

Students and Online Learning: Friends or Foes?

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the system of education in Indonesia. The pandemic due to the corona virus has made the Indonesian government alter the education system from conventional meeting to online meeting. However, the closure of schools in Indonesia during the pandemic has ignited problems for teachers, students, and parents. Despite the benefits it offers, online learning also has some evident drawbacks. The pros and cons of online learning are also experienced by the students at UNARS. Accordingly, an online survey was conducted among the students to see how they perceived online learning. The result of the survey shows that although not as pleasant as offline meeting, online meeting is rated somewhat enjoyable by 50,8% of the students.

Keywords

Online learning
Conventional meeting
Covid-19 pandemic

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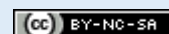
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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the system of education in Indonesia. One of the most obvious impacts of the pandemic is the change in the learning process, from conventional learning to online learning. The policy on the regulation of online learning was issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture on March 9, 2020 (Padmo et al., 2020). The policy was made to ensure the fulfillment of the rights of students to get educational services during the Covid-19 emergency, protect education unit residents from the adverse effects of Covid-19, prevent the spread and transmission of Covid-19 in education units, and ensure the fulfillment of psychosocial support for educators, students, and parents (Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). Even though online learning is cheaper and more flexible, this learning system is rarely used by educational institutions in Indonesia. Not surprisingly, with this transformation, many institutions feel unprepared and not optimal in implementing such a system (Basar et al., 2021) (Alifia, 2020). The pros and cons of online learning are also experienced by the students of Universitas Abdurachman Saleh Situbondo (UNARS). Students of UNARS come from different demographic background. Thus, this affect their experience in online learning. Some students argued that the implementation of online learning was ineffective due to some factors, such as their limited access to the internet, limited access to adequate facilities low IT skill, and distraction at home. However, some others said that online learning was the best option they could have during the pandemic as it was flexible and fun.

The pros and cons of online learning has become a topic widely discussed in research in the past year. Online learning, as the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, is considered so problematic that its implementation has been studied from varied aspects. Some research studied how online learning is implemented in Indonesia, the problems occuring during the implementation (Ganesha & Nandiyanto, 2021) (Febrianto et al., 2020), and the methods to improve the quality of online learning.

Because the main purpose of education is the improvement of students' quality, we cannot leave aside how students perceive online learning. Their learning attitude towards online learning determines the success of the teaching process. Some research analyzing students' perception towards online learning have been conducted, resulting in various findings. (Wijaya et al., 2020) analyzed the preferred learning system by students in West Java and found that conventional learning was chosen by 98,54% of the total respondents. (Saragih et al., 2020) studied students' perception towards online learning. Their research revealed that the students of Faculty of Education of Universitas Sari Mutiara Indonesia perceive online learning positively, particularly on the teaching and learning process aspect and lecturers' capabilities. Another study on students' point of view about online learning was conducted by (Misran & Yunus, 2020). The research focused on analysing five aspects: accessibility to online learning, learning independence, learning effectiveness, equality, and communication. Apart from these three studies, many other research (Laili & Nashir, 2021) (Hendrawaty et al., 2021) (Anwar & Wahid, 2021) (Agung et al., 2020) (Cahyawati & Gunarto, 2020) (Rakhmanina et al., 2020) with the topic of students' point of view on online learning have been carried out. In brief, these research provide information that online learning has some advantages and disadvantages during its implementation under different circumstances.

Taking into account the results of the previous research - despite the advantages and disadvantages it gives - online learning is the only choice that should be taken to keep the teaching and learning process going while keeping our feet on the ground. Concerning the issue, this paper tries to present how students of UNARS perceived online learning.

