



P-ISSN 2355-2794  
E-ISSN 2461-0275

## Gender Perceptions of Benefits and Challenges of Online Learning in Malaysian ESL Classrooms during COVID-19

Khalilah Ramli<sup>1</sup>  
Aladdin Assaiqeli<sup>\*2</sup>  
Nor Azmi Mostafa<sup>2</sup>  
Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English Language, Centre for Languages and Foundation Studies, Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah, Kuala Kangsar 33000, MALAYSIA

<sup>2</sup>Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim 35900, MALAYSIA

### Abstract

*The current study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning implementation in ESL classrooms and how gender differences influence their perceptions. Participants were 60 undergraduate students from a private university in Perak, Malaysia, who enrolled in English language courses taken during the shift to online learning at the institution. The study utilizes a quantitative approach where data were collected using an adapted questionnaire in the form of Google Form. Data collected were analysed with independent samples t-test using the SPSS software. Overall, the majority of the students agreed that the implementation of online learning posed challenges for them. The students, however, showed unbiased opinions towards the benefits of the online learning implementation in the ESL classrooms. Based on the analysis, the study found that gender differences do not influence the students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning. The findings indicated that students do face difficulties in learning online and that there is a need for the lecturers to improve the teaching practices and strategies for online learning. The institution management is also recommended to*

---

\* Corresponding author, email: [assaiqeli@fbk.upsi.edu.my](mailto:assaiqeli@fbk.upsi.edu.my)

**Citation in APA style:** Ramli, K., Assaiqeli, A., Mostafa, N. A., & Singh, C. K. S. (2022). Gender perceptions of benefits and challenges of online learning in Malaysian ESL classroom during COVID-19. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 9(2), 613-631.

Received March 1, 2021; Revised October 20, 2021; Accepted April 16, 2022; Published Online May 23, 2022

<https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v9i2.21067>

*provide better resources and technical support for effective online learning.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, English as a Second Language, gender, online learning, perceptions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a major shift from the traditional to the online classroom since early 2020 due to the outbreak of COVID-19. This solution is currently promoted by most academic institutions due to the crisis (UNESCO, 2020). The traditional classes are now conducted virtually in order to continuously provide knowledge to the students and minimize disruption to the academic calendar. In Malaysia, with the closure of public and private educational institutions since March of 2020, the teaching and learning sessions have been conducted through online platforms, and later in May, the Higher Education Ministry announced that online university lectures are to continue until the end of the year (Landau, 2020).

Online learning is the experience of using different devices in synchronous or asynchronous environments where students can learn remotely and communicate with teachers and other students (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Many studies have been conducted to identify the perceptions pertaining to the benefits and challenges of its implementation in the classroom. However, Imsa-ard (2020) emphasized that studies conducted to understand the learner's perceptions of online learning's sudden implementation due to the crisis are found to be scarce. Hence, this study aims to revisit the learner's views on the benefits and challenges of the online learning implementation with the focus on the English as a Second Language classroom setting in a private university. The study through such an aim also seeks to shed light on the role of the virtual or online instructional environment in the development of interaction, viewed by researchers as the genesis of language learning (Assaiqeli, 2019).

Numerous studies have been conducted to explore the perceptions regarding the implementation of online learning in their institutions during the outbreak of COVID-19. In a study conducted by Nambiar (2020), to investigate the teachers' and students' perceptions of online learning in India during the pandemic of COVID-19, the researcher found that a majority of the respondents from both groups agreed that they prefer the classroom teaching mode over online learning mode.

In a study conducted by Minghat et al. (2020), regarding the Indonesian and Malaysian students' perceptions of online learning throughout COVID-19, the researchers found that respondents were mostly neutral about the implementation of online learning in their institutions. However, their findings also showed that the respondents perceived online learning to be passive, difficult in terms of instructions, and did not increase their motivation. Kumar and Tiwari (2021) also conducted a study to understand the students' perceptions regarding online learning in Punjab during COVID-19. The results of their study showed that most of the students accepted online education during the pandemic but did not prefer the learning mode as an alternative to traditional classroom learning. Their findings also revealed that there was no significant difference in the perceptions between genders.

Meanwhile, a majority of respondents had positive perceptions of online learning in a study conducted by Mad et al. (2020). In understanding the Malaysian UiTM students' perceptions of online learning implementation during the pandemic, their findings showed that the students preferred the hybrid learning mode, embedding the online learning into the traditional classroom setting. In another study by Baharum et al. (2021), to investigate perceptions of Malaysian students from private and public universities on online learning compared to face-to-face classrooms, the researchers found that most of the respondents preferred the traditional classroom learning over online learning. The findings of their study showed that the respondents perceived the traditional classroom to be more effective.

Although numerous studies have been conducted to investigate students' perceptions of the implementation of online learning during the pandemic (Baharum et al., 2021; Kumar & Tiwari, 2021; Mad et al., 2020; Minghat et al., 2020; Nambiar, 2020), limited research focused on ESL classrooms and the difference in perceptions between genders especially in Malaysia. Hence, this study aims to fill the existing gap and provide recommendations based on the findings.

The general purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of students towards the benefits and challenges of implementing online learning in ESL classrooms while the specific purpose of the study is to understand how gender differences are related to the students' perceptions. In order to meet the purposes of this study, the following questions were addressed:

- 1) What are students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom?
- 2) Is there a significant difference in male and female students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom?

Based on the research question, 'what are students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom?', the following hypotheses were constructed:

H<sub>0</sub>: There are no significant different perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom.

