

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS ONLINE ENGLISH LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC COVID-19

Ni Kadek Ary Susandi<sup>1</sup>, I Gede Galang Surya Pradnyana<sup>2</sup>

Institut Teknologi dan Kesehatan Bali  
[Institute of Technology and Health Bali]  
Denpasar, Indonesia  
[arysusandi.stikesbali@gmail.com](mailto:arysusandi.stikesbali@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The year 2020 has been marked by the emergence of coronavirus disease, the COVID-19. This virus has reached all around the world - paralyzed the lives of many people as people were forced to stay at home in confinement. The educational system has also been affected by the pandemic which forced teachers and students across the world to carry out the teaching-learning process online form home. This study was a qualitative study which aimed to investigate the students' perception towards online English learning in Bali, Indonesia. 25 students in the Institute of Technology and Health Bali were interviewed to provide information about their experience on learning English online. The findings revealed that the majority of students had negative perception towards the online English learning. The main reasons were the lack of students' understanding on the learning materials, dull teaching methods and ineffective online teaching. Findings also showed that students experienced some personal and technical problems such as unfavorable learning environment, high internet cost and poor internet connectivity.

**Keywords** – *Students, Perception, Online English Learning, Covid-19*

### Background

When the news of an epidemic began to spread in a Chinese city in early 2020, no one anticipated the scope of the epidemic for the entire world in a very short span of period, from Wuhan (China) to Europe, through USA, South America, Africa and Asia. The new coronavirus or commonly known as Covid-19 which caused severe acute respiratory syndrome has paralyzed, to a greater or lesser extent, the life of people in many countries, causing over 5 million deaths and about 250 billion infections (WHO, 2021). To suppress and stop the chain of Covid-19 transmission, many countries around the world implemented a total lockdown in their own country, such as China and Italy; and some countries prefer to implement the large-scale social restrictions, such as Australia and Indonesia. This condition forced all non-essential sectors, such as malls, public service offices and even schools to be closed in order to suppress and stop the chain of Covid-19 transmission. The tag line “stay at home” became popular, as people were forced to carry out their activities form home, including work from home and study from home.

The pandemic not only hit the health and economic sectors; even the education system also falls apart. The government around the world has launched various response to mitigate the negative impact of pandemic on education. Among these responses including, but not limited to curriculum revisions, provision of technological resources and infrastructure, shift in education policies and inevitably compelled education institutions to migrate fully from face-to-face learning to online learning indefinitely.

UNICEF (2020) estimated around 15 billion students were affected by the schools' closure and had to learn from home. Among these students, there were around 45 million

students in Indonesia (3% from the total number of affected students worldwide) who also experienced similar problems in studying (Azzahra, 2020). Online learning was and is considered as the only way to solve this problem; in which the teaching-learning activities were conducted virtually through certain applications such as the campus E-Learning system, Zoom Meeting, Google Classroom, Google Meet, WebEx, etc. Online learning is seen to be easy to carried out because it allows students to do learning from home or anywhere in accordance with the agreement between students and teachers. In addition, this kind of learning only requires an internet connection and the ability to use the application properly. Thus, online learning in its nature is practical and able to keep everybody safe from the Covid-19 transmission.

Online learning, can be an excellent way of transmitting knowledge. The textbooks of the past can be read online and students can go through online quizzes and simple games to test their understanding of the materials. Transmitting lectures online is not new – many universities around the world provided options for their students, whether to attend the course offsite the campus or online. Nowadays, everyone is able to record anything on their phone and post it on YouTube or other platforms; from lectures on quantum physics from the world's top universities, to individuals explaining how to do effortless make-up or cooking and baking.

Most of learners have their empowered gadgets such as individual computers and mobile phones (Green & Hannon, 2007). They are utilizing these advanced gadgets for communication over formal and informal platform of networking such as e-mails, chatting, blogging, etc. Some teachers or educators are also exploring the use of more advance technologies through certain applications such as Moodle, Web-CT or Blackboard to create hybrid course (Rodriguez et al., 2008).

