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Online Learning during Pandemic:
Students' Motivation, Challenges, and Alternatives

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Abstract: Pandemic had intrigued the change of EFL learning mode in higher education. The students had to adjust with the situation that created learning challenges that might obstruct learning progress. Furthermore, students' motivations and creativities would lead them to find alternatives. Hence, the present study was aimed to investigate the students' challenges, motivations, and alternatives. It was a descriptive qualitative research case study by gathering students' responses using questionnaire and interview with 10 students who joined KSP (short course) English Syntax using WhatsApp group at English Education Study Program of UIN Mataram in July 2020. The results showed that students' motivations were increasing scores in remedy class (90%) and gaining more science understanding (10%). The challenges faced by students during the online course were poor internet connection (50%), simultaneous agendas (30%), limited WhatsApp feature (10%), and anxiety (10%). Regarding challenges, students did alternatives such as preparing phone credits (30%), praying for the end of the pandemic (10%), learning extensively (10%), searching for the best place to get an internet signal (20%), setting alarm (10%), and creating on-going motivation (20%). The research showed that online mode learning needed adequate preparations mentally, physically, and financially to back up their learning deficiency.

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, education all over the world has experienced massive changes because of the emergence and spreading of the Covid-19 virus that was initially popular in Wuhan, China in late 2019 (Onyema, 2020). People across the world have criticized China for its non-transparency and interruption in getting the disease people. Covid-19 is wreaking havoc on the lives of these people and the system of numerous nations across this world. In this case of Covid-19 outbreaks, lockdown is one way to reduce the meeting with others to reduce the possibility of Covid-19 spread.

Emergency remote learning (ERL) is intended as a temporary shift from normal learning modes (Rahiem, 2020). The situation happens when learning becomes remote (or distant), it takes what is supposed to be face-to-face teaching and transform it to become digital education. When a crisis occurs that requires schools to close, emergency remote learning may be in the form of online lessons, radio, or mixed learning solutions. In current times, most of the world finds itself dealing with emergency remote learning because of the Covid-19 virus pandemic.

The world faces unprecedented international health and socio-economic

crisis sparked by the Covid-19 epidemic (Chriscaden, 2020). Indonesia has recently witnessed the impacts of the virus on the education sector. Ministries in various countries have taken steps in every school and university to conduct learning through the internet. This online learning aims to increase awareness and the process of stopping the spread of viruses through direct interaction among people. The transition from face to face learning to online classes, has forced various parties to be able to do it online so that the learning system continues to run well, but apparently, this system did not work as effectively as we imagined, in fact, all parties experienced difficulties, not only students, parents, teacher, and the government also felt it.

In a time of crisis, distance education is the method of remote training without frequent face-to-face tutor communication (Burns, 2011). Emergency remote learning (ERL) is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. At one point are courses presented completely online, never meet the teacher or fellow student face-to-face, and may take online tutorials rather, interact with the teacher by social media or learning management system (LMS) and learn from texts as well as online resources.

Successful distance education students are autonomous learners and take initiative at their training (Fidyati, 2016). They want assistance from different resources, other students, and their teachers. They read outside the core materials to see issues and they actively attempt to change their learning skill. Teachers must improvise as a result even though conditions are not as much as perfect (Meiers, 2007). All online education activities that are planned and provided in response to the new situation are not just the same as those of the well-planned online education system.

KSP (Short Course) English Syntax as one of the courses that were offered by English Education Study Program, Faculty of Education and Teachers Training, State Islamic University (UIN) Mataram to the students also adopted the ERL system. The course had been set to run for 14 meetings in two weeks. The teacher and students' interactions were directed to avoid a face-to-face meeting and applied online learning to use WhatsApp. This application was chosen as the agreement between teacher and students who had enrolled their names to participate the course. Furthermore, during the course run, many stories appeared regarding students' obstacles to join the course, their motivation to maintain their course attendance, and their creativity to seek alternatives to break the obstacles.

Based on the rationales above, documenting the students' motivations, challenges, and the alternatives they put forward, especially with respect to teaching and learning process in KSP English Syntax is important to provide significant information for the schools and teachers as well as other English students on how to deal with such a critical learning situation. Therefore, this study aims to explore the motivations of students to join KSP English Syntax, the students' challenges during the Emergency Remote Learning (ERL), and alternatives they deal with such learning barriers amid the Covid-19 outbreak.

