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Students' Attitude Towards Online English Language learning during COVID-19 Outbreak in the North Asia: a Case Study of North-Eastern Federal University

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Abstract

This article aimed to identify the attitudes of undergraduate students towards online English language learning in the North-Eastern Federal University, Russia. The questionnaire was conducted using Google form. The sample included 303 undergraduate EFL students. The research subjects are the students of Institute of Engineering and Technology, Institute of Mathematics and Information Sciences and Automobile and Road College. The research tools were questionnaire and Chi-square test. The data were interpreted in terms of three parameters: by gender, by place of residence and by academic achievement. By gender 180 respondents were male, while 123 were female. The number of rural students is 125 students, whereas urban students make up 178. The majority of students (65,7 %) are B grade students, 16,2 % of students are A grade students, 18,2 % of students are C grade students. The results of the study revealed that students have a favourable attitude to online learning. In particular, female students were statistically detected to have a more complimentary attitude to online learning than male students. In contrast, the statistics did not discover the preference of online learning by the place of residence. As it was also shown that academic performance did not affect the preference of online learning. The challenges faced by students are slow Internet connection, non-comprehension of learning material, lack of effort and interest, and lack of personal space. In addition, this study revealed the unpreparedness of university network infrastructure and its technological capacity for conducting online classes. The study discovered that students prefer an equal mix of online and face-to-face instruction.

Keywords: COVID-19, English as a foreign language, Arctic, Russian Far North, online learning, perception, circumpolar region, Northern Asia.

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1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, universities and institutes have transferred to online education. The impact of COVID-19, particularly on education, work, economy, and governance is immense and unprecedented worldwide (Papapicco, 2020). Educational establishments had to offer a variety of online courses by the needs of students in different subjects. Online learning has become a popular tool for teaching and learning. A wide range of modern technologies and platforms are being used in online learning.

The transition to online training took place in 2020 across the entire territory of the Russian Federation, including the Russian Far North. Specifically, the transition to online training took place in March 2020 at the North-Eastern Federal University, which is located in Northern Asia or in the Arctic zone. Such a sharp transition from full-time education to online education caused challenges and stresses for both students and teachers due to the lack of internet learning experience. Russia's Arctic zone, as the most remote and vast territory to live in, has experienced access difficulties to online training. English as a foreign language is studied by all students (approximately 20,000 students) of all schools and colleges of North-Eastern Federal University. The university employs online platforms such as Moodle and Skyes. Moodle is a free open-source learning management system used by a large number of educational institutions in the Far Eastern regions of Russia. In addition, the Skyes digital platform is used for learning English.

The article seeks to discover attitudes, perceptions and challenges that undergraduate students' have faced in online English language learning during COVID-19 lockdown in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). The challenges are related to learning content, use of technology and perspectives of online learning. It discusses the following research questions: (1) What is the students' attitude to online English language learning in terms of gender, place of residence and academic achievement? (2) What difficulties and challenges have the students faced during online English language learning? (3) What are the perspectives of online English language learning in students' opinion?

2. Discussion

Definition of online learning, E-learning and distance learning

In scholarly literature the terms "online learning", "e-learning", and "distance learning" are used interchangeably. Recent research in education gives different definitions of the terms under discussion. The scholars have elaborated different aspects of online learning or e-learning. (Cojocariu et al., 2014; Rekkedal et al., 2003; Hiltz, Turoff, 2005; Singh, Thurman, 2019; Anderson, 2011 and etc.). In particular, Cojocariu et al. (2014, p.2000) argue that "most of the terms (online learning, open learning, web-based learning, computer-mediated learning, blended learning, m-learning) have in common the ability to use a computer connected to a network, that offers the possibility to learn from anywhere, anytime, in any rhythm, with any means".

Rekkedal et al. (2003, p. 7) state that "online learning represents a subset of distance education". It is characterized by (a) the separation of teacher and learner; (b) learning materials provided by educational organizations; (c) the use of computers and computer networks by the participants in the learning process.

Hiltz and Turoff (2005) regard online learning as a new version of distance learning. Similarly, Benson (2002) states that online learning is a newer version or, an improved version of distance learning.

According to Singh and Thurman (2019: 291), online learning is "learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access. In these environments, students can be anywhere (independent) to learn and interact with instructors and other students". Online learning makes the teaching-learning process more student-centered, more innovative, and even more flexible.

Anderson (2011) clarifies that online learning refers to a type of teaching and learning situation in which (a) the learner is at a distance from the tutor/instructor, (b) the learner uses some form of technology to access the learning materials, (c) the learner uses technology to interact with the tutor/instructor and with other learners and (d) some kind of support is provided to learners.

Harasim (2006, p.64) distinguishes three categories of online learning: (a) adjunct mode is when online learning activities are used only to supplement a course; (b) mixed (blended) mode is when online activities are used as a significant part of a course; (c) totally online mode describes courses in which the majority (if not all) of the course activities are done online.

While continuing the consideration of the basic terms, we witness that researchers diversely define E-learning. For instance, Guri-Rosenblit (2005: 469) thinks that E-learning is “the use of electronic media for a variety of learning purposes that range from add-on functions in conventional classrooms to full substitution for face-to-face meetings by online encounters”.

