

LOOKING INTO EFL STUDENTS' PREFERENCES IN TURNING ON AND OFF THEIR VIDEO CAMERA DURING VIRTUAL LEARNING: WHAT DOES IT IMPLY?

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Abstract

Video conferencing tools with their webcam features are among the platforms that support the implementation of an online learning system amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, students' attitudes toward webcam use can carry out essential meanings in the teaching-learning process in distance learning. Through a survey method, the present study aimed to determine students' preferences toward webcam use and the reasons behind their behavior. The results indicated that Indonesian EFL students at an average level agreed to keep their webcams on during virtual classrooms. To this point, there are situations where they turn their webcams on and off during courses in a week. Several reasons, such as facing anxiety issues, having an internet connection problem, and concerning their privacy, become the primary reasons why they turned the camera off. Findings also highlighted that even though students had some difficulties using it, they tried to keep their cameras on during several courses even if it was not mandatory. It was sought to show respect and closeness to their lecturers and be more attentive in joining the online classes. Thus, the study offers implications for educators to encourage—not as mandatory—their students to turn their webcam on during online classes. Emphasize

that even if they are in an online learning classroom keeping their webcams on could demonstrate their socio-affective skills, namely showing respect, attentiveness, and closeness to their lecturers.

Keywords: *EFL students' preference, virtual learning, webcam off, webcam on*

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced the global impacted countries to transform their education settings into a new face. Accelerated shifts in instructional implementation from in-person to remote teaching were made as efforts to mitigate Covid-19 transmission. In Indonesia, the Covid-19 issue was officially declared on March 2, 2020, when the first case of Covid-19 was discovered. In response to this, the Ministry of Education and Culture released a policy addressed to the schools and universities to conduct working from home and learning from home on March 9, 2020. Denoting the regulation issued by the government, the learning process has significantly changed from offline to online learning. The recent policy regulates that from January 2021, schools and universities can implement face-to-face learning activities considering several requirements: permission from three parties (local government, the principal, and school committee), school eligibility, strict implementation of health protocols, and support from parents and stakeholders. However, most of them still decide to conduct online learning due to the Covid-19 cases that are remaining high by May 2021. Hence, online learning still presents as the gateway to performing the academic process which in turn reflects the use

of technology which hold crucial role in providing a high-quality learning environment during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Regarding online learning, synchronous virtual learning is preferable to embrace connectedness and interaction between teachers-students and student-students amid global pandemics. Moreover, with support from the massive growth of internet access, the bandwidth available, and technology around the world; conducting an online classroom, particularly by utilizing videoconferencing technology, becomes a promising approach to generate a virtual co-presence in distance learning (de Fornel, 1994; Kozar, 2015; Manstead, Lea, & Goh, 2011; Van Merriënboer & Kester, 2005)

In education, a videoconference tool is illustrated as synchronous meetings, in which participants who live apart geographically—connected by the internet—can participate actively in the learning process. The adoption of videoconferencing technology has made students' and teachers' surroundings suddenly shifted and invaded by webcams, headphones, and microphones of their devices to engage in the virtual classroom.

Although remote learning using videoconference technology is not a current breakthrough in the educational system, however, the existing condition of Covid-19 has dramatically increased the use of videoconferencing technology (e.g., ZOOM, Google Meet, Cisco WebEx, Skype, etc.). The utilization of web conferencing technology in remote learning is believed to counter the negative impacts of online learning in terms of professional isolation, learning loss, demotivation,

loneliness, and health consequences (Aleman & Sommer, 2020; Castelli & Sarvary, 2021; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Kozar, 2015). Concerning the implementation of videoconference technology in synchronous virtual learning, researchers address the benefits of using webcams in the field of cognitive and pedagogical. Additionally, the webcams offered in videoconferencing tools assist teachers and students to increase socio-affective domain since students can see and communicate with their teachers and classmates directly (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021; Develotte, Guichon, & Vincent, 2010; Jauregi, de Graaff, van den Bergh, & Kriz, 2012; Kozar, 2015; Marcelli, Gaveau, & Tokiwa, 2005; O'Dowd, 2006)

