

## Challenges and adaptation on online learning during COVID-19 pandemic

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received Mar 31, 2022

Revised Jul 12, 2022

Accepted Aug 31, 2022

#### Keywords:

Adaptation

Challenges

COVID-19

Online learning

Urban area

Vocational school

### ABSTRACT

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) has impacted the continuity of learning in education aspects. This research aimed to analyze the challenges and the adaptative strategy of online learning for urban vocational school teachers and students during COVID-19. The research applied a descriptive qualitative design in supporting the data needed. The sample of the study was taken randomly from a vocational school in Indonesia consisting of seven students and four teachers in English subject teaching class. In gathering the data, observation and interview were used as research instrument and it was analyzed using Braun's thematic analysis. The data gathered revealed that vocational school students face some challenges when learning online in English teaching subject during COVID-19 pandemic and did the adaptation dealing with the situation. The interview exposed the challenge faced by the vocational school teachers and students during online learning covering lack of lesson understanding, low creativity in using learning sources, lack of psychological bond with the teacher, internet stability, lack of face meeting exposure, and learning accessibility. The adaptive strategy implemented by the respondents mainly link with technical stuff like stabilizing internet coverage, searching the learning resource more intensive, and providing learning module.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic is still wreaking havoc on the education industry around the world, particularly in Indonesian schools. As a result of the pandemic's impact, students have been learning from home over the internet for more than a year, and online learning has become the primary method of processing teaching and learning [1] as well as educators must make certain that teaching and learning activities are carried out. As a result, big change in learning pattern needs formula to support the continuity of education.

In Indonesia, the running of education during the spreading of COVID-19 period is implemented via learning from home like many countries in the world [2], [3]. The learning from home is the main option in this situation and carried out through online/distance learning to run a meaningful learning experience for students without any burned of curriculum target. Learning from home can support the life skill education, the events of learning and the assignments [4], [5]. The experience of learning from home may differ for each student based on their interests and conditions, including considering any gaps in accessing the facilities of

learning at home. Learning from home support good qualitative and useful feedback from the teacher, and without any burden in giving quantitative score.

When the school closure started in the beginning of 2020 as the impact of the virus pandemic, the school process changed to online learning, non-face-to-face meeting and it affected most countries in the world [6]–[12]. The limit teaching hour of English language in general or vocational school affect the whole teaching aspect. In certain, English language subject as adaptive skill in vocational school gets shorter than usual and needs much flexibility from teacher and students' side. On teacher side, the adaptation toward teaching mode, teaching method, teaching style or other pedagogic aspect needs much attention in online learning. They should learn a lot to adapt their teaching by considering students' condition in the unstable situation. On students' side, the adaptation toward new learning system; face-to-face to online learning is not easy for them. Therefore, they should change their learning habit from meeting the teacher directly and having class material in their traditional classroom to online meeting and online classroom management.

In addition, the closing of the schools during the unstable condition brings impact on students' learning value and the competence of the teachers in teaching English. All education institution in the world agreed on school closure impermanently to avoid the virus spreading and it has impact on students globally, including in Indonesia [1]. The troubles in the process of direct teaching and learning between teachers and students affect the psychological value of the students and resulting in decline of skill quality. Consequently, when kids learn English at home, teachers must pay attention to their development as educators.

Here, the student's development when learning English from home should be the teacher's focus. During the learning, teacher's attention should be on the students, their level of growth, as well as the differences that may exist between the learners. The teacher's pedagogic competence works hard in this difficult time like the ability of educators to manage classrooms. The competence of pedagogy refers to how the teachers organize the classroom, and manage their students' range [2]. So, occasionally, teachers apply different way of pedagogy by considering students' view, and as a result, there is different outcome reveal that it may good in teacher's side but not for the students' intake.

The impact of pandemic is not only for general school, but also affects the students in vocational school like school of tourism, agriculture, engineering, and nursing [3]–[13]. In vocational school, the lesson subject is divided into two parts: productive and adaptive. Productive subjects cover all subjects dealing with vocational skill such as tourism, hotel, agriculture, engineering, nursing, maritime, whilst adaptive subject covers general knowledge like mathematics, social science, basic science, Indonesian language, sports, and English language. The teaching portion for both subject types is different. Productive subject will be given more teaching hours than adaptive subject. English language as adaptive subject gets lower portion time in teaching than any other productive subjects in regular condition. As a result, students' English learning is short and not fully explored, and impact on students' competence in English language.

