

## Factors Affecting Indonesian University Students' Participation in Synchronous vs Asynchronous Online English Classes: A Perceptual Analysis

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### Abstract

With the expanding realm of online education in Indonesia, determining factors influencing university students' participation in distinct modes of virtual learning is crucial to developing more effective digital pedagogy. This research aims to scrutinize factors affecting Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university students' low participation in synchronous and asynchronous online learning classes. This research was framed quantitatively by employing a five-rating Likert-scale survey. This survey aimed to illuminate the underlying factors that shape students' behaviors or perceptions within these online learning modes. The findings showed that factors affecting the Indonesian tertiary EFL students' low participation in synchronous virtual learning mode include technical problems, learning anxiety, social isolation, socioeconomic status, and pet and human interferences. Meanwhile, heavy workloads, tedious content, and deprivation of human contact were associated with the factors affecting the EFL students' low participation in asynchronous learning modes.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The education landscape is rapidly transforming, driven by the proliferation of online learning platforms and the integration of digital technologies (Malik, 2018). This shift has been further accelerated by the global events that have necessitated alternative modes of education delivery (Qureshi, Khan, Raza, Imran, and Ismail, 2021), including in Indonesia. With its diverse cultural tapestry, vast geographical expanse, and rapid technological advancements, Indonesia presents a compelling context for investigating online education dynamics. Zacharias (2003) mentioned that English proficiency is considered a gateway to enhanced employability and global communication in Indonesia, magnifying the importance of effective English language instruction. The recent surge in online education and the cultural significance placed on language learning underscores the need to delve deeper into how Indonesian students engage with different modes of online English classes.

Several studies have identified various factors influencing students' engagement in different online learning modes, encompassing both synchronous and asynchronous classes. Adedoyin and Soykan (2023) have pointed out that the factors contributing to students' reduced participation include technology, digital competencies, heavy workloads, socioeconomic backgrounds, interruptions from humans and pets, and assessment and supervision. Pardede (2023) stated that many teachers and students who are not ready encounter difficulties in online learning. In addition, Karal, Cebi, and Turgut (2011) have highlighted internet-related issues such as disconnections and poor sound quality as significant problems in synchronous online learning, leading to student disinterest. Furthermore, Ebrahimi, Faghih, and Marandi (2016) conducted another study identifying key factors influencing students' engagement in asynchronous online learning, including technological obstacles, time constraints, personal characteristics, grades, group size, and instructor involvement.

While existing research has explored online learning preferences and engagement factors in various settings, there appears to be a relative need for more research examining English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students within Indonesian higher education settings. By concentrating on Indonesian university students, this study addresses this gap and aims to shed light on how sociocultural elements, technological accessibility, and the importance of English proficiency jointly influence students' perspectives regarding virtual English language classes in synchronous and asynchronous online learning environments. The primary objective of this research is to answer the research question 'What are the main factors that impact the participation of tertiary-level EFL students in Indonesia in both synchronous and asynchronous online learning?'. The significance of this research outcome is expected to guide the development of targeted online English language courses that align with Indonesian cultural norms, technological access, and desired learning outcomes. Furthermore, it can contribute to creating more effective and engaging online learning experiences for Indonesian university students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

By synthesizing existing literature, this research highlights the potential factors affecting students' participation in both synchronous and asynchronous pedagogy from various literature, aiming to serve as a theoretical framework for this study and to shed light on university students' perspectives toward factors affecting their participation in synchronous and asynchronous classes. Moreover, strategies on how to mitigate these factors are also provided in this research to address the identified factors hindering participation. These mitigation strategies are rooted in evidence-based recommendations derived from the literature and aligned with the experiences shared by the participants. By proposing actionable solutions, the research contributes to enhancing the design and implementation of both synchronous and asynchronous classes, fostering an environment conducive to active and meaningful engagement.

### **The Causes of Low Participation in Synchronous Online Classes**

Synchronous online learning can be defined as the learner's and instructor's continuing physical separation during scheduled learning sessions, where real-time instruction allows students to engage in text, audio, or video communication with their peers and the teacher, facilitating meaningful dialogue and interaction (Martin, Ahlgrim-Delzell, and Budhrani, 2017). Nevertheless, this type of learning mode faces challenges leading to a low participation rate among students. Some factors have been associated with the main cause of low participation in synchronous online classes, including technical issues, discomfort with participation, limited interaction, and instructor-centric approaches.

