

Hybrid, Online or Face-to-Face Learning? Experiences during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. Online learning activities have run for two years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. In 2022, a hybrid method is widely implemented in almost all educational institutions because the pandemic has been gradually under control. This paper aims to explain the students' experiences at Semarang State University during online and hybrid learning processes. The respondents are the students of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Negeri Semarang. The data are collected using a questionnaire distributed online. Descriptive analysis aims to explain and analyse the obtained data. The findings show that most students prefer the face-to-face learning method because they can be lively and interactively engaged in classroom activities. They think online or hybrid learning techniques are not more effective than face-to-face meetings. Online and hybrid lectures trigger higher stress levels for them. However, according to them, the online and hybrid learning methods are still interesting to be done. The lecturers' competence and abilities have been capable of handling such techniques to manage the class effectively. The students' inputs are important for the improvement of hybrid lectures. The hybrid learning must also be evenly distributed in both directions (real class and virtual class) so that there should be better classroom management skills that must be owned by each lecturer.

Keywords: face-to-face learning; hybrid learning; online learning; COVID-19

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced all educational institutions to hold the learning activities through online platforms [1]. The education system has changed drastically from traditional to online teaching mechanisms [2]. The education system has been reformed into a new era of virtualization. The students who previously must go directly to their classrooms should transfer their academic learning processes to their homes [3]. All universities strive to complete their supporting facilities and train teaching staff to conduct online teaching and learning programs. In other countries, many colleges do not have enough training facilities to implement these online courses. The main problems can be encountered in the early stages of its implementation. The sudden change from regular to virtual mode cannot be directly accepted by all students because they must depend on the availability of information and technology infrastructure [4]. However, online learning is the only way that can be done by universities in any country in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic era.

Great support for the implementation of online learning is caused by the rapid development of web-based technology and the high acceptance of the students toward distance learning [5]. Such significant growth can be found in the online learning methods that have been popularly

applied all around the world. There are three common online learning approaches, namely enhanced approach, blended learning, and online learning [1]. The enhanced approach is an innovative on-site teaching method that uses technology intensively, while blended learning tries to mix online learning methods. The use of learning management systems (LMS) by educational institutions further emphasizes the massive shift from direct meetings to online learning [6]. Blended learning can be one of the best solutions in providing educational services in the current 21st century [7].

The learning strategies applied by the lecturers will influence the students' enthusiasm, including in the online lectures [8]. Previous findings show the effectiveness of online learning with face-to-face meetings. Online learning correlates with learning outcomes. However, face-to-face learning is still the best choice for the students [9]. Online learning is considered more flexible in meeting the students' needs [10]. Various efforts aim to improve the students' achievement related to online learning, such as microlearning principles. Online lectures can be more accessible and exciting to create a more positive experience [11]. The lecturers should record their teaching process and give a quiz at the end of the session because most students prefer this kind of technique [12]. The lecturers' creativity in utilizing information and technology facilities must be well-maintained because it will result in much better learning quality [13].

Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) is one of many state universities in Indonesia that has the best online learning performance and support for two years (2020 and 2021). UNNES provides adequate facilities for high-quality online learning by developing ELENA (Electronic Learning Aid) as a learning management system (LMS) platform. During the pandemic, ELENA becomes the platform for online learning and exists well-utilized by lecturers and students. In 2022, UNNES implement hybrid learning because the pandemic can gradually be controlled by the government. The impacts of online learning have also become the basis for implementing this policy. The government has recommended limited face-to-face learning at schools and colleges.

This paper tries to explain the students' experiences during hybrid learning compared to the online one. ELENA is an appropriate learning medium for most students [14]. Therefore, the implementation of hybrid learning also needs to be regularly evaluated. The student' opinions will be constructive inputs to improve the teaching and learning quality in the future. UNNES plans to implement direct or face-to-face learning in the 2022/2023 academic year. Online or hybrid learning aims to support the face-to-face learning method.

2 Methodology

The respondents are the students of the Faculty of Economics of UNNES. The questionnaire is used to collect the relevant data. The students are asked to fill out an online questionnaire based on a 5 Likert scale. The questionnaire has been developed by previous researchers [5]. It is based on the evaluation of the online and hybrid learning policies. The statement items in the research questionnaire include the students' opinions about online, hybrid, and face-to-face learning. They are also asked to respond to the lecturers' competence, supporting facilities, stress level, lecturing processes, and assignments given by the lecturers. Their inputs will be used to improve the teaching quality item. The collected data are then analysed using the descriptive statistic method to explain the students' experiences during the learning processes.

