



Online Learning Activities and Social Styles of Online Learners in General English Course: A Survey in Two Classes in a Private Higher Educational Institution in Bandung Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a report of a survey on identifying the most preferred online learning activities in an online learning platform and types of learner styles taking General English Course as an obligatory course in two classes in a private higher educational institution. The aim of this study is to identify the most preferred online activities and the tendency of social learners of online learner in online learning platform. The data employed in this study were gained by distributing a survey to sixty-four online learners and categorized them into online learning activities and the social learning styles from Grasha-Riechman Student Learning Style Scales. The results indicate that the most preferred online learning activities are doing practices or exercises, conducting virtual meeting and watching videos and their social learning styles in online learning tend to be more dependent, collaborative and participative.

Keywords: online learning activities, Grasha-Riechmann, social styles of online learners, productive interaction..

INTRODUCTION

As the Covid-19 cases have subsided in the early year of 2022, some subject courses in higher educational institutions start being conducted in face to face classes and some other courses are still implemented in distance learning or online teaching and learning. One of the subject courses which has been still conducted in distance learning or online classes is English Course, commonly as an obligatory course in higher educational institutions. Teachers and students in English Course have been experiencing in such a mode of teaching and learning for two years since the outbreak of Covid-19 started.

Online English Course has been conducted in different teaching and learning online platforms or different Learning Management System (LMS) in different higher educational institutions. Moodle and Google Classroom are commonly used for LSM platforms in online classes. A variety of learning activities need to be designed based on the objective of the learning and students need guidance to be able to meet the objective of the learning. Since all learning activities cannot be conducted in synchronous learning, other activities designed in asynchronous learning need to be well-provided so that students can be easily guided from one activity to other activities and can foster a meaningful experience of learning.



Activities for synchronous learning are virtual meeting, online quiz, online test, whereas for asynchronous activities are watching video, learning from Slides, discussion forum discussion, practices, individual assignment, collaborative work etc. Some considerations are needed when designing these learning activities such as language skills, the objective of the lesson, students' learning modality, social learning styles of students, language exposure, etc. Students themselves have different preferences in the way they learn. Some of students would prefer to complete task in a group work rather than work on it individually. Some students prefer virtual meeting in every session while the others prefer it in only for several sessions. This depends on student's preferences in learning, and social styles of online learners are different from one student to other students.

A previous study of learning styles in online learning platform by Hiong and Ling (2020) identifies the level of students' learning styles, the level of usage towards online technology learning platforms and whether there is any significant relationship between students' learning style and usage towards course components in online technology learning platform. This study involved thirty students from a private educational institution in Sibuluan, Sarawak and Grasha-Riechmann Student Learning Style Scale and RASE (Resources, Activity, Support, and Evaluation) pedagogical model were employed as the instruments to gain the data through a survey in August 2018. The results show that with the use of a learning platform, students become more aware of their learning styles and more versatile learners and educators who have a strong focus on learning design in the activity variable, when actual academic success in the activity variable would yield more conclusive results.

Another previous study of online learner styles (Sukmiarni, 2021) involved eighty-eight students learning English online in a private higher educational institution as the participants. This study identifies social styles of the participants when learning English online and the theory from Grasha and Riechmann was employed to categorize students' preferences in learning online. The result shows that the learners' social styles tend to be more dependent, collaborative and participative in online learning. However, the present study discusses online learner styles in a private higher educational institution as it was discussed in Sukmiarni (2021) but furthermore the most preferred learning activities was also identified. Therefore, the present study aims to identify social styles of online learners and the most preferred online learning activities in two online English classes in a private university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective learning activities are activities that can mobilize, engage and enable to develop learners' knowledge and skills (Allan, 2007). Then generating interest, enthusiasm and motivation are needed when they participate in the activity (p.100). This means that providing learners with various activities and relevant to objectives of learning is needed to be designed and prepared well. As it is stated that authentic tasks or situation are designed



and delivered to learners as individuals or groups (p.101). These authentic tasks which are relevant and related to real, current issues are needed to be designed in online classes.

