

offline dan online

Foreign Language Students' Voices on Blended Learning and Fully Online Classes during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Due to the restrictions of direct interactions during the pandemic, educational practices have been massively and simultaneously shifted to remote teaching. To some extent, remote teaching is often viewed as an ineffective instructional delivery. It lacks interactions between teachers and students that are primarily found in traditional classrooms. In addition to ubiquitous technical hindrances, many educators find students' learning progress hard to monitor in remote teaching. The obstacles in remote teaching have prompted the government and educators to explore the possibilities of holding a face-to-face meeting in a blended learning format amid the pandemic. This paper is aimed to present a sketch of students' perceptions of the possibilities of combining face-to-face classes with online learning during a pandemic. Using online surveys for data gathering and descriptive statistics for data analysis, this study has found that students' perception of current emergencies influences their preference of instructional delivery mode. The students appear to be much more tolerant of numerous hindrances in remote teaching than those exposed to the potential risks of COVID-19 transmissions. Most students of this present study prefer fully online learning to blended learning. For them, health is the top priority.

Keywords:

Remote teaching, online learning, COVID-19, pandemic, blended learning

1. Introduction

Education practices worldwide are facing challenges to make the best decisions amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Daniel, 2020). First, it is to shut the offline teaching process and ask the students to learn by themselves at home (Dhawan, 2020). Second, it is to carry out a face-to-face teaching and learning process in the classroom under certain conditions such as limiting the number of the students joining the meetings, adhering to physical distancing procedures, wearing masks, and washing hands. Third, it is to integrate an online learning concept (Horzum, 2017; Anderson, 2008) into their teaching practices and make use of learning management systems (Elhawwa, 2017) such as Google Classroom, Canvas (Yundayani et al., 2019), etc. In most countries, the education nowadays has been shifted to remote teaching during the pandemic (Handarini & Wulandari, 2020; Rosyada & Sundari (2021). Making the best decisions for education during a pandemic is not always easy to do. Numerous issues such as people's literacy skills in technology, technical capabilities to access digital materials, internet technology support need to be considered. Above all, health is also one of the top priorities that we should never neglect.

To deal with the current emergencies, the Indonesian government has issued several policies. For example, on August 7, 2020, the government issued a revised Joint Decree of Four Ministers. At that time, the schools were given the flexibility to choose their curriculum that suited their needs and conditions. In March, the national exam was canceled. In addition to school examinations, a portfolio of student reports and achievement were used to determine graduation. Moreover, from March to April 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture provided a free quota, reallocating billion rupiahs to support public facilities and education during the pandemic. To enhance learning from home programs, the government mandated the national television station to broadcast learning materials nationally. At the same time, the schools were also given the privilege to manage the government's financial aid to pay teacher fees, school facilities, and other relevant cost items during this

emergency. From May to June 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture offered single tuition assistance for four hundred and ten thousand students whose families got affected by the pandemic. The Ministry of Education and Culture also provided internet quota subsidies for students, teachers, students, and lecturers for four months from September to December 2020: 35 GB/month for the students, 42 GB/month for the teachers, 50 GB/month for college students and lecturers (Sulisworo et al., 2020). These various aids show how serious the government is handling problems due to the pandemic. While inequality in access to technology is quite massive in various regions in Indonesia, the Indonesian government has taken concrete actions to help ease the burden on the society, including the residents living in remote areas.

The implementation of remote teaching, which has been running for more than a year and a half, has inevitably caused technical and psychosocial problems. While the government has made severe measures to combat COVID-19, such as providing vaccinations to the citizens, the Minister of Education lets the local governments and schools make decisions about holding a face-to-face meeting in the classrooms in combination with online learning. The government admits that holding fully online classes for the long term may result in unexpected learning outcomes such as boredom, stress, and even a high dropout rate. The government authorities emphasize that the schools in yellow and green zones are permitted to conduct face-to-face learning if they adhere to rigorous health protocols. Nevertheless, even if the school areas have been claimed to be safe for being in the green or yellow zones, the children will continue studying from home if their parents do not give permission (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

The publication of research on Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in foreign languages and the second language has quite recently started to arise. A preliminary review of the existing literature indicates that a growing number of studies have been carried out mainly on ERT practices in foreign language education/seconds encountered during the process using various data collection tools with different stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, and students. Meanwhile, the in-depth investigation of students' voices is essential since the policy should be suitable and proper with the subject's needs, preferences, and reasons. This paper is expected to fill the gap and focus on two problem formulations: the relationship between students' preferences for online-blended learning and their reasons to stay safe during the pandemic? How do the students view the teaching and learning process in online and blended learning during the pandemic?

