Rural Students' Barriers in Learning English during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Rural Students Barriers in Learning English during the COVID-19 Pandemic Research paper: this research describes the obstacles that students who reside in rural areas experience and how they overcome those obstacles. Ten students from the English Education Investigation Program were the subjects of this study. The author employed a qualitative technique and a case study design. The writer utilized an online questionnaire, interviews, and documents to collect data. The data findings revealed that practically all students faced social, institutional, dispositional, and epistemological difficulties. The data also indicated that students face nine obstacles, such as an unsupportive learning environment, a network difficulty, time management, a significant assignment, a cost, students' challenges in learning English, a learning style issue, and students lack of desire. They overcome such hurdles in various ways, depending on the individual. This study's findings will impact the teaching and learning processes. The professor is required to assist pupils in overcoming obstacles. The study also recommended that students pay more attention to the online learning experience. The study also contributes to the realm of language, and future researchers should pay close attention to this phenomenon.

Keywords: Rural Students, Barriers, Online Learning, Covid-19 Pandemic

Introduction

COVID-19 was declared a worldwide emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020, and a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. COVID-19 now affects 213 nations and territories (WHO, 2020). In reaction to COVID-19, some nations implemented strong social separation measures and a lockdown strategy. The epidemic has significantly impacted schools, students, and instructors.

As of March 12, 2020, 46 nations across five continents had proclaimed school closures, with 26 completely closing schools nationally (Huang, Liu, Tlili, Yang, & Wang, 2020). The Indonesian government has limited community organizing in an effort to stop the disease from spreading further. It still advocates for people to do business, learn, and worship without leaving their homes. Schools and universities in Indonesia have been closed temporarily since March 14, 2020.

In Indonesia, where school and HEI closures have occurred, the teaching and learning process has been continued remotely via Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). It has been determined that online learning is the best approach to keep teaching and learning throughout the outbreak. American higher education, which has had the fastest expansion of online education in recent years, has embraced online learning (Bartley and Golek, 2004; Evans and Haase, 2001). In addition, online education is a mode of study in which teachers and students are not in constant physical contact with one another (Allen & Seaman 2007). Through the use of the internet, it is now possible for instructors and students to work together in real-time while being physically separated. Thus, this kind of instruction may allow education to proceed even in the face of a global epidemic.

Nevertheless, not all students find success with or readily adapt to online education. On Monday, March 22, 2021, a preliminary observation was conducted by interrogating a sample of sixth-semester English majors at IAIN Bengkulu. It was discovered that individuals, particularly rural kids, face hurdles to learning. Students who reside in remote locations have poor network reception. Because online learning necessitates a robust internet network, students face challenges and limits in accessing the internet. Furthermore, due to the unreliable network, the pupils had difficulty understanding the lecturer's description of the learning material delivered via video conferencing. The problems or hurdles that instructors or students may have while incorporating e-learning into the teaching and learning process are referred to as barriers (Schoepp, 2005).

Situational obstacles and institutional and dispositional barriers as the three types of problems with distant education obstacles and those identified by Rezabek (1999). Transportation, age, time limits, and family duties are all examples of situational obstacles; problems with an institution's programs, rules, and procedures, such as enrolment, scheduling, financial assistance, and support services, are examples of institutional hurdles. The dispositional hurdles people face result from their unique history, outlook, drive, and character.

Numerous reports have been written about the difficulties experienced by pupils in remote areas. An Inclusive Education Approach to Rural Online Learning in the Context of COVID-19 in South Africa" by Bekhitemba Dube is the first of two studies on the topic (2020). This research looks at the challenges rural students in South Africa face in light of the global epidemic. According to the results of this research, the high cost and, in certain situations, shortage of internet connection is one of the main barriers to online education. The second study, by Nashruddin, Alam, and Tanasy (2020), discovered that students residing in rural places had trouble connecting to the internet because geographic spots were far from coverage. It also creates a barrier for online students, making adoption less successful. Based on the conditions outlined above, the writers are interested in researching the difficulties experienced by students in Indonesia, particularly at IAIN Bengkulu, and how the students overcome such barriers. Then, this study entitled "Rural Students' Barriers to Learning English During the COVID-19 Pandemic (A Case Study Undertaken by the Seventh Semester at IAIN Bengkulu)".