The use of webcams could be one useful way to allow for direct interaction and conversation within an online course (Al Samarraie, 2019; Giesbers, Rienties, Tempelaar, & Gijsselaers, 2013; Gillies, 2008). On the other hand, previous research highlights different aspects related to its use, showing mixed results. Kozar's (2015) study on webcam use in private online English language lessons showed that the webcams were only used at the beginning of their lesson since it was perceived that 'webcamming' was viewed as a more tiring mode and constitutes an interruption into privacy concerns. In the similar vein, Bedenlier et al. (2020) found that in order to feel like they are in a physical classroom most teachers used the videoconference tool during the online classes. However, students avoid using their webcams due to some behaviors related to personal thoughts and feelings (e.g., privacy), to course features (e.g., group cohesion), and it distinguished due to specific groups (gender,

study degree). Other factors besides the personal privacy, such as being concerned with other people and their physical location being seen in the background, as well as having a poor internet connection, influence students to prefer to turn off their webcams during online classes (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021).

The literature emerges a variety of explanations for students to use or not use a webcam, ranging from concerns over being bothered with their privacy, as found by Kozar (Kozar, 2015), to degrees of shyness and self-disclosure (Brunet & Schmidt, 2007), merely a lack of perceived need to use webcams (Svenja Bedenlier et al., 2020; Nilsen, Almås, & Krumsvik, 2013). However, studies on the videoconferencing behavior specifically the use of webcams in online English as foreign language (EFL) classes are not yet comprehensively investigated. Thus, this present study aims to explore higher education students' behavior in using webcams in online classes and to investigate potential concepts related to webcam use considering their position as EFL students, which is perceived as the research gap. The following research objectives are designed to frame the present study: (1) to know EFL students' attitudes towards webcams in a virtual classroom, (2) to identify how many courses students turn the webcams on even it is not mandatory and the reasons behind it, and (3) to know the characteristics of EFL students' environment where they attend online classes.

Method

The current study employed the survey method under the quantitative research design. Participated by 70 EFL students at a state university in Indonesia came from all years of study; the present research aimed to explore their attitudes and uncover the reasons behind their preferences regarding the use of webcams during synchronous remote learning amid pandemics. To collect the data, researchers used a questionnaire that was adapted from Gherheş et al. (2021) and Castelli and Sarvary (2021).

In the initial stage, researchers distributed an online self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised 20 questions items (four open and 14 closed) that were added to the respondents' gathered information. Open-ended questions were used to figure out the reasons why respondents and their colleagues do not keep their camera turned on during online classes, to identify the number of hours and the reasons why they do keep the camera turned on (although this is not mandatory), to determine what other activities they are performing concurrently, and to find solutions that would influence students to keep their camera turned on. Overall, the questionnaire covers several aspects, including (1) EFL students' attitude toward using webcams in online classes, (2) the number of courses EFL students turned their webcams on, and (3) EFL students' surrounding environment in which they participate the virtual class.

The researchers analyzed the data utilizing the quantitative descriptive analysis technique. Specifically, the questionnaire

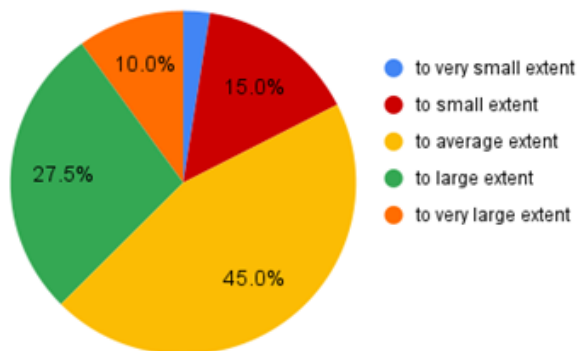
results were interpreted quantitatively by reading, calculating, and interpreting the information obtained in order to attain a more profound depiction of students' underlying reasons for their video camera use. Next, the findings were grouped into three main discussions following the research questions.

Discussion

A total of forty EFL students filled the questionnaire. Further, to answer two questions of the study, the discussion is divided into three sections as follows: (1) determining EFL students' perceptions and reasons towards webcam use during online classes, (2) determining the approximate number of courses in which EFL students keep their webcams and reasons for this manner, (3) determining the characteristics of EFL students' environment and investigating EFL students' behavior while attending online learning.

