

Students' Perceptions of Online Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali persepsi mahasiswa tentang pembelajaran online di tengah Pandemi Covid-19. Ada seratus lima puluh peserta yang menyelesaikan survei ini. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk memberikan jawaban atas dua pertanyaan penelitian; apa persepsi siswa tentang pembelajaran online? dan apa saja tantangan pembelajaran online yang dihadapi siswa?. Metode campuran digunakan dengan menggunakan kuesioner dan wawancara semi terstruktur sebagai instrumen penelitian untuk mengumpulkan data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Data dari kuesioner dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif, dan temuan wawancara dianalisis untuk mendukung temuan kuesioner. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa fleksibilitas dan penggunaan platform pembelajaran online adalah pengalaman positif siswa. Namun, pengalaman negatif siswa disebabkan oleh kurangnya pengaturan diri dan motivasi diri, gangguan rumah dan beban kerja masing-masing. Siswa juga menghadapi beberapa tantangan dalam pembelajaran online, seperti sinyal lemah dan biaya internet.

Kata Kunci: Persepsi, Pembelajaran Online, Pandemi Covid-19

Abstract

This study aims to explore students' perception about online learning amidst Covid-19 Pandemic. There were one hundred fifty participants that completed this survey. This research was conducted to provide the answers to the two research questions; what are students' perceptions of online learning? and what are the challenges of online learning faced by the students?. The mixed-method was used by administering a questionnaire and semi-structured interview as research instruments to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the interview findings were analyzed to support the findings of the questionnaire. The findings revealed that flexibility and use of online learning platforms were students' positive experiences. However, the students' negative experiences were caused by lack of self-regulation and self-motivation, home distractions and workloads respectively. Students also face some challenges in online learning, such as weak signal and internet costs.

Keywords: Perception, Online Learning, Covid-19 Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Classroom activities aim at providing an experience to improve students' communication skills. According to Huang & Hu (2016), classroom activities can engage students in the learning process, facilitate learning by doing, and practice their communication skills. These activities provide many benefits, such as giving immediate feedback to students and experimenting with a real environment model. However, due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, all face-to-face teaching and learning process were suspended.

Covid-19 is a contagious disease caused by the Corona Virus type that can attack anyone of all ages. Covid-19 was found in Wuhan, China, late December 2019. The virus is spreading so fast that it has spread to almost all countries, including Indonesia. Indonesia

was one of the countries that had been exposed to the virus between early March and June 27, 2020, with 52,812 positive cases confirmed across 34 provinces and 415 districts/municipalities (National COVID-19 Task Force, 2020 year).

As COVID 19 spread like fire in the forest. The government issued decree no 4 of 2020 of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Permenristekdikti 4/2020) concerning the prevention of Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) in the Education Guide, which aims to keep teaching and learning processes going on during the Covid-19 pandemic through online or distance learning. Distance learning is planned to be conducted until the end of the year. (CNN Indonesia, 2020).

Online learning is a form of distance education in which a course or program is intentionally designed to be delivered entirely online. Online learning has been proposed for years with little enthusiasm from universities, academics and students. Until the Covid-19 outbreak, the Indonesian government and universities had no choice but to make plans online. This situation has led to a shift in education from traditional classroom instruction to technology-based online instruction.

Online learning becomes a solution for students during the Covid-19 crisis pandemic. Almost all university universities has shifted to online-based education at this time. To prevent the spread of Novel novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) around the campus, Tadulako University (UNTAD) decided to changes its learning system into an online-based one, starting from March 15, 2020. Online learning is not a new thing for UNTAD. Some course subjects has had incorporated online learning previously.

Many recent studies showed that the online learning system is great because of its flexibility. The students can study at any time they want. They can access the virtual classroom through their computers instead of going to class physically. Nguyen (2015) stated that flexibility observed in web-based teaching is among the key reasons why there has been a higher demand for this approach. Learners, especially adults with multiple duties and tightly busy scheduled lives, can still attend online classes (Xu and Jaggars, 2013). Fitting conventional face -to -face classes in such tight busy schedules would have often been impossible. Another notable benefit of online learning is that it creates less distraction as compared to face-to-face learning. In a survey conducted by Kirtman (2009), 68% of online students argued that web-based classes positively impacted their education as their concentration was solely geared on their studies. One of the students argued that their focus is was only on class lessons and not on other non-academic related issues such as traffic, parking, and gas, among other items (Kirtman, 2009). However, the online learning implemented in Indonesia work differently from those in the developed countries. This is due to a lack of preparation in this country.

While the strengths of online learning are impressive, an online learning environment may not be appropriate for all students. There are issues of equity, as not all students have access to an Internet connection or electronic devices. Unlike in U.S where devices are distributed to students by schools and private companies. And also for an online student, a reliable internet connection is key. Low bandwidth and weak internet can affect how quickly they can connect and participate in class or even submitting their work.