Although the effectiveness of online learning has long been acknowledged by the education community (Barrot, 2020, 2021; Cavanaugh et al., 2009), evidence on the challenges in its implementation continues to pile-up (Boelens et al., 2017; Rasheed et al., 2020). Other countries, particularly the developed countries such as the USA, European Countries, Australia and some Asian countries such as Japan and Singapore are less likely facing the problem in the field of internet connection as all these countries have known to be advance in technology and digital-related matters. Indonesia, however, although has one of the highest numbers of internet users in the world, has relatively low internet penetration compared to the neighboring countries in Asia (Nurhayati-Wolff, 2021). Indonesia also has a relatively limited 4G coverage, in which demographically, more than 50% of the total Indonesian's mainland has not been covered by the 4G (Kompas, 2020). In addition, Adriyansah (2020, in Kompas, 2020) claimed that more than 30% of Indonesians do not have any gadget or smartphones, thus creating another challenge in the implementation of online learning in Indonesia.

Given today's challenges and uncertainties, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of students' online learning experience in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, many studies have investigated this area with a focus on students' mental health (Copeland et al., 2021; Fawaz et al., 2021), home learning (Suryaman et al., 2020) and students' overall learning experience (e.g., Adarkwah, 2021; Day et al., 2021), however there has yet a study conducted in the field of online English learning in Indonesia. English is deemed to be an important subject in Indonesian education framework, particularly in the Bali province. Tourism is the main industry in Bali; thus, the need of English-speaking professionals became crucial and English became one of the most important subjects taught in schools and universities in Bali.

Based on those facts and reasons, the students' perception on online English learning in Bali is merit to conduct. Addressing the area of teaching English online would shed a light on the extent of challenges that students experience in a full online English learning space, particularly within the context of the pandemic; and their perceptions and challenges would

provide relevant information to universities’ administrators and English educators to better support the online learning needs of students. This information would also be critical in revisiting the typology of strategies in an online learning environment.

## Methods

This research is a mix-method (quantitative and qualitative) descriptive research involving 25 students in a tertiary education in Bali, the Institute of Technology and Health Bali. The participants of this study were those who agreed and gave their consent to participate in this study. The participants were given a list of close-ended questions through google form and then interviewed further through online focus group discussion to yield more information on their perception towards online English learning. Both the survey and interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure their understanding on the questions and allow them to speak more freely and accurately.

The collected data were then classified based on Miles and Huberman theory. Miles and Huberman (in Sugiyono, 2010) stated there were three activities on data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, data reduction referred to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the data that appear in the transcription. Second, data display means that the data can be displayed in the form of table, chart, diagram, pictogram that provide a new way of arranging and thinking about the more textually embedded data. It makes easier to assembly information which permits conclusion drawing. In this study, the classified data was displayed in the form of table and finally, conclusion drawing involves stepping back to consider what the analyzed data mean and to assess the implication. The data were verified its reliability and validity, so that it can be taken as the conclusion.

## Findings and Discussion

### A. Research Findings

#### 1) Students’ learning tools

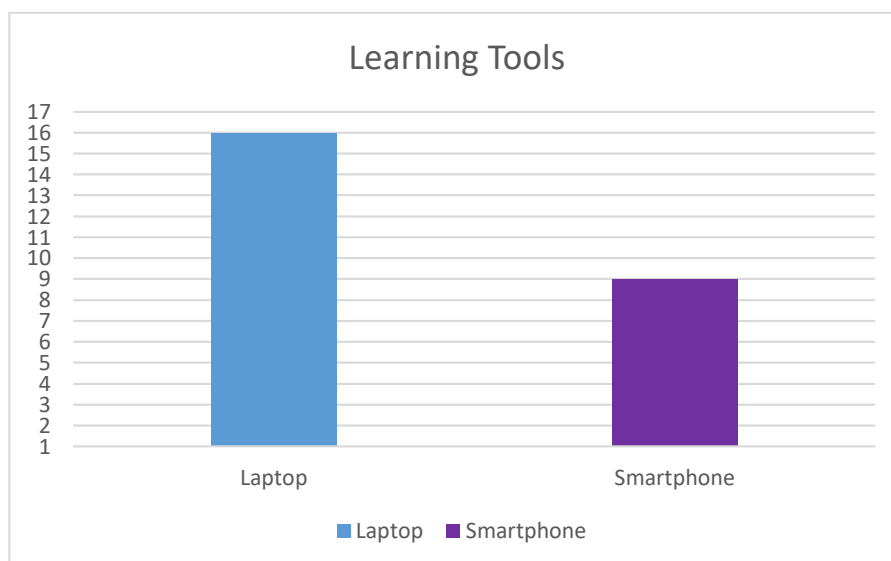


Fig. 1 – Students’ learning tool

Figure 1 shows that the majority of students (16 people; 64%) use laptop to carry out the online English learning and the other 9 students (36%) use the smartphone. On

the interview, these students explained that they feel more comfortable using a laptop than a smartphone because the laptop allows them to view teaching materials (e.g., power points, lecturers' notes, etc.) and work on their assignments in a better way. On the other hand, those who used smartphone revealed that they do not have any laptop or computer, thus, smartphone is the only technology available for their online learning.

