

# Online Grammar Learning: How The Learners Perceive Its Effectiveness

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**Abstract.** The pandemic forced all learning to be done online using technologies that can connect students and teachers in different locations. This online teaching and learning also need to be applied to teaching and learning English grammar which is usually much more comfortable to be done offline. This study was conducted to determine university students' perceptions of the effectiveness of their online grammar learning and their reasons for saying that it is effective or ineffective. The data were collected using a questionnaire to 35 batch 2017, 2018, and 2019 university students. The findings revealed that most students (68.57%) perceived that online grammar learning was ineffective. The reasons are that they could not understand the materials easily when they learned it online (65.71%). The students also could not interact with other friends to learn together (54.29%), they could not get grammar corrections from the teachers directly in online learning (37.14%), and they could not follow teachers' grammar explanations easily (37.14%). Besides that, the requirements that they needed to fulfill to use the applications for their online learning also became another problem in their grammar learning such as the applications used needed strong internet connections (65.71%), the applications required the students to have a large storage capacity in the device that they used for grammar learning (31.43%), and the applications required the students to have more than 1 gigabyte of internet quota (25.71%).

Keywords: students' perception, online grammar learning, problems, EFL learners

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Students' perception of online learning or internet-based distance learning has attracted the attention of ESL and EFL researchers. Anderson (2004) suggests a collaborative community online learning, which can allow learners to get involved in the learning process and interact with teachers and other students in the community. The teaching-learning process should be interactive to engage students in online learning. Furthermore, Larsen-Freeman (2014) suggests creating meaningful grammar learning "where all students have an opportunity to learn" with teachers' help and guidance. The previous two theories remind us of the importance of allowing all students to learn collaboratively with the teacher and other students in the learning process. Online learning may be complex for students because of the clumsiness of using a new platform, but they could get used to it later. Internet connection and maintenance may become big problems while doing online learning.

Nonetheless, a study by Altunay (2019) found that the students in his study perceive online learning as more flexible in terms of time and place factors for them to study. However, in another study, Bali and Liu (2018) revealed that face-to-face learning eases students to communicate and interact with their friends and teachers. Here, we can see the pros and cons of how effective online learning is for students.

Because of the pandemic that happened worldwide, all activities, including the teaching and learning processes, had to be done online. This online mode also applies to

teaching and learning in Indonesia. As a result, the teaching and learning of English, specifically the teaching and learning of English grammar, which was considered to be effective when it was done offline, had also to be done online. When the grammar teaching and learning were done online, the synchronous sessions could be done using meeting applications (e.g., *Google Meet*, *Zoom Meeting*, and other virtual meeting applications). In contrast, asynchronous learning could be done using a Learning Management System (e.g., *Moodle*, *Edmodo*, *Schoology*, and other LMS). Kilickaya (2019) suggests that when teachers prepare an online platform, they must pay attention to which platform can be used to see and hear the teachers or find the materials for the learners' better grammar learning. While doing online grammar learning, students may discover its advantages or limitations. According to Aslani and Tabrizi (2015), the first advantage is that when the learners are demanded to use technologies for learning, they can accomplish their autonomy in online learning. They were familiarized with the technologies which could help them in their learning, and finally, they could reach their grammar learning autonomy through online learning.

Furthermore, Gamlo (2019) stated that online grammar learning using *Learn English Grammar* mobile application was effective and accessible for learners and could encourage them to enjoy an online learning environment. In addition, various tasks using technologies are more effective in gaining students' motivation in grammar learning than photocopied exercises (Alian, Khodabandeh, & Soleimani, 2018). Furthermore, Taj, Sulan, Sipra, and Ahmad (2016) stated that the use of mobile applications is effective for learners irrespective of their age. However, learning grammar online also has its drawbacks. The first drawback is the unstable internet connection which may discourage students in their online language teaching-learning process (Ozudogru & Hismanoglu, 2016). The students' discouragement is caused by the fact that when there is a problem with the internet connection, then they may not be able to listen to their teacher and see the materials broadcasted online by their teacher well (Zamari, Adnan, Idris, & Yusof, 2012). Thus, the development of infrastructure for online learning may be needed for a better experience in the online grammar teaching-learning process. The second drawback, according to the findings of Hazari's study (2020), is that two major problems are caused by online learning. The first significant problem is "a mismatch between students' specific learning style preferences and the online learning environment," the second major problem is the communication problems among students or between the students and the teacher.

