VOCATIONAL STUDENTS' PREFERENCES TOWARD ONLINE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Boni Saputra[1], Rionaldi[2], Arita Destianingsih[3]
[1,2,3]Lecturers od English Study Program of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis
State Polytechnic of Bengkalis
Jl. Bathin Alam-Sungai Alam, Bengkalis-Riau, 28711 Phone: (+6277) 24566, Riau, Indonesia.
e-mail: boni@polbeng.ac.id, rio@polbeng.ac.id, arita@polbeng.ac.id

Abstract: *The Covid-19 pandemic insists face-to-face learning on campus be switched to online or e-learning. However, radical changes are challenging for both educators and students.. This study aims at finding students' preferences toward online English Language Learning and teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants of the study were 54 Language Department students at the State Polytechnic of Bengkalis. The research was conducted in a descriptive method. Data and information were gathered through a 5-point Likert scale Google form survey adapted from Coman, et.al (2020). The questionnaire covered students' technical condition, students' technical skills / learning styles, lecturers' technical skills / teaching styles, student's ability to assimilate and learn while learning online. The data were analyzed using Statistical analysis application; The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to provide descriptive statistics. The study discovered that video conference platforms were the most preferable in online learning, and live video conference and discussion on chat/forums were the most favorable ones. It was also found that the satisfaction level toward online learning was low; face-to-face learning is still the most favorable. In addition, improvement on students' technical condition, students' technical skills / learning styles, lecturers' technical skills / teaching styles were still needed. Therefore, appropriate utilization of video conference and forum discussion was a necessity. Finally, it is recommended to provide both lecturers' and students' training programs to promote better online learning and teaching.*

Keywords: *online learning, teaching, pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing Covid-19 outbreak has forced school closures across the globe. It leaves educational institutions, educators, and governments fewer options. Stakeholders demand that classroom instruction be replaced with online learning or students learn from home. In this context, using online media-based activities in teaching and learning is an alternative learning method. Google Classroom, Google

Meet, Zoom, and Whatsapp, as well as YouTube applications, are among the most popular platforms since the outbreak last year. Nonetheless, educators are still working hard to develop interactive activities that allow students to learn through the numerous characteristics of media used during the study.

Online learning, or e-learning, is not a new concept. Yet, implementing online learning with e-learning systems at the State Polytechnic of Bengkalis was difficult at first since it was not employed in language learning and teaching practice at the campus before. As a result, it takes more for the lecturers and also the students to adjust to this new teaching and learning practice. Interactions occur when lecturers invite the students to have video conference classroom, post assignments, share and comments on related topics and guide students in discussion, presentation activities.

Jabeen and Thomas (2015) found that learning with an instructor to be much more effective than studying alone in an online environment for the students. Offline classroom setting is more preferred to an online one for language learning. Therefore, it is crucial that students and lecturers to adjust their learning and teaching styles toward online learning setting since it is the only option available during the pandemic.

Many researchers have undertaken a number of studies on the effectiveness of online learning. The majority of results suggested that online learning is still a supplementary to the overall learning process. According to Fleck and Jacob (2011), distant (online) learning must be supplemented with physical presence (blended learning) to enhance the effectiveness of the educational process.

Similarly, Chatrand (2012) discovered that students with limited time for actual English communication can be encouraged to use the Internet to develop their English communication abilities. It can be inferred that both lecturers and students are still finding best way to implement this as main program during pandemic situation.

In order to optimize the process of teaching and learning, there is a need for a study on students' preferences and the implementation of online learning using various platforms. The findings of this study can be a reference in selecting platforms of online learning media and

organizing procedures of learning. Appropriate usage of these platforms determines the quality of learning. The result of the study is students' preferences for online learning as well as the design of suitable English online learning. It is expected that it could lead to an effective learning procedure guide.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Online learning (also known as e-learning, digital learning, or computer-based learning) is defined as instruction delivered via a digital device to support learning (Clark & Mayer, 2016). This definition is divided into three sections that address the what, how, and why of online learning: The material presented consists of words in spoken or printed form and/or graphics such as illustrations, diagrams, photos, animation, or video; (b) the medium is a computer-based device such as a desktop computer, laptop computer, tablet, smartphone, or virtual reality; and (c) the instructional goal is to cause specific changes in the learner's knowledge. Because instruction is increasingly shifting away from traditional media such as books and face-to-face meetings, online learning has gained traction.