H<sub>1</sub>: There are significant different perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom.

In addition, based on the research question, 'is there a significant difference between male and female students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom?', the following hypotheses were constructed:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between male and female students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference between male and female students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews previous literature in relation to the benefits and challenges of online learning as well as the influence of gender differences on perceptions.

## **2.1 Students' Gender and Perceptions of Online Learning**

Understanding one's perception of a phenomenon may help to provide valuable insights. Perception is the man's core means of cognitive engagement with the environment and it could be elicited based on experience (Efron, 1969; Rojabi, 2020). Understanding students' opinions are very beneficial in educational research. According to Kulal and Nayak (2020), in the education system, students' views are what really matter. Without the students' acceptance of online education, it may not be sustainable in the future educational scene. Hence, it is important to acquire the students' perception of the implementation of online learning. Many factors can influence an individual's perception, including demographic variables such as age, gender, and race. According to Nielsen et al. (2017), gender diversity might help researchers in learning new things by diversifying their perspectives, interests, and study fields.

Murphrey and Arnold (2012) stated that in order to design efficient online course delivery techniques, it is important to first study students' demographics and how they use Internet-based technology. In a study by Lim (2004), it was found that in terms of gender disparities in computer use, female students managed the learning process using computers and the Internet significantly better than male students. In another related study, Murphrey and Arnold (2012) also suggested that technology can have a beneficial influence on participants' perceptions dependent on their gender and categorization. This shows that demographic variables do provide insight into the phenomenon being studied.

Regarding the demographic variables that influence perceptions of online learning, many previous studies have also been conducted to find gender differences in views of online learning. Tsokova et al. (2017) conducted a study to investigate the influence of gender, age, specialty, and previous e-learning experience on the opinions of healthcare students about online learning. From the students' perceptions, they found that students of different genders have different views of online learning and female students were more likely to accept the implementation.

A study by Mahawar and Nandedkar (2019), however, showed no significant effect made by gender on the perceived effectiveness of e-learning. Both male and female students were equally comfortable with online learning and had no gender biases toward online learning. A study by Rafiq et al. (2020), found a contradicting opinion from a study conducted in Pakistan in which male students showed more positive attitudes toward e-learning as compared to female students.

## **2.2 Benefits of Online Learning**

Studies on the implementation of online learning in recent years have shown that the new culture is perceived to be useful for schools as well as higher education institutions. Technology is an important component of online learning and the aid of technology is one of the benefits of online learning, which was also highlighted by Baxter (2020) and Gillett-Swan (2020). Educators and learners use technology mainly to communicate, provide instructions and make two-way feedback since there is a limitation to face-to-face communication. Hence, the use of technology offers the opportunity for students to engage in the language in order to communicate (Baxter,

2020; Gillett-Swan, 2020). For example, students are able to learn how to write proper emails to lecturers with proper and correct language use.

The development of the Internet also turns out to be helpful for students. Tareen and Haand (2020) reported that students perceived online learning as having the ability to promote student participation in class since they are able to actively engage themselves with teachers and other students, for example, through forums. The Internet also allows teachers and students to share content through Learning Management System (LMS) or messaging applications as well as communicate with each other despite the geographical distance between them (Mathew & Ebelelloanya, 2016).

With the Internet as well, online learning is made convenient to conduct research and have access to the latest information. Students are also more encouraged to do research online since they have accessibility during class (Paudel, 2020). Another feature of online learning in higher education is the use of LMS software. In a study conducted by Allo (2020), LMS software was perceived to be helpful for students to learn beyond the traditional model of the face-to-face classroom.

Mustafa and Yaakub (2021) carried out a study to investigate the effectiveness of using WhatsApp in teaching Bahasa Melayu to a group of foreign students in one of the selected public universities in Malaysia. The course was taught during the recent global pandemic COVID-19. Data were collected using an experimental research design. The main purpose of the study was to look into how the students learned effectively through WhatsApp as an online learning platform. The findings revealed that students favoured learning language skills through WhatsApp as it provided them more opportunities to interact with peers and exchange ideas.

Al-Rasul (2020) developed an electronic program to teach the voices of the Arabic language to a group of non-Arabic speakers. The researcher incorporated oral audio as one of the initial steps considered significant in teaching the Arabic language. The electronic program was developed with the hope to assist non-Arabic speakers to identify and distinguish the vocabulary, sounds, and structures of the language to enable the speakers to recognize the same voices and comprehend what they hear. This study highlights the importance of using modern technologies and media in instruction and the application of this to learn listening skills. The findings showed that educators have to pay attention to several factors when it comes to the teaching of the Arabic language, namely the electronic and technical features in teaching language skills.

Singh et al. (2020) carried out a study to investigate the ESL teachers' strategies to teach the English language during the movement control order that was enforced in April 2020. The researchers employed a case study design for data collection purposes. Data were collected from eight ESL teachers voluntarily. The findings revealed that the ESL teachers used Telegram, WhatsApp, Google classroom, and Zoom to ensure the teaching and learning process was carried out as planned. The teachers made use of various learning apps including Quizziz, Padlet, and Kahoot to ensure mastery of learning at the end of the teaching session. The teachers reported that they faced other issues while teaching, including getting students to participate through the apps used, students' attitude and their lack of cooperation to take part actively in discussion, and students' inability to access audio materials shared during the teaching and learning process.

