

# Is the online learning good in the midst of Covid-19 Pandemic?

## The case of EFL learners

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the learners' perception on online learning in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic. This research applied qualitative method. The subject of this research are the learners of English study program of UKI Toraja. The instrument used is semi-structured interview. Thus the pandemic of covid-19, the researcher interviewed the learners by calling them by using WhatsApp application. A thematic analysis was employed in the current study. The study showed that the learners' perception on online learning reveals that it is good in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. They perceived online learning is very helpful in the middle of pandemic. This study not only report that online learning is good in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic but also spotted the light on the availability of internet access, financial issue, and online learning implementation. At the learners' condition in terms of financial issue, they hope that lecturers make use of facilities such as free Messenger application in Online Learning System. In the light of the availability of internet access, they said that individual tasks are better to keep the distance physically due to pandemic, they need group tasks to help friends who do not have an internet pulse and access. About the implementation, they hope that material and assignment must be preceded by explanation. Thus, they recommended that Voice Note will be effectively used when giving instructions. It implied that the material and instruction implemented by the lecturer in the online learning were not easy to use.

**Keywords:** *learners' perception, online learning, COVID-19 pandemic, EFL learners*

### Introduction

There are a number of studies on online learning so far especially in the ESL Context for the most part. However, none of the studies was conducted in the EFL Context especially in terms of Learners' perception on the use of online learning amid covid-19 pandemic. Pandemic COVID-19 has a massive impact on global human life. In fact, according to a report made by Suminar (2020) pandemic the Covid-19 could make the global economy shrink to one percent in 2020, and could contract further if the restriction of economic activity was extended without adequate fiscal response. Furthermore, according to estimates, locking in Europe and North America is hitting the service sector with a harsh, especially industry involving physical interactions such as retail, recreational and hospitality trading and transportation. Collectively, such industries cover more than a quarter of all jobs in these countries. In Indonesia, the impact on the economic field is also the same problem. As delivered by the Indonesian Treasury ministers quoted from CNN-Indonesia (2020) that Covid-19 has not been addressed, the spread is still increasing and its impact to the heavy economy. The impact on finance will continue to be heavier. Sri Mulyani as cited from (CNN-

Indonesia, 2020) claims to formulate economic measures to suppress the impact of the corona virus, and based on the budget of 2020, then the refocusing and reallocate steps will be in accordance with the presidential decree IV/2020.

Pandemic COVID-19 was felt also by the world of education. Rajab (2020) as the director of Ma'had and Islamic Studies Tazkia International Islamic Boarding School, Malang quoted from *detikNews* reveals that the effects of the Corona Virus is now also perceived by the education world. This has been recognized by the United Nations education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on Thursday (5/3), that Corona virus outbreak has impacted the education sector. Nearly 300 million students interrupted their school activities around the world and threatened their future education rights. The previous day, 13 countries including China, Italy, and Japan had closed schools around the country in an attempt to stop the spread of the virus. It affects nearly 290 million students. Most of the students come from China. Across the country, including Hong Kong and Macao-specific administration areas, more than 233 million students are not schools due to viruses. It was followed by the Japanese, which had nearly 16.5 million students moved. In Indonesia, the educational world also feels its impact. A wide range of comparative Foreign Studies Program activities (overseas) should be cancelled. Our own school, Tazkia IIBS Malang, had to cancel some important activities abroad, such as the Arab language debate race in Singapore that should be held mid-February canceled by local authorities. This is done after the level of spreading of Corona virus in Singapore rises from yellow level to orange level. Another activity is the comparative study of overseas to Japan which should depart at the beginning of March to be canceled.

Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja, as one of the campuses in *LLDikti IX*, is very responsive to respond to this pandemic and took steps related to prevention of COVID-19 transmission by eliminating the activities on campus in the middle of pandemic. Officially, through the circular letter of the rector of UKI Toraja No.: 60/UKI/P/III/2020 that as of March 17-31, 2020 the study at UKI Toraja continues to run via online learning by utilizing E-campus facilities or other forms. Furthermore, because this pandemic is not yet ended, then through circular letter of the rector of UKI Toraja No.: 66/UKI/P/III/2020 carried out the extension of the activities of the online learning process until April 30, 2020.

