (2020), their study result showed that due to the use of e-books for reading, students would quickly continue their reading whenever and wherever they had free time and it was low cost.

Regardless of any issues or challenges as well as the benefits of online reading classes. The discussion will then shift to offline reading classes, which also present problems and advantages. Offline reading classes typically encounter few problems or difficulties. Inversely correlated with the cost-effectiveness of online reading classes for

EFL university students, some students claimed that the cost of printing reading materials or purchasing books was slightly higher for these offline reading classes.

Student 3
In offline reading classes, I have to buy books or print text files provided by the lecturer as reading material, so additional costs are required.

Student 1
The problem or difficulty I feel with offline reading classes is that it requires a small amount of money to print texts or buy books.

Some students also mentioned that taking offline reading classes has its limitations. Limitations on reading time and required reading topics are in concern. These limitations lead to reduce some students' understanding, and unfulfilled student needs for reading resources. Additionally, there were previously few reading resources due to a substandard library.

Student 5
For offline reading classes, reading time is limited. In addition, the reading sources that we read are usually predetermined, so that makes me less flexible in choosing reading topics... sometimes, limited time also makes me did not understand the context of my reading material.

Student 10
Sometimes the reading material for offline reading classes is limited to only one reading source.

Student 4
When an offline reading class was held before, my campus did not yet have a sufficient library, so I had difficulty finding the reading resources I needed for my reading class.

In line with one of the findings of Qarqez and Rashid (2016), participants' struggles with reading comprehension were caused by the limited time that they had to cognitively process the text. Besides that, there are still various reasons why students enjoy offline reading classes.

Student 4
Offline reading classes are fun activities... by carrying out offline reading classes, communication between lecturers and students, as well as interaction between students is getting better, instructions from lecturers are also very clear, and if you have something to ask, you can ask directly.

Student 6
Offline reading classes are excellent and highly effective; the lecturer's explanation is more detailed, and I can meet my lecturer individually outside of class sessions to ask questions about material that I don't understand.

One of the expressions above represents that offline reading classes are enjoyable and effective. The enjoyment that students feel is caused by the class atmosphere which makes them feel free to learn. Students can interact with their classmates and of course their reading lecturers. When they can interact and communicate well, they can exchange opinions about their understanding. This also supports the effectiveness of the offline reading classes themselves. In addition, some other students stated that when they took part in offline reading classes they became more focused, comfortable, and made it easier for them to understand the reading material. Moreover, students are much more enthusiastic when they can get direct feedback. Students can get direct feedback when participating in these offline reading classes. They also prefer printed text which did not cause eyes weariness and they can easily highlight or take notes of the materials' explanation.

Student 1

Offline reading classes are very interesting for me...I can interact with other readers directly, I also get feedback and suggestions from my lecturer for my reading mistakes. Moreover, I can give highlights in my textbook or give some notes.

Student 2

I like it more than online reading classes. I can read printed books, not on the handphone or laptop screen. It makes me comfortable and focused. I can also exchange ideas and give feedback to my friends.

Student 3

I like offline reading classes because they feel more effective and communicative. We can meet face-to-face with the lecturer directly, then get feedback or suggestions. In offline reading classes more monitored so that my learning motivation increases.

Student 5

I enjoy offline reading classes, for I can ask about some material I do not understand to my lecturer directly.

Student 7

I can understand and pay attention to the material explained by the lecturer's face to face... when I practice reading, I will immediately receive correction, advice, and motivation from my lecturer.

This is consistent with Wright (2017) research, which showed that more students generally connected offline courses with better motivation and more interest due to improved knowledge, valued classroom interaction with the lecturer and classmates, and feedback from the lecturer. Online reading classes cannot substitute for the interaction between students and professors that occurs in a classroom setting. The flexible and enjoyable interactions that students could experience in offline reading classes cannot be replicated online. Further, it has been said that offline learning is more effective than online learning according to the research findings (Racmah, 2020). Students prefer offline learning because they are able to comprehend the subject better, able to focus, be active, and enjoy studying. The studies above support the idea that offline reading classes can be effective, interactive, and communicative.

Conclusion

According to the student's perspective presented above, both online and offline reading classes present students with a variety of difficulties and advantages. It can be concluded that EFL students generally struggle with internet stability, difficulty communicating with the lecturer, downloading textbooks, and weary eyes in reading online text. Whereas, the advantages experienced by EFL students in online reading classes are that students have more reading sources, have time and reading topics flexibility, and are cost-effective. Moreover, EFL university students have problems or difficulties with offline reading classes such as more cost, limitation of reading time and topics, and few reading resources. While the advantages of offline reading classes are enjoyable and interactive also communicative.

Student preference information was also discovered in this study. Following an extended discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of both online and offline reading classes, students then share their preferences as well as the reasons behind their choices. Due to the flexibility of the time and reading topics, as well as the larger number of reading resources, three of the study's participants chose online reading classes. The other seven students prefer communicative, interactive, and non-eye-weary offline reading classes.

These students' preferences can represent that students prefer offline reading classes with its various advantages. The current research can be a general description for English teachers and help them in determining whether to conduct online or offline classes based on students' perspectives. For future researchers who are interested in taking a similar topic, this study hopefully can help them in arranging a literature review.

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