

Online Learning in ELL: Barriers and Perceptions of Indonesian Students

Teguh Sulistyono¹, Winda Efmilika Anjani², Saiful Marhaban^{3*}, Rofiqoh Rofiqoh⁴, Yunita Puspitasari⁵

^{1,2} Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan Malang, Indonesia

³ Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

⁴ Universitas Tadulako, Palu, Indonesia

⁵ Postgraduate of Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

⁵STKIP PGRI Jombang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT - The present study highlights the interventions of online learning in English Language Learning (henceforth ELL) in Indonesian contexts during the pandemic of Covid 2019. It tries to describe the barriers and perceptions of Indonesian students after the interventions of online learning platforms in cyberspace pedagogy. This study employed 232 students from three different universities in Indonesia representing three demographics: West, Middle, and East parts of Indonesia. The data were collected using Google Form Questionnaire to find out the students' preferences and perceptions towards online learning as well as the barriers they experienced. The findings revealed that they have some problems during online learning platforms that influence their preferences and perceptions towards online learning. It suggests that teachers need to consider the learner context interface and the sense of trust and connectedness in online learning platforms.

Keywords – Barriers, English Language Learning, Online learning, preferences, perceptions.

I. INTRODUCTION

The presence of online learning platforms in cyber pedagogy is not something new in the world of education. Many kinds of online learning platforms have been offered both synchronous and asynchronous tools. The existence of Web 2.0 technology is a motivational tool in ESL/EFL education and various learning tasks (Halim & Hashim, 2019), and with the supports of computer and the Internet, online learning changes the cyberspace pedagogic strategies and ultimately empowers the efficiency of teaching and learning (Cai, 2012). Online learning basically takes place when a teacher and students are physically separated in the distance, and it employs web 2.0 technologies to bridge the instructional gaps. Somehow, it is suggested to provide interpersonal communication chances for students to socially interact with the teacher and peers (Chi et al., 2016) in an online learning community in which a group of different individuals is united by communication tools cultivating a sense of trust and connectedness (Du et al., 2010).

There have been several studies focusing on how online learning-based activities affect the outcomes of English Language learning (ELL) (Abidin et al., 2011; Al-haq & Al-sobh, 2010; Chi et al., 2016; Du et al., 2010; Foroutan, 2013; Sulistyono et al., 2019; Widiastuti et al., 2018). Yet, research focusing on the barriers faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students of university level and their perceptions towards online learning is still under-researched, especially in Indonesian contexts. Let alone, the pandemic of Corona (Covid-19) spreading out all over the world, including Indonesia, forces people to employ self-isolation or physical distance. Nevertheless, education activities must go on, so, in

response to these phenomena, the Indonesian Government decided to implement the teaching and learning process using online learning platforms. The question arising is whether this recent condition and quick decision match Indonesian students' needs and readiness in joining ELL courses using online learning platforms. This present paper was also motivated by a study conducted by Faizi et al. (2015), which revealed that online tools provide schools and universities with more opportunities to go beyond traditional delivery formats and develop learner-centered personalized learning environments. This finding should be investigated further whether it matches Indonesian contexts where facilities, the psychology of the students, or probably the new atmospheres of learning will determine the students' perceptions towards online learning platforms.

In response to these facts, this paper then aims at finding out the barriers, preferences, and perceptions of Indonesian students when joining English Language Learning classes using online learning platforms. It is hoped that there will a clear insight related to the interventions of online learning in Indonesian contexts that may be beneficial to be taken into consideration before, during, and after the implementations of online learning platforms.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. The use of online learning platforms in English Language Learning (ELL) classrooms

The presence of Web 2.0 has changed paradigms in education, including ELL, where teaching-learning activities are not only limited to face-to-face courses in classrooms but also bi-directional communication courses



available online. Coutinho & Bottentiat Jr (2010) state that teachers and students engaged in online courses can maximize a series of tools from the Internet called Web 2.0, which are simple to apply so that they construct new cyberspace horizons for teaching and distance learning. Fan (2018) suggests that it is important to develop new cyberspaces in language learning by empowering Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Somehow, the term of E-Learning 2.0 referring to the new generation of E-Learning (online learning) that followed the changes of paradigms in Web 2.0 is much more a social than a technological revolution. It implies that the new paradigms of communication between the teacher and the students and among the students should be changed into an online line community. It is a constant change (Rahmawati, 2016) that must focus on how the teaching-learning process runs well with satisfactory outcomes of ELL, both the development of EFL students' competencies and positive perceptions towards online learning.