Learning activities that were previously done by the face to face method in the classroom switched to the online learning system. The concept of social distancing, and physical distancing requires everyone to stay home so that the spread of this virus is not expanding. Thus, both lecturers and students are expected to remain at home and still carry out their duties and responsibilities. Creative and innovative, lecturers are required to keep teaching to keep students informed of proper education and teaching. Through the use of E-Campus application and other applications, the UKI Toraja lecturers continue to perform teaching tasks by interacting online with students. That interaction by inputting lecture materials into e-campus applications, providing assignments, online discussions, and review of the learning process.

With the changing models from face to face learning to online learning brings out different perceptions from various parties. There are some advantages and disadvantages of this kind of learning model, so it has an impact on achieving the purpose of learning itself. Smart and Cappel (2006) examines learner' perceptions of integrating online components in two undergraduate business courses where learners completed online learning modules prior to class discussion. The results indicate that participants in an elective course rated the online modules significantly better

than those in a required course. Overall, participants in the elective course rated the online modules marginally positive while those in the required course rated them marginally negative. While, (Swan, 2019) in her report says that recent trends in usage away from “distance education” and towards “e-Learning” may be marginalizing distant learners. Thompson makes a strong argument for the power of language to shape our thoughts and her observations clearly deserve reflection.

In order to avoid that claims, Sun and Chen (2016) provide practical suggestions for those who are planning to develop online courses so that they can make informed decisions in the implementation process. Based on the findings, the authors argued that effective online instruction is dependent upon 1) well-designed course content, motivated interaction between the instructor and learners, well-prepared and fully-supported instructors; 2) creation of a sense of online learning community; and 3) rapid advancement of technology. In doing this, it is hoped that this will stimulate an on-going discussion of effective strategies that can enhance universities and faculty success in transitioning to teach online. Holmes and Gardner (2006) sums up that by noting that the ability of e-learning to assess the learners or learners as they learn, and at the same time increasing their experiences in education, by way of interactivity suitable to community education, cultural diversity and globalization, and eradicating boundaries of place and time. To them the most vital characteristics as well as advantage of e-learning in education is that it centers on the learners.

There were several researcher had conducted the research related to students' perception on online learning. Popovici and Mironov (2014) find that it becomes quite obvious that students are deeply aware of the changes brought over by the digital technologies, by their impact on the learning process. Related on gender perspective, Keller and Cernerud (2002) shows that male students, students with previous knowledge of computers and students with positive attitudes to new technologies were all less positive to e-learning on campus than other students. While, Eldeeb (2014) investigates that students preferred mixed mode and web supplemented courses rather than a web dependent course or fully online courses. About the advantages of e-learning, Mislinawati and Nurmasyitah (2018) shows that the students perceived the e-learning web-based module to be useful in improving their understanding, independence, self-discipline, motivation to learn, and interactions with each other and with the teacher. And, Mamattah (2016) show that majority of the students think e-learning is an innovative idea and must be encouraged, however, few concerns such as the fear of employers' discrimination against those who study through e-learning were discovered.

Learners certainly have their own perception of online learning in the midst of pandemic this COVID-19. The importance of student perception is known to be an input for lecturers and institutions in running this online learning process to keep it running optimally and keep the transmission of COVID-19 widely. Thus, from that background, the purpose of this study is to investigate the learners' perception on Online Learning in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic.

## Method

This research applied qualitative method as Creswell (2012) states that the qualitative research is can be taken to refer to research that is based on descriptive data that does not make (regular) use of statistical procedures. In qualitative research, statistics are not used to analyze the data; instead, the inquirer analyzes words (e.g., transcriptions from interviews) or images (e.g., photographs). Rather than relying on statistical procedures, the qualitative researcher analyzes the words

to group them into larger meanings of understanding, such as codes, categories, or themes. The subject of this research is the learners of English study program of UKI Toraja. The instrument used is semi-structured interview. Thus the pandemic of covid-19, the researcher interviewed the learners by calling them by using WhatsApp application. Research design applied in this research was case study. Case study is a variation of an ethnography in that the researcher provides an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, an event, a process, or an individual) based on extensive data collection, Creswell (2007). To analyze the data, the researcher applied thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) describes an iterative process as to how to go from messy data to a map of the most important themes in the data. The process contains six steps, they are: familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

## Results

### The learners' perception on online learning system in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic

The purpose of this study is to investigate the learners' perception on Online Learning System in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic. Here are the results of data analysis obtained from interviews on the subject of this study.

