

## SCRUTINIZING STUDENTS ONLINE LEARNING PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY ON STUDENT AGENCY

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**Abstract:** This study aims to recognize the students' mindset profile and find out how mindset as one of the elements of agency helps senior high school students to cope with difficulties in online learning. This study used a qualitative case study approach involving two students from different Senior High Schools in Cimahi. This study which specifically focused on the mindset of student agency gained its data from observation, interview, and documentation. The results of the analysis revealed that belief in one's capability is the main element in mindset since it influences one's attitude towards online learning, achievement in learning, and resilience concerning learning online. Regarding to the result of the study, it can be concluded that developing student agency can be started by encouraging students to believe in their capacity.

**Keywords:** *mindset; online learning; resilience; students' achievement; students' agency.*

### INTRODUCTION

Entering the year 2020, the world is facing a Pandemic of Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19). All life aspects have changed massively in a blink of an eye. Schools as one facility to get an education cannot escape the effects of this pandemic. This significant change has made the education world shift from offline learning to online learning. The way students learn, the way teachers teach, and where and when learning takes place also changed (O'Riley, 2014). Increasingly, mobile devices equip students to take charge of their learning in a context where learning occurs anywhere, anytime, and with access to a wealth of content and interactive tools.

Senior High School students are already familiar with this digital world, yet they are still facing some obstacles in online learning, such as technical issues (Efriana, 2021; Kulal & Nayak, 2020; Prayudha, 2021; Yuzulia, 2021), adaptability struggle to online learning system (Martin *et al.*, 2021; Mushtahaa *et al.*, 2022), lack of interaction (Efriana, 2021; Mushtahaa *et al.*, 2022), unconducive learning atmosphere (Barrot *et al.*, 2021; Kostaki & Karayianni, 2022), digital literacy (Barrot *et al.*, 2021; Efriana, 2021) and many more. Despite all these difficulties, they still have to stay motivated to be successful to learn in this new condition. One factor that contributes to

student motivation and sustains student learning is student agency. According to Bandura, the mediating factor from thoughts to action possesses three main properties; forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura 2018). It means student agency is the factor underlying the action taken by a student. In a similar vein, Reeve & Shin (2020) define agency as students' desire, intention, and sense of purpose to produce intentional and strategic changes in one's functioning and in one's surrounding environment or it can be said that agency is the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change. As agency relates to thought, Parry (2016) states that the key characteristic of student agency is a mindset, i.e. a set of beliefs or a way of thinking that determine somebody's behavior and outlook (Silver & Stafford, 2017).

The term agency in education has been defined in various ways. Reeve & Shin (2020) define agency as students' desire, intention, and sense of purpose to produce intentional and strategic changes in one's functioning and in one's surrounding environment or it can be said that agency is the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change. As agency associated with self-efficacy, self-reflective, and desire that underlying the students' action and

interaction with their environment so Parry (2016) suggests that agency deals with student's mindset and know how to act in a manner that empowers and positions learners for a lifetime of learning.

There are many definitions of mindset. (Dweck & Yeager, 2019) describes mindset as beliefs that shape someone's attitude; a set of beliefs or a way of thinking that determine someone's behavior and outlook. In a similar vein, Silver & Stafford (2017) state that Mindsets are a group of beliefs and attitudes about oneself, the external world, and the interaction between the two. The clearer concept of mindset comes from Parry (2016) who posted four characteristics of mindset and its profile.

The first characteristic of mindset I believing in oneself or one's capacity (self-efficacy). It deals with confident perspective of who one is and what one can do. Bandura (2018) acknowledged that efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave. Students with a strong sense of self-efficacy will work harder, try longer, overcome greater obstacles, and bounce back more quickly from setbacks than their less self-efficacious peers and are more likely to engage in tasks they feel confident in completing successfully and tend to withdraw from tasks for which they lack such confidence (Silver & Stafford, 2017). Furthermore, self-efficacy affects the choices we make, the effort we put forth (how hard we try), our perseverance (how long we persist when we confront obstacles) and our resilience (how quickly we recover from failure or setbacks) (Silver & Stafford, 2017).