Online learning

Online learning, which is also referred to as e-learning, is the process of acquiring the knowledge taking place through electronic technologies and media (Abernathy, 2020). A broader definition is given by (Dhawan, 2020). He states that online learning is learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environment using devices such as laptops and mobile phones with internet access, so the process of learning is more innovative, flexible, and student-centered. However, (Sangrà et al., 2012) argue that e-learning has a concept that is subject to change, as it has to be accepted by the majority of the scientific community. They classify the definition of online learning into four forms:

1. technology-driven definition that includes definitions from private companies and a few academics emphasizing the technological aspects of online learning, while presenting the rest of its characteristics as secondary,
2. delivery-system-oriented definition that presents online learning as a means of accessing knowledge (through learning, teaching, or training) that focuses on the accessibility of resources and not the results of any achievements,
3. communication-oriented definition that considers online learning to be a communication, interaction, and collaboration tool and assigns secondary roles to its other aspects and characteristics,
4. educational-paradigm-oriented definition that defines online learning as a new way of learning or as an improvement on an existing educational paradigm.

From all definitions given, the thin line basically lies on the use the internet because online learning implies a distance between the teacher and the students.

Learning environment

According to (Bates, 2019), learning environment or learning climate is the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn, which also includes the culture of a school or class. A similar definition is given by (OECD, 2015) that says that learning environment encompasses school climate, parental involvement, and school leadership. (Babic, 2011) gives a simpler definition of learning environment. It has to have three components: a person who teaches, a person who is taught, and an educational content. Learning environments are multiple platforms where users interact and engaged to learn new skills. However, the definition has been expanded to be a more preferable and accurate alternative to traditional classes (Movchan, 2018).

A positive learning environment is essential for maximising learning outcomes (Alsadoon, 2017), keeping behavioral problem to a minimum (Wilson-fleming & Wilson-younger, 2012), and promoting student's sense of belonging, trust, encouragement (Roig, 2017). Hence, a positive learning environment is the key to student's academic, social, and emotional success. A positive classroom climate is closely related to positive student behavior. This shows to what extent students can internalize class norms and values. A positive learning environment also represents student's academic achievement and wellbeing. Students are more intellectually engaged when the learning climate reflects an effective use of study time, positive relationships between teacher and students, and a positive discipline climate.

Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the learning system around the globe. The conventional face-to-face learning has changed into the virtual one. It surely changes the learning environment as well. Virtual learning environment is a digital-based system aimed at creating interactive and active learning environments (Top Hat, 2021). (Dillenbourg et al., 2002) say that there is a social interaction between the teacher and the students even if it occurs in a virtual mode, so it can be said as social space. The pros and cons of the new learning environment has arisen since many of the students, for particular, are not familiar with such a new thing. some may feel that online learning is beneficial, but some others may think the opposite.

Learning quality has played an important role in online education for decades. As the distance learning situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic develops into a more powerful best alternative, the topic of the quality of learning has taken on new urgency. (Venable, 2020) mentions seven qualities of an effective online course. These qualities include components to create an effective environment and facilitate the process of learning.

- a. learning objective. Objectives are usually listed in several places, including the class syllabus, and state what the students should know or be able to do as a result of successfully completing the course.
- b. assessment. Assessments are designed to measure students' progress toward the objectives.
- c. course materials and activities. Often called course content, course materials and activities support students path to learning. The goal is to provide the relevant resources and practice opportunities so students can achieve the learning objectives.
- d. faculty and student interaction. Even though online courses typically offer flexibility and options for self-paced work, a good online course will integrate multiple communication tools — like email, video conferencing, and messaging to reduce emotional detachment.
- e. online student support. High-quality online courses give the students access to a variety of resources developed to support their learning.
- f. technology requirements. High-quality online courses use technology to enhance the learning experience — not complicate it.

- g. evaluation and improvement. Good online courses have plans for continuous review and revision to make sure all aspects of the courses are up to date, from technology and interactions to materials and assessments.

Students' learning point of view

Rahmania et al. (2020) say that point of view or perception is made based on assumptions about the construction of reality. Each individual develops a restricted set of point of view through his/her unique dealings with the environment to handle the unlimited variety of possible sensory images received. (O'Malley, 1999) says that student's point of view is important in evaluating the success of learning process. Further, he mentions that students' point of views are vital as they may be more important than reality, i.e., decisions, many times, are based on perceptions. The definition of students' point of view is given by (Agung et al., 2020). They define it as the experience of object, event, and relationship acquired by resuming information and interpreting messages. Attention, hope, motivation, and memory are involved in the process of resuming and interpreting the messages. Thus, we can define students' learning point of view as the developed opinion after having a certain experience learning on a certain environment. The experience they have contain the messages that the students resume and process on their mind to come up with a final idea, image, knowledge, acknowledgement, or understanding about the environment.

