

EXPLORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ONLINE LEARNING PROGRAM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LEARNERS IN REMOTE AREA

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Abstract: This research is intended to explore students who follow the online learning program called Recognition of Prior Learning in Remote Area. A qualitative descriptive method was conducted to gain the data. After spreading the questionnaire as the instrument of the study, the result shows that students' motivation must be maintained after the first meeting of the class; students' autonomous learning does not activate automatically even when the teachers use online learning platform; teachers' instruction must be vividly stated: there is an instruction that insists them to open the platform outside the learning period. Students' English proficiency also seems not to show a positive vibe. Stakeholders of the program are advised to do training on the lecturer before running the program in a remote area, to mitigate the discrepancy of the learning system of the platform used. Teachers are boosted to have clear instruction to mitigate time and space constraints in online learning activities.

Keywords: *online learning, students' motivation, autonomous learning, English proficiency*

The emergence of the application of technologies has been viewed to have a greater impact in the classroom. This emergence has been perpetuated due to the Covid-19 pandemic rising. As such, Indonesian government has set an online learning program, namely Recognition of Prior Learning in Remote Area or RPL 3T (*Rekognisi Pembelajaran Lampau di daerah terdepan terpencil dan terluar*). As the programs run, there are strengths and drawbacks perceived by students in remote areas.

COVID-19 Pandemic has affected various sectors, including education. As a consequence, Universities are constrained to carrying out the teaching and learning process exclusively online. Internet-based learning is considered a panacea, an alternative to maintain the learning process in this milieu.

When using online learning platforms, there are so many elements that must be considered to be a bottleneck in the process of learning, such as students' motivation, autonomous learning, and English proficiency. However, these drawbacks can be overcome with teachers' teaching strategies. In remote areas, teachers' experience and competence in teaching online are considered deficient, coupled with the short time in which teachers must adapt their teaching strategies to the new norm. Those tendencies can perpetuate the drawbacks of online learning. The result of a study conducted by Agung, Surtikanti, and Quinones (2020) is relevant in confirming that, in remote areas, both teachers and students faced online learning for the first time. It can be assumed that they are not ready yet to conduct an entirely online learning vibe. Besides, they also do not have the experience to approach the student in blended learning.

Both teachers and students struggle with many challenges. For teachers, they must struggle with keeping the content of the course consistent and relevant to the learning objective (Coman & Tiru: 2020), and be familiar with the learning platform used in learning (Chien, Kwok, Yeh, Sweany, Baek & McIntosh: 2020). On the other hand, students also perceive challenges. A study conducted by Kumi, Sallar, Kiramba, and Kim (2020) identified that the main challenges students encountered were accessibility, connectivity, lack of appropriate devices, and social issues represented by the lack of communication and interaction with teachers and peers.

Taking into account the challenges mentioned above, the massive surge in online learning evoked the educators to understand how students perceive and react to online learning. The factors that may lead to different approaches depend on where online learning takes place and who the students are. Some studies were conducted about students' perspectives on online learning. Coman and Tiru (2020) stated the result of a study about students' perception of online learning revealed that higher institutions in Romania do not seem ready for exclusively online learning. Another study was conducted in Jordan, and the result of the study found that the students' perception of online education is the way out in the current pandemic; however, its efficiency is less than face-to-face learning and teaching (Almahasees, Mohsen & Amin: 2021). Farrah and Al-Bakry (2020) stated in their study's result that there is a need to conduct change and improvement regarding the implementation of online learning. Agung, Surtikanti, and Quinones (2020) stated in their result study on students' perception of the implementation of online learning that the students are not ready for the rapid shift of teaching style; thus, they suggest that instead of learning online entirely, it is better to do it in a blended learning.

Although online learning continues to grow rapidly, it still remains in an early stage of development in remote areas. This paradigm shift could generate changes in students' perceptions of this way of teaching. Consequently, institutions and teachers need more understanding of how students perceive and react to the elements of online learning since students' perception is critical to learning.

