

## EFL STUDENTS' SELF-REGULATION IN ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates self-regulation in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically how students regulate their learning activities amidst challenging circumstances. This research focuses on the challenges faced by students in online learning activities. Moreover, this study emphasizes on the strategies students employed to regulate their learning processes. The participants of this study were 38 students from two private universities in Indonesia. Data were collected through Forum Group Discussion (FGD) and analyzed by using open coding. The results of this study revealed that students dealt with difficulties during online learning, specifically related to an internet connection, an unsupportive learning environment, and negative emotions. However, they utilized self-regulated learning strategies to support them in online learning activities such as self-consequating, environmental structuring, emotion regulation, and time management. Further, lecturers or teachers could use the results of this study to be introduced and implemented as students' learning strategies because self-regulated could be developed.*

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**Keywords:** *Self-regulation; Self-regulated learning; Online learning; Covid-19 Pandemic*

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### INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of Covid-19 brings immense changes in our life, including how educational institutions conduct learning activities. The learning processes have been shifted to online learning following the government regulation to have social distancing. Technology has offered great help to break the chain of coronavirus which allows the students to engage in distance learning. Distance learning is considered an effective solution in this time of crisis as it provides flexibility both to the teachers and students (Azhari & Fajri, 2022). Students could access the learning material anytime and anywhere. As a result, students have to regulate their own learning process.

Students have to be autonomous during online learning. However, students often encounter impediments lowering their motivation in online learning activity. Seeking tangible evidence, some researchers conducted studies to discover the hurdles faced by students in online learning circumstances. Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2020) focused on EFL students' challenges during online learning. The participants of their study were higher students of a private university in Indonesia. Their study revealed that EFL students encountered several impediments during online learning, namely, unstable internet connection, insufficient collaborative learning activities, and limited discussion opportunity with the teachers. In addition, the researchers urged teachers to provide material which relates to the real world in order to arouse students' interest.

In a similar vein, Meşe and Sevilen (2021) found that students' motivation in online learning was affected by several factors such as learning interaction, material, and environment. Their study revealed that teachers hold an essential role in the learning processes. Amidst the limitation of face-to-face interaction, students craved activities that could engage them in social interaction with peers. Indeed, online learning will never replace face-to-face meetings. This study also highlighted that authentic material and learning activities prepared by the teachers were considered significant to the students. Online learning is believed as an exhausting activity for students. Moreover, students tend to easily get bored. This study suggested that teachers had to provide enjoyable learning activities for the students. Gamifying the lesson could be the finest approach to occupy the students' learning demands. Students nowadays are considered digital natives since they grow up within the technology development. As a result, they tend to choose learning activities that involve technology.

Concerning the issue of online learning challenges, Azhari and Fajri (2022) delved into the challenges of online learning from Indonesian teachers' points of view. No one is ready for the abrupt changes of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers also experience a sudden shift in the educational system. Azhari and Fajri (2022) discovered that teachers tended to be unprepared in adjusting to the new learning environment. Diverse online applications or websites are easily found and used to support the learning processes yet teachers' ICT mastery is still low. Therefore, teachers had to learn how to use ICT while adapting the materials to the current condition. Another adversity encountered by teachers was related to the internet connection. Due to the geographic condition of Indonesia, teachers in remote places experienced difficulties in delivering the material. Furthermore, the economic condition of families which could not support the

implementation of online learning through having online platforms became another challenge confronted by the participants. However, teachers devoted enormous effort in order to support the learning process by using a low-cost online application.

Despite the impediments aforementioned, the flexibility of online learning advocates students organizing their own learning process. Students have to be self-regulated learners in order to attain the learning goals during the online learning situation. Self-regulation obtains a spotlight recently since learning is shifted to online learning. Sizeable research on online learning has been discussed by previous researchers. However, the studies merely focus on the challenges of online learning. There is still little research discussing self-regulation in online learning, specifically in EFL higher educational contexts. Accordingly, this research was conducted to shed more light on the literature. This research focuses on self-regulated learning in speaking and writing classes as those skills are productive skills and considered challenging by the students. Therefore, this study investigate how students regulate themselves in online learning classes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Online Language Learning*

