



## **EFL Students' Challenges towards Home Learning Policy During Covid-19 Outbreak**

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### **Abstract:**

*Obviously, the world wide is shocking with pandemic of Covid-19 where it effects to every single part of human lives and everyday activities for sure. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic also has its influence toward education system from lower to upper levels. Both teachers and students feel the impact from the recent pandemic especially in Indonesian context where of course it triggers barriers due to the educational adjustment they have to follow. Therefore, this research is particularly aimed to investigate perception of EFL students toward home learning during pandemic of Covid-19. In-dept interview was applied to eight students of English Department students of University of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda. Specifically, the in-dept interview is consisted of the students' perception mainly regarding with challenges they faced when having home learning activities during the Covid-19 pandemic up to the recent time. As a result, the researcher found that the students face three major types of challenges including internet connection, healthy reason, and the use of certain online application. Further discussion and fruitful suggestions also provided in this research.*

**Keywords:** *EFL students, learning challenges, home learning policy, Covid-19 outbreak*

### **1. Introduction**

Pandemic of Covid-19 is shocking the worldwide including Indonesia. All elements are affected by this pandemic starting from economic, culture and tourism, including education (Almanar, 2020). It is impossible and not allowed for students to have face-to-face direct

interaction among classmates and teachers because being in a crowd becomes one of the most significant factors in spreading out the disease. The government is forced to change education system rapidly to adjust the current situation i.e. changing conventional teaching and learning method to online classroom (Agung, Surtikanti, & Quinones, 2020; Al Lily et al., 2020). Not only Indonesia, many countries all over the world is insisted to provide alternative way of conducting different classroom platform because students cannot take the lesson at the institution directly (Abidah, Hidayatullaah, Simamora, Fehabutar, & Mutakinati, 2020).

Moreover, using online platform seems to be one of challenges for teachers to conduct their online classroom. Not only it will test their capacity on conducting online platform of teaching and learning, they need to choose proper platform to teach certain course and topic (Azzahra, 2020). As what has been researched by Nadeak (2020), whose research tried to investigate how far the significant effect of distance learning by using social media is. As a result, Nadeak (2020) found that social media in the context of one of universities in Indonesia only effective for theoretical and practical courses. It means that condition of education in Indonesia today especially in higher education still need to explore more on the use of various online platforms or application in order to fit with the needs of the students and the appropriateness to the course topic. In the context of teaching, the Covid-19 outbreak, indeed, make new barriers to teachers i.e. teachers capability in using technology, school facilities, difficulties in explaining certain topic through online platform, limited internet access by students, cost of internet quota, and support from parents (Lestiyanawati & Widyantoro, 2020). Alike with Lestiyanawati & Widyantoro (2020), several points such as availability of learning facilities, both students and teachers capability in using online application, and how the application of the distance learning become matters which occur nowadays in our education life (Mulyanti, Purnama, & Pawinanto, 2020). Other than that, the condition where some students live in remote area also a challenge both for students and teachers in using online platforms of teaching and learning (Amin & Sundari, 2020).

The research related to pandemic of Covid-19 seems to be a fascinating study as it is very relevant to the current situation that the world faces including Indonesia. It is very interesting to figure out how students survive to remain having a positive attitude and away from learning anxiety as well as what strategies they use to manage a new learning method when learning in this emergency situation (Baloran, 2020). Additionally, psychological side of the students when experiencing an online learning also needs to be consider because to have a great "mental health" for students is a must especially in the recent learning situation (Wajdi et al., 2020; Hasan & Bao, 2020). Therefore, students' perception (Layali & Al-Shlowiy, 2020), readiness (Mohalik & Sahoo, 2020), and strategy (Nurjanah, 2020) toward the use of online learning during the pandemic of Covid-19 is important to be investigated especially as there are some activities which are new in teaching and learning that both teachers and students should handle with (Cahyadi, 2020).

Particularly, this research is aimed to investigate challenges that EFL students at university level face in learning English during the current situation of Covid-19 pandemic. Even though some previous studies have found result regarding with both teachers and students'

barriers in facing online learning during the pandemic of Covid-19, but specifically in this research, the researcher feels that it is very urgent to explore more on the challenges faced by students especially in learning English. In this case, the researcher focuses on the students at university level where at their learning level and age, they tend to be more independent in learning rather than lower level of education. To go further, the researcher is excited to explore how they struggle in following the learning method allowed by university in order to adjust with the condition of Covid-19 pandemic.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Home Learning Policy in Indonesia During Covid-19 Pandemic**

