THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARD ONLINE DISCUSSION IN A THREADED ONLINE PLATFORM

DHIMAS DWI NUGRAHA HADISTYA

Politeknik Negeri Malang

ABSTRACT

This study follows up students' perception to threaded online discussions from private university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. This study was conducted on a sample space of 45 undergraduate Civil Engineering students who were all aged between 18 to 24 years. The participants included 13 females and 32 and they were then broken out into six groups to read the material and discussed in in the threaded online discussion through ProBoard platform. It employed a mixed-method approach and the interaction level were examined based on Thomas' framework. Six students were interviewed in Bahasa Indonesia using semi-structured interviews to ensure that responses are clear. Interviews and questionnaires showed that 13 students experienced technical problems on the online platform. The atmosphere and communication matters played significant roles in eliciting unfavourable perceptions of the students in terms of online discussion. A follow-on examination indicates that in general, students do not like threaded discussions. However, the study also indicated that there is potential for online discussion to be used in language learning setting.

Keywords: *Threaded online discussion, computer-mediated communication, perception*

INTRODUCTION

Good Communication is when you can communicate your thoughts in an understandable language. part of this comes down to expressing the ideas in speaking and by writing. Healthy communication is a give and take between two or more people while they hold some sort of meaningful conversation. Broadly speaking, participating in such dialogue necessitates listening to the messages discussed (listening), vocalizing one's message (speaking) and responding to exchanged ones throughout discussions of information exchanges.

Student participation is an important marker of the effectiveness of the educational process in teaching and learning. When students participate actively it is not only creating a pace for learning, but we also receive valuable feedback, on which the teacher can later give a thought of improvement. A collaborative environment fosters a two-way flow for innovation and learning.

In English language teaching you need as much student participation and feedback. Creating a collaborative learning community that supports language acquisition is essential and often includes scaffolding students who are reticent to become involved in discussions developed by the teacher (Bangert, 2004; Partlow and Gibbs, 2003). Additionally, active participation implies a greater cognitive commitment on the part of students who must participate in discussions debates and presentations online (Boyle & Nicol 2003).

As a way to encourage student interaction and participation online discussions in English classes have become more common among teachers. But considering that English is not the first language of half students, participation in online discussion tend to be very little. For example, they are inferior (Arnold, 2007) or shyness (Warschauer, Turbee, & Roberts, 1996; Dörnyei et al., 1994)

Many researchers have examined various ways for using online media to improve student participation (Mokoena, 2013; Meyer, 2003; Simpson, 2009; Baron,1984 and Kern.,1993 Pratt & Sullivan ,1994; Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts, 1996), The foregoing studies indicate that asynchronous online platforms may help to address some of the issues faced by students in classroom discussions, although they too are not without their limitations — namely, a lack of interactive cues (Hew & Cheung 2007; Wang & Woo 2007; Tiene 2000). Even so, online discussions represent an important resource to create this kind of environment which mobilizes the students in their own language learning process. Therefore, the present study answers the following research problem: "What is the perception of the students toward threaded online discussion?"

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) was first introduced by Hiltz and Turoff back in 1978. They saw it as a way to enhance communication through computers, particularly in the realm of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Over the years, CMC has gained widespread popularity because it helps bridge the gap of time and location, making activities like chatting and web browsing everyday practices. In the educational sector, CMC has become a tool for creating more flexible learning environments, adding interactivity to the learning process, and fostering better communication among language learners (Rabab'ah, 2013; Vandergriff, 2006).

This study zeroes in on asynchronous online discussions, particularly those taking place in internet chat forums. These platforms allow students to collaborate without the need to meet in person. Mokoena (2013) stressed the importance of providing clear instructions, offering timely feedback, organizing content effectively, keeping students motivated, and setting clear expectations to manage online discussions well. This study underscores student participation as a crucial motivator, echoing Mokoena's findings.

