Interaction and Communication in the Online Learning Process during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT. The pandemic of Covid-19 has made significant impact on aspects of human life, including education. The restrictions by the government as an effort to prevent the spread of the virus have an impact on changes in the way of learning and the academic process. For 2 years the learning process was running by online. Now, slowly the hybrid system is also being implemented. Students with different characteristics try to redefine the process that they have undergone regarding the online and hybrid learning process. It is interesting to observe how students see the interaction in the online learning process and transition to hybrid. Using qualitative approach with focus group discussion as data collection technique to 10 students from different batches. As a result, there was confusion at the beginning for students, especially the class of 2020 because they did not have an idea how about the online learning process. The learning process with virtual becomes something informal in their perception when it can be done anywhere, for example from home. Distractions and difficulty in focusing happens to almost of all informants when they studying online .The phenomenon of dual device and multi-tasking is something often happens in online learning. When there is changing policy from online to hybrid, certain adaptations and adjustments are needed for students of the class of 2020 but not for students of class 2019. Most of the informants who have undergone the online learning process and are undergoing a hybrid system feel that the hybrid system offers flexibility for students as its positive side.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19 Pandemic, Online Learning, Hybrid,

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 virus firstly declared to have found in Indonesia on March 2020. At that time, President Joko Widodo and the Minister of Health, dr. Terawan held a press conference to announce that has been found a suspect who has infected with the COVID-19 . Since then, news about COVID-19 like the patient's condition, government policy to handling and prevention, and impact of the pandemic has reported daily. Even at the most extreme level at that time reports about increasing number of sufferers were routinely announced every day, including the number of people who were exposed, declared cured, and died.

The pandemic of Covid-19 has a massive impact. Beside of large number of patients exposed, the handling process as an effort to reduce and prevent a wider spread is not easy to implement. Efforts to limit with the various names and terms turned out to have complex consequences. For example PSBB (Pembatasan Sosial Besar Besaran) with various levels, PPKM (Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat) both macro and micro levels. All of these regulate restrictions on community activities in religious, educational, socio-cultural aspects, to community mobility. On two occasions, religious holidays, such as Idul Fitri, there was restrictions activities especially in the "mudik"

One aspect that is affected by the restrictions is education including higher education. Learning activities that are usually run with face-to-face model must change to online/virtual. Classes that are usually filled with discussions, presentations must turn into virtual meeting rooms facilitated by

applications and platforms. If class transfer is characterized by student mobility from one room to another, in the online learning, this shift has changed for moving from one link to another link. This change is certainly very drastic in the context of learning in Indonesia which not many have adopted learning models mediated of virtual media communication before pandemic. However, when the pandemic took place, drastic and rapid changes made learners (especially students and lecturer) have to adapt immediately.

The learning process certainly is a communication process. With the classical format of communication as who says what to whom in which channel, of course, the learning process also seen as a communication. Lecturer as a communicator who sends messages such as learning materials to the communicant (in this case students) through an medium / channel. Or, dynamic communication perspective when viewing the learning process as a two-way communication process in which the communicator and communicant exchange messages and build meaning for each other. When the communication process use face-to-face mode, the message meaning process can be observed and it is easy to see the feedback. However, when the communication process is mediated through communication devices that are virtual (with certain values that are believed to be carried by a set of technologies) then the process of interpreting communication becomes interesting to observe.

Online learning policies also diverse in any area. It's depends on the status of the PPKM level in the area which determines whether the learning process can be done in a limited way, 100% face-to-face or must be done fully online/online. In this case, especially in East Java, the learning process at the higher education level is still limited. Petra Christian University as one of the universities that organizes higher education in the city of Surabaya also follows the applicable regulations according to government direction. At the beginning of the pandemic the learning process was running out fully online. In several times it was tested for a limited learning process. The latest, the learning policy is carried out in a limited hybrid. Especially for students in the Greater Surabaya area (Surabaya Sidoarjo, Gresik) then they carry out the face-to-face learning process on campus. Meanwhile, students who are out of town are still doing the online learning process. In terms of the class, the variations in different conditions are felt by students. Especially for the class of 2019, the learning process was carried out offline and then turned online and has now turned into a hybrid. Meanwhile, the 2020 and 2021 classes will undergo a direct online learning process and are now undergoing a hybrid.

