

EFL Students' Perceptions to the Benefits of Online Group Discussion

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Abstract

This research aims to describe the students' perceptions of online group discussion in EFL research methodology project. In frame of qualitative research, it utilized a case study research design taking 12 the Magister program students at Universitas Negeri Makassar. It used a semi-structured interview as the research instrument that was in thematic analysis coming with some steps, namely familiarizing self with the data, coding, generating and reviewing the themes, and writing the report. The results of this research showed that the students positively perceive the online group discussion in learning the course of Research Methodology indicated by (a) positive collaborative experiences, (b) increasing engagement, (c) challenging and stimulating, (d) social interaction, and (e) various learning styles. The positive collaborative experiences involve improving students' understanding, share ideas and experiences, collaborative problems solving, collaboratively to finish the project; Increasing engagement allows an active participation; challenging and stimulating contributes to appreciate the challenge of defending the ideas, an opportunity to learning from the experience of others, learning from new viewpoints from group members, and to improve the quality of thinking and analysis; social interaction remains developing interpersonal communication skills, supportive learning environment, promotes effective teamwork, and improves learning experience; and various learning styles include platform for sharing ideas and experiences, variety of learning media and styles, improved students understanding. These findings lead to a conclusion that the use of the online group discussion in learning bridges the students to have a good interaction and communication among the students in EFL classroom.

Keywords: *Students' perceptions, online group discussion, research methodology.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the integration of digital technologies into educational practices has transformed the landscape of language learning and teaching. Particularly, the rise of online platforms has offered new avenues for collaborative learning and interaction, which are crucial components of modern educational methodologies. Among these innovations, online group discussions have emerged as a significant tool, providing unique opportunities for students to

engage, collaborate, and learn in a virtual environment Malik, R. (2021). The relevance of online group discussions in EFL contexts cannot be overstated. They offer a platform where students can practice language skills in a real-world context, share diverse perspectives, and develop critical thinking and research skills, Cakrawati, 2017). For EFL students, who often face challenges such as limited exposure to the target language and anxiety about speaking in public, online discussions can provide a less intimidating environment for active participation Oktarini, (2017).

Online group discussion is one of the classroom activities in the teaching and learning process. Online group discussion is a teaching technique that is usually used by the teacher to facilitate students' interaction in the classroom. Online group discussion facilitates students to exchange their knowledge and experience together and also allows students to share their own opinion with others, which helps them to build relationships with peers. For example, online group discussions allow students to express their opinions and ideas freely. Students who participate in these types of activities gain confidence in expressing themselves and learn how to work together. Online group discussions also help students learn from each other and communicate effectively. This evidence is in line with Hatmanto et al., (2023) who argues that with online group discussion students learn many educational experiences in the learning process and group discussion helps students to talk actively in the learning process.

There are several benefits of online group discussion, that is to help students in interaction, problem solving, cooperation, mastery of content, and to improve their communication skills (Dallimore et al., 2004; Elise et al., 2004, and Philip, 2005). Online group discussion is popular for all types of students due to its asynchronous nature. To a large degree, a synchronicity gives them an ability to participate in the course when it is convenient for them to do so (Horvath & Stone, 2004). Additionally, there are many types of individual differences between students in the online group discussion. In line with individual differences, there will be many ideas so it can generate more knowledge for students' performance. Learning in a discussion requires the students to discuss a topic making them connect with other students in learning together as a team and mention interpersonal skill as a skill in which the students connect with each other using emotional engagement as human beings.

However, the preliminary observation conducted about 7 months ago found that in Research Methodology class as one of the subjects for graduate students at Universitas Negeri Makassar mostly used online group discussion in the learning process. There were students who barely participated in an online group discussion and others who had more confidence to express their opinion more often and dominate the discussion. Based on the data found, a sense of curiosity to know the students' perception of its' utilization in teaching and learning process. Therefore, it addresses a research question to seek for the answers, that is how do the students perceive the benefits of online group discussion in Research Methodology class? The findings of this research will theoretically contribute to the use of digital tools in language education, offering practical implications for educators and policymakers aiming to foster more effective and engaging learning environments for EFL students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of Online Group Discussion

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the research issue, the researcher will undertake a thorough literature analysis encompassing previous research studies on online group discussion. The analysis will involve an extensive search for academic journals, peer-reviewed publications, and scholarly research. By examining the findings of related study, the researcher aims to develop valuable insights and enhance their understanding of the subject matter.

