

Experience, challenges, and engagement amidst pandemic: The online learning to onsite learning

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced stakeholders to find the best way to carry out student learning activities through online learning as the best solution during the pandemic. However, the onsite learning system has been switching slowly in the last few months. The current study summarizes the narratives of the challenges and benefits of four undergraduates from the same major who joined online learning and onsite learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through a narrative qualitative, the lens examines the students' experiences. The instruments are interviews and diary notes of participants during conducting online and onsite learning amidst the pandemic and analyzed qualitatively. The findings showed that the students deal with four challenges: limited devices, lack of enthusiasm, anxiety, and unexpected disturbance during online learning. Meanwhile, the benefits save time, and cost, are easy to access, and students can learn independently. Moreover, this learning might help the student to become problem solvers and critical thinkers through task-solving activities and learning responsibilities. It also opens opportunities for students to better understand their own abilities in learning.

Kata Kunci: online learning, college student, qualitative

Pengalaman, tantangan, dan keterlibatan di tengah pandemic: Pembelajaran online hingga pembelajaran luring

Abstrak

Pandemi Covid-19 memaksa para pemangku kepentingan untuk mencari cara terbaik dalam melaksanakan kegiatan belajar siswa melalui pembelajaran online sebagai solusi terbaik di masa pandemi. Namun, sistem pembelajaran di tatap muka telah beralih perlahan dalam beberapa bulan terakhir. Penelitian ini merangkum narasi perihal tantangan dan manfaat dari empat mahasiswa dari jurusan yang sama yang mengikuti pembelajaran online dan pembelajaran di tempat selama pandemi Covid-19. Instrumen yang digunakan berupa wawancara dan catatan harian peserta selama melakukan pembelajaran daring dan luring di tengah pandemi dan dianalisis secara kualitatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa menghadapi empat tantangan: perangkat terbatas, kurangnya antusiasme, kecemasan, dan gangguan tak terduga selama pembelajaran online. Sedangkan keuntungannya adalah menghemat waktu, dan biaya, mudah diakses, dan siswa dapat belajar secara mandiri. Selain itu, pembelajaran ini dapat mendukung siswa untuk menjadi sosok pemecah masalah dan pemikir kritis melalui kegiatan pemecahan tugas dan tanggung jawab belajar. Hal ini juga membuka kesempatan bagi siswa untuk lebih memahami kemampuannya sendiri dalam belajar.

Keywords: pembelajaran online, mahasiswa, kualitatif

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted human social lives, including the education sector. It has been happening in almost all corners of the earth since the end of 2019. Implementing online learning is a solution for various countries in breaking the chain of the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Indeed, the Indonesian government had applied online learning for the entire academic degree for approximately two years. Its online learning utilizes technology devices to facilitate learning and communication between educational activities. At first, the students experienced difficulties adjusting to the online learning system and atmosphere. However, as time went by, online learning switched to the onsite learning system, which provided its challenges and advantages for students to readjustment, especially during the transition period of the learning system.

The beginning of online learning via zoom is considered exciting and fun by students since they experience a different learning atmosphere. Generally, the teaching is carried out through the accessible zoom version with a maximum of one hundred students for forty minutes (Dewanti & Sujarwo, 2021). However, its platform provides limited participants and learning time during learning (Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020). The implementation of online learning cannot be applied optimally in underdeveloped countries where most internet connections are still scarce, and the ability of students to operate technological devices is still minimal. In a developing country, for instance, in the Philippines, the students experience difficulties regarding inadequate learning resources, limited teacher scaffold, poor peer communication, and mental health struggles (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020). In developed countries, for instance, in the US, not all children have internet access at home (Morgan, 2020); Therefore, it affects the learning outcomes (Adnan & Anwar, 2020).

Like other developing countries, Indonesia faces the challenge of limited technology availability and stakeholders' ability to operate it as a challenge to the success of online learning (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Online learning amidst pandemics has indirectly accelerated the application of the 21st-century learning model based on increasingly massive technology (Festiyyed et al., 2022). In Indonesia, most students use WhatsApp social media to support learning communication with lecturers and to discuss with fellow friends during the pandemic (Mulyono et al., 2021). The participants in this study actively use WhatsApp to communicate with lecturers and friends in collecting assignments, discussing with group mates, and sharing learning materials during online learning (Setyaningsih & Rahmawati, 2021).

