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Voices of the Newly Users' of Online-learning during Covid-19: Bridging to be EFL independent Readers

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Abstract

The Corona pandemic which has splashily spread to this universe has affected all people's field of life. In common, people of any age and status do not only socially, economically, psychologically, but also culturally suffered. The classroom learning culture is not anymore suitably employed. The EFL students who used to be dependents much on their teachers to acquire English language should change into online learning. They become the newly users of this online learning. There are many online learning applications, one of them is Schoology. This article is then intended to portray the voices of the EFL students who took Inferential Reading Comprehension Course on their use of online learning application during Covid-19 pandemic in relation to become independent readers. The qualitative data were obtained through distributing questionnaire to EFL tertiary students of a state Islamic University in a district of East Java Indonesia. They were taking Inferential reading class. The number of respondents getting involved in this small survey is 58 students. The finding of this study in one hand indicates that for the newly users of online learning application, employing Schoology is not better than classroom instruction for some reasons, such as adaptation to online application, time management, financial support, connection, emotional support of the lecturer, and reading schemata. On the other hand, the awareness of the existing Covid-19 pandemic has forced some of them to adapt with the online learning activities even though they face the above mention obstacles. This even leads them feel to be more independent readers which they believe to be able to trigger them to become independent learners.

Keywords: voices, the newly users, independent readers

1. INTRODUCTION

Frag Covid 19 pandemic leads to changing pattern of teaching and learning – from commonly offline (classroom instructional practices) into online. This change should be equipped with quality human resources that have sufficient digital literacy. Nisa (2017) in her study found that online learning based class has emerged new role of teachers namely mastering the ICT and having the ability to handle technical problems on the technology. In addition, the changing characteristic of learning from what so called "teacher-center" into student-centered will be as one of the significant obstacles in carrying out the online learning. These will furthermore hinder the achievement of the instruction. Similarly, in context of teaching and learning English in university level, these two points are influential factors to the success of achieving the goals of instruction. As adult learners, the students are trained to be independent learners which in Reading Comprehension (RC) class this can be identified by becoming independent readers of English texts. In the context of RC class, there is not much different between offline and online learning activities in terms of the availability of reading recourses. This is one of factor that can support the learners to be independent readers which is one of the



indicators of good reading habits. The difference is in how to run the instruction during the online learning platform.

The online instructional practices actually have been supported by abundant kinds of online learning application such as Zoom, Google-meet, e-learning, Schoology, Google classroom, Video, and so on. Each has its own menu which is used to plan, do, and assess all the teaching and learning activities. Both teachers and students who do not get used to apply online learning application are challenged to train themselves to select and use the most appropriate online learning application with the course. This means that their ability to use a certain application greatly contributes to the success of instructional activities. Based on the results of survey to 170 lecturers in a university in East Java, it was found that there is still some of them 1.2% who are not good in using technology in their teaching practices. Moreover, it was also found that 12.9 % of them (above fifty years old) are not sure to feel happy to use digital media to teach and 10 % claim that they do not like to use digital media to support their teaching practices. This data indicate that lecturers of digital immigrant do not easily adapt with technology. The newly users of online learning application encounter not only the way to adapt to the application, but connection and quota as well. In short, it is stated that the social fact shows that the sudden changing pattern of learning due to Covid-19 to fully online learning can't be well adapted by the newly users of an online learning application. Thus, the instructional objective can't be well achieved.

Online learning during Covid 19 pandemic which centered on the learners should affect them to be independent learners and in the context of reading they can become independent readers. Sze Yean (2019) proves that the use of information technology can promote active learning and independent learning among young students of the 21st Century. Students are required to read some references independently to finish doing their paper and to prepare for better involvement in the instructional practices. In online learning, the students have less chance to cheat and to depend on each other. With the variety of online learning activities which require the students read references mostly in English independently can trigger them to be independent readers, because students with good habits in reading affect much on the success of learning. Hariyanto (2019) in his study found that extensive reading has a contribution on students' independence learning. Thus, it can be sum up that online learning which centered on learners to read references a lot in order to support their learning activities is related much with establishing independent readers.

This paper is written based on an assumption that online learning makes students learn and read references more independently. Students with lack of independence in attending online learning will encounter problem of not being able to do the learning activities well. This is due to the fact that each student is in his own place which is apart from his classmates, so that he should be independent to tackle his own learning and technical problems. It is also assumed that online learning requires either lecturers or students to be more active, creative, and discipline, because they work with a system which was set in a way that it should be obeyed. Unlike offline learning, excuses can be easily given in some inconvenient learning atmosphere. Thus, online learning with which all instructional activities are well set at the beginning of the course can lead both lecturers and students to be more discipline, responsible, and independent so that the goals of instruction can be well achieve as well. Specifically, this paper is aimed at revealing the students' lens on obstacles of using online learning in the Reading class and the use of online learning application to bridge them becoming independent readers.

