

# **Students' Difficulties, Perceptions, Feelings, and Types of Technology Used in Learning English**

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*This study aimed to investigate students' experiences in learning English. The secondary aim was to find out the types of technology students use when learning English. The data were collected by interviewing 15 undergraduate students enrolled on a Social and Political Science program. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed in Indonesian, translated into English, and analyzed to identify categories of the students' difficulties, perceptions, feelings, and types of technology used when learning English. The study's results show the effectiveness of using a phenomenographic analysis, which may be used to create more interesting and meaningful English teaching and learning activities in second language environments. These could also be used by teachers to help them build the best possible curriculum for teaching second language students.*

*Keywords: learning English, technology, phenomenography*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the era of globalization, English is one of the most widely used international languages around the world. In most Asian and Middle East countries, English is used as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) (Kirkpatrick, 2007). English is taught in schools, but is not used as the primary language of teaching in EFL countries (Fernandez, 2012) because EFL is typically learned in settings where English is not the primary language of the local population or the school (Nordquist, 2020). EFL students often have few opportunities to interact in English with and receive feedback from others due to the lack of actual English practice scenarios (Chien et al., 2020).

Nowadays, the use of technology is crucial to support teaching and learning activities. Learners will be motivated by teachers or educators who use technology in teaching and learning in indirect ways, and this will result in good learning outcomes because technology plays a significant part in their learning (Shahrol et al., 2020). Technology use for English learning in particular has the potential to significantly improve language proficiency and speed up the learning process (Kieu et al., 2021). This aligns with Ahmadi's

observation that students are strongly motivated to learn language skills effectively using the right technology (Ahmadi, 2018). In addition to helping students and teachers solve their learning challenges meaningfully, using the right technology can have many other benefits for both parties (Hazaymeh, 2021).

### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to answer these following research questions.

1. What are the senior undergraduate Social and Political Science students' difficulties in learning English?
2. What are the students' perceptions and feelings when learning English?
3. What are types of technology the students use when learning English?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Learning EFL**

Learning a foreign language is required at all educational levels (Bhowmik, 2015). English communication is now considered a fundamental skill that should be improved in all academic settings (Fandiño et al., 2019). Teachers should be aware of this because it may be possible for them to help students to solve their issues (Peacock, 2010). Students tend to ascribe their success or failure in EFL to external or uncontrollable causes rather than internal or controllable ones, which impacts learning (Peacock, 2010). There are two implications of effective classroom engagement (Fojkar, 2005). The first is about creating a welcoming classroom environment where everyone is involved in the learning process. The second is to help students improve their ability to communicate in the foreign language.

### **Use of Technology in Learning English**

One advantage of using technology to teach English is the ability to engage students in innovative ways. Another advantage is that students have access to English-related apps on their phones (Kieu et al., 2021). Although technology facilitates learning, teachers should think about using it as a learning support tool (Ahmadi, 2018).

It is generally accepted that utilizing current technology in English teaching includes the creative use of techniques, devices, materials, systems, and strategies that are specifically relevant to the English teaching, and result in the achievement of desired objectives (Prayudi et al., 2021). Yang & Chen (2007) showed that technology tools can improve communication, teaching methods, and English proficiency. Hazaymeh (2021) also supported this, revealing that students' attitudes toward technology use to effectively develop English language skills were positive.

## **METHOD**

### **Study Design**

This study used a phenomenographic analysis. Phenomenography is a qualitative research method increasingly used to examine the diversity, or variations, in how people within a group experience a particular phenomenon (Marton, 1981). Phenomenography is more precisely described as a research method for mapping the qualitatively varied ways in which people experience, interpret, perceive, and understand various elements and phenomena in the world around them (Marton, 1986). This study sought to investigate the variety of the students' difficulties, perceptions, feelings, and types of technology used, whilst learning English.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were 15 senior undergraduate Public Administration students at a private university in East Java, Indonesia. They were all Indonesians consisting of 8 females and 7 males, their age range was 21-23 years old, and they had been learning English around 13 years since kindergarten or elementary school. Six of them started to know and use technology, such as the internet, mobile phones,

and computers, in high school. The rest started using technology at the university because they lived in suburbs where they never used technology to study.