One of the prominent causes of low participation in synchronous online classes is technical difficulties. Yan, Whitelock-Wainwright, Guan, Wen, Gašević, and Chen (2021) agree with Muilenburg and Berge (2005) indicating that technical issues such as poor internet connectivity, platform glitches, and compatibility issues, leading to disruption of students' ability to fully engage during synchronous classes. O'Brien, Roll, Kampen, and Davoudi (2022) share a similar perspective to Johnson and Renner (2012) clarifying that This technical barrier can create frustration, leading some students to disengage or opt out of sessions altogether. In cases of persistent technical challenges, students might perceive synchronous classes as more trouble than they're worth, resulting in diminished participation.

Furthermore, participation anxiety could also deter engagement in synchronous online classes. Yarmand, Solyst, Klemmer, and Weibel (2021) share a similar view with Rohmadi and Indriani (2020) stating that students experience inhibition and discomfort sharing video or audio in synchronous classes, preferring instead to use text chat. This discomfort stems from fears of language evaluation, broadcasting one's appearance, and talking into a "void" without social cues (Rohmadi and Indriani, 2020; Yarmand et al., 2021). As a result, students who experience participation anxiety tend to participate less in synchronous online classes, leading to a negative impact on conceptual understanding.

Moreover, while synchronous classes offer real-time interactions, these interactions might not be evenly distributed among students. In larger classes, only a few students might actively participate, while others prefer to remain passive (Chou, 2002). This lack

of opportunity for everyone to contribute can lead to feelings of exclusion and reduced motivation to participate. The pace of discussion might also hinder students from formulating well-considered responses, deterring them from engaging actively (Hew, Cheung, and Ng, 2010). Therefore, despite the real-time interactions synchronous classes provide, the uneven distribution of participation, potential exclusion, and the pace of discussion can collectively diminish overall student engagement.

Another factor hindering students' participation in synchronous online classes is students' socioeconomic status. Gorard and See (2009) state that students with less prestigious socioeconomic status backgrounds tend to be less engaging in class, impacting their academic achievement. Similarly, Karampoor (2016) and Estabrooks, Lee, and Gyurcsik (2003) suggest that individuals from lower socioeconomic status struggle to contribute actively in class due to inaccessible environments. Furthermore, the presence of family members and pets during online sessions is another factor affecting students' low participation. According to Adedoyin and Soykan (2023), the unexpected appearance of family members or pets can result in disturbances that hinder students' active engagement during synchronous online sessions.

In addition, tech-illiterate is also associated with factors driving low participation during synchronous online learning. Adedoyin and Soykan (2023) demonstrate that students lacking proficiency in digital skills may encounter challenges when attempting to make the best use of digital learning. In addition, Omotayo and Haliru (2020) establish a positive correlation between students' active participation in online learning and their level of digital competence. Therefore, it is likely that EFL higher education learners with less digital competence might struggle to participate in synchronous online learning due to their difficulty in accessing learning material or operating online learning devices.

### **Causes of Low Participation in Asynchronous Online Classes**

Asynchronous online classes, characterized by flexibility in learning schedules and reduced real-time interaction, offer convenience but also face challenges that can lead to low participation rates. Previous studies have highlighted factors affecting students' low participation in asynchronous learning mode, consisting of lack of structure, social isolation, self-regulation challenges, and disconnection from content.

One of the factors affecting students' low participation in studying English in asynchronous online learning is the lack of structure and accountability. Baker and Tukhvatulina (2023) found that adult learners in asynchronous online degree programs perceive the volume of coursework and deadlines as significant contributors to low engagement, underscoring the challenges they face in self-regulating their learning experiences. Ezeah (2014) illustrates that poorly designed courses and modules contribute to low participation among higher education students. Additionally, Dennen (2005) clarifies that a well-designed course structure, consisting of clear organization, guidance, and mechanism, is critical in maintaining student participation during asynchronous online learning. Similarly, according to Pardede (2019), restructuring classes into a blended learning format has the potential to enhance EFL participation at the tertiary level. Accordingly, the evidence suggests that a lack of structure and accountability can lead to one of the main factors affecting student participation.

