EXPLORING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION OF THE BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS IN DISTANCE LEARNING DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This present research focused on exploring undergraduate students’ perception of distance learning in terms of experiences, benefits, and drawbacks (time management, cost, technical difficulties). It was grounded in a qualitative approach with a phenomenological case study design. Three undergraduate students of the 9th semester from the English Education Department in Wiralodra University were recruited to participate in this research. The data were derived from the three-interview series framework that consists of fifteen questions. The interview data were qualitatively analyzed by using inductive phenomenological reduction based on Seidman (2013). This research revealed that undergraduate experience varies, from the struggle with the connection to the limited communication between lecturer-students or student-students. Distance learning also impacts their feeling on how they mean distance learning, which makes the students mostly lazier as the communication is also limited and the policy is none to them who are not attending the class. It is also showed benefits and drawbacks where it is more flexible but unstable. The cost comes to be cheaper, but they still pay the tuition fee even though they did not use the campus facility, and the main technical difficulties lie in which device and apps they used at that moment.

Keywords: perception, distance learning, benefits, drawbacks.

Introduction
Coronavirus (Covid-19) has been declared a global pandemic officially by the World Health Organization (WHO), which must have caught the full attention of the entire world requiring the general public, including educational institutions to stop activities with large numbers of masses to suppress the number of infections and the spread of the Covid-19 virus. To mitigate the risk of Covid-19, most of the universities in Indonesia have implemented a complete shutdown of face-to-face learning activities to distance learning to provide uninterrupted learning opportunities by using several applications such as videoconferencing (Zoom Meeting) and WhatsApp Group as an emergency response to physical distancing which it is unprecedented and unplanned.

For many universities, which were the campus-based experience, this sudden shift caused students and the lecturers had to get used to learning online overnight. But for many other universities that already have had distance education for decades, distance learning is suddenly thrust onto the center and has decided that they are going entirely online to remain viable. The irony for campus-based experience is, it had taken a calamity to rethink and reengineer the approaches to learning and teaching. Furthermore, the current response is looking for quick fixes and short-term solutions for long-term issues. One such response is the hasty adoption of emergency remote teaching. This concept is about packaging what works on campus and piping it down the tube without much attention to its redesign for new media. While this might seem to be the easiest thing to do for the moment, it is rather like using a square peg to plug a round hole.

Prior research into how undergraduate students’ perception of distance learning provides essential findings, for example, in terms of technical difficulties. Fidalgo (2020) reveals that 70% of students in Portugal and Ukraine agreed that they are confident in using computers and the Internet as the basis of distance learning. Still, almost 40% of them wish they had better computing skills and better computer equipment. Apart from that, Lai and Pratt (2009) found out that the use of videoconferencing and WhatsApp with the intent to offer recommendations for their educational use had not necessarily improved teacher-student or student-student interaction, which Rehn et al. (2016, p. 313) highlighted the need for teachers “to learn how to
adapt pedagogy to the technology” when using synchronous videoconferencing. In terms of cost, Mohalik (2020) indicates that almost all student teachers have a smartphone and/or laptop. Still, they do not have a 24-hour electricity supply, good Internet connectivity, and space for an online class at home. Moreover, Mishra (2020) reports that most students from remote areas with low socio-economic conditions did not have a desktop or laptop at home. The mobile phones were not found effective enough to participate in online classes.

Prior research on exploring undergraduate students’ perceptions mostly covers the drawbacks and issues related to distance learning. To fill this void, this present research focused on exploring undergraduate students’ perception of distance learning and its impact in terms of benefits, and drawbacks (time management, cost, technical difficulties) and their reflection when using the video conferencing system and WhatsApp group discussion in discourse study subject as a media of distance learning due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

A. The Notion of Perception Distance Learning

The term distance learning represents approaches that focus on opening access to education and training, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place. It offers flexible learning opportunities to individual and group learners. This is the most rapidly growing segment of education. The potential impact of distance learning on all education has been emphasized by developing Internet-based technologies, particularly the World Wide Web. It can be described as learning involving implementing information, computing, and communications technology applications in multiple locations (Webster & Hackley, 1997, p. 1284). The basic definition of distance learning considers that the teacher and the students are separate in the spatial dimension and that this distance is filled by using technological resources.

Distance learning is used for a wide range of purposes. Today, by virtue of new technologies, fast development, and constant cost fall in processing, storing, and transmitting data, many private and public,
non-profit, and for-profit institutions worldwide offer distance learning from the most basic instruction through the highest degree level.

B. Benefits and Drawback of Distance Learning in Undergraduates’ Level

In this study, all three specified dimensions of perception were generated to build robust data to explore undergraduate students’ perception toward distance learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic;

1. Time Management

Time management is the process of organizing and planning how to divide your time between specific activities. Good time management enables you to work smarter – not harder – so that you get more done in less time, even when time is tight, and pressures are high. Failing to manage your time damages your effectiveness and causes stress. Time management, though it is the strength of distance learning these aspects, is fragile and creates problems. Students’ non-serious behavior in terms of time and flexibility can cause a lot of issues and stress.