However, the sudden shifts from face-to-face learning to distance learning at home as a short-term solution. A question has arisen on whether online classes are more effective than face-to-face learning. A number of studies on online learning versus face to face learning have had been conducted since the 2000s, and the results have always been that students prefer face to face classes.

Therefore, based on all the aforementioned, the researcher is interested in exploring how students perceive online learning during COVID-19 pandemic. Smart and Cappel (2006) noted that exploring student perceptions can help the instructors on the best way to encourage students to participate actively and be involved in the learning process, which effectively enhances students' learning and motivation. Students' perception plays a very important role in supporting the learning process in classroom activities. As stated by Dorman et al, (2006) Students learn better when they perceive the learning environment

positively. Thus, it is important to explore students' perceptions in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses. As with most teaching methods, online learning also has its own set of positivities and negativities. Understanding these positives and negatives will help English Education Study Program in creating strategies for more efficient delivery of the lessons.

Sekuler and Blake (2006) stated This perception is how a person (student) feels about a particular thing, whether conscious or unconscious, visual or auditory, and thoughts caused by brain processes. In other words, perception is what people think about what they think is real. This means that perception refers to how someone feels or thinks about a particular object.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed sequential explanatory mixed methods design where quantitative data (Questionnaire) informed the qualitative phase (interviews with students). Descriptive analysis was completed for the quantitative data and thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data.). The subject of this research is the third-year undergraduate students of English Education study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Tadulako University in academic year 2019/2020. Therefore the total population was 321 students. They were the students who participated in online learning for one semester.

Convenience sampling was used to select sample for the study. The researcher selects selected the sample according to their availability and willingness to participate. To collect the data, questionnaire and in-depth interview were used. The aim of the questionnaire was to explore students' perception about online learning. The questionnaire consisted of both close-ended and open-ended question. The close-ended question designed for the students consisted of 3 parts. In the first part of the survey, students were asked to enter their demographic details such as, age, describe their IT skills, and state whether they had previously participated in any type of e-learning. In the second part, Participants were asked to rate ten statements using a four-point Likert scale with the following values: (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree). A 4 point likert scale was used to force respondents to express a definite opinion. An open-ended question was included at the end of the questionnaire to collect additional comments about online learning. Second, the interview questions aim to get more information in order to complete and enrich the students' responses to the questionnaire.

The researcher distributed the online questionnaire to the students in the third semester of the academic year 2020/2021 from August 25th, 2020 to September 23rd, 2020. Each student was allowed to complete the questionnaire once. All respondents were fully informed about the objectives of the research and agreed to participate voluntarily. From the survey, only 100 responses were collected, making the response rate of approximately 31.15% of total students, which is sufficient enough to draw a meaningful conclusion.

After the questionnaire was returned to the researcher, the questionnaire was processed to find out the results. In each statement, the number of students who chose SA, A, D, or SD is calculated as a percentage. The following formula is used to calculate the percentage.

$$\text{Figure 1. The Percentage Formula} \quad \frac{\sum x}{\sum n} \times 100\%$$

Where:

$\sum x$ = the number of students that choose the same scale in each statement

$\sum n$ = total students

Then, the researcher found out the mean of each category was estimated to know whether the category is considered as positive or negative response. The criteria is presented in the following table

Table 1. Scale Score Criteria, adopted from (Pornel, Balinas, & Saldana 2011).

Score	Criteria
1.00 - 2.49	Negative
2.50 - 4.00	Positive

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The first part of the questionnaire asked a number of demographic questions such as gender, age, technology skills, a number of courses they enrolled in the second semester, and so on. A majority of the students who took the survey were in the age groups of 19 to 23 years, 34% were male while 64 % were female students. The researcher asked the students whether they had participated in types of e-learning before the pandemic. Most of the students had not participated in online classes previously. In terms of internet access, 58 % of respondents said they have WiFi Broadband at home, while 37% are using mobile data package. Talking about mobile data packages, the average student will spend approximately IDR100.000-IDR200.000 on mobile data and IDR350.000-500.000 for WiFi broadband.

