Tertiary Students' Perceptions of Online Learning Strategies in Remote Learning Environment at Covid-19 Pandemic Era

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study aimed at investigating the perceptions of tertiary students about online learning strategies in the Remote Learning Environment during the Covid-19 pandemic era. The method used in this research was a descriptive qualitative method by using a survey to collect the data from 20 tertiary students' perceptions of their online learning strategies in rural areas during this pandemic era. The results indicated that students agreed with online learning strategies with digital platforms but they are still confused about how to learn and access them. Virtual meetings declined students' motivation to learn because of bad access to the internet in their areas. Using Video Conferences is more flexible because it can be used wherever whenever. Online learning still becomes the best learning strategy in this pandemic, but access to the internet in rural areas must be improved. Tertiary students need access to the internet and infrastructure and instructional materials design especially applied in this pandemic era. In conclusion, online learning strategies by using digital platforms still become the best solution to be applied in the remote learning environments during this Covid-19 outbreak, even there are some obstacles still existed.

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1. Introduction

Online learning is a situation where the teacher and the students do not meet and gather at the same spot (classroom) instead, teacher and students are separated by the distance. The teacher teaches in one place, and the students learn in their own home, separated. Kraemer (2008) has defined distance learning, in its essence, as planned learning that takes place whenever there is a distance between teacher and student in time and/or space. In general, distance learning is a controversial issue from many points of view including the access to education, the process of adjustment to new learning environments, individual development, the development of learning autonomy, the knowledge and the awareness of students, and the active participation of students in the learning process.

The use of technology as online learning strategies can be expected to send messages and learning materials as well because students supposed to be able to access the subject materials from their devices from any areas they lived. Technology usage is the main important strategy in applying online learning. It is done by using digital media and digital platforms in this pandemic era. According to Dewi (2020:19), online learning is the use of the Internet in the learning process which has the flexibility of time to learn, can learn anytime and anywhere, especially in the period of COVID 19. A large explosion coronavirus can provide many reasons to learn online, namely: online learning function as an alternative solution in times of crisis. Approachability, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, lifelong education, and policies are some of the advices related to online learning strategy (Agarwal:2020). It is regarded as a relatively cheaper approach of education in terms of the lower cost of transportation, accommodation, and a fee based on institutional-learning as a

whole. The flexibility of online learning is one of the advantages of this mode, where students can schedule their time to complete the course. Students can learn anytime and anywhere, thus evolving new skills in the process that leads to long life learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic also forced universities to move entirely from FTF (Face-To-Face) to be online remote instruction in each students' areas. This condition caused an unprecedented instructional environment for both lecturers and students (Toquero:2020). Lecturers faced many challenges including learning to use new technologies in a short period, designing instructional materials that fit the new environment, providing interactive remote learning environment, and adopting new assessment techniques. Many universities and schools provided professional training sessions to their faculty members to smooth the transition from FTF to online remote instructions. Moreover, students also faced the same challenges as their lecturers did, especially for the ones who lived in remote learning environment and use Bahasa Indonesia as their second languages, because local language is their first one.

In Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED), many students from English department use Video Conferences, like Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, What's App and LMS (Learning Management System) as learning media in online class from their own rural areas during this pandemic. These features include a virtual white board with annotation capacity to explain concepts, breakout rooms to create small collaborative group work, polls for student feedback, chat to facilitate class discussions. In addition, zoom meetings can be recorded and made available for future reference. (ASU website: https://ets.engineering.asu.edu/zoom/). Several students have shown their capacity in using IT/ICT as well, but some of them have limitations in operating IT/ICT especially for the ones who lived in rural areas. Those unluckily students would normally also have difficulties in getting access to study in online learning. They have to deal with other obstacles caused by the inequality in access to technology, especially from the infrastructure. The coverage of mobile telecommunications providers mainly concentrated in Java because of the high need for the internet to support urban areas (Khatri, 2019). But there is no other option, a distance online learning temporarily reduce the impact of the spread of disease through the corona. So, the optimal online learning can be done with the conditions in which people can accept the new changes using technology, for example in the city.

Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the perceptions of tertiary students about online learning strategies in Remote Learning Environment at Covid-19 pandemic era. Those students who lived in rural areas of North Sumatera Province, like: Pakpak Bharat, Sidikalang, Aek Kanopan, Aek Loba, Siborong-borong are interviewed to give some perceptions toward L2 online learning from their remote areas. The significances, obstacles and solutions of technology usage in online learning strategy will be explored from the tertiary students who learned English from remote environment. We need to know whether technology can successfully send messages and learning materials as well because students supposed to be able to access the subject materials from their devices from rural areas they lived.