The focus here is on asynchronous CMC, where communication happens with delays—like through email. This method supports collaborative discussions and encourages students to engage more deeply with course material (Pratt & Palloff, 2011; Conrad & Donaldson, 2011). According to Lehman and Conceição (2011), asynchronous discussions can help create a sense of presence, which enhances meaningful learning. Additionally, Meyer (2003) and Yamagata-Lynch (2012) have pointed out that the nature of asynchronous CMC allows students the time to think carefully about their responses, leading to more thoughtful and considered contributions.

The study also looks into how online group discussions, particularly in second language classrooms, can encourage equal participation. Kern (1995) found that online discussions tend to have higher participation rates than traditional face-to-face discussions. This study integrates reading comprehension tasks, followed by questions designed to stimulate higher-order thinking, aiming to develop students' critical thinking skills (Kalelioğlu & Altun, 2012).

Discussion in an asynchronous online forum

It is no longer an uncommon trend to utilise online discussion in forums. Many teachers have been prepared to move toward the use of technology, so as to conduct a discussion, apart from traditional face to face discussion. Furthermore, many people believe that in this era of advanced technology teachers should be accustomed to utilising online media to conduct more lively, flexible, effective and interactive discussion (Mokoena, 2013; Meyer, 2003; Simpson, 2009; Baron, 1984; Kern, 1993; Pratt & Sullivan, 1994; Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts, 1996).

Discussion in an asynchronous online forum is affected by several roles regarding its application. Moreover, several factors that have been studied demonstrated the fundamental aspect of conveying the role of asynchronous online forum. Those aspects are specifically, the

role of the instructor (Mokoena, 2013), the role of time and the role of thinking (Meyer, 2003).

The Role of the Instructor

The same as in traditional discussion, in online discussion, the role of the instructor is one of the most important factors in creating a good ambience and effectiveness in a discussion. The instructor is responsible for generating students' motivation, directing the students to use the forum properly, as well as providing feedback (Mokoena, 2013).

In an online discussion, one of instructor's main responsibilities is to facilitate the students to engage and participate in a discussion. Here, the instructor will be responsible for putting the students, in addition to the online forum on track (Beaudin, 1999). It is not a novel issue that during an online discussion, students could lose track of the original matter being discussed (Hew and Cheung, 2007). Therefore, as a facilitator, the instructor will have to design good questions and undertake training in order for students to conduct the discussion (Rose and Smith, 2007). Additionally, as a facilitator in an online discussion, the instructor should provide feedback to the students and should be sensitive to any message sent by the students, whilst making a comment about it (Roper, 2007). However, the instructor should not be too involved in the discussion as Poole (2000) notes that students become more engaged and responsible for their participation, when the discussion is not fully facilitated. Mazzolini and Maddison (2003) add that there is a tendency to have a shorter discussion when the facilitator actively starts the discussion.

During the online discussion, the instructor is also required to be an encourager to boost students' motivation. Tagg and Dickinson (1995) established that in an online discussion, the encouragement of the facilitator could enhance the students' participation. Moreover, such encouragement could also improve students' willingness to critically engage in a discussion (Gao Wang and Sun, 2013). The form of instructor's encouragement could be in the appearance of guiding the student through personal email, giving a response, and persuading the students to be more involved in a discussion. Moreover, the facilitator could also make the students feel comfortable during the forum by

promoting social presence (Shea, Pickett, and Pelz, 2004) and providing social space (Heckman & Annabi, 2006).

The last role of the facilitator in an online discussion is to make sure that no technical difficulties occur during the discussion. This point is also critical knowing that the probability of a technical error occurring during online discussion is reasonable high. Cifuentes, Murphy, Segur & Kodali (1997) suggest that the facilitator should be involved in a discussion as a keeper to maintain access to the online forum. Besides being concerned with any technical issue, the setting of students' expectations should be understandable. Roper in Mokoena (2013) comments that "this declaration may consist of directions regarding how often students should post comments in the discussion forum site and how many they ought to post, what the pattern of their contribution should be, how the students should approach the subject and in general what is expected of them".

The Role of Time

Meyer (2003) mentioned that time is crucial in order to seek the difference between face to face and online discussion. She then pointed out 5 aspects of time to look at to figure out how significant the role of time can be.

