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Research article

Online Learning: Yea or Nay?

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Abstract.
The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the education system in Indonesia from conventional offline classes to online classes. This sudden change has influenced the process of learning both positively and negatively. To some extent, online learning is considered advantageous; however, for prolonged use, it has some evident drawbacks. The pros and cons of online learning are also experienced by the students of English Literature at UNARS. Accordingly, a survey was conducted among 62 students to see how they perceived online learning. This research also examined how online learning has affected the students' study of English. The results showed that even though online learning was considered to not be as pleasant as offline learning, online learning was rated as somewhat enjoyable by 45.2% of the students.

Keywords: online learning, students' point of view, survey

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed the education system in Indonesia. The learning system in Indonesia is undergoing a transformation from conventional learning to online learning. The Ministry of Education and Culture issued this policy on March 17, 2020, two weeks after the first Covid-19 case was found in Indonesia [1]. The policy was issued to ensure the rights of students to obtain educational services during the Covid-19 emergency, to protect education unit residents from the adverse effects of Covid-19, to prevent the spread and transmission of Covid-19 in education units, and to ensure the fulfillment of psychosocial support for students, educators, and parents [1]. Theoretically and practically, online learning is seen as cheaper and more flexible, but this learning system is rarely used by educational institutions in Indonesia. Many institutions feel unprepared and not optimal in implementing such a system [2, 3] online learning system has caused many pros and cons on teachers, students, and even parents. The pros and cons of online learning are also experienced by students of Faculty of Letters, Universitas Abdurachman Saleh Situbondo (UNARS). The demographic background of students who mostly come from rural areas affects

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their experience in online learning. A small number of students are familiar with online learning, but the others see it as something new.

1.1. Definition of online learning

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning has become an alternative to reform the entire traditional education system [4]. According to Dhull [5], online learning requires a range of technologies, such as the worldwide web, email, chat, new groups and texts, audio and video conferencing that are delivered over computer networks to impart education. This means that the process of acquiring the knowledge takes place through electronic technologies and media [6]. Further, Dhawan {7] adds that since online learning occurs in synchronous or asynchronous environment using devices such as laptops and mobile phones with internet access, the process of learning is more innovative, flexible, and student-centered.

Fordham University Libraries [8] divides online learning into three types in its implementation. First is synchronous learning. This learning system takes place in real time so that teachers and students can interact at the same time. Simultaneous interaction occurs via text, audio, or video. In asynchronous learning, students usually have a regular schedule arranged by the teacher/institution. This system is similar to the conventional face-to-face system because student interactions and activities can be facilitated in real time. Thus, students can get answers and responses to questions and comments in real time. Synchronous learning is considered more effective in conveying more complicated and complex information, but it violates the main principle of distance learning in terms of flexibility. The time that students have is very limited. Since meetings are conducted in real time, students need tools to participate in live meetings. This is said to be one of the synchronous learning barriers.

The second type of online learning is asynchronous learning. In asynchronous learning, students are provided with content such as blogs, pre-recorded lesson videos, or discussion boards. As there is no class meeting time, asynchronous learning provides flexible and independent learning, so students can study independently at a pace that suits their schedule and learning style. In addition to that, asynchronous learning can foster student agency through a shift to a learner-based learning model. The success of the learning process using online learning is usually hampered by limited access to technology and internet speed. However, asynchronous learning has lower technological barriers to entry. In asynchronous learning, a sense of detachment can be reduced as there is no face-to-face meeting. Thus, such a system is likely to result in

students having to wait for their questions or comments to be responded to. The learner-based learning model is based on student motivation, so it is possible for students to get married in a hurry. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that the students complete their tasks in a rush since this learner-based model of learning relies on students' motivation.

Hybrid learning or blended learning is the last type of online learning. This system combines synchronous learning and asynchronous learning. Hybrid learning makes use of asynchronous learning and the social interactions of synchronous learning. Therefore, institutions should be able to take advantages of the asynchronous model and add the material with multiple synchronous activities and teaching, and to set clear expectations for students, communicate them well, and keep them consistent. Typically, hybrid learning requires teachers and students to meet face-to-face several times during a semester and provides computer-based communication between face-to-face sessions. Nevertheless, it is important to inform the students about the meeting schedules on the first day because hybrid learning requires students to keep some of their time open during the semester. Then no wonder that this learning system makes students confused because of the different modes of interaction.