2. Literature Review

Knipe and Lee (2002) investigated a research about the concern of teaching and learning by using video conferencing is not of the same quality of the one experienced in a traditional classroom environment. The results indicated that the teaching and learning that the students in the remote site experienced was of less quality then students in the traditional classroom. Candarli and Yuksel (2012) searched a study to explore students' perceptions of video conferencing in higher education. The participants of the study were second and third-year university students who attended a videoconferencing English class for about thirty minutes. The results of the study indicated that students had a negative attitude towards the use of video conferencing in the class.

Wang et al. (2018) conducted a blended synchronous learning environment (BSLE). The majority of students attended the course FTF while the rest joined the course using two-way videoconferencing (Zoom). The purpose of the study was to investigate the students' learning experiences and their perceptions of the blended synchronous learning approach. Twenty-four students enrolled in an elective course at a teacher education institution participated in the study. Results of the study indicated that students liked the flexibility and convenience of attending lessons via Zoom at remote sites. However, the researchers observed that students' participation through Zoom was low. Students occasionally shut down their webcams and did not answer when they were called upon. In addition, the researchers did not observe any critical technical difficulties and the student did not report any major technical difficulties using Zoom and it seemed that all online students could easily join the Zoom sessions. In their conclusion, the researchers identified the following factors for creating a successful BSLE experience: effective communication between the online students and the instructor, and between the online students and classroom students, the engagement of online students, the redesign of instructional activities; and the quality of audio.

2.1 Online Learning in Remote Area

Facing the Covid-19 pandemic, the government made a policy that is learning conducted at home online. The policy aims to cut the chain of the spread of the virus. This policy is certainly very good to implement, considering that in some countries affected by the virus also applies the same thing. However, online learning is not easy, because the learning objectives must also be carried out entirely through the online media, such as the existence of apperception, the delivery of material, the question and answer process and evaluation activities. This online learning design must also be accompanied by careful preparation from the school, teachers, students and parents.

Online learning has actually been researched over the past decade (Nie & Zhe, 2020; Perri, 2016; Petrakou, 2010), where this learning model utilizes media in the form of smartphones, desktop PCs, laptops, or other media connected to the internet. The other research conducted by Adnan (2020:49) also indicated additional challenges faced by students like lack of campus socialization, group study issues and instructors response time. However, smartphones are preferred by users compared to other devices, this is because the convenience of smartphones to carry and the price offered is also more affordable than other devices. Online learning is a system that facilitates learners to do a wider and more varied learning. Through the facilities provided by the system, students can learn without being limited by distance, space and time. Learning through online media not only presents material in written form, but can also be more varied such as the addition of video or audio (Abu, et al, 2017).

Online learning is also called distance learning. It enables students in rural areas to learn successfully by providing access to learn constrained by geographical distance, so that in the learning process requires an interactive communication system to connect the two with various resources needed in it. Distance learning is adopted to increase students' motivation towards collaborative learning, reduce the limits in learning offered by schools, and enable students to achieve unforgettable learning experiences (Cathy: 2020). The distance learning process offers the possibility to encourage learning that can cross national borders, through free access to educational sites for different subjects (Fuicu et al., 2017). Distance learning is a revolution that describes other forms of learning, for example online learning, e-Learning, learning technology, online collaborative learning, virtual learning, web-based learning, and so on.

2.2 Learning Strategy in Second Language Teaching

There are three reasons proposed to delineate why language learning strategies are important. First, learners' language learning may become more efficient and effective by using appropriate learning strategies. Learners take certain actions which have been referred to as learning strategies to help to learn smoother, faster, and more effective.

Second, the use of language learning strategies, viewpoint, is to fulfill the goal of facilitating learner autonomy. Since language learning is a lifelong task and learning the language only through teacher instruction in the classroom is not enough. Hence, students should develop their autonomous ability for learning outside the college.

Third, language learning strategies are supplementary means to solve the difficulties learners encountered in second language learning. In this way, the process of language learning will be facilitated and improved with a higher frequency of using appropriate learning strategies. In sum, language learning strategies are the causes and outcomes of successful language learning. Language learning strategies not only help learners to develop autonomy but also enable them to become good language learners and make language learning faster but effective.

