

Distance Learning: Challenges and Opportunities in the Context of Language Learning in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Background. Distance learning has become a major focus in the higher education context, especially in line with digital transformation and the global pandemic. The background to this change creates the need to understand students' perceptions of distance learning, especially in language learning at Indonesian universities.

Purpose. This research aims to contribute to the development of a better learning system through a quantitative approach with survey methods. The aim of this research is to analyze student perceptions of distance learning and identify factors that can increase its effectiveness.

Method. This research methodology adopts a quantitative study design with a survey approach. The research objects are language students at various universities in Indonesia. The research sample consisted of 30 respondents selected purposively, covering various demographic characteristics. Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, allowing participation of students from various geographic areas.

Results. The research results showed that although students felt ready for distance learning, there were concerns regarding inequalities with face-to-face learning. The main challenges involve limited internet connections and communication difficulties. However, opportunities arise through easy access to materials and independent development of skills. Data analysis focuses on the interpretation of results, highlighting the importance of technological infrastructure and more effective communication strategies.

Conclusion. The conclusion of this research is that a deeper understanding of student perceptions of distance learning can provide a foundation for improving learning experiences and effectiveness in the future. By understanding the challenges and opportunities students face, educational institutions can direct their efforts towards necessary updates and improvements, so that distance learning can provide a more meaningful and equivalent experience to face-to-face learning.

KEYWORDS

Challenges, Distance Learning, Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

Significant improvements in the domain of information and communication technology have given a major boost to the paradigm of education, particularly in higher education (Saykili, 2019).



This shift is reflected in the phenomenon of distance learning (PJJ), which has attracted major attention in discussions and thoughts in education (- Lie et al., 2020a). This phenomenon not only reflects an essential transformation in teaching and learning approaches, but also accommodates the challenges and opportunities that arise along with technological developments and the demands of increasingly complex educational needs (Harteis et al., 2020).

The context of higher education becomes the main stage for the development of distance learning, where universities play a central role in preparing future generations (Núñez-Canal et al., 2022). Through distance learning, the challenges that arise can be balanced with the opportunities accommodated by technological advances. However, the background of distance learning is not only a response to technological advances, but also due to the urgent need for wider and more inclusive access to education (Williamson et al., 2020).

Distance learning emerges as an answer to geographical constraints that often limit access to higher education (Khan et al., 2020). These constraints can range from physical limitations of the region to economic aspects that can prevent students from various walks of life and regions from accessing higher education. By engaging students from all walks of life (Chang et al., 2021).

Further examined, the lack of motivation among students is also an aspect that cannot be ignored. Distance learning requires a high level of motivation to ensure students remain committed to the learning material, and the absence of physical interaction with lecturers or classmates can reduce the sense of engagement, which in turn can affect the learning process (Besser et al., 2022).

Another obstacle lies in the aspect of infrastructure and accessibility, especially in remote or inland areas (Wei et al., 2022). Limited technological infrastructure can prevent students from accessing learning materials effectively (Alim et al., 2019). In this increasingly connected world, such limitations can widen the gap in access to education, posing significant challenges to the implementation of equitable and inclusive distance learning.

In the face of the complexity of distance learning challenges, solutions are essential in improving the effectiveness and quality of language learning in higher education (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022). One of the proposed solutions is the utilization of advanced technologies, such as online learning platforms and artificial intelligence-based applications. The integration of these advanced technologies is expected to enhance students' learning experience and support the development of language skills (Burbules et al., 2020).

In order to increase student motivation, engaging and challenging learning strategies are also a key focus (Seli & Dembo, 2019). This approach may include the use of interactive learning methods, online discussions, and creative assignments relevant to the language learning context (Webb & Doman, 2020). Thus, it is expected to increase student participation and dedication to the learning process.

In the past decade, the landscape of higher education has witnessed a notable surge in the prominence of online learning. Despite the substantial body of research devoted to this domain, educators remain apprehensive about the effective integration of online learning methods. This study endeavors to contribute to the discourse by evaluating the effectiveness of an online Business English course within the realm of higher education. The research delves into a comparative analysis of student satisfaction in an online versus face-to-face Business English course, aiming to elucidate the extent to which the online learning environment enhances the student experience and identifying factors influencing satisfaction. The findings reveal noteworthy distinctions in student satisfaction levels between the two modalities of learning English as a foreign language. Notably, students participating in the face-to-face course exhibited higher overall satisfaction across various dimensions compared to their online counterparts. This research sheds light on the nuanced

dynamics of student satisfaction in different learning environments, providing valuable insights for educators and institutions navigating the landscape of online education (Tratnik et al., 2019).