The study's research questions are based on the gap analysis findings. Question 1) In the seventh semester of the English Education Department at IAIN Bengkulu, what obstacles do rural students face when attempting to study English during the COVID-19 Pandemic? and 2) What are some strategies for overcoming obstacles to English language study during the COVID-19 Pandemic? The purpose of this research is twofold: 1) to better understand the challenges rural students have when attempting to study English during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and 2) to provide insight into the strategies these students employ to overcome these challenges. Furthermore, the significance of this research is to identify the limitations that students experience, and the research findings can provide appropriate answers to these challenges.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative technique and was designated as a case study. According to Noor (2011), a case study is essentially an intense study of an individual or group who is seen to have a specific case. Purposive sampling was used in this study to select research participants, which is the purposeful selection of research subjects based on specified criteria or factors (Sanapiah Faisal, 2007, p.67). According to the writer's preliminary observations, this class is one of the classes where students had the most difficulties. The writer then chose ten students who resided in remote areas. The questionnaire, observation, and interview were used to collect

data. Zoom Meeting was used to run both instruments. Since the present epidemic situation, no face-to-face learning has taken place. The questionnaire, observation, and interview were the research instruments employed in this study. The writer conducts observations to determine the barriers that students face when learning English. Concurrently, a questionnaire is given to get a bird's eye perspective of the obstacles students experience, and an interview is held to get a better sense of the specific obstacles students face and how they are overcome. The best workable method for analysing the data for this study is the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994, p.174).

Findings
Barriers faced by English students in Rural Area

      Students have fundamental concerns with their Internet connection, and the service teachers offer, as evidenced by the survey results and interviews. Respondents cite difficulties with online connectivity as a significant barrier. No shortage of ISPs offers the bandwidth and speed necessary for effective online education in densely populated areas. However, few ISPs serve outlying regions. Unfortunately, the ones that are readily accessible have poor Internet connections and are thus unsuitable for use in online education. The writer discovered various challenges experienced by students in remote locations during online learning based on data acquired through interviews with five respondents. The writer will not disclose the Respondent's name but will refer to it with an initial 'R,' which stands for Respondent. Gerland (1993) identified four potential barriers: situational, institutional, dispositional, and epistemological. As seen in the diagram, the writer discovered that the most significant barrier is situational convergence.
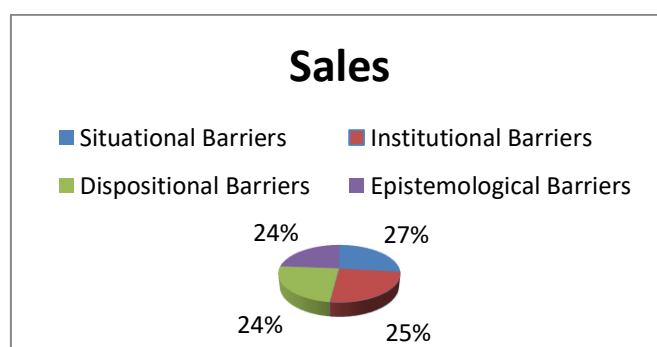
Picture 1

Four potential barriers that faced by the students

The diagram above shows that the situational barrier was students' most significant hurdle. The situation in the student learning environment is a significant aspect. This could be due to a student's environment being unsupportive of both the learning process and the Internet's difficulty. In the following comments, respondents explain the challenges associated with the learning environment:

"In my home, there are a lot of children who often disturb me when I am taking online lessons and it made me uncomfortable" (R1)

"In my opinion yes it is very constrained, especially when there are power outages that cause network loss, and sometimes I have to go far to find a signal" (R2)

"In addition to frequent power failures in my area, which result in network loss whenever I attempt to join Zoom, my surroundings are not very encouraging" (R3)

These statements show that the students' learning was significantly disrupted at home. They protested the institutional barrier during the following barriers. This is related to the homework assigned by the teacher and the cost of online learning. The following statements from students describe difficulties:

"We are expected to learn the information only by reading, and the lecturers often hand out tasks at each meeting, with due dates nearly always the same." (R3)

The students also revealed that the cost during online learning was quite large as mentioned below:

"Yes, my parents are farmers who are also affected by the pandemic, so I think the costs incurred during online learning are quite large" (R3)

"Yes in my opinion, because my parents' income during the pandemic was not really good, it actually decreased so it seemed that the cost of online learning was large" (R4)

The third type of barrier is dispositional barriers, which are related to the students' learning styles. According to the research and interviews, some respondents did not have difficulties with the online learning style problem. Because they learn in their way, this is some feedback on pupils' learning styles.

