



## VIRTUAL LEARNING AMIDST COVID-19 OUTBREAK: THE CHALLENGES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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### Abstract

The outbreak of COVID-19 has put the universe into big changes. Most sectors of life including education has to be adjusted for the sake of everybody's safety. Language learning, which ideally needs a lot of interactions, should be held virtually. This sudden shift may cause several intervening factors which influence the success of it. This study was aimed at discussing the factors that may challenge the language learning during the virtual learning mode amidst the COVID-19. After studying some research about this issue, several factors namely lack of internet access, poor comprehension, poor interaction, overload tasks, insufficient infrastructure support, environmental distraction, and lack of motivation are found to be the challenges in implementing a successful virtual language learning amidst the outbreak.

**Keywords:** *virtual learning, language learning, challenges, COVID-19*

### INTRODUCTION

Since 2019 when coronavirus hit the universe, human life's components have shifted a lot. Education becomes one of the sectors with the biggest adjustment towards the virus attack. All schools took prevention by stopping the entire school face-to-face activities to minimize direct physical contacts of the students. The process of learning, which are normally held in the classroom and attended by the students, has been shifting into virtual mode. School closures makes students to stay at home and do virtual learning for all the subjects, including language learning.

The main objective of language learning is communication. For this reason, a good and flexible interaction during the learning process is necessary. Often conversations or any other interactive activities are integrated in it. During the virtual learning, not all the interactive interactions could be easily done. The distance among students creates a lot of limitations. Therefore, the optimization of virtual language learning might be threatened. These past years online learning has been conducted and the teachers and students perhaps start to be accustomed to this kind atmosphere of learning. However, the success of online learning during the pandemic era might be affected by several factors. This paper aims to discuss about the challenges of virtual language learning amidst the COVID-19 outbreak that may influence the accomplishment of it.

### The Challenges of Virtual Language Learning amidst the COVID-19 Outbreak

Among the challenges mentioned by UNICEF (2020) for Indonesian context are platform support, internet access, and electronic devices. Due to the remaining issue of education inequality, internet access and electronic devices become the primary problem for the children with low-economic background and who live in remote areas. Instead of supporting their children to the condition of learning online, the parents from poor family background focus to fulfil the whole family support. In some underdeveloped settlement, internet access is even unavailable.

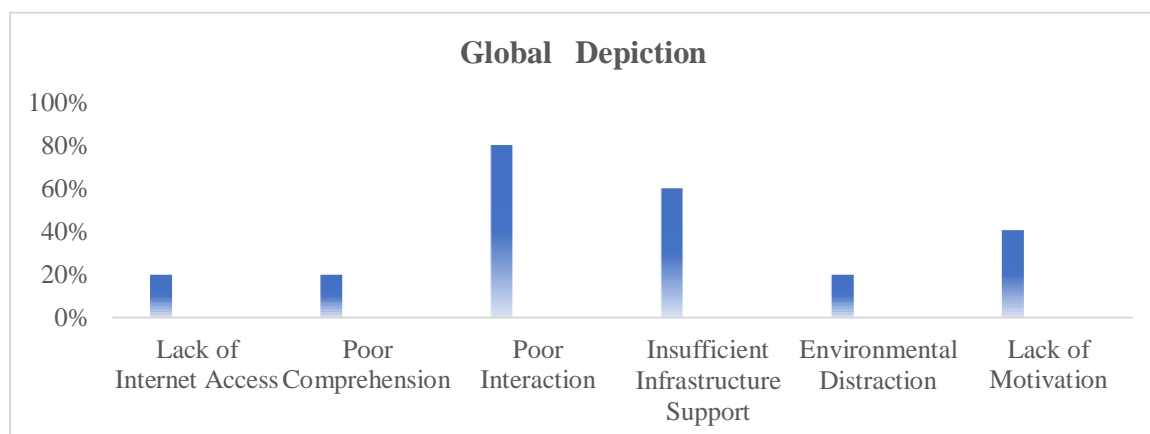
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### Global Representation

A lot of researchers around the world have analyses on how students perform academically on the shift of face-to-face learning to virtual learning. Many factors also contributed to whether the learning hit the objectives or not. Wang, et al. (2022) investigated students' academic performance during the pandemic era in northeast China, showing that readiness and emotional competence significantly contributing to the success of virtual learning. The students with better abilities in operating software programs and digital features would possibly have better academic performance. In terms of emotional competence, having a good skill in virtual communication and distraction avoidance may lead to preferred learning performance.

Some findings show various problems faced by every school party around the world towards the problematic online language learning amidst the outbreak. Every country may have different context and condition. In facing the changes of learning model also, they should encounter diverse issues. Some countries could be ready for the sudden shift with all the supports on hand, while others could be not. At least, internet access, interaction, comprehension, infrastructure support, distraction, and motivation are aspects that mostly affect the success of language learning online. Challenges happened during the language online learning in some countries are portrayed into the below chart.

