

# Students' Difficulties in Learning English during Online Learning amid COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract.** This study is aimed to investigate the students' difficulties in learning English during online learning. The participants were the students of ELT Program at Universitas Brawijaya amid COVID-19. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach. Two instruments were utilized to answer the research questions, those are a 4-Likert scale questionnaire and a list of open-ended questions. The findings of this study are beneficial in the current condition, that is the post- pandemic era, in which blended learning is applied. The major difficulty that students face in this study comes from the environment. It means that lecturers and parents need to consider their role to help students have better online learning. Some students struggle to develop their skills and abilities, so the lecture shall discuss these issues with students who are struggling to find solutions.

**Keywords:** online learning; students' perception; students' difficulties

## 1 Introduction

After having implemented hybrid learning (online and offline), Universitas Brawijaya (UB) again held the learning in full online. During the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, teaching English as a foreign language had various changes in government policies. The governments decided to implement policies to begin implementing learning methods with online systems, which have begun to be effective in several provinces in Indonesia on Monday, March 25, 2020 [1]. This is also the case for the English education department of Universitas Brawijaya to be able to adapt well using online learning. Along with the prevalence of online learning, the Internet is a valuable source of information for solving the academic challenges of this era [2]. Lee et al. stated that online learning is widely recognized as a tool that can be used daily in education [3]. The online learning in UB is carried out by lectures through online media such as Whatsapp, Google Meet, Google Form, and other types. A new technology called a podcast can be used as an online learning tool for teaching speaking in English language teaching (ELT) Programs [4]. When used in listening skills, WhatsApp can help students stay motivated to learn and reach their intended learning goal [5]. Then the note menu that is available on Edmodo facilitates the cognitive involvement of students. It is also used during the writing process to

facilitate students' being able to do meaningful activities [6]. Learning outcomes for students are impacted by the use of Kahoot as an online media for teaching reading skills in ELT programs [7]. However, those online learning systems need special learning designs and techniques to be implemented. It is challenging to teach English as foreign language at university level [8]. The lecturers must be proficient in information and communication technologies (ITC) [9]. According to reality, online learning is not effective and maximal when applied to students from low-income families and students with disabilities on using online learning facilities, who are the most impacted. The concrete reasons why this research was conducted are: Students at Universitas Brawijaya come from multiple backgrounds, some from low-income to high-income families. Some have a family environment that supports online learning, some are ignorant. The variety of living areas also affects online learning at Universitas Brawijaya where those who live in urban areas can easily access the internet while those who live in rural areas are quite constrained by internet connections. The previous research was conducted at the University of Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic. The gap analysis from the research before is only using five variables i.e. language skills, learning materials, students' motivation to study online, preparedness for online teaching and learning, and effectiveness of foreign online teaching. The questionnaire consisted of 10 open questions, out of which two questions were demographic and focused on respondent's age and sex. The purpose of this study is to investigate and to find the solution of the students' difficulties in learning English during online learning since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2 Methods**

The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach. The researchers chose the qualitative research design because the researchers wanted to describe the situation that would be observed in the field more specifically, transparently, and in depth. The participants were the 3rd semester students of the ELT Program, Universitas Brawijaya amid COVID-19 pandemic. The students have experienced online learning English since the first semester so they shall expect to understand very well about English online learning. The department is also adapting to the online learning condition, and with this research we can find the solution to the difficulties faced by students during online learning. The instrument used in this study was questionnaire, it gave the respondent time to consider their responses carefully. The questions used there were adapted from the previous study. To collect the data the researcher used the questionnaire as the instrument and separated it in the 3rd semester students at intercultural listening class of the ELT Program, in a university at east java. A 4-Likert scale questionnaire was used as the instrument. The procedure of gathering data was started when the questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire has to be sent in order to collect data. Information was gathered from the third semester students of ELT Program on October 25, 2022. The questionnaire was distributed using Google Form. It was completed in about 45 minutes. After the data had been gathered, the acquired data was analysed to determine the results of this study in the form of qualitative descriptive. The questionnaire contains two sessions: the first session contains willingness to fill out the questionnaire and several questions that state the student's personal data (name, phone number, batch, and class); the second session contains 29 questions derived from six variables. The questionnaire covers six variables, i.e., the language skills and abilities contains three questions (questions 1 to 3), the learning materials contains five questions (questions 4 to 8), the students' motivation to learn online contains six questions (questions 9 to 14), the online learning readiness contains seven questions (questions 15 to 21), the effectiveness of learning

English in online teaching contains three questions (questions 22 to 24), and other supports during online learning contains five questions (questions 25 to 29) (see Table 1.1 below). The purpose of the study had been explained to students before the questionnaire was distributed. Since the survey contains a statement of willingness before being answered, it was not required.

