

## **University Students' Perceptions of Motivation, Attitude, and Self-Efficacy in Online English Language Learning**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study examines university students' perceptions of their motivation, attitude, and self-efficacy in online English proficiency classes. Existing research indicate that these individual differences directly affect learning especially during the period of online instructions; as students may suffer from the feeling of isolation and loneliness, being far away from an immediate learning community. A set of questionnaire score was created from the adaptation of five existing surveys to measure the individual differences. It was distributed to 270 participants via convenient sampling at a university in Malaysia. The results of this study demonstrate the students' perception of a strong self-efficacy of their digital and technical ability in managing, completing, and submitting English language tasks via online medium. Relatedly, students perceive a high positive attitude and decent motivation for online English learning. Furthermore, the students demonstrate a preference for a synchronous session, which is linked to forming a community of learners as an academic support system. The findings are discussed in relation to human factors and

pedagogy. It considers students' needs for engaging sessions, and teachers' limitations in creating content while emphasising creative and fun language activities.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### *Article history:*

Received: 18 August 2021

Accepted: 14 October 2021

Published: 14 December 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.4.36>

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*Keywords:* Attitude, motivation, online learning, self-efficacy, university students

### **INTRODUCTION**

Students' motivation, attitudes and self-efficacy as individual differences have been researched and debated in English

language education. Furthermore, these aspects are of the utmost importance in any learning environment and catalysed students' good performance across English courses (Alberth, 2019). In Malaysia, a good mastery of the English language, besides Bahasa Malaysia, is fundamental in securing good employment. However, Selvaratnam (2019) found that 50% of Malaysian graduates performed below par in their English language competency, communication and writing skills, and work attitudes. Studies indicated that students' poor competency and achievement was often related to low motivation due to insufficient English language practice opportunities and non-conducive environment (Jalleh et al., 2021). In Malaysian education system, English language is a compulsory subject for all students from primary schools to tertiary institutions; and, at university, students are required to pass specific units of English courses to qualify for graduation. As Malaysian students have been introduced to English language as early as 6 years old, their inability to keep pace with the current demands for English-relevant job markets must be addressed. Of late, the incorporation of technological and digital tools into the English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, i.e., blended learning and flipped learning, have proven effective in boosting students' interest to master the language and assisted learning process (Radia, 2019).

While educators accept the idea of a blended and flipped environment, the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the world has

instantly transformed tertiary education into fully online instruction. As a result, students do not get to physically meet their lecturers and peers during teaching and learning sessions; and, they rely heavily on synchronous and asynchronous digital tools to emulate this. Synchronous learning is conducted in real-time, i.e., live sessions, where students can directly interact with their lecturers, while asynchronous learning is conducted in non-real-time, and students can complete the task or activities in their own time (Lee, 2021). Both synchronous and asynchronous learning are seen to have specific advantages of fostering a stronger sense of community via interaction and discussions, allowing students to attend to lessons at own pace, and stimulating active lecturers-students-peers communication (Lin & Gao, 2020). In learning a new language, social interaction, feedback, and co-creation of new knowledge within a community of learners are essential (Stern & Willits, 2011); and these processes may be facilitated and enhanced via synchronous and asynchronous modes.

In Malaysia, the COVID-19 cases have reached their highest cases, and in mid-August 2021, the cases rose to more than 20,000 (Reuters, 2021). Therefore, many academic institutions are expected to remain close for physical activities for an indefinite period. Online learning seems to be the way forward under the circumstances, but there are issues. Students from the lower socioeconomic background, rural areas and developing countries often encounter difficulty securing digital gadgets and

maintaining a good internet connection at all times (Alatas & Redzuan, 2020; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020). Nevertheless, students reported readiness and satisfaction in online learning instructions (Chung et al., 2020; Mohd Yasin et al., 2020; Selvanathan et al., 2020). Despite the students' positive and negative responses, their motivation and attitudes in online language classes are still undetermined. This study investigates university students' individual differences that are motivation, attitudes, and self-efficacy in online English courses, as literature have reaffirmed intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy as the two most critical variables in foreign language learning (Alberth, 2019). Mohd Yasin et al. (2020) found that students' attitude indeed mediated technology access, technical usage self-efficacy, online communication self-efficacy and online media that led to an increase in blended learning readiness; thus, this study would like to extend these factors to a fully online environment. The findings would provide educators information of students' interest and enthusiasm and possible methods of teaching and learning that may further elevate learning experience, despite being miles away from their lecturers and peers. While an extensive number of studies have looked at students' experience in online learning in general, there is limited research on English language learning per se.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the aspects of motivation, attitudes and self-efficacy

in English language learning and online instructions. Past studies have reaffirmed individual differences such as personality traits, learning styles, learners' beliefs, strategies, aptitude, age, and motivation as predicting success in language learning (Raofi et al., 2012).