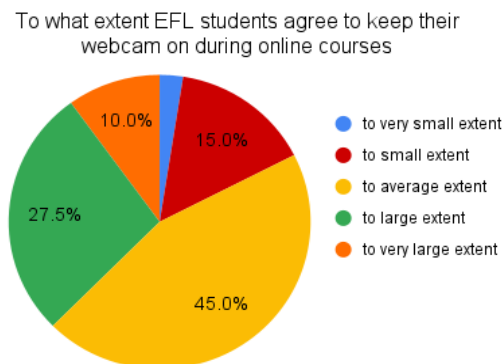
Determining EFL Students' Perceptions and Reasons towards Webcam Use during Online Classes

To what extent EFL students agree to keep their webcam on during online courses



By distributing the questionnaire, researchers revealed that EFL students at an average level agree to keep their webcams on during virtual learning. It was reported that only 45% or 18 students out of 40 students felt okay to turn their cameras on. Meanwhile, the next frequently selected level of EFL students' agreement concerning their tendency to turn on their webcams was a large extent (27.5%). It implies that students recognize the beneficial aspects of turning on their cameras during online courses. The recent findings are quite surprising compared to the previous study conducted by Gherheş et al. (2021). Gherheş et al. (2021) highlighted that most students were reluctant to stay their webcams on during the online meeting. This difference might be occurred due to participants involved in their study. As it is mentioned, the current study aims to explore EFL students' tendency, yet Gherheş et al. (2021) focus on attitudes that non-English students hold regarding the use of webcams during synchronous online learning.

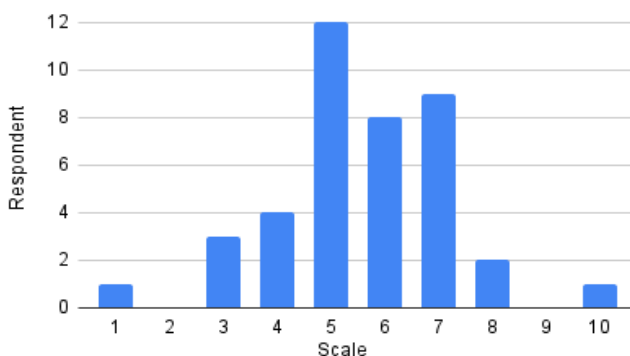
Chart 1. EFL students' attitude towards the use of webcams during online course



Under students' responses on their attitudes related to webcams, researchers also investigated how comfortable students to show their face during virtual learning. As it is depicted in the graphic (Figure 2), from scale 1-10, the average value of scale is 5.57. It is represented in the table that twelve students rated 5 out of 10 on how comfortable them to show their face. From the findings, it infers that students are quite comfortable (mean = 5.57) turning on their webcams.

Chart 2. How comfortable EFL students to show their face during virtual meeting

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is minimum and 10 is maximum, how comfortable do you feel to show you're face during online courses?



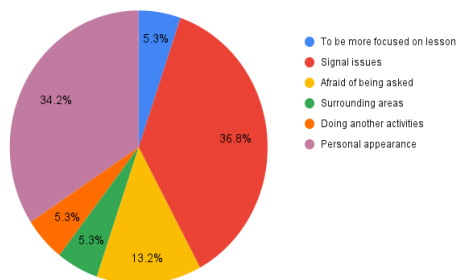
The results are quite similar to Gherheș et al. (2021); their study denoted that non-English students in one of the universities in Romania felt comfortable staying in front of the webcam. To this point, researchers indicated that EFL students already recognized the impact of keeping their webcams on during virtual classes. Develotte(2010) disclosed three benefits of using webcams,

namely socio-affective, cognitive, and organizational. Regarding the socio-affective aspect, previous researchers explain that it deals with the psychological closeness between teachers and students, which boosts students' motivation, and promote an effective teaching-learning process in the remote learning class as it facilitates visual and non-verbal communication (Develotte et al., 2010; Kozar, 2015)(Develotte et al., 2010; Kozar, 2015). Further, turning on webcams considers as a promising approach to provoke a virtual co-presence in distance learning (de Fornel, 1994; Kozar, 2015; Manstead et al., 2011; Van Merriënboer & Kester, 2005).