Designing learning activities in an online class is intended to foster productive interaction (Nilson, L.B., Goodson, L.A.: 2017). As in an offline class, teachers can be easier to monitor to yield productive interaction between teachers and students and among students can be directly guided whereas in an online class interaction it needs to be designed with considerations so that the interaction between the teachers and students and among students will take place productively. Besides activities providing the interaction, activities that help learners to learn more are by including multimedia learning. This learning includes visual and auditory materials that help learners create mental presentation (Mayer, 2014).

Besides a consideration to provide productive interaction in an online class, another consideration is teachers' awareness of learners' social styles in learning. Learning styles are as "personal qualities that influence learner's ability to acquire information, interact with peers and the instructor, and otherwise participate in the learning experience" (Grasha, 1966 cited in Stavredes, 2011: 24). Furthermore, Stavredes emphasizes this definition on the social styles and the interaction taking place between peers and the instructor in a given learning environment which gives an impact on learning.

Anthony Grasha and Sheryl Riechman developed The Grasha-Riechman Student Learning style Scales (Grasha: 1996 cited in Stavredes; 2011: 24). This describes how learners interact with the instructor, other learners, and the learning environment. The scale ranges in six categories and in three dimensions of preferences: *Independent-dependent*, *competitive-collaborative*, and *avoidant* (p.24-25).

Table 1. Grasha-Riechmann Student Learning Style Scales

Style	Preferences
Independent	1. Prefers to work alone 2. Not interested in discussion and other learner interaction 3. Not interested in team work
Dependent	4. Looks to instructor and learners as guide 5. Prefers an authority figure to tell them what to do 6. Prefers highly structured environment
Competitive	7. Interested in learning for reward and recognition 8. Prefers exams to projects
Collaborative	9. Learns by sharing and cooperating with instructor and learners 10. Prefers group work discussions
Avoidant	11. Not excited about attending class and discussion 12. Uninterested 13. Overwhelmed
Participate	14. Interested in class activities and discussion 15. Works hard 16. Wants to meet instructor's expectation



Table 1 shows a set of criteria of different learning styles. These criteria of each learning style can help teachers to be aware when designing online learning activities. What kinds of online learning activities can maximize positive criteria so that the meaningful learning can be fostered and, minimize negative criteria that probably appear in certain students so that they can be motivated to gain the goal of learning.

Study Description

Participants

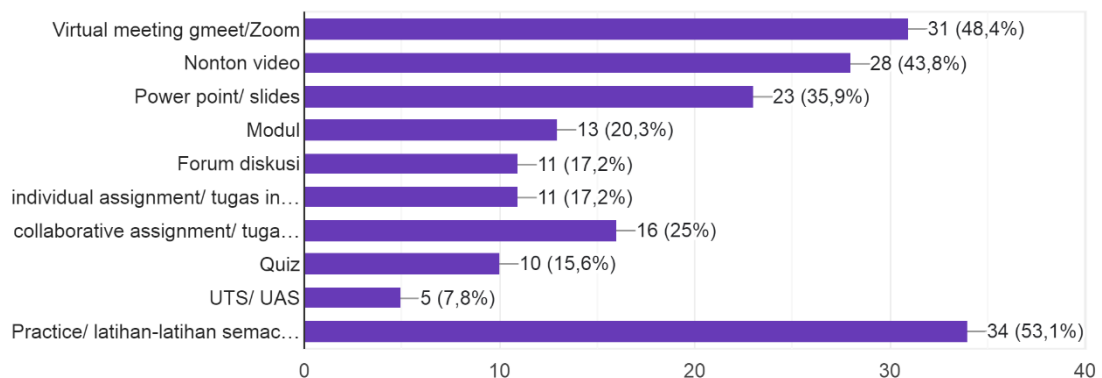
This study was conducted in two classes in a private university in Bandung. The participants are 64 university students who are learning General English 2 as an obligatory subject course. The data were taken by the end of April 2022 and numbers of the participants are 36 female and 28 male students.