1. Öztok (2016): Online group discussion is a virtual conversation between multiple participants who communicate through a digital platform, such as a forum, social media group, or video conferencing software. This type of discussion allows individuals to engage in a conversation with others from different locations, time zones, and backgrounds, fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environment. Online group discussions are typically asynchronous, meaning that participants can respond to each other at their own pace, allowing for more thoughtful and reflective contributions.
2. Black., et al (2011): Online group discussion is interactive, text-based conversations taking place on the internet and involve multiple users discussing a topic or issue. These discussions can be structured around a specific topic, such as a course assignment or project, or they can be more open-ended, allowing participants to explore a topic of their choice. It can be facilitated by a moderator or instructor, who may provide prompts or questions to guide the conversation, or they can be self-directed, with participants taking on the responsibility of guiding the discussion.
3. Akcaoglu & Lee (2016): An online group discussion is a form of online communication that a group of people discuss a topic or issue through a shared digital platform, such as a discussion board or chat room. These platforms allow participants to post messages, respond to each other, and engage in a conversation in real-time or asynchronously. It can be used for a variety of purposes, including learning, problem-solving, and community-building.

Based on the opinion above, it can be concluded that online group discussion is an active communication with a forum where participants share their ideas, opinions, and perspective based on a given topic fostering collaborative communication and problem solving.

Students' Perception of Online Group Discussion

Students' perceptions of online group discussion vary. Some find them beneficial for enhancing understanding through diverse perspectives, while others may feel anxious or believe individual contributions are overshadowed. Effective facilitation and clear objectives can positively impact students' experiences in online group discussions by Lee & Martin (2017).

1. Positive Collaborative Experience: some students view online group discussions as an opportunity for collaborative learning in which the diverse ideas contribute to a richer understanding of the topic.
2. Increasing Engagement: for others, online group discussions serve as an engaging platform, promoting active participation and reducing monotony associated with traditional teaching methods.
3. Challenging and Stimulating: certain students appreciate the challenge of defending their ideas within a group, finding it intellectually stimulating and a way to refine their own understanding.

4. Social Interaction: online group discussions provide a social aspect, fostering interaction and relationship-building among students, creating a more dynamic and supportive learning environment.
5. Varied Learning Styles: perception can also be influenced by learning styles, with kinesthetic learners appreciating the interactive nature, while auditory or visual learners may have mixed feelings depending on the group dynamics.

Based on the opinion above, online group discussions offer a multifaceted set of benefits, including the exposure to diverse perspectives, collaborative learning, enhanced critical thinking, improved communication skills, and the generation of innovative solutions through collective brainstorming. These advantages make online group discussions a valuable approach for fostering learning, creativity, and effective communication.

METHOD

This research utilized a case study in qualitative method in which the word "case study" is an extensive term encompassing the examination of an individual, group, or phenomenon Bassey (1999). This research focuses on the students' perception to the benefits of online group discussion in Research Methodology Project taking 12 graduate program students as the subject of this research. It used a semi-structured interview as the research instrument that was in thematic analysis coming with four steps, namely familiarizing self with the data, coding, generating and reviewing the themes, and writing the report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result of the interview revealed the students' different perspectives of online group discussion in Research Methodology Project divided into five categories, namely positive collaborative experiences, increasing engagement, challenging and stimulating, social interaction and various learning styles describe in the following lines.

Positive collaborative experiences

The research subjects perceived that online group discussion contributed a positive and collaborative learning experience that helped students develop some essential skills in learning and working on Research Methodology Project assigned and the ability to work together, to share ideas, and to learn from each member's perspectives was available. This collaborative experience can lead to meaningful learning, the development of high-order thinking, and the creation of an e-learning community where collaborative group activities are encouraged. Due to their positive responses above, the online group discussion plays a crucial role in increasing their learning motivation in the course. The following are the various positive responses:

1. Improving the students' understanding

The online group discussion can significantly improve the students' understanding by fostering a collaborative environment where they can share knowledge, exchange ideas, and learn from other members' perspectives that can be seen in the following extracts.

Extract 1 (AA, 18/4/2024)

"Kami saling berbagi referensi dan berdiskusi tentang EFL Research Methodology project, menambah pemahaman kami melalui saran dan masukan dari teman kelompok." (We shared

useful resources and references about the EFL Research Methodology Project, and improved our understanding from feedback and suggestions from group members).