However, such studies have yet to reveal specifically how university students perceive their online grammar learning. Since the problem of online grammar learning is significant in language learning, it is necessary to conduct this study for the following reasons. First, this study may discover that university students may or may not perceive online grammar learning as effective. Another reason for conducting this study is to find out why the students perceive their online grammar learning as effective or ineffective. The findings of this study would be helpful to EFL teachers because they may find out the students' perception toward their online grammar learning and why they consider the learning as effective or not effective.

## 2. METHOD

This study used a descriptive quantitative design in the form of a survey study. The main objective of survey research is to describe a group's or population's characteristics (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). It is essentially a quantitative research approach in which the researcher asks a sample of people – or, in some situations, the entire population – to complete some survey or questionnaire to characterize their attitudes, opinions, behaviors, experiences, and other aspects of the population (Creswell, 2005). Thus, the data for this study were gathered through a questionnaire. The data were analyzed using a descriptive quantitative analysis method where detailed descriptions of students' problems during their

online grammar learning were sought from their answers in the questionnaire. The analysis of the data involved the use of statistical procedures such as simple frequency distributions and descriptive statistics.

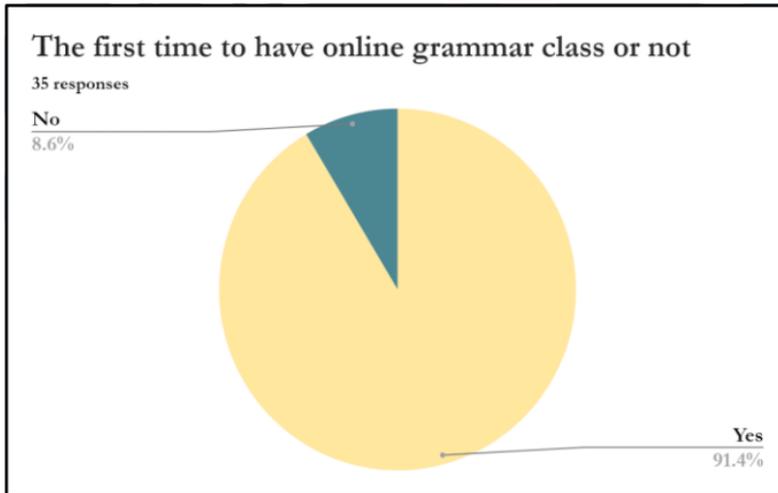
The respondents of this study are all English Language Education program students who took an Intermediate Grammar class in semester Antara of the academic year 2019/2020. They are from different batches (i.e., 2017, 2018, and 2019). The total number of respondents is 35 students. The data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to find out three crucial things about students' perception towards online grammar learning in general, the learning applications used, and how grammar lecturers deliver the teaching materials. The questionnaire, which was self-created by the researchers, has seven questions about the respondents' background information and seven major questions meant to find answers to the research questions of this study. There were four close-ended and three open-ended questions to answer the research questions. The first three close-ended questions are used to ask the students' perceptions of how grammar lecturers deliver the teaching materials, the online learning applications used by the teachers to teach them, and the functions of those applications in the teaching and learning of their online Grammar Class. The last close-ended question is used to ask their perception of the effectiveness of their online grammar learning. The two open-ended items seek their reasons to state whether their online grammar learning is effective or ineffective for them. Then, the last open-ended item is an optional question that they can either answer or not. This question is used to ask students' suggestions for their online grammar learning. The questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

The questionnaire was piloted first through the use of Google Forms to 5 respondents of the study's targeted population to find out confusing or ambiguous questions. After the questionnaire was piloted, the Google Form link was distributed to the remaining 55 students out of 60 students who were not involved in the piloting process. The link to the questionnaire was given to the respondents for them to fill in the questionnaire through a communication medium in which they can be contacted (i.e., email, WhatsApp message, and direct message on Instagram). The respondents were given a week to fill in the questionnaire, and the researchers always reminded them if they still needed it. At the end of the time given to the respondents to fill in the questionnaire, there were 35 students out of the targeted 55 students who filled in the questionnaire.