The study examines the challenges faced by university teachers in implementing online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Russian higher education, focusing on Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University. Using various research methods, including surveys, 87 teachers shared their experiences. Key challenges identified include varying computer literacy, inadequate university electronic support, and the readiness of both academic staff and students for online learning. Respondents highlighted the distinct methodological demands of digital teaching. The study emphasizes the need for psychological, technological, and methodological support, along with professional development programs, to enhance the efficiency of online education in the face of rapid educational changes (Almazova et al., 2020).

This study investigates the readiness of university students for online learning following the rapid transition prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Analyzing data from 399 students in two online courses in Malaysia, the research finds that students, in general, are prepared for online learning. Females and degree students show higher readiness, satisfaction, and better experiences compared to their counterparts. However, more than half of the respondents express reluctance to continue online learning in the future. The preferred method is through pre-recorded lectures on platforms like Google Classroom and YouTube. Challenges differ, with degree students citing internet connectivity issues, while diploma students struggle with understanding subject content. The study emphasizes the need for investments in internet infrastructure and additional training for academics to enhance online teaching skills in the ongoing era of online learning (Chung et al., 2020).

From three previous studies, we look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education (Saputra, 2022), particularly in the urgent transition to online learning. The studies covered the effectiveness of online business language learning, challenges faced by lecturers in Russia, and student preparedness in Malaysia. In this context, the next study aims to contribute to the development of a better learning system. With a focus on students' perceptions of distance learning, this study will analyze the factors that can improve its effectiveness. A quantitative survey method is used to gain deeper insights. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide practical guidance to improve the quality of distance learning, particularly in the context of language learning in higher education.

The next issue that arises is the lack of motivation among students. Distance learning requires a high level of motivation from students to remain committed to the learning. The absence of physical interaction with lecturers or classmates can reduce the sense of engagement, which in turn can be detrimental to the learning process. This can be detrimental to the development of language skills, as low motivation can affect students' level of participation and dedication to learning.

Another issue is related to infrastructure and accessibility. Some regions, especially those located in rural or remote areas, may experience constraints in technological infrastructure that can affect the quality of distance learning. Limited access to stable internet and modern technology devices are serious obstacles in ensuring that all students can access learning materials smoothly and effectively.

In the face of these problems, the solutions provided are crucial in improving the effectiveness of distance learning in the context of language learning in higher education (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021). One of the proposed solutions is the utilization of advanced technology. The integration of online learning platforms, artificial intelligence-based applications, and other advanced technologies can provide a more interactive learning experience and support the development of

language skills (Hendradi, 2020). By utilizing advanced technology, distance learning can be designed to be more engaging and in line with students' needs and interests.

The importance of this research lies not only in the identification of problems and proposed solutions, but also in the contribution it can make to our understanding of the effectiveness of distance learning in the context of language learning in higher education. By conducting this research, it is hoped that there will be an increased understanding of the extent to which distance learning can overcome the constraints faced in language learning.

By understanding the background, problems, and solutions associated with distance learning in language learning in higher education, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the development of a better learning system. Through a quantitative approach using the survey method, this study aims to analyze students' perceptions of distance learning and identify factors that can improve its effectiveness.

By conducting this research, it is hoped that solutions can be found that can improve the implementation of distance learning in the context of language learning in higher education. The contribution of this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth view of the challenges and opportunities of distance learning in the world of language education. Hopefully, the findings of this study can provide practical guidance for policy makers, teachers, and students in improving the effectiveness of distance learning in language learning in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is designed as a quantitative study that uses a survey approach to analyze students' perceptions of distance learning in the context of higher education (Gonçalves et al., 2020). This research design was chosen because it allows for the collection of large amounts of data from respondents representing diverse backgrounds. The object of our research is language students at various universities in Indonesia, who are considered to have unique experiences in online language learning.

