English Grammar Learning during the Covid Pandemic: Indonesian Students Voice

by Istanti Hermagustiana

ENGLISH GRAMMAR LEARNING DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC: INDONESIAN STUDENTS' VOICE

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Abstract

This current study seeks to scrutinize the Indonesian students' views of English Grammar (EG) learning during the Covid 19 pandemic in one of the universities in Indonesia. Ten participants of the fourth semester students of English Education Department got involved in the study. The data were obtained from open questions administered through an online platform. The data were qualitatively analyzed using thematic analysis. Some themes were identified from their responses towards the questions, namely online interaction between the lecturer and students, comfort and flexibility of online learning, distracted learning situation, and the preference on the face-to-face classroom. In addition, it was found that the participants indicated the supports they perceived during learning EG in virtual classrooms. Some implications toward teaching and learning in the future will be discussed.

Keywords: *English Grammar, Indonesian students, online learning, qualitative analysis*

Introduction

A new virus was discovered at the end of 2019 and quickly spread during the first months of 2020. The World Health Organization (WHO) named the recently discovered virus COVID-19 on February 11, 2020, and by March 11, the disease had been deemed a pandemic (Doctors without Borders, n.d.). In addition to widespread infection and loss of life, attempts to curb the virus's dissemination had a significant effect on many industries around the world, including tourism, industry, and education. Many states and organizations instituted physical separation mechanisms in order to shield people. Although such interventions protected physical wellbeing, they also generated feelings of alienation, depression, and loneliness in certain people, which had an effect on their mental and emotional health. Though stress, or emotional burden, is a universal part of the human condition, it may have a negative effect on basic body functions such as sleep, metabolism, and immune systems, as well as undermine overall health and wellness (e.g., Tovian, et al., 2017).

Wang et al. (2020) identified the virus's early effects, including agitation and stress, difficulties associated with home confinement, and health concerns for family and extended family. Among other findings, they discovered that students had higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than those of non-students. Such results imply that disadvantaged individuals, such as students, may need additional assistance when confronted with stressful challenges such as those caused by the pandemic. Researchers expect that physical separation and widespread feelings of fear caused by the COVID-19 pandemic would trigger a wide range of educational difficulties, including poor academic results (Sintema, 2020), concerns around students' physical fitness and well-being (Rundle et al., 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020), as well as negative disruptions to internal and public reviews (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020).

As the virus started to spread rapidly, some colleges soon closed to protect students and teachers, while others switched to online teaching and learning using different internet-based services. In that situation, students must resume their studies from home using an online learning system. This is the only option for ensuring that students continue to learn despite the crisis. According to Jena (2020), online learning is a learning system that makes use of the internet. Teachers maintain an unphysical presence in the simulated classroom by providing a supportive and relaxed atmosphere for students (Joshua, 2018).

Teachers have required students to have English experience in speaking or listening by using a video conference or zoom application; however, not all students will be able to join because their Android smart phones do not allow it. Despite the fact that the schools or colleges included a free internet access plan, this issue could not have been resolved adequately. According to Pallof and Pratt in Gudea (2008), teaching online isn't always simple because it needs direction and tough work. It is

concluded that teachers should have to spend more time developing resources and activities, assessing students, and other aspects of online instruction.

A number of research have recently been examining online learning as the solution to provide students from various disciplines with adequate facilities to catch up with learning materials (Al Amin et al., 2021; Almetzawi et al., 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Destianingish & Satria, 2020; Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020; Moser et al., 2021). Despite the previous studies concerning online learning due to the pandemic, little is known about how students perceive their learning condition when learning English Grammar through a virtual classroom using the Zoom platform. Therefore, the researcher is interested in exploring: 1) How do the students view English Grammar (EG) learning during the Covid 19 pandemic?, and 2) What supports the students' understanding of English grammar during the pandemic?

Methods

In this research, a qualitative case study design was applied to discover students' perceptions of English grammar learning which was delivered online through various online platforms. The data were collected from ten English students of Advanced English Grammar which is considered one of the courses taken by the fourth semester students and were administered through an open ended online questionnaire using the G-form platform. The participants were selected following the convenience sampling technique by choosing the students who could be reached conveniently. This sampling was properly chosen due to the pandemic situation in which it was difficult to reach all students for data collection. The data were then analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis process. From the analysis, a number of themes related to the students' views on English grammar learning and supporting and impeding factors of understanding English grammar during the pandemic were revealed.