#### *Online learning is very helpful in the middle of pandemic*

The application of the online learning system in the center of pandemic brought about the various reactions and perceptions of the student Program English studies of UKI Toraja. The form of Learning Management System used in the UKI Toraja is an *e-campus* program. Here are the Learners' perception of using that LMS in Drama class:

- St. A** : *Tidak berat ji, pak.*  
[For me, not incriminated, sir.]
- St. B** : *I think, sir. Tugas kuliah via online itu bagus supaya kita di rumah terlatih mengerjakan sesuatu, cuma yang berat pak kalau ada tugas kuliah tapi proses perkuliahan/discussion time tidak ada. Ditambah jaringan dan kuota internet yang tidak semua mahasiswa mampu dapatkan.*  
[I think, sir. Online coursework is good so that we at home trained on something, just an obstacle if there is a coursework but the lecture/ discussion time does not exist. Moreover, network and Internet quota that not all students are able to get.]
- St. C** : *Tidak berat ji pak cuma. Kurang dapat komunikasi karna melalui internet na kadang jaringan mengganggu*  
[No problem, Sir, just less able to communicate well because over the internet and sometimes the network is annoying.]
- St. D** : *Tidak ji pak menurutku, tapi jaringan dan data yg berat...hhh*  
[No, Sir, I think, but the network and Internet data is a problem.]
- St. E** : *No sir. Hanya saja masalah kuota internet dan jaringan sering menjadi hambatan.*  
[No, sir. It is just that Internet quota and network problems are often obstacles.]

From the interview result above, it is obvious that the learner fully supported the online learning system as tool to help them learn beyond the usual model such face to face in classroom. With this LMS learners are trained to get used to working Internet-based and paperless. They will acquire new vocabulary, and expertise in information and technology fields. As such, when they graduate in the future, they will no longer experience difficulties in using the main application in the field of education and teaching. They quite enjoyed the lecture online. But, the problem is on Internet access. The problem is the availability of Internet network and the financial ability of different students. Anyone can afford to buy an Internet data package, some are not even able to buy it.

### ***Voice Note will be effectively used when giving instructions***

Due to the number of package data needed when accessing the LMS e-campus, the learner hopes that the lecturer use the Voice Note application on the WhatsApp application to provide instruction for lectures. The financial condition of students is very different, and to use the application in the learning, lecturers do need to adjust the ability of students, as in the following quotations:

**St. F** : *Kayaknya lebih bagus kalau kita pake Voice Note saja pak kalau memberikan instruksi.*

[I think, It is better if we use Voice Note, sir, in giving instructions.]

**St. G** : *Good, jika bapak kirim materi soft-copy buku dan ada yang kita tidak pahami kan kita bisa bertanya di grup WhatsApp ini. Nah, jadilah maksud perkuliahan secara discussion by using voice note..*

[Good, if lecturers send the material soft-copy the book, and some learners do not understand then we can ask in this group WhatsApp. Well, be the intention of lecture in discussion (by using voice note).]

One limitation on e-campus application is that there is no facility to provide or explain the material with voice mode. It is perceived by students as a very complicated thing to understand the material and instruction of lectures. Referring to it, learners suggests that lecturers use the Voice Note application on WhatsApp application to make lectures more effective. In addition, according to the learners, through this application, the tone of the interaction is better between lecturers and learners.

### ***Individual tasks are better to keep the distance physically due to pandemic***

Obviously with this pandemic, social distancing and physical distancing should be done so that the spread of COVID-19 is not widespread and needs prevention. Related to that, there are expectations from students in order to give assignments in the form of individuals only, without the task of the group. Although the task of this group is done online, but is not effective due to communicating indirectly for example face to face.

**St. H** : *Menurut saya pak to. Bikin saja naskah drama tapi per individu pak supaya bebaski bercerita sendiri. Sebnarnya bagus berkelompok pak tpi karna situasi yg tdak memungkinkan jadi susah untuk berdiskusi pak.*

[I think, Sir. Make it a drama manuscript but per individual, Sir, so that the learners freely storytelling by themselves. Actually a nice group but because of a situation that does not allow so hard to discuss.]

Basically, students agree and like to study with group discussions, but awareness of this pandemic will suggest giving task in the form of individual duties. According to the learner, with individual assignments will make them more focus work and pour ideas on their task. Of course, there are learners' concerns about the spread of this virus so as to choose individual assignments for now.