Related research

As online learning is considered new to students, it is important that their perceptions towards such a new environment be assessed. The aim is to find out how they view online learning and how it impacts their learning process. Some research utilising the topic of students' point of view about online learning in higher education level have been conducted in the last one year. They collected the data through the use of online questionnaire. (Cahyawati & Gunarto, 2020) analyzed the perceptions of students of Universitas Sriwijaya. (Misran & Yunus, 2020) investigated the perception of students of Islamic education management at IAIN Palopo towards and the factors supporting and inhibiting the online learning. Questionnaire and interview were their data collection methods. A research with students of Automotive Engineering Education at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo as the research subject was conducted by (Jatmoko & Faizun, 2020). They wanted to reveal the students' perceptions towards online learning, particularly on the quality of service given during the pandemic. They utilised online questionnaire to get the data. (Sirjon et al., 2021) studied students' point of view about online learning and how it related to students' participation. Data collection techniques used were survey, observation, and interview.

Method

This research employed an online survey distributed to students of UNARS through Google form. In the survey, there were seventeen questions given which were divided into four parts: basic information about the students, advantages and disadvantages of online learning, comparison between conventional learning and online learning, and acceptance towards online learning. 314 respondents filled up the online survey. They were some students from six faculties at UNARS: Faculty of Letters, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Faculty of Social and political Science, and Faculty of Agriculture. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively. The questionnaire used a Likert scale with a value range of 1-5. Nine students were chosen to be interviewed related to the virtual learning environment they have been in during the last 3 semesters. Seven questions were given to see the students' opinion about the quality of online learning they have been in. It is important to note that you do not need to use too many formulas or tables unless it is absolutely necessary to be displayed.

Results

Students' demographic background

The respondents were 187 female students and 127 male students from semeser 2, semester 4, semester 6, and semester 8. Students' age ranged from 18-30 years old. Among 314 respondents, 84,4% of them reside in Situbondo District, and the rest are in outside Situbondo. The respondents' IT skill was divided into three

categories: 278 students (88,5%) as moderate, 21 students (6,7%) as low, and 15 students (4,8%) as high. 67,8% of the total respondents (213 students) said that they have never been in any online class before the pandemic, and 32,2% (101 students) have been.

Advantages and disadvantages of online learning

The most frequent advantages of online learning chosen by the respondents were the ability to stay at home (249 students), ability to record the meeting (117 students), and easy access to online material (107 students). The next three advantages were learning on student's own pace (69 students), comfortable surrounding (54 students), and class interactivity 926 students). Then, the majority of the respondents chose technical issues (259 students), followed with poor learning condition at home (151 students), lack of interactions with other students (144 students), lack of interactions with lecturers (143 students), inability to measure actual skills (108 students), and social isolation (81 students).

Comparison between online learning and conventional learning

The questionnaire also reveals the results of students point of view towards the effectiveness on students' development of knowledge, effectiveness on students' development of social competence, effectiveness on students' development of skills, and students' activity. Table 1 shows the result that compares online learning and conventional learning.

Table 1. Comparison between online learning and conventional learning

variable	online learning	conventional learning
effectiveness on students' development of knowledge		
really effective	0,3%	24,2%
effective	21%	40,8%
somewhat effective	51,6%	32,5%
ineffective	19,4%	1,6%
really ineffective	7,6%	1%
effectiveness on students' development of social competence		
really effective	1,3%	20,7%
effective	18,5%	39,8%
somewhat effective	50%	36,9%
ineffective	24,8%	20,7%
really ineffective	5,4%	0,6%
effectiveness on students' development of skills		
really effective	1,9%	15,3%
effective	22,3%	44,3%
somewhat effective	52,9%	36,9%
ineffective	19,1%	2,9%
really ineffective	3,8%	0,6%
students' learning activity		
really active	5,1%	10,2%
active	25,2%	37,9%
somewhat active	52,9%	47,5%
not active	14,6%	3,8%
really not active	2,2%	0,6%

Students' acceptance of online learning

When asked about their acceptance of online learning, 50,8% of the students said that online learning was somewhat enjoyable. 25,2% said that online learning was enjoyable, 9,9% said it was not enjoyable, 9,6% said it was really enjoyable, and 4,5% said it was really not enjoyable.