### Motivation in ESL/EFL Instructions

Motivation is the key factor in explaining the success or failure of any learning undertakings (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013). Motivation refers to the combination of attempts and desire to obtain the objective and desirable attitudes towards learning the language. In language instructions, motivation refers to the extent to which the individual works or tries to learn the language out of desire and contentment (Alizadeh, 2016). Gardner (1985) posited motivation as the most critical internal factor in determining the effectiveness of language learning and divided motivation into three components—the effort to achieve a goal, the desire to learn a language, and satisfaction with the task of learning that same language (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013).

The two basic types of motivation are integrative and instrumental (Gardner, 1985). Integrative motivation refers to language learning for personal growth and cultural enrichment, i.e. learning a language to enter into the target language society successfully; while instrumental motivation arises from the need to learn the language for functional or external reasons and involves aims like passing the exams or getting

rewarded financially (Alizadeh, 2016). Integrative and instrumental motivation often exist concurrently instead of exclusive of each other; hence, it is impossible to attribute language learning success to certain integrative or instrumental causes (Alizadeh, 2016). These two types of motivation can further be divided into four more specific ones—intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative. Intrinsic motivation is internally initiated and often deemed as the most powerful form of desire, as students themselves decide to initiate or act on something. It is signified by the feeling of enjoyment when performing a task (Alberth, 2019). Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation refers to the influence of external factors that lead students to do something (e.g., teacher's instructions, family encouragement or peer support). Dörnyei (2001) further divided motivation into a model of three stages, namely, choice motivation, executive motivation, and motivation retrospective. Choice motivation takes place at the beginning of the learning process, which involves getting started and setting goals where one usually set wishes, hopes, desires and opportunities; to determine the practicality and workability based on an individual's degree of competence (Reeve, 2009). Reeve (2009) proposed that the set-out goals are challenging and specific to improving performance by producing motivational effects. In the second stage, executive motivation relates to maintaining motivation while correctly doing a specific task. Students in this phase often need strategies and resources to sustain

motivation while completing an activity (Dörnyei, 2001). At the third stage, the motivation retrospective acts as a reflective phase, whereby performance is evaluated and reviewed after a task is completed and the goal achieved (Dörnyei, 2001). The primary objective of this stage is to assess the achieved action-outcome and consider potential inferences for future actions. By having all the stages of motivation, students will benefit from the learning process, improve motivation, and enable internal support.

#### **Attitude in ESL/EFL Instructions**

Motivation and attitudes go hand-in-hand in language learning. Gardner (1985) posited that L2 learners with positive attitudes towards the learning of the target language could learn the language more effectively than those who do not; and that learners' attitudes in language learning are highly influenced by the learners' feelings and emotions (Choy & Troudi, 2006). For example, students have positive or negative attitudes towards the language they want to learn or the people who speak it (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013). Citing various scholars, Hosseini and Pourmandnia (2013) divided attitude into three components—cognitive (related to the beliefs, ideas, or opinions about the object of the attitude); affective (the feeling and emotions that one has towards an object like or dislikes, with or against); and behavioural (made up of one's actions or behavioural intentions towards the object). Therefore, it places attitude as a changeable, non-fixed trait

that can be developed within complex elements; and is defined as a disposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing, such as an idea, object, person, or situation (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013). It may, hence, change in the rapid progression of the online learning environment.

### **Self-Efficacy in ESL/EFL Instructions**

Self-efficacy is related to motivation to learn; whereby, learners with a high self-efficacy are more motivated to participate in learning activities and vice versa (Wong, 2005). Self-efficacy is the judgment about one's own ability to plan, manage, and conduct activities to succeed in a certain performance (Alberth, 2019; Altunkaya & Topuzkanamış, 2018). It plays a vital role in predicting learners' performance in educational context and can predict performance better than actual abilities (Raoofti et al., 2012). An individual's perceived self-efficacy is believed to influence the choice of tasks, the level of task performance, the amount of effort put into performing chosen tasks, and perseverance while conducting the tasks (Bandura, 1997). The effect of self-efficacy on students' success has been well established across several behavioural domains (Arkes et al., 1989), including academic achievement by college students. According to Bong and Clark (1999), the nature of self-efficacy is one-dimensional in that it is predominantly cognitive. Bandura (1977) accounted for the claim that students contemplate numerous aspects when assessing their

level of competency, which will then shape their self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura (1977) justified those variations in self-efficacy are owing to effort and ability, and for self-efficacy to improve, success should come from skills instead of luck. Otherwise, students would not place as much value on success. Scholars, therefore, saw self-efficacy as critically important in the studies of academic achievement, motivation, and learning (Pajares & Schunk, 2005).