The second characteristic of mindset is loving to learn. It deals with someone's intrinsic motivation, including passionate, curious interest in learning which is driven from inside an individual rather than external rewards. Intrinsic motivation comes from within, while extrinsic motivation arises from outside. She also stated that when you're intrinsically motivated, you engage in an activity solely because you enjoy it and get personal satisfaction from it. Those with high self-efficacy often have high motivation and vice versa, but it is not a foregone conclusion. Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation is reward-driven behavior (Legault, 2016).

The third characteristic of mindset is being resilience. It deals with the ability to properly adapt and rebound from stress and adversity or when confronting overwhelming obstacles. According to Price-Mitchell (2015), children

who develop resilience are better equipped to learn from failure and adapt to change. Eva *et al.* (2021) stated that resilient students interpret academic or social challenges in a positive way (such as increasing effort, developing new strategies, or practicing conflict resolution). There are several critical abilities associated with resilience according to Eva *et al.* (2021), including emotional regulation (the ability to keep calm and express emotions in a way that helps the situation), impulse control (making a conscious choice whether to act on a desire to take action, and the ability to delay gratification and persevere), causal analysis (to analyze problems and identify causes accurately), empathy (the ability to understand the feelings and needs of another person), realistic optimism (keeping a positive outlook without denying reality), self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to solve problems and handle stress), and opportunity seeking (the ability to take new opportunities and reach out to others). Furthermore, resilience is significantly influenced by people's mindsets — their patterns for interpreting events, including why they happen, who is to blame for the difficulty, and what impact a problem will have (Eva *et al.*, 2021).

The last characteristic of mindset is learning style. It deals with the approach to learning which recognizes the unique strengths, gaps, and preferences of a learner. The learning styles have a significant impact on the way students understand the subject, recall the information and apply it in real life.

In the classroom, teachers are expected to design the learning in such a way that can match students' learning styles. As learners may be more successful when classrooms, either by designed or by chance, are tailored to their learning style. However, it seems quite hard for the teacher to accommodate all types of learning styles. In fact, the crucial skill for independent learners is having an interest and being able to encourage themselves to learn (Kopzhassarova *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, online platforms may inherently affect learning on a single dimension (visual or auditory) while students with kinesthetic learning style would struggle more than visual or auditory learners (Min *et al.*, 2018).

In addition to describing the characteristic of student agency, Parry (2016) also provides the levels of students' agency which range from no awareness to agency stage as can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. *The characteristic of student agency*

Students' Characteristic	No Awareness	Early Stages	Promising Stage	Agency Stage
Belief in oneself and one's capacity	Example: Nearly every day, I feel others are much more confident and capable than I am in learning situations.	Example: I am tentative about my confidence and capabilities, but a time or two each week I sense myself feeling or even responding more confidently in learning situations.	Example: Most days of the week, I experience myself feeling or even responding more confidently and capably in learning situations.	Example: I am confident and capable consistently in a diversity of learning situations
Love of learning or intrinsic motivation	Example: Nearly every day I am indifferent or even resistant to pursuing new subjects at school.	Example: Often, I am hesitant or tentative about learning new subjects at school.	Example: More and more I am experiencing a growing interest in pursuing new subjects.	Example: I am curious and find myself thinking about or even posing questions as I pursue new subjects.
Resilience	Example: I react with resistance or avoidance when faced with problems or obstacles.	Example: Sometimes I am comfortable asking my facilitator or peers for assistance when confronted with a problem.	Example: I can coach myself to consider and pursue alternatives when faced with problems or obstacles.	Example: I identify and pursue alternatives when faced with problems or obstacles.
Learning style	Example: I struggle when it is not my preferred learning format.	Example: I am gaining an awareness of other learning formats.	Example: I recognize many of my preferences of learning.	Example: I understand and apply my preferences of learning and how they can impact my learning.