The Indonesian government decided to conduct online learning during the pandemic for approximately two years to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 virus in society. In 2020, in Indonesia, school closures extended, and learning took place online (Sparrow et al., 2020). Indeed, the implementation of online learning simultaneously offers several advantages for students, such as being easily accessed using devices without being at the campus site, saving cost and time, and stimulating students' independence in learning. Initially, students need a certain amount of time to accept this learning system because they must adjust to accepting and carrying out online learning. Conversely, the online learning system also challenges students to adapt to, such as the lecture schedule being fully implemented via zoom. At first, they have difficulty operating the tools in the software; the discussion between lecturers and fellow students is also carried out online. Therefore, students must participate in all online learning activities. As time goes by, in Indonesia, the success of online learning can be determined by the willingness of technology as the prominent supporter of learning, the support of the national humanist curriculum, and the collaboration of stakeholders (teachers, parents, all parties in schools and the government (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). The new learning system challenges students to adapt to the learning atmosphere and situation (Silalahi & Sitorus, 2021).

This participant conducted online learning for approximately two years, following Indonesian government regulations. However, since January 2022, they have been conducting onsite learning by following strict health protocols. Indeed, this onsite learning presents its challenges for them, including

adapting to the learning atmosphere and learning environment. Many researchers did online learning research in higher education during the pandemic, including student experiences, learning methods, advantages, and challenges faced by all stakeholders; however, after the re-enactment of onsite learning in developing countries, including Indonesia. Few researchers pay attention to the change in the learning system, especially the student experience in the direct implementation of learning in the university environment, with the condition that all health protocol regulations are met. Thus, this study aimed to examine four university students' experiences conducted online learning into onsite learning amidst the pandemic, particularly in rural area. This study figures out a research question "What is the students' experience joining online and onsite learning amidst a pandemic?"

METHOD

This study was conducted in one of the private universities in rural area, Indonesia. This study involved a group of purposively and conveniently selected four undergraduate students who study in education faculty major. Participants were selected based on their ability to provide the needed information and their connectivity during this study. They have varying ages from twenty to twenty-two years old. They come from different locations, regularly attending online classes from home and face-to-face meetings in the last three months. Four undergraduates' backgrounds are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. *Four Undergraduates' Backgrounds*

Name	Age (years old)	Interest
PW1	21	Boarding student
PW2	20	Staying with parents
PW3	22	Boarding student
PW4	21	Boarding student

The raw data were collected through interviews and diary notes of participants during conducting online and onsite learning amidst the pandemic. Firstly, the researchers arranged the interview schedule with participants based on the participant's free time and recorded the interview in a conducive atmosphere. There are a total of three interviews conducted for each participant. Secondly, the participants were asked to write diary notes in English during both online and onsite learning.

This study analysis was performed using narrative qualitative through three steps adopted: managing, analyzing, and interpreting data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Then, the researcher analyzed the raw data by coding based on the themes for two phases. Lastly, the researchers interpreted the theme in the conclusion of this study. The researcher collected multiple resources to validate the participants' responses to the interview sections. Besides, the researchers also discussed with seniors regarding the research finding and did a literature review from previous research. Those are steps taken by the researchers to do validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The four participants had participated in online learning for four semesters which were carried out entirely in their campus amid a pandemic that attacked the world. In this context, the researchers use term "*campus*", which means university, because Indonesian students use its term to describe university. Indeed, they go through up and down experiences in online learning for approximately two years; they face challenges in adapting to it and simultaneously get benefits from it that they never planned before. Fortunately, they have held onsite learning on campus for the past three months.

Limited devices

During online learning, the participants experienced problems with limited devices, such as the low quality of the cellphone, which is easy to heat, and even low battery when participating in learning via zoom and google meet. Unfortunately, they did not have a laptop to support online learning from home for two years of online learning. Nevertheless, they try to participate in online learning despite such circumstances actively. However, with the condition of the family's minimal economic background, it is difficult for them to update their devices. Moreover, because their parents' income as farmers with unstable income every day, especially in such a pandemic, sales of harvested crops also decreased even lost. Besides, their parents also work as private employees whose monthly salaries expect the minimum wage standard to decline due to pandemic conditions like this.