Extract 2 (AEP, 18/4/2024)

“Kami berdiskusi satu sama lain sesama anggota kelompok tentang desain dan pelaksanaan penelitian, yang membantu kami memahami serta meningkatkan kualitas EFL Research Methodology Project secara keseluruhan.” (We discussed with group members about the design and conduct of the study, which helped us understand and improve the overall quality of the EFL Research Methodology Project).

Those extracts above simply show that the online group discussion is helpful, especially in helping students understand about the course in which their collaboration between group members and overall learning experience are increased as the result.

2. Sharing ideas and experiences

The students found that the online group discussion allows them to share their ideas and experiences in which it comprises a valuable method for the students to interact, to learn from each member of group, and to improve their understanding on the course through a digital platform that can be seen in the following extracts.

Extract 3 (I, 18/4/2024)

“Kami berbagi pengalaman kami dalam mengumpulkan dan menganalisis data, serta memberikan tips dan saran tentang EFL Research Methodology Project kepada anggota kelompok lainnya.” (We share our experiences in collecting and analyzing data, and provide tips and suggestions about EFL Research Methodology Project to other group members).

Extract 4 (AN, 18/4/2024)

“Membantu saya dan teman kelompok untuk menyusun serta memilih jurnal penelitian yang akan menjadi topik utama dalam EFL Research Methodology Project. Kami berdiskusi menggunakan platform online jadi kami bisa berbagi files, ide, pengalaman dan dokumen secara langsung menggunakan aplikasi Zoom.” (It helps me and my group members to choose the research journal that will be main topic in EFL Research Methodology Project. This discussion was facilitated through online platform allowing to share file, ideas, experiences and document in direct discussion by used Zoom application).

Those extracts above obviously point out that the online group discussion initiates the students to share their learning experiences in collecting and analyzing data on the course project given by using digital platforms that help them to stimulate their new ideas to improve their understanding on the course.

3. Collaborative problems solving

The students feel that the online group discussion methods help them solve the problems dealing with the course project assigned.

Extract 5 (SNA, 18/4/2024)

“Kami menggunakan diskusi kelompok online sebagai forum untuk memecahkan masalah atau kesulitan yang kami hadapi dalam proyek metodologi penelitian, dengan mendiskusikan solusi dan alternatif bersama.” (We use online group discussions as a forum to solve problems or difficulties we encounter in research methodology projects, by discussing solutions and alternatives together).

Extract 6 (AFR, 18/4/2024)

“Diskusi kelompok online membantu kami untuk mendiskusikan kebijakan etika penelitian dan masalah-masalah metodologis yang mungkin kami hadapi, sehingga kami dapat mengambil langkah-langkah yang tepat untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut.” (Online group discussions allow us to discuss research ethics policies and methodological issues we may encounter, so that we can take appropriate steps to overcome these challenges).

Extract 7 (AC, 18/4/2024)

“Dalam diskusi kelompok online, kami berkolaborasi dalam menginterpretasikan hasil penelitian serta mengidentifikasi masalah yang terjadi kemudian menyelesaikannya secara bersama-sama. Ini bisa dijadikan sebagai pengalaman untuk penelitian selanjutnya.” (In online group discussions, we collaborate on interpreting the research results and identifying the problems than solving them with group members then solve the problems. This can be an experience for future research).

Those extract above slightly figure out that the online group discussion triggers the students' learning motivation to find some alternative solution to solve the problem appeared in working on the course project. It is a learning method that allows students to learn from the successes and failures of the group members and it motivates them to improve their both personal academic performance and achievements.

4. Completing the course project collaboratively

The research subjects perceived online group discussion not just as a simple learning method that helps them to improve performance and personal achievements, but also as a method that facilitated them collaboratively to finish the EFL Research Methodology Project by sharing roles, share tasks, and celebrating their achievements that motivated them to finish the project successfully.

Extract 8 (AIA, 18/4/2024)

“Kami secara kolaboratif saling membagi tugas dalam mengerjakan EFL Research Methodology Project, dengan mempertimbangkan kemampuan dari setiap anggota kelompok sehingga tidak ada yang merasa terbebani.” (We collaboratively share tasks in the process of EFL Research Methodology Project, taking to the abilities of each group member so no one feels burdened).

