

Students' Perception of Online Discussion During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This research aimed to describe students' perceptions of online discussion and to find out the correlation between (1) motivation as well as enjoyability and students' perceptions of online discussions, and (2) lecturers' roles and students' perceptions of online discussions. This study employed descriptive quantitative and correlation methods. A total of 91 students were selected as participants through a purposive sampling technique. The findings of this study indicated that students had positive perceptions of online discussion. Students agreed that online discussion could improve language skills, enhance skills in drawing conclusions, encourage useful social interactions, facilitate idea sharing between students and lecturers, and broaden their knowledge. However, some of the participants doubted that online discussions could motivate them to continue learning and that online discussions could make the discussion materials interesting to study. The role of lecturers in encouraging the effectiveness of online discussions was fairly correlated with students' perceptions. On the other hand, the role of lecturers had a weak correlation with motivation, meaning that the presence of lecturers in online discussions did not stimulate students' desire to study hard. It could be concluded that students had a positive perception of the use of online discussion methods, but they still showed doubts in terms of learning motivation and enjoyability in participating in online discussions.

Keywords

Online Discussion, Perception, Motivation and Enjoyability

1. Introduction

Online learning is defined as learning that uses internet networks with accessibility, connectivity, flexibility, and the ability to encourage a variety of interactions in learning (Moore et al., 2011). Not only that, but online learning is also considered the newest or the upgraded version of distance learning (Benson, 2002). Online discussion is the most popular activity used by lecturers to teach during this period (Clark, 2001; Langford & Damsa, 2020). Online discussion is often intended as a substitute for face-to-face social interaction. Also, online discussion has been the subject of many studies, indicating that online discussion has the potential to develop knowledge (Darabi et al., 2011).

Langford & Damsa (2020) stated that students were not ready to switch to digital education, and thus they experienced many challenges. In line with this, a study related to online discussion during the COVID-19 pandemic was carried out by Wahyudin et al. (2020), concluding that most students chose online discussion as a distance learning solution. Studies on the online discussion in Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic were so limited, especially those regarding students' perception of learning. Studies that discussed online discussions focused more on how to develop systems such as vector machines (Erlin et al., 2013), Smart Gateway System (Subekti et al., 2013), or new algorithms in E-learning (Okfalisa & Iskandar, 2017), whereas it is important to know students' perceptions of learning, whether online discussions are sufficiently accepted, favored, and able to increase students' learning motivation. Many studies

had examined the relationship between perceptions and students' learning outcomes and they showed a positive correlation between the two variables (Fitriana et al., 2016; Mulyana & Hidayat, 2013; Sari et al., 2015).

Perception is often defined as the process of interpreting, organizing, and realizing sensory information obtained from the surrounding environment, and this process is closely related to the human senses (Gellatly, 1999). Basically, one's perception of learning affects his or her motivation to learn (Nauert, 2011). Someone who has good motivation in learning will try to create a comfortable atmosphere for learning so that active learning can be created (Nayir, 2017). It is suggested that teachers encourage students to develop their learning motivation during online learning (Xie & Ke, 2011). Hence, this study tried to determine students' perceptions of learning with online discussions that they were currently undergoing and the correlation with the role of lecturers as well as motivation and enjoyability in participating in online discussions.

1.1 Objectives

This study aimed to describe students' perceptions of online discussions and to find out the correlation between motivation and enjoyability. A total of 91 students majoring in the Primary School Teacher Education study program of PGRI University of Yogyakarta participated in this study. This study would focus on students' perception and the role of lecturers in online discussion during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study would contribute to lecturers regarding students' perception of online discussion learning methods during the Covid -19 pandemic.

2. Online Discussion during COVID-19 Pandemic

Online discussion is a popular method used in online learning. Discussion occurs when a group comes together to communicate with one another to discuss and listen to a topic, that in this time of education disruption is often carried out using social media, video conferences, instant messaging tools, social platforms, and learning communities (Huang et al., 2020). Based on the implementation time, online discussions can be divided into two, namely asynchronous online discussion (not real-time) and synchronous online discussion (real-time)(Hew & Cheung, 2012). In this study, the researchers tried to investigate asynchronous online discussion. Many experts report that online discussion can improve students' critical thinking (Guiller et al., 2008) or higher knowledge construction levels (Schellens et al., 2005), the quality of students' self-confidence, particularly that of students who are shy or introverted as well as have language difficulties (Qiyun & Huay, 2007), and active collaboration (Yeh, 2010).