1.2. Students' barriers to and readiness for online learning

Because the change in the learning system is very sudden, it is not surprising that there have been cases mentioning the problems faced by many higher education institutions. Even though several universities have implemented online learning far before the COVID-19 pandemic, many still feel that online learning could not be carried out optimally. Such problems are mostly experienced by private universities and are challenges for them [9]. This is due to the unpreparedness of both universities and students, whereas both parties have an equally important role in determining the success or failure of online learning [10]. Several studies examining problems in online learning in universities show that its implementation during the pandemic is indeed not optimal, particularly which is caused by students' barriers to online learning. In general, the obstacles experienced by students are fundamental, such as limited access to internet connection and low quality of services provided by lecturers [11], financing problems to buy internet quota, lack of interaction between the lecturer and students [12], bad weather that influences the internet network, and low IT skill [13].

Actually, the problems faced by students during online learning are due to their unpreparedness. Sriwarthini et al. [14] mention three indicators of students' readiness for online learning that include readiness in terms of facilities and infrastructure owned,

readiness to use media / online learning platforms, and readiness for the obstacles that will arise when online learning is implemented. In line with Sriwarthini et al, Setiaji & Dinata [15] states that there are four indicators to see students' readiness for online learning. The first indicator is the ability to operate and repair computer and or smart-phone software and hardware. The second indicator deals with students' concept in understanding e-learning and their habits in using the internet for self-study. The next indicator is readiness to receive learning materials through e-learning that is represented with a statement regarding the hardware owned by the student, the available internet connection, and past experience of receiving e-learning. The last indicator is students' positive attitude of towards computer technology and the internet. This last indicator relates to changes in attitudes, perceptions, motivation, and self-confidence about e-learning.

1.3. Perceptions towards online learning

Perception as one of indicators of students' readiness for online learning is important as it can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning process [16]. He adds that students' perceptions are vital since they may be more important than reality, i.e., decisions, many times, are based on perceptions. Agung et al. [17] define perception as the experience of object, event, and relationship acquired by resuming information and interpreting messages. The process of resuming and interpreting the messages involves attention, hope, motivation, and memory. Perception, according to Rahmania et al. [18] is based on assumptions about the construction of reality. They add that each individual develops a restricted set of perceptions through his/her unique dealings with the environment to handle the unlimited variety of possible sensory images received. Students' perception can be described as the developed opinion after having a certain experience that needs adjustment. Therefore, in relating to online learning, students' attention, motivation, hope, and memory determine students' participation, accessibility, materials and assignment delivery, and online-learning platform suited to their needs and condition.

1.4. Learning environment

Learning environment includes three basic elements: a person who teaches, a person who is taught, and an educational content [19]. Based on the definition provided by Educause [20], learning environment includes learning resources and technology,

means of teaching, modes of learning, and connections to societal and global contexts. Movchan [21] adds learning environment is a diverse platform where users engage and interact to learn new skills, but justifies that the term now refers to the more preferred and accurate alternative to the traditional classroom. Hence, it does not pass on a traditional or limited connotation such as brick and mortar school. From the definitions given, it can be seen that learning environment encompasses the context, location (structured or unstructured), and culture where the students learn.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the learning environment globally has transformed into virtual mode. Virtual learning environment is a social space, as there is a social interaction between the teacher and the students even if it occurs in a virtual mode [22]. Online learning that has become the only alternative of learning during the pandemic is a new learning environment that students in Indonesia have to be familiar with. The sudden change in the learning system has caused some pros and cons from students' point of view. Some may enjoy the new learning environment, but others may feel the opposite because of some barriers. Those who do not enjoy learning virtually will not participate actively during the teaching and learning process. Without students' participation, there will be no effective and enjoyable teaching. So, does students' perception matter? Definitely, yes. If students have positive perceptions towards their learning environment, they will have positive attitudes in learning which then leads to a good achievement. That is why students' perception should be taken into consideration in determining the success of teaching and learning [23]. The quality of learning environment also determines students' motivation, performance, and effectiveness in learning [24, 25]. In line with this, Alsadoon [26] states that online learning impacts student outcomes.

Some research utilizing the topic of how students' perceptions relate to learning environment have been carried out to see the potential drawbacks and benefits of online learning, particularly in EFL settings. Hendrawaty et al. [27] conducted a research to investigate EFL undergraduate students' perceptions of utilizing online learning applications during the Covid-19. Rakhmanina et al. [28] carried out a research to find out the perceptions of two different department students at University of Prof. Dr. Hazairin of learning English online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Another research to investigate students' perception towards online learning was conducted by Laili & Nashir [29]. Their respondents were the students of Stikes Banyuwangi joining Intensive English class in the 2020/2021 academic year, and were also assigned to fill up questionnaires delivered through Google form.