In vocational school, certain subject which categorized as adaptive subjects like English language faces more challenge to be taught than teaching English language in non-vocational school in terms of shorten teaching time and limit teaching access. The limit teaching hour as the main challenge for teacher poses them to be more creative and autonomous in teaching. It is supported by Fretheim *et al.* [14] who stated that the assistance of technology cannot be avoided as the vital aid to maintain the learning process and maximize teaching hour.

The maintenance of education during covid-19 has been reported by many scholars whether for general school [15]–[27] or vocational school condition [7]–[9], [11]–[13]. These researchers focused their research mainly on teachers' perception, barriers on online learning, internship activity, learning facilities, information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching, attitudes and practices. However, research on vocational school in terms of students' voice during learning process in pandemic times is still limit to found. This study tries to fill the gap by providing students' voice on the challenge they face and their adaptive strategy on learning experience during the hard time of COVID-19.

The paper aims to reveal students' and teacher's experience on learning English language via online from home. In particular, it will expose challenges and the way to cope them from students' and teachers' side. The research findings can be used as an evaluation for education policy regarding the good and minus of learning and teaching via online based from home. Also, the study will contribute knowledge on vocational school condition in maintaining the running of education during unstable situation.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research applied qualitative design with descriptive approach as it aims to describe a thing, understand and explain [28]. The descriptive qualitative used in this research dealt with students' voice of vocational school on challenges and their adaptive strategy during unstable time of COVID-19 pandemic. The research setting was at a Vocational School (sekolah menengah kejuruan/SMK) 2 in Parepare, Sulawesi province, Indonesia which focused its school program on engineering areas like machine, electronic,

computer networking, electricity, and automotive. The research participants were seven students that chosen randomly; five women and two men from diverse departments and four English teachers. The seven students of class 12 or the third-year students chose from different department (networking computer, machine, electronic, electricity), while for teachers, it was taken only English subject teachers because the main concern in this research is the learning of English subject in vocational school.

In collecting the data, recording observation and semi structured interview were the type of chosen research tools. Recording observation was done by making record of the data taken via documentation and field notes and semi structured interview was applied with research question guideline provided to ease the interviewer in collecting the data from participant. Semi structured interview was chosen as interview guidelines provided but it may develop more questions to the research subject [29]. In analyzing the data, Braun's thematic analysis using the six-phase guide of [30] was selected to be implemented in the study. The step of six-phase framework is become familiar with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define themes, and write-up.

### 3. RESULTS

The recording observation was implemented to gather the data on urban Vocation School of 2 Parepare, Sulawesi Province, Indonesia as the research setting. It was done using field notes as well as photo document the school condition during unstable condition of COVID-19. It was revealed on the descriptive field notes that the learning process was conducted using the aid of Google Classroom and WhatsApp as the main media in continuing the learning process. The process of learning mainly by sending information about the class material/task via WhatsApp and Google Classroom.

The data of observation was mainly taken from researchers' hand notes about challenges and adaptive strategy that the teacher and students' face when learning English from home. The observation data deals with the situation of teaching and learning process. It was found out that teachers mainly assigned students with tasks but limit instruction on it. As a result, many students did the tasks inappropriately. Other observation result is limited explanation on learning material from the teacher and resulting on students' low comprehension of class material. Next finding is students' low eagerness in submitting the class task. The teacher must remind them via WhatsApp group to submit it on time at Google Classroom. The good point found is online media like Google Classroom and WhatsApp ease both parties; teacher and students in communicating about the class material or the task.

#### 3.1. Challenges and adaptive strategy on online learning: Students' experience on learning from home

During online-based learning, the urban vocational students faced some challenges in learning from home, particularly in learning English. The limit hour in teaching English subject as adaptive subject become more difficult when it was conducted via online-based. The interview results with students exposed the problems they had were vary; from psychological side like stress and confusing on teachers' class material, learning facilities such as laptop or gadget for learning, internet stability, financial support in learning like sharing usage of laptop/gadget with family members. Eventhough the students faced challenges in online-based learning, they keep willing to learn and put forward adaptive strategies in dealing with the problems during learning from home. They maximized their effort to counter the problems during learning in the unstable condition like using Google search to extend their comprehension on the class material, having online meeting as the changing role of face-to-face meeting, asking friends or internet searching in understanding the task given, finding stable network area, and rescheduling laptop/gadget usage with family members. The summary of problems and adaptive strategy of the students' experience on learning from home can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' view on problems faced on learning from home and the strategy to deal with

No	Problems	Adaptive strategy
1	Low understanding on class material provided by the teacher	Using Google search application to extend understanding of the materials
2	No face to face with the teacher	Online meeting via Gmeet or Zoom
3	The unclear questions about class material given by teacher	Asking friend or internet searching
4	Unstable network	Find stable network location
5	Laptop/gadget sharing with family members	Scheduling laptop/gadget time for learning

As seen in the table, the students experienced difficulties in understanding the material provided by the teachers. Some said that the teaching media the teachers used in delivering materials can be

understandable but others found difficult because short explanation from the teacher regarding the materials as stated in the interview extract below. Hereby, the code 'PS' is the acronym of participant student.