The sample of this study consisted of 30 purposively selected respondents, with consideration of diverse demographic characteristics, such as semester level, gender, and college. The selection of this relatively small sample aims to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions and cover a fairly representative spectrum of the Indonesian language student population. Data collection is done using a questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The link to the questionnaire will be shared in a WhatsApp group containing language students from various universities. This approach is expected to facilitate the participation of students from diverse geographical areas in Indonesia, providing a rich diversity of perspectives on distance learning.

The questionnaires will cover various aspects, such as students' perceptions of the effectiveness of distance learning, their satisfaction with the learning methods applied, challenges faced during online learning, and their expectations for the improvement of distance learning in the future. In the data analysis stage, we will apply Miles Huberman data analysis technique (Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). Data collected through Google Forms will be processed and analyzed descriptively. The steps of this analysis include classification and categorization of answers, processing descriptive statistics such as mean, median, and standard deviation, as well as comparing variables between semester level, gender, and college. By doing so, we will be able to identify trends, patterns, and significant differences in students' perceptions of distance learning.

In addition, data analysis will focus on the interpretation of the results to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence college students' perceptions. We will compare results from different groups of respondents, such as comparisons between semester levels, gender, and

colleges. Thus, we hope to present comprehensive and relevant findings in the understanding of how language students in Indonesian tertiary institutions respond to distance learning. This research contributes to the development of a better learning system by providing a deep insight into students' perceptions of distance learning. Through the quantitative approach, this research is expected to provide practical guidance for policy makers, teachers, and students in improving the quality of distance learning in the future.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Distance Learning Experience

Distance Learning Experience covers the entire series of learning processes in which interactions between educators and students occur without requiring physical presence in the same location (Schiavio et al., 2021). The Distance Learning Experience utilizes Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as the primary means to deliver learning material, facilitate communication between teachers and students, and enable student access to learning resources remotely (Oliveira et al., 2021a).

In its implementation, Distance Learning Experiences can involve various platforms and media, including but not limited to online courses, video conferences, online discussion forums, and innovative educational applications and software (Febrianto et al., 2020). The success of PPJJ really depends on the effectiveness of the technology used, as well as the readiness and skills of students in managing learning independently (Alam & Parvin, 2021). It is important to recognize that the Distance Learning Experience provides accessibility and flexibility for learners, allowing them to learn anytime and anywhere according to their individual needs and preferences. This is an important solution to overcome geographic limitations and provide educational opportunities to individuals who are in remote locations or have limited mobility (Keshav et al., 2022).

Teaching strategies in the context of Distance Learning Experiences involve the use of online evaluations, remote tutoring, and the development of curricula specifically designed for supports distance learning format (Hill, 2021). The successful implementation of PPJJ also depends on the availability and adequacy of technological resources, the support of distance learning tutors or facilitators, as well as a deep understanding of the characteristics and needs of different students.

Through the Distance Learning Experience, education becomes more inclusive and allows greater access wide without being limited by geographical limitations (Lembani et al., 2020). This learning system can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of education, bridge access gaps, and bring education to a higher global level.

Based on the results of distributing a questionnaire to students majoring in language at universities regarding distance learning experiences with the question How ready are you to take part in distance learning since the beginning of its implementation? With the following answer options: Very Ready, Ready, Neutral, Not Ready and Very Not Ready. The result obtained is:

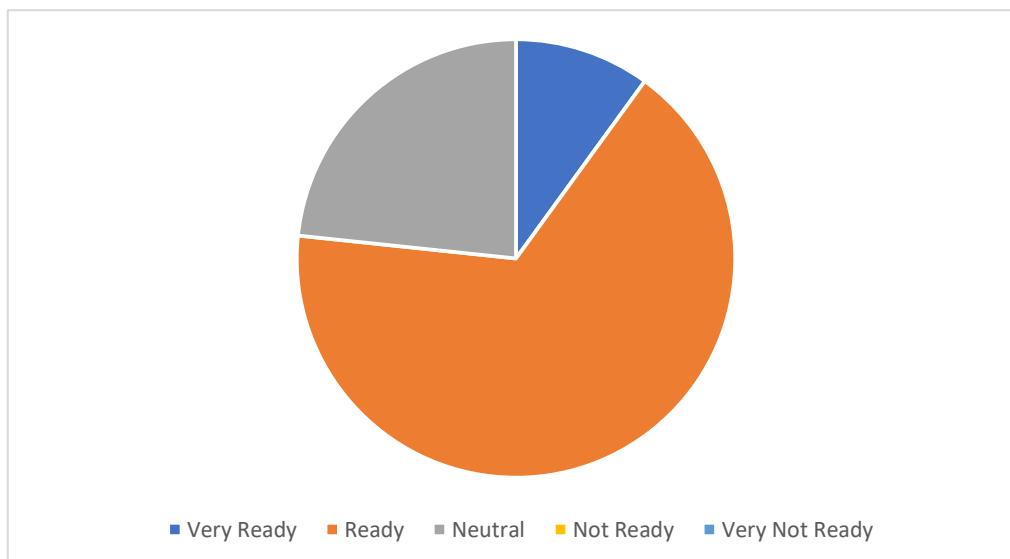


Figure 1. How ready are you to take part in distance learning since the beginning of its implementation?

Based on the results of distributing a questionnaire to students majoring in language at universities regarding distance learning experiences, it appears that the majority of respondents showed a relatively high level of readiness from the start of its implementation. Of the total 30 respondents, 3 people (10%) stated that they were very ready to take part in distance learning, while 20 people (66.67%) felt ready. A total of 7 people (23.33%) showed a neutral attitude regarding their readiness to face distance learning.

The fact that the majority of students feel ready or very ready can be considered a positive indication regarding their adaptation to this learning model. However, it should also be noted that a number of students (23.33%) expressed a neutral attitude, which may indicate that there are certain aspects that need to be paid attention to or improved in the implementation of distance learning. Further analysis or in-depth interviews with students can help identify factors that influence their perceptions of readiness for distance learning. In conclusion, the results of this questionnaire provide an initial picture of student responses to distance learning, while deeper understanding can be gained through additional data collection and further analysis.

Then the next question is How do you assess the effectiveness of distance learning methods in the language courses you take? With answer options: Very Effective, Effective, Neutral, Ineffective and Very Ineffective. With the results, namely:

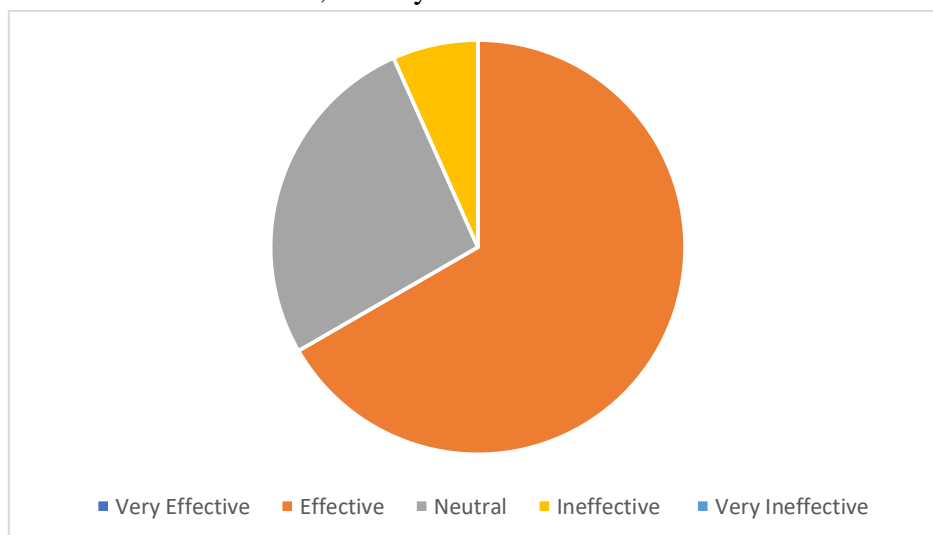


Figure 2. How do you assess the effectiveness of distance learning methods in the language courses you take?

Based on the results of the answers to questions regarding assessing the effectiveness of distance learning methods in language courses taken by students, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents have positive perceptions regarding the effectiveness of these methods. Of the total 30 respondents, 20 people (66.67%) stated that they considered the distance learning method to be effective, while 8 people (26.67%) felt neutral about its effectiveness. Only 2 people (6.67%) stated that the distance learning method in the language course they were taking was not effective.