METHOD

The present research used qualitative approach and employed descriptive case study type. Yin (2009) defines case study as a scientific inquiry that thoroughly investigates current contextual issues, particularly when there is a lack of understanding between the

context and a certain phenomenon. For that reason, this study sees the case of COVID-19 that results in the emergence of ERL as a phenomenon worthy of investigation in order to establish an understanding of the challenges and possible alternatives that can be learnt from that phenomenon. The context where this research was carried out was in the Syntax KSP (Short Course program) held by English Education (TBI) Study Program, Faculty of Education and Teachers Training, UIN Mataram on July 2020. The reason for choosing this course was due to its access ability to the target participants, the TBI students who registered their names to join the course. Then, the researcher was the lecturer. Secondly, it is because the course could represent the case of EREL in UIN Mataram the program was held by all departments in the university. The sources of the data were the 10 students' answers on the open-ended questionnaires that were administered at the end of the Syntax KSP (Short Course program).

Because of the use of open-ended questionnaire and interview to collect the data, the data collected need to be categorized into certain emerging themes (Presser, 2010). In order to figure out the themes in the data, Braun and Clarke's thematic data analysis procedures will be used. Thematic data analysis refers to a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. The phases of the thematic analysis include self-familiarity with the data, coding the data, themes searching, reviewing themes, themes definition and naming, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present research was aimed to investigate the students' motivations, challenges, and alternatives in the KSP (short course) English Syntax online learning during pandemic Covid-19. According to the data that was acquired from the questionnaire, the motivations underlying students to join the KSP English syntax were both integrative and instrumental motivations. The proportions of each are depicted as in the following figure:
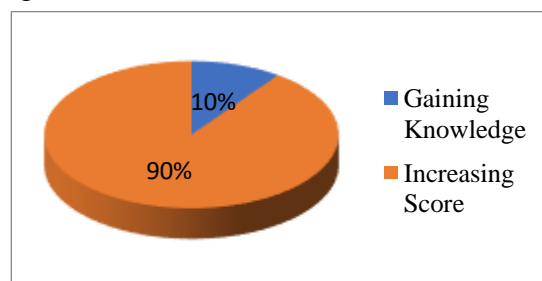

Figure 1. Students' Motivation to Join KSP English Syntax

The dominant motivation was students needed to improve their English syntax score as they failed to pass the regular schedule English syntax class. The small portion of the chart, one student said that she required gaining more knowledge by recourse the English syntax.

During the implementation of ERL English syntax, students faced some obstacles or challenges that might obstruct their learning progress. Students said that the most often occurred challenge was about the stability of internet connections (50%). Most of the students said that their houses are located in remote or hilly areas that made signals unable to be transmitted normally to their hand phone. Then, it was about 30% of responses said that simultaneous agenda during the course influenced the frequency of their attendance. At the time they joined KSP class, they were joining the KKP (Participatory Internship) program which was organized by Community Service Bureau of UIN Mataram. Sometimes, they had difficulties to keep contact and interactions during WhatsApp class as they also had a meeting in village office.

The other challenge was WhatsApp did not provide flexible features to interact responsively and fast by typing (10%). Students had to wait for each other's responses to avoid jumbled chat between teacher-students and students-students. Furthermore, students found that it also became a factor which triggered laziness to give responses during the lesson. The last challenge that was faced by students was they still had anxiety during the course (10%). Students thought that their chatting should be in perfect grammar or zero error which made them unconfident as they think they were still learning. The detail portion of challenges is pictured as follows:
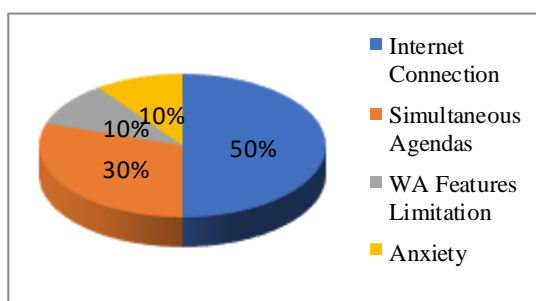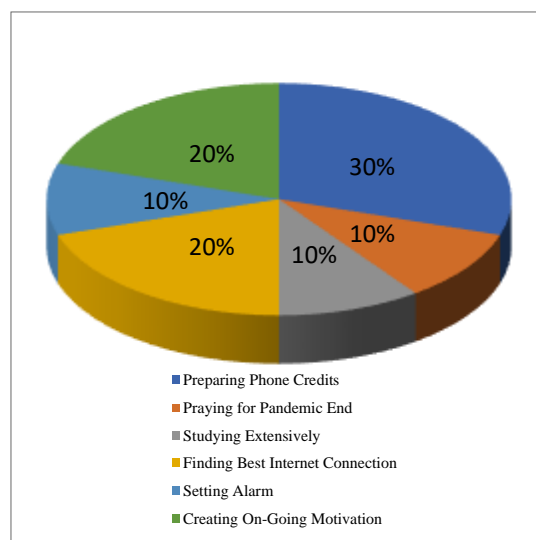

Figure 2. Students' Challenges during KSP English Syntax

Regarding the challenges faced by the students during the KSP English Syntax, as mentioned in the background that ERL would be successful if the students were autonomous to find the solutions. Then, the students had searched for alternatives to avoid being a failure to pass this course. They mentioned that they did some alternatives.