**Table 1.1** the description of the variables' measurement elements

Variables	Measured items
The language skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I have improved my language skills while studying online.</li> <li>2. I am experiencing any difficulties while improving my language skills through online English learning.</li> <li>3. I found difficulties in improving the language skills during English online learning.</li> </ol>
The learning materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. I prefer electronic learning materials.</li> <li>5. I prefer printed learning materials.</li> <li>6. I found difficulties accessing lecture material during English online learning.</li> <li>7. During my English online learning, I have any difficulties understanding the lesson.</li> <li>8. It is hard to do the home work during English online learning.</li> </ol>
The students' motivation to study online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. I was motivated during English online learning.</li> <li>10. I feel I have more spirit during English online learning.</li> <li>11. I feel I am being lazy during English online learning.</li> <li>12. I feel I am being bored during English online learning.</li> <li>13. I get tired during online English learning.</li> <li>14. I can keep my mental health condition during online English learning.</li> </ol>
The preparedness for online teaching and learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. All lectures in foreign languages are well prepared to provide instruction online.</li> <li>16. During the English online learning, I am well prepared to study.</li> <li>18. I prepared a learning strategy during English online learning.</li> </ol>

	19. I feel the strategies I prepared during English online learning was effective.
	20. I can adapt during English online learning.
	21. The internet connection is always stable during English online learning.
The effectiveness of foreign online teaching	22. I consider online foreign language teaching (EFL) to be effective.
	23. I consider online foreign language teaching (EFL) not effective.
	24. It is difficult to concentrate during English online learning.
The other supports during online learning	25. My parents always support my learning activities during English online learning.
	26. I have limitations on learning facilities during English online learning.
	27. I need more support from my environment during English online learning.
	28. The internet quota from the ministry helps me during English online learning.
	29. I think my parents always supervise your learning activities during English online learning.

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### 3 Results

The findings showed that 59 students from 3rd semester students who study the intercultural listening course (D, E and F classes) submitted the questionnaire. The result of this study will be described based on six variables, i.e., the language skills and abilities, the learning materials, the students' motivation to learn online, the online learning readiness, the effectiveness of learning English in online teaching, and other supports during online learning.

**Table 2.1** The skill and abilities of the language that are considered to improve the language skill during online learning

Measured items	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. I have improved my language skills while studying online	3.4	68.8	28.8	-
2. I am experiencing any difficulties while improving my language skills through online English learning.	3.4	71.2	22	3.4

3. I found difficulties in improving the language skills during English online learning.	5.1	74.6	18.6	1.7
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The skill and abilities of the language that are considered to improve the language skill during online learning are described in Table 2.1 above. Most respondents agree (68.8%) they can improve their language while studying online and 0% states strongly disagree. This is because one of the advantages of online learning is that it can be accessed anywhere, making it easier for students to practice their language skills repeatedly independently. Though 71.2% and 74.6% agree that they are experiencing any difficulties while improving their language skill. The stability of the network connection and a conducive environment are crucial for online learning. If these two requirements are not fulfilled, it can cause students to be late getting the material, which makes it difficult for them to develop their English skills independently. From the fact above most respondents feel the skill and abilities can be improved while online learning because of its advantages. However, some students continue to struggle with developing their skills and abilities, then they shall be able to ask a lecturer or a friend, and use YouTube and Internet to overcome their difficulties in improving their language skills.

**Table 2.2** The learning materials students prefer during online learning

Measured items	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
4. I prefer electronic learning materials.	15.3	52.5	27.1	5.1
5. I prefer printed learning materials.	15.3	67.8	15.3	1.7
6. I found difficulties accessing lecture material during English online learning.	3.4	25.4	62.7	8.7

	11.9	59.4	28.8	
7. During my English online learning, I have any difficulties understanding the lesson.	1.7	30.5	61	-
8. It is hard to do the home work during English online learning.				6.8

Based on table 2.2 below, most respondents (52.5%) agree that they prefer electronic learning materials. Electronic learning offers a more practical and easier-to-utilize media. 68% of respondents prefer printed learning. It is easier to add their own notes or important information and create simpler words to memorize it. 62.7% of respondents disagree that they had difficulties accessing lecture material, and 6.1% of respondents state they disagree if it is hard to do the homework during English online learning, since online learning offers access to time and place. For students who are not comfortable using online media during online learning, they can inform the lecturers if they are having trouble accessing material. Ask friends for help or study via the internet or YouTube when they have difficulty understanding lessons or doing homework.