## 2) Favorable learning application

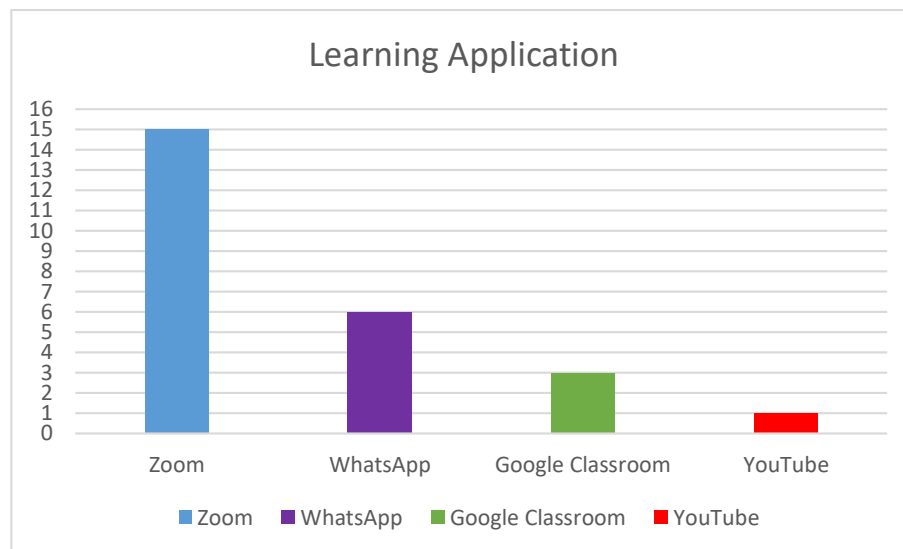


Fig. 2 – Favorable learning application

Figure 2 shows that the majority of students (15 people) preferred to use the zoom meeting application for online English learning, meanwhile the others preferred to use WhatsApp (6 people), Google Classroom (3 people) and only 1 person who preferred using YouTube. The follow-up interview revealed that the reasons behind their preference were internet connection stability and available internet data, also personal reason such the need to experience face-to-face connectivity with classmates and English lecturers.

## 3) Students' level of understanding

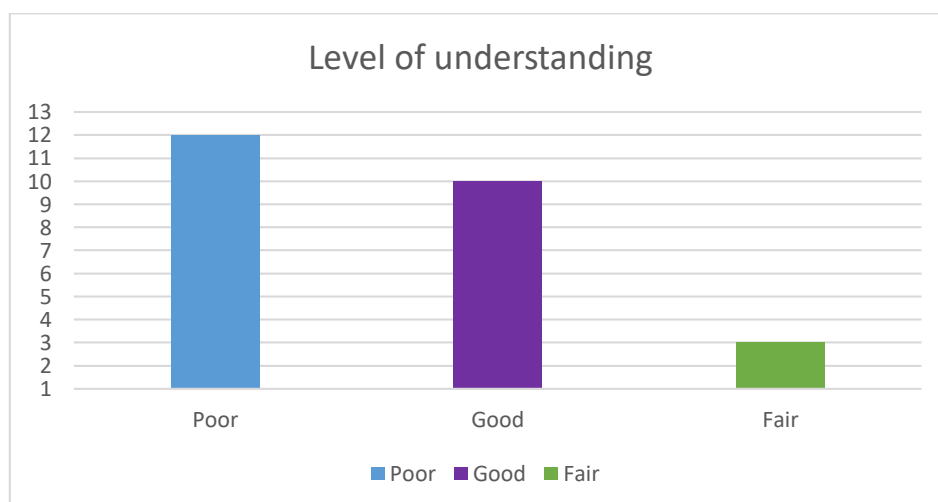


Fig. 3 – Students' level of understanding

Figure 3 showed the students’ level of understanding towards English lessons delivered by the lecturers. The majority of students had a poor understanding (12 people; 48%), 10 students (40%) had good understanding and 3 students (12%) had fair understanding. In the interview, students mentioned that the lack of face-to-face interactions affecting their understanding as the lecturers often send the English materials in the form of power point with recorded voice. Sometimes they could understand the explanation, but most of the times they couldn’t really understand it, however, they felt reluctant to ask further questions.