### ***Group tasks to help friends who do not have an internet pulse***

In addition to individual tasks, students still wish to be assigned a group task. Various reasons for the group's assignment form are considered better. Starting from the availability of Internet networks, financial capabilities, and the positive impact of working in groups, as follows:

**St. I** : *Masukanku pak diadakan saja diskusi kelompok seperti yang kemarin supaya ada bantuan dari teman lain.*

[My opinion, held a group discussion just like yesterday so there is help from other friends.]

**St. J** : *Kalau saya setuju ka ini karena kita juga bisa tukar pikiran.*

[I agree, this is because we can also exchange thoughts.]

**St. K** : *Kalau menurut saya, lebih bagus bikin kelompok Karena kalau individu sempat tman-teman yang lain tidak punya data internet atau jaringan rusak jadi bisa dibantu sama teman kelompoknya kalau kita bikin kelompok.*

[I think, it is better to make a group because if the individual could have other friends do not have internet data or damaged network so can be assisted by the group friend if we make a group.]

**St. K** : *Saran sedikit pak. karena terhubung jaringan kadang tidak mendukung, tetap belajar per kelompok pak. Alasannya agar ada teman-teman yang mungkin bisa membantu mengirim tugas lewat portal dan mungkin lebih bagus menggunakan buku juga pak...atau materinya dalam soft copy saja.*

[Little suggestion, Sir. Because the network connection sometimes does not support, keep learning per group. The reason is that there are friends who might be able to help send a task through an e-campus portal, and may be better to use the book too, or the material in a soft copy.]

The main reason of choosing Group tasks on online learning system in accordance with the learners is to help friends who do not have an internet pulse. The learners realized that there are several of them that do not have internet data or damaged network so can be assisted by the group friend if we make a group. Other ones, because the network connection sometimes does not support, keep learning per group. The reason is that there are learners who might be able to help send a task through an e-campus portal, and may be better to use the book too, or the material in a soft copy. The last, according to their voice through group tasks can also exchange thoughts.

### ***Material and assignment must be preceded by explanation***

Pedagogically, before pandemic occurs, lecturers always give lectures through face to face. Lecture material is explained by the lecturer in front of the class, then followed by interaction by giving the student feedback, and usually there is a task at the end. However, during this online lecture, some habits of learning interactions began to be eliminated. Through online lectures, lecturers only submit materials accompanied by coursework assignments. In addition, other applications are still used for example: WhatsApp and e-mail. But apparently there are challenges that students face when given the task, so they hope there is explanation in advance, although there

is already a description or instruction on the task that has been sent. It can be seen in the following excerpt:

**St. K** : *Menurut saya, kemampuan kita masing-masing beda-beda, ada yang lebih mengerti jika ada penjelasan materi dahulu dan panduan dari buku materi yang ada lalu tugas ada yang langsung mengerti tanpa dijelaskan dahulu hanya dengan materi. Kalau saya mengertinya kalau dijelaskan dulu materinya baru dikasi tugas.*

[In my opinion, the ability of each of us is different, some understand if there is material explanation first. There is also an immediate understanding when given a book guide then given a task without explanation. For me, I understand if the material described first and then given a task.]

**St. G** : *Good, jika bapak kirim materi soft-copy buku dan ada yang kita tidak pahami kan kita bisa bertanya di grup WhatsApp ini. Nah, jadilah maksud perkuliahan secara discussion by using voice note..*

[Good, if lecturers send the material soft-copy the book, and some learners do not understand then we can ask in this group WhatsApp. Well, be the intention of lecture in discussion (by using voice note).]

Acceptance ability in terms of understanding of learning problems is very different. With this online learning, the impact is certainly different in terms of learning process. In the interview excerpt above, it is very clear that students experience their own challenges for example they say that the ability of each of us is different, some understand if there is material explanation first. There is also an immediate understanding when given a book guide then given a task without explanation. Learner, on another case will understand if the material described first and then given a task. From these conditions, students expect that good, if lecturers send the material soft-copy the book, and some learners do not understand then we can ask in this group WhatsApp. Well, be the intention of lecture in discussion by using voice note.