Since students' perceptions and attitudes are critical toward the success of the learning program, the researchers would like to find out the perceptions of the students who are involved in the online learning of the English subject. Students' perception can be described as the developed opinion after having a certain experience that needs adjustment (Mathew & Al-Rubaat: 2019). However, online learning implementation in remote areas may have more obstacles than it seems, as only a few studies can be found. This research is going to fill that gap. Therefore, in this research, the student's perception is focused on the students' motivation, autonomous learning, and English proficiency. Those factors are necessary to bring the students' perception of online learning to be more contextual with the needs of students. Thus, our research can contribute to the development of the online learning process theory, for it provides information that can meet students' needs in order to deliver the courses.

These topics, students' motivation, autonomous learning, and English proficiency, are crucial to explore due to online learning inherently offering a positive vibe for these aspects. Cakrawati (2017) reported in her study that students perceived that their English proficiency and autonomous learning have improved. However, the study was conducted in nine days. It is assumed that the subject was still in the honeymoon phase, in which the subject was still in a good mood. It is questionable if online learning runs for one semester. Another study run by Dhawan (2020), Rahmawati (2016), and Soliman (2014) stated that online learning boosted students' autonomous learning, English proficiency, and student motivation. Nevertheless, time spending in conducting online study and location online learning applying will have different impacts on the result of the study. Thus, this study will fill the gap of conducting a study in online learning.

Taking into account the aspect delivered about teachers challenges, to cope with the teachers' drawbacks in applying online learning, especially the learning platform available, the Minister of Education launched a program that make it possible for the exchange of lecturers from one institution that lack teachers' competency in running online learning to others that have the capability in doing online learning. The online teaching-learning program launched is the Recognition of Prior Learning in remote areas or *RPL 3T (Rekognisi Pembelajaran Lampau di Daerah Terdepan Terpencil dan Terluar)*. This program was launched in 2020 to cope with the problem in the education field in the new norm era due to the coronavirus pandemic. This program is intended to develop the capacity of the learning program in remote areas. In this program, there are two institutions collaborating. The first kind of institution is those that have applied online learning and have a Learning Management System (LMS). These institutions will do the teaching-learning process for institutions in remote areas. The second institution is those in remote areas that still do not apply online learning properly. This second kind of institution will follow learning activities offered by the first type of institution. Moreover, this program is run online, using either synchronous or asynchronous learning platform.

METHOD

This study was conducted after Gajah Putih University had a chance to accomplish RPL 3T program in 2021. This is an online learning program that was launched by the Directorate General of Learning and Student Affairs (*Direktorat Jenderal Pembelajaran dan Kemahasiswaan*). There were two institutions involved. The first one was a college partner. This institution offered teaching and learning process, due to it having a high qualified lecturer in teaching online, and it had LMS to support online

learning. The second one was the main college in a remote area. The second institution was assumed to not be ready yet in teaching online entirely due to having no high qualified lecturer in teaching online, and a learning management system was not available. The second institution was in a remote area in *Perguruan Tinggi Daerah Tertinggal (PTDT)* that makes online learning more dramatic. In this study, the college partner was STIKES Bethesda Yakkum Yogyakarta, and Gajah Putih University was the main college in the remote area. Gajah Putih University obtained the teaching and learning process offered by STIKES Bethesda Yakkum for one semester entirely.

All students in semester one, in which Gajah Putih University classified English subject to be obligatorily followed in the program offered because the class for English subject had been taken over by STIKES Bethesda Yakkum. There were 122 students, and all of them were selected in this study.

This study employed qualitative research. Data were collected in Gajah Putih University Takengon, Aceh Tengah, that joined RPL 3T program in 2021. The online learning platforms used on this occasion were Schoology, Zoom, Quizzes, Kahoot, Jamboard, Mentimeter, and ScreencastOmatic. In addition, to give fast responses to students' questions, the lecturer used Whatsapp group. There were 16 meetings for one semester, and the program ran from the 3rd of November until the 16th of February 2021.