3. Method

This research used a descriptive qualitative method which is focused on involving an interpretative and naturalistic approach to define subject matter in details. The researcher observed phenomena of online learning in their natural settings of tertiary students' remote learning environments, then attempting to interpret the result into the data description of individual subjects. The data consisted of students' perceptions of online learning strategy applied in their L2 remote learning environment which were gathered by using survey (Questionnaire Distribution). The subject of this research belongs to 20 respondents of English department students of State University of Medan (UNIMED) who lived in remote areas of North Sumatera Province, like: Pakpak Bharat, Sidikalang, Aek Kanopan, Aek Loba, Siborongborong were observed and interviewed to give some perceptions toward L2 online learning from their remote areas.

A survey conducted by distributing questionnaire consisted of five open ended questions to be answered by 20 participants freely. Each of respondents answer the questions based on their knowledge, experiences and understanding completely and independently. After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed all respondents' answers into the data description and classified it into table of same categorized. At last, each of the analyzed data in table was explained descriptively into some paragraph descriptions to interpret the

meaning in details. This final procedure was the finding of the tertiary students' perceptions of online learning in L2 remote learning environment during Covid-19 pandemic.

4. Results and Discussion

The tertiary students' responses to the five open-ended questions in an online interview were about: (1) How is your opinion about the implementation of online learning by using Digital Platforms during Covid-19 pandemic era?, (2) How does online learning affect your learning experiences in your rural areas?, (3) Why offline and online learning become two different learning strategies?, (4) Which learning strategy is better to be applied in your areas during the Covid-19 pandemic, offline learning or online learning?, (5) Write your suggestions to improve online learning strategies in your remote areas during this pandemic era!

Table 1. How is your opinion about the implementation of online learning by using Digital Platforms during Covid-19 pandemic era?

No	Students' Perceptions
1	Yes I agree, but sometimes it makes me confuse to learn and access it easily
2	No, I do not agree with that, the access is very bad in my areas
3	Yes, I agree with the implementation of online learning by using Digital Platforms in this pandemic era
4	Yes, I agree if the connection is stable
5	Yes I agree, digital platforms help us to learn virtually in this outbreak

Table 1 shows that students mostly agree with online learning by using digital platforms in pandemic era, but they got confuse in learning and accessing the internet connection in their rural areas. However, some other respondents didn't agree with that because the access is very bad in their areas. The other respondents were also agree without any obstacle, while some of them were agree if the connection is always stable. At least, few respondents showed their agreement to online learning in this outbreak because digital platforms help them to learn virtually.

Table 2. How does online learning affect your learning experiences in your rural areas?

No	Students' Answers
1	Virtual meeting declines my motivation to learn because of bad access of internet in my areas
2	After 1 year online learning, I felt bore when my lecturer and other students present the materials through Zoom
3	When the lecturer raise the question to one of us, and the interaction feels like in the offline teaching learning
4	I found many difficulties in group discussion and materials presentation
5	I cannot really understand materials given by the lecturer

The highest result in Table 2 elaborates that virtual meeting declines motivation to learn because of bad internet access, the other said that after 1 year online learning, they felt bore when their lecturer and other students present the materials through Zoom. Some respondents explained the situation feels in offline when the lecturer raised the questions. The other perceptions declared many difficulties in group discussion and materials presentation, while the least of them cannot really understand materials given by the lecturer in online learning.

Table 3. Why offline and online learning become two different learning strategies?

No	Students' Opinions
1	Using zoom is more flexible, we can learn wherever whenever
2	Because of the effectiveness, online learning gets lower effective than offline learning
3	Online learning has the limitation of space and the interaction, not in offline.
4	Because of its situation, offline learning is real and online learning is virtual
5	Because of its interaction, direct interaction is in offline, while indirect interaction is in online learning

Table 3 explains some reasons why offline and online learning are different. Most respondents perceived that using zoom is more flexible, they can learn wherever whenever. The other said that online learning gets

lower effective than offline. Some respondents perceived that online has the limitation of space and interaction, followed by others believed online learning is virtual while offline is more realistic. Few of them found the differences on direct and indirect interactions between both.

Table 4. Which learning strategy is better to be applied in your areas during the Covid-19 pandemic, offline learning or online learning?

No	Students' Opinions
1	I think it is still better using zoom at this pandemic, but improve the access of internet to my rural areas
2	I think its better if we back to offline teaching (FTF) as soon as possible
3	In my opinion, it is better using Blended Learning/Hybrid
4	It is better to apply offline learning (FTF) with health protocols
5	Using zoom still the best way for now i think

Table 4 investigates the result of students' preference to choose either offline to online learning. Most respondents argued that is still better using zoom at this pandemic, but improve the access of internet to their rural areas. On the other hand, some of them stated that is better if we back to offline teaching (FTF) as soon as possible. The others thought that is better using Blended Learning/Hybrid and few of them believed that offline learning (FTF) with health protocols is better. At least respondents stated that using zoom still the best way for now.