Referring to the table, it can be seen from the table that the student agency occupies the highest stage. In terms of mindset, the students are classified to possess agency if they are confident and capable of handling the diversity in learning situations, they have a curiosity to find out the answer to the questions they have about the thing they like, and they always try to find a way out anytime they encounter problems. As it has been known widely that there are some challenges to deal with in online learning, among others the limitation of internet access (Hafeez *et al.*, 2022), lack of interaction with the teachers (Kolang *et al.*, 2021), Lack of understanding lesson materials (Wiratman & Rahmadani, 2022), and lack of supervision because some students may easily lose focus (Rahman *et al.*, 2022), and some others tend to procrastinate their learning time (Melgaard *et al.*, 2021). The disadvantages of online learning often put students in trouble. They have to struggle and keep their faith in learning. In this

kind of situation, students' agency may determine the success of the students to cope with the challenges in online learning.

By far, researches regarding students' agency show that agency has a major impact on learners' self-efficacy, identity, motivation, and metacognition—four constructs that are instrumental in determining language learning success, in particular in the distance learning context (Teng, 2018). Another research was conducted by Layali and Al-Shlowiy (2020) who review the students' perceptions of e-learning for ESL/EFL in Saudi universities during this Coronavirus time. The results revealed students' positive views, many benefits, and limited drawbacks of e-learning for ESL/EFL in Saudi Universities.

Regarding to the experts' theory, it can be said that mindset is the core of student agency. A student with growth mindset will be sufficiently motivated to achieve and adequately engaged in

classroom learning, and their chances of succeeding academically are greatly enhanced (Rhew *et al.*, 2018). There are abundant research on online learning in decade discussing the teaching and learning process (Adebo, 2018; Coman *et al.*, 2020; Kulal & Nayak, 2020; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020; Roddy *et al.*, 2017; Yuzulia, 2021; Zboun & Farrah, 2021; Prayudha, 2021). However, none of them talk about student agency which connects to students' efforts to adapt to the new habits of learning. This current study is concerned with students' mindsets as a part of students' agency towards online learning. The following research questions that need to be addressed 1) What mindset profile do the students have?, and 2) How can mindset as one of the elements of agency help the Senior High School students cope with difficulties in online learning?

This research is significant due to the importance of student agency in increasing their engagement throughout the teaching and learning process, particularly in online learning as it could boost their academic and social-emotional outcomes.

**METHOD**

This qualitative study employs a case study. Christensen, L. B., Johnson, R. B., & Turner (2015) defined case study as the intensive and detailed description and analysis of one or more cases. So, the research procedure must be systematic and well-planned. The procedures in

this research are preparation, data collection, and writing of findings.

To gain the data. the study got through the preparation stage by determining the participants and asking for their willingness to join the research. In this research, the participants' activities while learning online were observed and they were also interviewed. It was decided that the Participants involved in this study were two students from two different Senior High Schools in Cimahi who represent middle and high achievers in their English subject.

The study began the investigation by identifying the agency of the students. Through casual conversation, the mindset of the participants can be identified. Capturing the role of student agency in sustaining learning, the study held observation and informal interviews with the students and figured out how students with different levels of agency keep their spirit for learning English and overcome the difficulties they experienced during online learning. The topic for the interview was guided by the table from (Parry, 2016).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

To get answers to the first research question, the study conducted a casual interview. The followings are data from the casual interview which were used to identify the agency of the two participants.