2. Literature Review

Remote teaching can be said to be one of the teaching deliveries that allow students to learn from the physical buildings through online platforms (Riggs, 2020). Remote teaching offers positive opportunities for students to improve their knowledge and skills. First, online learning is an innovative learning model that most students have never experienced before (Agung, Surtikanti & Quinones, 2020). Second, students have more time to do their tasks and assignments (Evisen, Akyilmaz & Torun, 2020). The students are taught to become self-directed learners and take responsibility for their learning progress (Maison, Kurniawan, & Anggraini, 2021). Third, the students feel safe when learning at home. A home is a safe place that prevents them from the spread of COVID-19 (Evisen, Akyilmaz & Torun, 2020). Remote teaching in the context of a pandemic is an emergency education approach (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Education has shifted to remote teaching due to the threat of COVID-19, which endangers public health.

Looking back at the results of research on the integration of technology into learning is pertinent since remote teaching utilizing online tools has clearly been the only alternative accessible to address the pandemic. For example, Maison, Kurniawan, and Anggraini, (2021), technology enables teachers to provide their students with opportunities to navigate digital platforms that excel in rapid knowledge transmission. In addition, students also gain digital literacy skills and boost their self-learning development (Boelens, De Wever & Voet, 2017; Dziuban et al., 2018). Technology offers other benefits to education because of its flexibility in implementation (Simpson, 2018; Jung, 2019; Bozkurt, 2019; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Mohammed et al., 2020). Maison, Kurniawan, and Anggraini (2021) also add that students can access materials wherever and whenever they are, and they can study materials at their own pace.

Nevertheless, problems in remote teaching are also apparent. For example, Alim et al. (2019) and Agung et al. (2020) and Pokhre and Chhetri (2021) have reported the challenges during remote teachings, such as unstable internet connectivity and the lack of networking technology support. Lynch (2020) has added that most students have severe problems sending their tasks or learning content when their internet connection is poor. Another challenge includes technical issues such as electricity blackout due to flood, blackout, etc. (Sari, 2016; Alvarez, 2020; Mohammed et al., 2020; Agung, Surtikanti & Quinones, 2020; Maison, Kurniawan, & Anggraini, 2021). Rosyada and Sundari (2021) add that digital literacy and technology support are not equally distributed among students, especially in remote areas. These problems hamper learning quality.

Pros and cons arguments regarding online-offline teaching modes are ubiquitous. The supporters of online teaching perceive safety as the top priority. Meanwhile, the cons supporters believe in effectiveness and inequality because different institutions have different circumstances and preferences (Rosyada & Sundari, 2021). The government and educational institutions continue their pros and cons arguments in mass media to convince public opinion that their reasons are more logical and applicable. However, these educational institutions hardly touch students' feelings, opinions, preferences, and reasons who become the victims of the implementation of the policy. The students are the subjects who get direct impact from the current teaching mode policy. Coeckelberg (2020) has emphasized that if we never learn from the main problem and our mistakes during the COVID-19 tragedy, the fact will grab its revenge when it is over.

3. Method

Study setting

This research design is a survey study in which data collection techniques are carried out via a link from Microsoft form from March to May. This online questionnaire contains several questions that point to respondents' views about the barriers and benefits of being fully online, their willingness to participate in offline meetings, parents' views about face-to-face meetings during the pandemic, etc. In addition to preparing research results, the authors deliberately prepared this questionnaire to meet requests from university leaders to get references in making decisions about the implementation of the teaching and learning process in the new semester in 2021-2022.

