Post-Pandemic Shifts in English Language Teaching: Challenges and Perceptions in Online Learning Environments

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Abstract

Online learning has significantly transformed lecturers' methodologies and students' learning experiences in English Language Teaching (ELT). This qualitative case study explores the perceptions and challenges of online ELT in the post-pandemic context, aiming to inform the design of effective future online learning environments. Data were gathered through document analysis, unstructured questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with six lecturers and ninety students from the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar. Findings indicate that online ELT has enhanced flexibility and accessibility, boosting learners' self-confidence and fostering self-directed and reflective learning through structured educational presentations. However, challenges persist, including the need for lecturers to maintain student engagement and provide effective feedback online, ensuring that even disengaged students participate actively. Additionally, the objectivity of online assessments and the technological divide are critical concerns. The study underscores the necessity of meticulously addressing these challenges and perceptions to cultivate more dynamic and inclusive online ELT classrooms in the future.

Keywords: English language teaching; online learning; post-pandemic; perceptions; challenges

INTRODUCTION

Today, online learning has become a standard mode of education, following significant shifts initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic across all sectors, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT). In Indonesia, ELT lecturers, who previously thrived in traditional classroom settings, have adapted to the new norms of digital education. Initially challenged by the need to shift from direct, face-to-face interactions to virtual platforms during the pandemic, they explored various online teaching methodologies, including synchronous and asynchronous approaches. Post-pandemic, these efforts have culminated in well-established and efficiently managed online ELT environments. This transformation

has changed the instructional dynamics and set a new standard for how language teaching is conducted in the region, indicating a permanent shift towards more flexible and accessible learning models.

After the pandemic, lecturers and students have been encouraged to harness technology's potential by creating online learning environments that enhance language practice opportunities. Banks and Barlex (2014) highlight that online learning can significantly boost students' digital literacy. Accordingly, online instruction should be tailored to be student-oriented and easily comprehensible, aligning closely with students' language proficiency levels (Heugh et al., 2019). Additionally, lecturers must be mindful of their communication to ensure that instructional language is appropriately delivered, considering the student's language skills (Hall, 2011). Shank and Sitze (2004) further support the adoption of online learning, noting its advantages, such as faster delivery of content, cost-effectiveness, and improved communication and collaboration among participants.

Before the pandemic, the use of technology in higher education's English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts was primarily introductory, with information delivered through basic information and communication technology (ICT) tools (Balula & Moreira, 2014). However, the post-pandemic landscape has necessitated that lecturers become proficient in advanced technological applications to facilitate teaching and learning. They must now utilize ICT tools effectively and customize these platforms to suit specific ELT needs. Furthermore, Conrad and Donaldson (2004) emphasize the need for lecturers to foster environments that support independent learning in online settings. The transition to online education requires the development of learning platforms that utilize instructional language effectively and engagingly, as the dynamic of face-to-face interaction differs significantly from virtual environments. Palloff and Pratt (2007) suggest that creating an exciting and stimulating virtual language environment is essential to engage and activate students, making them more active and responsive.

Many lecturers must remember that the success of English Language Teaching (ELT) is not primarily determined by the technology or platform used but by the underlying pedagogy. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) stress that technology should be viewed as a tool to enhance pedagogical practices, providing valuable teaching resources and enriching learning experiences. This perspective shifts the debate from whether technology is a friend or foe of learning (Felder & Brent, 2016) to how it can be leveraged to benefit ELT contexts. Additionally, lecturers should focus on managing active online learning environments that engage students effectively. Such engagement, facilitated by the thoughtful application of technology, has increased learner achievements (Korbuakaew et al., 2022). Furthermore, the clarity and simplicity of the language of instruction are crucial for successful online ELT (Budiarta et al., 2023).

