

ONLINE LEARNING: PERCEPTIONS FROM THE STUDENTS IN THE FRONTIER, THE OUTERMOST, AND THE LEAST DEVELOPED REGIONS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic placed the technology as the main tools in the learning process. The use of technology during the beginning of the pandemic time gave different lessons learned for both teachers and students, including students from the frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia. This study is a descriptive qualitative which aims at describing the perceptions of the students from the frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia who were studying in Sanata Dharma University. The perceptions were related to their difficulties in joining the online classes, the solutions they took, and their expectations of the online class during the pandemic situation. Questionnaires were distributed to the students and interviews were conducted to some samples to gain the data for those three concerns. The findings of this study can be used to help the lecturers to design the learning which can trigger the engagement of the students from the frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia.

Keywords: engagements, learning experience, learning models, perceptions

Introduction

Sanata Dharma University has great concerns on the education for all young people in Indonesia. As a Jesuit institution, the university applies the four Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP) in the service for 10 years (2019-2029). The UAP includes showing the way to God, walking with the excluded, Journeying with the Youth, and caring for our common home (<https://www.jesuits.global/uap/introduction/>). In relation to the preference of walking with the excluded, the university has given attention to, among others, the students from the frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia (*daerah terdepan, terluar, dan tertinggal /3T*). Based on the data provided by BAPSI (March 2021), there were 1819 students whose place of birth is in the frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia. Table 1 describes the detailed information on the place of birth of the respondents.

Table 1. The Origin of the Place of Birth of the 3T Students

No	Province	No	Regions	Number of the students
1	Aceh	1	Aceh Singkil	1
2	Sumatera Utara	1	Nias	3
3		2	Nias Selatan	8
4		4	Nias Barat	34
5	Sumatera Barat	1	Kepulauan Mentawai	35
6		2	Solok Selatan	1
7	Sumatera Selatan	1	Musi Rawas	24
8	Bengkulu	1	Seluma	1
9	Lampung	1	Lampung Barat	8
10		2	Pesisir Barat	1
11	Jawa Timur	2	Situbondo	4
12		4	Sampang	2
13	Banten	1	Pandeglang	1
14		2	Lebak	7
15	Nusa Tenggara Barat	1	Lombok Barat	4
16		2	Lombok Tengah	1
17		3	Lombok Timur	5
18		4	Sumbawa	6
19		5	Dompu	2
20		6	Bima	6
21		7	Sumbawa Barat	1
22	Nusa Tenggara Timur	1	Sumba Barat	97
23		2	Sumba Timur	52
24		3	Kupang	80
25		4	Timor Tengah Selatan	12
26		5	Timor Tengah Utara	45
27		6	Belu	54
28		7	Alor	8
29		8	Lembata	58
30		9	Ende	90
31		10	Manggarai	115
32		11	Rote Ndao	7
33		12	Manggarai Barat	119
34		13	Sumba Tengah	25
35		14	Sumba Barat Daya	89
36		15	Nagekeo	42
37		16	Manggarai Timur	52
38		18	Malaka	17
39	Kalimantan Barat	1	Sambas	10
40		2	Bengkayang	34
41		21	Landak	72
42		22	Ketapang	98
43		23	Sintang	135

44		24	Kapuas Hulu	63
45		25	Melawi	39
46	Kalimantan Tengah	1	Seruyan	3
47	Kalimantan Selatan	1	Hulu Sungai Utara	1
48	Kalimantan Timur	1	Mahakam Hulu	4
49	Kalimantan Utara	1	Nunukan	14
50	Sulawesi Tengah	1	Banggai Kepulauan	13
51		2	Donggala	2
52		3	Toli Toli	2
53		5	Parigi Moutong	4
54		6	Tojo Una0Una	1
55		9	Morowali Utara	7
56	Sulawesi Tenggara	1	Konawe	1
57	Sulawesi Barat	1	Polewali Mandar	1
58		2	Mamuju Tengah	1
59	Maluku	1	Maluku Tenggara Barat	9
60		2	Maluku Tengah	4
61		7	Maluku Barat Daya	3
62	Maluku Utara	1	Halmahera Barat	1
63	Papua Barat	2	Teluk Bintuni	2
64		3	Sorong Selatan	3
65		4	Sorong	36
66		6	Tambrauw	2
67	Papua	3	Nabire	31
68		8	Boven Digoel	5
69		9	Mappi	99
70		12	Pegunungan Bintang	1
71		26	Deiyai	1
				1819

The frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia can cause the different condition of the education facilitation for the students. Educational problems in the 3T area, among others, are related to teaching staff, such as limited number of teachers (shortage), unbalanced distribution of teachers, under qualifications, less competence (low competencies) and mismatches between educational qualifications, inadequate infrastructure, and infrastructure for easy access in attending education that is still lacking (Surahman, Santaria, & Setiawan, 2020). Therefore, when they continue their study at the university level, they will find completely different learning environment. Thus, teachers, including the university teachers, need to design the learning which can facilitate so many different education background

The pandemic situation brought a difficult time for everyone, including people in the education field. Everyone suddenly had to depend on the technology. Students had to learn, communicate with teachers and the other students through gadgets. Teachers had to deliver materials, communicate, and give the assessment using the technology. In relation to the current situation, a closer look at the learning designed at the university level can be beneficial to see the possible problems and

therefore to expect a better learning plan for the students coming from the frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia. Therefore, this study focused on three research questions, namely (1) what are the perceptions of the students from the frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia on their difficulties in having the online learning?, (2) what solution did they do?, and (3) what expectations did they have on the online learning models in this pandemic situation?

Learning problems in the pandemic situation

There was some research on how the situation put the teachers, the students and even parents. First is about the internet quota. Some students said that they had problems in providing themselves internet quota needed for their learning (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Indrawati, 2020; Nastiti & Hayati, 2020; Putri et al., 2020) and the infrastructure that cannot provide them good internet connection (Pandey & Sharma, 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020) as well as parents’ economic condition that cannot support their children learning (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Putri et al., 2020). The second one is related to students’ psychological conditions (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Some students feel stressed since they cannot communicate with their friends directly both related to their tasks or normal conversation (Nastiti & Hayati, 2020; Sembiring & Oktavianti, 2021) and even feel anxious (Simamora, 2020). The last one is related to students’ low digital literacy (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020) and discipline (Putri et al., 2020). Some students found it difficult to use some applications to support their learning but they also do not force themselves to learn using it as well as forcing themselves to always be on time in submitting any tasks.

Online learning in the pandemic situation

The design and models of the learning in the offline classes should consider many aspects; some of which are learning goals, learning materials, learning methods, and learning assessments as shown in Figure 1 (https://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/certop/imp_design.html).

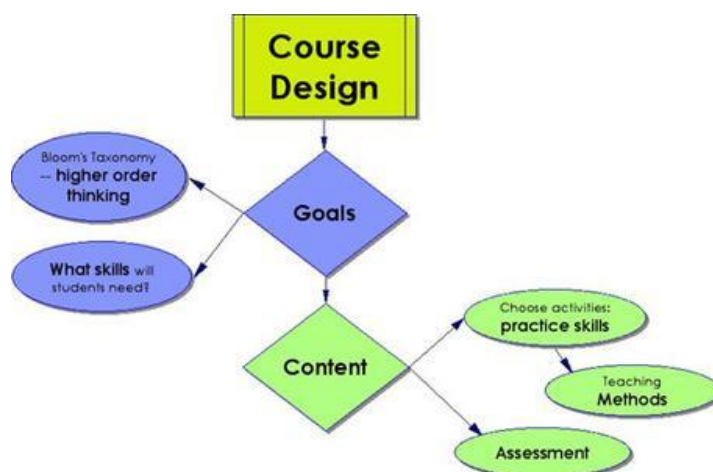


Figure 1. Concept map for the course design

The key in designing online learning is the selection of components that can help and facilitate students to be fully involved in learning content (Lister, 2014).

Research by Lister (2004) reveals that there are four important components in online learning design. The main things are (i) structure, ii) learning content, iii) collaboration and interaction, and iv) feedback (Lister, 2014).

What is meant by structure is features in the form of syllabus information, lecture schedules, a clear framework for learning activities, an outline of learning activities, examples of solving questions as a guide, assessments and rubrics, and instructions on assignments, as well as reminders from the lecturer to complete the assignment. This feature provides assistance to make students focus on learning (Ausburn (2004), Lee (2014)).