Instruments and Method

A simple set of questionnaires was administered to all the participants. The questionnaire used in this study is close ended questions. Criteria of the questionnaire were based on the criteria of six categories of social styles by Grasha -*Independent-dependent, competitive-collaborative, and avoidant-participative*, comprising of sixteen questions and a list of online learning activities that they have been dealt in learning English. The data were collected from questionnaire and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data from questionnaire used to identify the most preferred online learning activities are indicated in graph, as follows;



From the graph above, the data show that the first preferred online learning activity is doing



practices or exercises gaining 53.1% and the second most preferred online learning activity is conducting virtual meeting reaching 48.4% whereas the third most preferred online learning activity is watching videos indicating 43,8%. Meanwhile the least preferred online learning activity is UTS/UAS or Middle Term Test/ Final Term Test gaining 7,8%.

Here is the list of online activities in the table 2. starting from the most and least preferred online activities.

1	Practice/ exercises
2	Virtual Meeting
3	Watching Videos
4	Slides/ Power point
5	Collaborative assignment
6	Modul
7	Discussion Forum and Individual Assignment
8	Quiz
9	Middle/Final Term Test

Table 2 Learning Online Activities

The reasons why the participants prefer practices/exercises, virtual meetings, watching videos as their three most preferred online learning activities, here are learners' opinion of what they think and also feel as follows;

I. The first most preferred online learning activity: Doing practices/exercises

"Karna kalo dilibatkan dengan game akan terasa menyenangkan ketika mengerjakan latihan atau tugas dll ."

"Because if the practices with game will be enjoyable when (I) complete those practices/exercises". (AR., PM#02)

"Karena saya menyukai hal tersebut juga ketika bermain game kita lebih seru dan lebih nikmatnya bersama sama".

"Because I like those kind of things, also when playing game (in exercises) more fun and more enjoyable doing these activities together". (NFH, PM#07)

"Karena mengerjakannya santai dan seru tidak seperti kuis".

"Because relaxed when doing those activities and fun not like when doing quiz. (IA, PF#14)

"karena selain menambah pengetahuan juga sangat menyenangkan mengerjakannya".

" Because besides increasing knowledge, also very enjoyable when doing those activities". (ZRH, PF#15)

"Menarik ga bikin bosan".

"Interesting not making (me) bored", (RS, #PM 35)

II. The Second most preferred online learning activity: Virtual Meeting



“karena cara menjelaskannya enak”.

“because the way (the teacher) explained was nice” (YR, #PM 59)

“*Karena lebih mengerti materinya*”.

“Because the material can be more understood” (NA, #PM 53)

“*Karena aktivitas diatas termasuk aktivitas yang enjoy, ilmu menjadi mudah terserap. dibanding dengan tugas, saya lebih menyukai aktivitas diatas*”.

“Because that activity is an activity which is enjoyable, knowledge becomes more easily absorbed than (doing) assignment, I prefer that activity (mentioned above).(BA, #PM55)

III. The third most preferred online learning activity: Watching Videos

“*Karna lebih menarik dan lebih menyenangkan*”.

“ Because more interesting and more enjoyable” (ECS, #PF61)

“*Lebih memudahkan dalam pembelajarannya*”.

“Easier in learning”(MTA, #PM16)

“*tidak membuat bosan juga menonton video dengan banyak animasi*”.

“not making bored by watching videos with a lot of animation” (SRM, #PF 25)

From the results above, these can be implied that designing interesting activities to provide students practices their English help them learn or understand more the lesson discussed. More interesting and relevant practices/ exercises will make online learners easily understood the lesson and completed the activities in an enjoyable way. This is in line with what Allan (2007) states that effective learning activities are activities that can mobilize, engage and enable to develop learners' knowledge and skills. The next, an interaction with their teacher is needed to help learners more engaged with the learning. An interaction between teachers and learners is conducted through virtual meeting. This mean that the existence of a teacher is still needed to give explanation or have a discussion on the material and questions from students. This is in line with what (Nilson, L.B., Goodson, L.A.: 2017) states that designing learning activities in an online class is intended to foster productive interaction.