Marquès (2006) considers E-learning to be “distance education through remote resources”. Li, Lau and Dharmendran (2009) regard E-learning as “the delivery of a learning, training or education program by electronic means”. Bermejo (2005) understands E-learning as “education that uses computerised communication systems as an environment for communication, the exchange of information and interaction between students and instructors”. Liao and Lu (2008) interpret E-learning as education delivered, or learning conducted, by Web techniques. Lee and Lee (2006) are of the opinion that E-learning is an on-line education conducted as the self-paced or real-time delivery of training and education over the internet to an end-user device”.

Koohang and Harman (2005) review that E-learning is the “delivery of education (all activities relevant to instructing, teaching, and learning) through various electronic media”. Aldrich (2005) believes that “E-learning is a broad combination of processes, content, and infrastructure to use computers and networks to scale and/or improve one or more significant parts of a learning value chain, including management and delivery”.

Roblyer and Edwards (2000: 192) characterize distance learning as “the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance”. Polat (2020: 18) explains distance learning technologies as “educational technologies realized by means of information technologies and telecommunications in indirect or not-so-indirect interaction of the student and the teacher”.

Having considered all the definitions, we make a conclusion that the discussed terms have much in common. Thus, online learning is carried out using electronic tools remotely through training materials supported by feedback. It is conducted in educational institutions according to the curriculum based on distance technologies.

Challenges of online learning during COVID-19 pandemic in EFL setting

The new research articles concerning English language teaching during COVID-19 pandemic have been published. Mahyoob (2019) conducted research on identifying the challenges and obstacles experienced by English language learners (EFL) in Taibah University, Saudi Arabia during COVID-19 pandemic. He pinpoints that the challenges faced by EFL students in online learning are related to technical problems, communication issues, and low satisfaction of students with online courses. Karim and Hasan conducted a study to know the challenges confronted by students in a virtual learning, and prospects of a virtual learning from the undergraduate students’ point of view in Saudi Arabia at a tertiary level. The results of the study revealed that students have a preference for a blended and online mode of education rather than face-to-face regular classes. The author concludes that students’ preferences for online learning should be taken into account in designing the syllabus. It is also needed to upgrade the students’ and teachers’ use of technology for efficient education.

Alfiras et al. (2020) bring up methodological questions about online learning arising from COVID-19 pandemic from the point of view of both teachers and students. Faculty members believe that online learning is good for theoretical and semitheoretical classes. But online learning is ineffective in teaching practice oriented courses in contrast to face-to-face instruction.

The authors conclude that online learning and face-to-face learning have become commonplace in the post-pandemic era. The following methodological issues remain unresolved. They include: 1. The nature of the training materials used for online learning 2. The problem of assessing students’ knowledge and skills in online learning, their effectiveness and validity. 3. The lack of skills in the use of technology for both students and teachers 4. The format of training depends on the discipline in question.

Ajmal et al. (2020) explored the responses and feedback of EFL students to the advantages, limitations of online teaching at University of Lahore, Pakistan. The results of the study demonstrate that modern technology in English language teaching has a beneficial effect on students’ achievement, students’ motivation, and students’ language awareness. However, it has several limitations: limited internet access area. Secondly, teachers’ lack of technological skills on the part of teachers or computer know-how, learners’ anxiety, low motivation, and low English proficiency level prevent them from developing their English skills. Technological tools cannot

replace classroom teaching. Their role is supplementary. Face-to-face interactions between teachers and students is essential for many courses which are aesthetic and practical in nature.

Furthermore, Farrah and Al-Bakry (2020) studied challenges of online learning faced by EFL students in Palestinian universities. The study concluded that students have a positive attitude to online learning. However, poor technological skills of students decreased learning efficiency. Among other problems determined are an unreliable evaluation system of students' performance, and the poor technological infrastructure of universities.

In a similar direction, Novrika and Arif (2020) investigated challenges encountered by EFL students' in Indonesia. The study reported that the main challenges were unsteady network connection, lack of communication or social interactions between teachers and students, lack of feedback, and frequent students' distraction from studying.

Kasyfur (2020) researched the perception of online learning by EFL students in Indonesia at the tertiary level. The research demonstrated that the students regard online learning to provide flexible time and nurture their autonomy/independence and confidence. However, the students have internet connection problems, their poor understanding of the online materials and lack of technological skills on the part of students. Overall, students have a positive attitude to online learning. The students consider online learning ineffective.

Coman et al. (2020) conducted research on students' perception of online learning and teaching in Romanian universities. The research concluded that universities, teachers and students were not prepared for fully online learning. The researchers identified the following problems: technical problems with the platforms provided by the universities, slow internet connection, lack of adequate technologies to connect to online learning, lack of communication (interaction) between teachers and students, online courses are difficult to assimilate (poor assimilation of courses), students' distraction and loss of focus. Students felt isolated. To sum up, students have a negative attitude towards online learning.

3. Methodology

Sample

A total of 303 respondents from the North-Eastern Federal University learning English as a foreign language participated in this research. Out of the total number of respondents, 180 respondents (59,4 %) were male, while 123 (40,6 %) were female. The number of rural students is 125 students (41,3 %), whereas urban students make up 178 (58,7 %). 65,7 % of students are B grade students (N = 199), 16,2 % of students are A grade students (N = 49), 18,2 % of students are C grade students (N = 55).