On the other hand, the condition of electricity often goes out suddenly during online learning. It becomes an obstacle that cannot be controlled and a significant obstacle when the power goes out while cellphone condition must require a charger. Moreover, it affects the students' online meeting attendance being absent because the lecturer has set a time limit for submitting the attendance even though they have joined a part of learning via zoom.

Participants live in rural areas where internet network conditions are not good even though they have chosen the type of the best operator. It is undeniable that the internet network can be wrong for online learning; moreover, bad weather conditions such as rain and strong winds make it worse and interferes with the online learning process. It makes the participants feel worse when holding mid-semester exams or final semester exams. In this case, they tried to find a proper location with a better signal; they had no choice but to take online learning from the fields or hills. PW1, the participant testifies,

“I live in a rural area where the network conditions are bad, especially for online meetings via Zoom and speed download documents is slow, and sometimes the network is buffering. I experienced a hard time when the lecturer called me to give feedback on learning; the idea was not conveyed clearly with poor network conditions. I was upset.”

Returning to onsite learning on campus can bring happiness to participants because they do not depend on gadgets and spend amount of data needed while learning. They can discuss it with classmates and teachers directly, and they are not afraid of missing out on filling in the attendance because they can do it offline. Furthermore, they can go to an internet cafe with an hourly payment system at an affordable price to do the assignment by typing and printing without any worries about the electricity going out or the loss of the internet network. The internet cafes are easy to find around campus.

Lack enthusiasm.

Participants experienced a lack of enthusiasm for participating in online learning for approximately two years. In the first semester, they still enjoy online learning from home because they feel free. However, as time goes by, they are increasingly bored and lose their enthusiasm for learning due to conditions that are only at home and without meeting classmates to discuss. However, although the participants experienced online discussions via WhatsApp, it was not enough to exchange knowledge or learning materials because they had difficulty finding small group members and limited communication. The participant, PW1 testifies,

“I often discuss with my friends to discuss subject content, especially when we get a turn as a facilitator. But sometimes, I think our discussion cannot get an optimal result because of limited spaces that we can only discuss via WhatsApp.”

On the other hand, the teacher of each course always gives a lot of assignments to students during online learning compared to onsite learning. Because they must help their parents in doing their homework, which is getting more and more done, and it can sometimes cause student annoyance with assignments load from the lecturer. Its assignment load gives its own burden to students and gets frustrated for sometimes that greatly affects the ability to understand the lesson for each course and affects learning achievement that is not optimal as expected. The student PW3 testified,

"I must clean the house, water the plants, and cook every day while my parents go to the fields to work. If I don't do it, then mom will do it so I'm sorry to see it. Sometimes the intention to do courses assignments decreases because I am too tired at home".

It becomes difficult for both to build chemistry in learning, and it influences students' interest in understanding the learning material. Meanwhile, onsite learning is much easier to build chemistry between students and lecturers. Its closeness can create students' interest in understanding learning materials and improve learning outcomes. The student PW4 testified,

"I can see the lecturer through half the body sitting during online learning via zoom. The limited communication among us is also challenging to gap our chemistry building with the lecturers becomes impossible. The learning process is also disrupted because we are not closer to each other and do not know the characters yet, PW4".

The participants need time to get to know each other's classmates and build chemistry with lecturers during the face-to-face meeting by obeying the health protocols such as wearing masks, keeping distance, and washing hands. However, the participants were glad to have a face-to-face meeting because they can restore their enthusiasm for learning even better.

Anxiety

However, as time went by, the students began to think that developing their understanding of the material studied online was not enough to prepare them for the following career path. Especially in the ability to develop language in communication that is difficult to develop during online learning. PW2, the participant testifies,

"During my online learning, I evaluate my insights as I got was not enough. Although I have tried to study independently. I think face to face learning is much more knowledge that I will get. It is a mental burden for me to prepare myself to get ready for the world of work in the future".