Many innovative approaches to learning can be supported by online venues, but research-based principles for how to best take advantage of these new opportunities are required. We are confronted with the problem that advances in instructional technologies have outpaced advances in instructional science required to determine how to best use them. In short, just because something is technologically possible does not mean it should be done. It is important to recognize that instructional media, including computer-based media, do not cause learning; rather, instructional methods cause learning (Clark, 2001).

Certain instructional technologies may enable instructional methods that are impractical or impossible with traditional media. Computer-based media, for example, enable interactive or dynamic graphics-based instructional methods that traditional book-based media cannot. However, there are numerous examples of the rise and fall of cutting-edge technologies in education throughout history, including motion pictures in the 1920s, radio in the 1930s, television in the 1950s, and programmed instruction in the 1960s

(Cuban, 1986; Saettler, 2004). The lesson from this early history is that it is necessary to take a learner-centered approach, asking how technology can be adapted to support human learning, rather than a technology-centered approach, asking how we can force humans to adapt to the latest cutting-edge technology.

METHODS

The The purposes of the research were to explore EFL students' preferences) towards online EFL language learning and teaching and to provide suggestions about the implementation of online English learning and teaching during the covid-19 pandemic. To achieve the research purposes and provide the answers to the questions, a descriptive research framework was selected using a survey method. The participants of this study were 54 students of the Language Department of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis consisting of 13 males and 41 females from two study programs; 36 students from the D3 English study program and 18 students from English for Business and Professional Communication study program.

For collecting the data, a closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire was distributed to each group participant to capture their perspectives. An electronic survey was used to collect the data since it is a good alternative to use during pandemic. The current study made use of the questionnaire adapted from Coman, et.al, et al (2020). All items in the questionnaire were organized and classified under 4 different groups as shown in **Table 1.** A 5-point Likert scale with five categories (1= never or almost never true of me, 2= rarely or usually not true of me, 3= somewhat true of me, 4= usually true of me, and 5= always or almost always true of me) was administered for students' technical conditions, students' technical skills/learning styles, and lecturers technical skills/teaching styles categories.

While, for student's ability to assimilate and learn while learning online categories, preferences for student-lecturer interaction(live, written, audio, not answering), presenting projects online (harder, easier, neutral), processing information (audio, video, forums/chats), online information processing (easier, harder, the same), opinion towards online learning (5-point Likert scale, where 1

= not at all satisfied, 5 = very satisfied), opinion towards the use of the online environment for learning (5-point Likert scale, where 1 = to a very small extent, 5 = to a very great extent), preference for future learning in higher education (online, face to face, a combination between online and offline−hybrid), preferences for platforms used in EFL teaching (video conference, learning management system, and social media messenger), preferences for EFL courses structure (live conference and discussion, live conference and forum/chat discussion, recorded video and forum/chat discussion, and LMS and live discussion). These item data were analyzed using Statistical analysis was carried out using The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to provide descriptive statistics such as item means, standard deviations, and response frequencies and percentages.

Table 1 Categories of EFL perspectives toward EFL Learning and Teaching

No	Categories	Items
1	Students' Technical Conditions	4 items
2	Students' Technical Skills/Learning Styles	4 items
3	Lecturers Technical Skills/Teaching Styles	9 items
4	Student's Ability to Assimilate and Learn while learning online	8 items