Findings

The findings of this current study were divided into two parts according to the research questions.

1. How do the students view English Grammar learning during the Covid 19 pandemic?

This first question uncovered a number of themes which were derived from the participants' responses of the questions. There were four themes obtained, namely: online interaction between the lecturer and other students, comfort and flexibility of online learning, preference of face to face interaction, and distracted learning situations.

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Online Interaction between the Lecturer and Other Students

Most of students realized that there was no other way of communicating and interacting with others in the classroom but through online interaction. The learning and teaching situation in the Covid-19 pandemic was seen as the biggest reason why learning and teaching must be done online. From the responses, most of them agreed on the use of teaching platforms which were commonly used to learn EG during the pandemic as seen in the following excerpts:

> *"We used Zoom meeting & WA group to communicate and interact. Some grammar tests were formally conducted through a google form, for example, the mid-term quiz and some other formative tests. But, the lecturer often gave some practice on Zoom, too. If time was over, it was continued on WAG"* (P1).

> *"I learned grammar through Zoom meeting and WAG with my friends. I communicated directly with my lecturer when trying to answer a question on Zoom meeting"* (P2).

From the above answers, it was found out that the complexity of English Grammar learning was shown by the continuation of learning process from the Zoom platform as the synchronous virtual classroom to the asynchronous WhatsApp Group (WAG) due to the limited time of virtual classroom. As a consequence, they used the opportunity to learn EG online by asking questions and doing exercises on Zoom which would be continued to the asynchronous discussion on WAG.

Comfort and Flexibility of Online Learning

Despite the emergency situation, some participants felt comfort and flexibility in learning English Grammar online. This is shown from the following responses they stated:

> *"When learning EG, I felt more comfortable because I didn't need to dress up while learning"* (P2).

> *"I like online learning because I learnt from my own room, I could be more relaxed and comfortable compared to face to face learning"* (P7).

> *"I like learning from home because it feels like at home, the atmosphere is more relaxed and more flexible, for example, when it is really tired to sit, you can rest"* (P10).

From the responses, it was shown that online learning lead to the feeling of comfort and flexibility to the students that bring positive motivation in learning.

The Preference on Face-To-Face Classrooms

While asked about their opinion pertaining to the types of classroom they prefer between online and face-to-face, all of the participants approved that face-to-face classroom was still the best option for them to understand materials compared to learning through online platforms. Some of the participants affirmed as follows:

"I prefer to have F2F interaction because it will make me understand more through visual situation. For example: lecturers cannot confirm whether students understand or not because no camera on Zoom meeting" (P1).

"In terms of the learning materials, I feel that I could understand them more when I learnt F2F with my lecture. For example, when the lecturer saw my face, usually she could understand, "ah, this student doesn't understand", so she explained again" (P8).

Distracted Learning Situation

Most of the participants believed that online learning lead to uncomfortable and distracted learning situations, such as the feeling of tired, sleepy, annoyed by surrounding at home, etc. Some different situations were briefly described from their responses:

"I enjoyed learning online, but sometimes I felt worried because when I felt too relaxed, I might become very lazy, for example, I might be learning while sleeping at the same time, or I probably could open other websites or play online games instead of focusing on the lecture, So, there may be too much distraction" (P2).

"When learning EG online, being focused is very difficult to do because there must be something or many things that can distract me from learning so this makes it more difficult for me to pay attention to the lecture.... I don't like the online class because sometimes when I wasn't ready with the materials or when I felt sleepy as I kept looking at the laptop all day long, I couldn't understand the material well" (P3).

2. What supports the students' understanding of English grammar during the pandemic?

The online learning situations are quite difficult for students. However, some supporting factors were known to be providing assistance for students to understand the materials of EG. The students' responses can be shown as follows:

Lecturer's explanation on Zoom meetings

One factor which helps students comprehend the materials in remote learning is the explanation from the lecturer. This factor is believed to give a good help to make students understand the grammar lessons. Some of the participants confirmed that:

"The lecture explanation is the main factor that helps me understand the material" (P3).