*Table 2. The characteristic of students' agency*

Students' Characteristic	Student 1	Student 2
Belief in oneself and one's capacity	"My close friends give motivation, when I'm stuck with assignments or problems, I usually listen to my favorite song cause that can also cheer me up again " (AZ-Participant 1).	She rarely asked her classmates for help.  "I don't ask my friends, because they don't understand either." (RA-Participant 2)
Love of learning or intrinsic motivation	AZ did all her tasks to complete all scores.  "If there's another subject that I don't like, if I don't understand it, I'll just let it go, the important thing is that I got score" (AZ-Participant 1).  The motivation they have is extrinsic motivation since it is reward-driven behaviour (Legault, 2016). This makes them in the early stage of the agency.	RA dreamed to enroll her favorit university by <i>Jalur Prestasi Akademik</i> , she had to have good scores in all of her subjects.  "I want to get into the university through the invitation. So, I'm excited to learn. In the exam, I try to get score more than 80", "If I take the invitation, it's just taken from my report, and I think my score is enough. I'm confident".) (RA-Participant 2).
Resilience	According to AZ, the students were being taught to be more active and independent in learning.	RA felt that google was her savior to answer all other questions.  "During the online learning, I taught myself,

Students' Characteristic	Student 1	Student 2
	<p>"Most of the teacher give assignments, explain the material slightly, the rest we do the inquiries. But that's the learning nowadays should be isn't it?"</p> <p><i>Google</i> had also helped her a lot in her online learning activities.</p> <p>"If there is a problem that is difficult, or someone doesn't understand, just google it, or read and read the material in the textbook again, watch the teacher's YouTube video again until I understand" (AZ-Participant 1)</p>	<p>if there is a video link, I repeat it over and over again, googling too, that's the answer to all the questions, Google really helps me. But sometimes I don't really understand, and I still have doubts, I feel something is lacking when it's not the teacher who explains it."</p> <p>She was also able to manage her study time during online learning,</p> <p>"I can manage time so far. Although there are a lot of assignments, but I can handle it because most of the deadlines are still long. My schedule is even odd. If there is an assignment that must be done that day, the lesson is usually easy. If there is a task that can be postponed, I will do another task that has a deadline" (RA-Participant 2).</p>
Learning style	<p>AZ knew what her learning preferences were that could make her more focus.</p> <p>"When I study, I don't like to be noisy, so I solved it, so I like studying while listening to music at home. But at school, even though I don't listen to the music, I can be focus, I don't know, maybe because the atmosphere is different." (AZ-Participant 1).</p>	<p>RA realized that she liked learning in a quiet atmosphere</p> <p>"Because there are only three of us at home, so no one disturbs me when I have online class. I can be more focused when it's quiet, it's not crowded, when it's crowded, I cannot be focus, but when writing or answering questions I like doint it while listening to the music. I can't do it when it's too noisy or quiet either, just more comfortable." (RA-Participant 2).</p>

The data in table 2 reveal that student 1 and student 2 have different perceptions of self. Student 1 should struggle with online learning. However, with the help and encouragement from her teachers and friends, she felt that she would be able to succeed in online learning situations. Referring to the level of agency from Parry (2016), it can be figured out that in terms of belief in one's capability, student 1 belongs to the stage of the promising agency. Meanwhile, student 2 seems to be more confident about herself and she believed she could succeed in online learning situations. With this reference, student 2 can be considered to be in the agency stage.

Concerning love to learn or motivation, both participants have extrinsic motivation for learning English. Their behaviors of learning were driven by rewards (Legault, 2016). They are getting scores from the teacher and being able to pass the university entrance exam. The next element is resilience. Both students 1 and 2 can be considered to be in the agency stage, since they seem to be able to find alternatives to solve the problem they face. Student 1 found difficulties

asking for help from the teachers during online learning so she decided to do googling to search for the solution. Meanwhile, student 2 seemed to be a good time manager since she was able to stay calm although she got many tasks to do. In the case of learning style, both participants can tailor their learning situation suit to their learning style. They did some preparations before having a synchronuous meeting, for example, finding a comfortable seat or space for learning and preparing stationary and notebooks.

Overall, the two students share almost similar characteristics of students. The difference is in the belief in one's capacity. Student 1 remains in the level of promising agency while student 2 already sits on the stage of the agency.