Online learning content that students like is content that contains a variety of activities. The existence of a variety of activities gives students the opportunity to choose activities that are in line with their learning interests and needs (Moallem, 2007). In addition, research by (Dahalan, Hasan, Hassan, Zakaria, & Noor, 2013) revealed that self-assessment is important in learning accompanied by immediate feedback. Self assessment is very helpful for students to review their learning and stimulate Higher Order Thinking (Trisnawaty, Citrasukmawati, & Thohir, 2017). Henderson, Napan, & Monteiro (2004) indicate that reflection is one component of authentic e-learning. Giving assignments that encourage reflection requires students to connect course material with their lives so that students are more involved in learning.

Interaction is a principle of online learning. Interaction can occur between students and lecturers-students. Interaction can be made through discussion forums, chat, and email. Hrastinski (2010) found that synchronous discussion could be used to support students when working on group projects and was useful for decision making and planning.

Giatman, Siswati, & Basri (2020) illustrates the principles of online learning as shown in Figure 2. In terms of the interaction scheme, online learning can be distinguished between synchronous and asynchronous forms (Seluakumaran, Jusof, Ismail, & Husain, 2011). Online learning is not enough just by changing the teaching material directly into material that is delivered online, but one of the most important things in online learning is how lecturers can interact with their students and students can interact with other students (Sutarto, Sari, & Fathurrochman, 2020). One type of interaction between lecturers-students and students-students can also be done through giving feedback. According to a study by Chen (2007), Dahalan, Hasan, Hassan, Zakaria, & Noor (2013) Gedik, Kiraz, & Ozden (2013) giving feedback is very important to increase student motivation and satisfaction. Feedback also helps students to develop the task and support them in future learning (Ion, Barrera-Corominas, & Tomas-Folch, 2016).

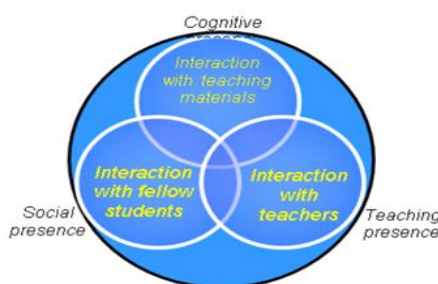


Figure 2. The principle of online learning

Learning engagement in the online context

Activities which trigger the students in learning should be facilitated by the teachers. The interaction in learning is not only dealing with how the teachers deliver the materials. Learning should also facilitate student's interactions. There are three student's interactions in learning; students-materials, student-teacher, and student-student (Moore, 1989) The model in Figure 3 was developed based on Moore (1989). This includes learner-teacher engagement, learner-learner engagement, learner-content engagement, learner-community engagement, learner-institution engagement.



Figure 3. Online learning model ([https://www.csu.edu.au/division/ learning-and-teaching/home/online-learning/online-learning-model](https://www.csu.edu.au/division/learning-and-teaching/home/online-learning/online-learning-model))

Method

This study employed a qualitative research method which utilized the questionnaire and interview to students of Sanata Dharma University. The data were obtained from the questionnaire and interviews to the students who are studying in Sanata Dharma University. The questionnaire was made by the university research team. This study used the results of the questionnaire from this range only December 26th, 2020 up to January 14th, 2021. The research leader of this study is one of the members of the university research team. Therefore, this study used the relevant data.

The questions which are relevant for this study are question number 1, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 28, 29, 32, and 33. The blueprint of the relevant items are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The blueprint of the related items in the questionnaire

RQ#	Category	Sub-category	Statements
Q1	Paradigmatic elements	Learning Model	I felt the teacher used the active methods.
		Self Evaluation	The online system helps me understand my ability and weaknesses in learning more.
Q4	Managerial elements	Social Factor	I will be more motivated if I can have direct (physical) interaction with the teacher and classmates.
		Planning	The LMS is completed with the learning objectives, materials, and clear instructions.
Q9		Input	The materials in the LMS are easy to understand and help me master the topic.
Q10			