Lecturers' behaviors in online discussions affect students' participation. Howard (2015) mentions several lecturers' behaviors that can influence students' participation in online discussions, namely 1) behaving aggressively, 2) creating a safe environment 3) creating equality of participants (race, skin color, and background), and 4) asking questions directly to the participants. On the other hand, through a systematic review, Hew & Cheung (Hew et al., 2010; Hew & Cheung, 2012) formulate several roles of lecturers that can influence students' participation in online discussions, namely 1) giving slow responses, 2) showing rude behaviors, 3) not giving feedback, and 4) ignoring students' posts either intentionally or unintentionally. Participation in online discussions has a key role in achieving students' academic accomplishment (Hew & Cheung, 2012). Students who are motivated and feel happy in online discussions will give a higher perception of online discussions (Wu & Hiltze, 2003).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a shift in learning practices from face-to-face to online learning. The practice of online discussions relies heavily on the use of gadgets (e.g., computers, laptops, and smartphones) and the Internet (mobile data, network connection) as the media that connect the instructors and students. If this primary access to learning is disrupted, logically the students will lose their motivation to learn. Studies on online learning in Indonesia report that students experience technical problems when learning online (Arlinwibowo et al., 2020; Jhon et al., 2020; Pratiwi, 2020; Purwanto, 2020; Rosali, 2020). A deeper understanding of whether students like, or dislike online discussions is highly essential to make it possible for stakeholders to have new perspectives on how online discussions can influence learning motivation.

3. Methods

This research was conducted at PGRI University of Yogyakarta in the academic year of 2020/2021. It was a descriptive quantitative study using a survey method with a cross-sectional survey design. The researchers collected the data at a place at a time (Creswell, 2012). This research began by determining the survey specifications. A good survey always begins with determining the specification of the concept to be measured (Widyaningsih, 2018), so that the survey actually measures what must be measured (de Leeuw et al., 2008). Operational specifications can be used in technical

language and definitions that construct survey questions. Researchers use a theoretical basis as the foundation for the survey in order to minimize errors. The researchers used a survey foundation (See Figure 1) from de Leeuw et al (2008) which met the following specifications: 1) Coverage (all students of Primary School Teacher Education study program, PGRI University of Yogyakarta) 2) Sampling (Purposive Sampling) with consideration to adjust to the object of research, namely asynchronous online discussion learning (Creswell, 2012; Sugiyono, 2015), 3) Response (All student conducting online discussions for 6 month have responds the questionnaire) , and 4) Measurement (using questionnaire to collect the data and analysis by statistic descriptive to describe motivation & enjoyability, instructors' roles, and using Spearmen correlation to see the correlation of it) see figure 1.

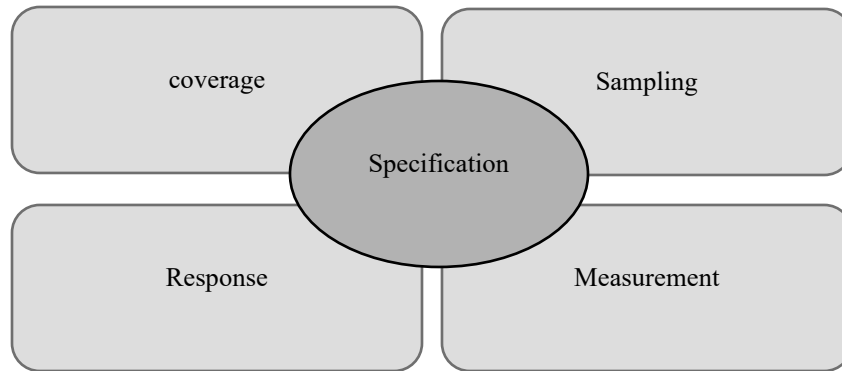


Figure 1. Survey Foundation

4. Data Collection

The population of this study was the students of the Primary School Teacher Education study program at PGRI University of Yogyakarta. Meanwhile, the target population was students learning using the online discussion method during the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of 91 students who met these criteria were selected as the research participants. All participants filled out the questionnaire without coercion. We inform participants that the data provided does not affect participation. The data collected in this questionnaire are only used in this study. We guarantee the confidentiality of participant's identity.