Furthermore, social isolation and lack of peer interactions also lead to low engagement during asynchronous learning. Bender and Dickenson (2016) state that students might feel disconnected from their peers and the learning community without real-time interactions. This absence of regular peer interaction could lead to disengagement and isolation, diminishing the sense of belonging and sharing learning experiences (Steenberghs, Lavrijsen, Soenens, and Verschueren, 2021). Accordingly, the absence of regular peer interaction and the resulting feelings of disengagement and isolation represent critical factors contributing to reduced engagement during asynchronous learning in English Language Students at a university level.

Moreover, students are also reported to be less engaging in asynchronous classes owing to their' self-regulation skills. Xie, Durrington, and Yen (2011) highlight that students' self-regulation such as autonomy, competence, perceived value, and relatedness have different levels of impact on their online discussion behavior. Gelles, Lord, Hoople, Chen, and Mejia (2020) state that students who struggle with self-discipline might find it difficult to engage consistently, resulting in low participation. Similarly, Tasgin and Tunc (2018) indicate that students possessing low motivation are reluctant to engage in the classroom and tend to ignore the learning process. Therefore, understanding and nurturing students' self-regulation and motivation are essential for fostering meaningful participation in asynchronous learning environments at the university level. Sulistyawati and Kuswando (2022) propose a procedural approach for students to enhance their self-regulation in online classes, involving fostering learning autonomy, maintaining learning focus, and applying critical thinking skills.

## **METHOD**

The research was framed through a quantitative methodology which utilized a questionnaire survey. Bryman (2016) demonstrated that administering a survey in educational research helps the researcher to investigate individuals' perceptions toward particular issues. Similarly, Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) state that a survey can serve to reveal characteristics of the population, including perception and attitude. Therefore, the researchers employed a survey to allow them to investigate factors affecting tertiary EFL students' participation in both synchronous and asynchronous online classes. This survey was designed using a Likert scale. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) characterize the Likert scale as a method of gauging individuals' sentiments on a specific subject through multiple indicators or items, enabling researchers to quantify the intensity of their opinions about that topic. Aligning with this idea, the researcher formatted the survey into five categories, ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. These five rating scales enabled the researchers to determine diverse agreement, neutrality, or disagreement levels among the survey participants, encouraging the survey's response rate.

The participants of this research were 131 university students studying in the English Department at Samudra University. These students coming from different semesters were selected due to experiencing both synchronous and asynchronous

classes over their study period. The sampling technique employed while selecting the participant can be categorized as criterion sampling, which according to Bryman (2016), refers to a technique used to select participants who meet certain criteria relevant to the research objective. Accordingly selecting these university students is in line with this research as they have experienced both synchronous and asynchronous classes.

The selected participants of this research were asked to complete questionnaires investigating their perspectives on the primary causes of low participation experienced during their synchronous and asynchronous classes. This questionnaire was designed using Bahasa Indonesia, to allow students to comprehend the survey questions (Saputra, 2020), leading to better insight. Furthermore, The obtained data from the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics, which involves summarizing and describing the data using basic statistical measures such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (Bryman, 2016; Saputra & Asirah, 2022). The employed descriptive analysis using frequencies and percentages measurement provides an overview of the responses and helps identify trends or patterns of factors affecting synchronous and asynchronous classes. Accordingly, this analysis aims to capture the essence of the participants' perspectives on factors associated with low participation in synchronous and asynchronous learning modes.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Factors affecting university EFL students' low participation in synchronous learning**

Table 1. *Distribution of factors affecting students' participation in synchronous learning*