This result reflects the positive attitude of the majority of students towards the effectiveness of distance learning methods in the context of language courses. While there is a small number who feel it is neutral or ineffective, this number is relatively small and can be a focal point for further improvement. Further analysis or in-depth study of factors influencing perceptions of effectiveness, perhaps through interviews or group discussions, could provide additional insight into improving the quality of distance learning in language courses. In conclusion, the results of this questionnaire show that the majority of students feel that the distance learning method applied to their language courses is effective.

Challenges in Distance Learning

Distance Learning (PJJ) presents various challenges that need to be overcome to ensure the smoothness and effectiveness of the learning process (- Lie et al., 2020b). One of the main challenges is limited access to technology, where some students may experience problems in obtaining hardware and a stable internet connection (Hayashi et al., 2020). The impact is the creation of access gaps, which can affect participation and the quality of learning. Apart from that, obstacles to social interaction are also a significant problem, with the absence of direct interaction between students and teachers and between students (Oliveira et al., 2021b). This can hinder the development of social and collaborative skills, as well as reduce the social support typically found in traditional classroom settings.

Other challenges include motivation and self-discipline, where students need to motivate themselves to remain focused and disciplined in independent learning (Gelles et al., 2020). Time management is crucial, both from the perspective of students who have to organize their study schedules and teachers who need to adjust how to manage time and provide feedback effectively. Evaluation and performance measurement also pose a serious challenge, because developing an evaluation system that is not appropriate to the distance learning context can hinder teachers' ability to accurately understand student understanding and performance (Tsolas et al., 2020).

Lack of parental involvement in supporting the learning process can also be an obstacle, because limited cooperation can affect optimal achievement in distance learning (Silalahi & Hutaaruk, 2020). Therefore, holistic and collaborative handling from all related parties is needed to overcome these challenges and improve the quality of distance learning.

Then the researchers distributed questionnaires to language students throughout Indonesia, getting 30 students as respondents with the question, What are the main challenges faced? Are you facing distance learning? with answer options: Limited internet connection, Difficulty communicating with lecturers and classmates, Decreased learning motivation, Difficulty understanding the material independently and Technical obstacles during learning sessions. The following results were obtained:

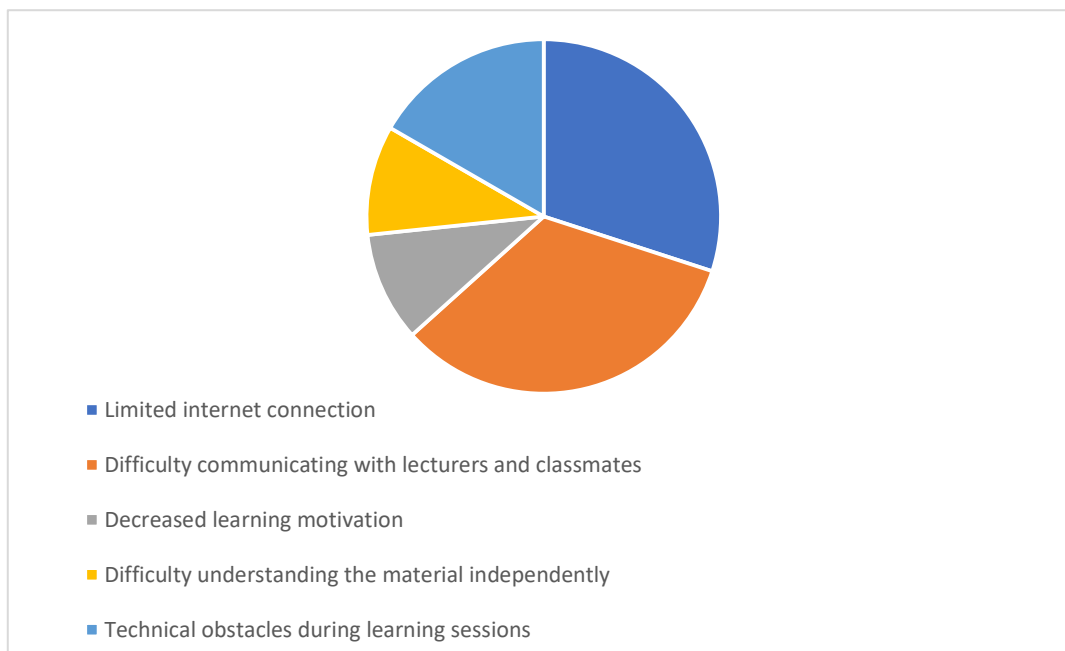


Figure 3. What are the main challenges faced? Are you facing distance learning?

