

## Students' Lesson Learned on Virtual Learning Implementation: A Case Study in English Education Study Program

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### Abstract

Virtual learning implementation obtained more exposure along with the pandemic situation in Indonesia. The drastic shift taken by the government policy made all formal institutions moved into the full-online course after trusted ordinary, face-to-face classroom routine in years. The purposes of this study are to reveal students' experience and possible challenges in implementing virtual learning at English Education Study Program. The method used in this research was qualitative design with a case study approach. The instruments of this research were questionnaires and interviews. The results showed that students enjoyed more flexibility in learning and spent less time and energy to reach campus. They found the course quite challenging to cope with, but students experienced virtual learning as the necessary option in a pandemic situation. The most prominent challenges in this system are infrastructure-related (gadget, connection) and learning arousalment.

**Keywords:** learning challenges, student's response, virtual learning.

### INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 has transformed every leaf of life, including the formal education sector in Indonesia. As the pandemic goes on, virtual learning becomes one of the possible and safest routes to held courses. Nadiem Anwar Makarim, Head of Indonesia Education Ministry, even signed the letter that ensures formal education shifted online (SE Mendikbud, No. 36962/MPK.A/HK/2020). On the letter's attachment, eight supporting platforms page that suitable to facilitate the implementation of virtual learning. For instance *Google Suites for Education*, *Rumah Belajar* and *Kelas Pintar*.

Thus, Chalmers (2018) voiced the exciting thought that virtual experience is inferior to physical reality. Even the value is limited to some extent, like experience obtained from reading a book or watching a movie, users in the virtual world can make choices from simple to complex, build something, and meet with many people. By realizing its limitation, the virtual world might offer valuable potential in its virtual space in learning and applied that experience to survive in the real world.

The distance education condition without exception also applied, and still is, on Majalengka. Schools and colleges ordered by Education Ministry to free their student from go-to-school daily duty to attempt to break the virus chain or minimize the risk while the vaccine is yet to be massively circulated. Specifically, at the English Education Study Program in one of university in Majalengka, virtual learning was fully implemented since

March 2020, since the education minister policy was implemented. Thus, the student experienced a shift from semi-virtual to entirely virtual. The situation raises questions about adapting to the change and sharing different learning approaches in virtual and distant environments.

It appears that virtual learning potentially fills the requirement for educational space during the pandemic situation. Bolstad and Lin (2009) argued that students categorized virtual classrooms between their most and most minor favorite conventional classes. The study also pointed out that both students and teachers perceive virtual classrooms as requiring greater learner independence and self-motivation. Being physical, being at a distance makes students and teachers grow trust in each other and the virtual environment to make the process flow run smoothly. However, the same research also suggested that virtual classrooms were best suited for more mature students who did well in independent environments.

Westbrook (2006) applied virtual learning in a virtual forum to complement in-class material on her third-year English literature students at National Taiwan University. The online element was conceived asynchronously to make it flexible and easy to manage while avoiding the temptation of some students eager to dominate the class and others trying to use the forum for their issues. However, by adopting an asynchronous approach, the researcher found the situation that deprives the students of another opportunity to explore 'best practice' in virtual collaboration.

Curtain (2002) used the "online" term, described the use of the internet in some way to encourage the interaction between teacher and student, which possibly including both classroom-based instruction and distance education modes. The researcher also stated other forms that synonymous with online learning are "web-based education" and e-learning. While Girvan (2018) shared the opinion that "virtual" is used to describe a simulated experience; anything provided a sense of something almost tangible as if it exists but lacks concrete attributes beyond the digital screen. Moreover, the virtual world, which is based on experience in the ordinary world, is a simulated environment that meets the framework of a world presented. The distinction lies in the types of expertise available for the user. Even based on the real world, the virtual world may offer alternative perspectives as a unique cultural space.

According to Gilbert (2015), the benefits of virtual learning possibly outweighed the challenges around. Online courses offer an excellent way for students to broaden their educational opportunities and stay competitive in the demanding realm of education. Online learning also allows for learning to occur in a setting that is not restricted by place or time and might provide the ability to pass barriers such as poverty, location, disability, and other factors. Even more online courses have the potential to open the pathways for more opportunities for students in "*....small, rural, or low socioeconomic school districts*". Another argument voiced that the interpretation of online learning was often pointing to courses that conducted entirely online, especially at the higher education level (Ryan et al., 2016). There had been an increasing trend of hybrid approaches between online activities and face-to-face instruction over the past decade.