The first reason is that time is a valuable resource. The more time the students have the more valuable resources the students will have to engage in a discussion. In addition, time management also reflects the value of the individual who controls it.

Secondly, time is limited. In a face-to-face class, the class limits the students with only 1-1, 5 hours of discussion; it is different regarding the online discussion. Thus, the online discussion may have a longer time frame for the students.

Thirdly, the students' experience of time can oddly seem fast or slow depending on students' interest in the activity; while moreover, this feeling is unique and subjective to different participants in a discussion.

Fourthly, different educational models promote different uses of time such as the intrusive perspective, learning which needs less time. Meanwhile, it has been observed that constructivist teaching and learning, where knowledge is gained from experience requires

more time. Nevertheless, taking more time could help the students to memorize and learn more. In other words, the constructivist model of learning may take a long time; however, it is more advantageous.

Lastly, time is harmonious with learning. Many researchers have criticized the assumption that quantity of time measures the quality of learning. Learning does take time, whether it is long or short, yet learning does not depend on time to measure the quality or quantity of it.

The Role of Thinking

The focus of this part is to explain the previous research which elicits critical thinking or higher-level thinking in threaded discussion. Newman and College (1999) conducted a study to examine critical thinking online and face to face. He determined that although during an online discussion students have fewer new ideas, they were prone to generating important statements and linking ideas. Hence, this infers that online discussion upholds "linear talk, linking earlier comments and bringing in outside knowledge".

Shapley (2000) also found that online students could gain a better score in an exam that requires critical thinking. In addition, according to Garrison and colleagues (2001) discussion online could generate four-stages of higher-level thinking primarily triggering, exploration, integration and resolution.

Constraints of Threaded Online Discussion

The most common form of asynchronous online discussion is a threaded forum. Threaded forum provides quite a neat thread where students can enter and comment on posts by either dropping a post or by replying to posts. In a threaded forum, the post made by the students will be in chronological order yet unlike synchronous online forum, the students are able to retrace and quote particular posts placed by others. Nevertheless, some studies conducted in the past inform us that there are several constraints or limitations on the threaded forum to conducting a discussion.

First, maintaining the focus of the topic in threaded forum is quite challenging. Threaded discussion can lose its original focus and digress for some time compared to face-to-face discussion (Hew and Cheung, 2007). Moreover, many users of threaded discussion pay more attention to recent posts rather than the post with a related content. Hewitt (2003) stated that the post which will be paid attention to more is the one which has been posted recently, whereas the older posts are likely to be ignored. This could be because of the design of the threaded forum. Herring (1999) believes that the design of the forum could simply make a conversation incoherent. He added that the threaded discussion system tends to have overlapping exchanges and topic decay.

Secondly, the threaded system has a constraint regarding promoting interactive dialogue in a discussion. Card and Horton (2000) pointed out that online forums do not always uphold a two-way interaction. In terms of the design, the structure of the threaded forum seems likely to fail in promoting an interconnection discussion post. In most threaded forums, there is only the reply and quote link to show the interaction between posts. Hewitt (2001, p.210) added that "online discussions may be much more intertwined and interrelated than the threaded representation indicates". In threaded discussion, participants can reply to the main topic at the same time, resulting in quite a lot of posts. Consequently, others will be confused which post they should comment on and end up not making a response to any post. As a result, their post will be poorly interconnected and turn out to be a monologue (Thomas, 2002). In addition, such poor interactivity could be caused by the limited time the students have. Wang and Woo (2007) established that the participants will struggle to answer the topic discussed and leave them little time to make further interaction.

The next constraint is difficulty in reaching a consensus, as having all the participants' voices is considered complicated to do in the threaded forum. Hewitt (2001) believes that the hierarchal structure of threaded forum only encourages expanding the topic but hinders reaching a con-clusion at the end of discussion. Thomas (2002) stated that messages posted by the participants cover up independent and interactive messages but not the conclusion message. In addition, some researchers also agree that it is more difficult in online discussion to reach consensus (De Sanctis & Monge, 1998; Walther, 1996).