"I don't really have a problem with the way I study, during online learning I only have a hard time understanding the learning material when compared to face-to-face learning, I don't seem to be enthusiastic about attending lectures" (R5)

The last barriers is epistemological barriers which is related to the students low motivation. This is their opinion related to their problem:

> "Yes maybe my friends also fells the same thing, I am not enthusiastic about learning because sometimes there are materials that are difficult for me to understand which makes me have to study by myself and it actually made me confused" (R2)
> "Yes, studying online makes me lose my motivation to study, especially if the lecturer is not clear in delivering the material, I become less interested in learning" (R3)

For students worldwide, the move to online learning has been difficult, and this struggle has presented itself in various ways. Many students' lacks of drive prevents them from attaining and experiencing new things.

How Students Overcome the Barriers

Students' approaches to overcoming obstacles are nearly identical. However, if the atmosphere in which they reside is ineffective, they will seek a more suitable environment to follow the learning materials effectively. Problems with school networks, including the Internet, are the most frequently reported by pupils. Learning that needs students to utilize specialized learning applications will be severely impacted if the Internet connection is inadequate. Children from rural areas who lack Internet connection face different challenges with online communities. Traveling to more distant areas in search of usable Internet connections was not unusual. To get beyond these barriers, we need to make some adjustments, such as offering new forms of support for kids who are not meeting their academic potential or developing online communities with their fellow students and professors. If these obstacles could be removed, parents and children might receive the remote learning mode more positively. Engaging all essential stakeholders and departments within a faculty and adopting innovative methodologies to promote cooperation is a crucial aspect of effectively deploying online/e-learning programs.

Discussion

Rural Students Barriers in Learning English

The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a pandemic. Thus, precautions must be taken to prevent an increase in cases. As a result, universities and institutions were forced to postpone face-to-face learning activities. This study aimed to characterize and clarify students' impressions of the challenges to online learning during the coronavirus crisis, as well as how they overcame those difficulties. According to the study's findings, there are

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various challenges that students who live in rural areas confront. These barriers were defined as an unsupportive learning environment, low student motivation, a challenging task, students' inability to study efficiently, and cost barriers. The students' perceptions of numerous problems in their online learning activities are becoming more apparent. These findings were remarkably similar to those reported by Rahiem (2020), who identified many chores, internet costs, a noisy environment, and technology as impediments to online learning activities.

Situational, institutional, dispositional, and epistemological hurdles have already been mentioned. Students face contextual barriers in the form of inadequate parental involvement in their education. Students found it challenging to focus on learning because their home environment differed from the college. Furthermore, students have challenges connected to the stability of the internet network. Due to network issues, many of them cannot attend face-to-face lectures via the Zoom program. This is consistent with the findings of Dube, B. (2020), who discovered a lack of network access in rural areas. Students also have a difficult time balancing study time and homework time. This is consistent with Gerland (1993), who discovered that students' time management issues reflected their time priorities, that is, their willingness to commit time to study at the expense of other activities.

Consistent with earlier research by Assareh and Bidokht (2011), which found that students posed the most significant obstacles to online classroom teaching and learning activities, the present study found that students posed the most obstacles. The present study's results corroborated those of Balanskat, Blamire, and Kefafa (2006), who had previously presented the idea that educators represent a significant barrier to the widespread adoption of online teaching and learning. This research's results indicating students' worries about the horrible signal corroborate those of Efriana's (2021) study, which similarly found that poor signal was an obstacle to online instruction.

Conclusion

The writer interviewed participants in the English Department Study Program at the States Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) Bengkulu to better understand rural students' difficulties when attempting to learn English during the recent COVID-19 outbreak. We may infer from the data and analysis that students struggled with online learning because of situational, institutional, dispositional, and epistemological constraints. Distractions and an unhelpful environment at home presented problems for pupils who tried to study there. They also encountered issues

with the internet network, particularly for pupils who live in remote areas. The second hurdle is related to institutional barriers, such as the cost of online learning and the lecturer's too many assignments simultaneously supplied by the lecturer. The third barrier was a dispositional one associated with the student's difficulties learning English during the online session and their learning style issue. The last obstacle is an epistemological barrier associated with the student's lack of motivation during online learning and frequent boredom in class.

The methods used by the pupils to overcome the obstacles differed depending on the student. One of the ways they increased motivation was to create a motivation board. So, if they lose motivation, they will recall the incentive they created. They frequently want to find a better area to continue their learning process because of the unsupportive environment barriers. Mainly if the learning process requires attendance at a Zoom meeting. Moreover, if the instructor sets too many tasks, pupils typically complete them earlier. Because if the duties assigned are not completed quickly, they will be piled on top of one another.

The author believes that the findings of this study provide some insight into the real challenges that students encounter in online classes. The professors' next responsibility is to find a method to minimize such issues. Looking at the real concerns, the author is optimistic that correct solutions can be provided to assist pupils in overcoming their learning difficulties.

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