Q12	Objective	The materials provided in the LMS make me easy to learn independently.
Q13	Objective	The learning activities provided in the LMS facilitate me to study independently to achieve the goal.
Q15	Organizing	I can communicate and consult easily with the teacher during the class sessions.
Q16	Organizing	The features in the LMS make me easy to learn.
Q17	Evaluating	The quiz, examination, and assignments given by the teacher are proportional and relevant in helping me learn the lesson well.
Q28	Technical elements	The best facility for the online learning
Q29		The expectation related to the class mode
Q32		The access to the internet connection
Q33		The availability of the gadget

The data gained from the questionnaire were analysed based on the needs. Then, the focus of the responses was on the responses given by the students who were from the frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia. Based on the data taken from BAPSI in March 2021, there were 1819 students from the frontier, the outermost, and the least developed regions in Indonesia who are studying in Sanata Dharma University. However, the data obtained only covered the answers from 618 students from those regions. The students who became the respondents who were from the 3T regions are described in Figure 4.

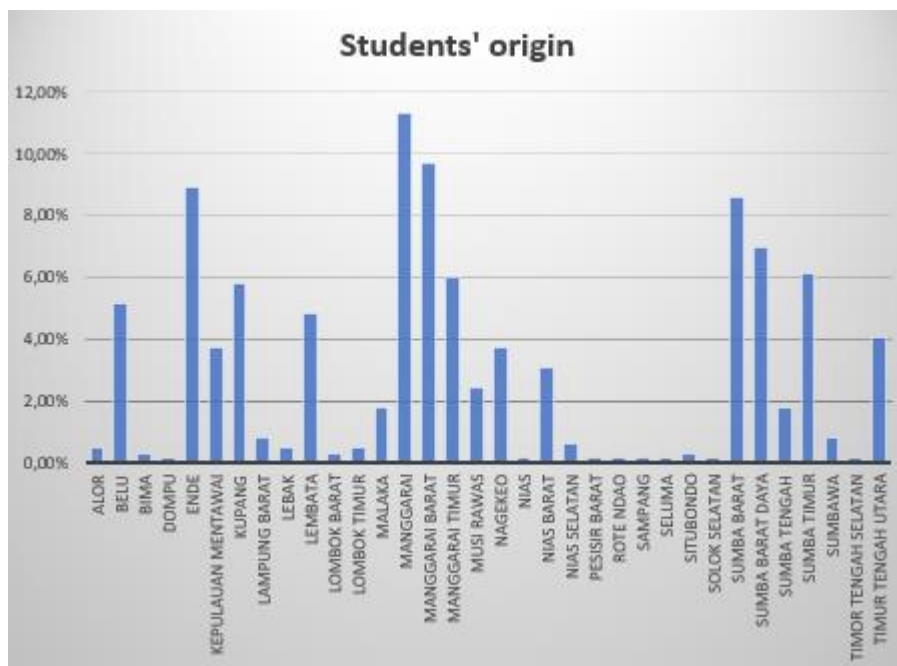


Figure 4. The place of birth origin of respondents

From Figure 4, the four biggest number of the respondents of the questionnaire were from Manggarai, Manggarai Barat, Ende, and Sumba Barat. In terms of where those respondents were taking their study at, Figure 5 presents the

description. The four biggest number of the respondents was from Accounting, Pharmacy, Theology and Management Study Program.