#### 4) Teaching method

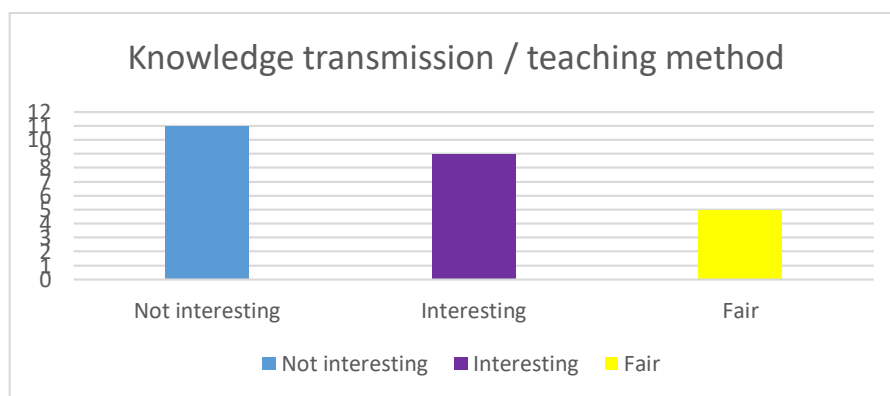


Fig. 4 – Knowledge transmission / teaching method

The survey results in Fig. 4 showed that many students (11 people; 44%) claimed that the method in knowledge/information transmission were not interesting for them. On the other hand, 9 students (36%) said that the teaching method were interesting, and 5 students think that the teaching method were fairly interesting.

During the interview, it was found that those who claimed that the teaching methods were not interesting said that it would be better if the online English learning could be carried out in the form of zoom meeting or other virtual conference which allow them to interact more within the class, both with their fellow classmates and English lecturer. Listening to the lecturer’s voice recording sometimes did not enough, because the recorded lectures in general were quite dull, no lively interaction like what they could get from the virtual face-to-face learning.

#### 5) Students’ opinion on online English learning

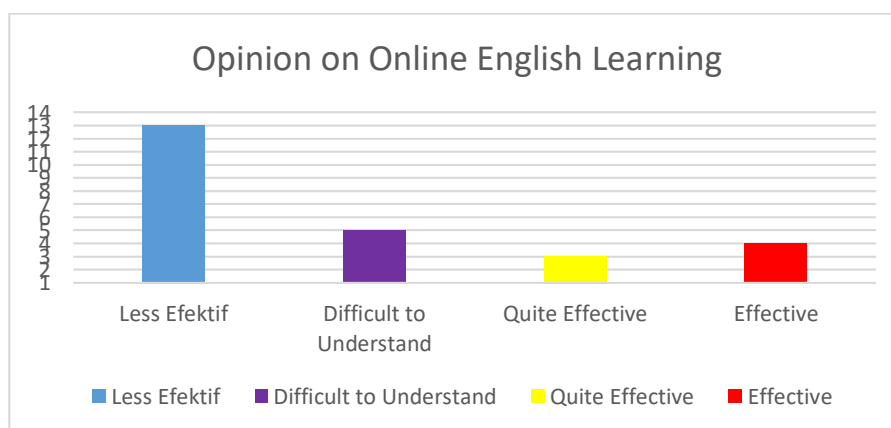


Fig. 5 – Opinion on online English learning

Figure 5 showed the students' opinion towards online English learning. Many students (13 people; 52%) viewed that online English learning is not effective, 5 people (20%) said that it was difficult for them to understand the lesson, 3 students (12%) considered it as quite effective and only 4 students (16%) believed that the online English learning was effective.