Teachers and educators, today, can employ numerous teaching and learning strategies by integrating technology and also a social network to ensure instruction takes place as planned. The integration of ICT into teaching and learning allows

teachers, educators, and students to communicate and collaborate (Alaa et al., 2019; Goyak et al., 2021; Shukor, 2015; Singh et al., 2020).

Shukor (2015) carried out a study to explore the views of tertiary students on the impact of Facebook as a collaborative writing tool in one selected public university in Malaysia. Their study employed a quasi-experimental research design and 33 participants participated in the study. The findings revealed that a majority of the students showed moderately high mean scores for the use of Facebook for collaborative writing activities.

According to Prensky (2001), teachers and educators should keep abreast with the latest development in ICT and how they can infuse ICT into the teaching and learning process. This is supported by McLoughlin and Lee (2010) on how the advancement in technology today could assist educators to be creative in terms of offering students more space for an interactive and stimulating experience.

Learning online also opens up the opportunity for students to make use of online tools to facilitate learning. Various websites, software, and applications have been developed to help with different skills including writing. With tools such as Google Translate and Grammar Checker, students are able to improve their writing skills rather than solely being dependent on classroom instructions (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Dahmash, 2020). Other benefits highlighted in previous literature include the cost-efficiency of online learning, its convenience in relation to their circumstances, the promotion of student autonomy and self-directed learning, and the ability to have more freedom (Baxter, 2020; Dahmash, 2020; Paudel, 2020).

Mastery learning by Benjamin Bloom (1986) is a theory relevant to online learning. According to Abakpa and Iji (2011), this theory emphasizes that although the students are provided with different learning environments, they could achieve the same level of academic performance. This theory supports the implementation of online learning in which students are able to learn at their own pace (Bergman & Sams, 2012; Eppard & Rochdi, 2017). Hence, mastery learning provides the opportunities needed for students to learn at their own pace and according to their own needs in the online classroom.

### **2.3 Challenges of Online Learning**

Although there are benefits as perceived in previous studies, the conduct of online learning also poses challenges for students, educators, and institutions. According to Dhawan (2020), the challenges of implementing online learning in the classroom range from issues for learners, and educators, to content (Dhawan, 2020). While the use of the Internet and technologies provide convenience for students in learning, it is also viewed to have posed a number of challenges in online learning. Without the availability of reliable Internet connection, students are limited to access to finding information online. A similar issue is also the technical glitches of the communication devices. Not only are the students sometimes unable to participate in online classes, but also they are unable to retrieve any files containing notes and exercises shared by friends and teachers (Allo, 2020; Baxter, 2020; Dahmash, 2020; Mathew & Ebeelloanya, 2016; Paudel, 2020).

Corresponding to the importance of having a reliable Internet connection and decent technologies, students from low-income families may struggle to afford an Internet connection and the required technologies for online learning (Allo, 2020;

Mathew & Ebeelloanya, 2016). They need to be able to afford mobile Internet data to join online classes as they may not have an Internet subscription for their home. Students also need to have decent technologies such as communication devices to communicate and work on their tasks and assessments for effective learning. Another aspect that was perceived as a challenge of online learning is also one of the benefits—the LMS software (Gillett-Swan, 2017). Certain LMSs have limitations which lead to ineffective communication of instructions from teachers to students. One of the limitations was highlighted in the study by Allo (2020) where students perceived that it was difficult to understand written instructions in LMS if not accompanied by the audio version.

The implementation of online learning also posed a few other challenges reported by Allo (2020), including the limitations on the materials used by the lecturers as not all learning resources could be adapted for online learning and are easy to be used by students. The study also found that the clarity of instructions was a problem for the students while another study by Tareen and Haand (2020) found that students perceived that there was a lack of precise feedback and support from the lecturers. In the studies conducted by Bailey and Lee (2020) and Baxter (2020), it was found that students' participation in online learning was fewer as opposed to the findings by Tareen and Haand (2020) and the class time was greatly reduced where lesser syllabus contents could be delivered.

A few other challenges in the implementation of online learning include the difficulties faced by the students due to the lack of necessary skills for online learning, especially in terms of time management and ICT (Paudel, 2020; Sornasekaran et al., 2020). These skills are very important in online learning as students need to balance their time to finish their tasks at home by themselves. The ICT skills are necessary to be able to access the Internet, and the technological devices are needed to communicate and complete the tasks. With the integration of the Internet and communication devices, while at the same time staying at home, students tend to become distracted and have no interest. (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Dahmash, 2020; Tareen & Haand, 2020). As opposed to learning in class, at home the teachers are unable to determine whether the students are focusing on the class or playing with their friends or mobile phones instead.

### 3. METHODS

This section provides a brief description of the research approach and the participants involved in this study. The details of the instrument and procedures on how the data were collected and analysed are also provided.

#### 3.1 Research Design

This research was conducted using a quantitative approach. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a survey is a research design that describes trends, attitudes, or opinions numerically or quantitatively, which represents a population based on a study of a sample from the population through the use of a questionnaire or structured interviews as instruments to collect the data. The results of the study on a sample will be useful to generalize to

a population (Fowler, 2008). A survey research design produces descriptions of the trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population quantitatively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Hence, this study adopted the survey research design in order to identify the opinions of private university students through the use of a questionnaire – one of the most commonly-used instruments in this design.

