

**THE DILEMMA OF ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19:  
CHALLENGES OR OPPORTUNITIES?**

**Ira Irzawati**

irairzawati@gmail.com

English Education Study Program, Universitas Katolik Musi Charitas,  
Palembang, Indonesia

**ABSTRACT**

This research aimed to investigate the challenges and opportunities of online learning system implementation from students' perspectives. In this survey research, 143 students of a private university were involved as the respondents. The respondents were third, fifth, and seventh-semester students from four different departments that have experienced learning English through an online learning system. The data of the research were gathered through administering an online survey to the respondents. The survey questionnaire covered items related to demographic information, online learning application, and challenges and opportunities of online learning. The data of the survey were analyzed by presenting the frequency of students' responses towards each item of the questionnaire in form of a percentage. The students believed that online learning potentially provided both challenges and opportunities to the students. Technical issues, minimum interaction, low discipline, and a less effective learning atmosphere were among the dominant challenges of online learning. Meanwhile, various material access, flexibility, interactive learning, and a relaxing learning atmosphere were the major opportunities of online learning. Anticipating the challenges and maximizing the opportunities are alternative solutions to promote the successful implementation of online learning.

**Keywords: Online Learning, Challenges, Opportunities.**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has a far-reaching effect on the education field (Huber & Helm, 2020). It shifted the educational system from classroom to online learning. Selecting online learning as an alternative way to resume education is inevitable because educational institutions around the globe are closed to halt the spreading of Covid-19 (Adnan & Anwar, 2020).

Online learning is a learning system that is mediated by the Internet (Rapanta, et, al., 2020). It is viewed as a core learning system during this pandemic (Baçzek, et, al., 2021). This learning system is bridging communication and interaction among educators and students, especially at the

higher education level. It facilitates teaching and learning activities that are not possibly conducted face to face due to the pandemic outbreak.

The implementation of an online learning system plays an essential role during this pandemic. It not only helps the learning providers to manage, plan, deliver, and track the process of teaching and learning but also aids the instructors, schools, and universities to facilitate student learning in the period of the educational institution closure (Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh, & Althunibat, 2020).

The successful implementation of a learning system relies on various factors. Challenges and opportunities are among the factors that require to take into account. The data related to

challenges and opportunities are highly beneficial to provide fruitful insights for developing the learning system. Minimizing the challenges and maximizing the opportunities are keys to supporting the learning system implementation success.

Numerous studies examined the benefits and drawbacks of integrating an online learning system (Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh, & Althunibat, 2020; Al-Qahtani, 2019; Appana, 2008, Jingyu, 2014; Sadeghi, 2019). However, the previous studies only concern with examining students' perspectives at certain levels and majors. This study investigated students' perspectives on challenges and opportunities of online learning through involving various levels and majors of the students.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **a) Overview of Online Learning**

The best learning system has been a part of debate topics for decades. Several scholars argue that online learning is better than classroom learning. Meanwhile, others suggest that classroom learning is less effective than online learning.

Alsaaty, Carter, Abrahams, & Alshameri, (2016) stated that the effectiveness of online learning versus classroom learning are classified into four categories: (1) both online learning and classroom learning are equally effective from an educational standpoint, (2) the superiority of online learning mode relative to classroom learning mode, (3) the superiority of classroom learning mode relative to online learning mode, (4) the superiority of hybrid learning system namely the combination between online learning and classroom learning.

Online learning refers to a learning experience or environment that relies upon the use of the internet as the main delivery mode in presentation and communication (Appana, 2008). It is a type of teaching and learning that requires the teachers and learners to conduct teaching and learning activities virtually. In addition, the materials and communication accesses entail technology support (Anderson, 2011).

Jingyu (2014) asserted that the implementation of online learning cause pros and cons both from students and lecturers. For

instance, in terms of flexibility, students and lecturers agreed that the flexibility of online learning brings benefits and limitations. From the students' perspectives, flexibility assists the students to accommodate tasks, control learning, and study at their own pace. Yet, it requires more self-motivation, organization, and planning than classroom learning. Meanwhile, the lecturers believed that online learning provides a time and place independent environment for teaching schedule. However, the time for teaching an online course is greater than classroom learning.

