

Commonly Encountered Online EFL Learning from the Perspective of Students at PSDKU MBD

Christian Albert Lewier ^{1*}, Fredy Meyer ²

*Corresponding Email: albertlewier14@gmail.com

^{1,2}English Education Study Program, Pattimura University, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore students' perception on problems and issues they encountered during the implementation of online learning. Students who live in remote areas at PSDKU MBD UNPATI were frequently subject to unprecedented hardship in online study. This study employed qualitative descriptive research design where the data was collected through interview, observation and documentation. The result show that although they enjoyed online learning, these students expressed some challenges they faced in online teaching and learning process. The challenges were ranged from infrastructure to digital literacy. They stated that infrastructure factor has been the greatest challenge in their online learning activities. Lack of opportunities to interact with their lecturers have caused ineffectiveness in knowledge gain. These students also sounded the urgent needs for capacity building in regards to technology and digital literacy. These EFL learners are also facing the daunting dual task of learning the material while sharpening their digital capacity. The students who predominantly come from diverse remote areas in Southwest Maluku region are known to be less fortunate as compared to their counterpart students in main campus in Ambon city who have better teaching and learning facilities. Implication borne in the study will be further discussed in this study.

Keywords: *Perception, problems, EFL learner, online learning, remote areas.*

INTRODUCTION

One obvious sign that human activities have been forced to change is the implementation of online learning in education sector where teaching and learning activity must be held in online mode. Nowadays even after the pandemic has long gone, the online learning seemed to be one of the teaching learning modes preferred by lecturers and students according to their needs and situation. Online learning or e-learning is a rapidly growing pedagogic mode that supports the flexibility of users who are beyond the constraints of time and place (Njonge, 2023; Prabowo et al., 2024; Sandi Sukandi, 2022). Online learning or e-Learning can be defined as process of learning that involves the use of gadgetry and requires internet connection to deliver lesson or conduct the teaching and learning activities. It is evident that e-learning has changed from a completely online course to utilizing technology to deliver part or all of the course beyond the time and space limitation.

The recent shifting from conventionally 'face-to-face' teaching and learning to virtual classroom activities has taken place within which some concern from various parties were arouse (Enyoojo et al., 2024; Nur et al., 2023). Despite the myriad advantage this technology-driven teaching platform may offer, it still has certain shortcomings. Teachers, school administrators, students and parents alike, cannot escape the drawbacks of online learning. Students, for example, who notably come from various social and economic background with different economic and social status, have been reportedly fragile for the online learning (Wei et al., 2023). Problem arises from the virtual learning activities range from health to social aspects. Frequent exposure to blue light from mobile phone known to have bad impact on young people eyesight.

Learning online is even harder for students who live in remote and isolated areas such as in Southwest Maluku Regency or Maluku Barat Daya (MBD) in Maluku Archipelago, in Indonesia. Located in isolation hundreds of miles away from the provincial capital, this area is covered by vast seawater that at times create difficulties to its inhabitant to go out, or for visitors to get in. To cater the students' needs, lecturers from main campus were assigned to visit the region and teach the students there. All this had to change due to the pandemic situation, and online learning was then implemented within which some problematic issues are inevitably encountered (Hidayat et al., 2024; Sandi Sukandi, 2022; Tsang et al., 2021). Some challenges linked to learner isolation, frustration, pressure, extra expenses, health issues, and increased exposure to cyber bullying and online violence are the effects students may encounter in online learning. This current study tries to identify the actual condition happens in the research site by posing two research questions. What are the common challenges and problematic issues faced by students during the implementation of online learning and how do the students cope with the hardship of online learning at PSDKU MBD UNPATI.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The online learning or distant learning has been a trend in education realm and was in its peak during the pandemic outbreak in recent years. Before the pandemic or even aftermath of the pandemic, the online learning still holds an essential role in teaching and learning practices. Many studies have shown that distant or online learning have been beneficial for education practitioners as it offers flexibility in usage and is cost efficient. Online learning can be done in various places and within flexible timeframe. It provides cost efficiencies for the administration of its implementation, efficiency in the provision of facilities to learn as well as cost efficiency for expenditures as it require no transportation costs and needs. The online-learning gives flexibility in choosing the time and place. Furthermore, online learning provides opportunities for students

to independently hold the entire procession in the learning process. Online learning offers a myriad of advantages that can be evaluated by technical, social and economic criteria.