Extract 9 (KR, 18/4/2024)

“Kami secara bersama-sama melakukan kritik dan revisi terhadap desain penelitian kami dalam diskusi kelompok online, memastikan bahwa metodologi yang kami pilih sesuai dengan tujuan

proyek.” (We collaboratively criticized and revised our research design in online group discussions, ensuring that the methodology we chose was appropriate to the goals and scope of the project).

Those extracts above lead to an assumption that the online group discussion facilitates the students to work on the course project collaboratively. It has positive impact to them to learn together and appreciate their own opinions in doing the project.

Increasing engagement

The students found the online group discussion can significantly increase their engagement in various ways. It provides active engagement opportunities for the students allowing them to actively participate in the learning process and contribute their ideas and perspectives. So, it offers a means of active participation for group members and various strategies that can be employed to enhance participation and used in educational settings to promote engagement and learning that can be seen in the following extracts.

Extract 10 (AN, 18/4/2024)

“Membantu partisipasi aktif dari semua anggota tanpa adanya masalah seperti tempat dan waktu, sehingga meningkatkan keterlibatan semua anggota kelompok dalam EFL Research Methodology Project.” (Online group discussions allow actively participation of all group members without place and time problems, thereby increasing overall engagement in EFL Research Methodology Project).

Extract 11 (AIA, 18/4/2024)

“Mempermudah saya untuk aktif berinteraksi dengan berbagai pandangan dan pengalaman dari teman kelompok, yang dapat menambah pemahaman saya tentang EFL Research Methodology Project.” (It allows me to active interact with a variety of views and experiences from other individuals, which can improve my understanding of the EFL Research Methodology Project).

The two extracts above simply reveals that the online group discussion is helpful to ease the students understand the course project. It can be concluded that it plays a significant role as a learning method to enhance the students’ understanding and stimulate their collaboration among the group members.

Challenging and stimulating

The students obviously perceived that the online group discussion offers a dynamic learning environment encouraging them to provide a challenging and stimulating environment for their students’ academic growth. It can also provide opportunities for students to develop the important soft skills required to possess, such as communication, collaboration, and problem solving that can significantly stimulate them in various ways. The description of these responses can be seen in the following lines.

1. Appreciating the challenge of defending the ideas

The online group discussion presents a unique challenge in communicating effectively as it requires the students to convey their thoughts and ideas through digital platforms without having face-to face interactions proved by the following extracts.

Extract 12 (KR, 18/4/2024)

“Memberikan tantangan untuk berkomunikasi secara efektif dan persuasif dalam lingkungan virtual, yang merupakan keterampilan yang sangat berharga dalam dunia akademik.” (Online group discussions provide the challenge of communicating effectively and persuasively in a virtual environment, which is an invaluable skill in the academic worlds).

Extract 13 (SNA, 18/4/2024)

“Saya seringkali dihadapkan pada tantangan untuk menyusun argumen yang harus terbukti kebenarannya, yang membantu saya meningkatkan keterampilan berpikir logis dan komunikasi saya.” (In the online group discussions, I am often faced with the challenge of constructing coherent arguments, which helps me improve my logical and communication skills).

Those extracts above clearly show that the online group helps the students to stimulate their academic world by exposing a variety of questions and arguments and facing the challenges to construct a huge number of coherent arguments which helps them improve their logical and analytical thinking skills providing some challenges to communicate effectively in the course as well.

2. Providing an opportunity to learn from the experience of others

The students perceived that the online group discussion provides an opportunity to learn from the experience of others by allowing the group members to share their personal opinion and insight which helps them avoid making the same mistakes in the learning process that can be seen in the following extract.

Extract 14 (A, 18/4/2024)

“Memberikan kesempatan untuk belajar dari pengalaman orang lain, yang memberikan wawasan berharga dan membantu saya menghindari kesalahan yang sama dalam proses pembelajaran.” (It provides an opportunity to learn from the experience of others, which provides valuable insight and helps me avoid making the same mistakes in the learning process).

The extract above reveals that the online group discussion is helpful for the students to share ideas and experiences in collecting and analyzing data, and searching related journals by using digital platform. Besides, it helps them stimulate new ideas and improve their understanding on the course.

3. Learning from new viewpoints from group members

The students perceived that the online group discussion helps them learn the viewpoints of other group members to have a reflection and analysis of the course project as shown in the following extracts.