Data collection procedure

Gathering the responses from the students is not always an easy task to do during a pandemic. Knowing that they are not always active in checking their emails, the authors have used numerous ways to contact them. For example, the writers have asked the faculty secretary to send survey invitations to the students through the groups of instant messengers. In addition to sending the emails, the faculty secretary manages to reach the students through their social media accounts such as Instagram and Facebook. From March to May 2021, the writers received responses from sixty respondents (60), or about 32% of the whole student population studying at the faculty. Out of these sixty respondents, twenty-eight (28) belong to the Mandarin education study program, and the other thirty-two (32) students from the English Letters study program. Concerning their gender, 14 (13) and 85.7% are males and female students, respectively. The questionnaire prepared in the Microsoft Form link consists of two parts. The first part deals with the demographic information such as gender, study program, and batch. The second part consists of the following questions. What kinds of obstacles did the students face during the remote teaching class in the last semester? Which teaching delivery models do they prefer in the coming semester? Is it entirely online or blended learning? Why do they prefer complete online or blended learning? What do they expect from the university if they prefer complete online or blended learning? Are they willing to follow health protocols (wearing masks, sitting in spaced seats, avoiding crowds, going home after the class) when attending face-to-face meetings? Are they willing to accept sanctions (reprimands) if they violate the rules? Do their parents permit the students to attend face-to-face activities? If yes, are they willing to submit the permission letters to the faculty? The researchers have carried out a face validity test by consulting with two psychometric experts. Before being distributed, the researchers have conducted a try-out to check the quality of this online questionnaire by distributing it to a group of students. From the try-out results, we conclude that the readability quality of all questions in the questionnaire can be accounted for.

Data analysis

The number of samples (60% of the total population) in this study is relatively sufficient to represent the data distribution. They estimate some parameters such as mean, median, and standard deviation to show the central data tendency. Furthermore, the Chi-square test and cross-tabulation are also used as data analysis tools. A cross-tabulation tool is employed to identify the patterns, the trends, and the correlation between study parameters. Moreover, they help the authors with data interpretations by drawing comparisons and correlations.

4. Findings and Discussions

Students' preference for full online to blended learning

This study is aimed to answer whether there is a relationship between students' preference for fully online-blended learning and their reasons to stay safe during the pandemic. To do so, this study has conducted a Chi-Square test to examine the alternative hypothesis; namely, there is a relationship between students' preference

for online-blended learning and their reasons to stay safe during the pandemic. From the SPSS calculation results, this study found the value of Asymp. Sig (2-sided) on the Pearson Chi-Square test is 0.028, which is smaller than 0.05. This result means that the authors reject the null hypothesis. Thus, students' preference for fully online-blended learning is significantly correlated with their reasons to stay safe during the pandemic. This finding also indicates that the stronger the students perceive the potential dangers of COVID-19 transmission, the more likely they are to choose a fully online class.

Table 3.1. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.084 ^a	3	.028
Likelihood Ratio	5.859	3	.119
Linear-by-Linear Association	.110	1	.741
N of Valid Cases	60		

a. 7 cells (87.5%) are expected to count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .11.

This present study has found that most of the respondents (89.3%) or about fifty-four students (54) like to have a fully online class instead of blended learning (see Table 3.2). The preference of the majority of the respondents has been strongly affected by social agents such as their parents and social media.

The students tend to view a pandemic as a dangerous situation threatening health dramatically affects their learning orientation to remote teaching. Most of them admit that their parents are central figures who play an essential role in making decisions. From the perspective of the students' parents, having good health is much more critical than taking face-to-face classes. The students' parents of this present study have realized that remote teaching has numerous weaknesses. For example, the parents are doubtful about the quality of remote teaching and are prepared with fund support to buy internet quotas and reliable electronic gadgets.

Nevertheless, fully online classes also provide benefits for the parents and the students. They feel safe from the crowds and thus keep themselves healthy at home while constantly attending online classes. In addition, the students' parents admit that they can save money to speed up things such as boarding room fees, transportation fees, and living expenses for their children.