FINDING DISCUSSION

The Table 2 Students' Technical Conditions

No	StateMent	VFq F (P)	Fq F (P)	NFq, NR F (P)	R F (P)	N F (P)	Mean	DS
1	I got difficulties while connecting to the online learning platforms	5 (9.3%)	8 (14.8%)	30 (55.6%)	8 (14.8%)	3 (5.6%)	3.074	0.949
2	I lose signal during the courses/ seminars	11 (20.4%)	8 (14.8%)	26 (48.1%)	7 (13.0%)	2 (3.7%)	3.352	1.067
3	I have delayed visualization of messages communicated on the platforms	4 (7.4%)	14 (25.9%)	18 (33.3%)	12 (22.2%)	6 (11.1%)	2.963	1.115
4	The sound, image and video are not clear (there are interruptions)	4 (7.4%)	11 (20.4%)	24 (44.4%)	13 (24.1%)	2 (3.7%)	3.037	0.951
	Total						3.107	1.027

In terms of students' technical conditions, in connecting to online learning platforms, the majority of respondents (55.6%) stated that they nor frequently nor rarely got that problem. Moreover, those who rarely and never got a problem connecting to the online learning platforms were 14.8% and 5.6 % respectively. Dealing with signal, the majority neither answered nor frequently nor rarely got that problem (48.1%), 35.2% of respondents frequently and very frequently lose signal during the course/seminar, while only a smaller

percentage (16.7%) of them rarely and never faced it and experienced this problem.

In the visualization of the message, the percentages of students who were frequently and very frequently faced delayed visualization of messages communicated on the platforms, and those who were nor frequently nor rarely experienced it were the same (33.3%). In addition, having unclear sound, image, and video or having interruptions during the course or seminar, the majority of them (44.4%) nor frequently or nor rarely faced it, 28.2% frequently and very frequently faced it, and another 24.1% rarely faced it, while the rest (3.7%) never had it. In short, the majority of students sometimes faced difficulties connecting to online learning platforms, losing signal during the course/seminar, having delayed visualization, and having interruptions during the course. The highest frequency of technical condition difficulties faced by the students was losing signal during the courses/seminars (M=3.352, SD=1.067). These findings are consistent with those of Jaradat and Ajlouni (2021), Coman et al. (2020), and Zboun and Farrah (2021), who

discovered that inconsistent internet connections and slow e-learning platforms and services make online learning difficult for most students.

In terms of motivation to learn online, 27.8% of respondents said they were frequently or very frequently unmotivated to learn online (Mean=2.962). Additionally, 30.7 percent of respondents reported being unable to focus in an online learning environment and being unable to avoid distractions, which is the highest mean of 3.302. This shows that it was the most difficult issue that students encountered while learning English online. This is congruent with the findings of Jaradat and Ajlouni (2021), who found that a large number of students lacked motivation and had difficulty focusing on online learning..

Moreover, 31.5% of the respondents' frequently and very frequently faced poor time management skills, which affect their online learning capabilities. The highest percentage among all (37.0%) of them nor frequently nor rarely faced it (mean=3, SD=1.256). This findings are in line with the finding of Jaradat and Ajlouni (2021) who reported poor time management skills faced by the students

(57.3%, M=3.47). In addition, only 14.8% of the respondents reported frequently and very frequently faced having poor ICT skills in using online learning platforms (Mean= 2.321, SD=1.252). This indicates that most of the students have already had strong ICT skills in using the online learning platforms. This finding contradicts Jaradat and Ajlouni's (2021) and Zhound and Farrah's (2022) findings (2021) who found that the students had low ICT skills and had trouble using Google Meet or other online applications.

In terms of online learning interaction, 42.6% of respondents cited a lack of interaction with peers/lecturers during online language teaching and learning. A study discovered that students feel alienated due to a lack of engagement, particularly with lecturers, because they spend more time inside, in front of the computer. Coman et al. (2021) discovered that students were impacted by a lack of engagement with both lecturers and peers. Zhound and Farah (2021) discovered that most students thought that interaction with teachers in online classes is less than that of in face-to-face classes, therefore, quality and timely interaction between

student and professor is required in online classes during Covid 19 as discovered by Nambiar (2020).

