Students' Difficulties in Online Learning of English Subject during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to find out the difficulties faced by students when studying English in an online school and the solutions they use to overcome those difficulties. The objective of this descriptive qualitative research is to explain the real situation of eighth grade students' learning problems at SMPN 3 Satu Atap Karangsambung, with the researcher as the key instrument. Researchers used the WhatsApp application to disseminate a questionnaire and conduct interviews with respondents in order to collect data. In analyzing the data, the researcher detects and categorizes learning difficulties, displays and calculates the percentage of data using the original text in the form of an essay, and provides findings and recommendations after evaluating the data. The study's findings revealed five challenges that students face when studying English in an online education setting. The most common issue students have is increasing English vocabulary, which has an impact on the appearance of the other four obstacles. In addition, the majority of students utilized the same approach to overcome their learning difficulties, according to the findings. The findings of this study aid teachers in assessing the learning process in order to better meet the needs of students.

Keywords: Students' difficulties, Students' solutions, Online learning, COVID-19 Pandemic

1. Introduction

One of the most essential foreign languages to master is English, which is a worldwide language spoken by the majority of the world's population. English is still taught as a foreign language in Indonesia. This does not, however, diminish the importance of English in different sectors of life. English is even included as a local subject in kindergarten and elementary school, and it becomes an obligatory subject in junior and senior high school.

Learning English, on the other hand, is not simple for students in Indonesia. Students must master various abilities when learning English, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Students must also master the components of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, all of which are crucial in the development of English language abilities. Not to mention other variables. Learning difficulties are caused by two types of factors: internal and external factors. Internal factors include intellectual abilities, affections such as feelings and self-confidence, motivation, maturity to learn, age, gender, study habits, memory skills, and sensory abilities such as seeing, hearing, and feeling. External factors, on the other hand, are those that originate from outside the learner and are connected to the circumstances of the learning process, such as: teachers, learning quality, learning instruments or facilities in the form of hardware and software, and the environment, including the social and natural environment, are all factors to consider[1].

Especially in light of the current situation, which has seen the education system shift from conventional or face-to-face to online or distance learning methods as a result of government recommendations to minimize virus transmission since mid-March 2020. Changes in the educational system demand students to adjust rapidly, even if they are not prepared for them. Students' unpreparedness causes problems with learning, such as students who are less able to understand the content of the material that has been presented through online media by teachers, internet networks that are occasionally disrupted, and a lack of use of online learning media. As a result, certain subject matter that necessitates the use of specific learning tools or media can not be fully transmitted by the instructor[2].

Karangsambung is one of the Kebumen Regency sub-districts that has been infected with the COVID-19 virus. As a result, schools in the Karangsambung sub-district take part in enforcing social constraints while continuing to learn independently at home. 3 SMPN Satu Atap Karangsambung is one of the schools that uses online learning. In accordance with the Central Java Governor's Circular on Prevention of the Spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) in Education Units in Central Java, this school has been offering online learning since mid-March. Following up on the circular, the Kebumen Regency Education Office sent a circular titled "Increasing Awareness Against the Risk of Transmission of COVID-19 Infection" to all principals of PAUD/TK, SD, and SMP, both public and private, throughout the regency. The letter's contents are written in the form of an invitation to students to study independently at home, receive creative assignments from teachers, use online learning through the use of ICT, and maintain personal health through handwashing and living healthy lives (Mohammad Amirudin, 16/03/2020).

As a result, researchers hope to do research on these issues at SMPN 3 Satu Atap Karangsambung, one of the schools that uses an online or remote learning system. This research attempts to discover students' learning difficulties and solutions, so that they may be used by teachers to evaluate the learning process and make it more successful.

2. Literature Review

a) Learning Difficulties

Learning problems are a state in the learning process defined by specific barriers to obtaining learning outcomes[3]. This is reinforced by Subini's opinion, which states that learning problems are a condition in which the competences or achievements attained do not meet the established standard requirements, both in terms of attitudes, knowledge, and skills[4].

From some of the ideas presented above, it can be inferred that difficulty is a state in which students face specific challenges during learning, as evidenced by less-than-ideal learning results.

Students who have learning difficulties frequently exhibit symptoms of learning difficulties, such as 1) low learning achievement, as measured by a value below a predetermined standard, 2) results that are not commensurate with effort, and 3) slowness in performing or performing the tasks of learning a subject. That is, students with learning disabilities frequently have a lower degree of competence than their peers. Students' sluggishness has an impact on their learning results as well as their conduct[5].