### **Issues Related to Language Learning in Online Environment**

Online learning is no longer a foreign concept to educators and students. It is now bigger than ever and provides numerous advantages to the overall teaching and learning process, especially in the context of universities. Prior to exclusively online instructions, e-learning was also known for its adjunct (assistant) and blended (a combination of online and face-to-face instructions) orientations. With the recent changes in instructions, Malaysian students reported readiness for online learning (Chung et al., 2020), satisfaction with instructors, course management, and teaching dimension; and were generally coping with the situation, despite some dissatisfactions (Selvanathan et al., 2020), especially on technical issues (Wai Yee & Cheng Ean, 2020). However, students did not perceive technological increase as improving their learning attitude directly but enhancing readiness to experience a blended environment (Mohd Yasin et al., 2020). Likewise, the Saudi undergraduates

echoed the positive aspects of online instructions, such as cost-effectiveness, safety, convenience, and improved participation (Hussein et al., 2020). Given a choice, however, many students wished to resume face-to-face instructions (Chung et al., 2020).

Present-day online platforms cater to mainly synchronous channels, such as WebEx, Zoom, Microsoft Team and Google Classrooms, while supported by many asynchronous media, such as institution-linked e-learning platforms. In this sense, social media seem to offer another solution for teachers as platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube support both synchronous and asynchronous interactions (Sobaih et al., 2020). Synchronous and asynchronous modes of interaction have their pros and cons. The pros allow learners to learn at their own pace and be flexible with their time, and essentially promote active engagement with teachers and classmates. Accordingly, Malaysian students reported a preference for online learning via pre-recorded lectures uploaded to Google Classroom and YouTube (Chung et al., 2020). On the other hand, the cons were the feeling of loneliness due to distance, distractions during learning sessions, low connectivity, technical difficulty, family members, and so forth (Lin & Gao, 2020). Students with lower socioeconomic ability were also at a disadvantage in digital skills ability (Welser et al., 2019). Wu and Nian (2021), therefore, substantiated the criticality of students' existence and validation into a network or community of learners in online

environment as it gives them a sense of belonging and support within a group of people who are working together to achieve a common goal. In support of this, Lasekan (2019) justified the need for learners to be immersed in a supportive network due to a finding that reported early immersion ESL learners' low motivational intensity.

Social media and other online platforms are often cited as offering solutions when students face the number one issue in language classrooms—insufficient authentic opportunities to practise their target language skills (Jalleh et al., 2021). Students generally demonstrated positive attitudes towards social media and felt more confident, less anxious, more competent, and more willing to communicate in English on the platforms (Sharma, 2019). However, an exclusively online learning environment may also pose a lot of problems to students and educators who suffer from communication anxiety and apprehension (Martin & Alvarez Valdivia, 2017), which may lead to a lack of focus and non-attendance to the online session.

In addition, unsatisfactory platform or medium of learning, unstable internet connectivity, heavy workload, insufficient support from educators and peers, and inadequate materials and resources also affected their learning progress (Hussein et al., 2020; Jalleh et al., 2021). Nonetheless, some media can be utilised to address learners' concerns, such as demonstrated by Ali and Bin-Hady (2019), who used WhatsApp in an EFL class to enhance the impact of the language, motivate EFL students and reduce anxiety; and

Kruk (2019) who introduced Second Life virtual platform to address willingness to communicate, motivation, boredom, and anxiety issues in an English course. In addition, students who were satisfied with the implementation of online learning felt an elevated sense of motivation to pursue the method further (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2015).

### **Past Studies on Motivation, Attitude and Self-Efficacy in Language Instructions and Online Learning**

Studies on motivation, attitude, and self-efficacy are often presented together and have been continuously conducted in the ESL and EFL fields, and are particularly pertinent in the times of blended, flipped, and online learning. It is undeniable that learners acquire language best in an online environment when they feel a sense of belonging to a specific community (J. Wong et al., 2019). Kundu (2020) mentioned that the key factor for successful online learning is by inducing self-efficacy, which is enhanced by role modelling, verbal persuasion, and self-mastery; thus, the stakeholders involved in online education should play crucial roles in its implementation. Lasekan (2019) termed self-efficacy, anxiety, willingness to communicate, culture, and human motivational influence (from parents, teachers, and peers) as individual difference factors that affect learning. He reported a significant positive relationship between high motivational intensity and other motivational factors, such as self-

confidence and human influence; and the positive impact of self-confidence and intrinsic motivation on students' English proficiency; which exemplifies the benefit of students' immersion in the target language community and intrinsic motivation on English acquisition.

