EFL LEARNING CHALLENGES IN THE MIDS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the EFL learners' challenges on online learning in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach. The subject of this research was the English Foreign Language learners of English study in senior high school in Cianjur. The instruments used were open questionnaire and interview. This thematic analysis was employed in the current study. The observation was to answer the issue about how learners faced the challenge of online learning setting and to know the supporting application used by the teacher. The study showed that the learners' challenges on online learning reveal that it did not run well during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many students were not prepared to respond to an online learning problem. This unpreparedness raised a feeling of laziness in pursuing the subject matter, especially for learning English which requires a lot of practice. The confusion also occurred to the most student who had just experienced school at this midle level. They perceived online learning is very difficult and less effective.

Keyterms:Covid-19 pandemic, online learning, learners' perception, technology enhanced language learning

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19, the name of a new virus that emerged or was discovered in an area called Wuhan, China. Based on Chinese government data, the first case was found in an individual aged 55 years from Hubei, China. It was suspected that this person was the first person infected with this virus on November 17, 2019. Since then, scientists have been trying to map patterns of early Covid-19 transmission before the outbreak became a global health crisis (Triandy, n.d.) This virus had infected in many countries. At the end of January 2020, the WHO Emergency State has declared a worldwide health emergency state. Committee cases have been increasing globally as COVID-19 confirmed cases.

Pandemic COVID-19 that has spread across almost all countries has resulted in several major changes and impacts in various aspects. In fact, according to a report made by Allo (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic could make the global economy shrink to one percent in 2020. In Indonesia, the impact of Covid-19 in the field of economics is the same problem. Not only about the economy, but also in the world of education (Allo, 2020). *detikNews* also reveals that the effect of Covid-19 is now also perceived by the education world. This has been recognized by the United Nation Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on Thursday (5/3), that Covid-19 pandemic has impact on the education sector.

The Indonesian Ministry of Education has also announced online learning in March 2020. Not only that, but the government has also provided a forum for the smooth running of this online learning, such as the government collaborating with the Ruang Guru application on the distribution of free quotas (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2020). Education in Indonesia has changed drastically into online learning, without prior preparation. This unpreparedness resulted in the shock of educators and also the students in facing online learning.

Online media can provide multiple benefits for both staff and students in supporting students' learning experiences particularly for isolated students (Gillett-Swan, 2017). Despite student acknowledgment of the benefits in supporting their learning through the technology, a

difficulty arises through the limits around the technical capability of the software particularly in terms of its functionality. As revealed through student feedback and experience from numerous online classes over several years, this can often be a source of frustration for students and facilitators/staff as it can make normally simple tasks such as viewing a video increasingly complex. Additionally, when completing assessments, such as group presentations online, the comparatively limited ability to interact face-to-face and draw upon non-verbal cues and body language of the audience can be an inhibiting factor. Even so, the importance of being able to engage your viewers/listeners/colleagues using an online, sometimes not visual (e.g., teleconference) format is an increasingly important skill in the modern workplace and emphasizes the importance of clear, concise, and focused communication skills (Salmon, 2011; 2014).

The accessibility and ease of access to the online medium tend to make it an easier platform for a group assignment than providing limited or no focused support. Some of the ways that these barriers can be reduced involve regular emails (weekly from pre-semester), drop-in sessions, step-by-step instructions for how to access and use each of the platforms and technologies, overviews of how sessions will be run, expectations, ability to access information and sessions at other times, reminders for what should be prepared for each week, interactive schedules through the LMS, user-friendly layout in LMS, and opportunities for consultation (online, offline and via email). For this reason, a number of strategies (such as those outlined above) can be incorporated that require little facilitator expertise and competency but can have significant effects on supporting students and their learning outcomes in the online space (Gillett-Swan, 2017).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In online learning, there are two types of theory. Those are synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous learning is any type of learning that takes place in real-time, where a group of people is engaged in learning simultaneously. Although learning occurs at the same time, learners do not have to be there in-person, or even in the same location. Synchronous learning enables learners to ask questions and receive answers on-the-spot, while also collaborating freely with their co-learners. Asynchronous learning is more learner-centered. It enables your learners to complete courses without the constraints of having to be in a certain place at a certain time. In essence, asynchronous learning does not hinder learners by place or time. As long as they have access to the internet, asynchronous learners have the freedom to complete course materials whenever they choose, and from any location (Lawless, 2020).