Frankly speaking, the Covid-19 pandemic has driven the utilization of technology in the learning processes. The integration of technology is “no longer become an option in the online learning but a necessity” (Dhawan, 2020). Indeed, the benefits of technology in online language learning have been long reported. Despite offering time flexibility, online learning assists students in language development processes (Manegre & Sabiri, 2020). In speaking classes, students are provided opportunities to hone their language skills since they are exposed to interact with people around the globe. A previous study showed that online learning improved students’ writing skills (Prasetyawati & Ardi, 2020). Further, Patra, Alghazali, Sokolova, Prasad, Pallathadka, Hussein, Shanan, and Ghaneiarani (2022) conducted a study on the effects of e-learning, specifically in reading class. The results showed that e-learning increase students’ reading motivation as well as reduce students’ reading anxiety. In addition to listening class, online learning offers flexibility and practicality to the students (Rahmawati, 2022). According to Rahmawati (2022), teachers could provide varied listening activities such as doing online quizzes, watching YouTube videos, and listening to online audio.

Based on the aforementioned explanation, online learning offers advantages for language classroom. Moreover, online learning provides new learning circumstances in which students are in charge of choosing their own learning style. Furthermore, online

learning promotes the advancement of autonomous learning (Ardi, 2017; Gacs, Goertler, & Spasova, 2020; Pasaribu, 2020). In brief, online learning facilitates teachers to provide authentic materials to the students as well as gamify the lesson in which barely could find in the conventional learning process.

#### *Self-regulation in online learning*

The need to regulate students' own learning process has been echoed over the past of couple years. The concept of self-regulated learning was first defined by Zimmerman in 1986. Zimmerman (1986) emphasized that self-regulated learning encompasses three phases, namely, planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning. In other words, self-regulated learning involves students' active participation to manage their own learning process. Students will engage themselves in controlling their behavior, environment, and thoughts to achieve the desired learning goals (Morshedian, Hemmati, & Sotoudehnama, 2016).

Self-regulated learning skills could be nurtured within a supportive learning environment (Cho & Kim, 2019). Moreover, self-regulation is closely related to students' achievement. Researchers found that self-regulated students attain better achievement than those who could not regulate their learning process (Wolters, 2003). Self-regulation obtains a spotlight in the present time, particularly due to online learning processes. Online learning demands students to be more independent in organizing their learning. Therefore, students need to be self-regulated learners. Self-regulation in online learning occurrences would be different from the offline meeting as students encounter different challenges in online learning classes. It is believed that successful self-regulation in online learning is determined by technology proficiency (Su, Zheng, Liang, & Tsai, 2018). Therefore, teachers and students are encouraged to become more acquainted with online applications or technology.

#### **METHOD**

This study aimed to investigate students' self-regulation in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic by employing qualitative method, specifically narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry enables researchers to delve in-depth information on individual's life experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). This qualitative research focused on higher students' self-regulated learning experiences in online circumstances. Thus, the theories used to discuss this issue is the theory of self-regulated learning by Zimmerman (1986) and Wolters (2003). The participants of this research were thirty-eight higher education students from two different private universities. The participants chosen in this research were those who had at least one year of online learning experience. Further, the

participants took speaking and writing classes since those skills were regarded as challenging to be honed during online learning. Based on the demographic profile, the participants came from different backgrounds in which some of them were also working. This particular fact could strengthen the data on how students regulate themselves in online learning as online learning offered flexibility for the students to create their own learning environment. The researchers conducted focused-group discussions (FGD) to obtain holistic sets of data. Then, open coding was employed to analyze and interpret the. The data were shorted into specific themes, namely students' challenges in online classrooms and strategies to regulate students' learning.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

In this section, the researchers present the results of the data analysis. The data analysis is classified into two parts which are the challenges faced by students in online learning and strategies employed by students to regulate their learning. In this part, participants demographic profile has been added to provide thorough elaboration.

**Table 1.**

Participants Demographic Profile

Demographic Factors		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	18	47%
	Female	20	53%
Job	Teacher	6	16%
	Student	32	84%

### The Challenges in Online Learning

In order to figure out the challenges in online learning, the participants were asked to recall their online learning experiences. During the FGD, P9 emphasized the difficulties she faced during online learning.