Likewise, Cocca and Cocca (2019) discovered the positive association of students' achievement with their motivational intensity, attitude towards English, desire to learn it, opinion of English native speakers, and the quality of the English course. However, realising the cultural difference and, often, boundaries in ESL classes, Cocca and Cocca (2019) called for more culturally enriching, student-centred classes to further enhance students' proficiency, which echoed Kassem's (2018) assertion that student-centred tasks directly affected learners' English performance, motivation, attitude, level of anxiety, autonomy, self-efficacy and beliefs. It is due to these cultural differences that, at times, there was no clear, direct relationship between the factors in online learning motivation, such as observed by Rafiee and Abbasian-Naghneh (2019), who reported complex relationships between the perceived usefulness and ease of use, e-learning motivation, online communication self-efficacy, and acceptance and readiness of e-learning. Essentially, students' perceived enjoyment and usefulness did not directly indicate students' e-learning acceptance and readiness towards a medium (Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh, 2019).

Notably, self-efficacy is directly related to learning strategies adopted, as presented by Petchinalert and Aksornjarung (2016) in their study, whereby reading self-efficacy was significantly, strongly, and positively correlated with Thai students' overall learning strategies. Similarly, Wong (2005) reported a significant positive relationship between language learning strategies and self-efficacy, whereby the higher a learner's self-efficacy, the more number and frequency of language learning strategies they adopted. Thus, it is indeed an important point for educators to not become complacent in their pedagogy and choice of digital tools (Chung et al., 2020; Wai Yee & Cheng Ean, 2020).

The incorporation of Web 2.0 tools of social media has been presented as a motivating factor in language learning due to the affordances they bring in easing synchronous and asynchronous interactions, creating a community of interest, and supporting various forms of multimedia (Alberth, 2019). It was evident in two English writing studies on Facebook among Indonesian and Turkish learners. The activities increased their intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, attitudes, and English language achievement; and emphasised the negative relationship between self-efficacy and writing anxiety (Alberth, 2019; Altunkaya & Topuzkanamış, 2018). Radia (2019), who integrated Moodle e-learning platforms with face-to-face reading instructions, reported participants' positive attitudes towards

the blended learning experience as they improved their reading ability and boosted learning motivation. Salikin and Tahir (2017) found that students who were initially bored with their inability to master vocabulary managed to complete assigned tasks with the integration of WhatsApp in daily learning.

Past studies on motivation, attitude and self-efficacy in English learning have concluded various results and outcomes. While many of the findings positively established the relationship between students' motivation, attitude, self-efficacy and English achievement, some research also argued complex and negative relationships; due to the dynamicity and influence of culture, socio-educational system, milieu, facilities and equipment, and human factors (Lasekan, 2019; J. Wong et al., 2019). Due to these differences and the current eminence of online learning, this study reasons that it is important to identify Malaysian university motivation, attitudes, and self-efficacy in online English classes to match the most suitable learning strategies to their different factors. Furthermore, the instrumentality and utilitarian need for the English language has never been prevalent, especially in the threatened global job market. Therefore, students must be equipped with excellent English communicative ability to place themselves at par with graduates worldwide for a chance at decent employment opportunities (Selvaratnam, 2019).



This study, therefore, aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the university students' perceptions on their attitudes towards online learning for English proficiency classes?
2. What are the university students' perceptions on their motivation towards online learning for English proficiency classes?
3. What are the university students' perceptions on their self-efficacy towards online learning for English proficiency classes?

## METHODOLOGY

This section describes the instrument of data collection and data collection procedure, participants, and data analysis.

### Instrument of Data Collection

The questionnaire was adapted from five existing surveys on motivation, attitude, self-efficacy, willingness, and online readiness to suit the current needs in learning (Brown et al., 2014; Hung et al., 2010; Ullah et al., 2017; Williams, 2021; Yavuzalp & Bahcivan, 2020). The adapted questionnaire is divided into five main sections – Section A: Demography, Section B: Attitude; Section C: Motivation; Section D: Self-Efficacy, and Section E: Digital Tools and Apps. The items in Section A

are multiple-choice questions. The items in Sections B to E were presented using a five-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree. The questionnaire also included three open-ended questions that gauged the challenges students faced in learning English online, the preferred method of English language learning, and suggestions to improve the online learning experience. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Form.