This paper aims to see how the perception and meaning of each participant in the virtual learning process (especially students) who have been through the learning process for 2 years (from 2020-2022). Data were obtained using a qualitative approach through focus group discussion with 10 informant with different characteristics. The first group is the class of 2019 students where this group is a batch of students who had gone through the offline learning process and then turned online and now turned back into a hybrid. While the second group, are students of the class of 2020 who have the characteristics of directly experiencing the online learning process and are now turning into hybrids.

METHODS

The writing of this study uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, trying to make sense of or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Data collection was carried out by Focus Group Discussion with 10 student informants representing two batches of students, especially the 2019 and 2020 batches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Computer Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a generic term now commonly used for a variety of systems that enable people to communicate with other people by means of computers and networks. Well-known examples of such systems include computer conferencing, electronic mail, discussion lists, and bulletin boards. However, there are yet other possible applications of CMC, both in the work environment and in education and training. In the work environment, a common and growing phenomenon is collaborative work by individuals or groups who are separated from each other by either time or distance. This has come to be called computer supported cooperative work (CSCW) (Grief, 1988). In the education and training context, in addition to computer "conferencing," we can set up computer-mediated discussions of a more-focused nature as exemplified by the so-called virtual classroom (Hiltz, 1986, 1990), computer-mediated seminars and case study discussions (Romiszowski & DeHaas, 1989; Romiszowski, Jost & Chang, 1990), and computer-mediated job "performance support systems" (Gery, 1991).

Dijk (1999, 228) mentions that computer mediated communication (CMC) has 4 main characteristics, namely: the communication partner is not in the same place, does not have to always communicate at the same time, computers and media are substitutes for humans as communication partners, either it is wholly or partly, and mental processes when communicating can be replaced by information processing tools.

Virtual Classroom Communication

The condition of restrictions on the Covid-19 Pandemic conditions finally pushed for a virtual class process. Virtual class as a class created with the help of the internet. Although it is virtual in nature, in reality, interaction in virtual classes is very possible between students and between teachers and students. Ani Mustika, Wiwin, Zulianto (2015: 213) mentions that there are several advantages of using virtual classes, namely: educators and students can communicate anytime, anywhere provided that they are connected to the internet; increased access to learning; students are required to be more active because learning is student-centered; sources of information could improve for the better; assessment becomes more varied; educators are easier to monitor students; motivation to learn becomes higher and individual learning models become more potential.

In the virtual learning process, the term synchronous, asynchronous, or hybrid systems are known. Synchronous learning environments are those settings where learning is occurring in real time and might incorporate activities such as an instructor learning, collaborative activities, and student questions. All members of the course are logged on at the same time each class meeting. Asynchronous environments are those settings where the students engage in activities that occur independently from the instructor or other peers. Asynchronous environments might include a review of a pre-created learning module, threaded discussion boards, and/or conversations via email with the instructor or class peers. A hybrid course can take many forms. Some course meetings are synchronous, while other activities are completed independently or asynchronously. Regardless of the synchronicity of the course, the key factor for students from rural settings is that element of education being offered to students who are not near the traditional, brick and mortar type instruction. (Coogle, 2015: 173-174)

The learning process is very thick with the interaction process. Interaction itself is a form of communication. So that in the classroom there is definitely a communication process. Communication in the classroom can be understood as an interaction between the teacher and the students in the classroom through verbal, nonverbal and written. As the social needs insist that we share our thoughts with others. It motivates, informs, suggests, warns, orders, changes behavior and establishes better relationships, to make interaction meaningful and make oneself understood. (Pasaragonda, 2021:55)