### ***Make use of facilities such as free Messenger application***

To access some applications in the lecture used by lecturers are considered to consume data packets are not small. It can be imagined that the financial burden of students will increasingly increase with this condition. In addition, there are some learners who rely on their own financial ability to work in order to study. After all, students hope that lecturers make use of free application for example Messenger in giving lectures.

**St. N** : *Mungkin bisa juga buat grup di messenger, supaya teman-teman yang tidak punya data bisa dapat informasi.*

[It can also be created by a group in Messenger, so that friends who do not have Internet data package can get information.]

**St. O** : *Di atas gunung juga masi bisa pak pake messenger.*

[On top of the mountain also can use Messenger.]

**St. P** : *Betul itu pak, mana kami anak kos-kosan yang kerja sambil kuliah kehilangan pekerjaan gara-gara coronajadi mau beli pulsa data pun susah sekarang*

[That's right, Sir. Anyway, we live in boarding house that work while in college and lost a job because Corona so want to buy data credits Internet package too hard now]

**St. Q** : *Jadi, minggu depan tidak ada tugas pak, ya? berhubung jaringan kami di kampung sangat tidak mendukung jadi bertanya memang sebelum pulkam.*

[That's right, Sir. Anyway, we live in boarding house that work while in college and lost a job because Corona so want to buy data credits Internet package too hard now

Students hope in online lectures regarding the use of free applications such as Messenger. This is based on their financial ability, and Internet access is difficult due to the geographical state of their residence which is still difficult to get telephone communication network, SMS, and Internet. They thought that it was good for lecturers to create learning groups in Messenger so that friends who do not have Internet data package can get information. Another case, there are learners who live in boarding house that work while in college and lost a job because Corona so want to buy data credits Internet package too hard now.

## Discussion

Regarding to the finding of this study, the learners' perception on online learning reveals that it is good in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. It was proved by the investigation that the learner perceived online learning is very helpful in the middle of pandemic. In line with Popovici and Mironov (2014) reveals that that students are deeply aware of the changes brought over by the digital technologies, by their impact on the learning process. The present study is quite different with Keller and Cernerud (2002) that students did not regard access to e-learning on campus as a benefit. Male students, students with previous knowledge of computers and students with positive attitudes to new technologies were all less positive to e-learning on campus than other students.

This study not only report that online learning is good in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic but also spotted the light on the availability of internet access, financial issue, and online learning implementation. At the learners' condition in terms of financial issue, they hope that lecturers make use of facilities such as free Messenger application in Online Learning System. This result is quite similar with Mamattah (2016) that the majority of the respondents think it is more expensive to offer courses through e-learning than fully face-to-face learning, it can be deduced that if decisions about choice of learning mode were to be made based on cost most of the respondents will go for fully classroom learning than e-learning. In the light of the availability of internet access, the present study shows that they said that individual tasks are better to keep the distance physically due to pandemic, they need group tasks to help friends who do not have an internet pulse and access. This investigation is inconsistent with (Mislinawati & Nurmasyitah, 2018) investigated that the students' familiarity with ICT in their everyday life played an important role in their familiarizing with elearning. About the implementation, they hope that material and assignment must be preceded by explanation. Thus, they recommended that Voice Note will be effectively used when giving instructions. It implied that the material and instruction used by the lecturer in the online learning were not easy to use. It is contrast with Mislinawati and Nurmasyitah (2018) that the students also agreed that the e-learning web-based module was easy to use.

## Conclusion

Based on the study result above, it can be concluded that the learners' perception on online learning reveals that it is good in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. They perceived online learning is very helpful in the middle of pandemic. This study not only report that online learning is good in



the midst of COVID-19 pandemic but also spotted the light on the availability of internet access, financial issue, and online learning implementation. At the learners' condition in terms of financial issue, they hope that lecturers make use of facilities such as free Messenger application in Online Learning System. In the light of the availability of internet access, they said that individual tasks are better to keep the distance physically due to pandemic, they need group tasks to help friends who do not have an internet pulse and access. About the implementation, they hope that material and assignment must be preceded by explanation. Thus, they recommended that Voice Note will be effectively used when giving instructions. It implied that the material and instruction implemented by the lecturer in the online learning were not easy to use.

Based on the perception of learners in this study related to online learning in the midst of pandemic COVID-19, then should lecturers look at the learners' condition in terms of financial ability, availability of Internet access for students, and selection of online learning applications that are effective and efficient to the implementation of online learning system in UKI Toraja can run to the fullest.

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