In Indonesia, Sadikin and Hamidah (2020), which wrote about online learning at Jambi University, viewed that most students already had standardized facilities (reliable internet

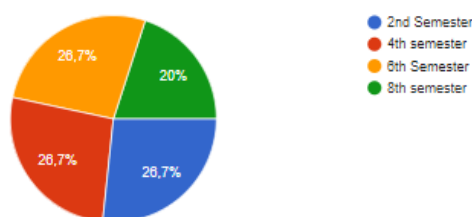
connection and reliable gadgets) to reach a comfortable point in virtual education. Overall, students are satisfied with the learning process (its flexibility, openness for interaction) and may grow self-autonomous learning. Even though there were still minor complaints such as the inability to grasp the whole material compared to traditional knowledge, there was no guarantee that students would take the course seriously.

The similarity of this research with the previous study reveals the experience that students obtained after using the virtual system in teaching and learning English. Meanwhile, the difference between this research and previous research is using a case study method to magnify the student's experience on virtual learning in one of the English students' departments, Universitas Majalengka.

## METHOD

This research was conducted at one of the university in Majalengka. The reason behind the setting chosen was due to the relation between the university and the problem itself. Virtual learning fully implemented since March 2020 due to the Corona virus outbreak in Indonesia and, specifically, Majalengka. Students experienced a shift from semi-virtual to entirely virtual. This situation raises the question about the way they adapt to the change.

This study focused on identifying student's experience on virtual learning held by the university. The researchers used qualitative design with a case study approach. Crowe et al. (2011) argued that a case study is a research approach used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. While Creswell (2009) defined qualitative research as "*...a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem*". The process of qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the



meaning of the data.

**Chart 1.** Research Sample

The research participants are 15 English Education study program students from one of University in Majalengka; Participants come from different semesters, with detailed composition, displayed in the above chart as four from the 2nd semester, four from the 4th semester, four from the 6th three from 8th semester. The entire participant is Indonesian and has taught English in formal education for more than six years.

To collect the data, the researchers utilized a close-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview. According to McLeod (2014), the close-ended statements structure

the response by allowing only the answers to fit into the categories defined by the researcher. In addition, the close-ended questionnaires will enable the inclusion of more variables in the research study. At the same time, the interview is one of the most used techniques for gathering data in research. Sugiyono (2013) stated that an interview is a meeting between two people to exchange information or ideas through questions and answers, resulting in communication and sharing meaning on a specific subject. The type of interview used to collect the data was a semi-structured interview.

Data analysis involves collecting all gathered data and developing an analysis from the information supplied by participants. Based on Creswell (2009), there are six steps to analyze qualitative data: (1) Organize and prepare the data, (2) read through all the data, (3) coding process, (4) generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis, (5) advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative, and (6) making an interpretation or meaning of the data.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In the students' lesson learned on virtual learning implementation, two themes were highlighted: Students' general responses and the challenge they experienced on the current implemented system.

### **Students' Responses on Virtual Learning Implementation**

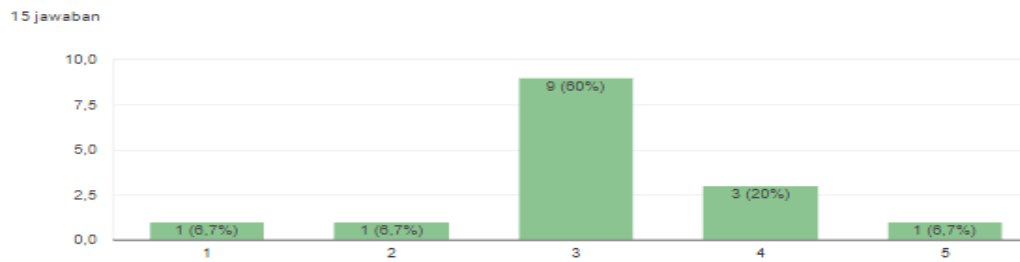
In the English Education Study Program, virtual learning, initially implemented by government policy, started with uncertainty. There was doubt among students about material delivery and whether they can learn effectively in a different system. It is possible if the anxiety of moving toward a new learning environment appeared on both sides, even on the lecturer side, as argued by Rosali (2020).

*"I'm not too sure at first without daily class. Such as a doubt that I can understand the lesson with no lecturing and any classroom activities. But also, I think there is an opportunity to be more practical by having the course inside my phone."*

- Respondent #2 on initial thought to virtual learning

Along the way, those doubts have been successfully eroded, with some worries left standing. Students learn that the virtual environment brings such flexibility, energy-saving, and practicality. As Landrum et al. (2020) wrote, students obtained space to learn anytime within the virtual environment. In other words, virtual classes provide flexibility for students to develop at their own pace. To be precise, the students' understanding of how the content is delivered, what the content entails, and how students interact with faculty and peers fits their purpose in taking the class.