Synchronous and asynchronous learning methods are actually good for online learning. Both have advantages and disadvantages according to what the student needs, however what may appeal to the learner is not always appeal to another. The synchronous method is good because learners can make a group for discussion, and easily interact with the instructor or one another. This method also takes a real-time even though different place. The learner can ask some questions and will get an instant answer. On the other hand, the learner and the teacher should have a stable internet connection. While the asynchronous method is not, the learner has a flexible time to relearn the material as long as the teacher still gives permission, and they can work on their assignment any time before the due date. Learners also easily contact the teacher, but they may need to wait for an answer or feedback.

This research is focused on asynchronous learning. Because most of the students of Senior High School in Cianjur were able to access the material as long as they have any connection to the internet. The student was able to learn as much as possible to improve their ability in the English language.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative method. According to Cresswell (1994), a qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. Qualitative research places emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people's words, actions, and records. The traditional or quantitative approach to

research looks past these words, actions, and records to their mathematical significance. The traditional approach to research (quantifies) the results of these observations.

In contrast, qualitative research examines the patterns of meaning which emerge from the data and these are often presented in the participants' own words. The task of the qualitative researcher is to find patterns within those words (and actions) and to present those patterns for others to inspect while at the same time staying as close to the construction of the world as the participants originally experienced it. The goal of qualitative research is to discover patterns that emerge after close observation, careful documentation, and thoughtful analysis of the research topic. What can be discovered by qualitative research are not sweeping generalizations but contextual findings. This process of discovery is basic to the philosophic underpinning of the qualitative approach (The Qualitative Paradigm, n.d.).

Data collection methods are techniques or methods used to collect data. The method refers to a way so that its use can be demonstrated through questionnaires, interviews, observations, tests, documentation, and so on. The data test method can also be interpreted as a technique or method used by researchers to collect data. Data collection is carried out to obtain the necessary information in order to achieve the research objectives. Sugiyono (2013) explains the data collection method is the most strategic step in research because the main purpose of the research is to get data (Hayati, 2019).

In this research, the researcher used open-questionnaire and interview in collecting the data. McLeod (2018) explains that a questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. Questionnaires can be considered as a kind of written interview. They can be carried out face to face, by telephone, computer, or post. Questionnaires provide a relatively cheap, quick, and efficient way of obtaining large amounts of information from a large sample of people. Questionnaires are divided into two kinds, there are closed questionnaires and opened questionnaires. Closed questions structure only allows responses that fit into pre-decided categories. Data that can be placed into a category is called nominal data. The category can be restricted to at least two options or more. Open questions allow people to express what they think in their own words. Open-ended questions enable the respondent to answer in as much detail as they like in their own words. Open questions are often used for complex questions that cannot be answered in a few simple categories but require more detail and discussion. In this study, the researchers used an open questionnaire to make it easier for students to express what they felt when learning English online, the answers from each student are summarized and selected as needed.

According to Oakley, the qualitative interview is a type of framework in which the practices and standards are not only recorded but also achieved, challenged, as well as reinforced. As no research interview lacks structure most of the qualitative research interviews are either semi-structured, lightly structured, or in-depth. Unstructured interviews are generally suggested in conducting long-term fieldwork and allow respondents to let them express themselves in their own ways and pace, with a minimal hold on respondents' responses.

Pioneers of ethnography developed the use of unstructured interviews with local key informants that are., by collecting the data through observation and record field notes as well as to involve themselves with study participants. To be precise, an unstructured interview resembles a conversation more than an interview and is always thought to be a "controlled conversation," which is skewed towards the interests of the interviewer. Non-directive interviews, the form of unstructured interviews are aimed to gather in-depth information and usually do not have a pre-planned set of questions. Another type of unstructured interview is the focused interview in which the interviewer is well aware of the respondent and in times of deviating away from the main issue the interviewer generally refocuses the respondent towards a key subject. Another type of unstructured interview is an informal, conversational interview, based on an unplanned set of questions that are generated instantaneously during the interview (Jamshed, 2014).

A qualitative research approach for this study was chosen because qualitative method is useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events that they experience. Online interviews and opened questionnaires were chosen because, in addition to the limitations of face-to-face during this pandemic, these two methods were chosen because they are very easy and quite helpful in collecting data. Its accuracy can also be said to be sufficient to collect research data.

This research took some sample data from several secondary schools in Cianjur. The participants were 23 EFL learners consisting of 16 females and 7 males from 5 different High schools and different degrees of school in Cianjur. Most of the students had experience in English virtual learning before the pandemic was spread in Indonesia. Meanwhile some of them were the very first time to face English virtual learning.