FINDINGS

The learning process that changed from face-to-face to virtual online with the help of technology such as the zoom application and google meet allows the learning participants to have a unique "story" that shows their experiences after undergoing the online learning process. Some findings related to the online learning process can be seen from the following points:

Perception of the Online Learning Process

Informants are students from different batches. Some are class 2019 while others are class 2020 students. Class 2020 is a batch of students who from the start have been through online learning. Even the initial process such as P3KMABA (early orientation period for new students) is carried out online. Of those in the class of 2020, they stated that it was the first time they had conducted online learning, they had no idea what the online learning process would be like. At first they were confused about what the learning process would look like when it was carried out online. This can be seen from the expression of T, a class of 2020 student who stated:

"For the first time,yeaa,we did not know what online learning is. When I was in Senior High School, there was no online learning so I had no idea about lecture using online learning. That's why I did not have any expectation, surely I did not know what online learning is and there is no expectation."

The same thing was conveyed by SP, a class of 2020 student who stated that he did not yet have an idea of what the online learning process was like because he was not familiar with learning media that are commonly used for online learning. He stated this in the following statement:

"same as others, I did not know any online learning media such as Google meet and zoom. Therefore, there is no any knowledge or expectation on what offline – online lecture will be."

A more extreme opinion was expressed by G, a 2020 student who herself felt a bit shocked when the learning process was carried out online, because apart from not being familiar with platforms for the online learning process, she also needed adjustments and learning first.

However, when the class of 2019 students who have had time to go through the offline learning process also don't have a clear idea at first what the online learning will look like. This was stated by GT, a class of 2019 student who stated the following:

"Ok, if we will have online lecture, actually I never have any thought on it before. Just by imagining it feels wierd. How the online learning will be? since we have offline learning but then suddenly it comes to online learning. I thought it will not be effective and it cannot be. But after months we go through online learning, we realize we can go through it.'

Perception of space and time

One form of change that occurs when the learning process is online / online is the fact that the learning process can be done anywhere either at home, in a café or elsewhere and does not have to be done on campus. This fact turned out to have an impact and differences in perceptions among students about the learning process itself. When the learning process is not carried out on campus but is carried out from their respective homes, the informal atmosphere is more pronounced than the learning process. If the learning process on campus is carried out in a very formal manner, natural and out-of-the-ordinary conditions that may not occur when studying on campus are very likely to occur when the learning process is carried out from home. This was stated by S, a class of 2020 student who stated:

"Ya sometimes we can see the lecturer wearing T-shirt while teaching because it is in a house so it's more informal situation though it is conditioned to be formal as it can be but when there is ice cream stall

passing in front of the house, it looks like informal too. Besides, there is a cat which may annoy the learning process.”

The informal atmosphere during the online learning process from home is also described when difficulties other than technical difficulties arise. Such as conditions of disturbances originating from habits at home that arise when students are in the learning process. SP, a class of 2020 student stated that when studying at home the informal atmosphere became more pronounced when he studied but sometimes he was also asked for help to help people at home such as parents. He stated this in the following statement:

“at college we are students whose responsibility is only study, when we are at home, we also have responsibilities beside studying, for example when parents or siblings ask for our help plus if there is any technical glitch since we use Internet.”

The same thing was stated by V, a student of class 2019. He considers when studying at home the challenge to study is an informal atmosphere, for example in a room that makes him feel like he is studying but can be done while lying down. This he states in the following argument:

“For me, honestly, there are a lot of inconveniences especially during full online learning because the online learning process is in my bedroom, I can laying on bed while studying”

The learning process from home also brings its own difficulties for students. The informal atmosphere that became a habit when they were at home turned out to make it difficult for them to focus and easy to be distracted from the focus of learning. In addition, activities that are usually carried out on campus are related to the learning process on campus when carried out at home, so there is a strange feeling when these activities are noticed by other people who are at home. This was stated by S, a class of 2020 student who stated the following:

“then, about mental matter just like what T, SP, G said, example when the class is ordered to be like presenter media, ordered to do something in front of screen such as reading text while wearing pants and clothes we usually wear at home, and then we are watched by people at home.”