The second research deals with the way how the student agency can help students Sustain their learning. To answer the question, the study held thorough observation of the 2 participants. The observations were conducted for 4 times over more than a month. While observing, an informal interview was also carried out to figure out the students' voice regarding their attitude towards

online learning. the result of the observation and interview are as follow:

*Table 3. Students' attitude to online learning*

Online learning	S1	S2
Preparation	She always washed her face and wore casual attire before having a synchronous learning.	She always washed her face and frequently wore a uniform.  "I just have to prepare myself, with my cellphone. In the past, usually from the evening before going to bed, books were prepared and assignments were also done, if there were any. I just study right at school"  "Just wear a uniform when ZOOM, so it's polite if zoom likes to turn on the camera."
While meeting online	She mostly attended the class without a camera on. Buts she always focused on listening to the teacher's explanation.  "The zoom camera was turned off because it was embarrassing right, at home like that. but if told to turn it on, turn it on.")	She often attended the class with the camera on dan always paid attention to the teacher's explanation  "When studying online, I often take notes on material, especially during zoom meeting"
Dealing with the task	During online learning, the teachers gave her a lot of tasks to do. She often had to struggle to finish the task on time.  "When I have a lot of work to do, something goes wrong, at most I ask permission to collect it late,..."  Besides, she also frequently has trouble comprehending the lesson  "In almost all of the lessons during online learning, I didn't understand the material."	The teachers gave her a lot of tasks to do. Therefore, she often felt stressful. However, she managed to do them by collaborating with her friend and handed in punctually Sometimes, she would work together with her friends to complete the tasks.  "Although I've never met, it's easy to mingle and get to know each other easily, I also like to join in when chatting in groups, and if I have trouble with a task, I like to ask my friends via personal chat, like to swap assignments, for example, I'm working on numbers 1 to 5, my friend number 6 to 10 ." Then, the completed tasks were sent over Google Classroom.
Perception about online learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She has more tasks to do during online learning  "At first I was surprised I didn't expect it, I was also happy to be on vacation from school, but after a while I got irritated with the constant work."</li> <li>The lesson seemed to be harder to comprehend  "In almost all of the lessons, during this online learning, I did not understand the material."</li> <li>"More teachers give assignments, explain a little, the rest we find out for ourselves. But that's how it should be, isn't it the learning method now?"</li> <li>She found it difficult to interact with the teacher  "Now, when I have questions, I have to send private chat to the teacher, whereas, when I want to ask questions, I'm sometimes awkward and afraid of being impolite. So I have my doubts."</li> <li>She often experienced trouble in terms of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are more assignment given during online learning. However, she managed to handle it  "So far, I could manage the time, although there're a lot of assignments"</li> <li>The bad signal often put her in trouble.  "The signal during zoom meetings was sometimes not audible clearly and intermittent."</li> <li>It is easier to get good score  "The score's better when it's online learning, I feel that my score got better."</li> <li>She can learn anywhere  "Sometimes, during online learning, it is more flexible and I can do my assignments anywhere."</li> </ul>

Online learning	S1	S2
	internet signal	
	"I don't have any problems with quotas, there's wifi. But I got some troubles when zoom meetings. Sometimes it's noisy or the signal is bad like that, in the end I asked my friend to discuss anything, or ask for permission to the teacher when it's getting bad."	

Table 3 above exhibits the findings from observation and interview. Referring to the gained data, it can be found that the participants share something in common. Yet, in terms of self-belief, there is a slight difference between S1 and S2. S1 appears to be in the promising agency stage while S2 is likely in the agency stage. S1 seems to be reliant on her friends. She needs her friend's words of encouragement to give her confidence.

"My close friends usually motivate me, when I got stuck with the assignments or problems, I just wondering whether I really can't do it or just being lazy." (S1)

On the other hand, S2 rarely asked her classmates for help.

"I don't ask my friend, because they don't understand either." (S2)

However, an apparent small difference in association to self-belief seems to have a significant impact on students' achievement. S1 who happens to be in the lower level than S2 in the case of belief in self capability sets short-term goals different from S2 who applies long-term goals for her learning.

S1 : "..., the important thing is that there get score from the assignments that I've done..."

S2 : "I want to get into a university through an invitation. So, I'm excited to learn. In the exam, try to get score more than 80."