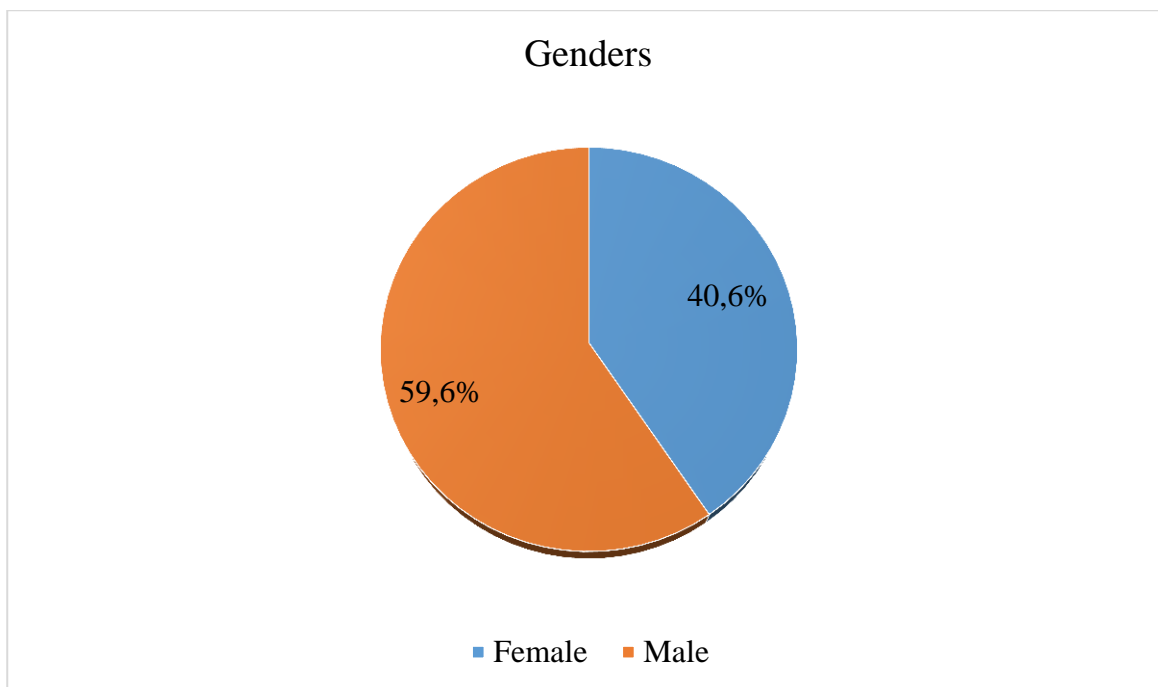


Fig. 1. Gender of participants

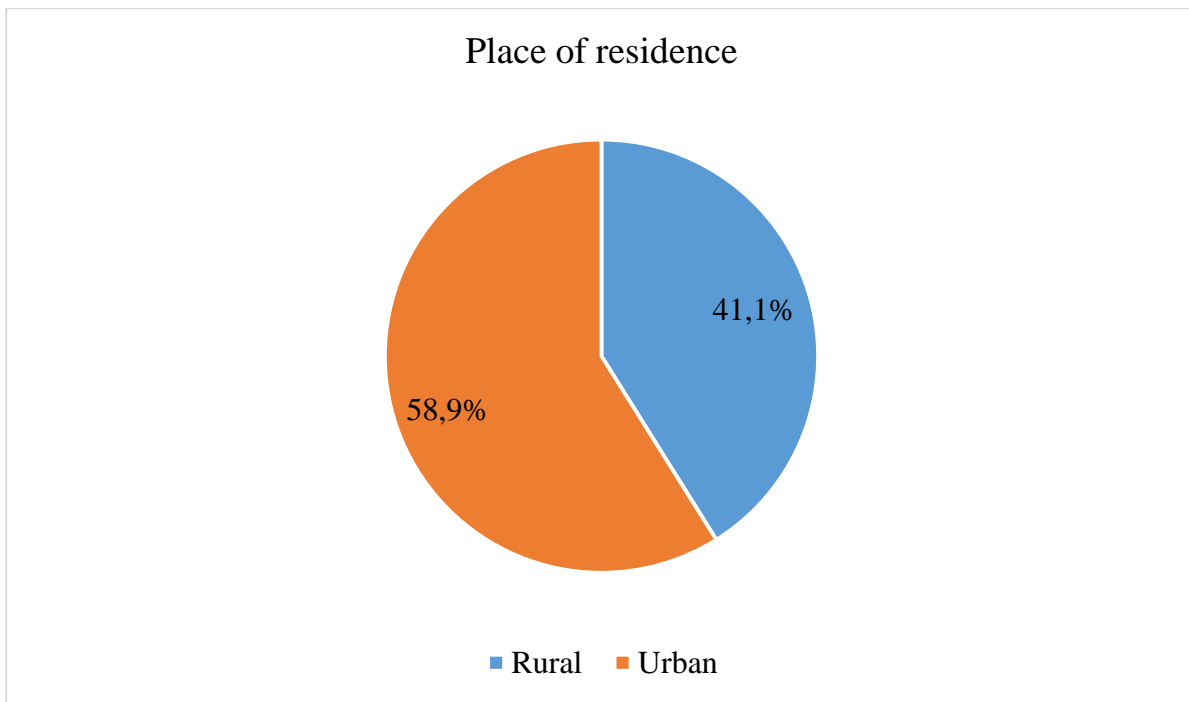


Fig. 2. Participants' place of residence

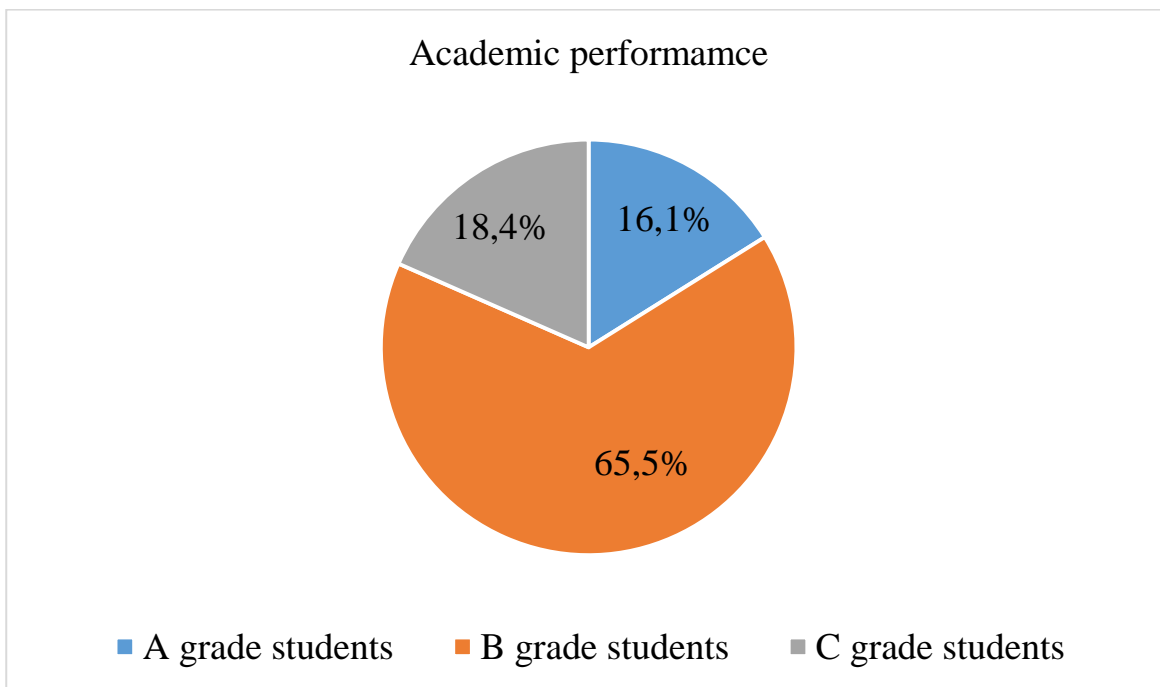


Fig. 3. Participants' academic performance

Instrument

The survey was held by means of a Google form (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1kkoKfaQv0HdGdIOlSdJw_EZyp5Q3pSD_F4-IQAtJhOI/edit?usp=forms_home&ths=true). The questionnaire included four major components: (a) demographic information, (b) online learning effectiveness, (c) challenges of online learning and (d) perspectives of online learning. When filling out the questionnaire, students chose answers on a 5-point scale ("strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree", "strongly agree"). The questionnaire items are based on several studies (Farrah, al-Bakry, 2020; Kasyfur, 2020; Mishra, Panda, 2007). The items were adapted to find answers to the research questions. The said questionnaire consists of 20 questions. The results of the questionnaire were

calculated using chi-square test. In the course of statistical processing, contingency tables were made for three parameters: by gender, by place of residence, and academic performance.

4. Data analysis

Regarding the first research question, the answers of male and female respondents revealed the noticeable differences on the 3 questions of the survey. Specifically, most female students 65 % (N = 80) have a more favourable attitude to online learning than male students 37,2 % (N = 67). 55,2 % (N = 65) female students think that online learning increases flexibility, whereas 55,5 % (N = 100) of male students have the opposite opinion. Furthermore, 59,3 % (N = 73) female students think that online learning improves their independence and self-development, while 62,7 % (N = 123) of male students disagree with this statement.

Other questionnaire items did not elicit obvious differences in the responses of the students. The majority of both genders' representatives disagreed with other statements of the questionnaire. For example, the students of both sexes do not consider that online learning increases their productivity and effectiveness 72,2 % (N = 130) male students and 58,5 % (N = 72) female students). Overall, both genders demonstrated a positive perception of online English language learning.

Moreover, almost half of male students 56, 2 % (N = 101) and 56, 9 % (N = 70) female students had no problems with the Internet connection. 71, 6 % (N = 129) male students and 65 % (N = 80) female students think that online learning did not affect their understanding of English. 81,1 % (N = 146) male students and 74,7 % (N = 92) female students disagree that online learning improves communication.