### **3.2 Participants**

The study participants were 60 students who took English courses at a private university in Perak, Malaysia, consisting of 41 females (68.3%) and 19 males (31.7%). The majority of the samples are from the age group of 18 to 20 years old (86.8%) and the rest are from the age group of 21 to 23 years old (10%), and 24 years old and above (3.3%). The students were from different faculties and in different years of study at the university. They were studying through online classes for one whole semester for 14 weeks. The reason for choosing the students who were taking English courses was to conform to the purpose of this study which is to identify their perceptions within the setting of ESL classrooms. Hence, it is relevant for this study to sample the participants from this population of existing students. This sampling method is known as the purposive sampling method which is the intentional choice of a participant because of the qualities that the participants possess, that meet the entry requirements for the study. Researchers are the ones who decide on what needs to be identified and find participants who are able and willing to provide required information based on knowledge or experience for this sampling method (Etikan et al., 2016).

### **3.3 Instrument**

The instrument used to collect the data to answer the research questions was an adapted questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on the findings reported by Tareen and Haand (2020). The items were modified according to the objectives of the study. The items in the questionnaire were originally focused on the perceptions of the postgraduates in a public university. Hence, several terms in the items were changed to focus on gathering undergraduates' perceptions. The items in the questionnaire were divided into three sections. The first section is the Demographical Data of the samples which consists of five items. The second section which is the Benefits of Online Learning consists of eight items and the last section, the Challenges of Online Learning, consists of nine items. In addition to the demographic information presented, the survey elements were considered using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing 'strongly disagree' to 5 representing 'strongly agree'.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

As the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia was still enforced when this study was conducted, data collection was only possible using an online platform. Hence, the questionnaire was adapted into a Google Form and arranged following the divided sections stated previously. The distribution of the link to the questionnaire was assisted by English lecturers through the WhatsApp application. The Google Form was open for responses for three weeks before it was closed when it reached 60



respondents. The collected data was extracted using Google Sheet and downloaded into digital storage in the researcher's laptop before analysis was conducted using the SPSS software.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The data collected were analysed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v.26. The students' general perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online learning were presented through percentages of responses. The items in the questionnaire were ranked based on the percentages of the agreement for both domains. Students' levels of agreement were calculated by adding the percentages of responses for 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed' while the disagreement levels were based on the total percentages of 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' responses.

According to [Sullivan and Artino \(2013\)](#), on an ordinal scale, as produced by survey data, responses can either be rated or ranked but the distance between responses is not measurable. However, based on compiled evidence in a study by [Norman \(2010\)](#) as cited in [Sullivan and Artino \(2013\)](#), parametric tests can also be used to analyse ordinal data from the Likert scale and that parametric tests, in general, are more robust than the nonparametric test. [Rickards et al. \(2012\)](#) suggested grouping the items into one survey scale to assess a particular construct of interest based on the total score or mean score. Hence, for this study, the items under the constructs of benefits and challenges were grouped into survey scales and the responses were totalled to get the score. Then, a parametric test of independent samples t-test was administered using the total scores of the two domains to compare means between the female and male students.

## **4. FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Benefits of Online Learning Implementation**

Students' perceptions of the benefits of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom were described with percentages in Table 1. The benefits were ranked from the most reported to the least reported based on the total percentage of agreement that was calculated by adding the percentages of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses.

From Table 1, overall, the majority of the students had neutral positions on the benefits of online learning implementation in the ESL classrooms showing that they neither agreed nor disagreed with all of the statements. The most reported benefit of online learning implementation in the ESL classrooms was that it is very convenient while the least agreed benefit was that online learning promotes better understanding compared to physical classroom learning.

**Table 1.** Students’ perceptions of the benefits of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom.

No.	Item	Percentage (%)				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Online learning is very convenient.	1.7	20	50	20	8.3
2	Online learning enables me to accomplish tasks more easily compared to classroom learning.	3.3	20	53.3	16.7	6.7
3	Online learning promotes greater student participation.	11.7	13.3	56.7	18.3	-
4	Online learning promotes better student interaction.	11.7	30	41.7	13.3	3.3
5	Online learning promotes better understanding compared to classroom learning.	18.3	23.3	50	6.7	1.7
6	Online learning improves my performance academically.	8.3	20	48.3	16.7	6.7
7	Online learning caters to individual learning needs.	1.7	16.7	58.3	18.3	5
8	Online learning improves the learning process.	8.3	15	53.3	20	3.3

In terms of the level of agreement towards the benefits of online learning, Item 1 with the statement that online learning is very convenient showed the highest agreement (28.3%) in comparison to disagreement (21.7%). This was followed by Item 2 with a percentage of students who agreed and strongly agreed at 23.4% on the statement of online learning enables them to accomplish tasks more easily compared to classroom learning. The next item for high agreement level was Item 6 on the statement that online learning improves their performance academically in which the percentage of students who reported agreement (23.4%) towards the statement was lower than those who reported disagreement (28.3%).

From the results, Item 7 reported 23.3% of students’ agreement compared to 18.4% who disagreed that online learning facilitated them with their different learning needs. An equivalent percentage of agreement and disagreement (23.3%) was reported for Item 8 stating that online learning improved their learning process. The survey data also shows that only 18.3% of the students agreed that there was more participation of students in online learning than in classroom learning, and only 16.6% reported that they agreed online learning promotes better interaction and communication. The least agreed benefit of online learning implementation was Item 5 where only 8.4% of the samples reported their agreement in comparison to 41.6% who reported disagreement.

## **4.2 Challenges of Online Learning Implementation**

Students’ perceptions of the challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classrooms were described with percentages in Table 2. Similarly, the challenges were ranked from the most reported to the least reported based on the total percentage of agreement that was calculated by adding the percentages of ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ responses.