Feelings of anxiety began to appear in them, which grew day by day. This anxiety is also spread to parents who see and hear their experiences during online learning. Parents are very supportive of having onsite learning for the participant's future career. Therefore, parents strongly support their children to vaccinate up to boosters as a basic guideline for preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus. In this case, parents must think realistically about the future needs of their children and prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. PW4, the participant testifies,

"I studied online from home for three semesters, and I felt bored with the learning atmosphere that was only through applications without face to face. But then, I am delighted with onsite learning in recent meetings.

Unexpected disturbance

The students join online learning via zoom from different locations; they might be indoors or outdoors. They often face two unexpected circumstances while conducting the learning process. Firstly, distractions from among students' manner and attitudes, for instance, one of their classmates enjoys food or drink, falls asleep, and even gets the sound of a mother or relative talking to them. Secondly, distractions from the unpredictable situation (Aivaz & Teodorescu, 2022; Dhawan, 2020; Wang, 2022), for instance, the students get the appearance of notifications and calls on their devices during online learning. These interfere with the concentration of students to be able to follow the process of learning activities. As participants declared,

"Initially, I was shocked when I joined online learning via Zoom, where my friend enjoyed his breakfast in the morning class. Indeed, the online learning atmosphere is different from offline learning during this pandemic. However, as time went by, I was able to adjust to the conditions of this online learning, PW4".

The participant PW2 added,

"When I seriously listened to the explanation from the lecturer since it was close to the final semester exam. However, suddenly my friend had just joined zoom and hadn't

unmuted the sound. He was busy talking to people around him, so his voice interfered with the learning atmosphere that was previously serious."

This situation interferes with the concentration of students in participating in the learning process, and even the achievement of learning outcomes is less than optimal. Moreover, it is quite different from the onsite learning process; the class atmosphere can be more orderly because the lecturers directly notice all students. So that such situations do not occur in onsite learning.

How to overcome the weaknesses of online learning: Studying independently?

Indeed, online learning is less effective for students due to the limited three challenges, as mentioned earlier, so they are required to study independently to better understand the material. The participants decided to study independently by reading the material and downloading learning material from the e-learning platform even though they spent the amount of data. They reread it in their spare time, which is a way to increase their understanding of the topic for each course for every semester. Besides, participants also often use google to add insight to answer the item questions on the quiz, mid-semester exam and final semester exam. Another way to upgrade their knowledge is to discuss online with classmates via WhatsApp to be able to share knowledge.

Furthermore, they are scheduled to go to the university site for campus administration matters. It is one way to recharge student enthusiasm for learning. Indeed, its activity must be carried out by obeying the health protocol in breaking the chain of the spread of the covid-19 virus, washing your hands, keeping your distance, and wearing a mask. PW1, testified as follows,

"I went to campus to have a discussion with classmates and met lecturers to discuss difficult learning content during the online learning system; by adhering to health protocols." I am a person who is easier to understand through onsite learning.

Participants have conducted onsite learning for the last three months. This learning provides their anxiety challenges in adapting to the learning environment they have longed for. Besides, they need a way to get to know each other's classmates who haven't met for a long time and sit together in the classroom together.

Save time, cost, and easy to access

Certainly, online learning is easy for students to access anywhere and anytime if there is a good network. Moreover, its learning system gives positive things to participants; they don't need to rush to campus. These four participants are stimulated to develop themselves in managing their time wiser. For instance, when they miss a material or meeting due to network difficulties, they have a second chance to study by downloading the material and rereading it when they have time for it. Participant, PW2 testified,

"I can accompany my mother when she is sick, and I can give her much attention to her when she needs my presence. I prepare food to feed her while taking online lessons."

Furthermore, for these three months of conducting onsite learning, students need time to prepare for going to class, such as taking a shower and wearing neat clothes. In Indonesia, the culture of dressing students must wear a shirt for men, polite clothes; and are prohibited from wearing sandals to campus. Therefore, Participants spent approximately thirty minutes on this preparation.

"The distance between my house to campus takes about an hour by bus. But, with online learning, I can save an hour helping parents and cleaning the house. Indeed, it saves money too because I don't spend money on bus fares, PW2"

The students do not need to spend money on bus fares to arrive at campus. As for boarding students, they do not need to spend money to pay for rent, house fees and living expenses for approximately two years. But they can live together with their parents in the village. Parents had difficulties paying tuition fees for private universities, which are more expensive than public universities. During this pandemic, parents got decreased income and even lost their jobs.