### **b) Review of Online Learning Studies**

Since the emergence of online learning, numerous studies have been conducted to investigate various issues related to the learning system.

In 2020, Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh, & Althunibat explored the critical challenges and factors influencing the E-learning system usage during the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents of this study were 30 students and 31 experts from universities in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Based on the findings, it was figured out that technology, e-learning system quality, and culture, self-efficacy, and trust are the critical factors that affect the usage of e-learning systems. In addition, three main challenges that impede the usage of e-learning systems are change management, technical issue, and financial support problems.

Appana (2008) presented a review of the benefits and limitations of online learning in the context of the student, the instructor, and the tenured faculty. The researcher concluded that increased access, improved learning quality, better preparation of students for a knowledge-based society, learning opportunities are the potential benefits of online learning. Vice versa, online learning start-up funding, organizational preparedness, and student readiness are the major limitations of online learning.

Another research that examined online learning was conducted by Sadeghi in 2019. The results of this study revealed the advantages and disadvantages of conducting online learning. The advantages of online learning cover flexible time and place, affordable cost, no commuting, free choice, time efficiency, multiple activities.

Meanwhile, the disadvantages of online learning include high distraction, complicated technology, no social interaction, and less interaction with tutors.

The other study was conducted by Al-Qahtani in 2019. This research focused on investigating teachers' and students' perceptions towards the applications of online learning. The results showed that both teachers and students agreed that online learning has advantages and disadvantages. The students stated that a comfortable environment, easy learning process, effort and time saving and various materials are the main advantages of online learning. Meanwhile, technical problems and lack of facial expressions are the most dominant disadvantages of online learning. In line with it, the teachers mentioned motivating teaching environment, effective time management, and technological tool integration, and time and place flexibility are the advantages of online learning. Whereas, technical problems, needs for extra training, and lack of student control are the disadvantages of online learning.

### **c) Advantages Versus Disadvantages of Online Learning**

According to Arkorful & Abaidoo (2014), The utilization of online learning systems provides advantages and disadvantages. Several advantages of online learning include: (1) flexible time and place as the students have the privilege to manage their time and place, (2) knowledge enhancement due to the easy access of huge amount of information, (3) interactive discussion forum to build communication and relation, (4) cost-effective and no commuting, (5) individual learner differences consideration, (6) self-pacing in learning for each individual.

In line with it, some disadvantages of implementing an online learning system cover: (1) lack of interaction with the lecturer, (2) less effectiveness compare to classroom learning dealing material explanation, (3) potential negative effect to communication skill, (4) less control of any cheating act during examination, (5) plagiarism exposure due to the ease of copy-paste, (6) limited institutions' socialization role and lecturers' instructor's role, (7) unsuitable for all types of major, (8) highly cost due to the

heavy use of websites.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

The researcher used survey design as it allows the researcher to scan a wide field of issues, populations, and programs to assess or present any generalized feature (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). In this study, the survey design was employed to investigate the challenges and opportunities of online learning system implementation from the students' perspectives.

One hundred and forty-three students voluntarily participated as respondents of this study. The students were third, fifth, and seventh-semester students that experienced online learning for at least one semester. The students also were from four different departments, namely Accounting, Management, Primary School Teacher Education, and English Education Study Program.

The researcher administered an online survey in the form of a close-ended and open-ended questionnaire to collect the data. The questionnaire comprised three main sections. The first section deals with demographic information that helps the researcher to identify the level, major, gender, pre-pandemic online learning experience, and IT skills of the students. The next section focuses on finding out students' perspectives on online learning. The last section provides questionnaire items that facilitate the researcher to examine students' perspectives related to challenges and opportunities of online learning. The questionnaire was adapted from a questionnaire written by Bączek, et., al. (2021).

The data of the survey were analyzed by presenting the frequency of students' responses towards each item of the questionnaire in form of a percentage. The high and small number of percentages assisted the researcher to portrait students' perspectives toward the implementation, challenges, and opportunities of online learning.

### **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **a) Results of Survey Student Profile**

Out of one hundred forty-three students that responded to the questionnaire where 60.1% of the respondents were third-semester students, 18.2% were fifth-semester students, and the rest 21.7% were seventh-semester students. Furthermore, the respondents were from four different departments, namely, Accounting (29.4%), Primary School Teacher Education (28.6%), Management (28%), and English Education (14%). In addition, 62.9% of the respondents were male and 37.1% of them were female.