2. Method

This research aimed at finding out how students of Faculty of Letters, UNARS perceived online learning. This current research employed an online survey distributed to the students and interview from five students as the sample. The questionnaire was distributed through Google form and consisted of seventeen questions divided into four parts: basic information about the students, advantages and disadvantages of online learning, comparison between conventional learning and online learning, and acceptance towards online learning. The questionnaire used a Likert scale with a value range of 1-5. 62 respondents filled up the online questionnaire. The respondents were students who have been attending the online teaching and learning for about one and half years. Five students were chosen to be interviewed related to their readiness for online learning to strengthen the result of the online survey. There were eleven questions given, and these questions represented the indicators of readiness for online learning: readiness for facilities and infrastructure owned (three questions), readiness to use media / online learning platforms (three questions), and readiness for the obstacles that will arise when online learning is implemented (five questions).

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Findings

3.1.1. Students' demographic background

The respondents were 38 female students and 24 male students from semeser 2, semester 4, semester 6, and semester 8. Students' age ranged from 18-27 years old. Among 62 respondents, almost 87% of them reside in Situbondo District, and the rest are in outside Situbondo. The respondents' IT skill was divided into three categories: 54 students (87,1%) as moderate, 6 students (9,7%) as low, and 2 students (3,2%) as high. 67,7% of the total respondents (42 students) said that they have never been in any online class before the pandemic, and 32,3% (20 students) have been.

3.1.2. Advantages and disadvantages of online learning

The most frequent advantages of online learning chosen by the respondents was the ability to stay at home (35,4%), ability to record a meeting (33,8%), easy access to online material (12,9%), learning on student's own pace (9,67%), comfortable surrounding

TABLE 1: Demographic background of the respondents.

variables	n (%)
Gender	
female	38 (72,6%)
male	24 (38,7%)
Age	
18-20	45 (72,6%)
21-23	15 (24,2%)
24-27	2 (3,2%)
28-30	0 (0%)
Residence	
Situbondo dictrict	54 (87,1%)
Outside Situbondo district	8 (12,9%)
Year in Faculty of Letters	
1st	40 (64,5%)
2nd	13 (21%)
3rd	5 (8,1%)
4th	4 (6,5%)
Previous Experience in Online Learning	
yes	42 (67,7%)
no	20 (32,3)
IT Skill	
high	2 (3,2%)
moderate	54 (87,1%)
low	6 (9,7%)

(4,83%), and class interactivity (3,22%). Then, the majority of the respondents chose technical issues (64,5%) as the main disadvantage of online learning, followed with social isolation (17,7%), poor learning condition at home (6,45%), lack of interactions with lecturers (4,83%), lack of interactions with other students (4,83%), and inability to measure actual skills (1,6%).

3.1.3. Comparison between online learning and conventional learning

When asked about the effectiveness of online learning on the development of their knowledge, 50% of the students chose somewhat enjoyable, 29% chose ineffective, 17,7% chose effective, and 3,2% chose very ineffective. Compared to online learning, the effectiveness of conventional learning was said to be effective by 46,8% students. 25,8% chose effective, 21% chose very effective, 4,8% chose ineffective, and 1,6% chose very ineffective. Figure 1 shows the differences.

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TABLE 2: Advantages and disadvantages of online learning.

| variables	n (%)
Advantages	
stay at home	22 (35,4%)
ability ro record a meeting	21 (33,8%)
easy access to online material	8 (12,9%)
learning on student's own pace	6 (9,67%)
comfortable surrounding	3 (4,83%)
class interactivity	2 (3,22%)
Disadvantages	
technical issues	40 (64,5%)
social isolation	11 (17,7%)
poor learning condition at home	4 (6,45%)
lack of interactions with lecturers	3 (4,83%)
lack of interactions with other students	3 (4,84%)
inability to measure actual skills	1 (1,6%)
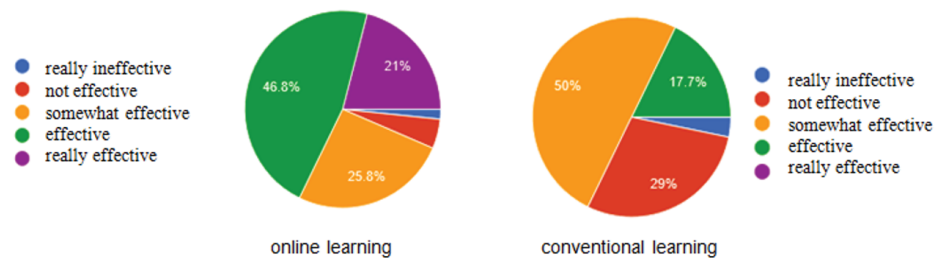
Figure 1: Effectiveness of online learning and conventional learning on students' development of knowledge.