Data Collection and Analysis

Twenty-three EFL learners volunteered to be a participant in this research through invitation. Given a list of questions, the EFL learners were requested to make a written reflection regarding their practice in joining online EFL learning and the challenges they encountered. While three of them were involved in a follow-up virtual interview individually since they provided attractive narrations and impactful topics in the written reflections and were determined feasible to be investigated further. The participants were asked to share a detailed explanation about their experiences and their challenges in online EFL learning during this pandemic. Repetitive and inconsequential data were deleted. As a result, a suitable explanation about online EFL practice lessons learned and challenges are informed in the result section. Some changes in grammar were made to ensure the effectiveness of the language of the extract without changing the intention and the meaning.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
This section conveys three key themes related to the practices of the students' challenges in online EFL learning. It includes the student's perspective about the challenges in online EFL learning, the supporting application and platforms used by the teacher, and student expectation for the teacher to carry out in online EFL learning. For each of the three themes, the most representative excerpts from the responses of the participants were selected.

Student challenges in online EFL learning.
Online EFL learning for same high school students is something new, especially for the first grade at that level. The students felt that online EFL learning ineffective because learning English requires frequent practice, not only that, online learning also requires supporting signals, adequate internet quota, and other supporting media that function properly such as handphone or laptop/computer. Here are the learner's perceptions and challenges in facing online EFL learning.

 "Saya sebelum pandemi ini berlangsung pernah melakukan virtual learning, jadi tidak terlalu kaget dan bingung sekarang" *[Before this pandemic I had done virtual learning, so I am not too shocked and confused now]*

"Baru pertama kali kak, jadi saya bingung. Saya siswa baru masuk SMA, cara belajar di SMA saja sudah berbeda sama waktu SMP, apalagi di lakukan dengan cara online seperti ini. Tidak seru, karna kita juga belum mengenal teman teman baru kita" *[This is the first time, so I am confused. I am a new student entering high school, the way to study in high school is different from middle school, especially if it is done online like this. No fun, because we also don't know our new friends]*

"Baru pertama kali. Makanya dirumah juga sekarang pasang Wi-Fi biar lebih stabil aja internetnya" *[It's the first time. That's why at home, now we install Wi-Fi so that the internet is more stable]*

The first challenge that they face in online EFL learning is this is the first time for some of them. They are still confused about how to face this situation without knowing each other first, even for the first grade at that level they do not know exactly the teacher. It is because from the very first-time learning begins, they have done it virtually.

"Kalau di sekolah saya guru nya itu hanya memberikan materi melalui classroom sedangkan kita itu sebenarnya butuh penjelasan lebih detail entah itu melaui vidio ataupun yg lainnya" *[In my school the teacher only provides material through (Google) classroom, we actually need a more detailed explanation whether it's through video or something else]*

"Teachers or students cannot participate in learning because of poor internet network problems so that the material presented by the teacher poorly received."

"Tidak ada partner untuk berlatih" *[There are no partners to practice]*

"Lebih sulit karena tidak bisa bertanya langsung pada bapak guru saya" *[It was more difficult because I couldn't ask my teacher directly]*

Those are several perceptions from the learners during online learning English. many of them also talked about the unstable internet in the area where they live. Among all the students that the researcher asked about, almost half of them explained that they could understand what their teacher explained, more than that they did not understand.

The supporting application and platform

Using the application in online EFL learning for helping the process is a must. There are a lot of features that can help teachers in providing subject matter. Therefore, online learning will not be separated from application and internet data. Here, researchers will describe about the applications they use during this online learning, and explain their perception about the effectiveness of the application.

No	The Aplication	Student's perspective
1	Kita pakai Zoom sama Google Meet *[We use Zoom and Google Meet]*	Ngga terlalu memahaminya, kadang aplikasi tersebut suka ada gangguannya tersendiri *[I don't really understand, sometimes the app has its own distractions]*
2	Emmm, google clasroom sih seringnya *[We often use Google Classroom]*	Menurut saya kurang membantu *[I think it is not really helpful]*
3	Lewat group WhatsApp, kaya dikasih materi berupa file gitu (video dan teks) *[Through the WhatsApp group, such as given material in the form of files (video and text)*	Cukup membantu sih asalkan kitanya bias fokus *[it is quite helpful as long as we can be focuss]*

