Socio-Cultural Perspective for Online Learning during COVID-19: EFL Male and Female Visually Impaired Students' Lens

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Abstract

It has been relatively limited research regarding online learning using socio-cultural perspective within the under-represented EFL context. This study explores male and female visually impaired students' perspectives on adopting to online learning and challenges faced in online learning viewed from a socio-cultural perspective. Qualitative research of in-depth interviews and questionnaires were employed to draw three different visually impaired students 'low vision categorized' from three private universities in Makassar, Indonesia. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the interview data, while the Likert scale was used for the questionnaire. The result of the study showed that both male and female students can interact effectively with teachers, peers, and learning technologies. In terms of satisfaction, both male and female visually impaired students believe that their teacher's use of multiple digital platforms fits their specific needs. Despite the fact that the presentation of material is less structured and the primary obstacles encountered by visually impaired students are vision limitation, internet network connectivity and the allocation of more time for learning, online learning is perceived to be effective and provides students with a sense of comfort. The study examined in detail the perceptions of male and female visually impaired EFL students, future plans, and the likelihood of fostering socio-cultural perspective in the online learning environment. Since this study did not rely heavily on the digital platforms utilized during online learning, recommendations were given for future researches to investigate the sorts of technologies and their efficacy in adopting this socio-cultural perspective in various EFL settings.

Keywords: Online Learning Experiences, COVID-19, Visually Impaired Students, Socio-Cultural Perspective

Introduction

Due to COVID-19, the shift from face-to-face to online learning occurs in all aspects of education, including the teaching of English. The form and medium of second language (L2) education has undergone unprecedented change from traditional face-to-face classrooms to online spaces (Yang et al., 2021; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). The lecturer and students are currently adjusting to a new atmosphere of teaching and learning. In line with Aziz & Pasaribu (2022) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on teachers' and students' teaching and learning processes. This has made a big difference in how face-to-face classroom learning has changed into online learning. Online learning as a learning experience in a synchronous or asynchronous environment using multiple internet-connected devices, such as mobile phones or computers (Dhawan, 2020). Moreover, online learning facilitates students' ability to track the advancement of information, learning materials are accessible at any time and are universal (Bahasoan et al, 2020; Hergüner et al, 2020). Online learning is used at all educational levels Suprianto et al (2020) stated that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a universal impact on elementary, secondary and higher education levels. Regarding higher education, universities have adapted, if imperfectly, to the move from traditional classrooms to virtual ones. In the context of higher education, lecturers can reflect on the implementation of learning, assignments, and exams by gaining a deeper understanding of the student learning experience.

Additionally, online education is applied to all students, including those with special needs including those who are visually impaired. Related to Hamid (2020) online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on all levels of education including students with student needs. Online learning at the higher education for visually impaired students has led to problems in regular classes if they aren't given the help they need (Mahfuz et al., 2021). In line with Zia et al., (2021) argue that without adjusting the online medium for students with visual impairments, it is impossible to create an equal learning environment.

Visually impaired students have the same right to a suitable online learning environment with reasonable changes and adaptations. Moreover, online learning familiarizes students with interacting with teachers, peers, and technological devices. This pertains to the sociocultural perspective. A socio-cultural perspective is used to describe how people are aware of their surroundings and how their social and cultural factors affect their behavior. Rachmawati, et.al (2022) revealed that socio-cultural perspectives refer to the learning process and outcome cannot be separated from students' interactions with peers, teachers, learning sources, and relevant communities. In line with this study, the socio-cultural perspective focuses on the learning process that focuses on the process of students social interacting with teachers and learning resources mediated through the use of digital technologies such as computers and the internet. Many socio-cultural activities and intercultural interactions are mediated by digital technology, such as the internet and social media, according to Kusumaningputri & Widodo (2018). Moreover, Rassaei (2020) discovered that the usage of smartphones, which in a sociocultural environment is one of the tools used to mediate learning and assist students in discovering the true meaning of words, is prevalent. In addition, Niu et al (2018) stated in a study involving four English students that they employ 13 socio-cultural tools classified as objects, rules, communities, and roles to facilitate their active participation in spoken English learning.