Online learning materials are comprehensible for the most part of male and female students respectively. 75 % (N = 135) male students and 61 % (N = 106) female students). 75,5 % (N = 136) male students and 87,7 % (N = 108) female students responded that online learning did not motivate them to learn more English during the COVID-19 outbreak.

As it turned out, the technological skills of both genders are at a high level. 71,6 % (N = 129) male students and 79,6 % (N = 98) female students know how to use the technology for online learning. The majority of 71,1 % (N = 128) male students and 65 % (N = 85) female students did not notice the increasing size of assignments and the studying hours. Furthermore, 52,2 % (N = 94) male students and 62,6 % (N = 77) female students tend to study English online.

The students' answers were checked by a chi-square test presented in [Table 1](#). The chi-square indicator is 22.6383, having the *p*-value is < .00001. The result proves significant at *p* < .05.

Table 1. Preference of online learning by genders

	Preferred online learning	Not preferred online learning	Row Totals
Male	67 (87.33) [4.73]	113 (92.67) [4.46]	180
Female	80 (59.67) [6.92]	43 (63.33) [6.52]	123
Column Totals	147	156	303 (Grand Total)

Touching upon the second question of the research it should be pinpointed that the responses of urban and rural students did not reveal a significant difference in all questions. More than half of the urban students 52,2 % (N = 93) have a favourable attitude towards online learning, whereas over the half of rural students 56,8% (N = 71) showed a negative attitude towards it. Moreover, 65,1 % (N = 116) urban students responded that they did not have problems with Internet connection. In contrast, under half 44 % (N = 55) of rural students faced no issues with Internet connection. The vast majority 93,8 % (N = 167) of urban students would like to learn English online in the near future, while only 53,6 % (N = 67) of rural students have the same intentions.

With respect to other questions in the questionnaire, more than half of the students give negative answers on the development of productivity, independence and self-development and motivation to learn more English during COVID-19 outbreak. For instance, only 34,8 % (N = 62) urban students and 31,2 % (N = 39) rural students said that online learning enhanced my effectiveness and productivity in learning. 55 % (N = 98) of urban students agreed that online learning increases the flexibility of teaching and learning. Only 37,6 % (N = 47) students agreed.

32.5 % (N = 58) urban students and 28,3 % (N = 36) rural students agreed that online learning improves their understanding of English.

Moreover, 75,8 % (N = 135) urban students and 82,4 % (N = 103) disagree that online learning improves communication (or feedback) between students and teachers. 39, 8 % (N = 71) urban students and 32 % (N = 40) rural students did not find materials provided easy to understand. 51, 6 % (N = 92) urban students and 38,4 % (N = 48) did not agree that online learning improves my independence and self-development. Only 34,2 % (N = 61) urban students and 34,4 % (N = 43) rural students agree that online learning motivates me to learn more English during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Both 69,2 % (N = 71) urban and 68,8 % (N = 39) rural students have an opinion that online learning did not increase the size of assignments and the studying hours. It should be noted that 82 % (N = 146) of urban students and 64 % (N = 80) rural students know how to use the technology for online learning. Moreover, 39,8 % (N = 71) urban students and 32 % (N = 40) rural students did not find materials provided easy to understand. In a similar way, 32,5 % (N = 58) urban students and 28,8 % (N = 36) rural students agreed that online learning improves my understanding of English. 65,8 % (N = 117) urban students and 65,6 % (N = 82) rural students disagree that online learning motivates them to learn more English during the COVID-19 outbreak.

65,1 % (N = 116) of urban students said that they did not have problems with Internet connection. In contrast, under half 44 % (N = 55) rural students faced no issues with Internet connection. The vast majority 93,8 % (N = 167) of urban students would like to learn English online in the near future, while only 53,6 % (N = 67) of rural students have the same intentions. 69,2 % (N = 71) of urban students and 68,8 % (N = 39) of rural students did not notice that online learning increased the size of assignments and the studying hours. 63,4 % (N = 113) of urban and 60,1 % (N = 77) of rural students would like to have online English classes. In general, the responses of urban and rural students did not reveal a significant difference in all questions.

The chi-square test did not prove the preference or non-preference of online learning by the place of residence (Table 2). The chi-square indicator is 2.4063, the *p*-value being .120844. The result is not significant at *p* < .05.

Table 2. Preference of online learning by the place of residence

	Preferred online learning	Not preferred online learning	Row Totals
Urban	93 (86.36) [0.51]	85 (91.64) [0.48]	178
Rural	54 (60.64) [0.73]	71 (64.36) [0.69]	125
Column Totals	147	156	303 (Grand Total)

In relation to academic performance, the students' responses reflected different opinions. Firstly, twice as many A grade students 89,7 % (N = 44) have a favourable attitude towards online learning in contrast to B grade and C grade students. The overwhelming majority of A grade students 93,8 % (N = 46) agree that online learning materials are easy to understand. Similarly, 79,3 % (N = 158) of B grade students and 38,1 % (N = 21) of C grade students adhere to the same opinion. Additionally, A grade students 71,2 % (N = 35) replied that online learning improves their independence and self-development. By contrast, the same opinion is shared by only 45,2 % (N = 90) of B grade students and 27,2 % (N = 15) of C grade students. The number of A grade students, who have high technological skills, are greater than the number of B and C grade students. In total, the biggest half of A grade students 73,4 % (N = 36), and slightly over half of B grade students 56, 7 % (N = 113) and less than half of C grade students 40 % (N = 22) are inclined to learn English online in the near future.