2. METHOD

This research was carried out through distributing a questionnaire survey to 2 classes which consisted of 58 EFL students staying in the fourth semester of a state Institute in East



Java. They were taking Inferential Reading Comprehension Course. The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the course in May 2020. It was done after one semester conducting online learning activities which implemented one of the online learning applications, namely Schoology. The instrument used is then a questionnaire which comprised some points, namely the student identity, their experience of using the application, the use of the application in improving their reading, the use of the application in supporting them to independent readers, the comparison between using online learning application and classroom instructional activities, and the advantages and the disadvantages of using online learning in Reading Class. The questionnaire was divided into two types, one was written in closed-ended question and the other one was in open ended question. The data collected from survey were in the form the respondents' opinion. The data collected from closed ended question were computed into percentage to find the greatest number of their voices about the use of Schoology to support achieving the learning goal, i.e. good at making inference so that they would be succeed in their reading comprehension as proved by Srisang (2017). Then they were analyzed descriptively. Meanwhile, the data from open ended question which were in the form students statement containing the advantages and the disadvantages of Schoology to learn inferential reading comprehension were analyzed descriptively. The result of data analysis was used as the basis to draw conclusion.

3. RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

There are two important findings resulted from the survey to the EFL college students who join online Inferential RC learning, namely their experience in using online learning application and its relation to building independent readers.

3.1 The newly users of online learning application really need adaptation

The survey tells that 100% or 58 out of 58 respondents (See Chart 1) declare to firstly use this online learning application for Inferential Reading Comprehension Course. It was found that 77.6% of the respondents need time to adapt with this new learning application for them. There are only 4 out of 58 respondents (6.9%) who state not necessary for them to adapt with the new application. Thus, this fact indicates that they are categorized as the newly Users of this online learning application, namely Schoology. People know that because of Covid 19 pandemic, since March 2020 all learning practices at any level in Indonesia were done through online. Some of educational institutions which get used to implement online learning or blended learning would not encounter any significant problem. However, the educational institutions which do not apply any online learning applications for any reasons such as economic, social, the availability of infrastructure, and Internet connection encounter big instructional problems. Within the first two weeks of the adaptation, most of the respondents started to complain with the online learning. In one hand, they are aware that during online learning, they have to become more independent learners. In other hand, they prefer offline learning in the classroom to online learning, because psychologically they can support each other. This can be seen in the following quoted respondent' statement:

“I just face the reality that I should learn everything alone, it's quite hard because usually when I don't understand about what I read I can ask my friend beside me directly. But in online learning, it isn't easy because sometimes I have trouble in internet signal. And discussing something but not face to face, I think it's not effective” (ADP-1)



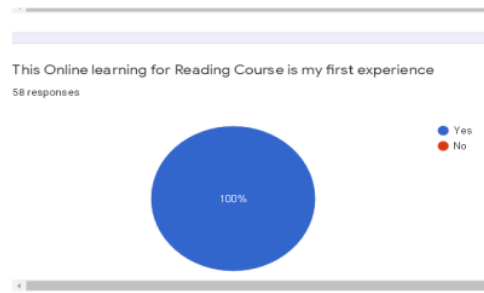


Figure 1: Respondents experience on the use of online learning application

They wanted the instruction to be carried out in the classroom, so that they could directly discuss their problems with their lecturers and their peers. There would be no more physical barriers which might lead to misunderstanding on the materials, as explicitly stated by in the respondents' quotations below:

“Yes, I misunderstand about the material because my lecturer did not explain face to face.” (ADP-2)

“...I also cannot understand all the materials well because there is no clear explanation like in the classroom”

The above quoted respondents' statements clearly show the importance of lecturer physically presence among the students in order to give clear explanation in order to avoid misunderstanding. Such a learning problem can result in the ineffectiveness of conduction online learning. Because conducting online learning in this pandemic era is a must, then lecturers are demanded to find the best and the most effective of providing the students with a clear explanation on the learning materials and interesting learning activities such as combining both synchronous and asynchronous types of instruction. Islam, C. (2019) in his study reveals that Graduate students who participate in synchronous web conferencing lectures in addition to using the asynchronous text-based lecture materials increased their understanding of the course material. These two types of learning instruction (asynchronous text-based materials and synchronous web conferencing lectures) are proved to be useful to emulate traditional face-to-face lectures so that the students will be convenient to join the Course as they are in their classroom.