Additionally, online learning has its pedagogical merit, leading to different ways of conceiving knowledge generation and acquisition. Online learning increases access to learning and training opportunities, provides increased opportunities for updating, retraining and personal enrichment, improves cost effectiveness of educational resources, supports the quality and variety of existing educational structures, enhances and consolidates capacity. Distant learning is convenient because many of the technologies are easily accessible from home. Many forms of distance learning provide students the opportunity to participate whenever they wish, on an individual basis, because of distance learning flexibility. This kind of education is quite affordable, as many forms of online learning involve little or no cost.

Distant learning can offer increased interactions with students. In particular, introverted students who are too shy to ask questions in class will often “open up” when provided an opportunity to interact via e-mail or other individualized means. Online learning can balance inequalities between age groups, geographical expansion of education access, delivering education for large audiences, offering the combination of education with work or family life, etc. If in a confined classroom the number of students cannot be more than thirty as would create noise, online learning may accommodate hundreds of pupils in one class, provide opportunities for teachers to have more time preparing. In addition, due to the frequent use of online media, as Bali and Liu (2018) points out, students may become innovative in learning.

While the above-mentioned studies have shown the strength side or the benefits of the online learning mode in education sector, this learning mechanism is not without weak points or drawbacks. Several studies reveals that the geographical condition in diverse parts in Indonesia has caused ‘discrepancies’ in accessing internet service (Nabilah, 2020). From health side, studies have shown the exposure to high internet usage affect the health of students. Not to mention, ability of low income-parents to provide educational facilities for their children to participate in online learning has been an issue (Kusuma, 2022; Sandi Sukandi, 2022).

With the rise of concern of online learning, the teaching must be based on some essential consideration. If not considered cautiously, as argued by Yan (2020) academic failures might occurred and it is already happened when online learning conducted ineffectively. Teachers should bring into account their role in teaching online as to provide knowledge effectively through online media and affectively impact the online learners. The online teacher has role related to the process pertaining to learning, information storage, memory, thinking and problem solving. An online teacher must be able to act as manager where he would create and provide safe and conducive

online class atmosphere to every student. He supposedly to be clever and tactful in distributing and share tasks among his pupil as to create fairness and equality. Daniel (2020) asserts that teaching should provide variation as to attract students attention and motivation to learn, especially in online platform. Scales of adaptation and differentiation within the approach should be used to better differentiate between different learners (Gillett-Swan, 2017). In an online teaching, similar to any conventional teaching mode, the teacher should be able to maintain his affective role. It is imperative that online teacher behave appropriately as to exert good example for his students.

Providing good example of interaction or influencing students to properly interact with other students and the online classroom atmosphere is crucial to effective online teaching and learning. Furthermore, the online teacher has managerial role in which he should be capable in planning the online course, organizing it, leading the online learning process carefully and fully in control of the 'traffic'. Certainly, the challenges that teachers face is quite heavy because teachers must be able to have creativity in developing attractive teaching strategies in online learning. Additionally, teachers are required to be able to choose the right and user-friendly media in the online learning process from the many available online learning alternatives to suit the needs of the students. It is essential to realize that online learning should be addressed tactfully to fulfill the learning aspects such as process knowledge, moral, skills, intelligence and aesthetics. While educators are urged to constantly evaluate effectiveness and adaptability of online learning needs.

While students have certain role to be played in order to achieve effective teaching and learning in an online platform.