The primary data were collected using a questionnaire that was sent online. the researchers used a questionnaire adopted from Wu and Hiltze's (2003) research which consisted of several variables such as students' perception of online discussions, as well as motivation and enjoyability in online discussions. Each questionnaire used a five-scale Likert scale with choices ranging from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Doubt, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Then, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to depict students' perceptions of online discussions.

In the data collection, the correlation was established by referring to the data that had been collected. The collected data were ordinal, and thus the analysis was carried out with the Spearman correlation to see the correlation between the role of lecturers, motivation as well as enjoyability, and students' perception in online discussions so that the hypotheses were:

H1: There was a relationship between the role of lecturers and students' motivation as well as enjoyability in online discussions.

H2: There was a relationship between motivation as well as enjoyability and students' perception in online discussions.

5. Result and Discussion

Nowadays, online learning is a must in the world of education for the last few years (He, Xu, & Kruck, 2014). Since face-to-face learning is often seen as closed learning environments and understood as a traditional model, better facilities are needed with the integration of technology and information (Darmalaksana & Dkk, 2020). Many of the approaches often used in traditional classrooms can also be effectively implemented in virtual environments; however, it is necessary to pay attention to how these practices are applied to a different teaching and learning setting so that what has been applied in face-to-face classes are not completely eliminated from online classrooms (Pace et al., 2020). With online learning, teachers and students can still interact through discussions, question and answers, and other methods such as through chats, activity forums, and assessments (Verawardina et al., 2020).

5.1 Numerical Results

As many as 91 students gave various responses. The data that had been collected were then analyzed using SPSS to describe the findings in the field, namely learning perceptions, motivation, enjoyability, and the correlation among variables.

Table 1. Perceptions of Student Learning in online discussions

Variable	Frequency				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Students' perceptions of online discussions					
learn a lot from peers	24.2%	47.3%	24.2%	4.4%	0%
Online discussion improves 4 language skills	33%	37.4%	25.3%	3.3%	1.1%
Online discussion improves concluding skills	22%	51.6%	23.1%	3.3%	0%
the quality of student learning increases	12.1%	20.9%	53.8%	12.1%	1.1%
Improved communication skills	11%	36.3%	44%	7.7%	1.1%
provide useful social interactions	22%	51.6%	23.1%	3.3%	0%
great opportunity to share opinion among my peers and lecturers	16.5%	46.2%	33%	3.3%	1.1%
expand knowledge	17.6%	40.7%	37.4%	4.4%	0%
useful in my learning	14.3%	41.8%	39.6%	4.4%	0%
Reducing the quality of learning	4.4%	13.2%	35.2%	39.6%	7.7%

Table 1 describes the students' perceptions of learning using the online discussion method. During the learning process, 47.3% and 24.2% of the students said that they learned a lot from their peers. To achieve more benefits in learning, students must be willing to contribute to the discussion from the start (Hew et al., 2010). More than half (33% and 37.4%) of the participants felt that online discussions improved their language skills.

This result was achieved because the students explicitly wrote their thoughts in writing so that they were more careful in expressing their ideas and thoughts. Online discussions also helped them develop their skills in drawing conclusions (51.6% and 22%). Apart from that, the implementation of online discussion also encouraged reflection which helped them to advance to higher stages of learning such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Hew et al., 2010). As inferred from the table above, it can be concluded that the online discussions that they had conducted provided a wider range of learning interactions. Interaction in online discussions often begins with a contribution in conveying an opinion on a topic of discussion.

The students' contribution is not an absolute measure, but their contribution is needed to obtain satisfactory learning outcomes (Hew et al., 2010). In the end, the more interactions happen among student-student or student-instructor, the higher the learning outcomes will be (Lee et al., 2011). The data from the table also shows that online discussions did not reduce the quality of their learning. One of the benefits of online discussion, especially discussions that make use of written media, is that the data used during the discussion can be stored as individual messages in virtual storage (Hew et al., 2010). Thus, the data can be used as a reflection of comments for themselves and other students. Cronbach's Alpha analysis identified a coefficient of $0.857 > 0.6$ so that each statement variable was proven consistent. It can be concluded that the majority of the students had a favorable view of online discussions. This conclusion was drawn based on the percentage of students who agreed that online discussion could improve language skills, enhance skills in drawing conclusions, facilitate useful social interactions, become a media for exchanging opinions among students and lecturers, and expand knowledge.