There are some factors to be taken into consideration in the implementation of online learning communities. According to Du et al. (2010), there are 4 elements of online learning communities: interactivity, collaboration, trusting relationship, and communication media. Interactivity is teacher-student and student-student communication in online platforms, and it should involve students continuously participating and responding to classroom discussions Yang & Richardson (2010). Collaboration is another aspect existing in both face-to-face and online learning communities. In online learning, it exists commonly when students work together by sharing and giving peer feedback. Trusting relationship is a very important element in which teacher really believes that students are honest when joining the class as well as doing a specific task (Du et al., 2010), including connectedness, which permits students to keep in touch with their teacher and peers even though they are physically separated. Last but not least, communication media are the tools to be maximized in online learning platforms. They can be synchronous and or asynchronous, which allows the students to interact actively in the online courses. A teacher implementing a certain tool should also consider the learner context interface, which refers to the interaction between a student and the digital interface (tool) in the online instructional context. Lavin, Korte, and Davies (Lavin et al., 2010) claim that the use of technologies in ELL has developed significantly as students have become increasingly tech-savvy. Thus, there is no more reason to neglect the benefits of technologies in ELL.

In conjunction with English Language Learning (ELL), there some online learning platforms which can be applied in virtual courses: synchronous and asynchronous tools. Somehow, teachers should be aware of the potential frustrations, such as technical difficulties that interfere with online classroom management situations (Erben et al., 2009). Some tools that may be applied in the cyberspace pedagogy are Google Classroom, Zoom, Ms. Team, WhatsApp group, e-mail, Edmodo, class blog, etc. in which the teacher must be sure that both teacher and

students are familiar enough with the tools they are using in the online teaching-learning process.

B. Theoretical foundations for online platform use in English Language Learning

Online learning platforms have been a popular issue in cyber pedagogy lately when the spread of technology and the Internet is widely developed around the world. One of the issues related to this issue is how students, especially in higher education, react to this. Zhang & Bonk (2010) state that when applying online learning platforms, a teacher should consider classroom diversities among the students, such as background, lifestyle, learning preferences, and social inclination. In addition, adult students frequently bring to the classroom a number of positive qualities, such as enthusiasm and a genuine desire to learn (Hsu & Hamilton, 2010). These conditions should be taken into account when a teacher plans to employ an online learning platform in ELL. In fact, online learning platforms require students' autonomous learning and independence since they do not regularly meet their teachers in face-to-face modes. Rather they are physically away from their teachers. According to Ekmekçi (2015), online learning not only offers learners and teachers great opportunities but also brings a lot of challenges. Learners are unsupervised, self-directed, independent, and expected to be more autonomous. Thus, it is really important to empower students with positive qualities and facilities when joining online learning courses.

With regards to English Language learning, there have been some debates about whether it is appropriate to bring English courses into online learning platforms. A study by Kuama & Intharaksa (2016) proved that in the majority of students increased their English competencies and had positive attitudes after being treated using online learning courses. Cai (2012) and Lin (2015) claim some benefits of online learning in ELL, such as the abundant teaching materials, easy access to information, direct interest, flexibility, and the access to observe learning activities. Fan (2018) also supports online learning by arguing that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is important to develop online foreign language teaching and learning. Let alone, and there is a tendency to use computers more than ever before; likewise, more people have adopted the habit of on-screen reading (Boudjadar, 2015). Thus, it is really important to apply more practices on online learning activities of language teaching and learning, yet teachers need to understand their students' conditions, particularly the level of technology savvy and the availability of supports such as the quality of the internet connection and other aspects which can be barriers in the implementations of online learning.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

To investigate the implementations of online learning activities in ELL, a research survey was developed to elicit Indonesian students' problems and perceptions towards online learning platforms. A questionnaire using Google Form tool consisting of 10 questions was given to university-level students majoring in English Language

Department after they were treated using online learning platforms. By using an online rather than a paper-based questionnaire, it was intended to obtain faster responses and more respondents, and the fact that pandemic Covid 19 did not allow us to have face-to-face communication with the students. The data were collected to find out the students'

preferences and perceptions towards online learning as well as the barriers they experienced.