Based on the results of distributing a questionnaire to 30 language students throughout Indonesia regarding the challenges in distance learning, various obstacles were found during this period. The main challenges identified involve several critical aspects of distance learning. Limited internet connection is one of the most striking obstacles, with 9 people or 30% of respondents stating that this is the main challenge. In this context, it can be concluded that technical problems, especially those related to unstable internet access, have become a significant obstacle in undertaking distance learning.

Apart from that, difficulties in communicating with lecturers and classmates are also challenges faced by most students, with 10 people or 33.33% detailing that social interaction in the distance learning context has become less effective. This highlights the importance of communication and interpersonal engagement in the learning experience, which may not be as optimal as in a physical classroom environment. A number of respondents also indicated that their learning motivation had decreased (10%), stating that psychological and motivational aspects were an important part affected by the shift to distance learning. Difficulty understanding material independently also emerged as a challenge (10%), indicating that the ability to learn independently and independently may require additional support in a distance learning context.

Furthermore, technical obstacles during learning sessions were also acknowledged by 5 people (16.67%). This includes all kinds of technical problems, from online learning platform problems to individual hardware problems that can hinder smooth learning. In further analysis, it is necessary to understand that these conditions may be influenced by various factors, including differences in technological accessibility and individual environmental conditions student. Therefore, efforts to improve technological infrastructure and provide further support in terms of social interaction and learning motivation may be necessary to improve the distance learning experience for language students throughout Indonesia.

The next question is, How big are the technical obstacles, such as internet connection problems, influence your participation in online learning? With answer options: Very Influence, Influence, Neutral, No Influence and Not Influence at All. With the following answer results:

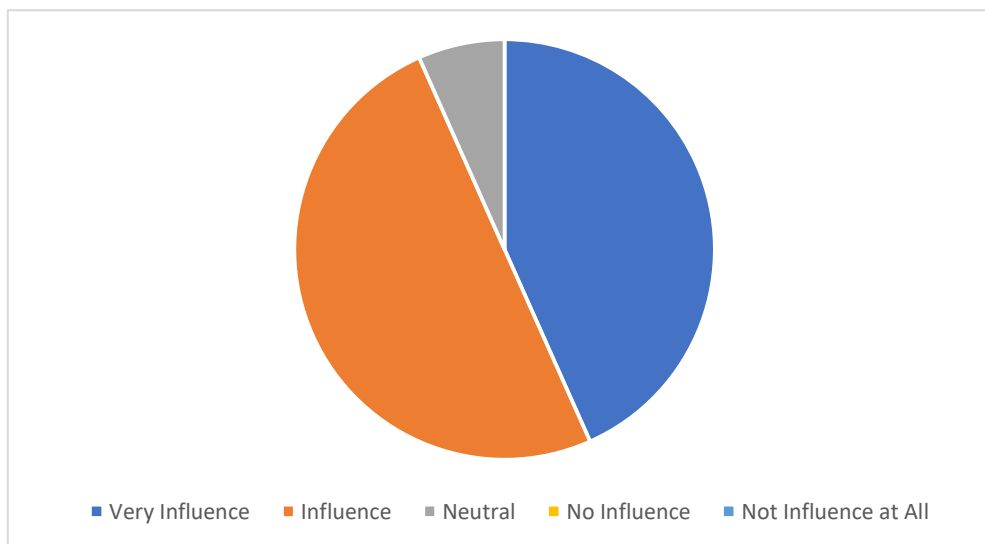


Figure 4. How big are the technical obstacles, such as internet connection problems , influence your participation in online learning?

Based on the results of the answers to the question regarding how much technical obstacles, such as internet connection problems, influence students' participation in online learning, it can be seen that technical obstacles have a significant impact on their involvement. Of the total 30 respondents, 13 people (43.33%) stated that technical obstacles greatly influenced their participation, while 15 people (50%) felt that these obstacles influenced their participation.

When more than 90% of respondents stated that technical obstacles had an influence on participation them in online learning, this is a major point of attention in planning and implementing distance learning. These impacts can include difficulty accessing learning materials, limited interaction with lecturers and classmates, as well as frustration that may arise due to persistent technical problems.