Table 5. Write your suggestions to improve online learning strategies in your remote areas during this pandemic era!

No	Students' Opinions
1	Online learning with digital platforms are suggested with the improvement of infrastructure on internet access in my rural environment
2	Using blended learning / hybrid is acceptable with health protocols
3	Offline learning can be done with health protocols
4	Online and offline learning are similar, we need to improve our learning styles.
5	Online learning is still safely done in this pandemic, but teachers need to improve teaching kits especially for online class.

Most students suggested online learning with digital platforms used in this pandemic era, but the infrastructure of internet access in their rural environment must be improved by our government. Others said that using blended learning/hybrid is acceptable to be applied with health protocols, but some of them believed that offline learning (Face to Face meeting) can be done with health protocols. They also expressed that online and offline learning are similar, students need to improve their learning styles. At last, there were few students declared that online learning is still safely done in this pandemic, but teachers need to improve teaching kits for the students in this Covid-19 outbreak especially.

The findings above show that most students do really agree with the application of Online learning strategies in L2 remote learning environment era because it still becomes the safest strategy done in this Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. However, those students who lived in rural learning environment found some difficulties in using technology in virtual learning because they have bad access to connect their devices to the internet. According to Dewi (2020:19), online learning is the use of the Internet in the learning process which has the flexibility of time to learn, can learn anytime and anywhere, especially in the period of COVID 19. However, the difficulties of unstable connections to internet refuse this theory. The online learning does not become flexible anymore, because most students in rural areas often lost their turns to learn virtually when the internet connection is bad in their remote environments. This caused students decline their motivation in online learning because they feel hard to understand online presentation from their friends and lecturers when they cannot join the online class, their signal is always leggy, up and down, on and off. In line with the theory from some previous researches found that the coverage of mobile telecommunications providers mainly concentrated in Java because of the high need for the internet to support urban areas (Khatri, 2019). This suggested our government to be aware of the infrastructure and internet access must be facilitated in rural environment in North Sumatera Province, like: Pakpak Bharat, Sidikalang, Aek Kanopan, Aek Loba and Siborongborong.

Moreover, students in remote environment also need the authentic online assessment and other instructional materials designed effectively by the lecturers. It is significantly different between online and offline

teaching. Lecturers need to be able to design the specific strategy in online teaching related to the materials presentation, online assessment, teaching method and discussion, learning module, handbooks and other learning resources, teaching media and other learning management systems as well. Lecturers are intended to consider the limitation of internet access in L2 learners in remote environment when they are designing all the teaching kits.

While in general, internet-based learning is considered as an option or even a solution to be used in this pandemic era. It is an essential element for maintaining learning activities at universities. This paradigm shift could generate changes in students' perception of this online learning that might be different from previous strategies in offline learning, blended learning or hybrid learning. The limitation of internet connections and inadequate facilities should not change tertiary students' perceptions of an outstanding learning technology to be unpleasant learning. That's why this new paradigm of online learning should always give good impressions to tertiary students in remote environment to avoid their boredom, hatred or even laziness in learning during this Covid-19 outbreak.

5. Conclusion

Tertiary students' perceptions of Online Learning in remote learning environment in pandemic era expressed some agreements and their obstacles in virtual learning by using digital platforms which indicated that students were agree with online learning strategies with digital platforms but they are still confuse how to learn and access it. Virtual meeting declined students' motivation to learn because of bad access of internet in their areas. However some of respondents believed using Video Conferences are more flexible because it can be used wherever whenever. Online learning still becomes the best learning strategy in this pandemic, but the access of internet in rural areas must be improved. Tertiary students need access of internet and infrastructure and instructional materials design especially applied in this pandemic era.

In conclusion, online learning strategies by using digital platforms still become the best solution to be applied in remote learning environment at this Covid-19 outbreak, even there are some obstacles still existed. The findings of this study cause some significant implications to the process of teaching and learning in this pandemic era. First, it encourages further researchers to have other similar research on online learning reflections and its potential inquiry through action research. Secondly, this research is recommended for other fields in teacher education such as social, technical and natural sciences di different scopes of online learning, like online authentic assessment, module, teachers' training and other instructional materials design in this pandemic era. At last, it is suggested to support digital learning facilities, especially internet connection to be well provided in remote learning environment.

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