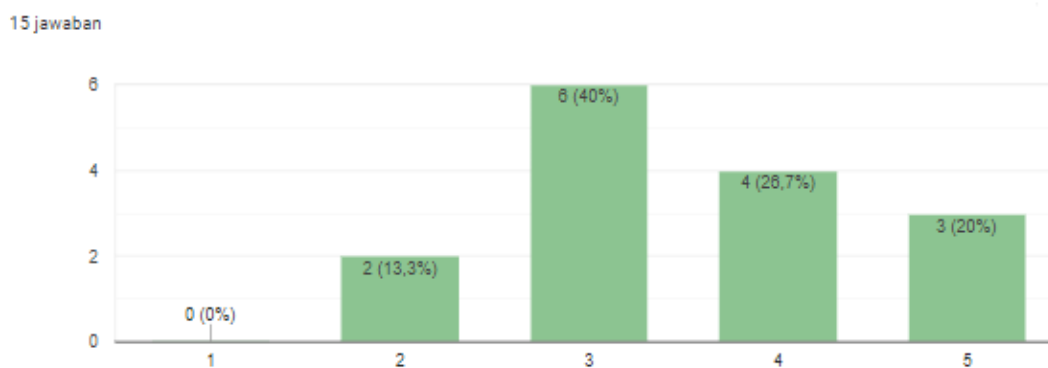
Students in English Education Study Program, who experienced a drastic shift from conventional face-to-face to virtual learning, were able to participate in the current learning process mostly through smartphones, android, or laptops. Even though they felt pretty difficult to cope with the course, they also found it was satisfying, as virtual learning gained "3" in 1 (not effective at all & poor) - 5 (extremely effective & excellent) scale on effectiveness and overall response.



**Chart 2.** Effectiveness of virtual learning from students' experience

There is no significant change in learning activities and duration. Most students spend 5-7 hours in virtual learning, almost matched with four offline courses a day in English Education Study Program that take more than 6 hours. They attend video call meetings, working on individual or group projects such as writing an article, reviewing, recording videos, and submitting it virtually. However, the idea of "monotonous activity" appeared in some students' heads, although there was no drastic change in learning motion except the vacuum of physical presence.

As for the lecturer's limited role, students expressed a positive review of it. They still felt the assistance of the lecturer during virtual class; For example, giving a guideline for the course, assess group presentation, point out material references, or passing an assignment. There were just a small number of students that experienced lecturer's aid close to "not helpful at all" in the online session. Outside the course, the interaction between lecturer and student seldom occurred, unequally ranged between "1" to "3" in 1 (rarely) - 5 (always) scale. Castañeda-Trujillo & Cruz-Arcila (2012) and Vargas-Madriz (2018) argued, teaching could be different in virtual learning compared with the face-to-face approach. It required teacher awareness of maximizing the environment and encouraging student's motivation.

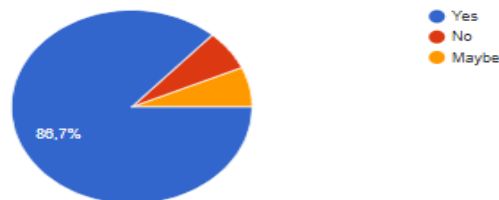


**Chart 3.** Students' perception of lecturer assistance during virtual learning

Not only student-lecturer, the frequency of communication between students almost laid the same result, with a tendency to still communicate during and outside the class. As mentioned before, the virtual learning process in English Education Study Program provided chances for students to work together in a group project. Every semester (2, 4, 6, and 8) had their group share academic-related content, and some courses also made their

group keep in touch with its member. More than that, English Education Study Program has a WhatsApp group that included lecturers and students to serve as discussion and information sharing spots.

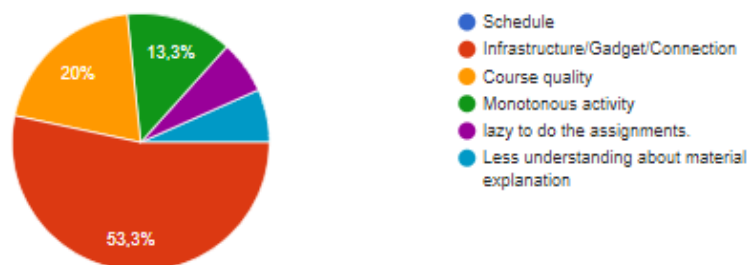
Even though the other result showed a positive response toward the current system, most students still consider doing conventional, face-to-face learning in the future. The possible reason is the need for a direct, physical experience missing from virtual learning implementation. However, this revelation does not necessarily deny that students have successfully adapted and were able to cope with the actual learning process.