#### 6) Interaction with classmates

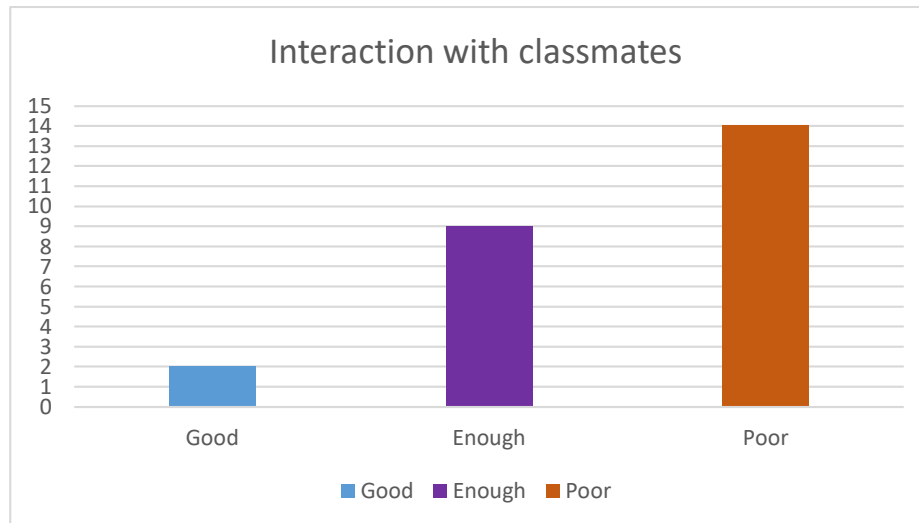


Fig. 6 – Interaction with classmates

Figure 6 described the interaction experienced by the students with their classmates. The majority of students (14 people; 56%) claimed that they had a poor interaction with their fellow classmates, 9 students (36%) mentioned that they had enough interaction and 2 students (8%) mentioned that they had good interaction with their classmates during the online English learning.

#### 7) Students' interaction with English lecturer

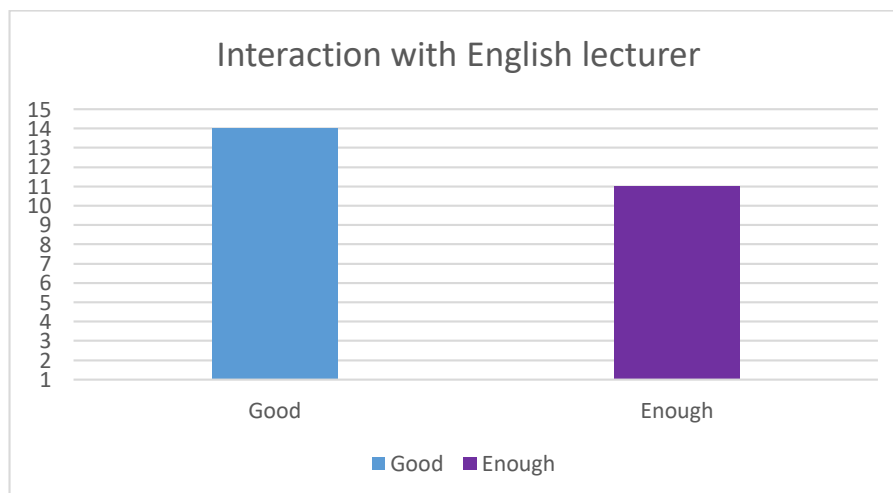


Fig. 7 – Interaction with English lecturer

Figure 7 showed students’ perception on their interactions with their English lecturer. More than half of them (14 students; 56%) considered their interactions with their lecturer during the online English class were good and the rest 11 students (44%) considered that they had enough interactions with their lecturer.