Table 2. Motivation and Enjoyability in Online Discussions

Variable	Frequency				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Student motivation and enjoyment about online discussions					

Online discussions motivate you to keep learning	14.3%	30.8%	47.3%	6.6%	1.1%
Online discussions make you interested in the material	3.3%	31.9%	53.8%	9.9%	1.1%
Online discussions make for a great job	13.2%	36.3%	40.7%	7.7%	2.2%
love online discussions	3.3%	24.2%	53.8%	12.1%	6.6%
enjoy online discussions	3.3%	38.5%	46.2%	7.7%	4.4%
enjoy sharing knowledge with friends in online discussions	12.1%	39.6%	41.8%	3.3%	3.3%
online discussions waste my time	2.2%	3.3%	25.3%	40.7%	28.6%
b. Lecturer role variable					
Lecturers have an important role to play in encouraging the effectiveness of online discussions	35.2%	37.4%	24.2%	0%	3.3%

Table 2 shows students' responses regarding their motivation and enjoyability in participating in online discussions. Nearly all of the items presented doubts from more than half of the research population. Most of the participants doubted that online discussions motivated them to continue learning (47.3%), be interested in the discussion materials (53.8%), do the assignments well (40.7%), be interested in online discussions (53.8%), and enjoy the process of online discussions (46.2%). Many factors could influence students' motivation and enjoyability in learning. The researchers tried to analyze the reasons why these students had doubts that online discussions could motivate them and provide enjoyability in learning. To do so, three students with the most responses showing doubts were interviewed. These students were Bunga, Mawar, and Melati (pseudonyms).

Table 3. Student's Verification

Items	Responses	Verification
Why do you doubt that online discussion can make you motivated and excited about a course?	I doubt it because online discussion can be either helpful or not. First, connection problems often occur, causing us to be late to join the discussion. Even worse, we missed the class. Second, on the positive side, online discussion helps us to be more independent since we have to work on our own without friends or groups to work on assignments with. (Mawar)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When the internet connection was poor, students felt unmotivated because they could not participate in the discussion. - When the internet connection was good, online discussions could train the students to learn independently (self-regulated learning).
	In this pandemic time, I find it difficult to understand the materials taught online by the lecturers, and thus I doubt it. (Bunga)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The students had some difficulties in understanding materials presented in distance learning.
	Honestly, I am the type of student who prefers to have the lecturers give direct explanations of the materials, and thus when I must study the materials on my own, I tend to be lazy. While studying online, I can lie down comfortably at home so that I do not feel motivated to learn harder. It makes the environment not conducive for learning. To me, understanding materials in offline learning is already confusing, it is just getting worse in online learning. Moreover, I tend to be lazier when my data caps are limited. (Melati)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student's personality

Due to several constraints, students doubted that online discussion could motivate them to learn. Issues such as technical problems, difficulty in understanding materials presented online, and students' personalities had been mentioned by Hew & Cheung (2012) as factors that caused students to make limited contributions in the learning process. Consequently, students became unmotivated and did not favor learning using online discussions.

On the other hand, many of these students liked to share their knowledge and opinions with their friends or lecturers so that in the end the online discussions did not waste their time (40.7%). This is inseparable from the fact that online discussions are different from face-to-face discussions, in that in online discussions, students have more opportunity to absorb information and think before giving their responses, so it is common for us to find people who are passive in face-to-face discussions but active in online discussions (Fawns et al., 2020). This means that they become freer in sharing knowledge with their peers. The roles of lecturers in encouraging effectiveness and activeness are particularly important in running online discussions. The Cronbach's Alpha analysis identified a coefficient of $0.715 > 0.6$ which showed consistency in each statement.