Most of the students believed that internet connection was the main challenge during the ERL in KSP English Syntax course. Hence, the most frequently applied alternatives were preparing the phone credits for keeping internet connection (30%) and finding the best place to get a good internet transmission (20%). The other important alternative was creating on-going motivation to strengthen their initial motivations which

were only about improving score and acquiring more knowledge (20%). The details of on-going motivations are described in the figure 4. Moreover, 10% response said that WhatsApp did not help students a lot to grab a lot of English syntax knowledge as they expected, they preferred to fill this deficiency by learning extensively. They learned more from e-book and links which were shared by the teacher. The same portion of response (10%) was also applied for setting the alarm in the hand phone as students' anticipation for being late and forgetful on the KSP English Syntax course schedule. The last alternative that was implemented by students was praying sincerely to God for ending the Covid-19 virus pandemic. They believed when God blesses their prayer, they will enjoy face-to-face meetings that they used to experience.The detail percentage is visualised as follows:

Figure 3. Students' Alternatives to Cope the Challenges during KSP Syntax

The last alternatives that were created by the students who joined KSP course were the on-going motivation. They remembered some items that might trigger their participation in the course such as: they remembered that they had to improve their score (30%), they had to remember that there was KSP English

Syntax course rules that they had to obey (25%), they had to finish the tasks during the course if they wanted to get participation score (25%), and they believed on some benefits or practicality attending the KSP course such as no need to go to university and saving more energy and time to learn (20%). The data from the questionnaire are tabulated in the following figure:
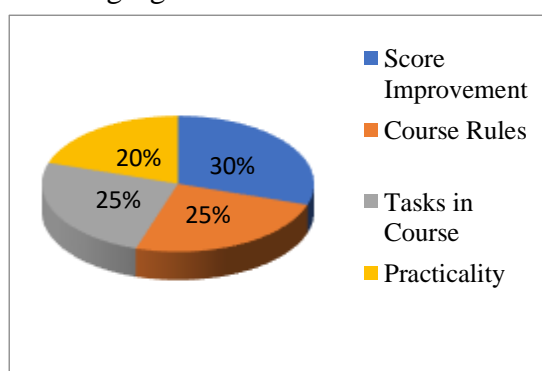
Figure 4. Students' Alternatives to Cope the Challenges during KSP Syntax in terms of Motivation

According to the result of the present research and the research objectives respectively, the discussion would elaborate the relations of motivation that the students had before joining the KSP English Syntax, challenges that students faced during the course, and the alternatives as to the proof of students' autonomy in ERL during Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, they would be discussed based on theories and previous studies.

Motivation is a factor that influences learners' failure or success (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010). Regarding this idea, all students who joined the KSP English Syntax had already had the integrative motivation that was about increasing the English syntax comprehension and instrumental motivation which was the intention to get higher English syntax score. The findings showed that instrumental motivation surpassed highly about 80% higher than integrative motivation. These situations

depicted similar results in some other L2 learning contexts as in the research by Liu (2015), Muftah & Rafic-Galea (2013), and Hussain & Masum (2016). This emphasizes that in most of the countries where English is taught as a second language, learners are more instrumentally motivated rather than integrative. Moreover, regardless of having one of those or both of the motivations, the students would make themselves readier to follow the class though with sudden unexpected situation or challenges. Motivation became the most fundamental issue for students' learning success in L2 context as it influences the requirement to prepare precondition before some efforts to trigger effective learning (Dornyei, 2007). Then, the students' motivation is highly correlated with students' autonomy (Almusharraf, 2020)

The implementation of ERL in the form of KSP English Syntax had experienced some challenges which required students who joined to pass. The most influential challenge that was faced during the online class was the lack of internet connections (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020). Internet as the main ingredient of internet-based learning in ERL context with synchronous model becomes the most pivotal factor to made the learning process run as intended (Algahtani, 2011). Luckily, the students had search for alternative by being prepared with sufficient hand phone credits and searching best place which help them to find best internet signal connection. Terrell & Brown (2006) states that students' motivation to find alternatives to solve the problems depict the characteristic of being an autonomous learner that is having self-efficacy.