No	Items	percentage				
		Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree
1	Technical problems cause me to engage less in a synchronous class	3.8%	8.3%	22%	21.2%	43.9%
2	Anxiety causes my low participation	3%	18.9%	40.2%	25%	12.2%
3	Social Isolation causes low participation	7.6%	25%	30.3%	27.3%	9.1%
4	Socioeconomic status leads to low participation	9.8%	19.7%	28.8%	17.4%	23.5%
5	Pet and Human interruption	17.4%	14.4%	29.5%	21.2%	16.7%
6	Tech illiteracy causes low participation	15.9%	22%	34.1%	15.9%	11.4%

Table 1 shows that most tertiary EFL students, in total 65.1% (21.2% and 43.9%), perceived technical problems as one of the main factors affecting their low participation in synchronous online classes. In addition, the majority of students, which consist of 40.2%, are unsure if the anxiety factor can affect their engagement in online classes. This trend is then followed by 37.2% of students in total agreeing that anxiety prevents them from participating in online classes. However, a small number of students, accounting for 21.9%, disagree that anxiety can affect their participation in online classes.

Furthermore, according to the data in Table 1, 27.3% of students agree, while 9.1% strongly agree that social isolation leads to reduced participation. This proportion can be summed up to 36.3% of students agree that social isolation leads to low involvement. Conversely, 32.6% of students disagree with this statement, and 30.3% maintain a neutral stance. Moreover, regarding the effect of socioeconomic status on students' low participation, it is confirmed that 23.5% and 17.4% of students strongly agree and strongly disagree, accounting for 40.9% of students believing that their low participation was caused by socioeconomic status. Nonetheless, 28.8% of students remained unsure, while 19.7% disagreed and 9.8% strongly disagreed with their socioeconomic status affecting their low participation. Accordingly, it can be concluded that most students believe that social isolation and socioeconomic status can contribute to their low participation.

In addition, table 1 shows that the percentage of students believing that their low participation is also caused mainly by human and pet interruption, ranging from 16.7 % strongly agree, and 21.2 % agree (37.9% in total). However, 31.8% of students, comprising 17.4% and 14.4% of students, either strongly disagree or disagree that this factor caused their low participation. Meanwhile, 29.5% of students remain neutral toward human and pet interruption, affecting low involvement. Additionally, most students in this study disagree that tech literacy is one factor causing their low participation, encompassing 38.1%. This trend is followed by 34.4% of students remaining neutral and 27.1% agreeing that technology skills drove low participation. Therefore, it is confirmed that although most students disagree that their ability to cooperate with technology caused their low participation, most believe that their low participation was driven by pet and human interruptions.

### Factors affecting university EFL students' low participation in asynchronous learning

Table 2. *Distribution of factors affecting students' participation in asynchronous learning*

No	Items	percentage				
		Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree
1	Workload causes low participation in asynchronous learning	1.5%	8.3%	38.6%	28.8%	22%
2	Tedious content leads to low participation	5.3%	15.9%	43.2%	22.7%	12.1%
3	Self-regulation (discipline and motivation) results in low participation	12.1%	22.0%	35.6%	21.2%	8.3%
4	Deprive of human contact leads to low participation	3.8%	17.4%	38.6%	18.2%	21.2%

Table 2 indicates students' perspective toward factors affecting EFL Student's low participation in asynchronous online classes. It can be seen from Table 2 that one of the leading causes of low participation in an asynchronous online class is a heavy workload; 50.8% of students agree that workload is one of the main factors of low participation in a synchronous online class, followed by 38% of students show a neutral attitude. In comparison, only 9.8% of students disagree with this category. Furthermore, The number of students agreeing that tedious content can affect their participation outweighs the disagreement, with 34.8 % agreeing compared to 21.2% disagreeing. Accordingly, class workloads and tedious content drive low participation among EFL Students in asynchronous online classes.

However, it can be noticed from Table 2 that the majority of students disagree that self-regulation, such as discipline and motivation, affects students' participation in synchronous class, with 12.1% of students strongly disagree and 22% of students disagreeing. Meanwhile, 35.6% of students are neutral about this item, and some feel that 29.5% agree that self-regulation can affect student participation in asynchronous online classes. Moreover, most students agree that depriving human contact leads to low involvement in asynchronous learning mode. The number of students agreeing to this reached 39.4%, while 38.6% stayed neutral, and a small number disagreed, comprising 21.2% of students. Therefore, although many students in this study believe that self-regulation did not affect their participation, most agree that depriving human contact is one factor affecting their participation in asynchronous online classes.