Lastly, there is a lack of appropriate feedback which may decrease communication

between the participants. Besides the time the participants need to think and type to provide a response to the topic, the feedback the students acquire is also time consuming. Jeong and Frazier (2008) reported that there is a possible longer time to wait for feedback from others in threaded discussion; therefore, it could affect the quality of the discussion.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participant

This study compares student participation in an Indonesian context, focusing on a sample from a private university in Malang, East java, Indonesia. The participants are first-year students who enrolled in 2014. To gain admission, students had to pass a university entrance exam, including a mandatory English test, despite English being a foreign language in Indonesia. Many students had limited prior exposure to English, with their proficiency based on high school exams. The study involved 45 Civil Engineering students, aged 18 to 24, comprising 13 females (29%) and 32 males (71%).

Threaded *Forum*

This study used Proboard as a threaded forum to perform online discussion. Proboard is a free forum hosting service which has many features that are simple to use. In addition, Proboard was chosen as one of the recommendations from researcher's supervisor. Besides, it is also free; therefore, in the future the researcher hopes that the teacher will be able to use it frequently. The last reason in choosing this forum is because of its practicality. Proboard is an easy-to-use forum with features which are easy to understand and operate, and moreover, anyone can moderate or participate easily in this forum.

Research Design

In this study, students engaged in a threaded discussion via a ProBoard, where they discussed a reading text over three days. The researcher, acting as the group admin, concluded the discussion after the three-day period.

The study aimed to explore students' perceptions of online discussions, using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews as secondary instruments. The questionnaire employed a modified Likert scale with four response options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, intentionally excluding a neutral option to encourage definitive responses. Closed questions were also included in the questionnaire.

To enhance the reliability of the findings', semi-structured interviews were conducted with six students, using Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clear communication. The interview transcripts were then returned to the participants for validation, confirming the accuracy of the data.

Data Collection

The students were divided into 6 groups, within each group they had the same reading material. They brought the reading material with them after the researcher made sure that they understood the instruction. When they came home, they would have the discussion within 3 days. Spreading questionnaire and doing the interview were done afterward.

Data analysis

The researcher categorized the students' posted messages into substantive and non-substantive types, using Thomas' (2002) framework. Thomas identified two primary message types: independent and interactive. Independent messages relate to the topic without referencing others, while interactive messages connect to both the topic and other students' messages. Interactive messages can further be classified into four categories:

1. **Independent**: No reference to other students' messages.

2. **Quasi-Interactive**: References other messages only as a starting point before offering an isolated analysis.

3. **Interactive (Elaborative)**: Expands on another student's message.

4. **Interactive (Negotiating)**: Engages in negotiation or debate with another student's message.

The study also included interviews and questionnaires to gather additional data on students' perceptions of online discussions, particularly in knowing their participation threaded discussions. The questionnaire and interview data were analyzed quantitatively to

support these findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Student interaction

Table 1 below shows the result of the online discussion.

Table 1. Result of online discussion

Level of Interactivity	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Independent	7	10	7	7	10	9
Quasi-Interactive	0	2	2	0	2	1
Interactive (elaborative)	2	0	0	2	0	4
Interactive (negotiating)	1	8	1	1	8	3
Total	10	20	10	10	20	17

In an online discussion, 6 groups engaged in various levels of interactivity. Group 1 had seven independent interactions, two elaborative interactions, and one negotiating interaction, but no quasi-interactive interactions. Group 2 showed a more diverse interaction pattern with ten independent interactions, eight negotiating interactions, and two quasi-interactive interactions, but no elaborative interactions.

Group 3 mirrored Group 1 with seven independent interactions, two quasi-interactive interactions, and one negotiating interaction, but no elaborative interactions. Group 4 had seven independent interactions, two elaborative interactions, and one negotiating interaction, but no quasi-interactive interactions.

Group 5 had ten independent interactions, two quasi-interactive interactions, and eight negotiating interactions, but no elaborative interactions. Group 6 had 9 independent interactions, 1 quasi-interactive interactions, 4 elaborative interaction, and 3 negotiating interactions

Despite each group having a total of ten interactions, the nature of these interactions varied significantly, highlighting different engagement levels and discussion styles among the groups. The table below shows the example of the interaction they made in the discussion.