Extract 15 (AN, 18/4/2024)

“Saya dapat belajar melalui sudut pandang dan pendekatan baru dari sesama anggota kelompok, yang membantu analisis yang lebih mendalam tentang EFL Research Methodology Project.” (I can learn from new viewpoints and approaches from group members that help to have a better reflection and analysis of the EFL Research Methodology Project).

Extract 16 (AIA, 18/4/2024)

“Saya merasa didorong untuk mengambil posisi yang lebih tegas dan mempelajari lebih dalam atas sudut pandang satu sama lain, yang membantu saya mengembangkan kepercayaan diri dan ketegasan dalam argumen saya.” (I felt encouraged to take a more assertive position and learn more a particular point of view in online group discussion, which helped me develop confidence and improve my arguments).

The two extracts above simply confirm that the online group discussion allows students to learn from others' point of view nurturing their learning motivation and the developing their self-confidence, arguments, reflection, and analysis on the course project.

4. Improving the quality of thinking and analysis

The students perceived the online group discussion improves the quality of thinking and analysis in deeper levels of cognitive processing in which they tried to positively take other group members' criticism shown in the following extracts.

Extract 17 (AFA, 18/4/2024)

“Memungkinkan saya untuk memahami kritik dari teman kelompok, yang mendorong saya untuk terus meningkatkan kualitas pemikiran dan analisis saya.” (It allows me to understand the criticism from my group members, which encourages me to continuously improve the quality of my thinking and analysis).

Extract 18 (AFR, 18/4/2024)

“Saya merasa didorong untuk terus mengembangkan keterampilan analisis kritis dan pemecahan masalah dalam diskusi kelompok online, karena seringkali dihadapkan pada situasi yang membutuhkan pemikiran kreatif dan solusi inovatif.” (I feel encouraged to continue developing my critical analysis and problem-solving skills in online group discussions, as I am often faced with situations that require creative thinking and innovative solutions).

The extracts above take into account that the online group discussion facilitates the students to improve the quality of thinking and analysis to learn and solve the problems appeared in the course project given.

Social interaction

The students perceived that the online group discussion facilitates social interaction among the students coming from diverse cultural backgrounds to promote empathy, understanding, and tolerance among students by providing a platform them to engage in meaningful conversations, to share ideas, and to collaborate on the course project described in the following lines.

1. Developing interpersonal communication skills

The online group discussion can be effective in developing the students' interpersonal communication skills by encouraging them to express their thoughts clearly, listen actively, and respond to others group members attentively as shown in the following extract.

Extract 19 (AFA, 18/4/2024)

“Saya menganggap diskusi kelompok online sebagai kesempatan untuk mengembangkan keterampilan komunikasi interpersonal, yang menjadi kunci dalam berinteraksi dalam konteks belajar maupun kehidupan profesional.” (I think online group discussions as an opportunity to develop interpersonal communication skills, which are key in interacting in the context of learning and professional life).

The extract above proves that the online group discussion is contributive to help the students develop their interpersonal communication skills to build a good interaction among other members of the group available in the course.

2. Supportive learning environment

The students perceived that the online group discussion can be designed to have a collaborative learning which is a crucial aspect of a supportive learning environment in the classroom. By working together, the students can develop a number of important required skills communication in learning, that is teamwork, and problem-solving that can be seen in the following extracts.

Extract 20 (AC, 18/4/2024)

“Saya merasa bahwa diskusi kelompok online membantu menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang inklusif dan mendukung, di mana setiap anggota kelompok merasa didengar, dihargai, dan diterima.” (I feel that online group discussion helps create an inclusive and supportive learning environment, where each group member feels heard, valued and accepted).

Extract 21 (AA, 18/4/2024)

“Saya dapat membangun jaringan sosial dengan anggota kelompok, yang memungkinkan kami saling mendukung dan bertukar informasi.” (I was able to build a strong social network with group members, which allowed us to support each other and exchange information).

Extract 22 (AFR, 18/4/2024)

“Saya menganggap diskusi kelompok online sebagai platform untuk berbagi pengalaman, pengetahuan, dan saran dengan sesama anggota kelompok, yang menambah pengalaman belajar saya dan memperluas wawasan saya tentang topik yang dibahas.” (I think online group discussion as a platform to share experiences, knowledge and suggestions with fellow students, which improve my learning experience and broaden my horizons on the topics discussed).