**Table 2.3** The students' motivation to study online

Measured items	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
9. I was motivated during English online learning.	6.8	59.0	32.2	1.7
10. I feel I have more spirit during English online learning.	6.4	32.2	57.6	3.4
11. I feel I am being lazy during English online learning.	11.9	57.6	30.5	-
12. I feel I am being bored during English online learning.	11.9	49.2	35.6	3.4

13. I get tired during online English learning.	10.2	37.3	47.5	5.1
14. I can keep my mental health condition during online English learning.	15.3	69.5	13.6	1.7

Based on table 2.3 59.0% of respondents agree that they were motivated during English online learning. 57.6% of respondents disagree with having more spirit during English online learning. 57.6% of respondents agreed and 0% strongly disagreed that they were being lazy during English online learning. 49.2% stated that they are bored during English online learning. 47.5% of respondents disagree that they get tired during online English learning. 69.5% of respondents stated that they could keep their mental health condition during online English learning. Learning motivation is influenced by various aspects. To reduce learning motivation, lecturers must make learning as enjoyable as possible. To solve the problem in the Table above, students should create learning motivation by using targets (e.g., rewarding if they have completed a project), creating a learning agenda, determining a suitable learning style, setting break times, avoiding learning disturbances, looking for the right atmosphere (for example, if I am not a morning person, then I do not take lectures classes in the morning), and having strong intentions and perseverance.

**Table 2.4** The online learning readiness

Measured items	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
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15. All lectures in foreign languages are well prepared to provide instruction online.	10.2%	78%	11.9%	-
16. The lectures Provide interactive feedback during English online learning	5.1%	72.5%	20.3%	1.7%
17. During the English online learning, I am well prepared to study.	1.7%	55.9%	40.7%	1.7%
18. I prepared a learning strategy during English online learning.	0.2%	61%	28.8%	-
19. I feel the strategies I prepared during English online learning were effective.	4.8%	52.5%	39%	1.7%
20. I can adapt during English online learning.	23.7%	71.2%	5.1%	-
21. The internet connection is always stable during English online learning.	3.4%	15.3%	54.2%	27.1%

Based on the Table 2.4 above, 78% of respondents agree that all lectures in foreign languages are well prepared to provide instruction online. 72,5% of respondents agreed that the lectures provide interactive feedback during English online. It is because the lecturers must be proficient in information and communication technology during online learning and get more attention to give feedback on students' work. 55.9% of respondents stated they agreed and 40.7% disagreed during the English online learning, students are well prepared to study. 61% of respondents stated they prepared a learning strategy during English online learning. 71.2% of respondents agreed and stated they could adapt during English online learning. The keys to successful online learning are the students' readiness to accept learning and their own learning strategy. If these two things can be fulfilled, this can cause students to be able to adapt during online learning. On the other hand, 52.5% of the respondents stated that they disagreed that they felt the strategies they prepared during English online learning were effective. 54.2% of respondents disagreed that the internet connection is always stable during English online learning. The ineffectiveness of students' preparation can be caused by an unstable connection and unsupported environment. Lecturers should always be available to provide interactive feedback so that students can know the level of student knowledge. Students must prepare a suitable learning strategy (doing assignments from the preferred course first). Students must also be willing to adapt to the existing learning technology. Students prepare their internet quota or wi-fi before learning starts so that there is no instability in the internet connection.

**Table 2.5** The effectiveness of learning English in online teaching



Measured items	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
22. I consider online foreign language teaching (EFL) to be effective.	5.1%	44.1%	50.8%	-
23. I consider online foreign language teaching (EFL) not effective.	1.7%	37.3%	55.9%	5.1%
24. It is difficult to concentrate during English online learning.	16.9%	61%	22%	-

Table 2.5 above, 50.8% of respondents disagreed, 44.1% agreed, and 0% strongly disagreed that online English language teaching (ELT) was effective. Although 55.9% of respondents disagreed that online foreign language teaching (EFL) was not effective, it is because online English language teaching (ELT) is not effective for some reasons, such as delayed response times, difficulties understanding due to poor internet connections, or simply because there's less interaction between lecturer and student. Next up, the lectureshould send study materials ahead of time so student can prepare for online classes. They would prefer if, before the virtual class, they could read the material again after the lesson and make sure that they didn't miss important information or could clarify once again what they didn't fully understand. 61% of respondents said they agree that 0% of respondent strongly disagree that it is difficult to concentrate during English online learning. The cause of this problem was so complicated, it can come from their environment or the management of time. The lecture should find an effective way if there is an unstable internet connection.