### Participants

The participants of this study were undergraduate students from a public university in Malaysia who were enrolled in various English proficiency classes. The participants were selected conveniently via their class teachers and consented to take part in the study. Two hundred seventy responses from 12 Science and Non-Science classes were gathered for three weeks, after nine weeks of fully online instructions. Three teachers distributed the questionnaire during their class hours. Most participants of this study were—female, within the age range of 21–22, in Year 1, of Malay descent, from the Science and Non-Science programmes, and moderate English users (Band 3 in MUET). The students' demographic information is presented in more detail in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Students' demographic information*

Attributes		Frequency (N=270)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	201	74.4
	Male	69	25.6
Age	19-20	82	20.4
	21-22	165	61.1
	23-24	3	1.1
	25-26	20	7.4
Ethnicity	Chinese	60	22.2
	Indian	22	8.1
	Malay	177	65.6
	Other	11	4.1
Year of study	Year 1	162	60
	Year 2	80	29.6
	Year 3	22	8.1
	Year 4	6	2.2
Malaysian University English Test (MUET)	Band 1	1	0.4
	Band 2	28	10.4
	Band 3	141	52.2
	Band 4	93	34.4
	Band 5	5	1.9
	Band 6	2	0.7
Discipline	Science	140	51.9
	Non-Science	130	48.1

**Data Analysis**

This study gathered quantitative data from the close-ended items and qualitative data from the open-ended items of the questionnaire. The quantitative data were analysed descriptively for percentages, mean scores and standard deviation (SD) using SPSS 27. The qualitative data were analysed deductively based on the questions asked. Both types of data were used to triangulate and corroborate the findings. The questionnaire's Cronbach's alpha is .884,

which indicates a high internal consistency and reliability of the items.

**Ethical Consideration**

Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, the students were briefed about the purpose of the study and asked to participate voluntarily. Upon their verbal consent, the questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp. Students who did not wish to participate and students who decided to opt out halfway were allowed to do so. The participants'

personal information is kept private and confidential and only accessible to the research team.

**FINDINGS**

The findings are presented quantitatively and qualitatively and discussed based on existing literature to address the research questions. The items in the tables are arranged in descending order, from the highest mean score that indicates strong agreement and the lowest mean score that indicates strong disagreement. All close-ended items were

tested using a one-sample t-test and gave the value of  $p < .001$ ; hence, are significant. In addition, some items were compared using the paired sample t-test, and the results are presented below.

**Attitudes Towards Online English Class**

Table 2 shows the students' perceptions of their attitudes towards online learning for English proficiency classes. Again, the Cronbach alpha for attitude items is .775, which indicates a high internal consistency.

Table 2  
*Students' perceptions of their attitudes towards online learning for English classes*

No.	Items	Percent (%)			Mean	SD
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree		
a.	I attend all my online English classes.	2.2	8.9	88.9	4.54	0.8
b.	I learn from my mistakes in online English classes.	4.0	19.3	76.7	4.00	0.8
c.	Online learning makes me too dependent on technology.	10.8	16.3	72.9	3.93	1.1
d.	I share my ideas with others during online English lessons.	9.6	30.0	60.4	3.70	1.0
e.	My overall experience with online learning is positive.	12.9	28.9	58.2	3.60	1.0
f.	I feel excited learning English online.	12.6	33.7	53.7	3.56	1.0
g.	I feel comfortable learning English online.	14.1	30.4	55.5	3.56	1.0
h.	Online learning improves the quality of English classes.	18.1	39.3	42.6	3.34	1.0
i.	I manage my time effectively through online learning.	23.7	30.0	46.3	3.33	1.1
j.	Online learning suits my learning styles.	22.6	39.6	37.8	3.17	1.1
k.	I prefer online English learning compared to face-to-face classes.	36.0	34.4	29.6	2.91	1.2
l.	It is difficult to learn English online.	38.5	31.1	30.4	2.89	1.2

Students seemed to have positive attitudes towards learning English through online mediums. It was exemplified by their strong agreement on attendance to class, learning from their mistakes in online classes, sharing ideas with others during online English lessons and feeling excited and comfortable in online English classes. These findings are substantiated by students' disagreement that it was difficult to learn English online. Having said this, the students did not strongly indicate that online learning suits their learning style, nor that they preferred online learning compared to

face-to-face sessions. Likewise, they neither agreed that online learning improves the quality of English lessons nor that their time management was effective. Naturally, online learning makes students highly dependent on technology.