Even though researchers identified that most EFL students are aware of the significance of staying on their webcams, yet the findings also demonstrated that students slightly hesitate to turn on their webcams. It is denoted from Figure 1 that EFL students agree to stay on in front of their webcams at the average level. Besides, the degree of comfort also illustrated that students comfortable are in average level (mean = 5.57). In response to this matter, researchers also sought EFL students' reasons to give up turning on their webcams. First, students were required to describe their partners' behavior, and then they explained their own behavior with regard to the use of webcams.

Chart 3 EFL student’s partner reason of his/ her reluctance to keep webcams on

What do you think is the main reason why your colleagues are hesitate to keep their webcam on during online courses?



EFL students addressed six common reasons regarding their partners’ motivations to give up turning on their webcams. They believed that their partners were doing another activity when they turned off their webcams (36.8%) during virtual courses. Further, their partners are also concerned about their appearances (34.2%) that might push them not to keep on their webcams. The current study has led to similar researches conducted by Castelli and Savary (2021). As they mentioned that most of the students were reluctant to stay in front of their webcams due to their appearances. This reason strongly captures that students get perturbed about others’ perceptions of their looks (Miller, Mandryk, Birk, Depping, & Patel, 2017) (Miller et al., 2017). EFL students’ level of concern for their appearance could be related to personality traits, culture, gender, and relationship status (Aune & Aune, 1994; Johnson, Francis, & Burns, 2007). Those factors are beyond that of teachers’ or instructors’ ability to observe. Therefore, teachers speculate that if students turn

on their webcams, they are more likely ready to join the class in regards to their outward and inward appearances. To put it another way, since EFL students concern about being seen while turning on their webcams during a virtual class, they will be more well-groomed (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021).

In response to the discussion above, the study also revealed individual reasons EFL students hold while turning off their webcams during the online meeting (Table 1). The results are quite surprising since all of the students (40 students) declared that they were afraid of being asked by the teacher if they decided to keep their webcams on. Besides, the next most frequently selected reason of EFL students' behavior for not keeping on their webcams is due to their unstable internet connection (28 students) and nervousness (14 students) when they have to speak, particularly in English, while showing their face in front of the camera. The reason number 1 and 2 indicates that EFL students encounter anxiety while they speak, particularly in English, while they have to show their face in front of the cameras.

Table 1. EFL students' reasons address for not keeping on their webcams on during online class

No	The main reason EFL students keep their webcam off during online classes	Responses
1	I am afraid of being asked by teacher if I turn on my camera	40
2	I am nervous if I turn on my camera while I am speaking English	14
3	I am concerned about my appearance	9

No	The main reason EFL students keep their webcam off during online classes	Responses
4	I am concerned about other people being seen behind me	2
5	My internet connection is weak	28
6	I feel like everyone is looking at me the whole time	9
7	I am concerned about my the physical location being seen behind me	4
8	I am concerned about distracting my classmate	1
9	I am concerned about distracting my teacher	1
10	I don't want to be seen not paying attention	9
11	I don't want to be seen walking away from my computer/device	6
12	I don't want to be seen doing other things on my computer/device	11
13	My webcam is not working	3

It is interesting to note that speaking anxiety becomes a major reason for EFL students to turn off their cameras. Foreign language speaking anxiety deals with a complex of self-awareness, beliefs, feelings, and attitudes regarding classroom L2 acquisition that is a result of the complexity of language teaching. Additionally, FLA is considered feelings of pressure and apprehension that are strongly associated with second language contexts such as speaking and listening (Horwitz et al., 1986). In general, speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon experienced by a foreign language student. According to Horwitz (2001), language anxiety faced by EFL students is a condition that arises from immature foreign language communication. Pahargyan (2021) found an interesting fact concerning the

speaking anxiety issue during remote learning in the EFL classroom, as it was reported that EFL students were inclined to be anxious in speaking English even though it was across the screen. Thus, Pahargyan's study (2021) supports the current results, which highlight that anxiety has impacted EFL students to prefer turning off their webcam. In this case, educators should be aware that maintaining webcams during the online meeting may trigger anxiety among EFL students. Further, teachers as facilitators play significant roles in decreasing EFL students speaking anxiety; so that they may give up turning their webcams on the virtual foreign language classroom.