*"I can easily see the questions given. But on the other hand, it is difficult, because it is through the media. We were only given questions without any explanation. Many students have difficulty answering questions"* (PS1. October, 2020)

*"I had trouble answering the question given by the teacher, because it was not included with the material. I don't like it. Because students do not understand the questions asked by the teacher"* (PS4. October, 2020)

*"The abilities of the teachers are varied, there are teachers who understand IT issues and some don't, as well as assignments. English teachers often give assignments. Learning from home is a little different. When study at school there are teachers, so, if there is something I don't understand, I just have to ask, while studying from home, sometimes it's difficult to contact the teacher. If there is a question that is not understood. Then the solution I searched on Google but the explanation from Google is difficult to understand"* (PS6. October, 2020)

### 3.2. Challenges and adaptive strategy on online learning: Teachers' experience

Learning from home via online-based is being the main option in continuing the education during COVID-19 pandemic. It remains unique experiences for the agent of education like teachers and students. Based on the interview result from the teacher side, teaching from home put some challenges to face such as lack of psychological bonding between students. In face-to-face meeting, the bonding between teacher and student are very close as they meet on weekdays. However, when unstable learning condition happen like the attack of COVID-19, the psychological bonding get looser as the limit time of meeting and it is conducted virtually. Unstable internet network is other challenge in conducting learning from home. The students complained bad internet signal when online-based learning and it affect on their accessibility on class meeting. As a result, teacher faces problem in delivering material because only few students can join the class meeting. Next challenge faced by teachers in learning from home deals with the students' accessibility of learning material. Some students got problems on internet stability, and affect their access of learning materials from teachers.

In continuing the learning, the challenges faced by teachers is not being the main constraint for them. They manage the problems by making strategy to cope them like problems on lack of psychological bonding. Here, to get back the bonding, the teachers make regular chats and online discussion regarding the class materials. In coping the unstable internet network that the students face, the teachers keep reminding students to search stable internet connection area, and also facilitating the students with learning module that can be access offline. Likewise, the strategy in coping problem on lack material accessibility for students is by providing learning material module that can be accessed easily by students via offline. The list of problems faced by teachers in learning from home and how they cope with problems can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Problems faced and adaptive strategy when learning English from home

No.	Problems faced when teaching English from home	Adaptive strategy
1	Lack of psychological bonding	Embracing students' bondings via regular chats and online discussion
2	Unstable network for students	Finding stable network area, preparing learning module to access offline
3	Lack material accessibility for students	Making learning module, being more creative in teaching

It reveals on the table that teachers get challenges in teaching English via online-based. Although they use technology as their teaching media like Google Classroom, but it is still different from teaching offline. They felt it was less efficient comparing the offline learning, as stated in the interview:

*"The teaching media I use is Google classroom because it is easy to apply, there are many features that make it easier for students to learn. My perception is that learning from home is less efficient"* (PT1. October, 2020)

Furthermore, good collaboration between teacher, parent and student should be built to improve learning awareness. Building good relation to run the learning process should not be teachers' main responsibility. The study from home needs parents' assistance as their time with their kid get longer than

before. They can observe their kid's learning and involve much in it. Other consideration is maintaining psychological bonding during the learning. The interview extract can describe it.

*"This media makes it easier for me to check student assignments. Very good, but there must be awareness between students and parents as well as teachers to understand each other and help to carry out the teaching and learning process properly"* (PT5. October, 2020)

In addition, the use of e-learning makes teacher more creative in arranging teaching atmosphere. It showed in the interview result that when students faced problem in accessing class material, the teachers would find the innovative way to maintaining the process of learning. The interview extracts presented how teacher deals with challenge in online learning.