"I only spend money to buy participant data every month. It helps my parents' finances during the pandemic. PW2"

On the other hand, participants prefer onsite learning because it is easier for them to understand the learning material by lecturing directly. So, they get maximum learning achievement that supports the students to develop critical thinking, skills, and self-development more optimally. Figure 1 depicts a conclusion from the results narrated.

Discussion

The primary problem students face when participating in online learning is technical issues. These technical issues include inadequate computer hardware or software and a slow or unavailable network (Dyrbye et al., 2009). Learning through discussion with partners is one way of learning that helps students to develop critical thinking skills (Hamann et al., 2012). Besides, virtual teams can enlarge the students' relationships and valuable investments for future careers (Kim et al., 2005). However, due to limited time, online learning significantly limits student and lecturer interaction. Giving assignments to students is one way to maintain communication relationships between teachers and lecturers in learning amidst a pandemic (Egbert, 2020).

At the beginning of the implementation of online learning from home, the participants felt happy because they could stay at home and study casually. However, students feel tremendous anxiety when given an assignment, even if they try to avoid its assignment (Russell, 2020). The age group of 20-29 years is more likely to experience anxiety during the pandemic (Megatsari et al., 2020). Online learning provides comfort for students with asynchronous education at the higher education level; however, onsite learning is more effective in improving students' skills in particular courses (Ferguson & Tryjankowski, 2009). In this case, the participants can set the time commitment (Dyrbye et al., 2009) for studying and helping parents use the time to help their parents clean the house, work in the rice fields, and accompany their parents at home (Dyrbye et al., 2009).

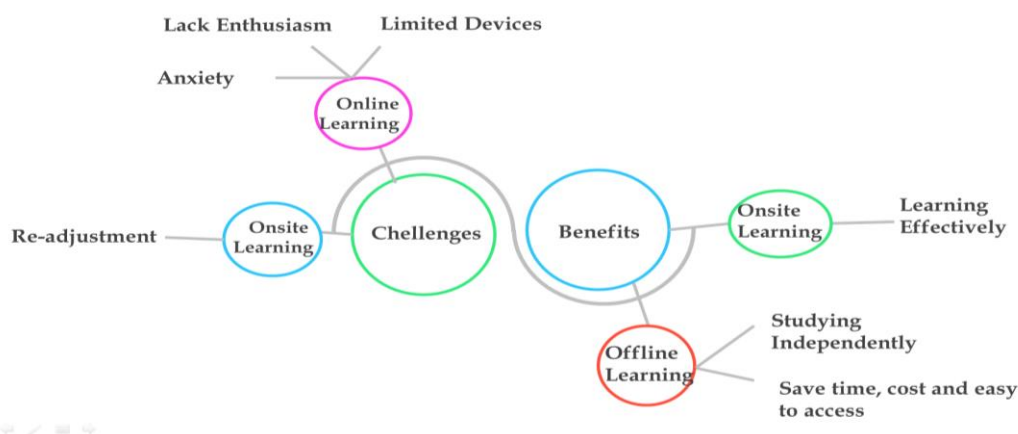


Figure 1. The scheme of advantages and challenges faced by participants.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the students' experience from online to onsite learning amidst the pandemic. Indeed, students encounter several challenges in participating in online learning for two years, such as students having limited devices, lacking enthusiasm, students feeling anxiety, and getting unexpected disturbances during online learning that can interfere with other friends' focus. Conversely, it also offers advantages simultaneously because the students share learning through discussion, which improves their enthusiasm for joining online learning even though it is constrained. Moreover, online learning helps students get close to fellow students for doing assignments and being careless. In sum, through a series of online learning activities, students are formed to be able to learn independently and be problems solver of learning difficulties through discussion activities.

After the pandemic conditions were under control, Indonesia's education sector began slowly opening a face-to-face learning system. As a result, participants in this study have attended onsite learning. However, it was challenging for students to re-adapt to the learning environment and interact

with the academic community since they had gotten used to the online learning approach and had been rigid with the atmosphere of onsite learning activities. This study has few participants, there are only four students from the same department participating in one of private university. The researchers suggest for future research might increase the number of participants to get broader results and conduct the data collection and analysis methods to be carried out by a quantitative approach.

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