This study obtained 232 responses of the students (180 females and 52 males) from three different universities in Indonesia representing three demographics: West, Middle, and East parts of Indonesia. The intention to distribute the questionnaire to different areas was to find more representative responses that could be generated more precisely related to Indonesian online learning contexts.

The data were then analyzed quantitatively to describe the conditions of online learning activities from the perspectives of university-level students in Indonesian contexts after they were treated using online platforms in English Language Learning.

IV. Results and Discussion

A. The tools and barriers in online learning platforms

The first issue in this study was the tools and the barriers that Indonesian students experienced in ELL during online learning platforms. Fig. 1 shows the tools they applied.

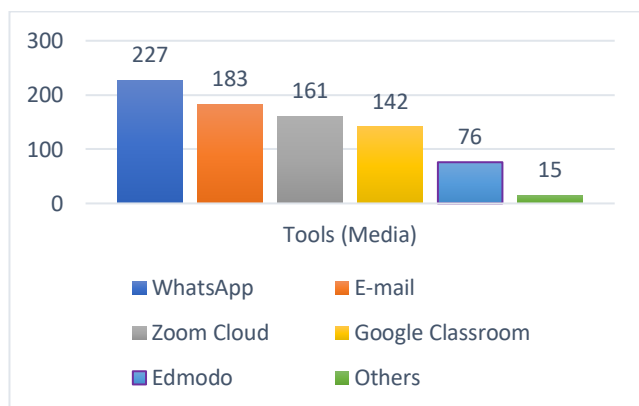


Fig. 1. Tools the students used in both synchronous and asynchronous modes

Fig. 1 describes that the most frequently tools the students applied were WhatsApp Group (227 students/ 97.8 %), E-mail (183 students/ 78%), Zoom Cloud (161 students/69.4%), Google Classroom (142 students/61.2%), Edmodo (76 students/32.8%), and others (15 students/6.45%). It seems that each student applied two or more tools when joining the class. WhatsApp Group application was the most frequently used, probably due to the students' styles in which they were familiar with this application and used it in everyday lives, and it could be applied both in synchronous and asynchronous settings. Meanwhile, Zoom Cloud Meeting was the most frequently employed when they had synchronous online learning activities.

With regard to the barriers in online learning platforms, Fig. 2 shows the problems the students faced, and one student probably experienced more than one problem in this context.

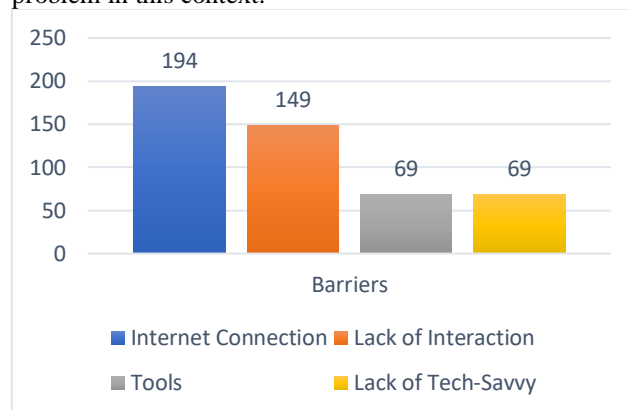


Fig. 2. The barriers the students faced

Fig. 2 describes that the Internet connection was the biggest barrier (194 students/83.6%). Then, lack of interaction was another factor (149 students/64.2%) where students basically still needed to have more communication with their teachers and peers. Surprisingly, lack of tools was also experienced by 69 students (29.7%), and lack of tech-savvy (69 students/29.7%) happened to them.