8) Students’ participation in the online English learning

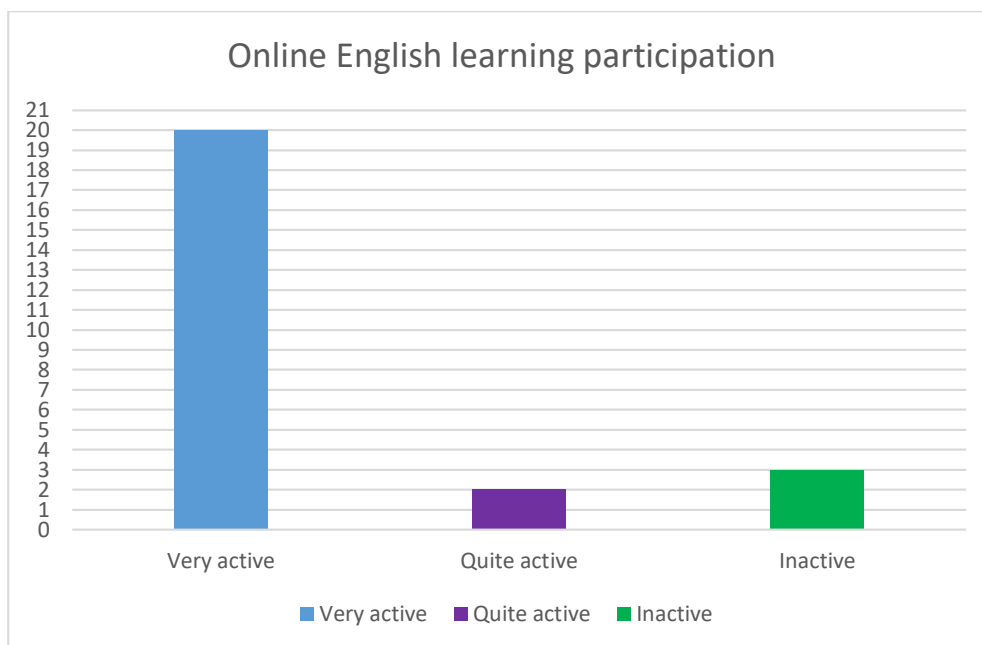


Fig. 8 – Students’ participation

Figure 8 described the students’ participation in the online English learning. The majority of students (20 people; 80%) claimed that they were very active participating in the online class, meanwhile 2 students (8%) stated that there were quite active and 3 students (12%) admitted that they were inactive.

9) Motivation in completing English tasks

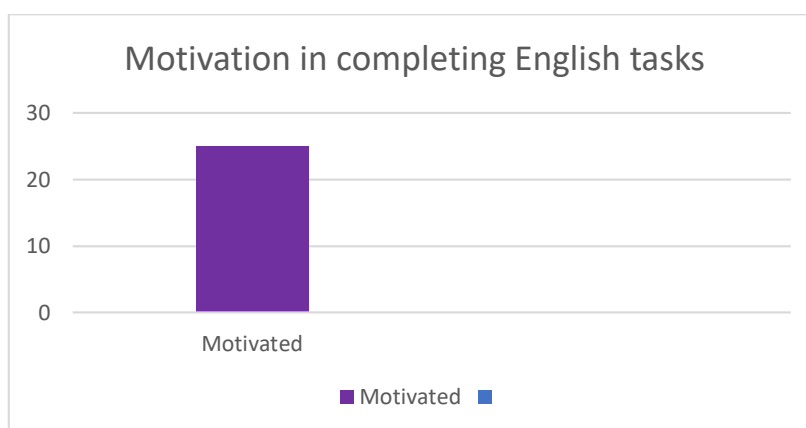


Fig. 9 – Motivation in completing English tasks

In terms of motivation in completing English tasks, all 25 students (100%) stated that they were motivated to complete the English tasks during the online lesson. They

further explained that the intention to get a good mark and good image from their English lecturers were the two reasons behind their motivation.