**Table 2.** Students' perceptions of the challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom.

No.	Item	Percentage (%)				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Online learning is not too favourable among students as students prefer classroom learning situations.	1.7	3.3	38.3	25	31.7
2	Online learning is difficult for students as lecturers' instructions are unclear.	-	8.3	26.7	40	25
3	Online learning could demotivate students as students do not know what criteria they will be assessed.	-	8.3	36.7	40	15
4	Online learning is difficult for those who need assistance in learning from the lecturer.	-	3.3	33.3	31.7	31.7
5	Online learning decreases students' motivation in learning because of the lack of formality in the teaching process.	-	8.3	33.3	30	28.3
6	Online learning is difficult because sometimes there are off-topic posts in the discussion.	-	10	46.7	21.7	21.7
7	Online learning makes it difficult for students to retain information.	-	11.7	33.3	30	25
8	Online learning is difficult because students tend not to participate in the learning process.	-	6.7	35	36.7	21.7
9	Online learning is difficult as there tends to be a single-student-domination.	1.7	5	43.3	30	20

The students reported the highest percentage of agreement (65%) on Item 2 where they found online learning is difficult for them as lecturers' instructions are unclear. Item 4 with the statement that online learning is difficult for those who need assistance in learning from the lecturer recorded the second-highest percentage of agreement (63.4%).

Most of the students also reported a high agreement level (58.4%) on Item 8 stating that online learning is a challenge due to students' tendency not to participate in the learning process. Concerning the demotivating effect of online learning for Item 5, the survey recorded 58.3% of agreement. About 55% of the students also reported on Item 3 that they were demotivated by online learning as they were uncertain about the criteria of the assessment.

For Item 1, a majority of the students reported with a high agreement level (56.7%) that they preferred classroom learning situations. This was followed by Item 7 where students reported agreement (55%) on the statement that they were unable to retain the information learned online. Item 9 recorded that a majority of the students agreed and strongly agreed (50%) with the statement that online learning is difficult as there tends to be a single-student-domination.

The least reported challenge of online learning implementation was Item 6 where only 43.3% agreed and strongly agreed that online learning is difficult because of the off-topic posts in the discussion compared to that 10% who disagreed. The students, however, mostly (46.7%) reported that they were not positively or negatively affected by the off-topic posts in the online discussion which often took place on the LMS platform.

### 4.3 Gender Differences

An independent samples t-test was administered to identify whether female and male students showed a statistically significant difference in their responses to the items in the instrument. Table 3 shows the summary of the independent t-test for the benefits and challenges of online learning between genders.

**Table 3.** Gender differences in perceptions towards online learning.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Benefits	Female	41	23.37	5.911	.509	.613
	Male	19	22.58	4.730		
Challenges	Female	41	33.71	6.186	.302	.763
	Male	19	33.16	7.290		

The result of the test showed that there was no significant difference in the responses on the benefits of online learning implementation between female and male students ( $t = .509$ ,  $p = .613$ ). Similarly, the test indicated that the responses to the challenges of online learning implementation were not significantly different between female and male students ( $t = .302$ ,  $p = .763$ ).

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Benefits of Online Learning Implementation

Overall, the majority of the students had neutral positions on the benefits of online learning implementation in the ESL classroom showing that they neither agreed nor disagreed with all of the statements. The most reported benefit of online learning implementation in ESL classrooms was that it is very convenient while the least agreed benefit was that online learning promotes better understanding compared to physical classroom learning.

From the results in Table 1, Item 1 recorded the highest agreement level showing that one greatest features of online learning is that it is very convenient for students. Learning online allows students to easily access all the latest information (Mathew & Ebeelloanya, 2016). The students' perceptions of the convenience of online learning may also be influenced by the current situation of the country due to COVID-19, as it is safer to have physical distances and this is corresponding to the study by Dahmash (2020) where the students reported that the implementation of online learning is relevant to their circumstances during the pandemic outbreak.

Students also believed that they could accomplish more tasks easily in classroom learning. This shows how online learning benefited students with the availability of online learning tools such as Grammarly and Google Translate to assist them in

completing the task better especially in writing (Bailey & Lee, 2020). In previous literature, online learning is perceived to help improve students' academic performance in terms of learning motivation, achievement, and engagement (Mandasari, 2020). This is contradicting the findings of this study, stating that more students believed their academic performance did not improve while learning online.

Another benefit of online learning based on this study is that it caters to individual learning. Similar to the traditional classroom, students are different in terms of their learning needs, in which some might need more time with their learning pace. With online learning, these needs could be fulfilled and this is supported in a study by Bailey and Lee (2020) in which, students can get extra time to prepare for answers in online classes compared to the traditional classroom setting. This helped the students to complete the tasks and participate in activities better throughout online learning.

The students also showed agreement that online learning improved their learning process. Throughout the implementation of online learning at the institution, content sharing of learning materials and assessments were made available using the university LMS software which is really helpful for the students' learning process. This is supported by Allo (2020) in which students believed that online learners could be fully supported with the online learning system tools such as LMS software.

The survey data also reported the students' agreement that there was more participation of students in online learning than in classroom learning but only a few agreed that online learning promotes better interaction. These findings are in contradiction with the study by Mathew and Ebelelloanya (2016) who stated that the major benefits of using technology in online learning included better interaction and students' engagement.