The students' parents' concerns about this study may not be greater than that of the Chinese students' parents of Zhang's study (2021). When surveying 741 parents whose children are still studying at K-12, Zhang (2021) has found that parents are overwhelmed with the potential of education loss in China. The low quality of remote teaching is dubious in enabling children to achieve essential competencies as needed by the children in real life. According to the parents, the teachers cannot control their children's learning progress during the online classes. In remote teaching, the parents are instantly forced to take a new role of teachers for their children at home. They complain about their inability to teach and difficulties in allocating time to meet their family needs.

On the other hand, the students' parents of this present study view their children as independent to manage their learning. Based on this present study and Zhang's findings, we conclude that the level of education of children has significant impacts on parents' perceptions in viewing the urgency and quality of remote teaching. The higher the level of education a child has, the more parents believe their child will be independent in regulating their learning rhythm, and thus they positively value the quality of online classes.

Table 3.2. Teaching mode preference during the pandemic

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Full Online	54	89.3	89.3	89.3
Blended learning	6	10.7	10.7	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Social media plays as an essential social agent that influences the students' perspectives about a pandemic. The pandemic that keeps community members from having direct interactions makes social media an alternative effective tool for people. They can communicate with each other while at the same time getting the latest news about the societies' current conditions around the globe. According to the respondents of this study, their lecturers have employed social media such as Instagram as a medium for learning. For example, they assign the students to collect information from social media for research data. These respondents admit that the news they obtain from social media has influenced their perspective about the COVID- 19 pandemic. The respondents have different reactions to the numerous news of COVID- 19. Some of them have been overwhelmed with anxiety.

Meanwhile, some others are less anxious because they use the governments' official information to validate the truthfulness of the news. Nevertheless, the respondents of this present study end up having online learning regardless of social media's influence. In the same way, Li et al. (2020) discover how social media has a substantial impact on psychological health. Misunderstanding of the news from social media can create excessive anxiety and lead to excessively avoidant behaviors. Moreover, Li et al. (2020) have found that students spend much time on the internet, and they are more likely to be misguided and experience triggering anxiety symptoms. However, students who believed that mainstream information was more trustworthy experienced less anxiety. Mora-Rodríguez and Melero-López (2021) have confirmed the influence of social media on readers' perceptions. When surveying 2,034 people in Spain, they have found that the more people are exposed to various kinds of news about the dangers of the COVID-19, the more likely they have a negative perception of COVID- 19. Spreading fake news about COVID- 19 is quite prevalent in Spain. This fake news generates misinformation, causes anxiety, and hampers the response to the outbreak.

Students' perception of fully online and possible blended learning classes

6 Furthermore, this study tries to answer the second problem formulation, namely, how the students view the teaching and learning process in online and blended learning classes during the pandemic. This study has found that the reliability of the Internet connection becomes the most significant problem (37.7%) the students have experienced during remote teaching. Some respondents of this present study admit that they cannot afford adequate internet access because they live in remote areas. To get better internet access, they ride on their motorbikes to the internet shop in the town. For male college students, staying in an internet shop until late at night is not a big problem. However, that is not the case with female students. Generally, the latter prefer to work on the assignments until 17.00. Furthermore, heavy rainfall has a big impact on the stability of the internet connection. The worst of all is that this heavy rain often results in electricity blackouts. When further confirmed, the officials from the state electricity company, electricity blackout is regarded as a precautionary measure to anticipate the potential danger of fallen trees or electric substations submerged by the river flood (Sari, 2016).