The findings indicate that Indonesian students in the majority still had an internet connection problem and a lack of interaction with their teachers and peers. In addition, they also experienced bad aspects dealing with the tools they had to possess and lack of tech-savvy, which might influence their perceptions towards online learning and outcomes of ELL. Some previous studies also revealed some barriers in online learning, especially dealing with internet connection in the Malaysian context, and lack of interaction since students had time limitation in the synchronous courses, and they needed more feedback from their teachers (Ekmekçi, 2015; Haron et al., 2015; Rahmawati, 2016). In addition, a study by Khan, Hasan, and Clement (Khan et al., 2012) revealed that the barriers faced by students were commonly lack of technology and lack of time in practicing cyber pedagogy. The barriers should be minimized so that online learning platforms can be developed and implemented well in ELL because removing obstacles to learning increases persistence and motivation in learning (Hsu & Hamilton, 2010).

The commitments of the stakeholders in education to help decrease the barriers are of importance, and the students' ability and willingness to increase their tech-savvy will be beneficial too in online learning atmospheres. Both factors contribute to the successful learner experiences in online learning environments. Good learning environments should also be assessment-centered, allowing students to get feedback for improvement (Chou, 2010) when interactions exist in online learning courses. Then, Moore (Moore, 1989) divides three types of online interaction: learner-content interaction, learner-instructor interaction, and learner-learner interaction. The

interactions should be built well in order to overcome the misunderstanding which potentially happens during online courses by applying two conditions: (a) teacher participation is key to student engagement by developing a teaching atmosphere inclusive of online course delivery and (b) engaged students tend to accomplish online courses (Estes, 2015). It seems that students were not ready when they had to join online courses due to pandemic Covid 19 since they used to have face-to-face courses, but suddenly they had to adjust themselves into new online learning environments with limited direct interactions. Thus, it is the duty of the teachers to help the students by creating good environments for online courses. In fact, when teachers can create performance expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions, students will reach positively in online learning platforms (Wong et al., 2019). Thus, the use of several combinations of online learning tools might help students to engage the online courses and maximize teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction so that they would not feel isolated.

B. Students' perceptions towards online learning

The second issue to be investigated in this present study was the students' preferences and perceptions towards online learning activities in English Language Learning. Figure 3 represented the students' preferences when they were given an opportunity to select learning activities in ELL. In the majority, 115 out of 232 students (49.57%) preferred face-to-face learning activities, 106 students (45.69%) chose blended learning, and the rest 11 students (4.74%) selected fully online learning. It seems that after being treated using fully online learning in 2,5 months, the students could feel and select which type of learning platform they liked best based on their experiences in learning with different platforms. Their perceptions were the results of their experiences during online learning activities in ELL. There must be pros and cons to online learning.

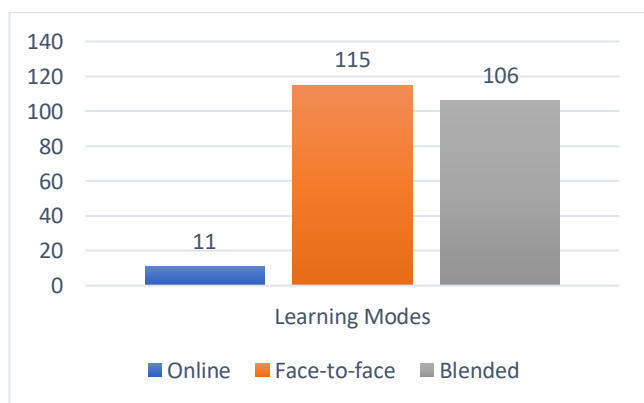


Fig. 3. Students' preferences in ELL

Fig. 4, in addition, figures out the students' perceptions towards the effectiveness of online learning platforms on teaching-learning activities of ELL. Surprisingly, 50% of students had positive perceptions of

online learning (10 very effective and 106 effective = 126 students), and another 50% had negative perceptions (101 ineffective and 15 very ineffective = 126 students).