### Motivation Towards Online English Class

Table 3 shows the students' perceptions of their motivation towards online learning for English classes. Again, the Cronbach alpha for motivation items is .699, which indicates a high internal consistency.

Table 3  
*Students' perceptions of their motivation towards online learning for English classes*

No.	Items	Percent (%)			Mean	SD
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree		
a.	I am always motivated to complete online tasks given by my English teacher.	1.1	11.5	87.4	4.29	0.7
b.	Online tasks and assignments boost my confidence to use English language.	2.6	20.0	77.4	4.12	0.8
c.	I am satisfied with the online English learning experience this semester.	6.0	17.4	76.6	4.00	0.9
d.	I am open to new ideas in online classes.	4.1	25.9	70.0	3.90	0.9
e.	I personally contact my English teacher when I have difficulty in understanding given task.	9.3	27.4	63.4	3.84	1.0
f.	I am willing to access the online platforms daily for announcements from my English teachers and other students.	9.6	25.9	64.5	3.79	1.0
g.	I am motivated to learn English in online classes.	8.5	28.1	63.4	3.70	0.9
h.	I am more likely to participate in online English classes if my responses were anonymous and not graded.	11.1	36.7	52.2	3.60	1.0
i.	I am happy to continue with online English learning next semester.	19.6	32.2	48.1	3.41	1.2
j.	Online learning makes me feel lonely.	38.2	20.7	41.1	3.04	1.4

Compared to the items measuring perceptions on attitudes, the mean scores for the items measuring motivation are slightly lower. Nonetheless, the students indicated a strong motivation to complete online English tasks, and they believed that online English tasks boosted their confidence to use the language. The students would have participated more in online classes if their responses were ungraded and anonymous. However, it did not deter their spirit, as they were happy to continue with online learning for English classes in the following semester. Noticeably, however, the students were undecided on whether

online learning makes them lonely, which may be attributed to the ways teachers conducted their sessions. In essence, the students indicated agreement towards motivation to learn English in the online environment.

**Self-Efficacy Towards Online English Class**

Table 4 demonstrates the items measuring students’ perceptions of their self-efficacy towards online English classes. The Cronbach alpha for self-efficacy items is .831, which indicates a high internal consistency.

Table 4  
*Students’ perceptions of their self-efficacy towards online learning for English classes*

No.	Items	Percent (%)			Mean	SD
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree		
a.	I am able to submit my English assignments successfully through email/ FB group/WhatsApp/eLearning/etc.	0.7	3.7	95.6	4.69	0.6
b.	I complete all my English tasks on time by proper planning and management.	2.6	8.9	88.5	4.40	0.8
c.	I learn to use new technology efficiently for my online English classes.	1.5	10.0	88.5	4.40	0.7
d.	I am able to overcome technical difficulties on my own.	2.6	15.9	81.5	4.23	0.8
e.	I participate in English discussions by leaving messages/comments to other students.	3.0	18.1	78.9	4.18	0.8
f.	When a problem arises, I promptly ask questions through available channel (e-mail, WhatsApp, discussion board, etc.)	3.3	14.8	81.9	4.17	0.8
g.	I successfully add audio or edit videos for English presentation slides.	6.3	16.7	77	4.16	1.0
h.	I use synchronous technologies (live) to communicate with my teachers and classmates (e.g., Zoom, WebEx, WhatsApp video call, etc.) effectively.	3.4	19.3	77.3	4.09	0.9

Table 4 (Continue)

No.	Items	Percent (%)			Mean	SD
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree		
i.	I focus on my English schoolwork even when I am faced with distractions.	6.3	19.3	74.4	4.00	0.9
j.	I communicate using asynchronous (non-live) technologies (e.g., discussion boards, e-mail, etc.) with my teacher and classmates effectively.	5.5	33.7	60.8	3.78	0.9
k.	I can stay focus during English classes without face-to-face interactions with the lecturer.	12.9	24.4	62.7	3.72	1.1

Compared to attitudes and motivation, the students demonstrated the strongest agreement towards the items measuring self-efficacy in online English classes, suggesting commendable digital and technical skills. Likewise, English assignments and tasks items scored the highest scale of agreement and mean scores among the students. The students strongly reported that they successfully submitted their English tasks via various social media and Learning Management System (LMS) platforms, followed by their ability to plan and manage time for their English tasks properly, and efficiently adapt to new technology for online classes. The students indicated a high agreement towards synchronous communication with teachers and peers, compared to asynchronous mode. However, the students did not strongly agree that they could maintain their focus in class without face-to-face interactions with the lecturers.