"I prefer having a Zoom meeting with the lecturer explaining rather than doing practice online on Google form" (P4).

"I am the person who learns better when being explained by the lecturer rather than reading the materials by my own" (P5).

"Despite the provided materials, I needed my lecturer to explain it before I did the exercises" (P7).

Friends' explanation

In addition to the lecturer's explanation, their classmates play a role in helping them understand the materials. When the lecturer's help was solely reached when they had a virtual meeting, friends' assistance in explaining the grammatical items was more easily obtained. It is revealed from the following excerpts:

"When I had trouble, I usually asked questions and had discussions with my friends who were more knowledgeable because I think it really helped me when I didn't understand a material and my friends helped me understand" (P3).

"When I didn't understand the explanation from the lecturer, the explanation from my friend also helped me understand the material" (P5).

Youtube Videos

The use of audiovisual materials supported the students to grasp the EG materials. One of the learning sources where those materials can be virtually

grabbed. The ease of technology use benefits the students from expanding their knowledge of EG. This can be seen from the following excerpts:

"To understand more about EG, I tried to watch videos on YouTube, the videos with the easiest explanation with understandable vocabulary and speech from the native speakers" (P5).

"Videos on YouTube helped me a lot when I didn't understand the materials of EG, even when my lecturer and friend had explained it to me" (P7).

Online Written Materials

Online written materials here refer to the relevant English grammar materials either provided by the lecturer through Powerpoint presentation or browsed freely from the internet. These materials are believed to improve students' understanding towards the given grammar topics. This is clearly seen from the following responses:

"Searching materials on internet is my preference during the pandemic because it provides complete materials, from lower to higher level of difficulty" (P6).

"The lecturer also provided her own self-made learning materials and practice in the form of powerpoints that could be used as a reference in learning. The materials were usually sent to us through WAG" (P9).

Discussion

The exploration of students' perceptions of online EG learning has proven that both the lecturer and students have done their best in undergoing English Grammar learning during the pandemic. A number of advantages of English grammar online learning through a virtual classroom reveals that students perceive positive sides of it. This is in line with a study done by Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) that found out that, in addition to the feeling of stress, frustration, and fear of the pandemic, the teacher and students had sense of priority to teach and learn English more diligently than they did previously.

This current study also revealed that Zoom was primarily used as the selected platform to convey the teaching and learning tasks in which it echoed a previous study which unveiled a similar situation where Zoom was preferred by the majority of the students and teachers in providing instruction and explanation of the lessons (Destianingsih & Satria, 2020). In addition, WhatsApp is considered another best interaction application to connect the effective communication between the lecturer and other students as stated by Klobas &

Renzi that students' interaction and engagement must be well supported by technology. In other words, technology which is applied well and wisely for teaching will result in effective students' learning.

Apart from the difficulties that might come along with the advantages of technology, virtual education is now becoming a new norm, so teachers' attempts to understand students' needs in learning virtually is a great challenge for the teachers (Witze, 2020).

Conclusion and Implications

The aims of the study is to explore students' views on the online English Grammar learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, including the supporting factors which help the students understand the materials in a remote learning context. Based on the results, it was revealed that the students viewed EG learning during the Covid 19 pandemic as something that is comfortable and flexible, but also unpleasant at the same time. Some aspects support the students' understanding of EG such as lecturer's and friends' explanation, online videos, and online written materials. All of the factors are inseparable factors which were used intertwined one another. It is hoped that when the pandemic is over, the teaching and learning situations can go well again. However, the use of technology to facilitate online learning can continue to keep supporting students' learning process.

The present research gives contributions to the literature on online language learning in EFL context from teachers' perspective. From the current study, some relevant implications can be highlighted. First, the lecturers are required to identify students' psychological problem when they learn English Grammar online. Learning English grammar is not like when the students are assigned to speak or listen to something freely, instead, they need to be provided with clear ideas on particular grammatical items. Second, the virtual classroom would be more meaningful if it is provided with various online grammar learning activities to attract students' attention so that they won't be distracted from other things but focusing only on the lectures. Las but not the least, both students and lecture should negotiate concerning the anticipatory actions when the internet connection problem occurs in the middle of the lectures, such as preparing another back-up virtual classroom just in case the main classroom was disrupted before the course begins or in the middle of the course.

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