After the data were collected, they were analyzed statistically using Microsoft Excel for the close-ended data. First, the answers for the close-ended items were counted based on the participants' responses for each item. After that, the number of answers for each item was put in a table and later presented as a graph or chart. Then, in the result part of the paper, the researchers explained the study's findings by the data presented in a graph or chart. On the other hand, the answers to the open-ended items were categorized and concluded the typical responses.

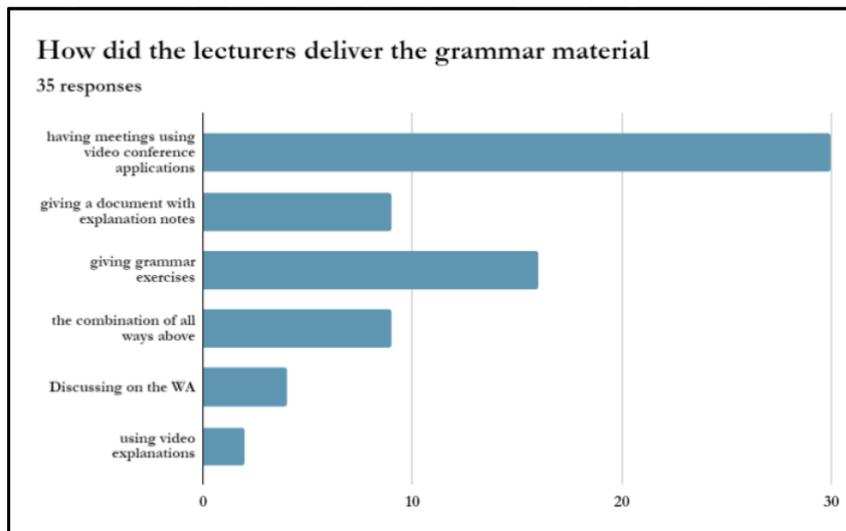
### **3. RESULT**

The results of this study show that almost all of the respondents experienced their first-time online Grammar Class in Semester Antara of the Academic Year of 2019/2020, and few of them had already had an online Grammar Class in the previous semester. As many as 32 (91.4%) out of the 35 respondents stated that they had the online Grammar Class for the first time in Semester Antara of the Academic Year of 2019/2020. However, 3 (8.6%) out of the 35 respondents stated that they had experienced an online Grammar Class before (see Figure 1 below). This finding indicates that the opinions or responses in the survey came from the students who had just experienced their Grammar Class online.