In terms of teaching style adaptation, 36.8% of respondents reported that they commonly encountered a lack of adaptation of teaching style or strategies for the online setting. According to a study conducted by Coman et al. (2021), a lack of adaptation of the teaching style to the online environment has a negative impact on students' ability to internalize and comprehend the material given during the courses. Also, a third of respondents (33.3%) said that they frequently encountered a lack of clearly formulated requirements/ directions from the instructors when teaching EFL. Sustaining students' attention in online EFL teaching, 29.6% of respondents said they commonly encountered instructors' inability to retain students' attention in online language instruction.

In the online learning process, 27.8% of respondents noted a frequent lack of help from lecturers. Jomana and Farah (2021) also discovered that the majority of students agreed both students and instructors were not adequately equipped to teach or learn in

online programs, resulting in reduced satisfaction for both students and instructors. In terms of punctuality, 29.9% of respondents reported frequently experienced that the classes did not start or ended at the established time. A study by Coman, et.al (2021) found that 32.8% of respondents declared that lecturers did not give breaks and classes did not start or end at the established hours.

In assessment and evaluation, the majority of respondents (43.5%), reported that assessment and evaluation used were objectives. It is incongruent with Xhaferi and Xhaferi (2020) that found that the assessment and evaluation done were fair and objective. Regarding on The structure of the courses taught online, the majority of respondents (51.9%) of respondents reported that they frequently experience the courses were more theory than practical. It is in line with the findings of Coman, et.al (2021). 33.3 % of respondents reported that they frequently have less time for individual study and project preparation since courses/seminars began to be held online. Xhaferi and Xhaferi (2020) found a much higher percentage of the students who reported that they were always given much homework (60%).

In short, the structure of online courses, which involves more theory than practice, has the highest mean (M=3.389). Furthermore, the percentage of people who encounter it regularly and very frequently was larger than the percentage of the other categories. The second-highest mean of all categories is a lack of adaptation of teaching style or tactics for the online environment (Mean=3.094). The percentage of individuals who faced it regularly or very frequently was 36.8%. Absence of interaction with peers/lecturers during online language teaching and learning (Mean=3.037) is the third-highest mean, with 42.6% experiencing it regularly or very frequently. In comparison, the assessment and help from instructors had the lowest means of all, 2.556 and 2.557, respectively.

In terms of student-lecturer interaction, the majority of respondents (46.3%) opted to provide a written response on a forum/chat, while 40.7% preferred to respond live during a video conference. Just 7.4% opted to respond by audio, while the remaining 5.6% did not know/did not respond. It is consistent with the findings of Coman

et al. (2021), who found that the vast majority of students prefer to interact with professors in writing, on chat/forum (52.4%), and use the microphone less.

Students find it difficult to present projects online. The majority of responders (40.7%) found it more difficult to present the project online. 29.6% found it easier, while the remaining 29.6% considered it neither easier nor harder to present a project online. Coman et al. (2021) discovered that delivering seminar projects online is substantially more difficult (32.9%).

The majority of respondents (70.3%) found it easier to process material conveyed by the instructor in the online setting when the course is held with video and audio. Another 24.1% found it easier to assimilate material when the course is developed in writing or through forums/chats. Just 5.6% of people believe that listening to audio makes it simpler to process information. It is consistent with the findings of Coman et al. (2021), who discovered that courses held in a videoconferencing system increased the degree of knowledge and information processing (73%). Online information processing is also challenging for

students. Most of the respondents (57.4%) stated that it was harder to do online information processing compared to offline courses. 29.6% stated that they were the same. Only 13.0% stated that online information processing was easier. It is also in line with finding that processing information is more difficult in the E-learning system (60.5%) by Coman, et.al's (2020).

Regarding the satisfaction of the respondents toward the online teaching system on the E-learning platform, only 11.1% felt satisfied+ very satisfied with it. The majority of the 51.9% were neutral. The percentage of those who were dissatisfied and very dissatisfied was 36.8%, much higher than the percentage of those satisfied + dissastisfied. In contrast, Coman et al discovered a substantially larger number of individuals who were very satisfied and satisfied by the E-learning process (39.1%), 31.9% were undecided, and only 29% were dissatisfied. Students who were more open to the use of the online environment in general for the teaching-learning process were more satisfied with their entirely online learning experience during the epidemic.