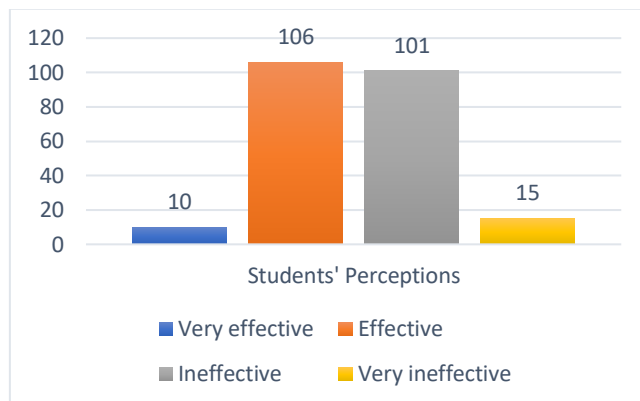


Fig. 4. Students' perceptions of online learning

Those selecting a face-to-face environment might not be ready to join fully online learning, or they still needed more time to adjust to new learning activities. It is in harmony with a study by Kuama & Intharaksa (2016), which revealed that students, specifically those with low English proficiency, lacked online learning skills and experiences in self-directed learning, so they were not ready for learning English online, and they still needed more time to adapt to some new learning environments. Rahmawati (2016) found that E-learning decreased direct communication and social interaction but increased student fear dealing with lack of tech-savvy and internet connection. Another study found that the main reason that influenced the students to use E-Learning is the fact that it is a compulsory component of the course (Haron et al., 2015).

A student noted:

“Since it is hard for me to join fully online learning activities due to unstable internet connection and lack of technologies and interaction, I prefer face-to-face environments.”

It is clear that students must be supported with adequate tools and readiness to operate the online learning tools, and teachers must be able to create online activities that reduce a sense of being isolated during online learning activities.

On the other hand, those who preferred blended learning seemed to be able to adjust to new learning environments, but they were not totally ready fully with online learning. One of the students stated:

“Using technology in ELL is very beneficial, but face-to-face also provides many advantages, such as direct communication, and it is easier to understand the materials. So, I like the combination of both.”

The idea is in line with the results of some studies. Blended learning, ELL that includes face-to-face and online learning activities (Hockly, 2015), allows a flexible language learning platform with a variety of interactive

language activities (Rahim, 2019), and it can motivate learning and improve scientific critical thinking skills (Wahyuni et al., 2019). Blended learning is a flexible way in ELL since both teacher and students may have an agreement when they apply online learning and face-to-face modes. It can accommodate students' needs in learning as well as their preferences in ELL.

Last but not least, a small number of students also like online learning for their own reasons. A student mentioned:

“It is time for students to adapt to new learning environments. Online learning enables them and me to work in flexible ways.”

His statement is in accordance with a study done by Rahmawati (2016), which revealed that E-learning offers flexibility, unlimited sources, and encouragement to read. It makes sense that if students got positive views about E-learning, they would like to experience more online learning activities. It was found that E-learning service quality was positively related to E-learning student satisfaction, which in turn would influence E-learning student loyalty (Pham et al., 2019). As a result, it is really a challenge for teachers to enable their students to have positive perceptions by providing satisfactory and challenging online activities.

All these findings indicate that the students had split perceptions on online learning. The students who obtained positive experiences during the interventions of online learning platforms tend to have good impressions on these platforms and selected very effective and effective choices. In fact, online learning provided opportunities for them to have more tech-savvy, flexible activities that could be done anytime and anywhere, new experiences, and they became more autonomous and independent. In contrast, the students who still lacked tech-savvy and had unstable internet connection had a tendency to have negative perceptions of online learning by selecting ineffective and very ineffective choices. They felt that they experienced a lack of communication and interaction with their teacher and peers and still got difficulties understanding materials given online.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The experiences in joining online learning platforms in ELL determined the students' perceptions of online learning. The experiences covered the students' level of tech-savvy, the quality of the internet connection and the tools they had as well as the quality and quantity in communication and interaction. In general, the obstacles of Indonesian university-level students cover the supports of tools, internet connection, and lack of quality and quantity of communication and interaction: teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction. Also, half of them have positive perceptions of online learning, and the rest have negative ones due to their own reasons. Online learning student satisfaction leads the students to reach E-learning student loyalty, but negative experiences influence

them to avoid fully online learning courses. It implies that the learner context interface influences their perceptions of

online learning environments. In fact, the students need more supports, time, and practice before joining fully online learning, so blended learning may bridge the preferences and obstacles of the students in joining new learning environments.

This present study may have some limitations, such as the length of online treatments, so it is strongly advised that future researchers take a responsibility to conduct more thorough research on online learning by investigating which online platform works better in ELL and the needs of the students in joining online learning platforms.

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