From the aforementioned studies, in the context of teaching English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) and learning practices, socio-cultural perspectives support the notion that language acquisition is more than a distinct construct. However, the socio-cultural perspective in teaching English via online learning has been extensively examined. Nevertheless, this study is different in that it applies the socio-cultural perspective to EFL male and female visually impaired students. Sociocultural perspective is helpful for grasping the learning experiences of students, their application to understand the learning experiences of visually impaired students is currently quite limited. The contribution of this research, namely the sociocultural perspective, is not limited to culture in general. However, culture in specific terms for instance things that people do as a habit in certain situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when the culture of learning changed to online learning. In addition, online learning is applied effectively to all students, including students with special needs, although its implementation will continue to face obstacles. Consequently, a sociocultural of the online learning experiences of visually impaired students during the COVID-19 epidemic is necessary. Based on this premise, the objectives of this study are to (1) investigate the learning experiences of visually impaired students using online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (2) reveal the challenges faced by visually impaired students using online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study provides new sociocultural insight into the dynamics of the visually impaired student's learning experience hampered by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Literature Review

Online learning from socio cultural perspective

Sociocultural theories, deriving from Vygotsky's (1979) social constructivism theory (SCT), view learning as socially and culturally constructed through separate community engagement (Tour, 2020; Wenger, 1999; Wilson et al., 2017). According to this perspective, the learning process and outcome cannot be separated from students' interactions with peers, teachers, learning resources, and relevant communities. Bhandari (2020) revealed that socio-cultural perspective maintains that students should be perceived as active learners who develop new social identities through participation in communities of learning. The sociocultural view on learning focuses on the interplay between the sociocultural environment and learning and, more specifically, on how participation in sociocultural activities influences learning (Wenger, 1999). A sociocultural perspective is characterized by the fact that each member of society is unique in terms of the communities they have lived in and the roles they have chosen or been assigned (Erdogan, 2016). This relates to online learning, which makes education accessible anywhere and at any time.

Online learning is a reflection of complex socio-cultural factors with impact upon their use and continuing effectiveness for both lecturers and students. Developing a social collaborative process in virtual classrooms, with lecturer as a facilitator, can enable the best use of virtual classroom (Bhandari, 2020). Therefore, online technologies do not isolate students, leaving them to work and study independently. Effective use of online sociocultural learning concepts enables online students to work independently while learning collaboratively through active online social engagement. According to Tu & Yen (2007) an effective online socio-cultural learning environment should enable students to actively engage in social interaction within the learning community and become aware of, plan for, and control their own effective online learning. In line with, Luppicini & Walabe (2021) found that the social and cultural complexities associated with online learning development in Saudi Arabia, as well as other regions of the Arabic world where similar e-learning development projects are underway, are significant. The interaction of Saudi culture and online learning has resulted in the development of a new learning model that responds to cultural norms while also providing a high-quality learning experience. Students' sociocultural and educational backgrounds impact their motivation to learn English. The majority of respondents were found to be extremely motivated to learn a foreign language.

Online learning in the field of English for special needs

Online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic is applied thoroughly, including students with special needs. Several past studies, both in Indonesian and non-Indonesian context, have shown that online education is useful for students with special need especially in teaching and learning English. In the Indonesian context, Khakim & Septianto (2021) asserted that different special-needs conditions necessitate different treatments; that distance weakens teacher supervision of students' learning growth; and that English learning via virtual meetings is unsuccessful. Hamid (2020) discovered that students with visually impaired during the COVID-19 pandemic, have a positive attitude toward online learning. A visually impaired student believes that, while not completely efficient, online education is extremely useful in pandemics. Zoom is an ideal digital platform for students who are visually impaired.

While, in a non-Indonesian context, Khasawneh (2021) indicated that from the point of view of Jordanian teachers during the new COVID-19 pandemic, there are some things that make it hard to use e-learning to teach English to students with learning disabilities. The results also showed that there were statistically significant differences in how teachers dealt with e-learning problems (gender and academic qualification). According to Yazcayir & Gurgur (2021), all students, including those with special needs, have continued their education through distance education provided by the Turkish Ministry of National Education via EBA TV and the Ministry's official website. Furthermore, some teachers delivered online lessons and distributed worksheets to all students via the WhatsApp group. Nonetheless, students with special needs were unable to regularly follow the lessons on TV; many of them did not attend online lessons; and their teachers did not provide feedback on their activities. Another finding by Martinez & Carvajal (2021) stated that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Down Syndrome (DS) can learn English online, but it's important to understand their conditions and use a variety of teaching methods that fit how they learn.