Then, EFL students also exposed that they preferred to turn off their webcams as they were triggered not paying attention to the lesson (9 students) as they did not want to be seen doing others activity while joining the class (11 students) or walking away from their webcams (6 students). In addition, students also reported that they were aware of their appearances and surroundings environment. To this point, the previous discussion on EFL students' partners' behaviors about the use of webcams is in line with their individual attitudes on the use of webcams during online meeting.

The study was also aimed to identify the approximate number of lectures on which students kept their webcams on, as well as the reasons behind this behavior. According to the graph below (Figure 4), it showed that most of the students leave their webcams during 3–4 lectures (45%), followed by those who do it during 1–2 lectures (35%). In descending sort of percentages,

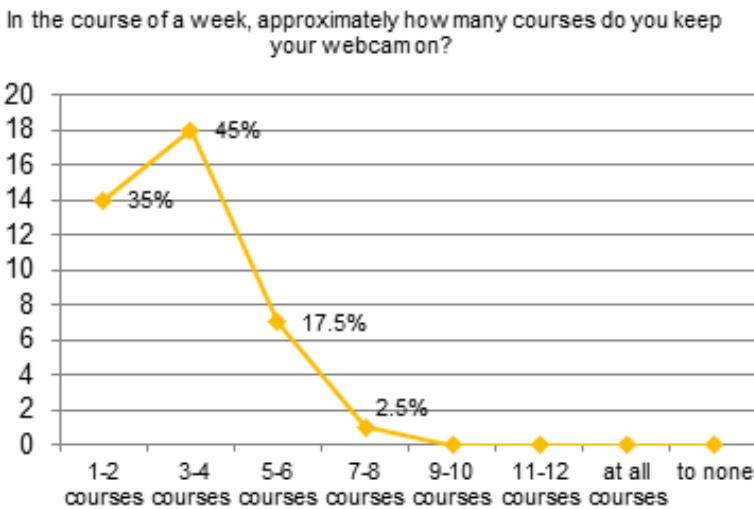
these classifications are followed by those who keep the webcam turned on during 5-6 lectures (17.5%) and 9-10 lectures (2.5%). The data demonstrate that none of the students turned their webcam off at all over the course of a week. Nonetheless, findings on the question “approximately how many courses are you required to keep your webcam on?” revealed that some lecturers required students to have their webcams on during online classes for 1–2 lectures (45%) or 3–4 lectures (37.5%). When students are asked the primary reason why teachers want students to keep their webcam on during online courses, almost all of the students think that it is due to they want to supervise students’ attention while joining the online classes.

Determining the Approximate Number of Courses in which EFL Students Keep Their Webcams and Reasons for This Manner

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Chart 4 The number of EFL students' lecturers' activities when the webcams turned on



Despite the fact that they were not required to do so, several students decided to keep their webcams on during online classes. The present study attempted to figure out what were the reasons underlying this behavior. Through the answers of an open-ended question in the data collection, results indicated the major reasons for these decisions, which were to show their