#### 10) Challenges in online English learning

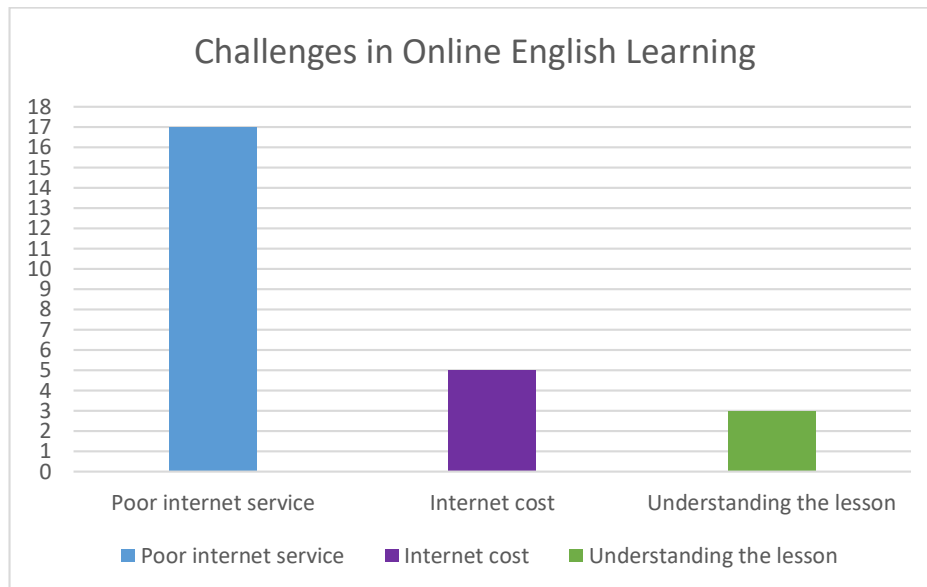


Fig. 10 – Challenges in online English learning

Figure 10 showed the challenges experienced by students during online English learning. 17 students (68%) mentioned that they experienced problem with the internet reception, 5 students (20%) mentioned they had problem with the internet data because they couldn't afford to buy much data and 3 students (12%) mentioned that they experienced some difficulty in understanding the English lesson.

## B. Discussion

### 1. Students' Perception towards Online English Learning During the Pandemic Covid-19

Students' perception towards online English learning were drawn from the findings presented on Fig. 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10. Based on the findings, it was found that the majority of students had negative perception towards their online English learning. This fact showed by the results in which the majority of students stated that they had poor understanding on the English lessons, they also mentioned that the teaching method was not interesting or dull and many of them claimed that the online English learning was not really effective compared to the face-to-face learning in the campus and some even said it was difficult to understand the lesson through this way of learning.

It is a common knowledge that students' level of understanding depends on their personal ability, however, educators' skill in delivering lesson and transmitting knowledge is also an important factor affecting the students' understanding (Ullamatulah, 2017). Although transmitting lectures online is not new, however, whilst very useful, this is all about transmitting and imparting knowledge; and the way the educators teach skills such as listening, reading, writing and speaking through online learning.

All explanations – be it the simple ones or the complex ones, all come towards the same goal – the students' understanding (Rasto, 2015). Through this skill, students



receive information, ideas and knowledge from the teacher. The main characteristic of teaching skill is the transmission of information which is well planned, presented correctly, and in an appropriate order (Azril, 2013).

As to the effectivity of online English learning, in the follow-up interview, students mentioned that besides the dull teaching method, they also have some personal problems such as difficulty in focusing their mind to the lessons, inconducive or unfavorable learning environment at home; and the dull teaching method made it even harder to follow and understand the lessons.

Certain strategies are absolutely necessary as an effort to conduct effective and efficient learning. Teaching online English requires certain methods and strategies because the lecturer not only has to transfer the linguistics knowledge, but also turn the knowledge into English skills. Thus, the lecturer has to master various learning methods that can make the learning atmosphere more conducive in order to create a pleasant learning atmosphere and fulfilling learning experience for students.

Besides the dull teaching method, other challenges that the students encountered also shape their perceptions towards online English learning; and these challenges were lack of interaction with fellow classmates, poor internet connectivity and high internet cost. The lack of interactions with classmates may cause a detrimental effect on learning and social skills (Barot, Llenares, Rosario 2021). The findings also reveal that the online learning aggravated the financial difficulties experienced by some students (see Fig.10), consequently affecting their online learning experience. This financial impact mainly revolved around the lack of funding for their online classes as a result of their parents' unemployment and the high cost of Internet data. Although they got subsidy of free 15 GB internet data monthly from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Rp.300.000 for phone & data credit (every semester) from the campus management, however, these aids were proven to be not enough because they have to study online every single day and the internet data spending became really high when they need to learn English online through certain platforms – particularly those with video conferencing which requires bigger data spending and speed such as Zoom Meeting and Google Meet.

This fact, however, in clash with another finding of this study – in which there were some students who thought that it was better for them to have the online English learning through zoom application because the zoom meeting allows them to have a virtual face-to-face interaction with their English lecturer and classmates. Students benefit from a greater level of interaction with their lecturer and fellow students. For some people, they could understand explanation or transmission of information better when they see the face of the person who deliver the explanation compared to listening to the voice through recorded voice only. This finding is consistent with previous study which also found that the majority of Indonesian students (93.3%) prefer the face-to-face learning than online learning (Ningsih, 2020). Face-to-face learning is essentially a teacher-centered method of education, and tends to vary widely among cultures. Given to the widely used and common practice of teacher-centered in Indonesia, it made sense that the students preferred to have the face-to-face than online English learning.