The least agreed benefit of online learning implementation was Item 5. This shows that students did not find online learning beneficial to improve their understanding compared to classroom learning. However, this is in contrast with the previous studies where the researchers found that online learning was perceived as beneficial as students can search for information while learning online whereas they did not have the chance to do so in a traditional classroom setting (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Paudel, 2020). The responses for this item could be explained by the instructions' clarity issue discussed in the challenges perceived by the students.

## 5.2 Challenges of Online Learning Implementation

Overall, the majority of the students showed agreement on the challenges of online learning implementation in the ESL classrooms based on the statements. The most reported challenge of online learning was the issue concerning the clarity of lecturers' instructions while the least reported challenge was the off-topic postings in the online discussion.

Item 2 reported the highest percentage of agreement showing that unclear instructions by the lecturers were the main challenge of learning online in the ESL classroom. This could apply when students were given tasks or assignments to be completed at home. Without clear instructions from the lecturers, students find it difficult to complete the tasks successfully. This is supported in the study conducted by Allo (2020) in which students stated that they were hoping that explanations would be provided before the assignments and materials were given to them. Another challenge of online learning based on this study is that there is a limitation in getting

lecturers to assist students in need. Item 4 recorded the second highest percentage of agreement showing that online learning limits the assistance given by the lecturers to those who needed them. This finding is supported by [Tareen and Haand \(2020\)](#) in which students had difficulties getting assistance from the lecturers as there was a lack of precise feedback and support from the lecturers for their learning process.

Students also face the challenge of the tendency not to participate in the learning process. This tendency may be the result of technical issues on the part of both the students and lecturers as well as the attitudes of the students ([Allo, 2020](#); [Baxter, 2020](#); [Dahmash, 2020](#)). The analysis also shows that students felt demotivated to learn when there was no formality in the teaching process. In the classroom setting, they could see the lecturers teaching in front. However, at home, since there was no lecturer to supervise them, they tended to feel demotivated to learn and easily get distracted ([Bailey & Lee, 2020](#)). The students also reported that they were demotivated by online learning as they were uncertain about the criteria of the assessment and this finding is in line with the study by [Paudel \(2020\)](#) where it was a challenge for the students in finding the learning path themselves.

A majority of the students reported that they preferred classroom learning situations, indicating online learning was not favourable. According to [Baxter \(2020\)](#), class time is greatly reduced in online learning due to circumstances. This could lead to ineffective delivery of lessons and less participation in class. The students also perceived that online learning was challenging for them to retain information. The findings of the study by [Allo \(2020\)](#) showed that it was difficult for the students to learn online when the lecturers implemented materials and instructions that were complicated to use. Materials that do not match the students' learning needs are considered as not suitable to be used ([Rahmadani et al., 2019](#)). This shows that students can retain information better in a physical classroom setting where instructions and materials are much more comprehensible.

Item 9 recorded that the majority of the students reported agreement on the statement showing that their learning was affected as they may not get enough opportunities to participate in online discussion when there was a single student who dominated the online learning. This is in line with the study by [Tareen and Haand \(2020\)](#) where it was found that the lack of interaction among the students made them more reserved since they did not know each other.

The least reported challenge of online learning implementation was Item 6 where the students perceived that they were not positively or negatively affected by the off-topic posts in the online discussion which often took place on the LMS platform. Students are most probably not affected since they are not fond of the use of LMS due to the lack of necessary features ([Gillett-Swan, 2017](#)).

### **5.3 Gender Differences**

Overall, there was no significant difference between female and male students' perceptions of the implementation of online learning. This shows that both male and female students have neutral perceptions of the benefits of online learning but mostly agreed on the challenges of online learning. This finding is in line with the study by [Mahawar and Nandedkar \(2019\)](#) which revealed that there were no gender biases towards online learning among the two genders although in an earlier study by [Tsokova et al. \(2017\)](#) female students were more positive on the implementation of

online learning in the classroom. This corresponds to the findings by [Apriani et al. \(2022\)](#), where female students in Indonesia favourably viewed online or ICT use in language learning as more advantageous to them in terms of competence, knowledge, and motivational enhancement, despite the fact that male students were more skilled in ICT literacy. However, the recent study by [Rafiq et al. \(2020\)](#) found that male students had more positive opinions on online learning indicating that the male students adapted better to changes in the learning environment.

#### **5.4 Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of the study shed light on some pedagogical implications for the lecturers as well as the management of institutions. First of all, it is important for the lecturers to improve the teaching practices, for example, better clarity of instructions and guidance in completing online tasks or assignments. Lecturers should also consider applying teaching strategies that provide an opportunity for all students to engage with the lecturers, other students, and the learning materials to promote participation, interaction, and a better understanding of the lessons.

It is also important for the lecturers to adapt to students' different learning needs when opting for suitable strategies to be used in online learning. On the other hand, the management of the institutions should upgrade the quality of the learning management system platform to provide greater accessibility for learning materials, ease of communication, and better students' engagement. Improved technical support should also be taken into account for both lecturers and students to minimize the differences between virtual and physical classroom learning.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the implementation of online learning could benefit the students in so many ways. The greatest feature according to students' perceptions of online learning was its convenience in accessibility to the latest information. The least perceived benefit of online learning was that it promoted better understanding compared with the face-to-face classroom setting. On the other hand, the greatest challenge of online learning was the issue of clarity in the instructions given by lecturers and the least concern for online learning among the students is the off-topic postings in online discussions. The gender factor also did not influence the students' perceptions of online learning.