The finding of the survey also shows that there is only 27.7 % respondents agree that the use of Schoology as one of the online learning applications in their Inferential Reading Course can help them improving their inferential reading skills. This indicates their confidence of achieving the learning objective of this Course. Still, most of them, 46.6% or 27 out of 58 respondents were worried whether implementing Schoology application in Reading class is beneficial to improve their inferential reading skills. Their worry is due to some problems they face, mainly, during the adaptation period. The problems cover either technical problems such as the way to operate the application, internet connection, and instrumental problem i.e. the absence of laptop/computer, or learning problem such as misunderstanding the learning materials. Thus, for the newly users of online learning application, it is necessary to conduct training of using a selected online application before a Course is started, so that during the instructional practices, the selected online learning practices can be well employed. As a consequence, this is advantageous to create convenient and interesting learning atmosphere which contributes to achieving learning goals.

3.2 The use of online learning application leads the students to be independent readers

The other important finding of the survey (See Diagram 1) explains that there are only 5.2% or 3 out of 58 respondents who disagree that this online learning application triggers the students to be independent learners. Otherwise, more than fifty percent - 37.9 % of the respondents who agree and 25.9 % who agree- claim that applying online learning application can bring them about being independent learners.

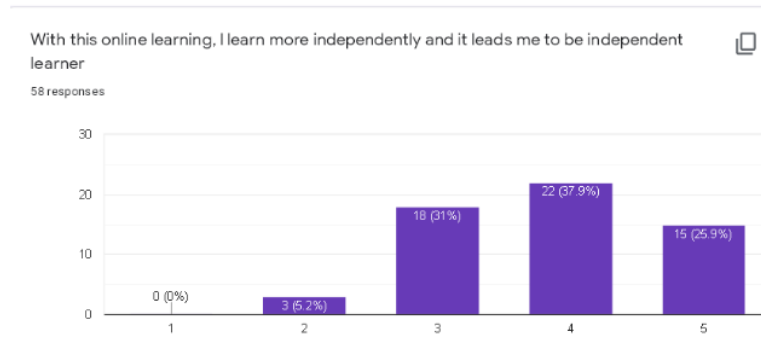


Figure 2: the relation of online learning and independent learning

As found from some of the respondents' quoted opinion that they were force by nature to read, to learn, and to get actively involved in doing all the RC learning practices independently. Their classmates to whom they are closer than to their lecturer are not able to help them.

"I don't really understand about the material, I have to study by myself even I ask my friend, there are ambiguoses and It is so hard to do it without face to face. I have to always stand on phone all the time and make me anxious." (INDL-1)
Learn and understand the material independently. (INDL-2)

It is also found from the survey that most of the respondent -62.1 % (See Diagram 3.) state that online learning application lead the students of RC Course to read various e-reading passage more independently and this can make them to become independent readers. This is due to the fact that during the instructional practices, the students who became the respondents of this survey were guided to read reading texts and doing exercises on inferential RC more independently. As revealed by Sung & Yeh (2018) who found that e-paper positively affects enhancing English reading proficiency of non-English major college students in Taiwan. Although they often encountered various learning obstacles, they had to complete the exercises and in fact they could pass very well.

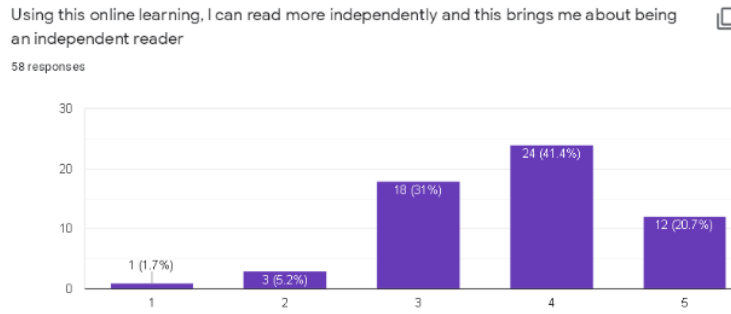


Figure 3: The relation of online learning and building independent readers

Without considering any other problems such as time limitation of learning and doing the task/exercise on Inferential RC and internet connection, working with online learning application makes the students be more strict on the time, more discipline, work harder, and more importantly, they have to learn more independently. Working under a strict schedule controlled by an online system in one hand make the students get stressed because they have to finish doing exercise on time. To the contrary, Khalil, et al (2020) in their study to Medical students in Saudi Arabia found that although they encountered some challenges, including methodological, content perception, technical, and behavioral challenges during sessions and online exams, the online modality was well-received, and all participants agreed that online sessions were time saving and that their performance was improved due to enhanced utility of time. Still, the finding of the present study proves that this system is beneficial to train student to manage their time well. This finding is supported by the following quoted respondents' opinions:

"I have to manage my time very well, such as understanding the materials, doing the exercises and submit it on time" (TM-1)