Concerning online learning, 74.1% of the respondents mentioned that they ever joined online learning before the Covid-19 pandemic. Vice versa, 25.9% of the respondents stated that they never experienced online learning. The respondents added that they had proper IT skills to participate in online learning. In terms of IT skill mastery, the respondents classified their skills into three categories where 88.1% of the students were in the moderate category, 8.4% of the students were in the low category, and 3.5% of the students were in the high category.

**Implementation of Online Learning**

The results of the questionnaire on students’ perspectives towards the implementation of online learning are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Students’ Perspectives on Online Learning**

No	Statement	A	D
1	Communication	60.1%	39.9%
2	Motivation	86.7%	13.3%
3	Effectiveness	89.5%	10.5%
4	Easiness	79.7%	20.3%

Pertaining to the implementation of online learning, the students generally perceived it positively. The responses of the students were classified into four main categories, namely, communication, motivation, effectiveness, and easiness.

Dealing with communication, 60.1 % of students agreed that online learning facilitated communication between students and lecturers. Meanwhile, 39.9% of the students disagreed that online learning provided effective communication,

especially between lecturers and students.

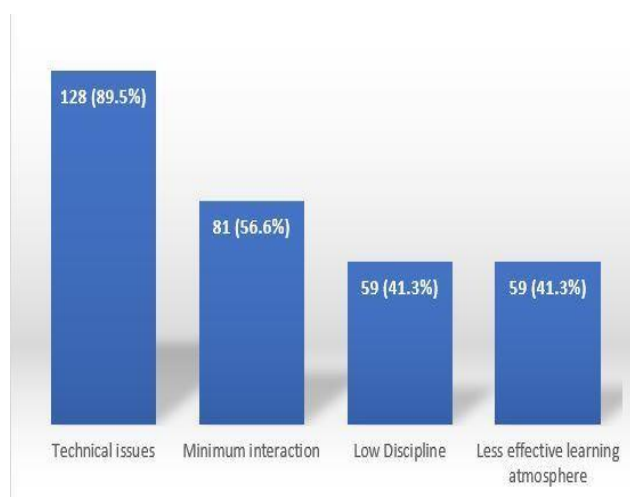
In relation to motivation, most of the students (86.7%) of the students expressed their agreement with the statement that online learning motivated them to learn better. Vice versa, some of the students (13.3%) showed their disagreement with the statement. The students believed that online learning didn't necessarily elevate their learning motivation.

Regarding the effectiveness, around 89.5% of students agreed that it was effective to learn English virtually. However, 10.5% of the students showed different opinions, learning English through an online system was not effective to support the learning activities.

Finally, many students (79.7%) believed that it was easy to learn English in virtual class but, some students (20,3%) disagreed with the statement. Studying in the classroom is simpler than learning in the virtualclass.

**Challenges of Online Learning**

The students’ opinions related to challenges that were potentially occurred through online learning are described in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 Challenges of Online Learning**

As the other types of learning systems, the implementation of online learning brought challenges to the students. Technical issues, minimum interaction, low discipline, and a less effective learning atmosphere are the main challenges encountered by the students.

In detail, most of the students (89.5%) stated that technical issues are the major barriers

during online teaching and learning activities. For instance, slow internet connection due to bad weather caused students unable to follow the class. As the consequence, the students missed the important points and did not grasp the materials well.

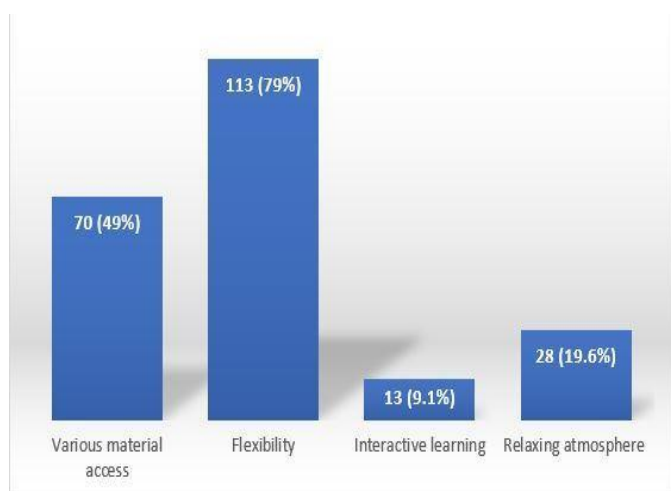
The next challenge is minimum interaction. 56.6% of the students said that online learning did not allow active interactions between students with their friends or students with their lecturers. It was challenging for the students to interact with the lecturer for asking more questions or explanation.