With this sudden shift from face – to - face learning to online learning. A lot of online platforms emerged to facilitate the student in distance education. Most platforms used by the students are Whatsapp, Zoom, and Google Classroom. 86% of the students chose Whatsapp to communicate with the lecturers, 84% chose Zoom for virtual classroom, 78% chose Google classroom to access the material, textbook, and submit their assignments. The second part asked the participants to rate ten statements using 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The responses to the questions are shown in the table below;

Table 2. Questionnaire results

Statements	Strongly agree ④	Agree ③	Disagree ②	Strongly disagree ①
Participate actively in class discussions	18.7 %	19.3%	60.7%	1.3 %
Convenience and flexibility	20%	59.3%	13.3%	7.4%
Struggling with time management	20.7 %	63.3%	10.7%	5.3%
Having internet connection issues during online class.	27.3 %	58.7%	11.3%	2.7%
Increased workload.	48%	43.3%	7.3%	1.3%
The lecturer was accessible and easy to reach outside the online class	3.3%	57.3%	36.7%	2.7%
Home environment is suitable for participating online class	9.3%	37.3%	44.7%	8.7%
The lecturer engages the students to participate actively in a class discussion	4%	49.3%	42.7%	4%
Online learning require most cost compared to face-to-face classes	37.3 %	50%	12.7%	0%
I prefer online learning to face to face learning.	0%	21.3%	46.7%	32%

DISCUSSION

Positive aspects of online learning as experienced by students

Overall, the data showed that students gave various responses toward online learning. Participants indicated most agreements (including strong agreements) with statements on convenience and flexibility of online learning. They stated that flexibility is the reason why they like online learning because they can study anytime, anyplace, anywhere. In terms of any time, they can study in the morning, afternoon, or even in the middle of the night. Anywhere, Students can participate in online classes from anywhere as long as they have devices and an internet connection. This is in line with the previous researchers stating that convenience and flexibility are the reason for students opting for an online program rather than on campus . (Hokanson& Hooper, 2000; Anderson, 2002; Wang, 2009). Flexible learning provides students with full control and accountability for their learning. Rather than having to show up to a class as a requirement, they can decide and allocate time for their learning.

Furthermore, the survey results indicated that they felt that using an online learning platform such as Google Classroom during their learning process is effective as it saves time and effort. They also consider online learning to be environmentally friendly as it saves paper for assignments and they get feedback directly from the instructor. With Google Classroom, all participants, including students and instructors, are in one place. Students can view all their assignments in a specific folder without worrying about losing documents or because they are all stored on the drive. Gunawan and Sunarman (2018) also revealed in their study that 88% of Indonesian vocational schools adopted Google Classroom. Learning with Google Classroom has the potential to enhance the problem solving skills of students

Negative aspects of online learning as experienced by students

While students enjoyed the flexibility and convenience of online learning has, they also It is important to remember that they must take some responsibility for their own learning. Due to the freedom and convenience of online learning, students have high expectations for self-motivation to succeed. As research has shown, motivation to learn is one of the key factors affecting student performance and learning, especially success in online learning (Cole, Field & Harris, 2004; Ryan, 2001). When a student cannot control himself, he/she may miss assignment deadlines or even exam dates. Several students missed the deadline for one of the exams. They had to keep in touch with their tutors to get the chance to make up their exams. But the lecturer will not accept any excuse. Participants in the study spent their time doing housework, babysitting and helping their parents with farming. As classes move online, sometimes they forget they have an online class. However, participants realized that they needed to control and motivate themselves.

This present study also indicated that students do not actively participate in the class discussions. Students act more as listeners and less to speak out in the online class. Sleeping, going to washrooms frequently, eating, or drinking are few common behaviours that occurred in online class which makes students not paying attention during online classes. When the teacher asks them about their ideas or opinions about the topic. Some students disconnecting their WiFi to avoid answering a question and blaming it on a poor connection. Participating in class is an important part of understanding the material. Hence, self-discipline is important during this crisis. According to Gorbunovs et al, (2016) self-discipline is the key factor which influences learners and allows them achieving main goals.

Students were also queried about their feelings regarding the assignment. Many students complained about the assignment, many students have claimed that they were being given a heavier workload now than they did when they were face-to-face classroom. 91 percent of students said they had too much homework. Too much homework can cause students to experience stress. Students are often stressed about how well they do on their homework, particularly because homework factored into students' grades.

Most of the student claimed that home environment is not suitable for participating in online class. Most of the students agreed that home environment is not suitable for participating online class. There are countless distractions while learning at home such as a passing vehicles, a sibling playing in the background, It can be tough for students to stay

focused because their home is not conducive to learn. This may negatively affect their ability to concentrate on school work. According to Sander et al, (2018), physical environment can significantly influence cognition, emotions, and behavior. This can affect your decision-making and your relationships with others. Working surrounded by clutter for example can have negative effects such as increasing your stress levels and hurting your concentration.

The challenges students face during online learning

On the interview, students were asked to describe their greatest challenge in learning from their course after it moved online. Many responses to this question as follows;

“The greatest challenge was finding the motivation to get out of bed and complete assignments”[Interview with Student DD on september 26th 2020]

“A couple time we face some issues because of the quality of internet connection.”