Each student was interviewed, the interview lasting between 20-25 minutes. Names of the students were anonymized to protect their real identities during the transcription process.

### Data Collection

The interview data were collected using open-ended questions regarding the students' experiences and types of technology used during English learning activities. Based on the students' responses towards the interview questions in Table 1, the interviewer added follow-up questions to gain more information.

**TABLE 1  
INTERVIEW GUIDE**

No.	Questions
1.	What are the difficulties you experience when learning English?
2.	What is the biggest challenge in learning English?
3.	How do you feel when you learn English in the classroom?
	a. When you read English texts, what difficulties do you experience?
	b. When you speak in English, what difficulties do you experience?
	c. When you listen to English conversations, what difficulties do you experience?
	d. When you write in English, what difficulties do you experience?
4.	What kinds of technology have you ever used when learning English?
5.	What do you think about the use of technology when learning English?

### Data Analysis

After the interviews were audio-recorded, they were transcribed verbatim in Indonesian. Then, the interview transcripts were translated into English. The English translation was then checked by an English language expert with 15 years of translation experience. The researchers read, re-read, and analyzed the interview transcripts to identify categories of the students' difficulties, perceptions, feelings, and types of technology used in learning English.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Students' Difficulties When Learning English

Table 2 shows the students' aspects of difficulties in learning English. As EFL students, they rarely used English outside the classroom. Some of them did not like English, and they did not focus on English because they were majoring in Social and Political Science:

“I don't really like English because uh, it's hard to understand, especially grammar. I am still confused about the grammar parts.” (S5)

“I have limited time to study English because English is not my major. I am a Social and Political Science student, so I don't focus on English. I once took an English course, but it didn't help. I still have difficulties with vocabulary, listening, speaking, and everything.” (S3)

**TABLE 2**  
**CATEGORIES OF DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH**

Major Theme	Sub-theme	Quotation
Speaking	Pronunciation	“Sometimes I still forget how to pronounce ‘student’ correctly. The correct one is /'st(y)oodnt/, but sometimes I pronounce it as /'stadnt/. I know that’s embarrassing.” (S2)
Grammar	Tenses	“I still can’t differentiate tenses, hemm.. what you call it.. oh, such as Present Tense, Past Tense, Future Tense, etc. I don’t even remember how to use them. I’ve learned them, but I still don’t understand.” (S10)
	Passive Voice	“Oh My Gosh, passive voice is hard, I think. I don’t like it, no, I mean, it’s hard for me to understand it. In passive voice, I have to use like ‘am, was, or were or whatever’ and hemm.. oh, verb 3. I don’t remember the verb 3 of all verbs. Sometimes I still use the wrong verb 3.” (S7)
	Conditional Sentences	“Conditional sentences are complicated, I think. There are four types of them, right? if I am not mistaken. I don’t know how to explain it, hemm.. so, I have to use the correct tenses in conditional sentences, right? for example, ‘If I study, I will pass the exam.’ Yes, I think like that, so the tenses must be correct in the sentence.” (S11)
	Question tags	“I don’t think a question tag is a real question. Maybe it just emphasizes the sentence. And again, I have to use the correct tenses, hemm.. the part of grammar that I don’t really like and I have to meet them everywhere. And, there are two types of questions tags, positive and negative, maybe like ‘she is here, hemm.. isn’t she?’, but I don’t even know which one is negative or positive.” (S14)
Writing	Spelling	“I’m still not confident if I have to write in English. I still have spelling problem, for example, I write ‘y’ instead of ‘i’ in the word of ‘little.’” (S14)
Listening	Sound element	“In English class, we often listened to English conversations on the tape, but sometimes I didn’t understand what the speakers were talking about. They pronounced words quickly, for example, /Whatcha doin’?/ is for ‘What are you doing?’” (S3)
Reading	Vocabulary	“When I read English texts, I often found unfamiliar words. I think that’s an obstacle for me to understand the message of the text.” (S3)

Although they had low ability in English, they realized that English was important and they would improve their English skills for their future.