The current situation related to the pandemic of Covid-19 has affected to every single aspect in life including education system. The government is forced to close all of educational institutions and suddenly change the method of face to face interaction in the classroom (Azzahra, 2020; Pujilestari, 2020). In this case, the government of Indonesia through the Ministry of Education and Culture has decided to change dramatically the implementation of teaching and learning process from offline to online classroom in the midst of March 2020 (Nadeak, 2020). Responding to this emergency situation, the regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture, through the Permendikbud No. 72 (2013) concerning with the implementation of special services of education and Permendikbud No. 33 (2019) regarding with the implementation of educational unit program with disaster safe, stated that education should be held and provided for students by paying attention to the students' needs as well as adjusting to the recent situation in order to fulfill students' rights in obtaining proper education. Based on this regulation issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, policy of home learning or what so called by Learning from Home policy (LFH) is applied in order to preserve children with decent education while maintaining their safety and healthy by keeping them away from Covid-19 virus. Additionally, the Ministry of Education and Culture published several policies in responding the Covid-19 pandemic toward education in Indonesia (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020) i.e. cancellation of the national examination or what so called by UN, school examination adjustment, distance learning with online method to conduct teaching and learning (Permendikbud No. 19, 2020; Permendikbud No. 20, 2020).

Furthermore, to react to the current pandemic of Covid-19, the Ministry of Education and Culture has released the guidelines for implementing the Learn from Home policy during Covid-19 pandemic (Kemdikbud, 2020). It is stated teachers should facilitate students with online distance learning in accordance with the condition and availability of learning tools as well as preparing for the learning plans, availability of time, condition and agreement between students and parents. Additionally, the application of Learning from Home policy especially for students in lower level of education is suggested to have parents' online assistance.

Special policy for school management is also issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, stated that school can have flexible usage of School Operational Assistance (BOS) and Educational Operational Assistance (BOP) with intention to fulfill school needs during the Covid-19 outbreak such as buying internet quota and credits for

teachers and students so that they can have fruitful distance teaching and learning (Permendikbud No. 20, 2020b). Moreover, not only policy in terms school management, the Ministry of Education and Culture pay more attention to health protocols of conducting teaching and learning process as stated on Permendikbud No. 3 (2020) concerning with the prevention of Covid-19 outbreak on educational units. Specifically, the regulation includes school needs to coordinate and communicate with local health service, ensure the availability of hygiene and health facilities, monitor the attendance of school elements especially when one of them is sick and in touch with breathing problems, promote healthy life style, remind the school elements to avoid direct physical contact such as hand shaking and hugging, cancel all activities which considered to gather a lot of people inside or outside of school sites.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Design**

This research is a qualitative research (Cresswell, 2003; Cresswell, 2005) where it aims to describe sort of challenges that EFL students faced in learning English at home during Covid-19 pandemic at University level.

#### **3.2 Site and Participants**

In this case, the subject is eight students from English department at University of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda. Additionally, those eight students taken from three different semesters in order to have the perception from the students as a whole.

#### **3.3 Instruments**

In-dept interview (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) is used to explore what sort of challenges they faced when conducting online learning at home during the Covid-19 pandemic and what suggestions they propose to the institution for the better quality system of education especially in the case of pandemic that Indonesia is facing at present time.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis Procedures**

In terms of data analysis, the researcher relies on the theory from Cresswell (2005) i.e. Spiral Data Analysis which consist of data managing, data reading and memoing, data describing, data interpreting, and data presenting.

### **4. Findings**

**Q1: Do you face challenges in terms of communication when learning at home? Please explain!**

Regarding with the first question, 7 out of 8 students agreed that they have challenges in terms of communication during home learning. Their challenges including boredom, the none of internet quota and phone low battery, the freedom of asking questions to lecturers especially towards learning materials and assignments which have not understood.

**Q2: Does the lecturers' style in teaching via online platform becomes one of barriers in online learning? Please explain!**

Three of students feel that different lecturer has different style in teaching, but they still can adapt with it. Three of the students feels that different style of lecturers is not a problem, as long as the online application used can provide mutual conference meeting. Related to this matter, application such as WhatsApp is not preferred by students because it does not provide two ways teaching and learning. Lecturers who use this application just send materials and assignments to students through WhatsApp group without having bounce back interaction between lecturer and students.

**Q3: How is the internet connection during home learning?**

All of the students answer that internet connection does not become the most obstacle occurred in online learning even though the internet is unstable. Some of them are facilitated with wifi at home. Some of them realize that they should stay in town to get a good connection during online learning and decided not to go back to their hometown. In this case, usually students who pursue their study in town are from different villages which have poor internet connection. However, during the pandemic of Covid-19, some students decided to go back to their hometown even though they should face the fact about poor internet connection.

**Q4: How is online application used by lecturers in online teaching?**

Based on the explanation from all of the students, they are alright with the use of online application by the lecturers. Unfortunately, there is an online application called SPADA which most of students sometimes feel difficult to access. They said that this online application needs more improvement.