The negative impact of online learning is being felt by students today. Many students are restless with this condition, and they hope that this condition will end soon. Online learning has several challenges for students, such as Poor internet connectivity and cost of internet.

In the COVID-19 era, life has moved to the internet, but not everyone has it. Many students came from rural areas which are not provided with strong internet connection having trouble when trying to participate in online class.

“Weak signal making hard to participate in virtual classroom. Not all areas are located in areas that have good signal, not all student's residence are located in cities, and there are many students who live in rural areas” [Interview with Student ANA on September 26th 2020]

And several students go to a high place to get a proper signal so that they could attend classes or submit their assignments.

“Yes weak signal is the only problem, sometimes I go to high place in search for better internet signal” [Interview with Student RPA on September 29th 2020]

To overcome this problem, some students rely on whatsapp group where their lecturers send the material. There is also a moment experiencing the student while attending online classes through Zoom meetings when their Wi-Fi is spotty and cannot understand what the lecturer said.

“i don't even understand the lecturer because of the Internet problems. Sometimes the sound goes off”. [Interview with Student SS on October 23th 2020]

Lack of internet access can affect students' academic performance. For example, one of the students says she has a problem submitting their work because of a weak signal that causes her to turn in late, and her lecturer won't accept the assignment.

“Ever since the internet has been essential during the covid-19 outbreak. Almost everyone using it make internet speeds slow down. A couple of times I had trouble submitting my homework”. [Interview with Student DA on September 16th 2020]

Lack of internet access in rural areas challenges for students to study online amid COVID-19 pandemic. The cost of the internet is yet another challenge that online students face. Previous research has investigated that e-learning can reduce costs due to a variety of reasons. For example, there is no cost for gasoline, meal cost, and printing cost. That is true, but it works only in normal circumstances. the problem now is that many parents' income is decreasing during the pandemic. Many costs come with studying from homes, such as higher electricity bills and internet costs. The average students spend IDR100.000-IDR200.000 on mobile data packages and IDR350.000-500.000 for Wi-Fi broadband.

“For mobile data packages, I spend IDR 200.000 per month because doing video conferencing such zoom requires high bandwidth.”

Since their parents' incomes being affected during pandemic. Some student cannot afford the cost of the internet

“I came from low-income families and the presence of Covid-19 even makes it harder. I cannot afford mobile data packages so I go to my friend house to use their Wi-Fi”

According to Communication and Information Technology Minister Johnny, the government has allocated a whopping IDR 1.9 trillion (around \$128.4 million) for internet data

subsidies provided by telecommunication companies. Students and instructors will soon receive an internet subsidy for their online classes for the next four months to support distance learning amidst COVID-19 Pandemic. However, such assistance cannot be enjoyed by students who live in rural areas which have unstable signals.

Students were asked for their perceptions of online vs. face-to-face courses. Most of the students still prefer face to face learning over online learning. here are some of the students' answers:

"Absolutely face to face learning, it's impossible to focus when you're lying on your bed and you don't even have to turn on the camera on". [Interview with Student SS on October 23rd 2020]

These findings indicated that that some students learn better when they are in a face- to - face classroom. Online learning makes it harder for students to learn, though. had its positives and negatives from students' perspective. Understanding these will help English Education Study Program creating strategies for more efficient delivery of the lessons and measuring their effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has created greatest disruption to the education system. This research aims to find out students' experiences of the transition from face-to-face to e-learning. After discussing and analysing the data, the researcher drew conclusions about students' perception on online learning.

Regarding to the first research question, it was found that most of the students had positive perception of online learning. The positive aspect that students feel with online learning is that they can listen at home, that place does not limit them, they can listen anytime, anywhere, and are not limited by time or space. And also the findings indicated that they perceive that using online learning platforms in the learning process is effective since it saves time and effort. The students' negative experiences were caused by lack of self-regulation and self-motivation, home distractions and workloads. Despite the positive aspect of e-learning has. Students also face some challenges in online learning, such as weak signal and internet costs. The study depicts that e-learning has its benefits and weaknesses from a student's perspective.

The experiences in this study may differ between students who have experienced different semesters of teaching. Therefore, the perception of students over several periods of time during emergency distance learning should be examined. In addition, this study has a limited number of students, so it does not reflect the experiences of all students. Because this study was conducted in Tadulako University especially 2019 batch student of English Education Study Program, the results do not take into account online learning that occurs at other university.

The researcher suggests that future researchers can research instructors' perceptions of online learning. Thus, we can find out what obstacles are instructors faced during online learning. Therefore, it can improve the quality of e-learning. The findings could also help course designers better understand creating strategies for more efficient delivery of the lessons and measuring their effectiveness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the second-year students in the 2019/2020 academic year at the Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Tadulako, Palu. Who have actively participated in this study.

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