## **Discussion**

Based on the result of this research, it is found that there are five principal factors affecting EFL students' low participation in synchronous online classes. One of the main factors is technical problems such as poor internet connection and technical glitches. This finding aligns with Yan et al. (2005) stating that such technical issues can affect students' ability to be involved actively in synchronous online classes. Johnson and Renner (2012) explain that technical problems during a synchronous online session can make students feel frustrated and opt out of the sessions. Furthermore, this study suggests that anxiety is pivotal in deterring EFL students' low participation during online sessions. Similarly, Yarmand, Solyst, Klemmer, and Weibel also indicate that students experience anxiety due to their fears of language evaluation and broadcasting their appearance, resulting in students feeling inhibition and discomfort to turn their cameras on and mute themselves during the online session. Due to such behavior, identifying whether they are actively engaged in the class or not can be challenging.

Moreover, this study highlights social isolation as another factor associated with tertiary EFL students' low participation in synchronous online learning. Chou (2002) and Hew, Cheung, and Ng (2010) indicate that students often feel excluded due to a lack of opportunity to contribute during online sessions, reducing their motivation to engage actively in synchronous online sessions. Additionally, the finding also indicates that students' socioeconomic status, such as not having well-supported compact devices, also hinders EFL university students' active participation during online classes. Khansir,

Jafarizadegan, and Karampoor (2016) indicate that students' participation and motivation in EFL classes were determined by their socioeconomic background.

Additionally, the study's findings also validate that the involvement of pets or family members can disrupt the engagement of tertiary EFL students in synchronous online learning. Adedoyin and Soykan (2023) demonstrate that the presence of unexpected family members or pets can lead to distractions that impede students' active participation in synchronous online sessions. Nevertheless, although some research suggests that technological literacy can impact online learning participation, this study suggests otherwise. Most students in this research believe that their ability to use technology does not hinder their participation. This is probably because this generation, digital natives, is accustomed to incorporating technology into their daily lives.

Furthermore, the finding also reveals that three primary factors contribute to the reduced engagement of tertiary EFL students in asynchronous learning. One of these factors is the course workload. This finding aligns with the results of Baker and Tukhvatulina (2023), which suggest that courses with an excessive workload and strict deadlines can diminish students' motivation to complete them, leading to decreased participation. Furthermore, another factor influencing asynchronous learning in this study is the inadequate design and content structure. This corresponds to a similar outcome observed by Ezeah and Demen (2005), which emphasized that poorly designed courses can result in reduced participation because students do not find the learning process enjoyable.

Another factor contributing to the limited participation of tertiary EFL students in synchronous mode is the absence of human interaction. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Bender and Dickenson (2016) and Steenberghs et al. (2021), both of which suggest that students' reluctance to engage in asynchronous learning is primarily because it lacks regular human contact, resulting in feelings of isolation and a reduced inclination to contribute to class discussions actively. Nevertheless, despite some studies indicating that self-discipline can impact students' participation, this finding suggests otherwise, with the majority of students in this study disagreeing that their self-discipline affects their engagement.

## **CONCLUSION**

Some factors are associated with EFL low participation during synchronous online learning modes. These factors include technical difficulty, students' anxiety, social isolation, socioeconomic status, and pet and human intrusion during online sessions. However, students in this study do not consider lacking digital competence as one of the main factors affecting their low participation during online classes. Furthermore, this research also establishes some factors that affect students' low participation in asynchronous online learning. These factors include workload, tedious content, and lack of human interaction. While some studies confirm that self-regulation, such as motivation, can affect students' participation in asynchronous mode, this study indicates otherwise, in which the majority of students believe that their self-regulation does not affect their involvement. By dissecting the factors that mold Indonesian university

students' participation in synchronous vs. asynchronous online English classes, this study contributes a unique perspective to optimizing online education. The insights gained through perceptual analysis provide valuable guidance for designing a more tailored, effective, and engaging approach to online language instruction, harmonizing with Indonesian students' specific preferences and circumstances.

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