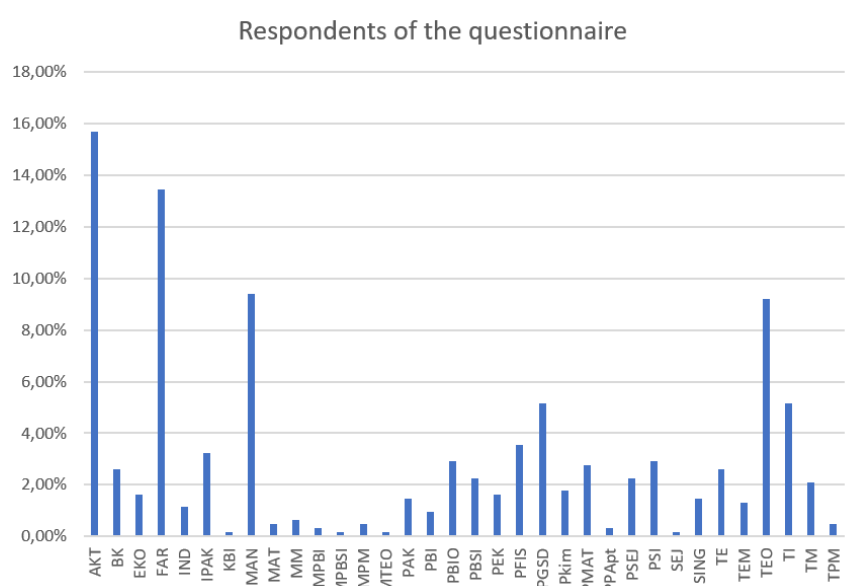


Figure 5. The study program where the respondents were in

The questionnaire was designed mostly in closed-ended versions of likert-scale responses and some closed-ended versions of non-likert-scale responses. The likert-scale responses included strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Since this study is a descriptive qualitative study, the percentage of each response was calculated. The perceptions related to difficulties were based on either the sum of the strongly-agree responses and agree-responses or the sum of the strongly-disagree responses and disagree-responses. It was considered as part of the difficulty if it was more than 20%.

Then, a focus group discussion was conducted to four students from those three regions who answered the questionnaire. The purpose of the group discussion was to explore their answers related to the difficulties they faced, the solutions, and the expectations they have on the online learning mode. The respondents of the focus group discussion were the following students. Student A, a student of the Chemistry Education Study Program, is from Sumba and was staying in Sumba during the online class. She is in semester four. Student B, from Sumba, is staying at the student residence in Yogyakarta. She is a student of the Chemistry Education Study Program who is now in the eighth semester. Student C, a student of the English Education Study Program, is from Ende but staying in Yogyakarta during the study. He is in his second year of study. Student D is a student from Sumba Tengah studying in the English Education Study Program. She stayed in her region during the online class.

Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the findings related to the three research questions, namely, the students' difficulties, the solutions they took, and the expectations on the online learning. The detailed findings and discussions are as follows.

The students' difficulties

The difficulties related to the technical matters are due to the availability of the gadget and the access to the internet connection. Many of the respondents were using their own gadgets and many others were using a shared gadget, as summarized in Figure 6.

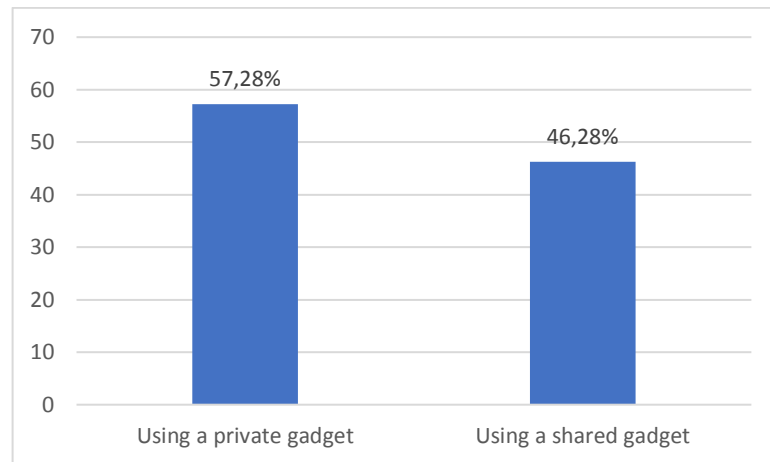


Figure 6. The gadget's availability

The second difficulty related to the technical matters is the quality of the internet connection when students needed to join the video conference meetings. There were 75% of the respondents mentioning that they had unstable connections and even 5% mentioning that they were not connected to the internet. Figure 7 represents the finding.