Following is the list of the role the students may have in online learning.

1. Students use appropriate technology to interact collaboratively with each other and teacher, and use feedback and consultation to develop and refine knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
2. Students are self-responsible for their own learning. They should decide what they want to learn, establish their goal, research and develop their subject.
3. Students research current data to answer questions and solve problems
4. Students learn to solve problems by assessment, data collection, and developing and implementing strategies using relevant information.
5. Students identify communication barriers, their causes, and solutions.
6. Students promote life-long learning and know how to access and use information when instruction is finished.

The following were the common challenges faced by students and lecturers during online learning:

1. Technical issues with the use of technology.
2. Students' Low Motivation in Learning Process.
3. Students have difficulties to adjust to the learning schedule.
4. Unsupportive Environment.
5. Data privacy.

Dhawan (Dhawan, 2020) discusses several solutions to problems associated with online education. The solutions may include pre-recording video lessons or lectures; humanizing the learning process by making it more interesting, dynamic, and interactive; creating forums for communication using social media and other digital platforms; continuously improving the quality of the online courses; allowing students to ask questions and provide feedback; and promoting collaborative learning, project-based learning, and group-based learning.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. The research was conducted at English Education Study Program, Pattimura University PSDKU MBD which is located on Jl. Kampung Babar, Tiakur, Kabupaten Maluku Barat Daya (MBD).

Research Site and Participants

Initial step taken was a preliminary study, in which the researchers observed the problematic situation in research site and decided to examine the condition. Researchers took 6 students of English Education study Program PSDKU FKIP UNPATTI MBD in academic year of 2022 as the informants in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this step, the researchers collected the data by using interview, observation and documentation (Lodico et al., n.d.). After collecting the data, in this step the writers identified and described the data regarding the challenges and problems experienced by the students. At a later stage, the researchers made classification of the data and then synthesized the suggested solution offered by the students for better and effective implementation of online learning.

The process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions were sorted for analysis. In this process, the researcher tried to reduce the data that suit the nature of the study. Data display is the second element of Miles and Huberman's model of qualitative data analysis. It is an organized, compressed

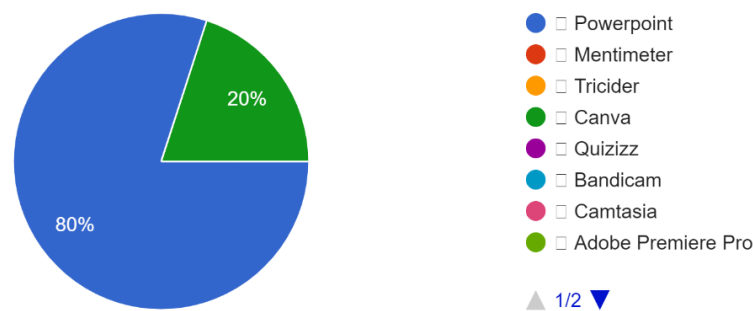
assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action. The data that had been reduced were organized and compressed. After reducing and displaying the data, the researchers drew conclusion and conducted verification. Drawing conclusion involves stepping back to consider what the analyzed data mean and to assess their implications for the existing questions. Moreover, verification involves revisiting the data as many times as necessary to verify the emergent conclusions. In this last step, the researchers made some conclusions based on their findings.

FINDINGS

Six students participated in this study. Their accommodation ranged from own houses, stay with their relatives, while four students stay in boarding houses (*kost*). These student parents' occupation are fisherman and farmers, even they identified their parents' job as odd jobs or even jobless. Only one stated that his parent is a civil servant or PNS. In terms of ownership of gadgetry to assist these students in the process of online learning all the participant students reported that they own HP Android. Three people have their own laptop, two have personal computer desktop and one student has an *ipad*. None of them reported to have tablet or other gadgetry differ from the ones that have been mentioned. When asked about various application and platform that they have been using, the two most frequent platform used in the online learning are Google meet and Zoom web conference tool. All of the students agreed that these two platforms have been used frequently by lecturers to deliver the lesson. Follows in the second place is *WhatsApp* and Google classroom. Some reported the use of Canvas platform as the third most used platform in online learning they have had. Microsoft teams and e-learning have been the least used tool during online learning. While in their experience, these students never used platform or application such as *padlet*, *schoology*, *tricider*, *telegram*, or *edmodo*.