Table 2. Example of interaction

Type of message	Example of the Message	Topic
Independent	I agree with Jokowi's	Sunda
	solutions, to link Java and Sumatra does not need to be expensive like building a bridge. But with a cheaper solution, for example by buying new ships and improve the service or build more effective sea transportation for upholding economic equality between Java and Sumatra.	Trait Bridge
Quasi-interactive	Yes, I agree with you, I think if you build the bridge on top of water or underwater, the people can move from Lampung to Java, and they can work efficiently.	Sunda Trait Bridge
Elaborative	I just want to add msuwahyudn's opinion that the Malang government can build a larger international airport for the convenience of transporting people outside Malang	Malang City
Negotiation	I disagree with you; I think what creates traffic jams in Malang is because there are too many students so that Malang cannot accommodate those students anymore.	Malang City

Questionnaire

The table below shows their perception toward the online discussion they had.

Table 3. Students' perception toward online discussion

Questions		Choices	Thick
1	Do you agree that online discussion is enjoyable?	Strongly agree	3
		Agree	16
		Disagree	6
		Strongly disagree	1
2	Do you agree that online discussion gives you more chance to participate in the discussion?		5
		Strongly agree	
		Agree	18

#	Question	Option	Count
		Disagree	3
		Strongly disagree	
3	Do you agree that online discussion is better than classroom discussion?	Strongly agree	
		Agree	4
		Disagree	20
		Strongly disagree	2
4	Is it easy for you to give your opinion in online discussion?	Yes	5
		Not always	6
		Not at all	15
5	Do you agree that online discussion is more difficult than classroom discussion?	Strongly agree	5
		Agree	16
		Disagree	3
		Strongly disagree	2
6	Do you agree that most of your classmates participate better in online discussion?	Strongly agree	
		Agree	2
		Disagree	17
		Strongly disagree	7
7	When you are in an online discussion, do you feel afraid to give your opinion?	Yes	3
		Not always	10
		Not at all	13
8	Do you feel that everything about online discussion is confusing?	Yes	10
		Only some of them	11
		Not at all	5
9	Do you agree that sometimes classroom discussion can be threatening, so you are hesitant to give your opinion?	Strongly agree	2
		Agree	10
		Disagree	11
		Strongly disagree	3
10	Is the teacher more helpful during online discussion?	Yes	1
		No	26
11	Is the online discussion system convenient to use?	Yes	5
		Not really	13
		Not at all	8
12	In terms of scoring and evaluation, do you think online discussion is fairer in giving credit to active students and passive ones?	Yes	10
		Not really	6
		Not at all	10
13	According to your opinion, what is the most difficult part in discussing using the online forum? (write down your answer)		

Moving to the next set of questions about the difficulty the students had in online discussion, two categories were created concerning the different issues the students had. The first is the technical issues regarding online discussion, whereas the second is the discussion issue. Among 26 students who submitted the questionnaire, 13 students admitted that they had technical issues with the online forum.

Table 4. Number of technical issues faced by the students

	Types of technical issues	students having technical issue	Example of their opinion
1	Could not use the online forum	10	I didn't really know what to do and I am not accustomed to using this kind of forum
2	Difficult to refer to particular post	1	I didn't understand how to quote.
3	Poor internet connection	2	I have poor internet connection in my boarding house.

The rest of the students faced more likely as the discussion issue.

Table 4. Number of discussion issues faced by the students

	Types of discussion issues	students having discussion issue	Example of their opinion
1	Other people' posts are not easy to understand	2	Some of my friend uses Google translate a lot; their post is funny and not understandable.
2	Don't really understand the material/the question	3	The article is difficult to understand so I looked for the Indonesian version
3	Do not know what to say	3	I don't really know what to say

Interview

Another instrument used to gather the perceptions of the students is the interview. This interview is a semi-structured one; however, in this part, it only covers the main question and the students' answers. Furthermore, the discussion part will convey a further explanation and additional thoughts of the students toward the whole interview. Additionally, the interview is in Bahasa and subsequently translated into English.