Students' responses about the quality of online learning

Nine students were chosen randomly to be interviewed about their opinions. The questions given were related to the quality of an effective learning environment. All of the respondents said that they were informed about the learning objectives in the beginning of each meeting. However, many times the learning objectives could not be reached because the learning did not run well. Technical issues, such as slow internet access, barriers to IT, and expensive price of internet data mostly became the main cause. The respondents admitted that they still got some assignments, but most of the time, they did not get any feedback about the assignments they submitted. The materials and exercises given were not really effective to improve their skills as the explanation given online is quite hard to understand. Physical board and marker were considered more effective to the students. The interaction between the lecturer and students was also not really frequent. The lecturers could not remember the names of the students fast like they did when they have a conventional learning. Physical face-to-face meeting enables the lecturers to memorize the names and faces of the students easily. Besides using Zoom and Google Meet, the interaction between the lecturers and students was also done via WhatsApp and Zoom and Google Meeting were used during a lecture, while WhatsApp and emails were used to submit assignments and examinations/quizzes. Related to access to learning materials and resources, students got material directly from the lecturers in the form of handouts, videos, modules, books, or PPT slides. In addition, lecturers usually provided independent learning resources for students, such as video links, books, or PPT slides. However, most students were lazy to open them if the lecturers did not ask them. The online learning platform the students used were Zoom, Google Meet, and WhatsApp. Since Zoom and Google Meet have similar features, students did not have many difficulties operating them. The students did not have any problem operating WhatsApp either, since they use it in their daily communication. However, the only difficulties they usually had was sending email that has size more than 25MB. Many of them were not familiar using Google Drive. Thus, when the assignment they had to send was bigger than 25 MB, many of them always asked the lecturers how to handle such a problem. The reviews given by the lecturers usually only focused on the problems occurring during the learning, such as makeup class made due to some errors with the learning platform and learning material. However few gave reviews on how to reduce the detachment during the learning. Even though the interaction between the lecturers and students was not as frequent as the interaction in a conventional meeting, there were no solutions offered to improve the quality and frequency of the interaction. Here we can see that from the interview, the problems that students encountered were mostly related to technical problems.

Discussion

Concerning the results of the survey and interview, it can be seen that students of UNARS see online learning somewhat enjoyable. Even though it is not really fun and effective as that of conventional learning, online learning is considered somewhat effective in developing students' knowledge, social competence, and skills. Even when they do not have any conventional face-to-face meetings, they can mingle well with their classmates. Apparently, the WhatsApp group helps them get to know each other. Students are also quite active during online learning. It is caused by some factors: many of the students have IT skills good enough to help them during online learning, almost all of the students are equipped with mobile phones and/or laptops (even though some are in poor condition), and students are mature enough to know that online learning is the only alternative they have during the pandemic that can help their study. Through online learning, they start to get used to finding learning materials with and without the lecturers' instruction. They have been exposed to new technological stuffs, like Google features, some online learning platforms, and online learning materials/media. These are the real benefits of the implementation of online learning. The research conducted by (Jatmoko & Faizun, 2020) revealed that the students perceive online learning to be quite effective in help them learn, do self-study, increase motivation, and facilitate the learning material. Similar results were found from a research carried out by (Sadikin et al., 2020) and (Aziz, 2020). They found out that online learning fosters independent learning and motivation. To sum up, online learning is beneficial for improving students' knowledge, social competence, and skill development. This means that the students have a positive understanding about online learning. They can understand that because of the pandemic, instead of not having any class meeting, learning online is the best choice they have.