P/V ETS

The students' internet connection is the other important factor which makes them work harder to manage their time, as explicitly stated in the following quoted respondent's statement: "I have to work little faster, because the deadline is short." (TM-2). To learn independently is often resulting in students' misunderstanding, as being claimed by the respondent below:

"yes, I misunderstanding about the material because my lecturer did not explain face to face." (PoIND-1)

P/V ETS

This indicates that the newly users of online learning application need not only learning online but classroom interaction as well. The survey tells that more than a half of the respondents - 58.6% (See Diagram 2)- claim that using online learning application (Schoology) is not better than classroom instruction. This finding can be as an essential critique for the lecturers who use online learning application to evaluate its uses and benefits for their students, because the main purpose of implementing such kind of learning application is to run the course well so that the learning objective can be successfully achieved. For the newly users, implementing blended learning is considered to be more appropriate for them to conduct an effective teaching and learning activities. Warman (2018) proves that to use Whatsapp in blended learning on reading comprehension was effective, helpful and useful to support them in learning English anytime and anywhere.

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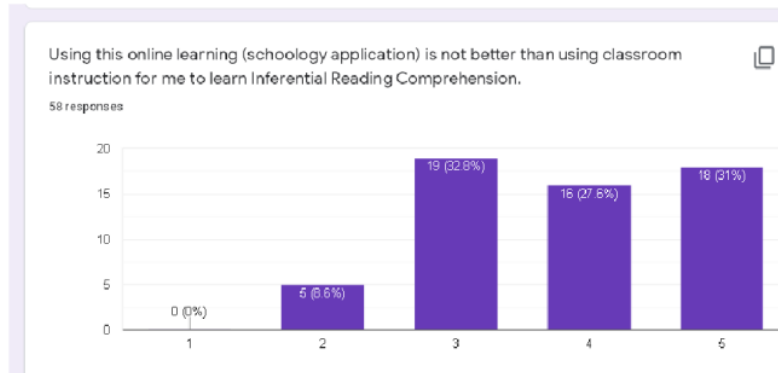


Figure 4: Respondents preference to having classroom instruction

In the other word, this study reveals that the newly users of online learning application need a certain period of adaptation. During the adaptation period, they find both technical problems and learning problems. Dealing with the first barrier, the survey proves that they find difficulties on how to use the lecturer-selected online learning application. In addition, the internet connection, signal, and the quota worsen the situation. Meanwhile, the learning problem resulted from the newly use of online learning application is that they do not get used to work under a strict scheduled time. Moreover, the lecturer explanation done through voice recording or video is not satisfying them. Although they can discuss their learning problems in the discussion forum set in the application and in their What Apps Group, psychologically they are not happy because they can't see their classmates and their lecturers directly face to face in the classroom. This problem can hinder to achieve the learning objectives. Thus, this study proves that blended learning with which students can have online and offline learning can be considered effective. This support a study carried out by Harpians and Suryani, (2019) which reveals that blended learning has significant effect on EFL student reading skills achievement. The other significant point resulted from this study is that the use of online learning application for the newly users of such kind of application is advantageous to train them and to make them become independent readers which can be as an indicator of being good at inferential reading comprehension. This present study is in line with Brannan et.al. (2020). They found that independent reading affects reading volume and achievement. This can further trigger them to be independent learners that can bring about getting academic success.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Covid 19 pandemic has changed the pattern of learning from offline through classroom interaction to online through online learning application. This change has shocked the newly users of such kind of application, because of some reasons. First, operating and applying online application needs certain skills. Secondly, for teachers of immigrant digital who are above fifty years old, implementing online learning application is not as simple as those of native digital. Even the students of digital native who are the newly users of a certain online learning application encounter some problems namely technical problems and learning problems. The first problem occurs during the adaptation period of using the application. It deals with the way to use it, internet connection, quota, and the availability of the supporting learning instruments- laptop, computer, or smart phone. A study by Zhang and Wang (2017) reveals that Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) model is more effective in stimulating college students' interest in English Reading. Meanwhile, their learning problem

is concerning with misunderstanding on the instructional materials which are usually explained through voice recording or video. The psychological problem arising because of not facing their lecturers directly in the classroom is supposed to be the main reason of students learning problem. In addition, the students' lack of reading schemata also becomes the reason of this kind of problem. However, the use of online learning application during Covid 19 pandemic has triggered the students to be independent readers because they have been forced to read independently for a certain period of time- one semester at least. In short, the implementation of online learning application for newly users on one hand is problematic for the EFL students taking Inferential Reading Comprehension Course. On the other hand, this is beneficial to bridge them to become independent readers. The result of this study can be pedagogically implemented for lecturers to make better instructional plan for conducting online teaching, so that the learning objective can be better achieved.



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