4	Ruang Guru and Google Classroom	Cukup mudah dipahami, tapi pejelasan guru yang kadang bikin pusing, hehe. Harus belajar secara tatap muka, agar materi mata pelajaran yang dipelajari bisa dipahami. *[Quite easy to understand, but the teacher's explanation sometimes makes you dizzy, hehe. Must learn face-to-face, so that the subject matter being studied can be comprehended]*
	Zenius	Lumayan sih mudah dan bisa dipahami *[It is quite easy to understand]*
	Google Translate	Cukup membantu untuk menerjemahkan kata dan kalimat yang saya belum tahu *[It's quite helpful to translate words and sentences that I have not known]*
	WhatsApp, Telegram, Google Classroom	Kurang membantu menurut saya karena aplikasinya juga kadang mengalami gangguan *[Not really helpful I think because the application also sometimes gets interrupted]*

From the explanation above, we can conclude that the use of applications to support the fluency of learning English is needed and very helpful for some students. It is just that some students feel that the application used by their teacher is considered less effective because of some interference they encounter when using the application either from the signal or from the application itself.

Student Expectations for the Teacher

This pandemic forced teacher and student to try new habits in learning, by virtual. Learning English actually needs more practice to make it easier to improve the ability of the English language. While virtual learning is sometimes hampered by the network and the limited time it uses. While some teachers who facilitate asynchronous learning also need time to wait for a reply from the teacher. And here are some of the students' expectations for their English teacher to get effective learning online.

"Saya lebih mengerti apabila dijelaskan melalui Google Meet atau Zoom karna bisa berinteraksi dengan guru secara langsung" *[I understand better when it is explained through Google Meet or Zoom because I can interact with the teacher directly]*

"Penambahan penjelasan materi agar murid tidak terlalu bingung" *[Adding more explanations to the material so that the students are not too confused]*

"Menjelaskan secara rinci seperti misalnya membuat video yang isinya tentang menjelaskan materi yang akan di sampaikan" *[Describe in detail, such as making a video that explains the material that will be delivered]*

"Saya juga tidak tahu. Sudah dijelaskan di grup kelas, tapi kurang mengerti, dijelaskan lewat video call di aplikasi zoom, banyak siswa yg tertinggal kelas karena gangguan sinyal atau HP yang kurang menunjang, lalu belajar secara kontak, tapi masih pandemi.

> Jadi saya juga tidak tahu apa yg harus guru lakukan" *[I also do not know. It has been explained in the class group, but we do not really understand, explained via video calls in the zoom application, many students are left behind because of signal obstacle or cellphones that are not supporting, then learning face to face, but it is still pandemic. So, I also don't know what the teacher should do]*

> "Pengen tatap muka kak" *[I want to study face to face]*

> "Memberikan video-video tentang bahasa Inggris berupa video film pendek inggris yg bersangkutan dengan materi bahasa inggris" *[Provide videos about English in the form of English short film videos related to English material]*

> "Belajar melalui vidio menurut saya lumayan efektif di bandingkan hanya melalui aplikasi" *[Learning through videos in my opinion is quite effective compared to only through applications]*

Some students complained about the material that was unclear and somewhat difficult to understand if the teacher only provided text material without a more detailed explanation in the form of videos. Some of them also explained that in order to improve their English skills, the teachers could also guide their students by using English films as a learning medium so that students did not get bored quickly with monotonous material.

CONCLUSION

The current study contributes to online literature language learning from the viewpoint of students in the EFL sense. Online EFL learning for same high school students is something new, especially for the first grade at that level. The students felt that online EFL learning was considered ineffective because learning English requires frequent practice, not only that, online learning also requires supporting signals, adequate internet quota, and other supporting media that function properly such as handphone or laptop/computer.

The first challenge that they face in online EFL learning is for some of the students, it was their first experience of having online learning. They are still confused about how to face this situation without knowing each other, moreover for the first-grade students, they do not know the teacher at all. Then many of them also talked about the unstable internet in the area where they live. Among all the students that the researcher asked, almost half of them explained that they could understand what their teacher explained, while the rest did not understand.

The use of applications to support the fluency of learning English is needed and very helpful for some students. However, some students feel that the application used by their teacher is considered less effective because of some interference they encounter when using the application either from the signal or from the application itself. Some students complained about the material that was unclear and somewhat difficult to understand if the teacher only provided text material without a more detailed explanation in the form of videos. Some of them also explained that in order to improve their English skills, the teachers could also guide their students by using English films as a learning medium so that students did not get bored quickly with monotonous material.

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