In terms of class participation and motivation, the majority of students claimed that they were very active and motivated in completing the English tasks. Among these students, some of them provided answers that the reason behind them being active and motivated were truly because they wanted to learn English and able to use English properly, while some of them admitted that they forced themselves to participate actively and maintain their motivation because they wanted to get a good mark and to have a good

student's image. Motivation is an important factor in the success of English learning – be it intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, both have its own part in the process of learning.

## 2. Suggested Solutions

The pandemic Covid-19 has forced thousands of students and educators to reevaluate how they have been carrying out the online learning for the past 1.5 years. Educators are working to ensure their teaching year can be successful no matter how it looks. Now more than ever, educators are critical for helping students continue to learn and thrive amid the uncertainty. Educators shouldering an extremely heavy burden and difficult tasks as they work to adjust their curriculum and lesson plans to fit their new normal.

Based on the findings on students' perceptions towards online English learning, it is crucial that the lecturers improve their teaching skills, using various teaching-learning methods and strategies to aid students getting the education they need. As things continue to change and shift, students are likely to feel uncertain about their study, thus it is crucial that educators are well prepared to improve their online teaching strategy and help students to have a meaningful and successful learning experience. Some improvements that lecturers and campus management can do in order to address these issues are:

- a) Lecturers now need to go above and beyond, doing extra work for online classrooms, changing their strategies and plans, and working to ensure that students can continue getting the education that they deserve. This can be done through several ways such as using the suitable and favorable technology, application and assisting tools for their online English learning. They need to rely on new technological methods to help them connect with students. This can include showing the students third-party videos, using visual aids, creating interesting projects, and more. YouTube, Power Point, Prezi, and learning games can all help add an interactive and visual element to online English classroom. These kinds of assisting tools can improve attention and participation, hopefully encourage the disengaged to be engaged in the online English learning. In the absence of such assisting tools, nowadays, educators can also develop their own media because they know the students' characteristics, needs and challenges, thus can provide a suitable material for them (Budiyono, 2020). Lecturers can create their own video using application such as Go-Animate and PowToon. Rusanti and Dewi (2021) found that PowToon is an excellent and fun media for creating video for teaching English for Nurses. Those animations could be set easily by the users to give the illustration of the materials.
- b) There are a wide variety of learning styles that students have and a wide variety of learning methods that lecturers can use in the online English classroom. For example, lecturers can opt to do a flipped classroom style. This teaching method involves learners reading interesting English articles, viewing video lectures and instruction as homework and then during class time when they are online with the lecturer, they go over problems and do assignments. This allows them to watch videos and learn concepts in the afternoon and then spend the online class time asking their lecturer questions and solidifying their understanding. This learning model is a great option for digital learning, as it gives students the opportunity to interact with their lecturer and ask questions for the majority of their learning time. Tang et al. (2020) tested the efficacy of different online teaching modes amongst engineering college students. The findings showed that the students were disappointed with online learning, mainly in

the aspect of interaction and discussion modes. The study also found that the combined model of online teaching with flipped classrooms improved students' attention, academic performance, and course evaluation. Hew et al. (2020) conducted parallel research in which he converted the conventional flipped classrooms into a complete online flipped lessons through a cloud-based video conferencing application. Their findings also revealed that those varieties of learning environments had been equally effective.

- c) Updating teaching skills is also merit to do by the lecturers. There are a wide range of free online teaching course available for English educators which can aid educator to improve their teaching skills and methods. Educators also can apply for seminar or workshop to the campus management, so they also can update and improve their knowledge and skills in teaching, particularly about online teaching.
- d) It is necessary for the campus management and lecturers to sit with parents go over the challenges experienced by students in their study during this pandemic, particularly in the parts of unfavorable learning environment and internet cost. Parents might be able to find ways to shoulder the internet cost in addition to the aids which have been provided by the Ministry of Education and the campus management. Parents and other members in the family might also able to help students maintaining and improve their study motivation and provide mental supports when they are in need.

## Conclusion

This study finds that the students have a negative perception towards online English learning due to dull teaching method, lack of interactions, poor understanding on the content and some other challenges such as poor internet connection, unfavorable learning environment and high internet cost. Knowing all these problems and challenges experienced by the students, it is expected that the English lecturers could go above and beyond, changing their strategies and plans and working to ensure that students can continue getting the education that they deserve, enjoy the learning process and have such fulfilling experience in learning English. It is also necessary that parents and other members in the student's family can work together to help the students to maintain their motivation and participation in the online class so they can successfully complete their online English learning.

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