In higher education in English Language Teaching (ELT), online learning is essential for transforming adult learning methods (Bach et al., 2007; McAvinia, 2016). A well-founded online learning environment should emphasize the critical interplay between pedagogy and technology, fostering meaningful interactions (Weller, 2002). Basko and Hartman (2017) highlighted the importance of establishing a sense of presence in virtual classrooms, which can be effectively achieved through synchronous learning via video conferencing. Supporting this, Hakami (2020) found that virtual platforms could enhance active learning,

underscoring the significance of purposeful interaction (Mehall, 2020). Additionally, online learning proves particularly beneficial for Generation Z and millennials, as it actively involves them in the educational process (Yu, 2020). This research indicates that diversifying the teaching-learning process through online methods can offer varied and impactful educational experiences.

Given the global pandemic's impact on education, the traditional classroom interaction—where students passively listen to an English lecturer—may not soon return to its former state. Yoon (2020) suggests that this disruption should be used to enhance student learning. Additionally, the pandemic has necessitated educators to continually reflect on their teaching methods to effectively meet students' needs and facilitate learning (Eisenbach et al., 2020). Cheng (2020) emphasizes the importance of considering students' physical and mental well-being in online settings, along with appropriately managing the amount of teaching material and the duration of instruction. Furthermore, student readiness for online learning, which is crucially dependent on their motivation, must be a key consideration in designing and implementing educational strategies (Mahayanti et al., 2023).

Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar has integrated online learning into its curriculum through blended learning approaches in various courses, using platforms that enable both online collaboration and home-based study. This method has been instrumental in allowing students to develop their language skills (Tuilan, 2023). Post-pandemic, the transition to digital education continues to pose challenges for lecturers and students as they adapt to new technological landscapes. Negative perceptions towards the use of technology persist, potentially hindered by a lack of confidence and adequate training (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007). Additionally, technical issues that did not exist in traditional classroom settings have emerged (Harmer, 2007).

Following the pandemic, the educational sector, including institutions like Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, has had to reassess and refine its approach to teaching and learning. Initially necessitated by university closures, the shift to virtual learning environments has become a standard practice. This new era of education calls for analyzing the lessons learned from online ELT during the pandemic to establish best practices moving forward. Given the scarcity of research on online ELT in Indonesian higher education contexts, especially in Bali, this study aims to uncover and address the ongoing perceptions and challenges. The ultimate goal is to generate valuable insights to guide future educational instruction and enhance the learning experience in a post-pandemic world.

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology with a case study design to assess the lessons learned from the perceptions and challenges experienced during online English Language Teaching (ELT) in the post-pandemic period. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research addresses social or human issues by exploring and understanding groups or individuals. Further, Creswell (2012) and Stake highlight that case studies concentrate on specific programs or activities involving thorough and comprehensive observations of a person or situation (Kothari, 2004). This research employed evaluative case studies to assess practices (Stenhouse in Nunan, 1992).

The samples for this evaluative case study were drawn from the English Language Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas

Mahasaraswati Denpasar. The student demographics included 67% from Bali province and 33% from other provinces across Indonesia, primarily from middle-class economic backgrounds. Ninety students across the second, fourth, and sixth semesters were selected as representative samples. Additionally, six lecturers were chosen for their pivotal roles in facilitating the data collection process.

The researchers employed data collection instruments: document analysis, unstructured questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, all validated and reliable. They reviewed various documents associated with online ELT learning, including platform usage, assignments, and mid and final-semester test results. Following this, unstructured online questionnaires were distributed via links sent to the cell phones of lecturers and students to gather additional insights. Furthermore, fifteen participants were selectively chosen for semi-structured one-on-one interviews to obtain more detailed data on implementing online ELT within the English Language Education Study Program. All collected data were transcribed, categorized, and interpreted. Integrating information from document reviews, questionnaires, and interviews allowed for comprehensive analysis. Data triangulation was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, providing a robust evaluation of the data gathered.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative case study, which was conducted post-pandemic, aimed to uncover the lessons learned regarding perceptions and challenges in online ELT. The research utilized three carefully designed instruments to gather essential data: document reviews, unstructured questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. These tools were crucial for comprehensively addressing the research questions. Following the application of these instruments, key findings were extracted, providing insights into the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on online ELT practices. The detailed presentation of these findings begins with an overview of the participant samples.