**Q5: How is your readiness in online learning?**

Regarding with this question, 5 out of 8 students said that they are ready in joining online learning during the Covid-19 outbreak. Before the online learning started, they prepared themselves especially in terms of equipment e.g. laptops, cellphones, good internet networks, and webcam with microphone. On the contrary, 3 out of 8 students said that they are not ready even not ready at all to face the online learning because of several reasons such as less effective and acquiring bad attitude in learning i.e. less serious in joining the online class.

**Q6: Do you face challenges in learning style during online learning? Please explain!**

For this question, 3 out of 8 students feel that by using the learning style, they face healthy problems e.g. headache and sore eyes because of the long duration of starring at cellphone or laptop almost every day. 1 out of 8 students said that it is more difficult for him to focus on online learning because of noisy sound coming from surrounding environment. 2 out of 8 students said that they are not used to do online learning so that it makes them less in terms of understanding. The rest 2 out of 8 students said that they have no problem with the way they learning in online platform because they feel online learning is more flexible especially in terms of places.

**Q7: Do you feel that you have a difficulty in terms of technical skill in using online application during online learning? Please explain!**

For this matter, all of the students feel that they do not have any problem in terms of technical skill when using online application. Even though 2 out of 8 students face difficulties in this matter at the first time, but they can adjust to the online learning very quickly.

**Q8: What kinds of online application that lecturers usually use when teaching?**

Sort of online application used by lecturers including Zoom, Jitsi, Google Meet, YouTube, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Spada. In this case, Spada is an application provided by University of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda to facilitate both lecturers and students to conduct online learning.

**Q9: From online applications used by lecturer, which application you consider to be the most effective one? Please explain!**

For this question, all of students prefer to use Zoom because it has more features, stable, simple usage, easier to use share presentation materials by using share screen menu. In addition, 1 out of 8 students chooses Google Meet because it has simple interface and features, easy to access, unlimited time to be used.

**Q10: What are your suggestions for online lecturing during the Covid-19 Outbreak?**

All of the students agreed to say that the application provided by the campus still needs to be improved because it is difficult for them to access it oftenly especially when their connection is unstable. Additionally, the students' condition regarding with unstable internet connection especially when they are at their hometown make them sometimes cannot join the lecturing session. Concerning with this matter, they ask for lecturers' favor to give them permission for not joining the lecture.

## **5. Discussion**

Based on findings above, it is clear that internet connection for students who live in town of Samarinda is often stable rather than those who decide to go back to their hometown during the Covid-19 outbreak. It is supported by the research from Amin & Sundari (2020), saying that students who live out of the town or particularly in remote area often face unstable internet connection problem. Therefore, matter of accessibility for students when they are engaged in online learning is very important since it has high connection to the use of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) (Ali, 2020).

Moreover, the findings reveal that all of the students feel that to operate the online application used by the lecturers is not a big deal for them. It is contradictive with a research findings found by from SĂLCEANU (2020) where 74,33 % of students face different difficulties in terms of operating competency. Additionally, just as the findings found by the researcher, SĂLCEANU (2020) noticed that students are happy with flexible management

of place in joining the online class or concerning with its accessibility (Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj, & Sethi, 2020). Meaning that they can still follow the class wherever they are.

Regarding with the matter of students' suggestion is particularly about the improvement of the online application provided by the campus because the internet connection of students when using it tends to be unstable. This fact reveals that suggestions for online learning during this Covid-19 outbreak are highly significantly as well as important. As what is suggested by Tanveer et al. (2020), saying that to overcome the problem of unstable internet connection, the formal institution needs to make networking with internet provider to support the online learning even though it will trigger higher internet bill (Putri et al., 2020). Therefore, change management system needs to be established by higher education manager in order to handle various academic problems (Mishra, Gupta, & Shree, 2020) including training for lecturers in using various types of online application as well as adjustment of lesson plan (Mukhtar et al., 2020).

Moreover, a barrier in terms of healthy reason face by some of the students specifically being headache in joining the online class where they should stay in front of their cellphone or laptop. For the matter, a research findings found by Espino-Díaz et al. (2020) reveal that in order to reduce stress of both lecturers and students, combination of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and neuroeducation are possible to give a better contribution in online teaching and learning process.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings of the research uncover that the EFL students particularly at University of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda face different types of challenges in joining online class. The result comes to the conclusion that there are three major challenges that the students face i.e. 1) unstable internet connection, 2) the use of certain online application used by the lecturers which often cannot be reached by the students especially when they have low internet connection, and 3) healthy reason i.e. being dizzy starring at the screen of cellphones or laptops. Moreover, suggestions for this research come to several points i.e. 1) improvement of certain online application provided by campus, 2) combination of online learning with neuroeducation to reduce stress of both lecturers and students, and cooperation between formal higher education and internet provider to support online teaching and learning.

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