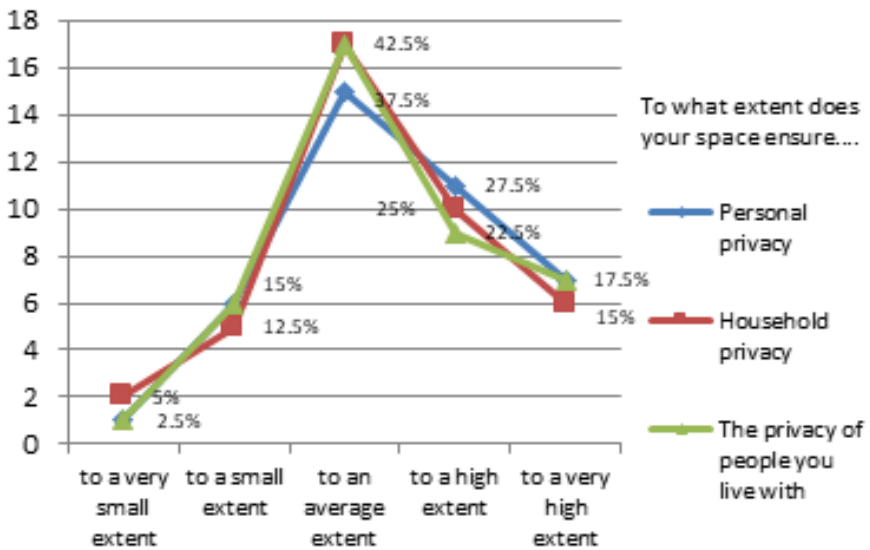
respect for the lecturers (35%) followed by evidence of they were present and attentive in joining the online classes (27.5%). Further, 10% of the respondents answered they turned on their camera since they feel confident to do it. The majority of the answer, which shows respect to the lecturer is in line with Gherheş et al. (2021) study, they found that most of the students turned their webcam on due to respect for the teacher. The findings are also supported by Develotte's et.al. (2010) study that webcam use can promote students' socio-affective, in this case, students' efforts to show their respect to the lecturer which demonstrates their psychological closeness to their lecturers, which boosts students' motivation to stay being attentive during the classes.

Determining the Characteristics of EFL Students' Environment and Investigating EFL Students' Behavior while Attending Online Learning

The environment or space in which students are involved in educational activities is a crucial aspect that needs to be determined (Gherheş et al., 2021). With regards to the origin of the environment, findings reported that 75% of students are from rural areas and only a third of the respondents (25%) are from urban areas. Moreover, the data indicated that 45% of the students have a specific place in their home that used personally to attend the online classes. Figure 5 shows that the majority of students' places have an average level of the extent to ensure housing privacy and the privacy of the people they stay with, as stated by 42.5 % who responded to this category. Furthermore,

only approximately a quarter of respondents stated that the place in which students participate in courses provides them with personal privacy, housing, and the people they live with is guaranteed to them to a very limited level. This situation influences their preference to keep turning their camera on/off, as stated by Kozar (2015) and Bedenlier et al. (2020) that students avoid using their webcams due to some behaviors related to privacy concern, as well as being concerned with other people and their physical location that may be seen in the background (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021).

Chart 5 Characteristics of EFL students' environment while attending online learning



Regarding the type of devices that EFL students generally used during online classes, as shown in the graph below (Figure

6), the study revealed that the majority of the students (62,5%) utilized their phones to attend classes on an online regular basis. Aside from the fact that mobile phone is viewed as an inappropriate device for joining online courses related to their small screen, however, Indonesian students are used to utilizing it for educational purposes. Research by Cambridge International (2018) indicates that Indonesian students are among the world's highest users of technology in education, with 67% of them using smartphones in classroom activities. It also might be due to they do not have access to any other equipment, with the cell phone being their only means of participating in online educational activities. Following that results, the data reported that students used a laptop (35%), a desktop (2.5%), and none of them used a tablet to participate in online classrooms.

Chart 6 Devices used by EFL students during online classes



The study also sought to evaluate how students behaved when taking part in educational activities in an online setting. According to the data, the majority of students (77.5%) follow the online learning process via audio and video, with 17.5 % primarily listening to lectures and 5% only watching them.

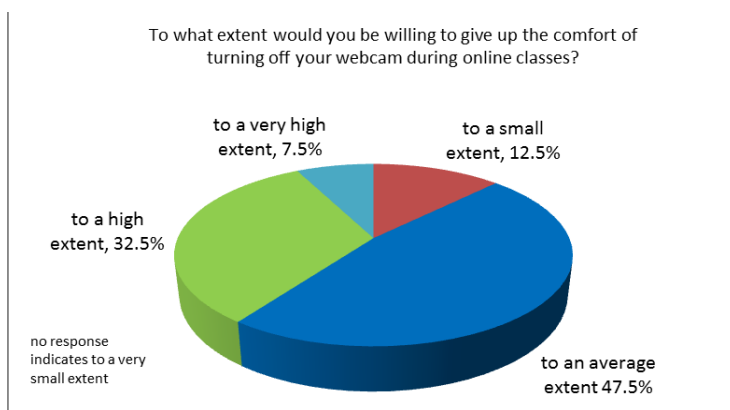
When asked to answer a question by the lecturer, 12.5 % said they always keep their webcam on. 87.5 % of students said they do it occasionally, and none of them ever use the webcam when the teacher nominated them to answer the question.