*"I have been doing the online learning for 2 semesters and for me it's harder than offline learning. Sometimes it's too fast or sometimes I just can't follow it and get confused at the end of the class." (P9)*

From the excerpt above, it is worth noting that online learning is more challenging than offline learning. P9 explained how she could not follow the learning activities. As a result, she often felt confused at the end of the class. P9 added that the time allocation for learning activities in the online circumstance became limited. Therefore, P9 could not

manage to deliver questions and clarify the learning process. In addition, P9 felt that she could not adapt to the learning change even though she had been experiencing online learning for a year. Apart from the limited activities in online learning, students also encountered other difficulties related to the technology, internet connection, and learning environment as explained below.

*"I cannot follow the online learning because I'm not a person that knows much about technology." (P13)*

*"The most challenging is the unstable signal." (P7)*

*"The situation that was not as conducive as on campus was a bit difficult for me to focus 100% on lectures and how I face that challenge is I'm using my headset to ignore all the noise distractions." (P8)*

From P13, P7, and P8's statements above, it can be seen that students, especially Indonesian students, were not ready in facing the changes from offline to online learning. No one is ready for the abrupt changes indeed. P13 appeared that she could not follow the learning activities in an online setting due to her lack of technology mastery. She was not proficient enough in using technology although all the activities in online learning were using the help of technology such as virtual meetings, chatting, and online assignment submission. Another different challenge was experienced by P7. P7 faced difficulty in terms of internet connection, specifically unstable internet connection. An unstable internet connection becomes one of the main concerns in online learning as students and teachers all around the globe encounter this hurdle. Further, P8's adversity was related to her inability to fully focus on learning. She expressed that her learning environment was less conducive compared to the learning situation at her offline classes. Furthermore, participants faced external challenges explained as follows.

*"The difficulty is that I have to regulate my emotions. Sometimes, I feel overwhelmed but I have to deal with the emotions and it is not easy to stay motivated all the time." (P4)*

*"I have two kids and it is difficult for me to stay focused on the online class because I have to take care of my kids. Sometimes, I also procrastinate the assignments because taking care of my kids is still my priority." (P1)*

P4 acknowledged that he faced obstacle in regulating himself during online learning, specifically in regulating his emotion. Online learning caused him emotionally unstable resulting in fluctuating motivation. P4 also expressed that he often felt overwhelmed because of plenty of assignments given by the lecturers. In P1's case, she faced problem because of the time flexibility offered in online learning. P1 is a mother of two-child. Therefore, she had to manage her time between studying and taking care of the family. P1 mentioned that she opted to put off task submission because of taking care of her family.

### **Self-regulated Learning Strategies**

Based on the results of FGD, which has been conducted to discover how participants regulate their learning during online classes, participants elaborated diverse strategies as their coping strategies to organize their online learning.

#### ***Self-Consequating***

Some of the participants regulated their learning processes by rewarding themselves every time they finished completing assignments. Giving self-reward was one of the strategies used to keep them focused on the learning process.

*"Usually, I will watch Korean or China dramas and variety shows after finishing my assignment. Every time I feel unmotivated or about to procrastinate the task, I keep thinking that I could watch a new Korean drama as soon as I complete the assignment. It is very effective because it forces me to work harder."* (P2)

*"I will do things that make me happy and relax after completing my assignments."* (P6)

The excerpts above show that both P2 and P6 possessed high motivation whenever she gave rewards after completing the task. The rewards given to themselves were common activities they usually did such as watching their favourite TV show or doing relaxing activities. However, this self-regulated learning strategy was an efficient strategy that helped the participants in the task completion.

### ***Environmental Structuring***

Based on the FGD result, P7 and P8 showed their endeavour in shifting the environment in order to support them in learning activities or task completion.

*"If the signal is unstable, there is nothing I can do instead of waiting around and maybe tethering to someone else."* (P7)

*"The situation that was not as conducive as on campus. I'm using my headset to ignore all the noise distractions."* (P8)

According to P7, he encountered an unstable internet connection. He emphasized that the difficulty was beyond his control. However, he tried to solve the problem by tethering from somebody's phone in order to be able to follow the learning activities. P8 articulated that online learning was less conducive compared to offline learning. Therefore, she had to manage the environment to support her learning process.

### ***Time Management***

Undeniably, one of the fruitful merits of online learning is time flexibility. Students could fully access the learning material anytime and anywhere. Consequently, students should have managed their learning time.