**Table 2.6** The Other supports during online learning

Measured items	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
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25. My parents always support my learning activities during English online learning.	30.5%	57.6%	11.9%	-
26. I have limitations on learning facility during English online learning.	6.8%	27.1%	57.6%	8.5%
27. I need more support from my environment during English online learning.	23.7%	66.1%	8.5%	1.7%
28. The internet quota from the ministry helps me during English online learning.	8.5%	59.3%	13.6%	18.6%
29. I felt difficulties utilizing the internet quota from the ministry during English online learning	9.2%	33.9%	49.2%	6.8%

Table 2.6 above, 57.6% of respondents agree, and 0% strongly disagree that their parents always support the learning activities during English online learning. 57.6% of respondents disagree that they have limitations on learning facilities during English online learning. Parents can help students by providing learning resources. 66.1% of the respondents agree that they need more support from their environment during English online learning. The support from the environment can help them be more focused during online learning. 59.3% of respondents agree that the internet quota from the ministry helps them during English online learning. The internet quota from the ministry can help save more on purchasing internet quota. 49.2% of the respondents disagree, and 33.9% agreed that they felt difficulties utilizing the internet quota from the ministry during English online learning. The affordability of access still needs to be developed so that the internet quota that is shared can be evenly distributed by students.

## Discussion

From the result most respondents feel the skill and abilities can be improved while online learning because of its advantages. However, some students continue to struggle with developing their skills and abilities. It is similar to previous research by Rizky Setiawan & Wiedarti that some students are still having difficulty using the tools, and it does not provide students with a comprehensive example [10]. The lecture shall discuss these issues with students who are struggling to find the best solutions. A lot of colleges still prefer printed materials over electronic ones, especially when studying a foreign language, even though most of the information is now distributed electronically. Some researchers said that online learning materials still have some positive effect on student achievement (11) They argue that underlining information makes it easier for them to remember it. This has been supported by

additional research conducted by Vilar and Zabukovec [12], who argue that electronic learning materials do not enable active student engagement and are not practical for taking notes. For students who are not comfortable using online media during online learning, lecturers should provide print media suggestions that are appropriate and can be used in learning. Department stakeholders should offer print-ready modules that have been neatly arranged to support online learning. The results show that a slightly higher percentage of students are motivated to study online. However, as with students who are not motivated to learn online, these students also face social isolation. According to the findings of other research studies [13-14] on online learning during the COVID-19 outbreak, students are usually less satisfied with online learning and feel that their motivation is decreasing. Lecturers shall make a combination of learning systems so that they are not monotonous. Parents can be more responsible so that when students feel demotivated parents can provide support when students feel bored or exhausted learning online. The environment around the residence must be supportive to be able to generate motivation for learning. Learning motivation is influenced by various aspects so that to reduce learning motivation lecturers must make learning as enjoyable as possible. Parents can be more responsible so that when students feel demotivated parents can provide support when students feel bored or exhausted learning online. The environment around the residence must be supportive to be able to generate motivation for learning.

The previous finding was similar to the earlier research [15-16]. The results of this survey show that although most students lack face-to-face lessons, they generally believe that online language classes are helpful. Similar to this, Panda et al. [17] report that traditional face-to-face instruction cannot be replaced by online instruction. Moreover, according to Poluekhtova et al. [18], they argue that the communicative environment of the conventional training process is not replicated in its original form in the online environment. It is challenging to deliver a successful teaching presence using Internet technologies, despite the fact that this is a crucial component of traditional technical education and a stimulus for the development of social and cognitive presence. When learning online, students are overloaded with assignments, independent study while acquiring the required professional knowledge, competencies, and skills takes on responsibility of its own. Consequently, the function of the teacher in this aspect is crucial, and therefore, educational institutions should make an investment to support these students financially, technically, and mentally. in this hard time in order to guarantee and providers offer instruction for future generations. It is similar to the previous research it was required to analyze students' perspectives on learning satisfaction in order to take covid-19-related anxiety and fear into consideration [19]. From the facts above we know that face to face teaching is difficult to change into online teaching. On the other hand during a pandemic we need to use online learning since the government asks us to use it. So here are some solutions to some difficulties for the students. External factors that are influential enough to support students' ability to adapt to online learning are lecturers and parents [20] Lecturers shall analyze students' grades and find students who feel that online learning is not effective, and discuss with students to find ways to make online learning easily accepted by students. Parents can fulfill the advice and infrastructure for online learning and make an effort to make a conducive housing environment so that it does not interfere with student concentration. Parents shall provide the best support for children to overcome online learning difficulties. The supports are such as motivation support and the parents can accompany online learning well. Parents and families can work together to create a conducive environment to create a comfortable online learning environment. The government can make

internet access more convenient by establishing quotas for all learning media access, students from low-income families, and students living in rural areas [21].