The students did not accord with the other statements of the questionnaire. For instance, only 40,8 % (N = 20) of A grade students, 32,6 % (N = 65) of B grade students and 29 % (N = 16) of C grade students agreed that online learning enhanced their effectiveness and productivity in learning. 38,7 % (N = 19) of A grade students, 30,1 % (N = 60) of B grade students and 27,2 % (N = 15) of C grade students did not think that online learning improves their understanding of English. Correspondingly, 36,7 % (N = 18) of A grade students, 34, 6 % (N = 69) of B grade

students, 30,9 % of (N = 17) of C grade students think that online learning did not motivate them to learn more English during the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, as the questionnaire shows, 69,4 % (N = 34) of A grade students, 80,5 % (N = 161) of B grade students, 80 % (N = 44) of C grade students discorded that online learning improves communication (or feedback) between students and teachers. In a similar way, 75,5 % (N = 37) of A grade students, 68,3 % (N = 136) of B grade students, 65,4 % (N = 36) of C grade students rejected that online learning increased the size of assignments and the studying hours. Less than half of all students agreed that online learning increases the flexibility of teaching and learning.

As for the Internet connection, 77,5 % (N = 38) of A grade students did not encounter problems, 58,2 % (N = 116) of B grade students did not have, in contrast to the C grade students, whose 30, 9 % (N = 17) of them did not have problems with the Internet. Particularly, 81,6 % (N = 40) of A grade students and 75, 3 % (N = 150) of B grade students and 67,2 % (N = 37) of C grade students responded that they know how to use the technology for online learning.

The percentage of B grade students and C grade students who have a positive attitude to online learning makes up 47,2 % (N = 94) and 40 % (N = 22) respectively.

Table 3 displays the data obtained by the A, B, and C grade students. As is shown in this table, the result is significant at $p < .05$. The chi-square indicator equals 32.9989. The p -value is < 0.00001 . Thus, the students of all grades prefer online learning.

Table 3. Preference of online learning by academic performance

	Preferred online learning	Not preferred online learning	Row Totals
Level A	44 (25.87) [12.70]	5 (23.13) [14.21]	49
Level B	94 (105.08) [1.17]	105 (93.92) [1.31]	199
Level C	22 (29.04) [1.71]	33 (25.96) [1.91]	55
Column Totals	160	143	303 (Grand Total)

In regard to English skills, 45,2 % (N = 137) students indicated that the most difficult skills are speaking, 44,2 % (N = 134) of students identified grammar, and 36 % (N = 109) of students indicated listening as is shown in Figure 4. Appropriately, among the skills need to improved are: speaking (63,4 % (N = 192)), grammar (56,1 % (N = 170)), vocabulary (51,2 % (N = 155)) and listening (51,2 % (N = 155)).

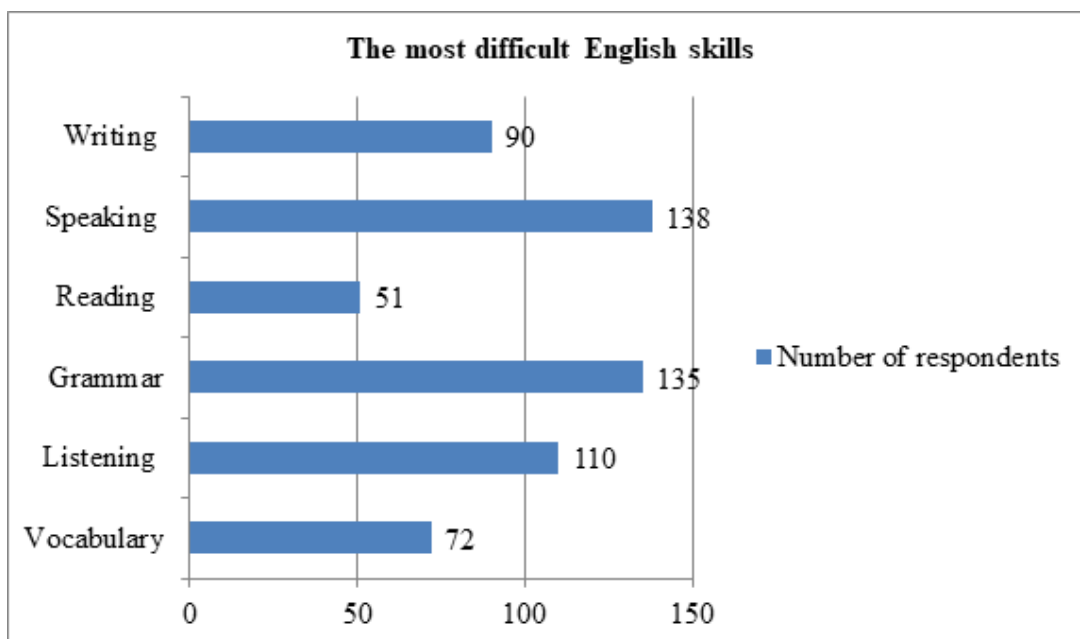


Fig. 4. The most difficult English language skills

The following chart shows the reasons why the students had problems with English learning: 30 % (N = 90) indicated lack of time, 26,1 % (N = 79) indicated lack of interest and effort, 25,4 % (N = 77) indicated lack of personal space (see the [Figure 5](#)).