**Figure 1.** First time having an online Grammar Class or not

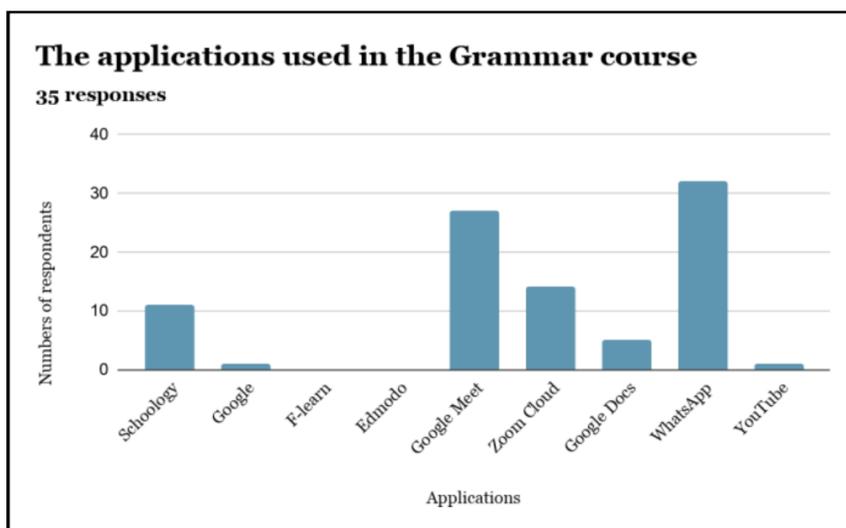
Figure 2 below shows that 30 (85.71%) of the 35 respondents stated that their lecturers delivered the grammar materials via synchronous online meetings through video conferencing applications such as *Google Meet* or *Zoom Meeting*. This result supports Kilickaya's statement (2019) that teachers must prepare an online platform where learners can hear and see their teacher. Besides having synchronous online meetings, 16 respondents (45.71%) stated that their lecturers gave grammar exercises (synchronously or asynchronously) to deliver the materials. However, nine respondents (25.71%) also stated that their lecturers delivered the materials by giving a document with explanation notes, and a similar number of respondents (9 respondents/25.71%) chose the option of combining the ways mentioned before. In addition, four respondents stated that they had a discussion on WhatsApp, and two respondents (5.71%) stated that using video explanations was another way of delivering the grammar materials by lecturers.



**Figure 2.** How the lecturers delivered the materials of the online Grammar Class

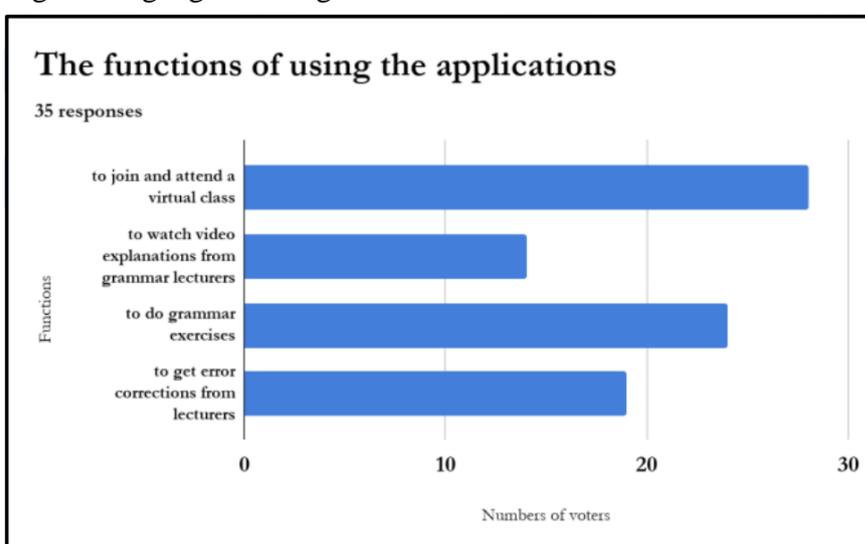
As for the applications used in the Grammar class, 32 respondents (91.43%) stated that they used WhatsApp, and 27 respondents (77.14%) stated of using *Google Meet* for their online Grammar Class (see Figure 3). However, 14 (40.0%) of them stated that they also used *Zoom Meeting*, 11 respondents (31.42%) stated that they used *Schoology*, five respondents (14.29%) stated that they used *Google Docs*, and one respondent (2.86%) mentioned the use of *YouTube* and *Google Classroom* as the online media for them to learn grammar in the

online Grammar Class. This finding is similar to the finding in Aslani and Tabrizi's (2015) study, where the participants also used several applications in online learning to get used to different kinds of technologies for learning.