Even though there were 2 people (6.67%) who expressed a neutral attitude towards the influence of technical obstacles, the majority of respondents indicated that internet connection problems and other technical obstacles significantly affected their participation in online learning. Therefore, strategies to overcome or minimize the impact of technical obstacles need to be considered in an effort to increase the effectiveness of distance learning. Additional technical solutions or support may be needed to help students overcome these obstacles so they can participate more optimally in the online learning process.

Opportunities in Distance Learning

Distance Learning (PJJ) not only brings challenges, but also creates significant opportunities in the world of education. One of the main opportunities is increasing educational accessibility. PJJ allows individuals from various backgrounds, regardless of geographic location, to access quality educational resources. This creates opportunities for educational inclusivity, expanding access to those who previously found it difficult to obtain education due to distance or limited mobility.

Another opportunity lies in the flexibility of time and place. PJJ allows students to organize their learning schedules more flexibly, according to individual needs and comfort. This provides an opportunity for those who have other obligations, such as work or family responsibilities, to continue their education without having to abandon their obligations.

The diversity of learning resources is another opportunity presented by PJJ. By utilizing technology, students can access a variety of learning materials, information resources, and interactive learning tools that may not be available in a traditional classroom environment. This creates a richer and more engaging learning experience. Apart from that, PJJ also provides

opportunities for developing technological skills. Students and educators engage in the use of online learning platforms, applications, and online collaboration tools, which can improve digital literacy and information technology skills.

A final opportunity is the potential for the development of innovative learning models. As technology continues to develop, PJJ creates space for experimentation with new learning methods, including the use of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and project-based learning. Overall, PJJ is not only a solution to overcome challenges, but also opens the door to new opportunities that can change the educational paradigm as a whole.

The first question regarding opportunities in language learning is, In your opinion, are there opportunities or advantages to be gained from distance learning? with answer options: Greater time flexibility, Easier access to learning materials, Use of technology as a learning tool and Development of independent skills. With the following answer results:

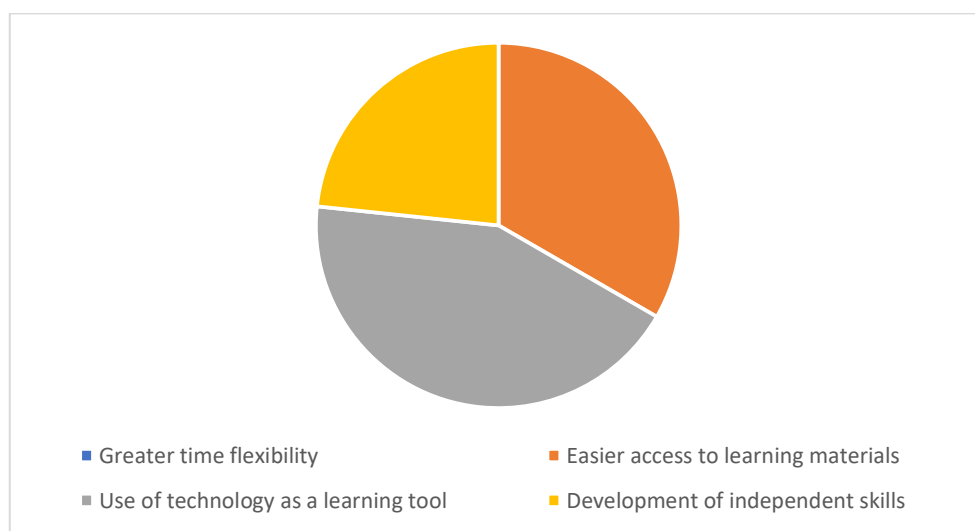


Figure 5. In your opinion, are there opportunities or advantages to be gained from distance learning?

Based on the results of answers to questions regarding opportunities or advantages obtained from distance learning in the context of language learning, several positive aspects can be identified that are recognized by students. Of the 30 respondents, it appears that there is a strong understanding regarding certain benefits of distance learning.

One of the most prominent benefits is the use of technology as a learning tool, which was recognized by the majority of respondents (43.33%). This reflects recognition of the role of technology in facilitating access to various learning materials. With the online platform, students can easily access learning resources, lecture materials, and various other supporting materials, which may not be as efficient as in conventional learning models.

Apart from that, a number of students see opportunities in developing independent skills (23.33%). Distance learning encourages students to become more independent in managing time, organizing study schedules, and developing better self-management skills. This can have long-term benefits in preparing students for future professional challenges.