Method

This study aimed to draw the EFL visually impaired students' perspectives on online learning of socio-cultural during COVID-19. Therefore, qualitative procedure was used to collect, analyze, and interpret data in a much more complete manner (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Richards, 2003). Given that individuals' viewpoints are dynamic and complex, a mixed-methods design could detect participants' full opinions and enhance study validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, qualitative research was chosen since the researcher is primarily interested in visually impaired students and intends to analyze in greater depth and detail material related to the

online learning process from a sociocultural perspective. The qualitative data were obtained from open-ended questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Guided by the information from the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were used to find out more.

Participants

This study's sample included 31 universities, 11 state universities and 20 private universities in the Indonesian province of South Sulawesi. Based on the previous survey conducted by researchers only three universities enroll visually impaired EFL students. **The reason for selecting EFL visually impaired students was** to delve more into whether the online learning experience is comparable to that of ordinary students. Collins et al. (2007) proposed a sequential nested sampling method, which was used to locate the targeted interviewees. The author conducted three EFL visual interviews based on eligibility criteria. The anonymity and confidentiality of all study participants' responses were ensured. The profiles of the three study participants are provided in Table 1..

Data collection

The section students' questionnaire were designed based on previous studies' socio-cultural perspective and online learning theories (Tu & Yen, 2007; Zhang et al, 2013; Erdogan, 2016). The questionnaire comprised a total of 20 items. The sections of students' questionnaire included the EFL visually impaired students' interaction (6 items), students' satisfaction (5 items), perceived usefulness (4 items), and obstacles in implementing their online learning (5 items). For each section of the student questionnaires, intervals of five-point Likert items were considered. In addition, the protocol for interviews was implemented in order to triangulate the qualitative data and enrich the quantitative data from the questionnaires. The interview questions were formulated using sociocultural

Table 1: Participating EFL students' demographic profile

Gender	Female 2 (2)
	Male (1)
Average Age	21 years old
Province	South Sulawesi
Grade	1st Female: Second semester 2nd Female : Fourth Semester Male : Fourth Semester
Categories of visual impairment	1st Female: Low vision 2nd Female : Low vision Male: Low vision
Questionnaire Participants	3 students
Interview Participants	3 students
Limitation	For learning sources to be clearly visible, less than 1 meter of visibility is required.

perspectives that emphasize interaction. (Tu & Yen, 2007; Gyamfi & Sukseemuang, 2018). In collecting the data, the teacher shares a link to a questionnaire via WhatsApp, instructs male and female visually impaired students to click the link, and explains that the questionnaire contains 20 questions. Both male and female visually impaired students simply click one of the researcher's five buttons. The researcher will then summarize the questionnaire responses provided by male and female visually impaired students. The researcher then asked a series of in-depth questions regarding interactions, satisfaction, perceived usefulness, and obstacles encountered by male and female visually impaired online learners. For the three participants, two visually impaired female students and one visually impaired male student, in-depth interview questions were developed and administered.

Data Analysis

All participants were given the questionnaire. The questionnaire is used to analyze the data, and the data obtained is classified based on the responses of male and female students. While the interview procedure was recorded, the author and co-authors conducted the interviews and immediately transcribed the interview data once each interview process was done. It aimed to enhance the transcription's correctness. The contents of the interviews were examined, and the common emergent themes highlighted by the study's research participants were meticulously noted and transcribed. Based on the implementation of socio-cultural frameworks in online learning, the author and co-author devised a coding scheme. The author also perceived the coding findings as a final step.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the data sources for this study revealed three major themes of learning experience: interaction, satisfaction, and perceived usefulness of online learning. In addition, the researcher identified a number of obstacles visually impaired students encounter during the online learning process.

Male and Females Visually Impaired Students' Views on Interaction

The interaction involves not only teachers and classmates, but also the presence of reassuring and learning-facilitating technology and other aspects. The visually impaired student adapts the assistive technology based on the digital learning platform used by the teacher. This is the most prevalent and prominent component of all data sources collected for this study. In this section, the results of the questionnaire and interviews will be described in detail. The interaction of visually impaired students in online learning is depicted in the figure 1.
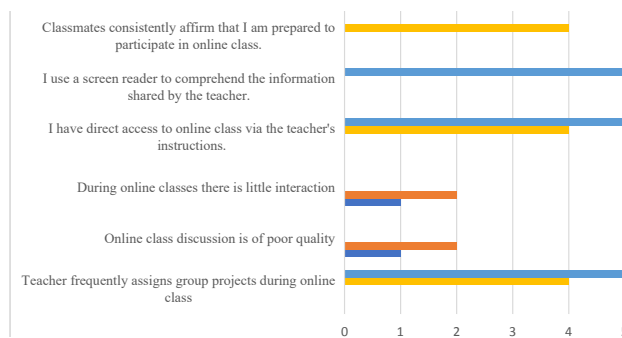

Fig. 1: Male and Females Interaction in Online Learning

Based on the Figure 1, it reported that male and female visually impaired students that **(agree)** their peers always remind them to participate in online learning. Also, both male and female visually impaired students **(strongly agree)** use a screen reader when they learn online. This pertains to the interview's findings:

VIs 1
I use JAWS to help me understand the material shared by the teacher.