**Figure 3.** The applications used in the online Grammar Class

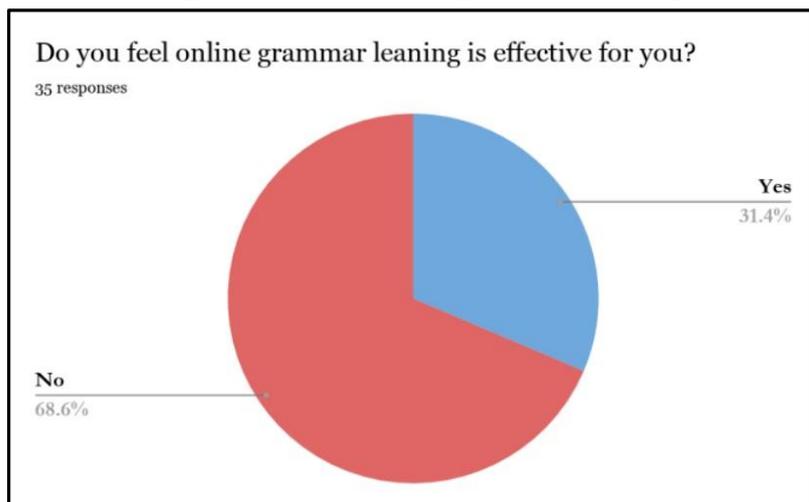
When they were asked about the functions of the applications they mentioned before, 28 respondents (80.0%) stated that those applications are used to join and attend a virtual class (see Figure 4). In addition, 24 respondents (68.57%) out of the 35 respondents stated that they used the applications to do grammar exercises. Furthermore, 14 respondents (40.0%) stated that they used the applications to watch video explanations from their Grammar lecturers, and 19 respondents (54.29%) used the applications to get lecturer error corrections. These results support Taj et al.'s (2016) suggestion that EFL teachers must use mobile phones or technology in the teaching-learning process based on the findings of their study, the use of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) proved to be helpful for the students in their English language learning.



**Figure 4.** The functions of the applications in the online Grammar Class

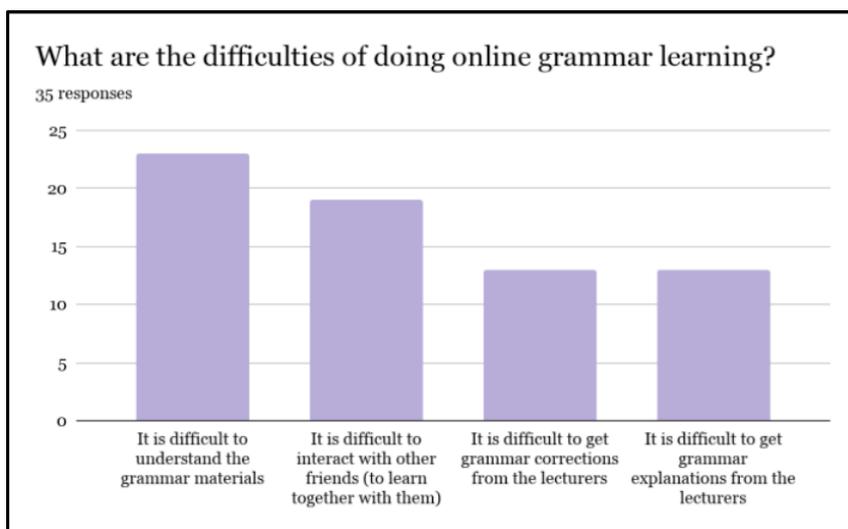
As for the effectiveness of their online grammar learning, 24 (68.57%) out of the 35 respondents stated that they disagreed with the statement that online grammar learning is effective, but the other 11 respondents (31.43%) agreed that online grammar learning is

effective for them (see Figure 5). The next question in the questionnaire sought the reasons for the students to perceive their online grammar learning as effective or not.