There are 2 main questions in the interview: 1. What do you think are the advantages of online discussion? 2. What do you think are the disadvantages of online discussion? Is it easy for you to use an online discussion forum? Below is the answer to the first question.

Table 5. Answers to the first questions

	Student
I: What do you think are the advantages of online discussion?	A: I think the advantage is that online discussion enables us to discuss anytime anywhere.
	B: Maybe it can save our time
	C: Saving time and also its fun because I can browse for everything online while discussing the task.
	D: As I said before, I can use Google translate to translate the language I want to use.
	E: We don't have to be present in the class, so we just need the

	internet as a medium
	F: In my case, I could understand the article better and could browse for the answer

Below is the answer to the second question.

Table 6. Answers to the second question.

	Student
I: What do you think are the disadvantages of online discussion? Is it easy for you to use online discussion forum?	A: I think this is the first time I have used an online forum, so everything is quite complicated for me. I don't really understand how the thing works and with everything I did I just wrote my opinion
	B: I felt desperate when I could not connect to the website, and I could not really chat with my friend. It's not like WhatsApp where you can chat and talk about things
	C: The internet I think, or maybe other students who don't understand the forum. It's hard if some of your friends cannot participate in the online discussion
	D: It's quite confusing to use the forum. We didn't have any proper training and adjusting myself is kind of difficult
	E: I don't really understand the good of having a discussion through online medium
	F: I feel lonely, I guess. It is not like chatting in a discussion

Discussion

According to the results of the interview and questionnaire, most of the students confirmed a negative response toward online discussion. Nevertheless, online discussion also has several benefits according to them. Overall, there are three factors contributing to students' perception toward online discussion: technical issues, the atmosphere and interaction issue.

From the interview, three students confidently stated that they prefer face to face discussion, whereas two other students are flexible about using both modes. However, there is also one student who stated that online discussion would benefit him better:

In terms of technicality, most students gave

negative responses to the questions related to technology, such as facility, internet connection and the procedure regarding online discussion. Baggaley, Belawati, Malik, & Ng Lee Hoon (2007) in their study determined that distance educators in most Asian countries face similar issues of poor internet and online infrastructure. Most students believe that they are not accustomed to discussing issues via online forum and it is quite complicated at first. From the interview, three of the students could not use online forum at all; two of them stated that they had poor internet connection, and one of them claimed to face difficulties when trying to engage with a particular post. Furthermore, several of them did not know how to reply to one comment, which made the discussion stagnant. From the questionnaire, only five of the students felt that the whole process of online discussion was easy, while the others faced certain difficulties. Twenty of the students claimed that online discussion was actually quite confusing, and only five of them did not become confused at all. In the interview, one student stated that face to face discussion was more practical than online discussion.

In contrast with the problem of technicality, most of the students have a positive perception regarding the atmosphere of the online discussion. From the questionnaire, sixty of them stated that they enjoyed the process of online discussion and only seven of them did not find the process enjoyable. In addition, the atmosphere scored a positive value towards online discussions. It should be noted that by atmosphere, it means comfort (Wang and Woo, 2007). From the interview, a student said that the advantage was that online discussion enables them to discuss topics at anytime, anywhere. They can join the discussion at their own convenience and feel comfortable in doing so. During online discussion, students were not limited by space and time. According to Gao, Wang and Sun (2013), researchers believe that the online discussion process frees learners from time and space constraints, providing ample possibilities for communication. In the questionnaire, twenty-three of them said that the online discussion process made them dare to state their opinion compared to classroom discussion. From the process of interview, it was revealed that face to face discussion often makes

them feel insecure about their language ability, as they are afraid to make a language error which will cause embarrassment and judgment. Therefore, they consider that online discussion has a more supportive atmosphere than face to face discussion.