VIs 2
I always turn on NVDA so it's easier for me to get to the teacher's materials.

VIs 3
JAWS assisted me in comprehending the material presented by the teacher.

Apart from classmates, the teacher also gives direct instructions to visually impaired students to access online meetings. It found that both male visually impaired students **(strongly agree)** and female visually impaired students **(agree)** with the statement. Moreover, in online learning, little interaction and discussion are not good. From this statement, the male visually impaired student **(strongly disagree),** while the female visually impaired student **(disagree).** It relates to the results of interviews as follows:

VIs 1
The teacher gave me the opportunity to ask if there was any material that I did not comprehend, and we then formed groups to discuss the material that had been taught.

VIs 2
In online learning, group discussion is more dominantly used by the teacher

VIs 3
Through online learning, I can ask this teacher or classmate whatever I want. In addition, the teacher frequently assigned us group projects.

From questionnaire data revealed that male visually impaired students **(strongly agree)** and female visually impaired students **(agree)** that the teacher frequently assigns group projects.

Male and Females Visually Impaired Students' Views on Satisfaction

Student satisfaction refers to the use of various digital platforms by teachers in accordance with their functions. This includes the provision of materials, the assignment, and the collection of assignments.

Figure 2 reported that the reverse data on students' satisfaction, all visually impaired students **(agreed)** that messengers made it simpler to obtain instructional materials. All visually impaired students **(agree)** thought it was appropriate to collect assignments using Google Meet. Therefore, the link provided by the teacher is simple to access. A male student who is visually impaired **(strongly agree)** that video conferencing makes him enthusiastic about learning. While female students **(agree)** that video conferencing makes them enthusiastic and it is easy to access the link, male students disagree. Then, all students concur that completing group projects is simple.

VI 1

The online learning process is carried out by a variety of individuals. Sometimes we receive study materials via WhatsApp or Google Classroom, or we are instructed to complete Google Classroom assignments. Zoom used to present the material by share screen the PowerPoint.

VI 2

The online learning process runs smoothly, and my classmates and I can easily access the meeting link provided by the instructor.

VI 3

The online learning process is more interactive if the teacher using Google Meet. Because sometimes the teacher explains
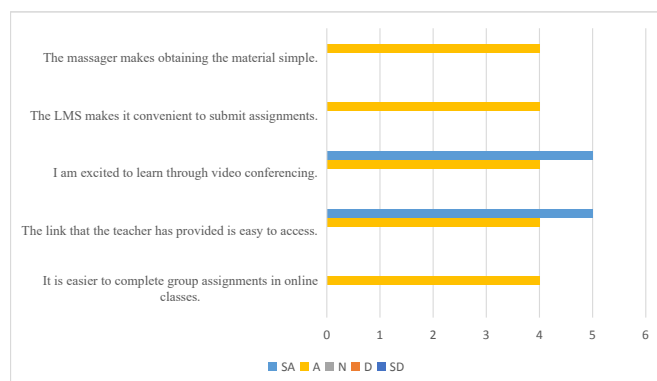
and displays powerpoints related to certain materials then we can do question-and answer section. Besides, it easy to submitting the group project via Google Classroom or WhatsApp.

Male and Females Visually Impaired Students' Views on Perceived Usefulness

Perceived usefulness refers to the comparability of the usability of online learning to offline learning. In this case, it includes how it can be used in online discussions, how consistent it is when learning, how easy it is to use, and how well it works.

Regarding Figure 3 shows in term of perceive usefulness showed that male visually impaired students **(strongly agree)** that they feel comfortable participating in online discussions, while female visually impaired students also **(agree)** with this statement. In contrast to offline classes, all visually impaired students **(disagree)** with the consistency of the material presentation in online classes. However, all visually impaired students **(agree)** that online classes are more convenient and efficient than traditional ones. This pertains to the interview's findings:

VIs 1

I am more at ease because I am able to study anywhere. However, material presentation is less structured than in online class. Additionally, more assignments are given during group discussions.