The three extracts above consider that the online group discussion becomes a supporting system to have a collaborative learning allowed the students to learn from some different points of view and to share experiences among others in the course.

3. Promoting effective teamwork

The students perceive that the online group discussion can significantly promote an effective teamwork by fostering a collaborative environment where the group members can share ideas and build trust with each other shown in the following extracts.

Extract 23 (KR, 18/4/2024)

“Saya berkolaborasi dengan sesama anggota kelompok dalam menyelesaikan proyek, yang memperkuat ikatan sosial dan meningkatkan kerja tim yang efektif.” (I often collaborate with the group members on completing projects, which strengthens social bonds and promotes effective teamwork.)

Extract 24 (MNI, 18/4/2024)

“Dalam diskusi kelompok online, saya dapat memperoleh umpan balik dan dukungan dari sesama anggota kelompok dalam mengatasi tantangan belajar, yang memperkuat kerja sama tim dalam kelompok.” (In online group discussions, I can get feedback and support from fellow group members in overcoming learning challenges, which strengthens the of the teamwork in the group).

Extract 25 (AN, 18/4/2024)

“Memberikan kesempatan kepada saya untuk berdiskusi dengan sesama anggota kelompok, yang menciptakan hubungan sosial dan rasa kerja sama tim di antara kami.” (It allows me to discuss with group members, which creates social connections and solidarity between us).

The extracts above clearly show that the online group discussion is a promoting effective teamwork by providing a platform for the students to share their thoughts and opinions in respectful and comfortable environment bridging to have a good social link among the students in all groups created.

4. Improving learning experience

The students perceived that the online group discussion is able to improve the students' learning experiences through a platform to lead them participate, engage, build connection and mutual support in the discussion shown in the following extracts.

Extract 26 (A, 18/4/2024)

“Saya menganggap interaksi sosial dalam diskusi kelompok online sebagai sarana untuk membangun koneksi yang bertahan lama dan saling mendukung, yang menambah pengalaman belajar saya.” (I consider social interactions in online group discussions as a means to build lasting connections and mutual support, which improve my learning experience).

Extract 27 (AIA, 18/4/2024)

“Saya dapat memperluas interaksi sosial saya dengan bertemu dengan orang-orang dari latar belakang yang berbeda, yang membuka peluang untuk belajar dari pengalaman dan perspektif mereka.” (I can expand my social interaction by meeting people from different backgrounds, which opens up opportunities to learn from their experiences and perspectives).

The extracts above clearly lead to an assumption that the online group discussion facilitates the students to improve their learning experience in which they can learn and solve the problem together in the course project.

Variety learning styles

The students perceived that the online group discussion can effectively facilitate the existence of varied learning styles possessed by the students by incorporating a range of teaching methods and tools accommodating the different learning preferences with the best suitable materials provided. Additionally, providing choices for the students to select their preferred method of learning, such as watching videos, reading articles, or participating in discussion, can also enhance the learning experience and promote inclusivity. Those points of view can be seen in the following descriptions.

1. Providing a platform for sharing ideas and experiences

The online group discussion provides a platform for sharing ideas and experiences, fostering a collaborative learning environment where the students can engage with other group members. It allows them to participate actively, build ideas of other group members promoting understanding and developing some essential communication and teamwork skills shown in the following extracts.

Extract 28 (AN, 18/4/2024)

“Saya percaya bahwa diskusi kelompok online dapat mendukung gaya belajar yang beragam dengan menyediakan platform untuk berbagi ide dan pengalaman dari berbagai perspektif.” (I believe that online group discussion can support diverse learning styles by providing a platform for sharing ideas and experiences from different perspectives).

Extract 29 (AC, 18/4/2024)

“Bisa menjadi tempat yang mendukung bagi anggota kelompok dengan gaya belajar yang lebih visual, auditorif, atau kinestetik dengan menyediakan platform untuk berbagi ide, beragam materi dan pengalaman.” (It can be a supportive place for group members with a more visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning style by providing a platform for sharing ideas, variety of materials, experiences).

The two extracts above simply point out that the online group discussion constitutes a supportive place for group members which is more adaptable with the visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning preference of the students to share ideas and experiences from huge number of different perspectives.

2. Variety of learning media and styles

The students perceived that the online group discussion can be utilized as multimedia learning resources such as videos and infographics to engage the students with different learning styles. It is designed to support collaborative learning which is a crucial aspect of supportive learning styles by working together on discussion as shown in the following extracts.