Lynch (2020) has said that poor internet connection is quite prevalent that many people have experienced during the pandemic. The need for an internet connection is a precondition for sending content remotely. However, unequal access to the technology needed for online learners or as instructors is ubiquitous. Lynch (2020) continues that having access to broadband at a minimum speed for consistently receiving high-quality voice, data, graphics, and video or supporting multiple streams within a household is a problem that is often found in twenty-seven percent of rural residents in America. Mahyoob (2020), teaching English to 184 English language learners (EFL) in Saudi Arabia, has found that the students also have experienced technical challenges during remote teaching. As a result, there is a strong tendency for the students to become unsatisfied with remote teaching, for they are unable to achieve competencies requested by the curriculum of language classes. Learning from the research of Lynch (2020) and Mahyoob (2020), we conclude that having good internet access is a global phenomenon that has interfered with remote teaching even in modern countries. In addition to adjusting to more explicit teaching materials and encouraging students to engage in learning, educators need to become more tolerant of the students with different circumstances. Especially for those with internet connection problems, educators need to think about alternative solutions. For example, teachers may make use of low technology such as instant messengers to interact with. Extending the due date for assignment submissions is another way to motivate the students who have difficulties gaining internet access.

Table 3.3 Challenges during online class

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Internet connection	21	35.7	35.7	35.7
	Task overload	11	17.9	17.9	53.6
	Electronic gadgets	11	17.9	17.9	71.4
	Electricity	9	14.3	14.3	85.7
	Home environment	9	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

A home environment is also one of the factors that affect students' learning quality. When all family members gather at home, family members rarely do physical activities such as cleaning the house, working in the garden, or even sports. Instead, they have far more screen time reading news, doing assignments with cell phones and laptops, or even playing virtual games and watching television. For the respondents, whose houses are relatively small, their family routine activities have interfered with their online learning. For example, they must carefully listen to lecturers' explanations during the teleconference session while at the same time listening to the other sounds coming from the surrounding house. Some other respondents of this study have reported that they must help their younger siblings with their homework. Their parents are busy doing their jobs from the office or being responsible for running their businesses. As a result, the parents leave the responsibility for guiding the young siblings to the respondents thoroughly. Majumdar, Biswas, and Sahu (2020) and Kapasia et al. (2020) have examined the effects of home confinement and restricted access to student learning quality. They find the increase in screen time that students have spent during the pandemic in India. Home confinement and restricted access to outdoor activities have reduced physical activities and increased screen exposure.

Moreover, excessive screen time harms health by severely affecting sleep patterns and duration. According to Majumdar, Biswas, dan Sahu (2020), the student have a sleep disorder due to the absence of the regular schedule they used to have before the pandemic. Thus, confinement to home plus anxiety and stress are most likely to contribute to depression. Learning from the findings of this study, and those from Majumdar, Biswas, and Sahu (2020) and Kapasia, et al. (2020), a house environment where most students generally access remote teaching materials may offer adverse effects on students' mental condition and physical health. Therefore, the increase in excessive use of screen time and the potential for sleep disorders must be appropriately anticipated by educators so that their students can stay healthy to carry out the educational process during the pandemic. In addition, collaborating with parents and communicating with students about effective learning strategies can overcome problems during online classes.

As shown in Table 3.2, the tendency of attending remote teaching is higher than having face-to-face classes. Although the government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, has recently granted universities or other educational units to carry out face-to-face education, provided that it meets health protocol standards, the respondents regard the current situation as uncondusive to conduct blended learning. Moreover, current news from social media or online newspapers about the risk of COVID- 19 transmission is so powerful that it has influenced the students' perspectives. As a result, they decide to continue attending remote teaching. They admit that the barriers to online classrooms are inevitable. Yet, health is the most important of all. Their parents play an important role in making choices regardless of the students' personal choices. They also see that the current conditions are not safe for their children to participate in a face-to-face meeting. Learning could happen although it is done online. Moreover, they believe that their children as college students should be independent to take responsibility and manage their learning. For the parents, online learning offers the flexibility that their children can access materials anytime and anywhere. They no longer spend money for house rent, transportation, food, and beverage as they used to do before the pandemic.

This study has found only six parents' respondents who have allowed their children to attend face-to-face classes (see Table 3.5). The latter argues that face-to-face classes are much better to promote quality learning processes. For them, it is difficult to control their children's learning progress via remote teaching. Moreover, these parents pity their children because of the current home confinement due to the pandemic. However, both types of parents have something in common. They urge that the university is willing to give some discount to their students' tuition fees. Their request is forwarded to the university leaders due to their economic condition, which is getting difficult during the pandemic. After a series of discussions, the university leaders come up with a financial relaxation policy: allowing the parents to take a more extended payment schedule for the university tuition.