VI 2

The material is not presented in a systematic manner, so I am sometimes confused. In contrast to offline classes, online class is a good way to learn in the modern way.

VIs 3

Online class is superior to offline class because group discussions can take place anywhere and at any time (more flexible in study time).
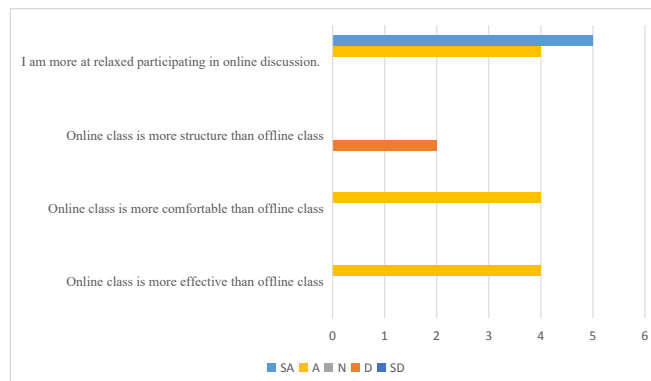

Fig. 2: Students' Satisfaction

Fig. 3: Perceive Usefulness

Obstacles faced by Male and Females Visually Impaired Students' during Online Learning

Additional themes presented concern obstacles for blind students in online education. Be receptive to the negative effects of online learning. Obstacles include the presentation of difficult-to-understand teaching materials; a lack of internet access; and a limited internet quota. The obstacles faced by visually impaired students in online learning is depicted in the figure 4.

As seen in Figure 4 showed that all visually impaired students (agree) that online classes make the material difficult to grasp. In addition, all visually impaired students (strongly agree) with the statements that in online learning, visually impaired students frequently leave meetings and need extra time. Meanwhile, unstable internet connection and limited internet quota. It become obstacles for visually impaired student to overcome. Regarding to the results of the questionnaire, male students (strongly agree) with the statement, whereas female visually impaired students also (agree) with the statement. In line with interviews data follows:

VIs 1

The teacher's use of multiple digital platforms, which makes it difficult for me to follow the lesson. Sometimes I also difficult to understand the material. My view is restricted in that it must be close to the laptop screen.

VIs 2

My viewing distance must be less than 1 meter from the material displayed on the laptop. In addition, Because of how unstable the internet network was, I had to go into and out of meetings a lot. It makes online learning more time-consuming.

VIs 3

From a very close distance to my laptop, I cannot see the content clearly, so it takes me longer to pay attention. The
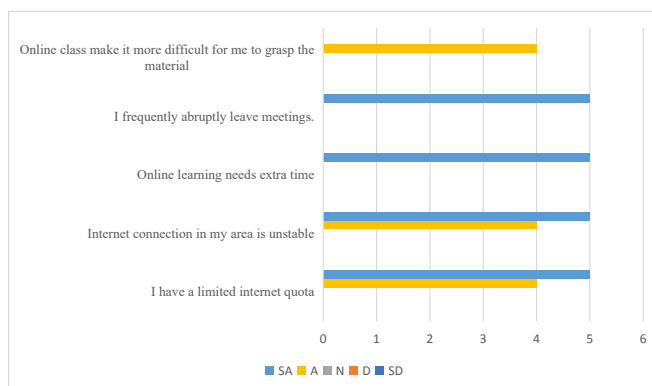

Fig. 4: Obstacles Faced by Male and Females Visually Impaired Students

unstable internet connection also caused me to be late to several online learning meetings. Online learning also consumes a huge amount of my limited learning quota.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was determined that male and female visually impaired students have different socio-cultural perspectives. From a sociocultural point of view, students should be seen as active learners who create new social identities by taking part in communities of learning (Bhandari, 2020). It proven students with visual impairments who are male believe that sociocultural online learning has a tremendously positive effect. Regarding female students with visual impairment, only optimistic thoughts are held. This will be evident in a number of ways, including the learning experience (interaction, satisfaction, and perceived usefulness) and the challenges faced by visually impaired students. First, interaction demonstrated that visually impaired students' online learning activities were affected by their peers. In line with Raaper & Brown (2020) asserted that peer support can help a learner become more independent by, for example, acting as a partner to help the learner ask questions, practice, and share assignments. The use of assistive technology in education facilitates the comprehension of material provided during virtual meetings by visually impaired students. The teacher gives the visually impaired students clear directions. Virtual meetings promote the learning of visually impaired students through discussions. Teachers are more likely to assign group projects in online classes. As a result of the interaction, it is possible to conclude that male and female students engage differently with teachers, peers, digital platforms, and assistive technology. Male and female visually impaired students perceive the world differently. Male students are more dominating and agree forcefully, while female visually impaired students agree.