Students' perception regarding the interaction pattern during online discussion is divided into two. Half of the students have a negative perception while the other half has a positive perception toward the interaction pattern. Among the students themselves, they discovered that it was difficult to respond to each other and therefore could not develop the topic in the same direction. According to Wang and Woo (2007), a commonly reported disadvantage of online discussions is that participants can rarely obtain immediate feedback from others because not all of the students participate at the same time. Furthermore, some students relied on Google Translate to overcome their language insecurities. Instead of improving their English, Google Translate made them even more difficult to understand. As a result, their other friends were not able to provide a proper response in the forum for their arguments.

Interaction between teacher and students is also considered not to be as effective according to the result of the interview and questionnaire. Moreover, most of the students believe that the teacher is not helpful during online discussion and remarked that they could not ask the teacher immediately when they face a problem; thus, they simply waited and did nothing. Baker's (2010) study shows how student perceptions of teaching presence in online courses are also positively associated with students' motivation to learn. This is why the process of online discussion seemed slow and not well-developed given that the teacher's role as guide and motivator could not be perceived directly by the students.

In the interview, students believe that in a discussion you should meet each other to interact, and that they should see each other to manage the discussion. These statements are in line with the theory stated by Wang and Woo (2007), that face-to-face discussions were more real and authentic than in-class online discussions because participants could talk to each other in real time, see their facial expressions and clarify matters immediately.

Somehow, in terms of participation, several

students believe that online discussion could promote balanced participation. Eighteen students considered that online discussion gave them more chance to participate because they had time to think of their answers and elaborate on their reasoning. Indeed, online discussions would be more helpful if the discussions intend to create more equal opportunity for all group members (Warschauer, 1995) or to avoid aggression. In short, the students had a negative perception toward student-to-student interaction and teacher-to-students interaction, yet they agreed that online discussion gave them more opportunity to participate in the discussion.

In terms of Teacher presence, in this study, the teacher could only give face to face guidance at the beginning of the session. Although there is a question-and-answer thread in the forum, students barely used it to communicate with the teacher. It therefore hinders the teacher in providing guidance to the students. By giving guidance, the teacher should be responsible for keeping the discussion in the online forum on track (Beaudin, 1999). However, if the teacher fails to do so, the online discussion will be difficult to run. Consequently, this problem may impede the students from actively participating in online forums.

The failure to keep track of the students' performance in online forum possibly affects the students' expectations. Students need to know the expectation of the discussion and therefore they will remain involved in the discussion (Mokoena, 2013). It is also one of the teacher's responsibilities that the students need to know. As happened during the online discussion, unlike in face to face, the teacher could only deliver the expectations of the discussion at the very beginning. So, when in the middle of the discussion the students lost their way, the teacher could barely remind the students of the set.

The teacher's presence in encouraging the students is also a problem in participating in an online discussion. Teacher encouragement could improve students' motivation to enthusiastically engage in a discussion (Gao, Wang and Sun, 2013). Indeed, it is possible, but the teacher cannot easily interfere only to give encouragement to the students in online forum. In addition, asynchronous online forum is not as lively as synchronous; therefore, encouraging the

students in a discussion seems less possible (Yamagata-Lynch, 2013). The one way to do so is to encourage them at the beginning of the discussion while showing them the guidelines required (Rose & Smith, 2007).

Regarding the technical issues the student faced, having a discussion in an online forum means that students should be able to deal with more advanced technology to help them participate. This study used Proboard as an asynchronous online website. The features in Proboard are more or less the same as those of Kaskus, the most popular online forum in Indonesia. The initial assumption is probably that some of the students are already familiar with the aforementioned website style.

There is a high probability for a technical issue to occur in an online discussion forum, especially if the study is conducted in an area where the internet connection is poor. Kompas.com (2015), one of the most trusted sites in Indonesia, reported that Indonesia was in 122 in the world in terms of its internet connection. Consequently, the researcher believes the technical issues impeded the students' participation based on the first, poor internet-based technology, and the second the students' inability to use the forum.