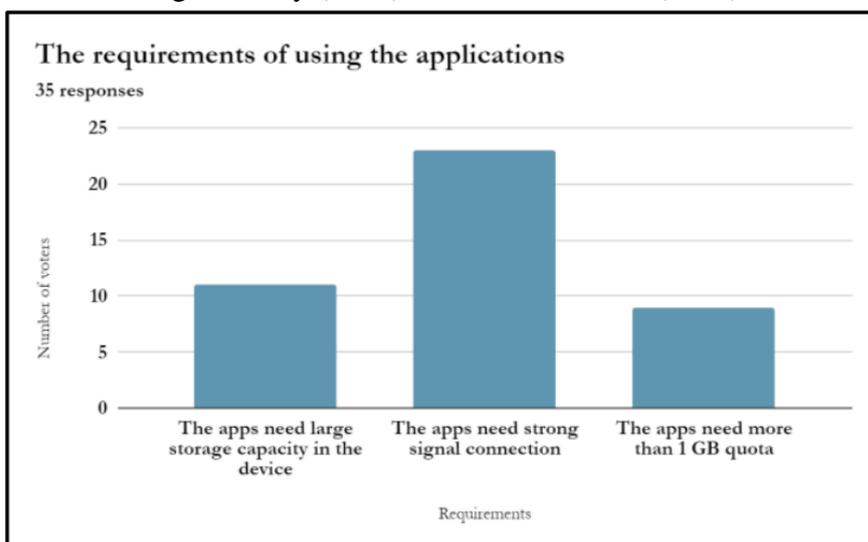
**Figure 5.** Students' perception of the effectiveness of the online Grammar Class

Online Grammar Class is considered to be ineffective by the students because there are several difficulties that they need help with when doing it. The 23 respondents (65.71%) stated that they could not understand the materials easily, and 19 (54.29%) of them stated that they could not interact with other friends well to learn together (see Figure 6). In addition, 13 respondents (37.14%) stated they could not get grammar corrections, and another 13 respondents (37.14%) stated they could not follow teachers' grammar explanations easily in online grammar learning. According to Kilickaya (2019), grammar teachers need to prepare online platforms from which students can hear and see their teacher and materials to learn grammar better. Students perceive online grammar learning as ineffective because the lecturers sometimes explain grammar patterns and functions quickly, the bad internet connection disturbs online grammar learning, and students need detailed explanations. Students also need their classmates' participation as if they are in the offline classroom. Furthermore, students preferred to communicate directly with the lecturers to understand the materials better than in online classes and ask what they still needed help understanding. The mentioned difficulties indicated that learners needed social presence and interaction, so they preferred face-to-face learning, as Bali and Liu (2014) stated in their journal article.



**Figure 6.** Student's perception of the difficulties of doing the online Grammar Class

Another thing that caused students to face difficulties when doing the online Grammar class was that there were specific requirements they needed to fulfill to use the applications well. As many as 23 (65.71%) of the 35 respondents stated they needed strong internet connections. Furthermore, 11 (31.43%) of them stated they needed a large storage capacity in the device. In addition, 9 (25.71%) out of the 35 respondents stated they need more than 1 gigabyte of internet quota for online grammar learning (see Figure 7). Strong internet connections have become a crucial issue in online grammar learning, as found in Ozudogru and Hizmanoglu's study (2016) and Zamari et al.'s (2012).



**Figure 7.** Student's perception of the requirements of using the applications for their online Grammar Class

Even though most of the respondents perceived their online grammar learning as ineffective, 11 respondents (31.4%) stated that their online grammar learning was effective because they could learn it themselves everywhere and at any time they wanted. When they did not understand, they could ask questions to their teachers. Regarding this finding, Altunay (2019) also stated that learners must be encouraged frequently in autonomy learning. Besides, the students can learn everywhere and keep the materials to be studied later.

In addition, the respondents in this study were also asked to give suggestions to make online grammar teaching and learning more effective for the students. Not all of them gave suggestions. However, there are three common suggestions that they gave: 1) they suggested that the lecturers upload the recordings of the online video conferences on the class LMS to overcome the lousy internet connection problems when having synchronous online meetings using *Zoom* or *Google Meet*; 2) the students also stated that using video conference applications (e.g., *Zoom* or *Google Meet*) was better than using *WhatsApp* for explaining the materials; and 3) they suggested the lecturers share more learning grammar videos for the students to learn the materials themselves.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to answer these research questions: "How do university students perceive the effectiveness of their online grammar learning?" and "Why do they think that their online grammar learning is effective or not effective for them?" by surveying 35 respondents from the English Language Education program who took Intermediate Grammar class in Semester Antara of the Academic Year of 2019/2020. Based on the analysis of the data gathered from a questionnaire distributed to the respondents, for the first research question, most of the students answered that online grammar learning is not effective for them.