Learning problems are affected by a variety of variables that may be divided into two categories: internal factors that originate within the learner and external factors that originate outside the student. According to Slameto's perspective, there are numerous sorts of variables that impact student learning problems, but they can only be divided into two groups: internal and external factors[6].

b) Problem Solving

Problem solving is an endeavor to overcome roadblocks on the way to a solution[7]. Problem solving is a scientific process in which a person goes through a phase of comprehending the problem, then seeks the knowledge needed to choose a solution and assess it[8]. As a result, problem solving is a scientific thinking method for determining the best answer to issues faced in order to accomplish the desired results.

Meanwhile, Ling and Catling see problem solving as a talent that is employed in a variety of situations every day, such as writing an essay or creating a daily routine[9]. That is, issue solving is very near to everyday life since people encounter numerous challenges while going about their daily tasks. A person who is accustomed to getting into difficulty will continue to learn and become wiser in choosing the best solution for the situation.

In order to solve a problem, a person must go through several phases of problem-solving before determining the best course of action. 1) problem identification, 2) problem description and representation, 3) plan development, 4) information organization, 5) resource allocation, 6) monitoring, and 7) assessment[10]. To summarize, the first stage in issue solving is to identify the problem at hand so that a strategy may be developed and then used to solve the problem, after which the approach is evaluated to see if it is appropriate or not.

c) **Online Learning**

Ivanova, et al. defined online learning as learning that takes place online via the use of learning apps and social networks[11]. The goal of the web application is to improve studens' independence and activity[12]. Online learning is a type of learning that involves the use of digital devices and the internet to make learning more engaging, creative, and autonomous[13].

As a result, online learning may be defined as distant learning that incorporates technology to make it more engaging with the goal of developing students' activeness and independence.

The use of online learning has both advantages and disanvantages. The advantage of online learning is that educators and students can connect more readily since they are not limited by distance, place, or time. Students may also study using a wide range of references since they have access to the internet, allowing them to broaden their knowledge and perspective. Distance learning can also help students develop their independence. The limits of distance learning include a lack of connection between professors and students or between students and other students, as well as a lack of student enthusiasm for studying, which causes students to overlook the academic side of the learning process and causes them to fail[14].

d) **COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Corona virus, also known as Servere Acure Respiratory Syndrome, is a virus that causes respiratory problems. Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a novel virus that affects infected people's respiratory systems. It's also known as COVID-19 [15]. At the end of 2019, the Corona-19 virus began to spread in Wuhan, China [16]. The origins of this outbreak were linked to the Basah Market in Wuhan, where it was thought that the virus was transferred from animals to humans. The Wuhan City Health Commission issued an emergency notification, reporting 44 patients with severe pneumonia to the World Health Organization (WHO). Until then, the World Health Organization in 2020 dubbed this new virus Corona virus 2019, or COVID-19. Fever, cough, myalgia, shortness of breath, headache, diarrhea, nausea, and stomach discomfort are the most common symptoms of this viral infection [17]. During its progression, however, patients with asymptomatic viral infections characterized by a loss of sense of smell and taste are also seen. Based on the symptoms, this virus was first considered to be comparable to SARS and MERS, but it turned out that this disease was more widespread in its spread. This is expected to occur through direct contact with virus-infected people.

Because of the possibility of virus transmission between people, the virus's pace of spread has grown to the point where it has spread to more than 100 nations, including the State of Indonesia. The COVID-19 virus initially appeared in Indonesia in early March 2020 and has since spread throughout the country. It was recorded from the united against COVID-19 application, which is an integrated information system to increase the acceleration of data recording in the context of accelerating the handling of COVID-19 in Indonesia, that the number of positive COVID-19 patients was 1,831,773 cases until Thursday (2/6/2021). This figure has risen by 5,246 instances in the previous 24 hours.

With this epidemic, the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, released a circular letter managing the COVID-19 outbreak. Through SE Number 3 of 2020, handling instructions for the avoidance of COVID-19 in education units are directed to province, district, and municipal Education Offices, universities, university leaders, and school administrators. The circular provides 18 directions that education units must follow (CNN Indonesia, 2020).