This finding supports the theory from (Bandura, 2018) who pointed out the influence of agency on people feeling, thoughts, motivation, and behavior. In this case, the student's belief in their capacity enables them to organize their actions to produce the achievement that suit their wish and the students with a strong sense of self-efficacy will work harder, try longer, and overcome greater obstacles (Silver & Stafford, 2017).

Belief in oneself also seems to influence students' attitudes toward online learning. S1 who

is in the promising stage of the agency did not have adequate self-confidence to have meeting with the camera on. This is different from S2 who always sets the camera on while virtual learning.

S1 : "The zoom camera was turned off because I was embarrassing right, at home. but if I was told to turn it on, I'll turn it on")

S2 : "...when zoom meeting, I usually turn on my camera."

In line with this, the data found in this study support the theory from (Bandura, 2018) who pointed out the influence of agency on people feeling, thoughts, motivation and behavior. In this case, the student's belief in their capacity enables them to organize their actions to produce the achievement which suits their wish and the students with a strong sense of self-efficacy will work harder, try longer, and overcome greater obstacles (Silver & Stafford, 2017) and may have a higher level of goal.

The two participants show resilience when finding difficulties during virtual learning. Both always access google to find the solution to the problems they encounter during online learning. However, dealing with the task, the result of the interview reveals different ways of handling the task. S1 said that she has to struggle to do a lot of tasks given by the teachers even sometimes she failed to submit them punctually.

S1: "When I have a lot of work to do, and I couldn't finish it, I usually ask for teacher permission to collect it late,..."

Unlike S1, S2 collaborated with her friends to do a lot of tasks given by the teachers. So that she was able to submit the task on time.

S2 : "Even though I've never met before but I'm easy to *get along* with and get to know each other very well, I also like to join in when chatting in groups, and if I have problems with an assignment, I like to ask my friends via personal chat, like to exchange assignments, for example, I'm doing number 1to 5, my friend number 6

to 10. Then, the completed tasks were sent over Google Classroom.”

The data reveal that S2 who has a higher level of the agency has better alternatives in coping with the challenges in virtual learning compared with S1.

This finding goes online with Bandura (2018) who suggested students’ belief in their capacity allow them to organize their actions to gain the expected result. In this case, a student with a higher agency can overcome the obstacle by finding out the alternatives solution for the problems faced during online learning (Fauzi & Asri, 2022; Silver & Stafford, 2017b). While the with a lower agency tends to consider the problem herself, and when she knows that it is not going to work, she goes in search of an alternative by asking for tolerance from the teacher.

The result of the interview and observation illustrates the learning achievement of the participants. The participant with a level of agency in the belief of her capacity is likely to have self-confidence so that she liked to be on cam while learning, set long-term goals for learning, and find more alternatives in dealing with difficulties in learning. This is in line with the statement acknowledged by Vaughn *et al* (2020) that the student with strong self-perceptions and beliefs in their roles, they tend to have confidence and are capable of taking decisions and taking action in learning events. However, having agency is important as it helps them to direct their own learning and to adapt with new environments (Zeiser *et al.*, 2018).

On the other hand, the participant who is in the lower stage of agency seems to be insecure and needs encouragement from her surroundings. As the result, she felt uncomfortable being on camera during a synchronous meeting, set only short-term goals for learning, and ask for tolerance from teacher for the late submission. It is in line with the result of the study carried out by Luo *et al* (2019) that a low level of student agency led to lower performance and evaluation ratings also their attitude toward learning. Referring to the findings, it can be said that believing in one own capacity is the main element in mindset since it influences one’s attitude towards online learning, achievement in learning, and resilience concerning learning online.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study describes the student agency in sustaining student learning. The students’ agency involves a mindset which contains belief in one’s capacity, resilience, love of learning/motivation, and learning style. This research points out that belief in one’s capacity is likely to be the main element in mindset as this element influences one’s attitude towards learning online, achievement in learning, and resilience concerning learning online. Therefore, developing student agency can be started by believing in oneself.

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