Another challenge that students faced was the schedule of KSP English Syntax was at the same time with students' KKP (Participatory Internship) agenda in the

village office. Some students said to the teacher that they were asked by the head of the village to manage meeting with the people and they were unable to avoid. Some others said that they mentioned earlier before the online class start that they would response slowly as they had to keep their attention to two simultaneous agendas. Unfortunately, the rest said that they forgot that they had synchronous online class. As the students' belief on their integrative and instrumental motivations, they did set the alarm to remind themselves that they had course. Students may take benefit of technology to help them in learning (Naranjo, 2014). Due to their lack of understanding on the day online class material, students read extensively the e-book and links that the teacher had distributed in the WhatsApp group (Lin, 2014). One of students, MAA thought that learning extensively would improve his comprehension toward incomplete materials as well as answering his curiosity. Dornyei in Muslimin (2018) stated that the normally and ideally, a good language learner are triggered to learn since they are forced by their inner curiosity to know more and explore everything.

WhatsApp is mainly developed as a texting and document sharing application (Baidowi et al., 2014). Though later, this application has been developed to enable users to do video call, but the students who joined KSP English Syntax made an agreement to run the class only through texting and document sharing in order to save their internet credit. Hence, the teacher designed the course outline to suit that agreement. Unfortunately, there were some difficulties that hindered interaction during the synchronous course, such as: 1) students' found themselves hard to make concise WhatsApp text while their ideas as response to the explanation were many; 2) students' had too limited time to

encode their idea into the written text as their idea transfer and texting speed was not so fast; 3) students found that teacher's explanation was too limited as they think that the teacher also wanted to make the explanation simpler. DNJ, one of the students, said "the teacher's explanation is too limited and I need more". To respond to these challenges, students decided to learn English syntax extensively and prayed for the Covid-19 pandemic end soon.

The last challenge that was mentioned by few students was having anxiety. AA and DNJ, students who joined KSP English Syntax, said that sometimes they were shy to ask and comments as his grammar was not good enough and their responses were observed by all in WhatsApp group. This showed that anxiety became the challenge or problem for 20% of students in the course. A similar finding was stated by Saadé et al. (2017) that 30% of students experienced anxiety during online learning. Another cause of anxiety was that the student was cautious all the time during class to think if the internet connection suddenly dropped and she lost a chance to learn (M – one of students). In order to solve this challenge students created on-going motivation that triggered the increase of their engagements during the course. The motivations were about: 1) remembering their initial instrumental motivation that was for getting a better English Syntax score. They had read the course outline containing the course assessment criteria which meant that the students should fulfill all the criteria to get a better score; 2) considering the course rules as something good to manage the course and good to follow. N, one of the student, said that the course rule was good to keep students' discipline and respect the learning schedule; 3) thinking that tasks were the aid to deepen the material comprehension not as a burden.

M, N, and DNJ, three of the students, said that tasks helped them in learning and receiving lessons; and 4) some students believed that they found it was better to have online learning compared with face-to-face learning since they did not need to travel to the university, saved time and money, and consumed less energy. Online learning provides flexibility for students to find the most convenient place to learn (Smedley, 2010).

Discussing the three variables in the present research, Turturean (2013) mentions that students' learning motivation has a relationship with students' ability to cope with the problems. His further explanation, in higher education, success involves the achievement of pre-established goals, and adaptation to the changes imposed by the know-how society. Hossain (2018) stated that successful solvers on an innovation intermediary platform had a certain motivation that underlying their efforts to find opportunities to face some challenges. Those previous research have shown similar ideas with the present research findings and discussion. All students successfully passed the KSP English Syntax as they were motivated and found alternatives to solve the challenges. They changed their negative point of view on the online learning challenges into something motivating or positive.

CONCLUSION

The present research presents the preliminary result of the students' motivation, challenges, and alternatives when joining KSP English Syntax course. The research found that the students successfully passed the course because of they had instrumental motivation as the dominant and integrative motivation. Those motivations helped students to conquer the challenges during learning such as experiencing bad internet connection, joining simultaneous agendas, finding limitation of WhatsApp feature, and having online learning anxiety. More than that, the students also did some anticipations before the challenges appeared such as preparing phone credits, finding the best place to get an internet connection, setting alarm, creating on-going motivation, and praying for God's blessings. To reduce their comprehension deficiency as well as to meet their curiosity, they learned extensively. This conclusion strengthens the results of other research proofing that there is a relationship among motivation, learning challenges, and the ability to find alternatives to solve challenges during an unconducive learning situation. Hence, the teachers, students, and stakeholders may look at the importance of motivation as capital to triggers students' creativity to overcome learning challenges in various contexts. Furthermore, future research is expected to do statistical calculations on the correlation among those variables which were not discussed in the present research.

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