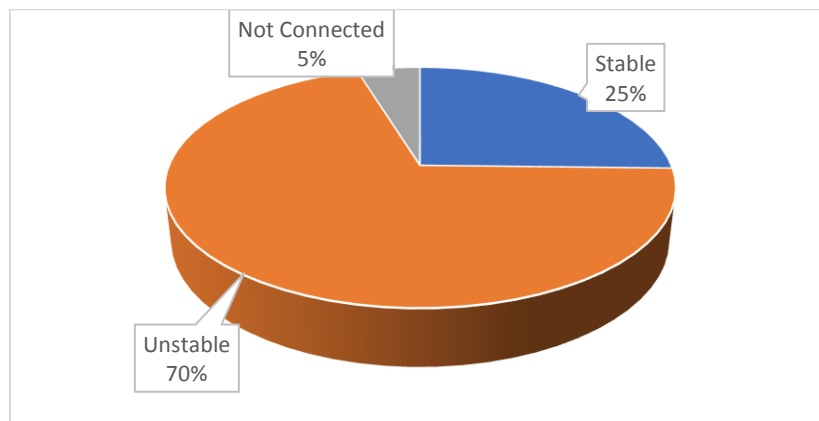


Figure 7. The quality of the internet connection

However, the internet connection problems did not solely depend on whether the students were staying in Yogyakarta or in their home city. During the interview, some problems were felt also by the students who were still staying in Yogyakarta. Student A did not have any problems with the internet connection even though she is staying in her region.

A study by (Febrianto, Mas'udah, & Megasari, 2020) revealed responses from student parents regarding online learning. Limited internet signal due to being in a

remote area and the need for a very large internet quota are the dominant complaints. Another difficulty experienced by students is in terms of operating the device. Students still feel confused about online learning. This happens because there are features required for online learning that are not available on laptops or cellphones (Windiarti, Fadilah, Dhermawati, & Partolo, 2019).

In addition to those technical problems, the interview data revealed that all students being interviewed experienced a learning shock during the beginning of the pandemic situation. They felt shocked due to the change of learning mode from offline to online. They had to learn how to use the learning management system, which were not yet used effectively before the pandemic. They also had to be able to use the virtual meeting applications to join the online meetings with the lecturers. Student A adjusted herself to use the application in the online class. The learning moved to the learning management system (LMS), video conference applications. This happened in the beginning of online learning. Student B also gradually was able to adapt himself to use the media. However, he then also faced difficulties in making the assignment where he needed to use the technology. He had to ask his classmates to help him make his presentation video. In the offline context, he had no difficulties in preparing presentations in the class. A study by Gillett-Swan underlined that “Some of the issues experienced can be personal such as: anxiety associated with using technology; ...” (2017).

The fourth difficulty is that they had problems managing the time since there were so many assignments given by the lecturers. That happened especially in the beginning period of online learning. The result is similar to some researches done before. There are many complaints regarding this issue. Some students say that they have many tasks but limited internet quota resulting in bad scores (Cicilblog, 2020; Febriani, 2020; JawaPos, 2021; Kompas, 2020; Rizky, 2020; Sugianto, 2020). In fact, there have been a lot of improvements due to the use of synchronous and asynchronous activities so that this problem is hardly felt by students.

Further difficulty is related to the limited communication media with classmates and teachers. Students found it difficult to communicate and discuss things with their classmates. One of the respondents (Student A) even mentioned that she found it hard to understand the materials without having the physical interaction with the lecturers and the other classmates. Communicating the lesson well was not easy to do. There was no problem contacting the lecturers since mobile phone chats, for example whatsapp chat, telegram chat, and other kinds of communication platforms, were available. However, the students felt that expressing their questions was not easy. Therefore, they felt more comfortable to ask questions to their classmates.

This result is inline with a research conducted by Gillett-Swan (2017) which mentioned that barriers were related to “collaborative learning tasks through group work, group presentations and group assessments (Davidson, 2015; Graham & Misanchuk, 2004; Jaques & Salmon, 2007)”. The study, further, found that there was inequity in assessment perceived by the students, especially related to assignments dealing with group work, and, “the (perceived) inability or difficulty in peer interaction, particularly in presentations” (Gillett-Swan, 2017).

The findings from the interview were triangulated by the findings from the questionnaire. Table 3 describes the results of the question items in the questionnaire.

Table 3. The students' perceptions on the online class implementation

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I felt the teacher used the active methods	18.45%	72.82%	7.93%	0.81%
The online system helps me understand my ability and weaknesses in learning more	18.77%	62.78%	16.83%	1.62%
I will be more motivated if I can have direct (physical) interaction with the teacher and classmates	44.66%	50.49%	4.37%	0.49%
The LMS is completed with the learning objectives, materials, and clear instructions.	26.86%	65.86%	6.80%	0.49%
The materials in the LMS are easy to understand and help me master the topic.	14.08%	69.09%	15.21%	1.62%
The materials provided in the LMS make me easy to learn independently.	15.86%	71.68%	11.49%	0.97%
The learning activities provided in the LMS facilitate me to study independently to achieve the goal.	15.70%	72.33%	10.84%	1.13%
I can communicate and consult easily with the teacher during the class sessions.	13.11%	60.68%	23.14%	3.07%
The features in the LMS make me easy to learn.	15.53%	71.84%	11.81%	0.81%
The quiz, examination, and assignments given by the teacher are proportional and relevant in helping me learn the lesson well	13.59%	70.39%	14.40%	1.62%