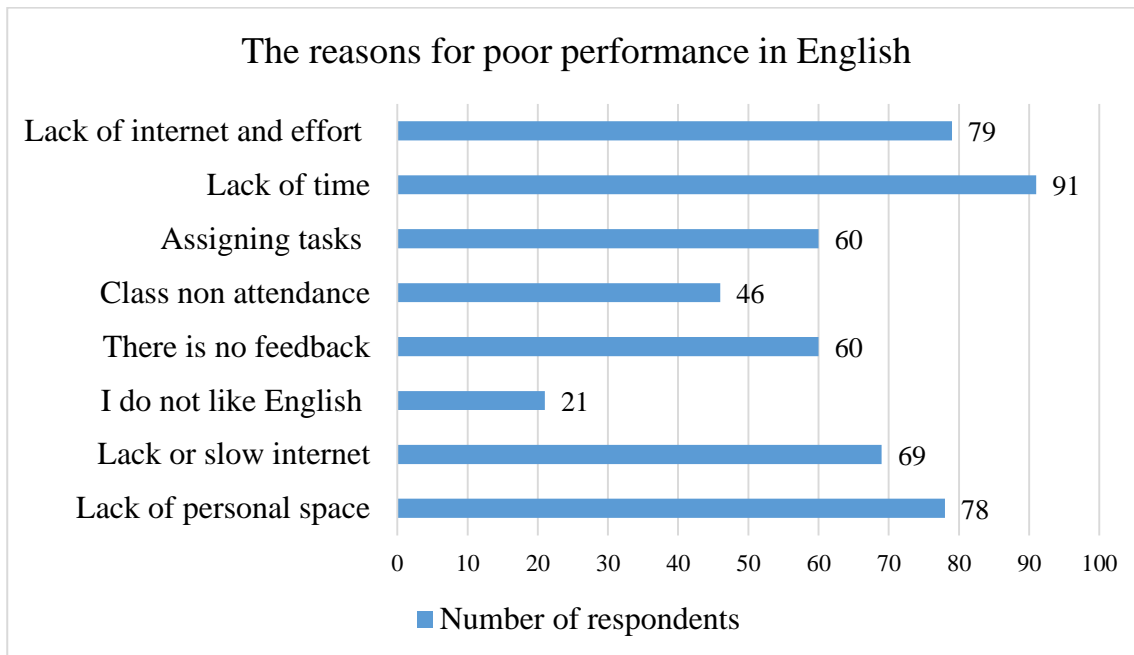


Fig. 5. The reasons for poor performance in English

Concerning the perspectives of English language learning, 37,2 % (N = 113) students chose an equal mix of online and face-to-face instruction. 20,7 % (N = 60) of students chose extensive online, some face-to-face format. Furthermore, 17,1 % (N = 52) of students chose an entirely online format. 16,8 % (N = 51) chose mostly face-to-face, minimal online format. Out of the proposed activities the students prefer the following: watching movies 61,1 % (N = 185), 45,9 % (N = 139) tests, 44,6 % (N = 135) online discussion, 32,3 % (N = 98) grammar rules and exercises, and 31,4 % (N = 95) role-plays and games.