3. Method

The descriptive qualitative research approach was employed in this research. Qualitative research is more concerned with describing the state, nature, or value of an object, or specific symptoms[18]. This remark is in line with the findings of research done at SMPN 3 Satu Atap Karangsambung with the goal of better understanding a situation of learning difficulties for eighth grade students. Researchers are key instruments in this case since the researcher operate independently in the data collecting process, with the help of supporting instruments such as questionnaires and interviews.

The researcher utilized a questionnaire distribution strategy to send questionnaires to chosen subjects, namely all eighth grade students at SMPN 3 Satu Atap Karangsambung, and conducted interviews with four selected students using the WhatsApp application, with the findings being used as data. The researcher employs the triangulation technique to check the validity of the data, which is the technique of testing the validity of the data by using anything other than the data itself for checking reasons or as a comparison against the data[19]. The researcher utilized method triangulation and source triangulation approaches in this research.

In order to analyze the data, the researcher took the following steps: 3) presenting data in descriptive essays using original text, 4) calculating the number and percentage of data, 5) discussing the findings, and 6) drawing conclusions and recommendations.

4. Findings

In conducting the research, the researcher focused the research by specifying the questionnaire and interview questions into four guidelines, namely symptoms of learning difficulties, factors of learning difficulties, students' learning difficulties, and students' learning solutions. These findings can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. Specification of Questionnaire

No	Component of Questionnaire	Number of Questionnaire	Total Item
1	The symptoms of students' learning difficulties	1 – 5	5
2	The factors of students' learning difficulties	6 – 14 & 18	10
3	Students' learning difficulties	15 – 17	3
4	The solutions of students' learning	19 – 25	7

Table 2. Interview Guideline

No	Component of Questionnaire	Number of Questionnaire	Total Item
1	Opinions or detailed explanations of students' opinions on symptoms of learning difficulties	1 – 5	5
2	Opinions or detailed explanations of students' opinions on factors of learning difficulties	6 – 14 & 18	10
3	Opinions or detailed explanations of students' learning difficulties	15 – 17	3
4	Students' statements on learning solutions	19 – 25	7

The following are the results of questionnaire data taken from the eighth grade students of SMPN 3 Satap Karangsambung with a total of 36 students:

Table 3. The Questionnaire Result

	The outcome of the data		
Total	Number of Questionnaire	Yes	No
	25	519	381
	Percentage	57.7%	42.3%

Based on the table above, with the number of questionnaire statements as many as 25 statements, the percentage of "Yes" answers is 57.7%, while the percentage of "No" answers is 42.3%. The results were taken from the number of students, as many as 36 students.

Based on the answers of the questionnaire, it can be inferred that students exhibit signs of learning difficulties such as lower learning outcomes and a disinterest in following lessons, as evidenced by the disinterest of students who have never examined the material given by the teacher. The data also reveals a number of elements that impact pupils' learning problems. Internal factors, such as 1) lack of students' interest in the lesson, 2) lack of mastery of the language, 3) students' lack of basic skills and knowledge of the material being taught, 4) laziness in studying and lack of effort in learning, and 5) incorrect student study habits are divided into two categories. Then there are external factors, such as 1) teachers' media and teaching methods are disliked by students, 2) a lack of relationship between teachers and students due to lack of interaction, 3) curriculum factors that reduce learning time, 4) students' social environment factors, and 5) a lack of books as learning materials. Based on the data gathered, it appears that students are having difficulty learning.

The percentages are from the calculation below:

Answer "Yes" $= \frac{519}{900} \ x \ 100\%$

Answer "No" $= \frac{381}{900} \ x \ 100\%$

$P = \frac{Total \ answer}{total \ number \ of \ answer} \ x \ 100\%$

The following are the results of interviews conducted with 4 students from the eighth grade of SMPN 3 Satap Karangsambung:

Table 3. The Questionnaire Result

Interview Guideline	Conclusion
Opinions or detailed explanations of students' opinions on symptoms of learning difficulties	• The students' grades dropped. • Material is rarely examined by students. • Students are behind on completing and collecting their assignments.
Opinions or detailed explanations of students' opinions on factors of learning difficulties	• Students' lack of interest • Only a few learning aid books are available. • Teachers and students have less interaction. • There was no variation in methods or medium. • The mood in the online class was monotonous. • The environment was less favorable.
Opinions or detailed explanations of students' learning difficulties	• Difficulty in comprehending the material and completing duties • The number of words in one's vocabulary did not expand. • English basic skills deteriorate
Students' statements on learning solutions	• Make use of an online dictionary • Utilizing Google • Enlisting the assistance of others