Second, in terms of student satisfaction, the use of a massager facilitates material acquisition. Google Meet is suitable for media collection projects. Visually impaired students are ready to study when utilizing Zoom or Google Meet. The learning resources of teachers are conveniently available. Submitting assignments through Google classroom is especially advantageous for students with visual impairments. In line with Laili & Muflihah (2020) argued that Google Classroom is putting in more effort to save time. It can be used for submitting paperless assignment, comments, and scoring of students' work. Then it can minimize wasting time during class. Therefore, it is safe to assert that visually impaired students can use digital platforms to learn, but at a slower rate than normal students.

Third, both males and females were visually impaired students, and their participation was facilitated through online discussions. Moreover, online lessons make them more

confident and efficient students. Students with disabilities must have confidence in the accessibility of the online learning tools that are gaining popularity in education (Verula et al, 2022). According to the findings of Hamid (2020), conducted during the COVID-19 Pandemic, students with visual impairment have a favorable attitude toward online learning. Students have the belief that online education, while not entirely effective, is very helpful in times of pandemics. In addition, Stone (2019) says that students prefer online learning because it works well and can be done at any time and in any place. However, online education is not delivered in a logical manner. Consequently, it can be stated that the online learning process is not challenging for visually impaired students since it has been demonstrated that they like the learning process in virtual meetings.

The last, the obstacles that visually impaired student faced in online learning. Male and Females visually impaired students have the same issue: visually impaired students have trouble understanding the material presented during virtual meetings. Students need a lot of time in completing assignments because they have limited vision. The weakness in seeing objects or teaching materials also become obstacles in learning. Because visually impaired students see with fonts 16 or larder than normal sizes in general. In line with, Sahin & Yorek (2009) revealed that the position of visually impaired students in relation to visual presentation should allow for a direct view. The information on the blackboard should be large. Images on all visual aids should be crips and clear. Moreover, of the unstable internet network and limited internet quota, visually impaired students are frequently required to attend meetings. Sari et al (2021) also stated that students face difficulties as a result of a variety of aspects, including academic abilities, internet access, and the presence of technological issues in the online learning process. Students' problems with online learning include unstable internet connections, financial issues, and a lack of digital literacy (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Agung et al., 2020; Basuony et al., 2020). It is due to the absence of learning discussions and the absence of students in the middle of the class. The time spent on learning increases as a result of the obstacles mentioned above (Widayani & Suanarjaya, 2021). Therefore, the Internet network poses the greatest challenge to both male and female visually impaired students. Additionally, Hebebci et al (2020) and Yılmaz et al., (2020) had previously reported that the limited Internet connection and technological glitches could contribute to students' demotivation in their learning.

Overall, it can be stated that online learning is seen from a socio-cultural perspective, emphasizing how the process of involving male and female visually impaired students goes well and how its implementation is nearly the same as offline learning for visually impaired students, despite the fact that it is only through virtual meetings and has several obstacles in its implementation. Most importantly, as a result of a study conducted by Meulenbroeks (2020), the learning environment and facilities in online learning settings must be prepared to maintain the synchronous meetings as experienced in offline classes. As a result, students' learning quality in online classes is comparable to that of offline classes.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding chapter's findings and discussions, male visually impaired students responded more positively than their female counterparts. On the basis of a sociocultural perspective that emphasizes interaction, visually impaired male and female students are able to interact with teachers, peers, and digital platforms during the learning process. Both male and female visually impaired students express a feeling of satisfaction over the fact that their teacher makes use of a variety of digital platforms, which they believe cater to their individual requirements. Even though the way information is presented is less structured and the main problems visually impaired students face are limited vision (they can only see in the near distance), trouble connecting to the internet, and needing more time to learn, online learning is seen as effective and gives students a sense of comfort. Using messenger, a learning management system (LMS), or video conferencing appropriately allows visually impaired male and female students to benefit from online learning. Nevertheless, visually impaired male and female students face a number of obstacles in its application. The internet network poses the greatest obstacle to this online education.

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