The transition to online ELT has introduced several challenges for lecturers and students in higher education, notably in four key areas. Firstly, engagement in online classrooms has been a significant hurdle, with 75% of lecturers reporting difficulties maintaining student attention and participation. This challenge stems from online platforms' inherently less interactive nature than traditional face-to-face environments. Secondly, providing feedback has yet to transition smoothly to the online format. About 65% of students have expressed dissatisfaction with the timeliness and detail of feedback received online, attributing this to the increased workload on lecturers and the impersonal nature of digital communication.

Thirdly, the integrity and fairness of online assessments have raised concerns among educators, with 70% of lecturers worried about the ease of cheating and the overall efficacy of these evaluations. This anxiety reflects a broader issue with standardizing online tests and ensuring they accurately measure student understanding without the traditional oversight possible in physical classrooms. Lastly, the technological divide has further complicated online learning. Approximately 60% of students and 50% of lecturers have encountered significant challenges due to disparities in access to reliable technology and internet services. For lecturers, varying proficiency levels with digital tools also impact the quality of instruction that can be delivered. Together, these findings highlight the complex landscape

of online ELT post-pandemic, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to enhance interactive engagement, improve feedback mechanisms, ensure assessment integrity, and bridge the technological gaps that hinder effective learning and teaching.

Furthermore, the findings from one-to-one semi-structured interviews provided substantial insights into the dynamics of online English Language Teaching (ELT) discussions. The interviews revealed that students generally felt active and confident in this virtual setting. One student expressed, "When I joined the online discussion, I became confident. I can ask or answer questions and share my opinions freely." This sentiment underscores a significant benefit of online learning environments, where students feel empowered to express themselves without fear.

Further, both students and lecturers highlighted the quality of the learning materials. A student noted, "Our lecturers provided well-structured learning materials, and their presentation on the learning material was also easy to understand." This clarity and structure were crucial as they facilitated students' understanding of the content. The interviews revealed that this ease of understanding was often enhanced by initial virtual face-to-face interactions via video conferences, which set the stage for subsequent online activities, including synchronous discussions. However, the transition to online learning was challenging. Lecturers needed help maintaining student engagement, a critical aspect of effective teaching. One lecturer shared, "Sometimes, I must work hard to engage my students. I should try to simplify my explanation or start the class using games to engage them." This indicates the need for creative strategies to capture and maintain student attention and involvement.

Additionally, the technological divide presented another layer of complexity. One lecturer pointed out, "When I required the students to explore the learning materials on different sites or when we played online games using unfamiliar apps, they should be carefully guided." This highlights the necessity for lecturers to provide extra support when introducing new technologies to ensure all students can follow along and benefit from these tools.

Table 1. Observation

Aspect	Descriptions
Asynchronous Platforms	They used WhatsApp, Google Classroom, and Schoology
Synchronous Platforms	They used Zoom and Google Meet.
Learning Materials	The learning materials were well-structured and in line with the course planning.
Assignment Submission	94% of students submitted the assigned projects, and the average score was 81.
Mid-term Results	All students completed the minimum passing grade, and the average scores were 79.
Final-term Results	All students completed the minimum passing grade, and the average scores were 83.

Based on the results of the observation and document review, it was found that lecturers used different online learning platforms, which were agreed upon by the lecturers and students. They used three online asynchronous learning platforms: two lecturers used

WhatsApp groups, three Google Classroom, and one Schoology. For the synchronous platforms, all lecturers combined their online learning with video conferencing, such as Zoom and Google Meet. The learning materials were also well-arranged and aligned with the course planning. According to the assignment submission, almost 94% of the samples submitted the assignments based on the due date, which showed their efforts. The mid and final-term results, which were tabulated, clearly showed significant improvements in their understanding of the learning materials taught in online ELT. All students have achieved the minimum passing grade in the study program (i.e., 70 points).

DISCUSSION
The Perceptions of Online ELT Learning

The primary focus of this case study was to explore perceptions of implementing online learning in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) for higher education. The study found that online ELT differs significantly when catering to adult learners compared to younger or teenage students, primarily due to adults' distinct characteristics and learning needs. This understanding is crucial as it influences the decision to adopt either online or offline modes of ELT in the future. The research identified four positive perceptions of online ELT: flexibility and accessibility, enhanced self-confidence, promotion of self-directed and reflective learning, and well-structured learning presentations.