Students who were more open to the use of the online environment in general for the teaching-learning process were more satisfied with their entirely online learning experience during the epidemic.. Coman et al. (2021) discovered that students who used the internet as their primary source of learning were more likely to be satisfied with their grades.

In terms of the suitability of online environment for education and training, the majority of respondents (44.4%) considered it considered it nor in small, nor in a great extent. The majority of students would prefer the teaching/learning process to take place face-to-face (48.1%) and a combination of online and offline (40.7%) rather than exclusively online (5.6%) - this is consistent with a study conducted by Coman et al (2021) who discovered that 48.1% of students wanted their teacher to be present in person and 41.3% would prefer an online or offline combination of the two.

Dealing with preference for the platforms in online language teaching, most students prefer to use Video Conferences platforms (Skype, Zoom, Cisco WebEx Meeting, Google Meet/Hangout, and Microsoft Teams)

for online language teaching. 13.0 %preferred learning management systems (LMS) platforms, and 22.2 % preferred Social media/ mobile messenger platforms. Furthermore, in terms of course structure, 38.9% of respondents chose live video conferences and video conference discussions. 20.4% chose a live short video conference over a forum/chat conversation. 20.4% preferred recorded educational videos/materials submitted/uploaded in the platform/social media, followed by forum/chat conversation. The remaining 20.4% of learning materials were uploaded to e-learning platforms, and discussions were held via video conferences.

CONCLUSION

The findings of Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis students' preferences toward online English language learning and teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic revealed that video conference platforms were the most preferable in online learning, and live video conference and discussion on chat/forums were the most favorable ones. It was also found that the satisfaction level toward online learning

was low; face-to-face learning is still the most favorable. In addition, improvement on students' technical condition, students' technical skills / learning styles, lecturers' technical skills / teaching styles were still needed. Therefore, appropriate utilization of video conference and forum discussion is essential. Finally, it is recommended to provide both lecturers' and students' training programs to promote better online learning and teaching. Moreover, frequency and duration of video conference meeting should be increased and assignments given should be reduced.

.

REFERENCES

Ajlouni, Aseel & Jaradat, S. (2021). Undergraduates' Perspectives and Challenges of Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case from the University of Jordan. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research.* 2021:12(1),149-173

Amin, F. M., & Sundari, H. (2020). EFL students' preferences on digital platforms during emergency remote teaching: Video Conference, LMS, or Messenger Application? Studies in English Language and Education, 7(2), 362-378

Chartrand, R. (2012). The reasons behind the popularity of social media. *Knowledge Management & ELearning: An International Journal*, 4(1), 74-82. Retrieved 20 April 2020 from http://learninglanguages.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/80099558/170-479-3-PB.pdf.

Coman, C.; Tîru, L.G.; Meseşan-Schmitz, L.; Stanciu, C.; Bularca, M.C. (2020). Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education during the Coronavirus Pandemic: Students' Perspective. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 10367. https://doi.org/10.3390/su122410367

Fleck J. (2012). Blended learning and learning communities: opportunities and challenges. *Journal of Management Development*. ;31(4):398–411.

Jabeen, Shazi Shah; Thomas Ajay Jesse. (2015). Effectiveness of Online Language Learning. *Proceedings of the World Congress on Engineering and Computer Science* 2015 Vol I WCECS 2015, October 21-23, 2015, San Francisco, USA

Jacob AM. (2011). Benefits and Barriers to the Hybridization of Schools. *Journal of Education Policy, Planning and Administration*. ;1(1):61-82.

Li, Voyce. (2017). Social Media in English Language Teaching and Learning. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching*. Vol 3, No 2

Xhaferi,B. & Xhaferi,G. (2020). Online Learning Benefits and Challenges During the COVID 19 - Pandemic-Students' Perspective from SEEU. SEEU Review,15(1) 86-103. https://doi.org/10.2478/seeur-2020-0006

Zboun, J.S. & Farrah, M. (2021). Students' perspectives of online language learning during corona pandemic: Benefits and challenges. Indonesian EFL Journal, 7(1), 13-20. https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v7i1.3986