“I do realize that English is very important. I still want to practice English, improve my English skills because I want to get a good job after graduating from the university. We have to be fluent in English if we want to get a good job.” (S7)

The difficulties of learning English are essentially the same in EFL countries. Students have difficulty learning English in the classroom, which stops them from reaching their full potential (Thoyyibah, 2019). The competency of teachers is a further problem. The classroom teaching strategies used by teachers are ineffective for the students (Thoyyibah, 2019). Despite having English lessons twice a week, the students do not begin to enjoy it (Thoyyibah, 2019).

### **Students' Perceptions and Feelings in Learning English**

The students thought that teachers had an important role during English teaching and learning activities, including the way teachers taught, suggested on students' work, and appraised students. Teachers' attitudes had a big impact on students' academic performance.

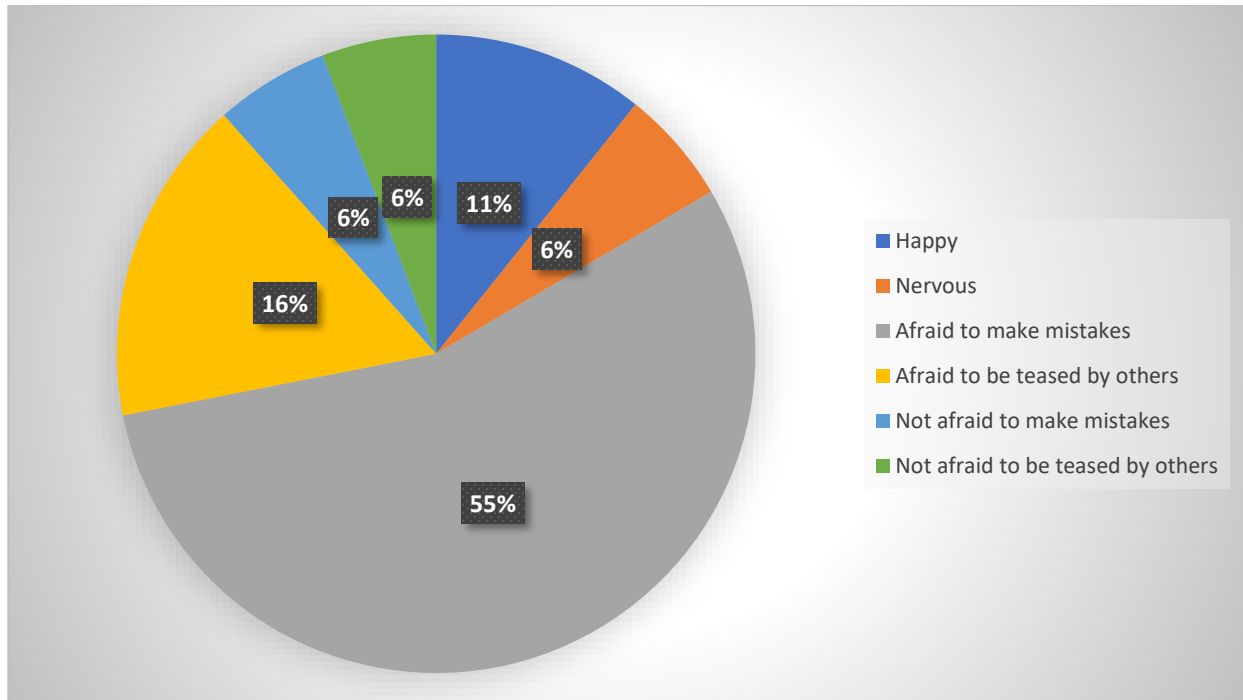
“In learning English, it also depends on the way the teacher teaches. If the teacher can teach in a good way, as a student, I can understand the lesson's content. My friends and I have traumatic experiences regarding English teachers. When learning English in high school, and I couldn't answer the question in English, the teacher told me that I was a dumb student. I still remember it until now. That incident made me dislike English. That's why I think a teacher's role is very important, especially the way he/she teaches and behaves to students, because students will keep remembering what their teacher said.” (S15)

Ekperi et al. (2019) revealed a significant and positive relationship between teachers' attitudes and students' academic achievement. The students explained that they preferred teachers who interestingly taught them, e.g., using games, to teachers who only lectured.