*"During the pandemic, I feel like I have a lot of things to do. So, I usually make daily notes. I write the important things that I need to complete and the finishing target as well. This really helps me use my time efficiently."* (P1)

*"This pandemic brings another challenge for me. There are plenty of tasks needed to be completed. I have to make sure that I manage my time well."* (P4)

P1 elaborated that she had many activities to be done, both academic and non-academic related. She realized that she could neglect some activities. Therefore, she listed things that should be done. This strategy facilitated her to manage and use of time efficiently. P4 also emphasized that online learning added another burden to him. According to him, online learning did not provide sufficient time for task completion. Therefore, he had to organize his time wisely.

### ***Emotion Regulation***

Within plenty of activities or assignments in online learning, regulating emotion becomes a fruitful strategy to be employed. One of the participants expressed how he regulated his emotion during online learning.

*"During this pandemic, I always try to get rid of negative emotions by taking a break for a while or sharing my problems with my parents or friends." (P4)*

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that P4 took a short break in order not to get burnout during online learning. He realized that his health, especially mental health, is important. He also sought encouragement from the closest persons. Therefore, he could boost his energy and motivation to accomplish the assigned tasks.

### **Discussion**

It is worth noting that online learning provides benefits during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Arkorful and Abaidoo (2014), online learning offers flexibility for students since students could access the learning material or activity at the time when convenient for them. However, the use of online platforms provides its challenges as well. Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2020) argue that one of the salient challenges of the online classroom during the pandemic is the readiness of teachers and students in using technology. This is in line with the results of the FGD in which students experienced several hardships, such as low technology proficiency and an uncondusive learning situation. Indonesia is an archipelago country which consists of thousands of separate islands. Therefore, an unstable internet connection becomes a substantial challenge during online learning. Rahmawati and Sujono (2021) articulate that technical problems, specifically insufficient technology infrastructure, interfere online learning activities during the pandemic. This opinion supports the FGD result of this study in which participants often encountered an unstable internet connection problem.

Facing sudden changes force students to adapt to new learning circumstances. As a result, students attempt to find pertinent coping strategies which could support them in their learning process. It is worth noting that the participants in this study regulated their learning process since online learning urged them to be autonomous learners. In line with Wolters (2003) P2 and P6 admitted that they gave rewards to themselves after completing their tasks. Self-consequating is one of the self-regulated learning strategies in which students will reward themselves every time they achieve their goals or give consequences if they could not attain the desired goal (Wolters, 2003). Students who use self-consequating strategy are believed to have high motivation and engagement in learning activities than those who do not utilize this strategy (Wolters, 2003). Thus, this strategy is effective in driving students to engage in the online learning activities and accomplish the tasks.

Another self-regulated learning strategy employed by the students was environmental structuring. Environmental structuring strategy is also frequently mentioned as environmental control as students have full capability to organize the environment around them in order to eliminate any kind of environmental distraction (Corno, 1993). P7 and P8's statements showed how they adjusted their learning environment to encourage them in online learning activities as well as in task completion. The results of this study are supported by Wolters (2003) who mentioned that environmental structuring strategy drives students to stay focused on the task completion by refraining from distraction.

During online learning, students often have to accomplish the given assignment and other responsibilities. Subsequently, students should have time management skill. P1 and P4 found that they had to complete abundant assignments given in the online learning. According to them, managing time was a paramount skill to be implemented during online learning. Kulusakli (2022) also states that students have to be skilful in organizing their time during distance learning as they have to accomplish responsibilities both from family and school.

Furthermore, emotion regulation strategy was also employed by the participant. Based on P4's statement, feeling burnout or overwhelmed was unavoidable during online learning. However, he always tried to avoid negative emotions by seeking others' reassurance. The results of this study are in line with Wolters (2003) who emphasized that emotion regulation strategy is often used to eradicate negative emotions by seeking for positive encouragement, shifting attention, and thinking of something else. To sum up, students experienced challenges during online learning. However, students regulated their learning activities by employing coping strategies which could help them solve the hardship as well as support them to follow the learning activities.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, students experience diverse adversities in online learning. Although the idea of integrating technology in the classroom has been echoed for the past decade, the activities in online learning are still considered brand-new by the students. As a result, students have to adapt to the new learning activity. This paper highlights the strategies utilized by the students to regulate their learning process. Among self-regulated learning strategies, giving self-reward and adjusting the learning environment are the most used strategies by the participants. Self-regulated learning strategies used by the participants in this study drive them to engage in the learning process and task completion. Thus, teachers could assist students to regulate their learning process since self-regulated learning could be nurtured. It would be alluring for future researchers to investigate self-regulated learning in post-pandemic.

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