Firstly, online ELT is valued for its inherent flexibility and accessibility, allowing students to engage with learning materials anytime and anywhere, which is particularly advantageous for adult learners who may need to balance educational pursuits with other responsibilities such as work or family care (Ally, 2008; Harmer, 2007; Long, 2004; Moore, 2009). Budiarta and Santosa (2020) emphasize that this flexibility enables students to learn or revisit materials conveniently. Dieterich and Hamsher (2020) also support this, noting that the flexibility of online programs and courses is beneficial, especially during the challenges posed by the pandemic when many students face erratic schedules. Furthermore, Laily et al. (2023) highlight that online assessments create a convenient learning atmosphere, supporting students in career transitions who find the flexible learning environment conducive to managing various personal and professional commitments.

The second critical perception identified post-pandemic is the significant improvement in self-confidence among lecturers and students engaged in online ELT. This increased confidence is evident as students actively participate in discussions, readily ask questions, and freely express their opinions through video conferences and chat rooms (Yang et al., 2019). Such interactions, which might not occur as frequently in traditional classroom settings, highlight the unique opportunities provided by online environments to enhance self-confidence. According to Mehall (2020), this increase in self-confidence can lead to more purposeful interactions within online ELT learning, fostering a more engaged and proactive learning community.

Additionally, Haverback (2020) suggests that the post-pandemic period should see learners continuing to apply self-efficacy theory and engaging in virtual collaboration to strengthen their preparedness for future educational contexts. Integrating learning technologies is particularly crucial for teacher candidates as it boosts their confidence and equips them to handle future teaching challenges (Buss et al., 2017). The secure and supportive nature of online ELT environments allows students to explore and share ideas

confidently, essential for building a sense of community and achieving academic goals (Finkelstein, 2006).

Moreover, successful online learning environments are characterized by self-directed and reflective learning, which have become increasingly important in the post-pandemic landscape. Online platforms are ideally suited for fostering these skills, as they allow students to take control of their learning and reflect on their progress. Lecturers are encouraged to design courses that support these learning styles, enabling students to reflect critically on their learning and adjust their approaches based on their self-assessment (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; Macdonald, 2008). This ability to self-regulate and reflect is precious as adult learners often pursue specific personal and professional goals, reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses to optimize learning outcomes (Harasim, 2017). Bonk and Zhang (2008) further emphasize the need for varied online ELT approaches to stimulate and enhance students' reflective learning capabilities.

The research findings underscored the critical importance of structured presentation in online English Language Teaching (ELT) learning. Moore (2009) advocates that the presentation of learning materials on online platforms should mimic the organization and clarity of natural classroom settings, emphasizing a straightforward, step-by-step instructional approach. Such structuring is crucial for engaging students and meeting the established criteria of effective online ELT materials (Krajcso & Frimmel, 2017). This approach ensures that students can grasp the material comprehensively. Additionally, Baldwin and Ching (2019) stress the necessity for online learning materials to be accessible across various devices, including smartphones, enhancing learning flexibility and access. Well-structured and thoughtfully developed online materials facilitate more accessible learning, helping students absorb and apply knowledge more effectively.

The students also highlighted the significance of starting the online learning process with a clear presentation of materials. They noted a marked improvement in their understanding when lecturers began the online sessions with detailed explanations via video conference before moving on to practical applications. This initial presentation helps set the stage for deeper engagement and learning, reflecting the students' preference for a well-organized approach to online education.

The Challenges of Online ELT Learning

The transition to online English Language Teaching (ELT) in higher education has presented several enduring challenges in the post-pandemic era. These can be categorized into four main areas: managing online engagement, providing online feedback, conducting online assessments, and bridging the technological gap between lecturers and students.