### The Challenges Students Faced During Online Class

The three main challenges students faced

during online English classes were internet connectivity, time management, and distractions.

According to students, they sometimes miss their classes (synchronous and asynchronous) due to poor internet connection. They were also frustrated when they faced problems completing and submitting assignments on time.

*R10: The main problem I had during online classes is Internet connection.*

*R20: Internet access is too slow in my house. So, I need to go outside of my village to submit tasks or assignments.*

*R30: My hometown did not have a good coverage of Internet connection. Thus, I need to sit on the rooftop.*

Timely online assignment submission was also an issue due to the additional workload the students experienced in a fully online environment. Besides meeting deadlines, the students must also complete house chores. Consequently, the students overlooked some important announcements and information from their teachers.

*R269: Sometimes I forget to check my phone as I am busy with house chores and missed something important such as announcements and so on.*

*R256: Too many tasks to be completed for every week when I have tons of other subjects' assignments, but I manage to settle everything on time.*

The students also faced distractions from their surroundings when sitting for their synchronous online sessions, family members, and background noises (e.g. thunder, social media notifications). They wished for more conducive synchronous settings, hence, expressed a preference for face-to-face interactions.

*R59: The challenges that I faced during online are requiring self-motivation to start, doing the task because almost or no study vibes at home.*

*R200: Distractions from family members.*

*R240: Some noise from surrounding and weather sometimes.*

### **Students' English Learning Preferences**

Most of the participants indicated a preference for fun, creative ways of learning English. Many preferred to learn English by watching movies, shows, motivational talks, informative YouTube videos, and drama series; without subtitles; though, some admitted that reading subtitles enriched vocabulary. This strategy also enhanced their speaking skills and imparted good values. Besides movies, the students enjoyed

listening to English music and studying the lyrics.

*R99: I prefer watching English shows as it helps to improve my communications skills and learn the correct pronunciation.*

*R136: Studying lyrics, evaluating movies/ shows, playing interactive games like 'Kahoot'.*

*R195: Watching English show such as 'Mind your language', an old show about learning English or listening to music.*

*R200: Watching motivational movies and what can you gain from the content. It is exciting.*

To further emphasise oral English skills, the students liked to interact with their friends and lecturers via online group discussions on Zoom or other platforms. They were less worried about making grammatical mistakes this way.

*R65: Talking to friends helps me. It is because they can correct me if I make any grammatical mistakes while talking and vice versa. It also helps to boost my confidence while speaking.*

*R98: I prefer interactions with my friends and lecturers to understand better on certain topics as it helps me to view the topics from different aspects through the discussions.*

*R201: Discussion together using Zoom meeting.*

These challenges and suggestions are not unexpected and are further discussed in the Discussions section.

## DISCUSSIONS

This study suggests that the students perceived a high self-efficacy towards online English classes, followed by positive attitudes and motivation. Furthermore, the students indicated high motivation to complete online English tasks in relation to self-efficacy in carrying out online submissions via various social media platforms. The findings from the items on self-efficacy indicated students' technical and digital ability in managing their online learning. Students' exposure to blended and flipped learning environments prior to the fully online uptake may have familiarised them with some extent of digital tools and skills. In the same breadth, Kassem (2018) underlined student-centred tasks that enhance learners' self-efficacy, language performance, motivation, attitude, level of anxiety, autonomy, and beliefs. Welser et al. (2019) added an interesting observation to this finding; students who have access to social support were associated with higher skill assessment and improvement in digital abilities; which is missing among students from the more rural areas. This, therefore, grounds the importance of social or community learning and co-creation of the experience in online learning (Lasekan, 2019; Sobaih et al., 2020; Stern & Willits, 2011; J. Wong et al., 2019; Wu & Nian, 2021) to enhance English language learning experience. Importantly, Kaufmann and

Vallade (2020) argued that while online learning can be a lonely experience, social presence and interaction activities practiced by instructors may build and maintain students' rapport and create a sustainable learning environment.