When asked whether students could come up with a solution to make them feel more comfortable when using the webcam, most respondents said that lecturers should give their encouragement to students such as by giving interesting online environment, appreciation, good discussion (32.5%). It also reported that 25% of the students recommended that they should just try to focus or be confident with themselves when their webcam is turned on, followed by 22.5% of students considered that they should have proper preparation before joining the online classes including wearing the neat clothes, have an appropriate background, and study the material that will be learned. Further, 5% considered that their classmates should be supportive, for instance, not judge their friends' appearance. 12.5% of students revealed that they did not have any idea about this problem.

The next discussion lies on students' willingness towards the comfort of turning the webcam off during the online classes. As can be viewed from Figure 7, seeing the response options "to a small extent", indicated that only about a quarter of students (12.5%) were unwilling to give up the convenience of turning off webcams during educational activities in the online setting. Almost half of the students stated themselves "to an average extent" (47.5%), and by cumulating the response scale "to a very

high extent” and “to a high extent” almost half of the students (40%) declared they are willing to keep webcams on during online classrooms.

Chart 7 EFL students’ willingness to give up the comfort of turning off the webcam during their online learning



The argument in the EFL online classroom context over whether students should be classified absent if they attend in class without turning on the camera does not appear to be successful in the university setting. From the question items, students are also asked if they would agree that students who do not have their webcam on during online lectures should be considered absent. Data reported that 40% of students responded “to a very little extent” and 35% of students responded “to a small extent” (35%). Only 7.5% of respondents who answered “to a large extent” agree with this category. It indicates that most of the students think that those who turned off the webcam during online classes should not be considered absent. The findings are in the same vein with Gherheş et al. (2021) which revealed

that students in their study also disagree if those who turned their webcam off are labelled as absent while joining the online classes.

Conclusion

The use of videoconferencing platforms has crucially increased amid the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in higher education institutions. Consequently, the interaction between educators and students only can be carried out across the screen or through the use of webcams. Studies highlight that there might be interesting facts that lie behind students' attitudes on webcam use. Thus, this current study investigated students' tendency of webcam use and reasons that they hold behind their behavior in the EFL online classroom context.

At the primary discussion on EFL students' willingness to turn their webcams on during the virtual meeting, the study has revealed that most EFL students at average level agree to keep their webcams on. Nevertheless, the study indicates a number of reasons when there is a moment EFL students are reluctant to turn on their webcams. It is quite surprising since speaking anxiety becomes the main reason not to turn on their webcams on online courses. In this regard, it is critically significant for educators to be aware that using webcams during an online conference may provoke anxiety among EFL students. To this matter, educators should promote the benefits of using webcams so as students may turn on their webcams in the virtual foreign language classroom.

With regards to the estimated number of the courses in a week they kept turning their webcams on and the reasons for this behavior, the study discovered that majority of the students kept the webcams on for 3-4 courses even if it is not mandatory. Although most of them stated that it is not comfortable enough to turn their webcams on but they mentioned that they kept doing it since they wanted to show respect to their lecturers and to be more attentive during the online classes. Furthermore, related to the characteristics of their environment while joining the online classes, which is considered crucial in online learning (Gherheş et al., 2021). Most of the students reported that their place can ensure their personal privacy, household, and people they live within the average extent.

The study offers a suggestion for educators to encourage the students to turn on their webcams during the online classes, but it is not mandatory. Highlighting the students' responses on webcams use indicates their socio-affective skills including being respectful, attentive, and close to their teachers even though in the online learning environment. The study also empowers the students' support systems to assist them in preparing appropriate space to conduct online

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