From the relevant question items, there are two concerns which relate to the difficulties, as seen in Table 3. One is related to the absence of physical interactions and the difficulties to communicate and consult with the teachers during the class sessions. It was obvious that the physical interactions really had an important point during the class activity. There was some fact that the absence of face-to-face interaction could lead to the stressful situation like reported in the Jakarta Post as follows:

Students reported the home-learning program to be even more stressful than regular classrooms. Some of the common reasons for this went along the lines of: "Normal classes may have been difficult, but having friends makes it so much more manageable and less stressful. Online classes take out the benefits of having friends to socialize with and being stuck alone with nothing but assignments." (Angdhiri, 2020)

Another difficulty faced by the students is related to the difficulty in communicating with the lecturers and in consulting with the lecturer. There are 26.21% of the respondents who stated the difficulty.

The students' solutions to the problems on the online learning

The first solution revealed from the interview is that the students tried to boost their motivation and concentration in online learning. One of the students (Student D) said that she tried to do the same routines like the ones she did in the offline learning. She would take a bath and had breakfast before the scheduled class.

According to Brophy, motivation is used to explain goal-oriented behavior. (Brophy, 2004). There is a close relationship between motivation and the learning process. Motivation is very important both in the learning process and in real life. (Gopalan, Bakar, Zulkifli, Alwi, & Mat, 2017). In the learning process, motivation is a very influential factor in the success and failure of students (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010). Turturean (2013) states that student learning motivation has a close relationship with students' ability to solve problems (Turturean, 2013). If students have high motivation, students will adapt to situations that pose learning challenges that can hinder their progress because with motivation, they will be directed to look for alternative problem solutions (Muslimin & Harintama, 2020)

Student motivation will increase if students have the ability to complete the assigned task properly (Brophy, 2008). One of the most important ways to involve them in the learning process is by providing great challenges and opportunities for students to develop their abilities. However, it should be remembered that the challenges given and the students' abilities must be balanced so that students can improve their abilities maximally to achieve the objectives of the challenges given (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). The challenges given to students will increase the energy and enthusiasm of students to do assignments. In the learning process, students will also show higher achievement when facing difficult challenges.

The second one is to be more independent in learning. The difficulty to communicate or ask their classmates made the respondent realize that she could not depend on others and thus tried to study independently. She was aware that she had to have a clear goal in the study, and had to focus to achieve the goal (Student D). Another student (Student A) also highlighted that she studied more. She did not depend on the teacher. Nor did she rely on listening to others. She took an initiative to contact and ask her classmates more outside of the class since in the online class they could not have enough interactions with each other. Further, she also tried to find the information herself. The distance learning in this case becomes the catalyst of independent learning even it can strengthen students' independent character (Rosilia et al., 2020) and learning which will benefit themselves (Meyer et al., 2008).

The students' expectations on the online learning

The following are the students' expectations related to online learning. The first is related to the mode of learning. Many of them expected to have combination models between online and offline classes as seen in Figure 8.