The instrument used in this study included a questionnaire in which students were first asked to provide their background information and questions related to their views on online learning. In addition, their view on online learning focuses on three major topics, namely students' motivation, autonomous learning, and English proficiency. The questionnaire was distributed and collected using Google form. The questionnaire was arranged based on the main topic, built upon the blueprint that represents the topic, and validated the questionnaire to make sure that the questions involved represent the topic asked. The pilot study was conducted by trying out the instrument to measure the reliability of items in the questionnaire. There were 10 questionnaires offered, and the subject of this study chose their answers in the form of a Likert scale.

Moreover, it was spread out after the class ended on the 19th of February 2021. To prevent data bias and to maintain their willingness to fulfill the instrument, the questionnaire was spread out before students' score was announced. Of the 122 subjects of study, all of them filled the questionnaire. The subjects also received the space to write the reason for their answers to enrich the data obtained.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For a long time, online learning platforms have been perceived to be the best panacea for learning as they circumvent the limitations that exist on the space and time constraints of the students, and most important of all, they provide students an entertaining way out in learning in the new norm era. However, from the data collected, the findings of this study might not agree with the ideas of an online learning platform. In the following, we are going to further discuss the findings of this research.

a. The program motivates the students

Of the 122 subjects of this study, there were 98 students or 80,3% who said that the program gives them more motivation to learn just at the beginning of the learning program, and 24 students said that the program did not motivate them to learn. The reason why they were not motivated varied among students. They said their gadgets did not have enough capacity to store the learning platform used: Schoology, Zoom, Quizzes, Kahoot, Jamboard, Mentimeter, and ScreencastOmatic in their electronic devices. 11 of the 24 students said they could not operate Schoology; thus, they were not motivated to follow the learning instructions. 8 of the unmotivated students gave the reason, which was due to they wanted to be accompanied while learning. They argued that it was hard to run the platforms if those were introduced when the learning activities occurred.

The use of platforms in the learning activities should be user-friendly. Shi (2016) stated that an online learning platform must be easy to operate as it supports students to boosting students' learning. Thus, they actively interact with their colleagues and lecturer. Although there are many platforms spread out, all the platforms that are needed in the online class are unnecessarily true. Students use the platform in order to fulfill the assignment, to do group work, to follow the learning activities with the lecturer, as well as to do course communication; thus, to meet the need of students and lecturers in an online class, the platform used must consider the demand of both of them (Yuniarti, 2014). In remote areas, it seems that the student must be motivated more. The wide range of various learning platforms used must go hand in hand with the vivid instruction delivered. Unless a number of questions arose about the instructions, and the lecturer could not handle it, the lecturer has risked the potential of students to learn.

The wide availability of online learning platforms makes learning easier and more convenient. However, online learning platforms will not be used successfully if students have no intention or strong motivations to use them. In the traditional classroom, students attend classes regularly, and their

learning progress is closely monitored by teachers. However, in the virtual e-learning classroom, teachers have no way to supervise students' learning. Consequently, the success of e-learning depends on students' motivation.

All of the subjects agreed that the program gave them a different vibe of learning. However, not all the subjects perceived it as a positive change. The negative groups assumed that too many students joined the program in one class; therefore, the lecturer did not respond to all the questions from students. Thus, they are motivated to follow the program only in the beginning.

Coman and Tiru (2020) identified that online learning platform has some barriers, taking into attention factors such as the lessening of students' motivation and the delayed feedback from the lecturer. The panacea to this obstacle is that there must be a marvelous teaching strategy adapted by the lecturer, due to space and time barriers, to maintain students' motivation. In order to do so, sufficient experience and knowledge about teaching strategies in the online learning vibe paved the students' motivation.

Although online learning program is urgently applied, the government should take the consideration on how this program can run well. How to operate the platform and how to instruct the classroom online are two different things. In addition, the lack of teachers' experience in using online learning, and the short time where they had to adapt their teaching strategies to the new era, might raise a new issue. Thus, Coman and Tiru (2020) stated that these challenges could be prominent in the educational process because of dealing with the unprecedented surge of online learning.