3 Result and Discussion

The research is conducted in March-April 2022 after UNNES implemented a hybrid learning policy. The respondents are presented in Figure 1, consisting of four study programs (Accounting, Development Economics, Management, and Economics Education). The questionnaires are distributed to 400 students. There are 120 students (30%) in the Economics Education study program, 100 students (25%) in Management and Accounting study program, and the rest (20% or 80 students) coming from the Development Economics study program. 160 students (40%) are still in semester 2 (Class of 2021), 150 students (37.5%) are in semester 4 (Class of 2020), and 90 students (22.5%) are in semester 6 (Class of 2019).

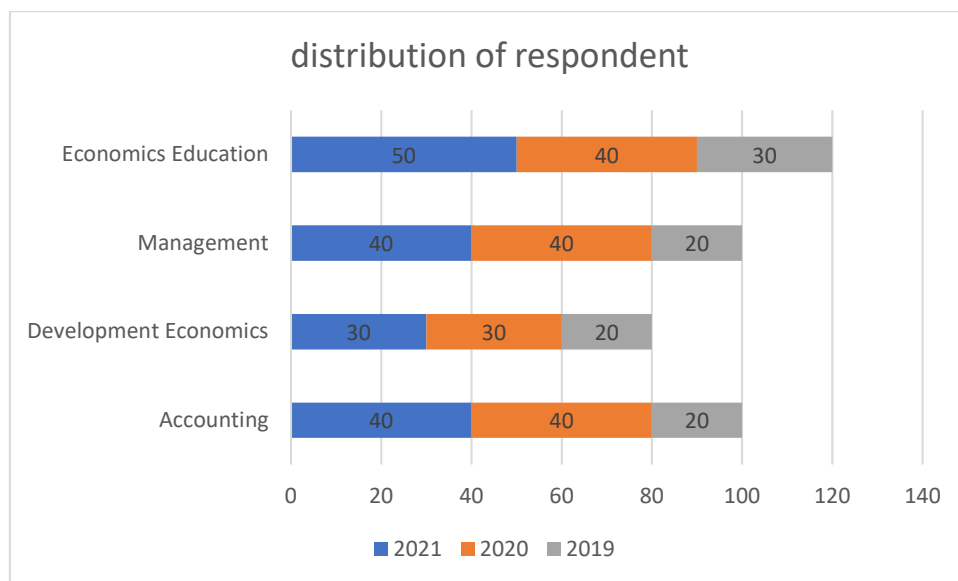


Fig. 1. Distribution of respondent.

Figure 2 shows the students' preferences for the lecturing model. 65% of respondents state that the face-to-face model is the best option. Only 11% of students choose online learning as the best method. The rest (25%) agree that the hybrid method may be an alternative solution during the pandemic. The learning materials cannot be covered in online or hybrid learning. However, other items (online quizzes and evaluations) are suggested by the students in online and hybrid lectures. It is because they can flexibly work on their assignments, quizzes, and others. Interaction in online and hybrid processes is also not as effective as face-to-face meetings. They experience problems in interaction groups during the learning process, especially in the hybrid method, where they must be into two groups (virtual and real classes).