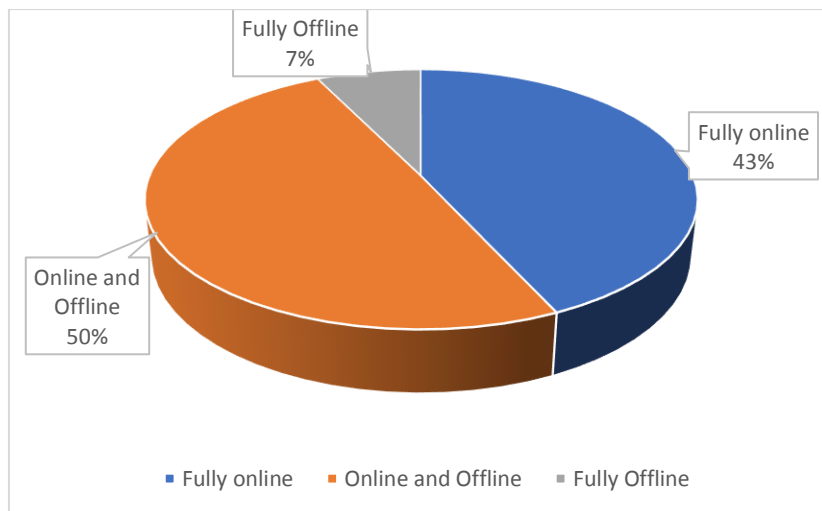


Figure 8. The students' expected mode of learning

The second one is their opinion on the online learning tools. They tended to have tools which can facilitate their interaction with the lecturers and the other students. Therefore, the most favourite tools are video conference applications and Whatapps chat, as described in Figure 9.

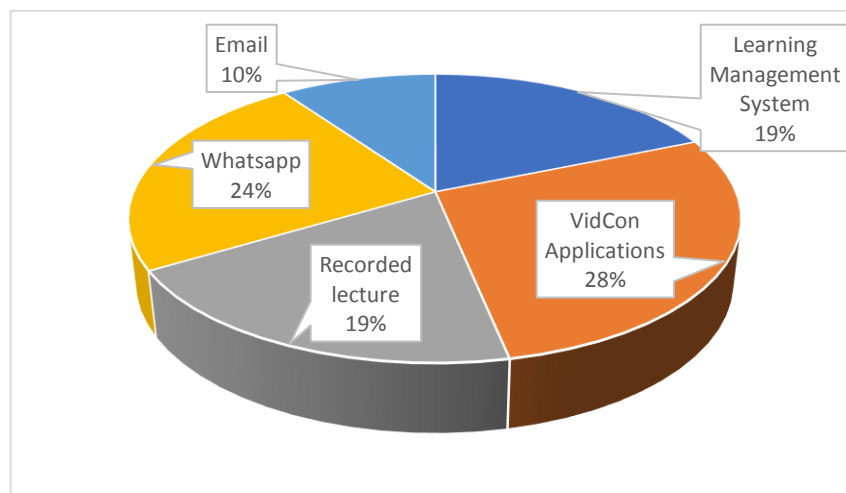


Figure 9. The best facilities for the online learning

In relation to the best facilities, the students mentioned in the interview that the video conference was felt as a more effective way for online learning. Therefore, student A hoped to have explanations of the materials in the video conference meetings. In relation to the best facilities, the students mentioned in the interview that the video conference was felt as a more effective way for online learning. Therefore, student A hoped to have explanations of the materials in the video conference meetings. Some students actually also prefer other media such as recorded video and WAG discussion are useful since the most important thing is they have the ability to help students have timely interaction with their teachers/lecturers, content, and their peers (Anderson, 2008).

In addition to the expectations revealed from the questionnaire results, there were other expectations. They realized that there should be some actions from the students themselves. Student D mentioned that the students had to have their own motivation. They needed to reflect on their own learning and adjusted the way they learned. The next expectation is directed to the lecturers. Student D mentioned that the lecturers needed to know the students' competences and thus can know the way to facilitate because some students felt shy to ask questions or were afraid to make mistakes.

Conclusions

The study found that there were three main difficulties felt by the respondents. The first is related to the technical matters. The students found it hard when they have only shared gadgets to use in online learning. The access to the internet connection was also a major problem for the students. Further, they had a difficult time adjusting themselves to the use of technology application in online learning. The second difficulty is related to the time management problem experienced by the students in relation to many assignment deadlines to finish. The third one is related to the absence of physical interaction during the online class and limited online real time interactions between the students with the teachers and among students. Due to those missing interactions, the students found some difficulties in understanding the materials, collaborating with classmates, communicating their problems and consulting them to the teachers. The next findings were related to the solutions they took for solving the problems. The students boosted their own motivations in online learning with the limited ways to communicate and collaborate with others. They also tried to be more independent in learning. Finally, there were three expectations they held. They expected to experience combinations of learning, namely online and offline versions. They also hoped to use easy-to-use communication tools to support the online classes. Last but not least, the students also expected that the teachers could do more activities to facilitate shy students who wanted more help but could not express it to the forum.

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