In terms of their effectiveness on students' development of social competence, online learning is considered somewhat effective by 41,9% of the students. 24,2% chose ineffective, 22,6% chose effective, 9,7% chose really ineffective, and 1,6% chose really effective. On the other hands, conventional learning was considered effective by 45,2% of the students. 32,3% chose somewhat effective, 19,4% chose very effective, 1,6% chose ineffective, and another 1,6% chose very ineffective.
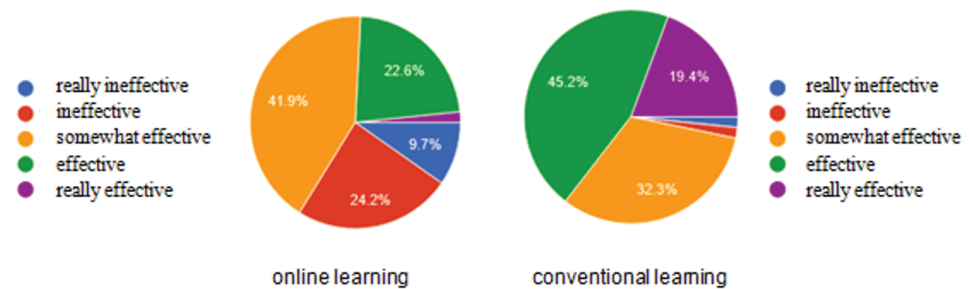

Figure 2: Effectiveness of online learning and conventional learning on students' development of social competence.

Online learning seen from its effectiveness on the development of students' English skills was considered somewhat effective by 40,3% of the respondents. Whereas the rest of them, 30,6% chose effective, 24,25 chose ineffective, and 4,8% chose very ineffective. Conventional learning, on the other side was considered effective by 46,8% of the respondents. 32,3% thought conventional learning was somewhat effective, 14,5% chose very effective, 4,8% chose ineffective, and 1,6% chose very ineffective.
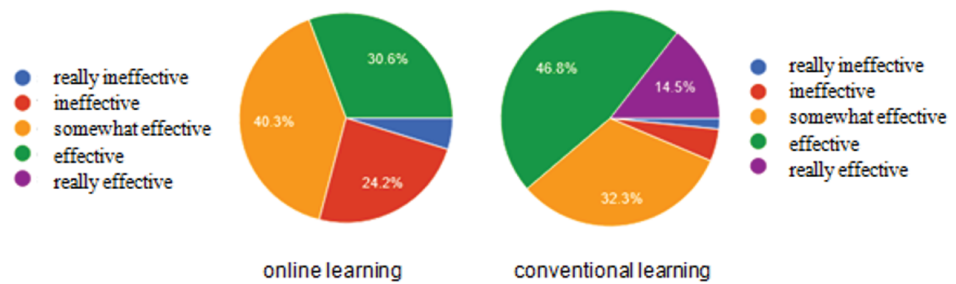

Figure 3: Effectiveness of online learning and conventional learning on students' development of English skills.

50% of the students said that they were somewhat active during an online learning. 32,3 admitted to be active, 11,3% said that they were not active, 3,2% mentioned that they were really not active, and another 3,2% said they were really active. When learning in a conventional environment, 45,2% of the students said they were active and 41,9% of the students said they were somewhat active. Then, 9,7% said they were really active, and 3,2% said they were not active.
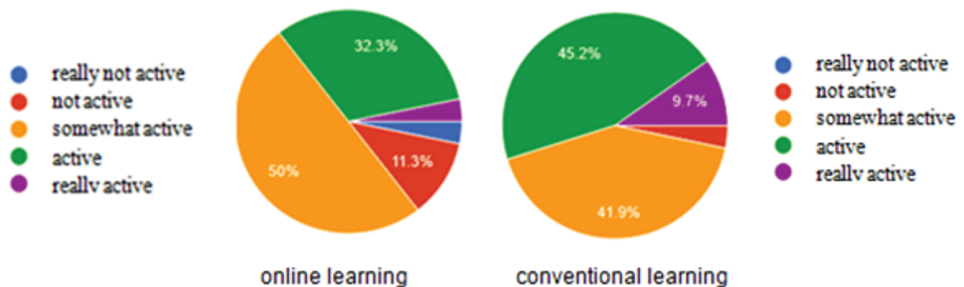

Figure 4: Effectiveness of online learning and conventional learning on students' learning activity.