Bugs on the online learning platform are not the item that will boost students' motivation to follow the course because they do not have enough IT literacy to fix the problem. In addition, students typically receive intermittent motivation from teachers or their mates for personal accomplishment (Chien et al., 2020). Moreover, procrastination in responding to students' questions is another drawback in online learning that can decrease students' motivation. Thus, students who are doing the learning instruction can potentially get the wrong understanding, or they are unmotivated to do the learning instruction.

b. Students' Autonomous Learning

Related to the subjects' opinion on their willingness to open independently the platform outside of the learning time instructed, 101 of them said that they did not think so. 14 subjects said that they would open the platform, and 7 subject subjects said that they would open if there was an instruction from the teachers. Moreover, from the point of where they were stimulated to search related topic delivered by teachers independently, only 5 of 122 had the willingness to search related issue that was not included in lecturer's instruction. The reason for this obstacle would vary among them. The first reason appears to be related to the supervision from the lecturer. The fact was that they only opened the learning platform if the lecturer instructed them and said that it was related to their score.

There is a couple of evidence to show that the e-learning platform allows learners to have autonomous learning after the class end (Zimmerman et al., 2020). When learning is not limited to the classroom and lacks the supervision of teachers, autonomous learning becomes the most dominant element of online learning (Farrah & Al-Bakry, 2020). Clearly, autonomous learning in online learning, to gain no child left behind, definitely requires learner's motivation to ensure its success. Contrary to the theory that stated that easy accessibility to English e-learning platform will greatly make EFL students learn independently without instruction, this study shows that even though more than 74% of the students polled (91 of the 122) indicate that e-learning programs did help them improve their English and acquire relevant proficiency certificates, less than 1% of students (5 of the 122) opened the platform outside the instructed learning time, which is a far cry from the expectation.

Doubtless, online learning has received a great deal of attention during the last decade from higher education institutes. Recently, it has received more attention because of the pressure from the Ministry of Education, which demands that college students need to hold online learning to prevent the spreading of the coronavirus. The demand for online learning platforms has unprecedentedly surged. As we call modern students the "e-generation," we tend to assume that all students today love and know how to use information and computer technology, and have little trouble adapting to using the technology in their learning. On the other hand, we also assume that high-level students will use e-learning programs more frequently because the function of repeated practice provided by e-learning is widely thought to be helpful to EFL students' performance in doing learning instruction. Unfortunately, those assumptions are wrong, and it is more surprising to find that only 5 of the subjects follow the learning instruction both inside and outside the learning instruction.

The subject also gave their opinion on the lack of the program that they followed. Most of them, 89 subjects stated that the lack of this program was the lecturer having many learning platforms. For a time, the lecturer used Schoology, Zoom, and Quizzes at the beginning of the learning. Therefore, running the additional platforms in the middle of learning was not easy with the rest of the learning activities. Some other platforms used in the online teaching activities were Kahoot, Jamboard,

Mentimeter, dan ScreencastOmatic. 20 of the subjects said that the drawback of the program was that it was hard to follow the lecturer's instructions. Once they wanted to clarify the instruction, the lecture did not give a fast response, or the event was not responded. 13 of the subjects said that the lack of this program was that the learning activities depended on the platform. Thus, the signal available was the significant factor that had to be considered.

Soliman (2014) stated that the lecturer must be considered in that online learning can trigger autonomous learning, but it must go hand in hand with easy learning instruction to follow. Too many instructions in one meeting become an awry situation; lecturers crave to give much instruction to stimulate their learning, but students become unmotivated to follow the complicated learning activities outside the learning schedule (Aini, Budiarto & Putra: 2020). The number of students who have the willingness to open the learning platform outside the learning schedule remains low, and this has broken the myth that more learning platform used on the online learning will greatly help students increase students autonomous learning as the system provides a 24- hour -a day and 7- day- a week learning environment to students (Soong:2012).

c. The Online Learning Will Increase Students' English Proficiency

Related to students' perception of their English proficiency, 83 subjects said that online learning did not have a significant impact. In addition, 18 of the subjects said online learning help them to increase their competency, and 11 of them said their competency was so-so.