The result of the study reveals that not all of these students are digital native despite the fact that they are included in the category of millennial who supposedly to have special capacity in technology. All of them are not fluent in the application and platforms such as Canva for presentation. Although Power point has been a common presentation tool, there are still couple of these students who are not able or are not fluent in working with the power point. The interactive application for online learning such as *Mentimeter*, *Tricider*, *Quizizz*, *Bandicam*, *Camtasia*, *Adobe Premiere Pro*, etc. are found to be unfamiliar tool to these students.

Figure 1. Students' familiarity to various Application and platforms for online learning



The result on the perceptions towards online learning at the English Education Study Program PSDKU FKIP of Pattimura University in Maluku Barat Daya (MBD) was revealed in terms of challenges and constrains that prevent them from participating in the online course satisfactorily. The challenges have been in various forms according to the experience of the students. They are ranging from the limited internet quota to the low affordable capacity to buy the internet data packet. Half of the number of the students expressed their incompetency to afford internet package for assisting them in online learning.

Result of the Interview

The objective of this research is to find out students' perception on the challenges and problems during online learning. Six participants DS, IM, HI, LA, PW and SA said that they enjoyed on line learning during pandemic situation. Some excerpts from the students are as follow:

"In my opinion we had to enjoy the online learning despite many challenges. We have difficulties getting very smooth internet connection. In my place it is expensive to buy data package. Sometimes I cannot afford it. I'm not rich" [Student DS]

I had difficulties understand lecturers when attending online class. I can hardly listen to the lecturers' voice. [Student LA].

When asked about their 'coping mechanism' to minimize the negative impact of challenges during online learning the students sometimes had to work together. They had to ask their peers when there is something that they do not understand during the online learning. They rarely able to ask for clarification to the lecturers due to psychological barrier. They felt shy or reluctant to ask the lecturer directly.

“I frequently had to attend online class by sitting next to my fellow students so I can ask them whenever I can understand something. I just too shy to ask directly to the lecturers” [Student SA].

“I felt bored sometimes and always felt sleepy during online learning. I did not find variation in learning and teaching online so far” [Student PW].

From the interview results based on the question, “Based on your experience, what are the factors that disturb you most during online learning? The interviewees reflected that there are so many disturbing factors such as quality of sound. The visual problem and many more. Sometimes they had to walk to campus to get signal just to find that the lecture was canceled.

“Sometimes I had to walk long distant try to get some internet connection. It was annoyed that the lecturers had to cancel the class on short notice. I can use that time working instead of wasting it. I have side (odd) job” [Student IM]

If you have to choose between online learning and offline learning, which one do you prefer? Give reason. This item gets almost unison feedback from the students that although they have no serious issues regarding the implementation of online learning, they would prefer to have offline face to face class.

What would you suggest to improve online learning at PSDKU MBD? This question was responded by the students by stating various thought.

“I think if we should learn better there should be coordination between various parties. Local authority should provide very good internet connection. They should build cooperation with internet provider to provide fast internet for us”. [Student IM].

“Electricity frequently went on and off. It is so annoying. PLN should provide good service so we can learn and work safely” [Student SA].

“We should get more training on technology mastery as well as the lecturers so we can learn better and the teachers can teach better with a lot of variation using various application and platforms. Thus, we can be happy and motivated to learn” [Student PW].