3.1.4. Students' acceptance of online learning

When asked about their acceptance of online learning, 45,2% of the students said that online learning was somewhat enjoyable. 29% said that online learning was enjoyable, 19,4% said it was not enjoyable, and 6,5% said it was really enjoyable.
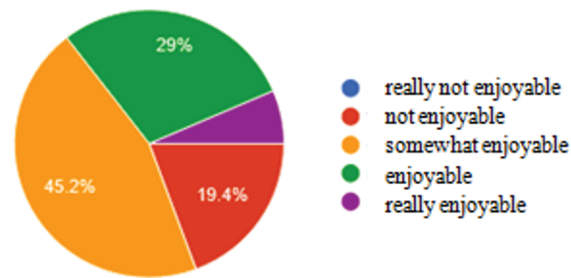
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Figure 5: Students' acceptance of online learning.

3.1.5. Students' readiness for online learning

From the interview, it was found out that all of the interviewees had smartphones that they usually used during online learning. One of them mentioned that his smartphone was not in a good condition, but it could be used during online learning with some errors here and there. All of them said that they used internet data from different providers during online learning because they did not have any Wi-Fi access at home. However, sometimes their internet connection was not stable because they lived in rural areas. Internet connection apparently was a problem not only for those who lived in rural areas, but also for who lived in suburb areas. The interviewees stated that Zoom and Google Meet were the only online learning platforms they were familiar with besides WhatsApp. It was because they used Zoom and Google Meet during their online learning. They also used WhatsApp if they encountered some problems with their learning platforms or internet network. WhatsApp was considered the most practical as it was used daily. When asked whether the students often used other learning platforms and/or online learning materials, only two of them answered yes. These two students mentioned YouTube as an alternative for them to find online learning materials. The other three students said that they never searched for any learning materials online because they were not motivated. The reasons were varied, from inability to use the right keywords to lack of understanding in the materials. When discussing about the hindrances they faced during online learning, they said that they did not have any serious problems except three things: lack of focus during online learning, access to internet network, and lack of understanding with the lectures. They said that they could not concentrate well during online learning because of the distraction from their surroundings, the unstable internet connection that affected the quality of the live lectures, and monotonous activity. When they felt that they started lacking their focus, they usually did something to cheer themselves up, such as secretly playing games, opening social media, or doing other things at home like keeping their shops, doing the laundry, or eating. If the boredom remained, they usually logged out of the learning platform. When they had issues with

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internet network, they usually tried to find Wi-Fi nearby. However, this only applied when they were in a place with free Wi-Fi connection. If they were at home and no Wi-Fi connection available, they usually told the lecturers that they could not attend the online meeting. The expensive price of internet data also became the cause of students' limited access to internet network. When they could not afford internet data, they usually went in search for free Wi-Fi. Another solution they usually did was using one smartphone together. In addition to fundamental issues of online learning, all of the interviewees admitted that online learning affected the quality of their learning. They said that they could not understand the lectures as well as when they had conventional meetings. This happened to some courses that required them to practice a lot, such as Grammar and Writing. However, they quibbled that they could ask for more detailed explanation from the lecturers about particular topics on WhatsApp group.

Briefly, from the three indicators of students' readiness for online learning (readiness in terms of facilities and infrastructure owned, readiness to use media / online learning platforms, and readiness for the obstacles that will arise when online learning is implemented), it can be concluded that the students' readiness is on a moderate level. Even though they are equipped with smartphones and laptops, they cannot use their gadgets fully to their functions. Their moderate IT skills are not supportive enough to help them fix any technical issues with their gadgets and online learning platforms. Most of the students are only familiar with the technologies they have been using, but have a low motivation to dig and know about online learning platforms and materials deeper. Therefore, when encountering problems during online learning, some of the students are not capable to find the solutions.