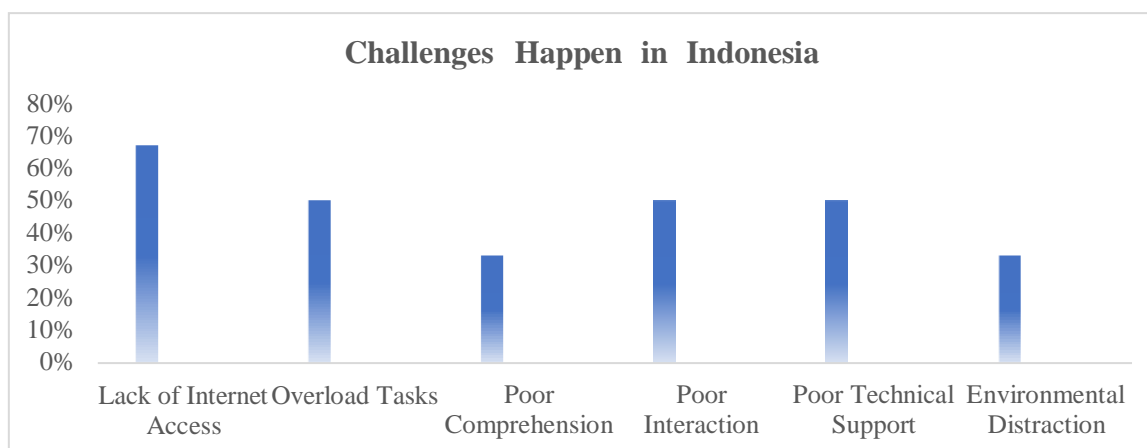


The problems were obtained from some findings investigating language virtual learning throughout the COVID-19 outbreak (Zboun & Farah (2021); Ying et al. (2021); Rahman(2020); Mahyoob (2020); Eze (2022)).

### The Depiction in Indonesia

Hermanto and Srimulyani (2021) found that students' discipline and motivation, and insufficient internet access and social interaction as may hinder the success of virtual learning during the covid-19 outbreak. The one-way-interaction learning models and plentiful assignments somehow demotivate the students which make them put their preference on the conventional one. Similar matters found by Maqbulin (2021) that almost one-fourth of the respondents complain about the relentless assignments, while more than half of them admit the main problem is in the material comprehension. The one-way interaction dominantly used during the learning prevents them to get better understanding of what is being learned.

The following chart portray the problems perceived by the students, teachers, institutions or even stakeholders in online language learning during the pandemic era from some research (Hermanto & Srimulyani (2021); Maqbulin (2021); Paisal et al. (2022); Nugraha(2021); Ulfa (2021); Syafrayani et al. (2021)).



## DISCUSSION

### Global and Local Case

From both charts, the two most challenges faced in virtual language learning are poor interaction and poor infrastructure or technical support.

#### *Poor Interaction*

As language is the means of communication, it is obviously and logically make sense that interaction in language learning is needed in order to support its accomplishment. Oral interaction, to be specific, will be very helpful for the learners in acquiring the language. Muhoand Kurani investigate the role of interaction in second language acquisition which reveal that it positively supports the development of second language. Input, output, and feedback in language learning can be addressed by the interaction between the language learners (Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996).

Knowing that interaction is impactful for the language learning, then poor interaction in language learning will decrease its optimization. In addition, making variation in language learning by having a lot of activities are difficult to do since the students and teachers are away apart. Not all the activities can be done through distance like this, especially those which need physical contact or activities. Consequently, the bad interaction, either teacher-student or student-student, is the challenge globally faced the most during the virtual language learning.

#### *Poor Infrastructure and Technical Support*

Infrastructure in education will support the teaching and learning process. In this case – virtual learning – devices like laptops, computers, tabs, smartphones or any other compatible devices are needed. Besides, internet connection and stable electricity supply which allow the students to do the virtual learning are also crucial. Unfortunately these aspects become challenges in online learning, especially in remote or rural areas. Kusuma (2022) investigated the challenges of online learning experienced by the teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in rural areas which showed that internet connectivity and student-owned technology devices are two of them. The implementation of online learning in remote areas, in fact, would be more effortful compared to in the urbans. Inequality of infrastructure in rural areas is the big issue for the students to have and experience an equal learning process. As the result, they are not ready to face 5je shifting from face-to-face learning to online learning unless are supported to fulfil the needs.

## Case in Indonesia

In Indonesia, internet access obviously becomes the challenge faced the most during the virtual learning. Bad internet connection during the learning makes the process less effective and efficient. Amidst the outbreak, the learning process are mostly performed through video conference by using apps like Zoom, Google Meet or any other supporting ones. Both teachers and students need internet connection to log in and then join the room. Often a lot of students are removed from the room due to unstable connection. They, moreover, are sometimes removed back and forth from the video conference which disable them to pay attention and follow the lesson well. The long term effect of this problem is the failure of learning. As mentioned before language learning needs a lot of interaction, if students face lack of internet access, it will hinder them from having a good interaction during the process.

The next challenges are overload tasks, poor interaction, and poor technical support. Tasks are given a lot to the students during the virtual learning for some reasons. Some of them are to support their comprehension on certain topic. The limited activities and interaction seems to make the learning, especially language learning less optimum. As the result, it is no wonder if the next challenge is the poor comprehension. As one of the efforts to prevent unsuccessful learning, tasks are regularly assigned. The relentless assignments later on could create a pressure state for students.

Lastly, environmental distraction is found to be one of the challenges. This is somehow true and real. The online learning makes the students stayed at home and have the virtual class at home. Sometimes the condition of surroundings is not encouraging. In some occasion, the parents or siblings may call the student to do a help. Additionally, for those who live in urban areas may experience inconvenience because a lot of vehicles pass by and leave noise. The blackout that might happen anytime will also affect the ease of learning. Consequently, the some of possible distractions mentioned may affect the effectiveness of learning which later cause poor ability in comprehending the lesson.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion, the external factors obviously affect the virtual language learning the most, though motivation becomes the internal one. Globally, poor interaction is the challenge that mostly faced in this matter, followed by insufficient infrastructure support. Limited interaction during the online learning possibly hinder the learning of language which is supposed to be packed in a varied activities. While in the case of Indonesia, internet accessibility and technical support become two of the most influencing factors. These issues might be minimize by the support from the government. Overload tasks and poor interaction also play significant role in local case. Finally, the online language learning could be implemented in an optimal way by minimizing the possibility of each factor to happen.

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