Table 3.4. Reasons for choosing an online class

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Safety	45	75.0	75.0	75.0
	Low costs	2	3.6	3.6	78.6
	No permission from parents	11	17.9	17.9	96.4
	Having care of a sick person	2	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Based on the results of the cross-tabulation analysis in Table 3.5, the characteristics of two groups of respondents are identified: the respondent group who chose the online class and the respondent group who chose the blended learning. The characteristics of the online group are those who have internet connection problems. In addition, they consider full online classes to be an overloaded task, have problems with technology and electricity, and feel uncomfortable with the environment at home. However, surprisingly enough, they are so tolerant of these problems that they still prefer to have a fully online class.

Table 3.5. The result of cross-tabulation between challenges and teaching mode

		Teaching mode preference		Total
		online	Blended learning	
Challenges	Internet connection	21	0	21
	Task overload	11	0	11
	Electronic gadgets	11	0	11
	Electricity	9	0	9
	Home environment	2	6	8
Total		54	6	60

The findings of this study confirm that all of us become more and more increasingly dependent on technology due to the pandemic. However, we must admit that integrating technology into learning should be seen as an opportunity to improve the quality of learning regardless of the pandemic. This time we are all forced and have little choice to refuse. Will full remote teaching have positive impacts on our students' language skills or language proficiency? Our literature review shows that their relationship is highly conditional and varied. However, Akbana, Rathert, Aqcam (2021) emphasize that remote teaching has taught our students good lessons. They are taught to embrace self-directed learning, become digitally literate, get engaged in learning activities, and adopt problem-solving skills and learning autonomy. In addition, ERT favors disabled students who are not required to perform excessive physical movements in learning.

5. Conclusions

Remote teaching might not be perfect; yet, it offers the best way of the prevailing alternatives amid the pandemic. Unfortunately, pessimistic views are often seen when it comes to discussing remote teaching practices. For example, remote teaching misses the interactions full of social and emotional messages shared by teachers and students in most conventional classrooms. Viewed as self-paced learning that encourages the students to learn independently, an online class is likely to widen the gap between teachers and students in such a way. As a result, the students are overwhelmed with remote feelings of alienation. Sadly, numerous teachers often leave the students confused since the former just sends teaching materials to the latter without any narrated explanation or feedback. Pessimistic views regarding online often sound quite loudly among educators since quality learning of the online class is hardly monitored and measured. These conditions finally compel either the government or many educators to open the possibility for face-to-face classes amid the pandemic.

This study has found that students' perception of unsafe face-to-face meetings during the pandemic influences their preference to study online. The students appear to be much more tolerant of numerous remote teaching hindrances such as internet constraints, task overload, interference from home environment activities, electricity problems than those exposed to the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Moreover, many educators feel that online classes cannot meet all the expectations of a quality learning process, such as difficulties in monitoring students in learning, not fulfilling specific skills that require guidance and interaction, etc. The fear of transmission from COVID-19 is the biggest obstacle that keeps the plan of conducting face-to-face classes from running. Having an awareness of the dangers of COVID-19 is indeed good for people to always be alert to their surroundings. Conversely, it is also true that having excessive fear that makes people overreact to the current situation is not worth doing.

Will this pandemic make all learning activities fully and permanently online? The fact is that the pandemic has "introduced" a new learning civilization. The educators must innovate in designing and implementing learning strategies and methods so that they are "forced" to get out of old habits and outdated teaching traditions. They get connected with global learning communities, educational institutions so that they have opportunities to collaborate with people from all over the world. They can learn from other people. With relatively cheaper costs, online learning can reach students in remote areas of the country. This condition strongly supports the fulfillment of the ideals of the equal distribution of education to all people: gaining education for all levels of society. Furthermore, online learning introduces the concept of "learning without borders." If developed and managed correctly, online learning nationally provides access to learning for all levels of society in all corners of the country without territorial boundaries, without boundaries of race, ethnicity, religion, class, time, and space.

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