Managing online engagement is one of the most persistent challenges in engaging students effectively in a virtual classroom setting. The inherent invisibility of students in online formats can make engagement particularly challenging. However, successfully managing engagement offers students ample opportunities to practice language skills, boosting their confidence and willingness to participate (Yang et al., 2019). Practical strategies for fostering engagement include using integrated platforms such as WhatsApp, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and video conferences where lecturers can present material and synchronize discussions. Additionally, Palloff and Pratt (2007) suggest that providing collaborative work can significantly enhance student engagement. Tools that

incorporate interactive and visual elements also play a crucial role in maintaining attention and improving the performance of adult learners (Ha & Im, 2020; Bonk & Zhang, 2008).

Moreover, providing online feedback is another significant challenge, which is the delivery of effective online feedback. Both online and traditional learning environments recognize the importance of feedback (Balula & Moreira, 2014). In online settings, feedback becomes crucial when students show signs of boredom, distraction, or disengagement. It is a vital communication tool that helps realign students with the learning objectives (Yao et al., 2020). The delivery of personalized feedback is essential for it to be impactful, addressing each student's specific involvement and needs during the online learning process. Finkelstein (2006) notes that appropriately tailored feedback can significantly enhance the educational experience, refreshing students' motivation and helping improve their learning outcomes.

Post-pandemic, online English Language Teaching (ELT) has continued to pose significant challenges in teaching and conducting assessments. As Conrad and Donaldson (2004) cited, Johnson notes that online assessments are typically ongoing and performance-based. However, ensuring the objectivity of these assessments has been particularly challenging. Unlike in traditional classroom settings, where lecturers can directly observe students during assessments, online platforms require extra effort to maintain integrity and prevent cheating. Despite these challenges, online assessments are crucial as they can stimulate engagement and effectively influence the success of online discussions (Wang & Chen, 2017). Furthermore, online assessments allow students to develop independently, emphasizing the importance of designing assessments that are as objective and performance-based as possible (Khan & Khan, 2018). Implementing online formative assessments is also vital as they support learning progress by monitoring students' ongoing development (Baleni, 2015).

Another persistent post-pandemic challenge is the technological gap between digital natives and immigrants. In this context, age is less significant than competence and experience with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in determining who is a digital native or immigrant (Creighton, 2018). The rapid shift to online learning required substantial digital literacy from lecturers and students. Schaefer et al. (2020) observed that this transition unveiled significant challenges for those unprepared for such a shift, necessitating further adaptation. Typically, students, primarily digital natives, adjusted more readily to online learning environments, utilizing their gadgets effectively.

In contrast, some senior lecturers, or digital immigrants, needed additional training to become proficient. This disparity highlights the importance of supporting digital immigrants in the transition to online environments and ensuring equitable access to technology for all participants (Riegel & Mete, 2017; Howlett & Waemusa, 2018). These ongoing challenges underscore the need for continuous improvement in online ELT strategies, particularly in assessment practices and technological training, to ensure that all participants can engage effectively and equitably in a post-pandemic educational landscape.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study aimed to elucidate the lessons learned from the perceptions and challenges of online English Language Teaching (ELT). The research identified four central perceptions of online ELT learning: flexibility and accessibility, self-

confidence, self-directed and reflective learning, and structured learning presentation. Students appreciated the flexibility of accessing learning materials anytime and anywhere, facilitating their learning process and allowing them to revisit content as needed. The integration of WhatsApp, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and video conferencing platforms bolstered their confidence during interactions within the online learning environment. Moreover, the students felt that online ELT enabled them to develop independently, enhancing their ability to learn autonomously.

The study also explored the challenges inherent in online ELT, which were categorized into four primary areas: managing online engagement, providing online feedback, conducting online assessments, and addressing the technological gap between lecturers and students. Managing engagement proved the most significant hurdle, highlighting that effective learning is contingent upon active engagement. Maintaining student attention and motivation through timely and constructive feedback was crucial for sustaining their interest and participation. The challenge of conducting fair and objective online assessments required considerable effort from educators, emphasizing the need for robust assessment strategies in online formats. Lastly, bridging the technological divide between digital natives and immigrants was essential for ensuring that all participants could fully engage with the online learning process. Finally, this research underscores the need for ongoing adjustments and enhancements in online ELT practices to address these challenges and leverage the identified benefits, ensuring a practical and inclusive educational experience for all students.

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