Tabel 4. Correlation

		Perception	The role of Lecturer	Motivation	
Spearman's rho	Perception	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.404**	.725**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	91	91	91
	The role of Lecturer	Correlation Coefficient	.404**	1.000	.178
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.092
		N	91	91	91
	Motivation	Correlation Coefficient	.725**	.178	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.092	.
		N	91	91	91
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Correlation analysis between variables was used to explore the implicit dimensions and test the hypotheses in this study. Table 4 shows that the role of lecturers in encouraging the effectiveness of online discussions correlated with students' perceptions with a correlation coefficient of 0.404 in the "fair" category. Even so, lecturers' roles had a weak correlation with motivation with a correlation coefficient of 0.178. Meanwhile, students' motivation and perceptions showed a strong correlation with a correlation coefficient of 0.725. All correlation coefficients were positive so that the relationship among variables was unidirectional, meaning that if variable X increases, variable Y will do so. These results could support the acceptance of both Hypothesis 1 (H1) and Hypothesis 2 (H2) that there was a relationship between the role of lecturers and students' motivation as well as enjoyability in online discussions (H1), and that there was a relationship between motivation as well as enjoyability and students' perceptions of online discussions (H2).

5.2 Proposed Improvements

Based on the results of this study, the researchers can propose several suggestions regarding the roles of lecturers in the virtual learning environment. Even though learning is carried out with the help of technology, it does not mean that technology teaches the students. There needs to be lecturer guidance in the learning process because technology only facilitates learning (Chick et al., 2020). The role of lecturers is so much needed to make learning using technology becomes more effective. In the field implementation, lecturers are advised to do Reflective Teaching more frequently. This is useful for knowing the condition of the students being taught. Reflective Teaching can be started by assigning students to fill out a questionnaire containing their complaints, feelings during lectures, obstacles in attending lectures, constraints in doing assignments, and recommendations related to their preferred learning styles. After that, the lecturers could begin to arrange learning according to the current conditions of the students. For example, to help students who have difficulty in understanding the materials, lecturers can provide a brief conclusion in the form of concept maps or infographics at the end of the lecture as a way for students to understand the main points of the lectures.

Commitment, motivation, support, active participation, and quality interactions are prerequisites for effective online learning (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). However, this goal cannot be achieved without personal awareness. Students'

personalities that are not able to divide their time between studying and resting can affect the quality of their own learning. Correspondingly, self-regulated learning is a challenge for many students in a technology-mediated learning environment, especially in an online learning environment where they may lack direct support and feel lost or socially isolated (Cho et al., 2010; Sun & Rueda, 2012). For instance, students could set their study room in such a way that could help them focus when studying. They could arrange a schedule of their daily activities so that they know when they should study, rest, or help their parents. By starting self-regulated learning early, these routine activities will later become a positive habit in learning. In line with the findings of Cho and Cho's (Cho & Cho, 2017) study, those who can manage their own learning tend to be able to develop self-efficacy because they have successfully practiced self-regulated learning and made those activities their habits. In addition, students with high efficacy tend to be skilled at managing themselves even in an online learning environment (Cho & Jonassen, 2009) Therefore, it can be concluded that it is particularly important for students to begin to understand themselves, especially understanding the learning styles that can affect the quality of their learning.

6. Conclusion

In general, the students had a good perception of online discussion. They agreed that online discussions could improve their language skills, enhance skills in drawing conclusions, serve as a useful social interaction, facilitate opinion sharing between students and lecturers, and broaden knowledge. From the results of this study, it was concluded that the students felt the benefits of learning that was carried out using the online discussion method. However, they still had doubts regarding their motivation and enjoyability during online discussions. These findings were related to several factors such as a bad internet connection which caused obstacles in joining the discussion properly, lack of understanding of the topic being discussed, and lack of practices in self-regulated learning.

Lecturers' roles were fairly correlated with students' perception of online discussion; however, these roles showed a weak correlation with motivation and enjoyability in learning. This fact indicated that the presence of the lecturers in online discussions did not play a significant role in motivating the students to learn and in encouraging them to enjoy the topic being discussed. In creating a virtual learning environment, the presence of lecturers in the online discussion has contributed to the process of forming students' learning perceptions. Therefore, reflective teaching is very much needed to be implemented at the end of the learning process, and lecturers are encouraged to give solutions to the problems encountered by the students during the learning process.

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Biography

Ghina Aulia Abidin is a student of elementary education postgraduate at Yogyakarta State University. She was an alumnus of the elementary school teacher education study program at Mulawarman University in 2018. During her undergraduate studies he was active in organizations, laboratory assistants and teaching assistants. in 2020, she taught students at Elementary School Teacher Education at PGRI Yogyakarta University as a teaching assistant.

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