2. Cost

Means (2020) stated that low-income students are more likely to have aged or limited computing devices and poorer home internet access, putting them at a potential disadvantage relative to peers from more affluent backgrounds. The not only device to support that aged or limited, internet balance and electricity also the more significant problem on cost. Those who may get a Wi-Fi connection may not suffer from this issue. But those who use mobile Internet may likely get through this challenge.

3. Technical Difficulties

The Internet and associated hardware and software components are the lifeblood of online learning and serve as the medium for content delivery and communication. Shamsy (2014) highlights that technical difficulties may result from the medium and the user of that medium. A wide range of skills exists amongst learners, with many "jumping into" online learning without thoroughly evaluating their technical abilities or obtaining the essential technical skills considered necessary for
online learning success. Shamsy (2014) pinpoint whether the medium or the user, technical issues can lead to a multitude of problems for the online learner, including distraction, frustration, apathy, isolation, and dissatisfaction.

By reducing technical difficulties and barriers through support mechanisms, learners can fully participate in the online educational experience and focus their efforts on engaging, collaborating, and learning.

Method

Grounded in a qualitative approach with a phenomenological case study design, this study explores undergraduate students’ perception of distance learning. Why phenomenological case study because Seidman (1937) argued that this approach attempts to investigate a specific phenomenon through qualitative methods such as discussions, research participant observation, and interviews and represent it from the research participants’ perspective.

The instruments used in this research are questionnaires and interviews. 3 out of 16 undergraduate students of the 9th semester of the English Department in a cohort are recruited as the research participant for this study. They are recruited on a voluntary basis as they have engaged in distance learning through WhatsApp group discussion and Zoom Meeting platform in discourse study subject for six months.

Discussion

A. Undergraduate students’ perception of distance learning due to covid-19 pandemic

Table 1. Students’ Perception on The Meaning of Distance Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>This means something new. (Participant 1, Online interview 05/02/2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>This is a new experience. I am sure that I will use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
this again someday, and overall, I can focus more on learning (Participant 2, Online interview 12/02/2021)

3 Getting more time together with family.
(Participant 3, Online interview 05/02/2021)

In this table, participants 1 and 2 felt that this whole experience was a new thing for them during this pandemic where there is a lot of activity that new to them that was a first time happen in distance learning classes such as filling online absent and virtual question and answer, linear to Buselic (2012) who stated that distance learning is also multi-sensory where many forms of distance learning provide a wide variety of materials that can meet everyone’s learning preference. Participants 2 and 3 also argued that this experience is valuable for future usage of this similar method. This skill is also needed in the working environment later after they are graduate. Supported this statement, Buselic (2012) stated that some students learn from visual stimuli and others learn best by listening or interacting with a computer program. Moreover, participants 1 and 2 also revealed that distance learning makes them more focused on their studies. In zoom, they are demanded to master the material before the class starts to avoid the drawback of not getting the materials optimally. Apart from that, participant 3 revealed that distance learning gives the participant enough time spent with family since students are studying at home until late 2020.

Table 2. Students’ Perception on the Impact of Distance Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The impact becomes lazier, and by using WhatsApp we can just delay the time. (Participant 1, Online interview 05/02/2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Become more focused since can do many things more relaxed, but sometimes feel lazy and few times absent from the class because there are no consequences. (Participant 2, Online interview 12/02/2021)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this table, all participants revealed that they become lazier for various reasons, such as staying up late and waking up late. This case led to the struggle with time management, where unserious behavior toward time management can cause students to struggle with their study resulting in class absence for several occasions. Penedo (2018) supported this statement where flexibility can also represent a disadvantage to students who do not have enough discipline to meet the required activities without the presence of a teacher to guide and supervise often. No consequence given to those not attending class also the factor that the student become lazier. In distance learning, especially in a discourse study subject, there is no study planning explanation and syllabus explanation in the first meeting, leading to no rules for absent students.

Moreover, WhatsApp also becomes the reason students get lazier where now the student can learn without even preparing to look like students who come to campus to study. Students tend to take the course with unserious behavior by overly chill and get done many tasks using copy-paste technique from the journal or article that the lecturer provided.

Lack of interactions between student-student or lecturer-student is also a key factor for students getting bored and lazier as they feel isolated from others. Supported this statement Arkorful (2014) revealed that distance learning as a method of education makes the learners undergo contemplation, remoteness, and lack of interaction or relation. Therefore, it requires powerful inspiration and skills with to the management of time to reduce such effects.

B. Benefits and drawbacks of distance learning due to covid-19 pandemic in terms of time management, cost, and technical difficulties

1. Time management

Time management is an important aspect in engaging and conducting distance learning (Arkorful, 2014) how students manage their time learning and other house chores they had in the house or
how the lecturer schedules the time to fit students’ schedules and the precision time starting the class.