DISCUSSION

Online learning during Covid-19 has obviously brought about many challenges for educators, students, school administrators, and parents. The challenges have been associated with limited technological infrastructure, socio-economic factors, lack of experience to conduct

assessment and supervision in an online mode, etc. Adedoyin & Soykan (2020) as cited in Sukandi (2022) brought up the issue of extra workload for teachers and education staff, and incompatibility with some specific subject matters or cultures, add to the hardship of these stakeholders. There are also other challenges linked to learner feeling of isolation, frustration, pressure, extra expenses, health issues, and increased exposure to cyber bullying and online violence (Daniel, 2020; Gillett-Swan, 2017; Nur et al., 2023).

In accordance with the finding of many studies such as above, the following were the common challenges faced by students during online learning at English Education Study Program, PSDKU UNPATTI. First issue as stated by the participants in this study regarding the technology or digital literacy. A mastery in technology aspect has been part of concern to most of teachers and students. Within the implementation of online class that deals with the use of technology, there are various problem and concern experienced by teachers, lecturers and students. Several technical issues in using technology in their online classes have been identified through several studies. The current study has confirmed previous findings of some other studies. Among the issues were the bad internet connection, unstable internet network, limited data package as well as unsupported gadgets (Enyoojo et al., 2024; Herliandry & Nurhasanah, Maria Enjelina Suban, 2020; Rahimi, 2024; Shahbodin et al., 2024). People are experiencing technical difficulties because of the high usage rate of online learning systems, video streaming software, and other digital tools. The platforms are overloaded: poor quality video and audio, internet problems. Internet connection is either unstable or the current data plan is not enough to cover the progressive e-learning needs.

Students' low motivation in learning process was listed as the next challenge perceived by the students in English Education PSDKU MBD, were their motivation which was sometimes not sufficiently high to participate in their online classes. Many of them stated that lack of variation in online teaching and the lesson tend to be monotonous. This has resulted in students feeling bored or uninterested toward learning. This in turn create gap in language learning process. Other challenges which come from students, that is time management, students are difficult to adjust to the learning schedule. Another point is lack of interaction between students and lecturer that can influence the students in understanding the material.

Another challenge emerged from the findings were the unsupportive environments. As the learning took place at students' houses the situations were not as supportive as those in the university. The crowd, the noise, and the parents' requests to help with the household chores disturbed the online learning. From the very beginning of school shutdown, teachers and students have been connected using multiple digital tools without paying attention to the amount, and nature of the personal data they collect. Reaching the main objective of a quick transition to online

learning, they had to neglect their privacy, especially when large e-learning software suppliers offer temporary free subscription plans. The recent case of Zoom, a remote conference services company that has appeared to store all video conference recordings on storage space without a password, proves they have to thoughtfully approach choosing the digital tools for online learning delivery.

CONCLUSION

As the aim of this study is to know students' perception of online learning, some conclusion can be drawn in regards to the challenges and problematic issues faced by students during the implementation of online learning or distant learning policy at PSDKU English Study Program. The result of this study shows that, there are still some hidden problematic issues that need to be seriously addressed by concerned parties. Student participants reveal the underlying needs in technology literacy while expecting that the lecturers need to build their capacity in technology mastery. This is perceived by the students as an alternative to create more engaging and interactive learning in online class. In regards to second research question of this study, the researchers have to admit that due to some factors, a comprehensive package in understanding this coping mechanism have not been sufficiently addressed. Thus, further research should necessarily be taken by future researchers. Through this simple study, all parties and stakeholders have to realize the condition of the students thus, some steps to overcome the problematic issues in PSDKU MBD can be overcome. Lecturers, local authority, internet provider should then work closely side by side to answer this issue. As the online learning has become a trend and will likely to persist, the mastery of technology and ability to operate the gadget and all the online application is surely required. Lastly, this study was done amidst various limitation, thus the result may be subject to bias or other validity indicators. However, the researchers hope that this simple study may be act as a foundation to do more comprehensive study regarding similar issue.

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