Low discipline is another challenge faced by the students during online learning. The core of online learning was the student-centered approach. The students are required to have high discipline in managing schedules, doing tasks, etc. Besides, there was no full control from lecturers during the learning process. Thus, for almost half of the students (41.3%), it caused low discipline awareness of the students that lead to another challenge.

The same number of students (41.3%) added that online learning created a less effective learning atmosphere. Technical problems and limited interaction are among the major factors that contribute to the occurrence of this challenge.

### **Opportunities of Online Learning**

The students believed that online learning provided many opportunities. The responses of the students are illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2 Opportunities of Online Learning**

Online learning not only brings challenges but also opportunities. Some of the opportunities included various material access, flexibility, a relaxing atmosphere, and interactive learning.

For most of the students (79%), flexibility is the main opportunity gained from online learning. It was possible for the students to manage their time well. The students did not need to come to campus and attend the class. They were able to study from their house or anywhere.

As stated by around 49% of the students, various material access is another opportunity found in online learning. Online learning enabled the students to access various materials for learning in any form. A large number of materials helped the students to understand the learning material better and obtain more knowledge related to the discussed topics.

Another opportunity is a relaxing atmosphere. Some students (19,6%) mentioned that online learning facilitated them to experience a relaxing atmosphere. Since the communication was indirect and through the internet, it helped them to anticipate anxiety to interact directly with the lecturers.

Around 9,1% of the students confirmed that interactive learning is the other opportunity provided by online learning. Learning activities were fun due to the use of technological devices as media and various learning materials that assisted them to enjoy the learning process.

### **b) Discussion**

The findings revealed that the students' perspectives towards the implementation of online learning were positive. The students believed that the implementation of online learning has brought positive impacts dealing with communication, motivation, effectiveness, and easiness. This implied that online learning was one of the potential learning systems to support the teaching and learning process, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In conjunction with it, online learning provided both challenges and opportunities for the students. The students mentioned that technical issues, minimum interaction, low discipline, and a less effective learning

atmosphere were among the most dominant challenges encountered during the online learning process. These challenges were possibly anticipated with the assistance of authorities, institutions, lecturers, students, and parents. For instance, the authorities are able to provide free internet access for lecturers and students and encourage the providers to improve their internet connection. Lecturers are able to apply more appropriate learning strategies and design learning activities that promote maximum interaction, elevate students' discipline awareness and create a more effective learning atmosphere. In short, participation from all parties is required to support the successful implementation of online learning.

Flexibility, various material access, a relaxing atmosphere, and interactive learning are the opportunities provided by online learning. It is important to maintain and develop these opportunities so that it brings positive impacts especially to the achievement of the students. Creating more opportunities enables the students to gain a better understanding and achievement in learning. A great number of the students believed that flexibility and various material access are the biggest opportunities for online learning. However, only a small number of the students considered a relaxing atmosphere and

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interactive learning as opportunities for online learning. It also requires efforts from all related parties to maximize the potential impacts of the two opportunities or create more new opportunities to bring many positive impacts, especially to students. For example, lecturers are able to use various media or games to build a more relaxing and interactive learning atmosphere for the students.

The findings of this research offer useful suggestions particularly to authorities, institutions, and educators to anticipate the potential challenges and promote the probable opportunities for successful online learning system integration.

## V. CONCLUSION

On the basis of findings and discussion, it was found that students perceived the implementation of online learning positively. However, this type of learning system provides both challenges and opportunities. It is important to eliminate the challenges and keep the opportunities so that the implementation of online learning will bring more positive impacts that support students' learning success.

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