Table 3. Students’ Perception on Time Management in Distance Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Benefits &amp; Drawback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1           | **Benefits**: Get notified before the class starts and often started earlier. (Participant 1, Online interview 05/02/2021)  
**Drawback**: Missing the class if do not get the notification or there is no notification from the phone. (Participant 1, Online interview 05/02/2021) |
| 2           | **Benefits**: Time management becomes more on time, and the class very often finishes sooner. (Participant 2, Online interview 12/02/2021)  
**Drawback**: |
| 3           | **Benefits**: It is quite flexible and does not interfere with other schedules since the lecturer has determined the schedule. (Participant 3, Online interview 05/02/2021)  
**Drawback**: Sudden class change is difficult to deal with since it will interfere with the other scheduled chores. (Participant 3, Online interview 05/02/2021) |

In this table participants 1, 2, and 3 indicated that in terms of time flexibility they do not have any issues where the schedule is mostly done by the lecturer a day before the class happens. There is also announcing an hour before the class starts. This statement is supported by Arkorful (2014), where the adoption of distance learning provides the institutions and their students or learners the flexibility of time and place of delivery or receipt of according to learning information.

Apart from that, some issues are still followed by the unplanned and sudden class schedule changes where participants 1 and 3 argued
that sudden class schedule changes are crucial for managing their time with other house chores. Time management needs discipline; excessive flexibility can also represent a disadvantage to students or lecturers who do not have enough discipline to meet the required activities (Penedo, 2018).

2. Cost

In terms of cost, distance learning in this research brings out some interesting data from all the participants about their perception of cost in distance learning:

Table 4. Students’ Perception on Cost in Distance Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Benefits &amp; Drawbacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Benefits</strong>: Cheaper, snacks, printing, and accommodation costs are reduced since everything is done in our own house. (Participant 1, Online interview 05/02/2021) <strong>Drawbacks</strong>: Still paying tuition fees even though it is online and it is wasteful of quota. (Participant 1, Online interview 05/02/2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Benefits</strong>: It became cheaper and cut accommodation costs. (Participant 2, Online interview 12/02/2021) <strong>Drawbacks</strong>: Lack of help from the university. (Participant 2, Online interview 12/02/2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Benefits</strong>: Given a quota subside from the government of 30GB data, which is a useful tool for Zooming or WhatsApp. (Participant 3, Online interview 05/02/2021) <strong>Drawbacks</strong>: The payment is only cut by a few percent; it is still not satisfactory. (Participant 3, Online interview 05/02/2021)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table 4, participants 1 and 3 stated that cutting only a few percent of the tuition fee cost is not satisfactory enough for students.
who use distance learning as their primary tool for engaging the study. They argue that they do not even use campus facilities in the meantime. On the other hand, quota subsidy seems promising for each participant in this research. Overall, all participants stated that distance learning is way cheaper than face-to-face learning since it cut the snacking cost, printing, and accommodation costs. Arkorful (2014) revealed that distance learning is cost-effective because there is no need for the students or learners to travel. It is also cost-effective because it offers opportunities for learning for the maximum number of learners with no need for many buildings. Shortly, the government and the university should decide on the tuition fee and provide more financial assistance to support their student facing this pandemic situation.

3. Technical difficulties

Technical difficulties cover several common issues that the participant had during distance learning and how they handle it during the process of distance learning;

Table 5. Students’ Perception on Technical Difficulties in Distance Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Benefits &amp; Drawback Technical Difficulties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Difficult to edit the typo; you have to resend it. Peripheral error (the speakers cannot function normally) (Participant 1, Online interview 05/02/2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Struggled in understanding Zoom key feature but was able to manage everything by watching the tutorial or asking friends for the solutions (Participant 2, Online interview 12/02/2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The device used (laptop) often dies in sudden peripheral error (damaged camera, so the image is unclear). (Participant 3, Online interview 05/02/2021)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In table 5, the main issue of student technical difficulties was that the peripheral devices built-in their gadget does not function normally, such as the speaker, camera, or even the cellphone or the laptop itself, cannot handle the task. The other issue comes from the software, in-app feature, and which app do they use. Correia (2020) argued that the quality of the videoconferencing system is affected by frequent disconnections, low quality of sound and image, and the time lag between sound and image. It is undeniable that the quality of the videoconferencing system will influence the quality of interactions and the overall learning experience (M. Martin, 2005). In WhatsApp, the ability to edit sent messages is not available, making students struggle with typos and often resend the message with some typo. In Zoom, a newcomer student is likely to have a hard time mastering the Zoom key feature in one go and should adapt over time. This is caused by an exorbitant amount of stress and anxiety (Correia, 2020).

Conclusion

Drawing on research findings, it can be concluded that distance learning impacted students’ laziness for various reasons, such as student behavior of often stay up late and wake up late, the application that can be delayed and manipulated. The last is lack of consequences given when they have missed the class. As for the drawback of distance learning in terms of time management, cost, and technical difficulties of videoconferencing systems and WhatsApp group discussion in distance learning due to Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher revealed that sudden class change makes things complicated as the students should manage and re-schedule their time with other house chores. Unplanned additional time during learning activity also complained by students. Students still have to pay the full tuition fee even though they are not using campus facilities during distance learning. Student technical difficulties were the unstable connection, peripheral device error, and software error.

References