However, this study has its own limitations which should be addressed. It is recommended for future studies to integrate qualitative analysis to further understand the reasons behind the students' opinions. Other than that, there is also a need to consider external factors such as the pedagogical factor as well as the students' experience with online learning. Furthermore, the current study only investigates the students' perceptions of online learning in ESL classrooms. However, extensive research needs to be conducted for classrooms in different fields. The data collected for this study was only limited to quantitative data; hence, future researchers should include the qualitative approach in future studies for in-depth analyses and discussions.

## REFERENCES

- Abakpa, B. O., & Iji, C. O. (2011). Effect of mastery learning approach on senior secondary school students' achievement in geometry. *Journal of Science Teachers Association of Nigeria*, 8(2), 24-31.
- Al-Rasul, O. H. (2020). وبثه بغيرها للناطقين العربية اللغة أصوات تدریس في إلكتروني برنامج إعداد [Preparation of an electronic program in teaching the voices of the Arabic language to non-speakers and broadcast on the Internet]. *SIBAWAYH Arabic Language and Education*, 1(1), 139-156.
- Alaa, M., Albakri, I. S. M., Singh, C. K. S., Hammed, H., Zaidan, A. A., Zaidan, A. A., Albahri, O. S., Alsalem, M. A., Salih, M. M., Almahdi, E. M., Baqer, M. J., Jalood, N. S., Nidhal, S., Shareef, A. H., & Jasim, A. N. (2019). Assessment and ranking framework for the English skills of pre-service teachers based on Fuzzy Delphi and TOPSIS methods. *IEEE Access*, 7, 126201-126223. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2019.2936898>
- Allo, M. D. G. (2020). Is the online learning good in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic? The case of EFL learners. *Jurnal Sinestesia*, 10(1), 1-10.
- Apriani, E., Arsyad, S., Syafrudin, Supardan, D., Gusmuliana, P., & Santiana. (2022). ICT platforms for Indonesian EFL students viewed from gender during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 9(1), 187-202. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v9i1.21089>
- Assaiqeli, A. (2019). God taught Adam and spoke to Moses: Language origin, functions and early multilingual development. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 11(5), 1-38. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v11i5.15206>
- Baharum, A., Nasirin, E. F., Jolius, E. E., James, J. E., Randang, N. S. H., Zaifulrizal, N. S., & Deris, F. D. (2021). COVID-19 crisis: Is online learning more effective than face-to-face learning? *European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine*, 7(8), 3827-3835.
- Bailey, D. R., & Lee, A. R. (2020). Learning from experience in the midst of COVID-19: Benefits, challenges, and strategies in online teaching. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning Electronic Journal*, 21(2), 178-198.
- Baxter, M. (2020). Engaging adult English language learners in distance education: An ESL program's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. *GATESOL in Action Journal*, 30(1), 59-69. <https://doi.org/10.52242/giaj.v30i1.99>
- Bergman, J., & Sams, A. (2012). *Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day*. International Society for Technology in Education. [https://www.rcboe.org/cms/lib/GA01903614/Centricity/Domain/15451/Flip\\_your\\_Classroom.pdf](https://www.rcboe.org/cms/lib/GA01903614/Centricity/Domain/15451/Flip_your_Classroom.pdf)
- Bloom, B. S. (1986). What we're learning about teaching and learning: a summary of recent research. *Principal*, 66(2), 6-10.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- Dahmash, N. B. (2020). 'I couldn't join the session': Benefits and challenges of blended learning amid COVID-19 from EFL students. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(5), 221-230. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n5p221>
- Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(1), 5-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239520934018>



- Efron, R. (1969). What is perception? In R. S. Cohen & M. W. Wartofsky (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Colloquium for the Philosophy of Science 1966/1968* (pp. 137-173). Springer.
- Eppard, J., & Rochdi, A. (2017). A framework for flipped learning. In I. A. Sanchez, P. Isaias, & L. Rodrigues (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 13th International Conference Mobile Learning 2017* (pp. 33-40). International Association for Development of the Information Society (IADIS).
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Fowler, F. J. (2008). *Survey research methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Gillett-Swan, J. (2017). The challenges of online learning: Supporting and engaging the isolated learner. *Journal of Learning Design*, 10(1), 20-30. <https://doi.org/10.5204/jld.v9i3.293>
- Goyak, F., Muhammad, M. M., Khaja, F. M., N., Zaini, M. F & Mohammad, G. (2021). Conversational mental verbs in English song lyrics: A corpus-driven analysis. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 17(1), 222-239. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v17i1.12619>
- Imsa-ard, P. (2020). Thai university students' perceptions towards the abrupt transition to 'forced' online learning in the COVID-19 situation. *Journal of Education Khon Kaen University*, 43(3), 30-44.
- Khatoony, S., & Nezhadmehr, M. (2020). EFL teachers' challenges in integration of technology for online classrooms during Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Iran. *AJELP: Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 8(2), 89-104.
- Kulal, A., & Nayak, A. (2020). A study on perception of teachers and students toward online classes in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi District. *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, 15(3), 285-296. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAOUJ-07-2020-0047>
- Kumar, S., & Tiwari, I. (2021). The perception of students regarding online teaching during pandemic COVID-19 lockdown. *The Online Journal of Distance Education and e-Learning*, 9(3), 427-433.
- Landau, E. (2020, May 28). University lectures to go online until Dec 31, except for 5 groups. *New Straits Times*. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/05/595758/university-lectures-go-online-until-dec-31-except-5-groups>
- Lim, D. H. (2004). Cross cultural differences in online learning motivation. *Educational Media International*, 41(2), 163-175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523980410001685784>
- Mad, S., Omar, N. A., Sarudin, E. S., & Aziz, N. H. (2020). Perception and intention to use e-learning from students' point of view-an evidence from Malaysia local university. *Journal of Computing Research and Innovation (JCRINN)*, 5(2), 11-20. <https://doi.org/10.24191/jcrinn.v5i2.163>
- Mahawar, M. S., & Nandedkar, T. (2019). Students' perception towards effectiveness of e-learning. *UNNAYAN: International Bulletin of Management and Economics*, 10, 189-194.
- Mandasari, B. (2020). The impact of online learning toward students' academic performance on business correspondence course. *EDUTECH: Journal of Education and Technology*, 4(1), 98-110. <https://doi.org/10.29062/edu.v4i1.74>