**Chart 4.** Comparison between virtual learning and conventional learning

### Challenge that Students' Experienced on Virtual Learning Implementation

The most prominent challenge that students experienced was related to infrastructures like connections and gadgets. The absence of direct interaction made students should prepared proper tools that might support the learning process. A deficiency in this factor can propagate to other things such as discouraging learning motivation, enhancing mental anxiety, feeling left-out, and, in the most extreme case, inability to follow the learning process. As a learning holder and institution, the university should be aware of this condition and be ready to assist students if there is any trouble along the way. This finding was quite similar to the situation in Jambi, where a majority of students concern about infrastructure (Sadikin & Hamidah, 2020).



**Chart 5.** The most challenging aspect of virtual learning

Another problem that is worth to be highlighted was arousement. Instead of getting mentioned directly, some findings pointed out the tendency of this problem. With no physical presence of others (peer students - lecturer), students should maintain their own

learning motivation within the virtual environment. Some of them confessed that it was easy to get carried off when worked on the assignment. They often waited until the deadline comes closed before take it seriously.

*"I missed physical presence more than I could imagine. Now, I realize that I could learn better in the class by recognizing the detail in visual and experiencing it physically."*

- Respondent #3 on the most challenging aspect of virtual learning.

*"For me, I prefer offline because I can interact with my friend directly and clear within the learning time. The virtual classroom is not bad exactly, but if we can get the old class, it will be much better."*

- Respondent #4 on learning preference in the future.

While connection and gadget concerns require greater attention and resource from all educational and non-educational elements, lecturers and students can encourage learning arousal. As Wong (2020) and Muilenburg & Berge (2005) stated, in virtual learning, arousal might appear with technical assistance and an appropriate stress level. Students' interaction with each other frequently and obtain proper feedback from the lecturer might be what virtual learning needed to succeed.

*"In this online system, I learn to be more responsive, clever in managing time, motivate myself and maintain energy. It brings several advantages, for sure, but I should admit that sometimes laziness gets the better of me, especially without friends and lecturer presence."*

- Respondent #1 on summary of the virtual learning experience.

It is understandable that both lecturer and student suffer through sudden change. Pandemic situation compelled Indonesia's formal education to turn into virtual environment while still grasp the appropriate way to integrate technology into learning process. With the aim of reaching better learning process virtually, all participant in education field should help each other and formulate proper planning, design and development of online instructional program (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). The designed plan might take students' anxiety related to pandemic situation, readiness and equality of facilities, and teacher/lecturer technology literacy, into consideration.

With the current pandemic still going on, it is no surprise if virtual learning will still be implemented further. Both lecturer and student should maintain, even enhance, adaptation rate and develop even more. In an ideal state, it might fill every factor, which Vonderwell & Zachariah (2005) refer to as virtual learning requirement; Those are (1) being familiar with technology, (2) learning management, (3) pedagogical practice, and (4) the social roles in a virtual environment that needed for online learning. The current condition, no

wonder, is an opportunity for English Education Study Program to reach the next level and integrate with technology advancement.

## CONCLUSION

Almost all students had a proper supporting tool for participating in virtual learning, either smartphone, laptop, or personal computer. They found the course quite challenging to cope with but acceptable enough overall. Even though the other result showed a positive response toward the current system, most students still consider doing conventional, face-to-face learning in the future. Indeed, they enjoyed more flexibility in learning and spent less time and energy to reach campus. The learning activity was quite the same as before-virtual era; individual-group, write or review an article, record video, group presentation, etc. However, some students found that the same pattern was monotonous.

The main challenges were infrastructure-related (suitable gadget, stable connection) and learning arousalment. While the first problem needed more element participation to get done with (internet provider, government, learning institution, and student's parent), lecturers and students might build an exciting course that encourages more interaction and increases closeness.

This research has some limitations and recommendations for future study. First, the findings of this research should not be generalized to other virtual learning settings because it was conducted in a relatively small group of undergraduate students. Second, in addition to the data collected from this research, it would be interesting to dig from various data sources such as the lecturer's and institution's point of view. A quantitative study, with a count of student's interaction, participation, grade, and another approximate measurement number, possibly offers another insight for this topic. Third, another exciting topic related to this research is the way to encourage learning arousalment in virtual learning. Without the physical presence of the lecturer and other peer students, it will be important to find engaging activities that could increase closeness, interaction, and more positive energy.

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