3.2. Discussion

From the results of the survey and the interview, we can see that the students perceive online learning to be somewhat enjoyable. They do have some problems with fundamental issues, such as problems with internet network and the price of internet data. The issue of fundamental problems of online learning seems to be common in Indonesian educational context. During the pandemic, such problems have been mushrooming, and are particularly experienced by students who live in remote areas in Indonesia [11, 30]. This is caused by the infrastructure development in Indonesia that is not evenly distributed [31]. Haryanto [32] adds that Indonesia's geographical location that consists of tens of thousands of scattered islands, coupled with the vast sea and many mountains makes deploying the network deployment challenging. The technical

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problems of online learning are experienced by almost all of the students because not all parts of Situbondo have an access to a 4G network.

Regarding the advantages of online learning, the students say that they like to have online learning because they can stay at home. It minimizes the expenses they have to spend when they have conventional learning. With online learning, they do not have to pay monthly fee of lodging house, fuel or transportation cost, and meal/snack. This is also proven similarly in some previous research [33, 34]. Instead, the students can spend their money on the internet data. The flexibility of online learning also enables them to do several things at once so they think they can use their time more efficiently. However, being multitasking during online learning is actually not a good sign of an effective learning process [35]. Further, he argues that multitasker activities in this kind of behavior in addition to making the students less productive can also disturb their mentality.

Online learning is considered effective in developing students' knowledge. Online learning is effective in developing students' knowledge if it is run well. The lecturers should be able to make the learning process fun and as active as it is in offline learning. Since the conventional environment is transformed into the virtual one, the lecturers should create a learning environment that is close to the same situation in conventional learning. This aim is to minimize the impacts of lack interactions between the lecturers and the students. When carrying out an online learning, the materials delievered are usually quite brief, so the students could get a grisp of them easily. The materials are also packed in interesting activities, so the students will not think that they are learning.

In developing students' social competence, online learning is somewhat effective. It is harder to make the students socialize well in a virtual world instead of in a real world. Since the students cannot meet their classmates in person, they are not really close, especially those who are in the first year. They only socialize online via WhatsApp group. Only few of them had chances to meet each other in person when they had to do group assignments. This usually is done by those whose houses are close to each other. The solution for this problem is promoting increased interaction among the students to make them close and monitor any sign of social isolation [36]. V [37] adds that the communication between the lecturer and the students and among the students themselves should be done variedly through oral and written forms.

Compared to offline learning which is considered effective in developing their English skills, online learning is seen to be somewhat effective by the students. Tamm [36] says "all educational disciplines are not created equal, and not all study fields can be effectively used in e-learning." As mentioned previously, there are some courses

that require the students to have enough explanation and many practices, such as Grammar and Writing. These seem to be difficult to do during online learning. The explanation is more difficult to be understood when given online. The feeling of writing on a virtual board is also less fun and less effective than writing in a real whiteboard. The distractions at home and the problems with the internet acces make it more difficult for the students to understand the materials. Tamm adds that a theoretical lecture is much easier to apply in an online learning environment than a practical lecture. With no face-to-face communication and physical meetings, executing practical lectures requires much earlier planning than theoretical one.

In online learning, the students admitted that they are somewhat active. However, their activity level is lower than that of conventional learning. Thus, students should be trained to do self-motivation to complete tasks and engage themselves in learning [37]. Besides, the students should be able to know their own preferred learning style, so they can learn through interaction, visual presentations, audio classes or written notes.

In brief, the students say that online learning is somewhat enjoyable for them. Even though they have to fight with the technical issues, they think that online learning is quite effective in helping them learn during the pandemic. They think online learning is somewhat enjoyable because of the flexibility it offers. They are happy because they are introduced to something new. Those who previously did not know anything about online learning platform are now regular users of Zoom and Google Meet. The students have also been exposed to varied form of online assignments and assessments. At first they might get difficulties, but they get used to online learning stuffs over time. Their moderate readiness for online learning influences their attitude towards online learning. This means that the level of readiness determines the level of acceptance of online learning.

4. Conclusions

From the findings and the discussion, it can be concluded that the students of Faculty of Letters, UNARS think that online learning is somewhat enjoyable. Why is it only on the moderate level? Surely because their readiness for online learning is also on the moderate level. Students' preparedness for online learning determines their attitude during the implementation of online learning. Some technical problems have been common issues to find. How the students should cope with them is the skill they need to be equipped with. So, is online learning yea or nay for the students? Yea, for those

who are ready, and maybe nay for those who are not ready. Online learning is a new and sudden change of learning environment to them, so adaptability takes time.

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