5. Discussion
a) **Students' Difficulties in Learning English During Online School**
1) Difficulty to Understand the Material of English
   - Students have trouble understanding English content because they have a restricted vocabulary. As a result, they are perplexed when trying to comprehend the subject. Another reason that makes it difficult for students to grasp the information is that in online classrooms, the teacher merely delivers material through Google Classroom and does not provide a thorough explanation. Students at online school are expected to study the subject on their own time. Students with a limited vocabulary will struggle if they are expected to study the subject on their own without guidance from the teacher.
   - Another source of difficulty is students' reluctance to approach the instructor in question when they are having difficulties. In this situation, it indicates that because school is performed online, there is less interaction between teachers and students. The absence of teacher engagement with students has an influence on the tight relationship between instructors and students, lowering students' self-confidence to seek aid from their teachers when they are having problems. Students will never be able to comprehend the subject if they are ashamed to ask the teacher if they do not understand it.
2) Difficulty in doing English task
   - When working on English questions, students show signs of difficulties. Students' grades have been dropping since they began online learning, indicating this problem. Students have difficulties working on English questions since the questions contain a large number of vocabulary that they are unfamiliar with. Not only that, but another symptom is the behavior of students who repeatedly postpone their English tasks, causing them to be late in collecting them. If students believe they can accomplish it, there is a slim chance they will put off working. Another indicator is that students utilize Google to look for answers to English problems. Students will not require Google's assistance in finding solutions if they are able to work on issues using the outcomes of their own thinking.
3) Difficulty in improving basic skills English
   - Students' fundamental basic skills in English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) have not improved and have even worsened after starting online education. Because teachers do not offer online practice activities in online schools, students do not have the opportunity to perfect their abilities. Because teachers seldom develop interactive online classrooms, these abilities are rarely employed in online classes. Students also lack the courage to practice on their own as a result of their unsupportive social environment, which actually lowers their self-confidence when studying.
4) Difficulty in adding english vocabulary
   - Since the online school, students' learned vocabulary has been lost or forgotten since it is not utilized frequently, resulting in a drop in the amount of English vocabulary mastered by students rather than an increase. Students do not take initiative to memorize new vocabulary during online school because they are unsure which vocabulary to begin memorizing first because the number of vocabulary is overwhelming, and the teacher does not direct students to memorize certain vocabulary that they require in learning English.
5) Difficulty to determine the right learning method during online school
   - When it comes to learning difficulties, students are still overly reliant on the teacher's instruction and seek the quick fix. This is especially challenging if you're still in an online education setting where students are expected to study individually. Because they only take online classes from institutions with limited durations, students believe that online learning is dull.

b) **Students' Difficulties in Learning English During Online School**
1) Using online dictionary
   - Most students choose to utilize online dictionaries rather than paper dictionaries to overcome the obstacles of studying English in online school. Online dictionaries are

seen to be more useful and, of course, simple to use. Students utilize online dictionaries to assist them comprehend certain words that they don't understand. Students utilize Google Translate and other translation apps, as well as online dictionaries.

2) Using google
   - Students frequently utilize Google assistance to overcome the obstacles of studying English in online school. Students utilize Google to research and answer questions.

3) Asking for help from other people
   - Students' final option is to seek assistance from other students who are deemed clever or who can assist them in English classes. Students frequently seek assistance from seniors, relatives, and neighbors who they believe can assist them in English classes.

6. Conclusion

Based on the results of data analysis, researchers can draw several conclusions. Researchers found that the difficulty most often experienced by students is difficulty in adding English vocabulary with the percentage results found that 100% of students answered 'yes', which means that all 36 students agreed if they had difficulty adding English vocabulary. Although there are other difficulties that show the same percentage, it is the lack of vocabulary mastered by students that affects the emergence of other students' difficulties. Meanwhile, the most rare difficulty experienced by students, among other difficulties, is the difficulty in determining the right learning method during online school. This is because some students have been able to determine the right learning method which is supported by several questionnaire questions that do not show 100% results. Researchers also found that most students have the same solution to overcoming their learning difficulties. These solutions include using online dictionaries to help students interpret vocabulary that they don't understand, using Google primarily to help find answers to questions, and asking for help from other people who students think they can in English lessons to teach them during online school.

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