*"The majority of students have installed the learning application on their smartphone, so that we as teachers no longer explain to students how to use it. This certainly makes it easier for me to teach. So, I need to create an innovative and different learning atmosphere"* (PT2. October, 2020)

*"The majority of students have installed the application media on their smartphone, so that we as teachers no longer explain to students how to use it. This certainly makes it easier for me to teach. Good, to avoid viruses and also create creativity for teachers in creating a different learning atmosphere and innovating"* (PT6. October, 2020)

Internet network problem is one the learning constraints faced by students. Many students live in remote areas and internet network is a privilege for them. They get hard access in online learning. Some students reported that they must cross other areas to find stable internet network and access the learning. Regarding problem on an unbalanced network of the students, particularly for students from remote area and hard access on internet, the teachers anticipate it by making learning modules to hinder them from unfinished assignment as well as the ease the student in accessing the learning materials.

*"Network problem is irritating; it causes the problem in the delivery of subject material to students. I provide a learning module to my students and it should be current one. This is to avoid students getting bored in learning English"* (PT5. October, 2020)

#### 4. DISCUSSION

As mentioned previously in the finding, it has shown that each student faces their own experience in learning English via online-based. The teachers and students voiced their opinion on teaching and learning English from home by expressing positive and negative views on it. Some students admitted that the learning media implemented by the teacher can ease them to learn. Nonetheless, others disagreed on it because they felt the media just used to deliver assignment with limit explanation regarding it. It is clearly seen here that learning media like Google Classroom, Gmeet, or WhatsApp may bring positive and negative support in learning. Furthermore, in using the learning media, the teachers should learn to provide themselves the current technology. They are supposed to have updated knowledge on it than the students [31], [32]. Here, the teachers are hoped to take advantage of technology in supporting the learning. Additionally, the teacher must have good literacy on technology.

Three interviewed students considered online-based learning using learning media is not hard for them because they can search more applications to enrich their learning, and it is more economical, and flexible. Regarding teachers' view, online based learning forces them to be creative and innovative in teaching to keep attracting students' attention. Also, the restrictions in learning material accessibility could be solved by pushing the teacher's creativity in selecting and producing and selecting the supportive learning materials. This is supported by Hardianto [33] who classifies one of the characteristics of online teacher is able to select the teaching material in online learning.

Learning from home is a less efficient activity. Collaboration between students, teachers and parents is needed. The role of parents at home is very important because they play a role as a teacher to help students understand material and facilitate students properly in doing online learning. Learning from home involves many agents to collaborate in creating good environment in learning [34]–[36]. This is necessary in attracting students' attention and be meaningful to students.

It is also exposed on the findings that learning English from home considered difficult because low understanding of the class materials, limited psychological bonding, and unstable internet network. The learning time limit and also virtual meeting with the teacher put students in ambiguity feeling and sometimes

position students into low of self confident. As a result, they feel awkward to get further explanation of the class material. Similarly, the teachers find it hard to check students' expressions on understanding the class material, particularly when the students turn off the camera during the online meeting. As a result, the class material facilitated by teacher is considered inadequate for students as a reference in doing the task given. It is clearly seen that learning from home affect students' learning and cause many challenges in learning [14], [22], [37].

Interestingly, three other students voiced learning English subject from home is normal as the current condition pushed it. They do not take it as a problem in learning process and have adjusted to it. This is supported by researchers [38], [39] that implementing an online learning program is a very good idea because most of the sample students support this initiative.

Furthermore, students who live in urban areas also find it difficult to get internet access when they run out of data packages, because during the implementation of the home learning program, there are some students who experience financial problem, so as a solution, the students did the assignments with other friends. Here, personal communication with friend is needed. This is supported by Dabbagh [40], that one of the features of students in learning online is the skill to communicate interpersonal. Students who want to adopt well in online learning must possess good interpersonal and communication skill. These skills are helpful in sustaining interactions or relationships with other students.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The teaching and learning English subject from home has colored the continuity of learning during the hard times of COVID-19 pandemic. All levels of school experienced it and vocational school is no exception. The present study sets out the students' and teacher's experience in online learning at vocational school setting particularly the challenges and the adaptive strategy toward it. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that both students and teacher experienced challenges.




In facing online-based learning, the challenges reveal in this study were lack of lesson understanding, low creativity in using learning sources, lack of psychological bound with the teacher, internet stability, lack of face meeting exposure and learning boredom. Other significant finding was teachers making adaptive strategies in facing these problems like making learning modules, developing interpersonal communication skills, being more creative in teaching, and improving teaching skill, while the adaptation that the students implemented mainly link with technical stuff like stabilizing internet coverage and searching the learning resource more intensive. The result of the study indicates that online-based learning during unstable condition put challenges for students and teachers, and the adaptation way are needed to face it. The empirical findings in this study can be used as an evaluation for education policy regarding the good and bad of learning and teaching from home. Also, the study contribute knowledge on vocational school condition in maintaining the running of education during unstable situation.

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