Since the online learning surge is unprecedented, both lecturers' and students' first step is to adopt online learning to their teaching and learning style. If the platform seems too complicated to operate and too many platforms play into action in the classroom, they will risk the potential students to follow lecturer instruction. Therefore, there must be an induction on how to operate the learning platform, how to run teaching instruction in online learning, especially for those who had no experience in teaching online or how to organize the education process more conducive in online learning (Aini, Budiarto & Putra, 2020).

For this bottleneck, more training on how to use the learning platform is the best way to apply before running the platform (Kumi, 2020). In order to achieve familiarity with the technology, they needed to be trained on the platform because understanding the learning material and comprehending the learning platform were two different things; the more complicated the technology, the more time they required to gain competence in it. As a consequence, it was not the case where students did not understand the material received; they just could not follow the learning instruction due to their lack of operating the learning platform.

The findings of Cakrawati (2017) state that lecturers have to be more creative in implementing learning instruction in online learning classes to improve student's English proficiency. The challenges encountered by teachers are implementing learning instruction which should meet the learning objectives, and the instruction should be compatible with the system of the learning platform. Teachers are also encouraged to be more interactive during the online learning process to see the improvement of students' proficiency. It will be better if they can give immediate responses and feedback on students' questions regularly that give immediate impact merely to learning and their proficiency (Cakrawati, 2017). Due to time and space constraints in online learning, lecturers' responses were vital elements; they must maintain students' motivation to follow learning instruction. Thus, students' English proficiency will be boosted. After all, technology can never take the place of the teacher, who is thought to be the most crucial element of any teaching activity (Harmer, 2000). Thus, blended learning is the best way.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

To gain the advantages of an online learning program, there is no easy way to go through. The government, students, lecturers must conquer the new vibe of learning through online learning. The shifting mode of learning should be guided wisely. The stakeholder of the RPL 3T program should make a strict plan on how to run the program, especially the learning instructions.

In reality, the shift presents a significant surge, especially for those who are in a remote area. The current study concludes that most English students are not ready for this rapid shift in teaching and learning approaches. Various reasons were identified, and they can be classified into students' motivation, autonomous learning, and English proficiency. From students' motivations, the challenge is their motivation was only at the beginning of the program. Students' autonomous learning is not activated due to teaching instructions not being vivid enough. Moreover, their English proficiency cannot be improved because they cannot follow the learning activity well.

The good news is, the students also report that they crave to join a similar program, although their gadget capacity is not enough for hi-tech platform use. Another issue that emerges in the current study, which may be relevant for further research regarding online learning in remote areas, is that a

more comprehensive plan must be formulated before procuring any online learning programs in the future, especially more in remote areas to obtain advantages of online learning.

After all, most users of the platform were not familiar with IT literacy; they were definitely having some problems when they first attempted to use the programs. It is recommended for teachers to show the students the step-by-step instructions in using the online platforms to ensure that their students will be able to operate the online platforms outside the classroom. In addition, in remote areas, it seems that they do not have the adequate motivation to mingle with the platform used by the lecturer in the developed city that has been familiar where its impact directly touches on students' participation.

Therefore, a user-friendly system should be considered, especially if it is done in remote areas. It will directly affect students' motivation and autonomous learning that have an impact on their English proficiency. Thus, teachers' decisions on the platform used play a vital role. Teachers, therefore, must make choices about the appropriateness of the technology to meet specific learning outcomes. As such, no matter how incredible the learning platform is, it will never take the place of the lecturer. Thus, the vivid learning instruction delivered while operating the platform is the key element in online learning instruction.

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