#### **4 Conclusion and Suggestion**

From the result, this study reveals that students need more support from their lecture, parent, and surrounding environment to create better online learning. In printed learning, it is easier to add their own notes or important information and create simpler words to memorize it. Although Some students continue to struggle with developing their skills and abilities, then they shall be able to ask the lecturer or friend, and use YouTube and Internet to overcome their difficulties in improving their language skills. The lecture shall discuss these issues with students who are struggling to find solutions. The parents and families shall make a conducive environment during online learning. Some students feel that they can improve their language while studying online. Although they are experiencing difficulties while improving their language skill, the skill and abilities can be improved while online learning because of its advantages. Electronic learning offers a more practical and easier-to-utilize material. For students who are not comfortable using online learning material during online learning, they can inform the lecturers if they are having trouble accessing it. It is hard to do the homework during English online learning, though online learning offers accessible to time and place. Ask friends for help or study via the internet or YouTube when they have difficulty understanding lessons or doing homework. Since the pandemic all students should study from home and the material was delivered in online media. Despite that not all students are comfortable with that online learning media. For students who are not comfortable using online media during online learning, lecturers should provide printed learning material suggestions that are appropriate and can be used in learning (e.g., student can buy that book in online shop). Department stakeholders should offer print-ready modules that have been neatly arranged to support online learning.

To solve the problem in Table 2.3, students should create learning motivation by using targets (e.g., rewarding if they have completed a project), creating a learning agenda, determining a suitable learning style, setting break times, avoiding learning disturbances, looking for the right atmosphere (for example, if I am not a morning person, then I do not take lectures in the morning), and having strong intentions and willpower. Lecturers can also make a combination of learning systems so that they are not monotonous. Parents can be more responsible so that when students feel demotivated parents can provide support when students feel bored or exhausted learning online. The environment around the residence must be supportive to be able to generate motivation for learning. Learning motivation is influenced by various aspects so that to reduce learning motivation lecturers must make learning as enjoyable as possible. Parents can be more responsible so that when students feel demotivated parents can provide support when students feel bored or exhausted learning online. The environment around the residence must be supportive to be able to generate motivation for learning. Along with the prevalence of online learning, the Internet is a valuable source of information for solving the academic challenges of this era. The lectures also must be proficient in information and communication technology during online learning and get more attention to give feedback on students' work. If these two things can be fulfilled, this can cause students to be able to adapt during online learning. In addition, the ineffectiveness of students' preparation can be caused by an unstable connection and unsupported environment. From the fact above parents should

be able to help students' readiness before online learning begins and make a supported environment. Parents and lecturers can ask what difficulties students feel and provide solutions to student. Lecturers can tolerate or find an effective way if there is an unstable internet connection.

Online English language teaching (ELT) is not effective for some reasons, such as delayed response times, difficulties understanding due to poor internet connections, or simply because there's less interaction between instructor and student. The ineffectiveness of students' preparation can be caused by an unstable connection and unsupported environment. Lecturers should always be available to provide interactive feedback so that students can know the level of their knowledge. Students must prepare a suitable learning strategy (doing assignments from the preferred course first). Students must also be willing to adapt to the existing learning technology. Students prepare their internet quota or Wi-Fi before learning starts so that there is no instability in the internet connection. Next up, teachers should send them study materials ahead of time so students can prepare for online classes. They prefer read the material again before and after the virtual class and make sure that they didn't miss important information or could clarify once again what they didn't fully understand. Lecturers shall analysis students' grades and find students who feel that online learning is not effective, and discuss with students to find ways to make online learning easily accepted by students. Parents can fulfill the advice and facilities for online learning and make an effort to make a conducive housing environment so that it does not disturb student concentration. It is difficult to concentrate during English online learning. The cause of this problem was so complicated, it can come from their environment or the management of time. The support from the parent varies could be by providing of learning facilities. Furthermore, parents shall provide the best support for children to overcome online learning difficulties. The supports are such as motivation support and the parents can accompany online learning well. Parents and families can work together to create a conducive environment to create a comfortable online learning environment. The support from the surrounding environment can help them be more focused during online learning. The internet quota from the ministry can help save more on purchasing internet quota. The affordability of access still needs to be developed so that the internet quota that is shared can be equally distributed to the students. The government can make internet access more convenient by establishing quotas for all learning media access, students from low-income families, and students living in rural areas.

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