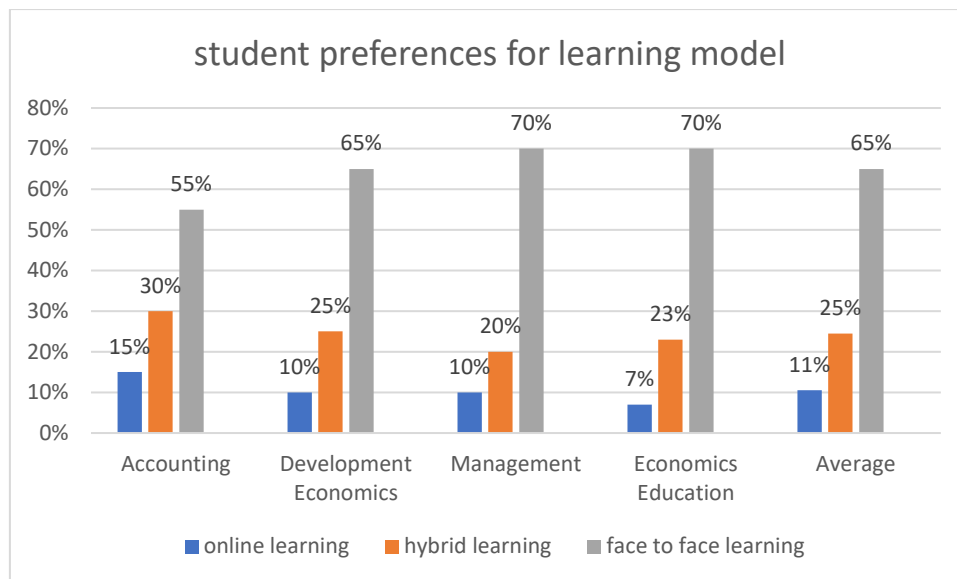


Fig. 2. Students' preferences in the learning model.

Table 1 shows the students' opinions on online and hybrid learning methods based on their experiences. They think that the lecturers can operate various applications in online and hybrid learning (especially ELENA). The lecturers' technological literacy is classified as good to support the two learning methods. This is strengthened by the students' opinions regarding the learning session which is decided as the most challenging to attend. The lecturers can create many kinds of activities so that the students gain extraordinary experiences in the class. There are also exciting and interesting assignments, quizzes, and projects. However, the stress level is still in the high category. It may be due to the sudden shift from conventional to online classes. The students must be able to adapt to a new and unexpected learning environment. The availability of personal gadgets also forces the stress level. The capacities of the students' computers, laptops, or smartphones greatly influence their participation in online classes. In hybrid learning, not all students already have sufficient technological facilities in their homes. This causes higher stress levels because they must deal with two types of learning (some students must attend Zoom class, and others must be in real classrooms). The lecturers' ability should be improved continuously.

Table 1. Student's perception about online and hybrid learning during COVID-19 pandemic

No.	Description	average score
1.	Lecturer competence in online learning or hybrid learning.	3,87 competence
2.	The learning process in online learning or hybrid learning.	3,64 challenging
3.	Assignments and/or projects in online learning or hybrid learning.	3,69 interesting
4.	The level of stress experienced during online learning and/or hybrid learning.	3,89 high
5.	In-class facility support in hybrid learning.	3,36 adequate

Figure 3 summarizes some students' inputs to improve the implementation of online and hybrid lectures. Strictly speaking, they prefer the face-to-face method for the coming semester. The facilities are the most important issue that must be solved by the leadership board. However, it also requires support from the lecturers to be creative in the classroom. Good communication between the lecturers and their students will be a temporary solution to manage the learning well. Many kinds of learning methods applied by the lecturers in online (and hybrid) classes still need to be improved to make the students more excited and interested. The lecturers must be fair to all students in real classes and in cyberspace (Zoom meeting). The lecturers must specifically pay attention to the interactions among the students.

- There should be fewer assignments, and of course, the facilities provided for hybrid learning must be improved because there are still some rooms that do not have hybrid facilities.
- In hybrid learning, the lecturers must pay attention and be able to share their focus with those of us who take part in online learning.
- The learning in the next semester should be face-to-face if the conditions are better. However, if they have not, it can be implemented in hybrid classes but must be supported with adequate facilities; if they are not, I think it is better to do it online. Thank you.
- For hybrid lectures, I hope the campus should improve the existing facilities because this is very useful for those who are offline, such as the projector cable that must support HDMI, and the most important is the air conditioner must work properly. That's all my advice, and I hope it's acceptable. Thank you.
- For project assignments (group assignments) in the hybrid classes, I think the communication does not work well because there are online and offline group members so the assignments must be done in more complicated ways.

Fig. 3. Improvement input from students for online/hybrid learning.

4 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused sudden changes in the learning process for all educational institutions, including the UNNES. The online learning method has been implemented for two years and a hybrid model is attempted to be implemented in 2022 because the pandemic has been brought under the government's control. The students' experiences during the implementation of online and hybrid learning become the concern of this paper. Most students prefer face-to-face meetings as the best learning method. The advantages of online and hybrid techniques cannot fulfil the benefits of direct meetings that are more interactive and comfortable for the researchers to attend.

The results have confirmed that online and hybrid methods have pushed the students to higher stress levels. Their adaptability in learning still needs to be improved to attend the lectures more effectively. The lecturers' ability in managing hybrid classes and the quality and availability of supporting facilities must be the main concerns for future improvements. The smooth implementation of online, hybrid, and face-to-face learning methods is a mutual responsibility of the lecturers, the students, the leadership board, and other related parties.

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