“I prefer modern to traditional teachers. Well, what I mean is, hemm, modern teachers refer to junior teachers, while traditional teachers refer to senior teachers. Junior teachers teach students in a fun way, such as playing games and discussing trending topics. And, we can still do those activities in English. But, senior teachers, hemm, they're too boring, they just give lectures, and that's boring, so I don't like them.” (S15)

Figure 1 shows that most of the students were afraid to make mistakes during English learning activities resulting in being quiet throughout the lesson (67%). Some of them were also afraid to be teased by their friends when they spoke English (20%), especially outside the classroom. Some other students were happy to learn English (13%) because they like English and the way teachers taught it. A few of the students were nervous during the learning activities (7%). The rest of them were not afraid to make mistakes (7%) and to be teased by their friends (7%). This means that there were only few students who were confident in using English.

**FIGURE 1  
FEELINGS DURING LEARNING ENGLISH**



**Types of Technology Used in Learning English**

Table 3 shows types of technology students use in learning English, namely Google Translate, an online dictionary, YouTube, and game-based learning applications. Based on the interviews, the students believed that technology was necessary to assist them in learning English.

**TABLE 3  
TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY USED IN LEARNING ENGLISH**

Major Theme	Sub-theme	Technology	Quotation
Improving English skills	Vocabulary	Google Translate	“I think technology is very important nowadays. I often use it to help me to learn English. For example, when I found unfamiliar words, I could look up the meanings using Google Translate. It’s very helpful, you know. It makes me not lazy to learn new English vocabulary. I can access it via smartphones or laptops.” (S1)
		Online dictionary	“When I found unfamiliar words in English texts, I would look up the meanings in the online dictionary that I already installed on my mobile phone. It’s easy and helps me a lot to learn English vocabulary. I didn’t do much effort, just clicking the English words in the online dictionary, and then I got the meanings.” (S7)

	Listening	YouTube	“I like learning English by myself. I often listen to English songs or watch English movies on YouTube. When I watched the movies, sometimes the subtitles were in English, not in Indonesian. Although I didn’t understand what the actors/actresses were saying, I still watched them. I think it can help me to improve my listening skill.” (S12)
Motivating to learn English	Attracting students to participate in learning English	Game-based learning application	“I like playing while studying, especially in English subject, because it’s fun and I enjoy that kind of learning. I often access Duolingo, a game application, to learn English vocabulary. I like it very much. I hope that learning English will always be fun, so my friends and I can be interested in learning English.” (S6)

Technology is critical in English language education since it has significantly enhanced and facilitated English learning (Alsulami, 2016). Zhonggen (2018) showed that the use of serious gaming to learn English vocabulary has great potential because games offer unique characteristics that traditional learning methods lack, such as fun or interaction. For writing skill, educational technology tools like e-readers are useful for instantly exchanging information and feedback with peers to build a better writing environment in a process-based writing approach (Hung & Young, 2015). Students could also learn using their mobile phones. They could get involved more in learning activities than in traditional classrooms since using technology like smartphones boosted their engagement and made learning goals reachable efficiently (Huang, 2021).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study used phenomenography to analyze Social and Political Science students’ difficulties and types of technology used in learning English. Students’ perceptions and feelings during English learning activities were also described. This study derives meaningful knowledge regarding the students’ experiences in learning English and using technology, emphasizing the necessity of further study to investigate the causes of students’ difficulties in learning English and how to solve their issues using technology. Future studies could also investigate students’ experiences in English learning activities using technology based on gender or at another education level or major.

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