While greater time flexibility does not appear as a primary option, it can be assumed to be an advantage recognized by a number of students. Greater time flexibility allows students to organize their learning schedule according to their personal needs and limitations, which can help in achieving a balance between academics and personal life. Further analysis of these benefits could provide valuable insights for further improvements in distance learning design. By taking advantage

of the advantages recognized by students, educational institutions can better develop strategies to improve the quality of online learning and effectively integrate these positive elements into the student learning experience.

Next question Do you feel that distance learning can provide an equivalent learning experience with face-to-face learning? With answer options: Yes, No and Not sure. With the following answer results:

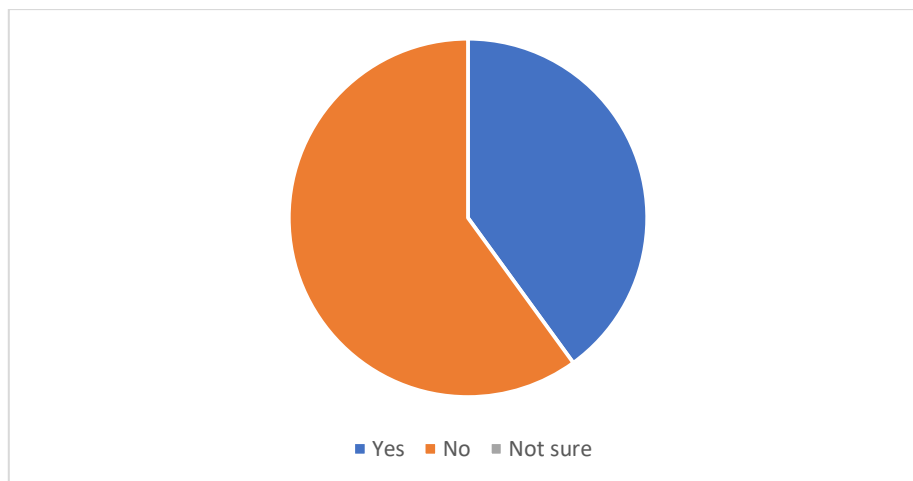


Figure 6. Do you feel that distance learning can provide an equivalent learning experience with face-to-face learning?

Based on the results of the answers to the question regarding whether students feel that distance learning can provide a learning experience that is equivalent to face-to-face learning, it can be concluded that the majority of students (60%) express inequality between the two types of learning. Of the total 30 respondents, 12 people (40%) thought that distance learning could provide a learning experience that was equivalent to face-to-face learning, while 18 people (60%) said the opposite.

These results indicate that there is doubt or uncertainty among students regarding the extent to which distance learning can provide the same learning experience as face-to-face learning. These differences in perception can be influenced by various factors, including personal preferences, learning environment, or personal experiences during distance learning. Further analysis of the reasons behind these answers and identification of areas that are considered deficient in equity can help educational institutions to improve the quality of distance learning. This may include improving technological infrastructure, developing more effective teaching strategies, or even providing more intensive social interaction opportunities in online learning contexts. Efforts to understand these student perspectives can help create a more satisfying and effective distance learning experience.

CONCLUSION

Students majoring in languages at Indonesian universities show their readiness to face distance learning. Although the majority feel ready, there are concerns regarding the learning experience that may not be equivalent to face-to-face learning. Along with this experience, several challenges emerged that affected the effectiveness of distance learning. Limited internet connections and difficulties communicating with lecturers and classmates are the main obstacles faced by students.

However, within the framework of these challenges, students also identify a number of opportunities that arise from distance learning. Easier access to learning materials is one of the main

opportunities recognized by students. The existence of technology as a learning tool makes it easy to access various learning resources online. In addition, there is an understanding that distance learning encourages the development of independent skills in students. In this situation, students need to manage their study time more independently, hone independent skills, and improve their ability to understand material independently.

The importance of this opportunity highlights the need for attention and improvement in certain aspects of distance learning. Improving technological infrastructure is key to overcoming limited internet connections, while developing more effective communication strategies can help overcome communication difficulties. With a deep understanding of these challenges and opportunities, educational institutions can direct their efforts towards necessary updates and improvements, so that distance learning can provide a more meaningful and equivalent experience to face-to-face learning.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

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