Another activity that can also help students learn more is watching videos. Interestingly relevant videos with the lesson discussed stimulate students' learning modality so that they can be eager to follow activities and complete them. This is in line with what Mayor states that visual and auditory materials help learners create mental presentation (Mayer, 2014)

The data from questionnaire, used to identify social tyles of online learners taking General English 2, as an obligatory subject course in two classes in a private university are indicated in table 3, follows;



Table 3 Learners' social styles

Preferences	(N)	(%)	Style
(1) Prefers to work alone	29	45	
(4) Look to instructor and learners as guide	35	54	Dependent
(2) Not interested in discussion and other learner interaction	27	42	
(5) Prefers an authority figure to tell them what to do	37	58	Dependent
(3) not interested in team work	11	17	
(6) prefers highly structured environment	53	83	Dependent
(7) Interested in learning for reward and recognition	3	5	
(9) learns by sharing and cooperating with instructor and learners	61	95	Collaborative
(8) Prefers exams	22	34	
(10) Prefers projects	42	66	Collaborative
(11) Not excited about attending class and discussion	5	8	
(14) Interested in class activity and discussion	59	92	Participative
(12) uninterested	6	9	
(15) works hard	58	91	Participative
(13) overwhelmed	10	12	
(16) wants to meet instructor's expectation	54	84	Participative

The table.3 shows that the most of participants from two classes tend to be dependent-collaborative and participative as their social styles in online learning. This result shows similarity to the result in the study by Sukmiarni (2021) that the learners' social styles prefer to be more dependent, collaborative and participative in online learning. This means the learners as dependent style of learners prefer looking to instructor and learners as guide, interested in having discussion and interaction with other learners, and they prefer highly structured environment, whereas as collaborative style of learners, they prefer learning by sharing and cooperating with instructor and learners and having group work discussion. Next, as participative styles of learners, they are interested in class activities and discussion, work hard and want to meet instructor's expectation.

The criteria of dependent, collaborative and participative styles of learners can be seen by their preference in online learning activities. Firstly, Doing practices or exercises, the first most preferred online learning activity, and watching videos, the third most preferred online learning activity, show a participative style of learners that means they are interested in class activities, and work hard and want to meet instructor's expectation that is to be able to meet the objective of the lesson.



Next, conducting virtual meeting, the second most preferred online learning activity, dependent and collaborative styles of learners. As a dependent style of learners shows that this activity provides a chance for learners to have discussions and interact with their teacher and learners, and also in this activity the teacher's explanation help learners to understand more towards material of the lesson discussed. This also means that the presence of a teacher helps them to learn more. Meanwhile, as a collaborative style of learners, this activity provides a chance for sharing and cooperating with instructor and learners. In virtual meeting, a feature of breakroom is beneficial for creating group discussion and interaction among learners. It is in line with what (Nilson, L.B., Goodson, L.A.: 2017) states that designing learning activities in an online class is intended to foster productive interaction.

It is interesting when it is found out that activities of Middle and or Final Term Test are activities which appear as the least preferred activity (see table 2). As it is seen from criteria of being a collaborative style of online learners that they prefer project work to exams. This supports criteria of the participants who tend to have a collaborative style of online learners as it indicated from the table 2 as the fifth most preferred online learning activity. Thus, employing collaborative work or assignment in online learning activities such as Problem Based Learning, and Project Based Learning will accommodate this learning style.

CONCLUSION

A variety of learning activities need to be designed to provide chances for learners to learn and meet the objective of the learning. These activities will also accommodate their social styles of online learners. Different activities also can stimulate their motivation to engage in their learning. The findings in the present study in the two classes of online learners taking General English Course 2, they prefer activities such as practices or exercises, virtual meeting and watching videos as the three most preferred online learning activities, However it is not restricted to these three activities. the other activities (table 2) or other activities also need to be employed in online learning activities as different types of activities to facilitate learners in achieving the goal of learning. As from the results that the learners prefer project work to exams, this implies that collaborative works such as Problem Based Learning or Project Based Learning should be taken into consideration to be included in online learning activities. Therefore, it is highly suggested that social styles of online learners are needed to be identified so that teachers are aware of designing online learning activities that can accommodate all styles. This means certain online activities can maximize certain positive criteria of social styles to achieve goals of learning and foster their meaningful learning, and minimize certain negative criteria of social styles. These negative criteria of social styles can lead learners unmotivated and lose their goal of learning, such uninterested, not excited about attending classes and discussion.



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