The curriculum in Indonesia which does not include any online activity in teaching English is not without reason. The limited infrastructure in Indonesia is the main cause of why there is a lack of online-based language learning there. Baggaley, Belawati, Malik & Ng Lee Hoon (2007) in their study established that distance educators in most Asian countries, not to mention Indonesia face similar issues due to poor internet infrastructure. Consequently, the students do not have the chance to adapt instantly to the online discussion once they were introduced to it. In the interview, some students claimed that they have trouble connecting with the forum and once they failed, they postponed registering and did not participate in the forum. Thus, it lessens the students' motivation to participate more in the discussion.

The second reason might be the inability of the students to use threaded forum. In threaded forum, the structure of the discussion is in chronological order. Students who want to comment on other's posts should quote that particular post and put their comment followed

by the original post, so everyone knows which post they refer to. This hierarchical structure means that it is difficult to promote more interactive dialogue that the students can follow (Gao, Wang and Sun, 2013). Eventually, it leads the students to an interrelated monologue (Thomas, 2002). As evidence, in two classes, most of the messages which appeared in threaded discussion were independent ones. Therefore, this proves that the students are only likely to answer the task without bothering to reply to the other post.

Additionally, unlike synchronous discussion, Proboard which is asynchronous forum cannot provide a prompt and direct response. Moreover, in acquiring the latest post, students need to refresh the website first, which can hinder students' participation. Wang and Woo (2007) alleged that many students become frustrated and impatient waiting for the response. As a result, the students will come back and start to discuss the last-minute of the due date. This actually happened in this study, where at the second meeting, almost all of the students started to drop their opinion 4 hours before the deadline.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion
This study investigated the views of students regarding threaded online discussions involving the ProBoard platform located in an English language classroom setting of a private institution in Malang city, Indonesia. The study was designed in such a way as to take in the interplay of both quantitative and qualitative data with a view of displaying student interactions and attitudes towards them.

The findings suggested that while a large number of people preferred using the tools that the students had learned, there was still a portion of the population with a somewhat negative perception towards online discussions, revealing several issues. Students often faced technical difficulties such as poor connectivity and difficult-to-use interfaces, which made smooth participation impossible. One major issue noted was that students rarely interacted with their instructors or received feedback from them,

resulting in a sense of isolation for the students. On the other hand, the advantages of not being present during such discussions which were scheduled for the first discussion were that there were difficulties in relations between the participants.

Nonetheless, the researcher has highlighted specific things students enjoy about using the online discussions. This group consists of the students' who are willing to jump in the discussions but want to go at her or his own lines. It also ensured that students were able to rethink their responses before submission, thus reducing impulsive posting.

To support the effective role of language online discussions, a few suggestions can be submitted. First of all, there is a great need to solve the preliminary problems with the use of the platform by enhancing its functionality and the interface. Secondly, provision of regular checks and quick feedback will improve learners' participation as followed absences lead to students feeling cut off from the process. Live elements and real-time interactions that can allow for more feedback and integration of other enhancing instructional and social components of online linguistical communities should be attempted.

In conclusion, while the existing opportunity of threaded discussion boards is undoubtedly effective, especially in ProBoard, it presents some challenges, too. However, it has great potential in increasing students' interest and involvement in learning English. If the mentioned problems are resolved and the accessory advantages of argumentative online discussions are transformed into the further pedagogical practice, it will allow for providing the learners with the even more productive and more comfortable learning environment. It is crucial to extend further investigation into creative modes of use of online discussions in pedagogy, which would be inseparable from both the technological development and teaching development aspect.

Suggestion
Results of the analysis suggest that students do

not like threaded discussions in general. As the study was conducted within an Indonesian context, its results do not generalize across all English language teaching and learning contexts. These include the nature of materials, that of subjects who used them, and the choice of platform (not a really appealing Proboard).

For future research, the use of threaded discussions can be further investigated in English as a foreign language setting, and it is suggested that both researchers and teachers conduct more experimental studies. Thread forums would also be considered as support system tools that may assist in improving students' performance. Research over a full semester could also provide insight into the matter of student participation and how to guide group discussions. Lastly, future studies could examine the implementation of synchronous online discussions and provide investigations related to teachers' digital pedagogy in Indonesia.

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