Relatedly, the participants seemed to prefer synchronous learning compared to asynchronous sessions for English lessons; perhaps, due to the opportunities for more meaningful online and in-person interactions with peers and lecturers; as they develop content knowledge, language skills and self-confidence. The finding contradicts Chung et al. (2020) and Lin and Gao's (2020) earlier observation that the Malaysian and Chinese university students preferred pre-recorded lecture videos uploaded to Google Classroom and YouTube; they had a stronger sense of community in asynchronous courses via interaction, discussion, and sharing ideas. In an asynchronous environment, students can learn at their pace but feel isolated at times. However, the findings of this study indicate that students were impartial about their feeling of loneliness in online learning. It certainly shows students flexibility, familiarity, and adaptation to new learning environments; hence, might contradict Chung et al.'s (2020) earlier finding that many students wished to resume face-to-face instructions. This finding substantiates Kaufmann and Vallade's (2020) assertion that the loneliness of online learning may be reduced by the presence and interactive activities between instructors and students in the formation of a sustainable learning



environment. On the other hand, while students felt stimulated via active interaction in a synchronous environment, they were often distracted by classmates (Lin & Gao, 2020).

Self-efficacy is one of the contributing factors to successful online learning (Kundu, 2020; Taipjutorus et al., 2012). Alberth (2019) concurred with the criticality of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation for English language learning. The self-efficacy items mainly measured the technical digital ability the students possessed in managing learning. It implies the establishment of students' pathway to autonomous learning by being able to overcome technical difficulties by themselves. These findings resonate with that of Dörnyei's (2001) and Reeve's (2009) assertion about the three stages of motivation model, with students indicating their ability to be systematic and timely in planning and managing their tasks and submission. Essentially, self-efficacy is tied to the learning strategies students adopt, whereby the higher the self-efficacy, the more learning strategies are employed (Wong, 2005). Chung et al. (2020), Kundu (2020), and Wai Yee and Cheng Ean (2020), therefore, urges educators to be mindful of pedagogical strategies and choice of digital tools, as efficacy is also induced by role modelling, verbal persuasion, and self-mastery, which emphasises teachers' roles in learning.

The findings on attitude resonate with many students across the globe who were equally impacted by the pandemic. Other than solely focusing on schoolwork that

became much heavier due to the change in assessment structure (Hussein et al., 2020), they had to make time for household chores like preparing food and helping their parents (Henaku, 2020; Suryaman et al., 2020). It is not an easy feat as they are often exhausted mentally and physically at the end of every day. Despite this, the participants generally perceived strong positive attitudes towards online English language classes. It would perhaps be further emphasised if creative, fun activities like watching English shows and movies, listening to music, and guessing lyrics are conducted, as it provides them with a relaxing learning session, compared to a serious, intense one.

## CONCLUSION

Students' efficacy is very much related to human factors (Wong et al., 2019). There is no better time than now for community of learners to be formed in supporting, facilitating, and engaging with each other's learning experience (Lin & Gao, 2020). Students' preference for synchronous learning is a strong indication of their request to be part of a learning community that may reduce the feeling of isolation and, at the same time, provide a target language practice platform. Therefore, the current and immediate teaching and learning environment boils down to teachers' ability to catch up with these technological advancements, online pedagogy, and students' enhanced skills (Chung et al., 2020; Wai Yee & Cheng Ean, 2020).

Teachers' perceptions, attitudes and motivation are directly related to their

readiness for technology-integrated classrooms (Zamir & Thomas, 2019). However, students felt disappointed with their teachers' limited digital knowledge and online pedagogic capability, which compromised a smooth learning experience (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020; Vandeyar, 2020). While complete adaptation is called for, Kellerman (2021) argued against the burden placed on teachers' shoulders to rapidly adjust to online learning and transformed all materials and assessments instantly, while simultaneously jumping onto the bandwagon of becoming content creators to assist students' learning. Instead of a leap forward, it may be regressive to place such expectations on teachers without proper training. Higher institutions must, therefore, ease collaborations between educators and professional content creators.

This study underlines Malaysian university students' high self-efficacy, positive attitude, and decent motivation in fully online English proficiency courses. Students indicated great technical and digital efficacy, good attendance, proper planning, management and submission of their English language tasks and assignments. However, like their global counterparts in many developing countries, they experienced challenges with connectivity issues and distractions in online learning, valued synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning afforded by an institution and commercial digital platforms, and enjoyed the fun, creative activities.

Future learning may further examine students' intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental,

and integrative motivation, as well as self-efficacy in an online English language environment, in identifying better teaching and learning strategies. A community of learners may also be examined to further provide students with an academic support system during online instructions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank Universiti Sains Malaysia, School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, research participants, and reviewers for their time, support, and contribution to our research.

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