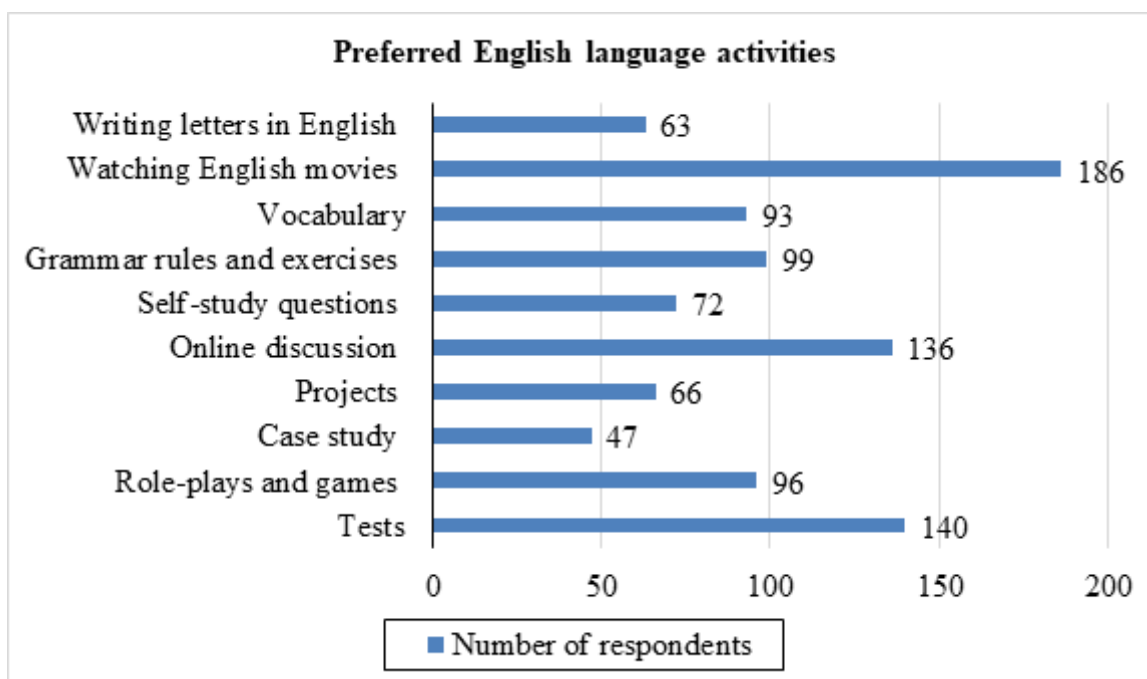


Fig. 6. The preferred English language activities

5. Discussion and implications

The survey conducted allowed us to reach certain conclusions about the perception of online learning by English non-major students. In general, male students tend to give neutral answers to the questions posed, while female students tend to give definite answers. Female students demonstrated a more favourable attitude towards online learning than male students. This was confirmed by the chi-square test, proving that female students have a clear preference of online learning. It can be assumed that the answers indicate that male students have not made a specific opinion about online learning as opposed to female students. They refer to flexibility and opportunities for independence or self-development to the advantages of online learning. More than half of male and female students would like to be taught English online.

Despite the fact that urban students in quantitative terms demonstrated a more favourable attitude towards online learning than rural students, the chi-square test did not detect statistically significant preference of online learning by them. Undoubtedly, the urban students are in a better position than rural students as the city or towns have better infrastructure and internet connection. Such conclusions are directly confirmed by the data that the majority of urban students had no problems with the Internet, while rural students often encountered such a problem during online learning. However, both urban and rural students aspire to learn English online. What is more, students from rural and urban areas displayed fairly high levels of technological skills. It can be explained by the fact that young people grew up and went to school in the digital era.

Although chi-squared statistics revealed a clear preference for online learning by students of A, B and C academic performance, the answers to the questionnaire questions allow us to make the following reasoning. A grade students in quantitative terms were discovered to favour online learning than B grade students and C grade students. The lowest percentage of positive attitude to online learning is shown by C grade students. Unlike C grade students, A grade and B grade students fully comprehend online materials. This is due to the fact that students with good grades understand English better. Moreover, the share of A grade students who indicated that online learning develops independence and self-development is much higher than that of B and C grade students. Apparently, the materials of the classes are more suitable for excellent students. Most of the A grade students did not have problems with the Internet in contrast to the C grade students. This may be due to the fact that most A grade students live in the city, while C grade students live in rural areas. Additionally, more A grade students know how to use technology for online learning than C grade students. As a result, more A and B grade students are more likely to learn English online than C grade students. On the whole, we come to the conclusion that there are certain problems with the infrastructure and Internet connection in the rural areas in the Arctic, which decreases students' motivation to learn English online. We assume that online learning materials are difficult for C grade students, that to a certain extent leads to a loss of interest in learning English. In sum, all students agreed that online learning did not improve their effectiveness and productivity, and their understanding of English. In students' opinion, communication between teachers and students also deteriorated in online learning. The students' responses indicate that they were not psychologically and technologically ready for online learning in a pandemic situation. The indicated reasons for poor academic performance such as lack of time, lack of interest and effort, lack of personal space and slow Internet connection confirm our conclusion.

To sum it up, the statistics indicated that most students demonstrated a favourable attitude to online learning. The majority of respondents chose an equal mix of online and face-to-face instruction. Thus, the students showed their balanced approach to English language education because they think that online education meets the demands of the up-to-date educational process. The questionnaire results may be used for the designing of online English language courses for A, B and C grade students. Timely needs analyses are necessary for creating flexible online courses. The students expressed their preferences for watching movies, tests, online discussion, grammar rules and exercises, and role-plays and games. The activities are expected to be included in the upcoming online course.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we examined the effectiveness of online learning, the challenges of online learning and the prospects of online learning in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). The students rated the overall effectiveness of online learning as low and not improving the quality of learning. The students pointed out a number of problems such as poor Internet connection, lack of

understanding of online learning materials, lack of interest and effort and poor feedback from the teacher. The findings of this study testifies that there are problems with the Internet due to poorly developed infrastructure in the Arctic rural regions, which has a bad effect on the quality of education. During the online learning the students demonstrated lack of self-motivation and self-organization skills. The university's communication systems and technical platforms proved to be unprepared for the active use of online learning means. However, the perspectives for online learning are hopeful since students' perception of online learning is predominantly positive.

The survey results showed that students have both a positive attitude and a favourable perception of online learning. Online learning is considered by them as an integral part of modern education in general, and English language teaching, in particular. The students' choice of equal online and face-to-face instruction learning format reflects a mature choice of students. The modern education is impossible without online learning. Online education should remain and develop simultaneously with a traditional format for creating modern education. For this purpose, it is necessary to take into account students' and teachers' opinions on learning and teaching, that lead to the effective functioning of the education system. Online English learning can be improved by developing of effective instructional materials. Thus, the challenges imposed by the implementation of online learning during COVID-19 pandemic open up new opportunities for efficient creation of digital learning environment.

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