However, it was also revealed that students have some barriers to online learning. The most dominant one deals with technical issues, such as the limited access to the internet network and low IT skills. This is in line with the results of the research conducted by (Hutauruk & Sidabutar, 2020) and (Albab, 2020). They mention that technical issues are the main cause that affect the quality of online learning. low internet connection impacts

students' motivation in learning. Low motivation will then affect students' participation. The expensive price of internet data also affects students' learning. Those who cannot afford the internet data usually find a free wifi access to be able to attend the online meeting. However, those who do not have an access to free wifi consequently cannot join the meeting. Some students admit that sometimes their IT skill is not good enough to help them cope with any technological problems. Some errors with their gadgets or online learning platform and their being new to some Google features like Google drive, Google sheet, Google form, and Google classroom are examples of technological problems some students of UNARS cannot handle. If such problems occur, these students usually seek for help from the lecturers and/or their friends. This means that the level of IT skills affects students' learning process. Students whose IT skills are not good enough are usually less active or participate less than those who have good IT skills.

One of the most obvious advantages of online learning according to the result of the survey is its flexibility. Flexibility is the main principle of online learning (Fordham University Libraries, 2020). Students can study from home and they can learn at their own pace. Since online learning allows the students to learn from home, it effectively minimizes the expenses spent for monthly fee of lodging house, fuel or transportation cost, and meal/snack. This is supported by similar results of the research conducted by (Harahap, 2020) and (G, 2021). Students also mention the flexibility of online learning that enables them to be multi-tasking. They can learn while doing other things at home, such as taking care of their younger siblings, opening social media, or eating. However, (Pamungkas, 2020) argues that being multitasking during online learning is actually not a good sign of an effective learning process. He adds that multitasking activities in this kind of behavior in addition can make the students less productive and disturb their mentality.

How the students perceive online learning as a new learning environment is important to be assessed because it impacts students' success in learning. (Maheshwari, 2021) in her research mentions institutional support (class interaction and teacher's support) and perceived enjoyment (satisfaction) affects the students' intentions to study the course online. This result reaffirms the definition of learning environment by (Babic, 2011), saying that it consists of three components: student, teacher, and educational content. This means that the components are related to each other. The culture of interaction between the lecturers and students, the support given by the lecturers, and how they delivered the educational content should be able to satisfy the students, to fill their needs. If this is fulfilled, students' intention to study online will arise.

(Venable, 2020) mentions seven core components that should be available in creating an effective online learning: learning objective, assessment, course materials and activities, faculty and student interaction, evaluation and improvement, technology requirements, online student support. She also mentions that an online learning is considered effective if it is seen positively by the students and creates students' learning satisfaction. The fulfillment of these seven components depends not only on the teacher, but also on the students. Although institution support has been given to the max, if the students are not ready for online learning, the learning process will fail. Since the implementation of online learning in Indonesia is new to many students, it is normal that many of them are unprepared for this. Students' readiness for online learning can be measured by three indicators: readiness in terms of facilities and infrastructure owned, readiness to use media / online learning platforms, and readiness for the obstacles that will arise when online learning is implemented (Sriwarthini et al., 2020). If seen from the results of the survey and interview, students of UNARS are not fully ready for online learning. In terms of readiness for facilities and infrastructures owned, some say that they often encounter technical issues such as limited access to internet network and low quality of gadgets they use to study online. In terms of readiness to use media/online learning platform, it has been described previously in the finding that some of the students are still new to technological stuffs like Google features, online learning platforms, and online learning resources. Then, in terms of readiness for the obstacles arising when online learning is implemented, the students are also not prepared since they have IT skills inadequate enough to help them cope with technological problems like errors with their gadgets or learning platforms. These barriers to online learning are clear signs that they are not really ready for online learning.

Still, students' unpreparedness for online learning does not change the fact that they consider online learning somewhat enjoyable. Even though it is not as fun as offline learning, online learning is beneficial to help them develop their knowledge, social competence, and skills.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that students have a positive point of view about online learning. Although its implementation is not maximum, online learning has been proven to be beneficial to help the students develop their knowledge, social competence, and skills. Still, students of UNARS are not fully ready yet for online learning due to some barriers. These barriers can be reduced if all parts (student, lecturer, and educational content) and the core components of learning environment can be integrated well. So, is online learning a friend or a foe? As the Covid-19 pandemic is still unknown when to end, online learning is not an option. It is a necessity.

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