When asked about their preference between online grammar learning and face-to-face grammar learning, most participants stated that they preferred face-to-face learning for Grammar courses rather than online learning. Hence, face-to-face grammar learning is perceived to be more effective than online grammar learning by the students in this study.

For the second research question, the students mentioned several reasons why they thought online grammar learning was ineffective. First, the primary reason they stated to be the cause for online grammar learning being ineffective for them is the interaction in online platforms which is difficult for them to do. In contrast, direct interaction, like what they often experienced in face-to-face meetings in the classroom, is needed for them to understand grammar better. The second major reason is the internet connection problem, which made them miss several parts of the lecturers' explanations in the virtual class using a video conference platform. For them to have a smooth virtual class meeting using a video conference platform, they needed strong internet connections. Therefore, to overcome this difficulty, they suggested that lecturers record their explanations and upload the recording on an online classroom platform, so learners who missed several explanations can replay the explanations. Other reasons for them to state that their online grammar learning is ineffective are that they could not get grammar corrections directly from their teachers, they could not follow the grammar explanation from their teachers easily, the applications used for their online grammar learning required them to have a large storage capacity in the device that the students used to do the online grammar learning and the internet quota of more than 1 gigabyte that they needed to prepare in order to do their online grammar learning.

This current study has shown how English learners perceive the effectiveness of their online grammar learning. The findings of this study may not be generalizable due to some of its limitations, where this study only focuses on students' perception of the effectiveness of their online grammar learning. Therefore, further research may investigate similar problems happening in different contexts of education and also discover teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of online grammar learning to yield more generalizable findings. Finally, the findings of this study are expected to be useful for further research related to the effectiveness of online grammar learning. The findings of this study are expected to help teachers in online grammar learning and inform teachers and educational practitioners about students' preference for face-to-face grammar learning over online grammar learning. The students' stated problems in online grammar learning would make teachers and learners realize the difficulties in online grammar learning, so both of them may discuss the better way to overcome the difficulties of online grammar learning.

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## APPENDIX

### Learners' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Their Online Grammar Learning Questionnaire

#### Respondents' Background Information

1. Students' Number
2. Age
3. Gender
  - Female
  - Male
4. How many times have you taken an Intermediate Grammar class?
  - Once
  - Twice
  - Thrice
  - Other...
5. Have you passed the Intermediate Grammar class in Semester Antara (2019/2020)?
  - Yes
  - No
6. GPA
7. Was it your first time to have an online grammar class for the whole semester?
  - Yes
  - No

#### Learners' Perception of Their Online Grammar Class

1. How did your lecturer deliver the grammar materials? (you can choose more than 1)
  - using video explanations
  - having meetings using video conference applications (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet, etc.)
  - giving a document with explanation notes
  - giving grammar exercises
  - the combination of all ways above
  - Other....
2. What are the applications used in the grammar course? (you can choose more than 1)
  - Schoology
  - Google Classroom
  - Moodle
  - Edmodo
  - Google Meet

- Zoom Cloud Meeting
  - Microsoft Teams
  - Google Docs
  - Other....
3. Related to number 2, what are the functions of using those apps? (you can choose more than 1)
    - to join and attend a virtual class (using video conference)
    - to watch video explanations from grammar lecturers
    - to do grammar exercises
    - to get error corrections from lecturers
    - Other....
  4. Do you feel online grammar learning is effective for you?
    - Yes
    - No
  5. If your answer to number 4 is 'Yes,' tell the reasons why you feel online grammar learning is effective for you.
  6. If your answer for number 4 is 'No,' tell the reasons why you feel online grammar learning is not effective for you.
  7. If there is any, please give your suggestions for your online grammar learning!\*