- Mathew, I. R., & Ebelelloanya, J. (2016, November 27-30). *Open and distance learning: Benefits and challenges of technology usage for online teaching and learning in Africa* [Paper presentation]. Pan-Commonwealth Forum 8 (PCF8), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- McLoughlin, C. & Lee, M. J. W. (2010). Personalised and self-regulated learning in the Web 2.0 era: International exemplars of innovative pedagogy using social software. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology* 26(1), 28-43. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.1100>
- Minghat, A. D., Ana, A., Purnawarman, P., Saripudin, S., Muktiarni, M., Dwiyantri, V., & Mustakim, S. S. (2020). Students' perceptions of the twists and turns of e-learning in the midst of the Covid 19 outbreak. *Romanian Journal for Multidimensional Education*, 12, 15-26.
- Murphrey, T. P., & Arnold, S. (2012). Verbal immediacy and audio/video technology use in online course delivery: What do university agricultural education students think? *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 53(3), 14-27. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2012.03014>
- Mustafa, A. S., & Yaakub, R. (2021). An experimental approach by using WhatsApp for teaching and learning of Bahasa Malaysia to international students at engineering campus, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) due to pandemic of COVID-19. *PENDETA: Journal of Malay Language, Education and Literature*, 12, 1-9.
- Nambiar, D. (2020). The impact of online learning during COVID-19: Students' and teachers' perspective. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 783-793.
- Nielsen, M. W., Alegria, S., Börjeson, L., Etzkowitz, H., Falk-Krzesinski, H. J., Joshi, A., Leahey, E., Smith-Doerr, L., Woolley, A. W. & Schiebinger, L. (2017). Opinion: Gender diversity leads to better science. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(8), 1740-1742. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1700616114>
- Norman, G. (2010). Likert scales, levels of measurement and the "laws" of statistics. *Advances in health sciences education*, 15, 625-632. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-010-9222-y>
- Paudel, P. (2020). Online education: Benefits, challenges and strategies during and after COVID-19 in higher education. *International Journal on Studies in Education*, 3(2), 70-85. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonse.32>
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.
- Rafiq, F., Hussain, S., & Abbas, Q. (2020). Analyzing students' attitude towards e-learning: A case study in higher education in Pakistan. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 4(1), 367-380. [http://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2020\(4-I\)29](http://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2020(4-I)29)
- Rahmadani, C. L., Fitrawati, F., & Syarif, H. (2019). EFL learners' perception toward the use of interactive e-book in grammar class. *AJELP: Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 7(2), 18-30. <https://doi.org/10.37134/ajelp.vol7.2.3.2019>
- Rickards, G., Magee, C., & Artino Jr, A. R. (2012). You can't fix by analysis what you've spoiled by design: Developing survey instruments and collecting validity evidence. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, 4(4), 407-410. <https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-12-00239.1>

- Rojabi, A. R. (2020). Exploring EFL students' perception of online learning via Microsoft Teams: University level in Indonesia. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 3(2), 163-173. <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v3i2.2349>
- Shukor, S. S. (2015). ESL students' perceptions on the use of Facebook as a collaborative writing tool in improving writing performance. *AJELP: The Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 3, 205-227.
- Singh, C. K. S., Singh, T. S. M., Abdullah, N. Y., Moneyam, S., Ismail, M. R., Tek, O. E., Karupayah, T., Chenderan, K., Singh, M. K. R., & Singh, J. K. S. (2020). Rethinking English language teaching through Telegram, WhatsApp, Google classroom and Zoom. *Systematic Reviews in Pharmacy*, 11(11), 45-54.
- Singh, V., & Thurman, A. (2019). How many ways can we define online learning? A systematic literature review of definitions of online learning (1988-2018). *American Journal of Distance Education*, 33(4), 289-306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08923647.2019.1663082>
- Sornasekaran, H., Mohammed, L. A., & Amidi, A. (2020). Challenges associated with e-learning among ESL undergraduates in Malaysia: A conceptual framework. *International Journal of Management and Human Science (IJMHS)*, 4(4), 30-38.
- Sullivan, G. M., & Artino Jr, A. R. (2013). Analyzing and interpreting data from Likert-type scales. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, 5(4), 541-542. <https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-5-4-18>
- Tareen, H., & Haand, M. T. (2020). A case study of UiTM post-graduate students' perceptions on online learning: Benefits & challenges. *International Journal of Advanced Research and Publications*, 4(6), 86-94.
- Tsokova, Y., Taneva, T., Torniyova, B., & Cherkezov, T. (2017). Undergraduate healthcare students' attitude to e-learning at Medical University-PLOVDIV. *CBU International Conference Proceedings*, 5, 855-861. <https://doi.org/10.12955/cbup.v5.1038>
- UNESCO. (2020, March 13). *COVID19 educational disruption and response*. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>