Extract 30 (AA, 18/4/2024)

“Memberikan kesempatan untuk penggunaan berbagai media dan alat pembelajaran yang dapat menyesuaikan dengan berbagai gaya belajar tiap anggota kelompok.” (It provides a spot for the use of a variety of learning media and tools that can adapt to various group members’ learning styles).

Extract 31 (AFA, 18/4/2024)

Menurut saya, dapat menjadi platform yang bermanfaat bagi siswa dengan gaya belajar yang berbeda untuk berkontribusi sesuai dengan preferensi masing-masing.” (In my opinion, it can be an inclusive platform for students with different learning styles to contribute accordingly to their individual preferences).

Extract 32 (KR, 18/4/2024)

“Diskusi kelompok online memberikan kesempatan untuk berkolaborasi antara anggota kelompok yang memiliki gaya belajar yang berbeda untuk mencapai pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif.” (The online group discussion allows for collaboration between group members having different learning styles to achieve a more comprehensive understanding).

Those extracts above clearly confirm that the online group discussion is designed to support the utilization of a variety of learning media and learning styles leading the students to gain the overall learning experiences shared among the group members.

3. Improving students understanding

The students perceived that the online group discussion can significantly lead the students to improve their comprehensive understanding absorbed in the course project given by sharing different viewpoints and learning approaches employed by the group members as shown in the following extracts.

Extract 33 (AIA, 18/4/2024)

“Saya pribadi merasa bahwa diskusi kelompok online membantu dalam memperluas pemahaman saya melalui interaksi dengan sudut pandang dan pendekatan belajar yang berbeda dari sesama anggota kelompok” (I personally find online group discussions helpful in improving my understanding through interacting with the different viewpoints and learning approaches of fellow group members.)

Extract 34 (I, 18/4/2024)

“Melalui diskusi kelompok online, saya telah mendapati manfaat dalam belajar dari cara berpikir dan pendekatan belajar yang berbeda-beda dari sesama anggota kelompok.” (Through online

group discussion, I have found the benefit of learning from the different ways of thinking and learning approaches of group members).

The extracts above slightly show that the online group discussion is able to develop the students' understanding from other different ways of thinking and learning approaches making them feel comfortable share their ideas and work together in the course project.

The students' perceptions of benefits of online group discussion in Research Methodology Project were categorized thematically into positive responses highlighting the positive collaborative experiences, increasing engagement, challenging and stimulating, social interaction, and varied learning styles. Firstly, the online group discussion provides positive collaborative experiences enabling the students to develop some essential skills needed in the course, such as the ability to work together, share ideas, and learn from other perspectives. In line with this point, Edo (2020) stated that collaborative experience in online group discussion can lead to meaningful learning, the development of high-order thinking, and the creation of an e-learning community. Therefore, the online group discussion plays a crucial role in increasing students' motivation in learning and working on the assignment of the course project.

Secondly, the online group discussion increases the students' engagement in various ways. Delaney (2019) states that online group discussion provides active engagement opportunities for students allowing them to actively participate in the learning process and contribute their ideas and perspectives. Thirdly, the online group discussion offers a dynamic learning environment encouraging the students to provide a challenging and stimulating environment for the students' academic development. Ghavifekr (2020) stated that online group discussion can also provide opportunities for students to develop important soft skills, such as communication, collaboration, and problem solving and can significantly stimulating students in various ways. Fourthly, the online group discussion initiates social interaction among students by providing a platform for them to engage in meaningful conversation to share ideas and to build a good and effective collaboration among them coming from different cultural backgrounds. Kumi-Yeboah (2020) stated that the cross-cultural interaction can help the students to promote empathy, understanding, and tolerance among them. Finally, the online group discussion is able to accommodate the students' learning preferences, namely visual, auditory, and kinesthetics by providing the best preferred learning materials and methods with those different learning styles among the students.

CONCLUSIONS

There are five aspects of perception to the benefits of online group discussion in Research Methodology Project that positively assumed by the students of graduate program, Universitas Negeri Makassar. Those five aspects are positive collaborative experiences, increased engagement, challenging and stimulating, social interaction and varied learning styles with some inherent indicators for each aspect bridging the students to have a good interaction and communication among the students in EFL classroom.

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