The same thing was stated by SL, a 2019 class student who stated that it was difficult to study online when she was easily distracted by things around her. He states in the following argument:

“For me, the hardest difficulty is distraction. When we are in online class, we are easy to distract by the things and it makes us unfocus. We will hear sounds we are not suppose to hear while we are in class yet we have to hear many instructions related to class such as who is going to print, there is somebody talking while at the same time mama or sister is calling. Finally everyone is distracted.”

Interaction with fellow students and lecture

The learning process is in dire need and there must be an interaction process. Interaction between fellow students and interaction between learningrs and students. When the learning process is carried out face-to-face, the interaction becomes very fluid to do. Feedback can be easily obtained. However, when the interaction is mediated by a device or application (with certain facilities) it sometimes makes the interaction more rigid and feedback can be difficult to obtain. This was stated by several students from the class of 2020.

"but when we are working in group, we are set to be in a group and suddenly the situation gets awkward because everybody turns off the camera since we do not know each other yet."

More or less the same thing was also stated by T, a student of class 2020. The interaction between students who did not know them before directly affects the interaction process among students when the online learning process is carried out. He stated this in the following statement:

"For example, at first time we don't know each other yet and randomly we are grouped into breakout room. In this situation, there is nobody speaks to start the discussion wether it is because nobody is willing to speak or because every body is afraid, and finally nobody speaks and there is no communication."

The interaction between learning and students or students with students mediated by technology devices/applications brings other unique habits. The communication process which is usually direct and face-to-face requires that the process occur in one "scene" and attention. However, when the interaction process is carried out mediated, the process can be carried out in parallel with other devices. Or in popular terms today is "dual device". This practice likens the process of interaction for an activity can be done simultaneously with interactions on other screens / on other devices. This emerged from the statement of V, a class of 2019 student who stated the following:

"Umm...sometimes the students just do what they want. I ever came back again to class, this is my way to prevent sleepiness and when in online class I have snacks and talk to friend with google meet in order to be not sleepy."

In addition to the dual device phenomenon that is becoming more common, the existence of certain facilities from technological devices that make interaction processes such as learnings mediated makes the main interaction possible with other activities. Either formal activities or other activities that have nothing to do with the main activity. The phenomenon of "multi tasking" becomes very possible when there are "off cam" and "off mic" facilities from technological devices. The learning process can be done with other activities. In G's view, the class of 2020 students online learnings can be ineffective because this learning process can be done with other activities. He stated this in the following statement:

"I think during the online class for two years, everybody does not do it seriously. Honestly, when the lecturer explains things, 90% of students are sleeping, eating, playing, or doing other activities because of the nature of online class that students do not have to sit still and listen."

Another argument was conveyed by GT, a 2019 student. She has the perspective of preferring offline learnings because they are considered more effective, but when she sees effectiveness at work, online becomes more effective. This he states in the following argument:

"For the evectivity of online class, I give some points. For example, from the point of process of learning and teaching, I prefer offline class or face to face since the online one we are easy to distract and finally we cannot focus just on one thin. However, if we are in offline class, we can get focus. On the other hand, from the point of interactions with friends or work on something, it is more effective in online indeed because it can be done directly yet it is difficult to find time."

"One phenomenon I feel the most is there are more things can be done in online class. I mean, in one time we can do many asssignments and it can be done in shorter time compared if doing it offline, one assignment can take hours because of the transportation and other things. For example, for me it takes 1 hour from home to college. In Online class, that 1 hour can be maximized by working on one assignment. So for me, in online class we can work faster. On the other hand, we can understand well in offline class"

Changes in Learning Policy

The policy of the learning process in its development then changed. This happened in line with the improvement in conditions that allowed the learning process to be carried out face-to-face but was limited. It is possible for the learning process to be carried out on site but also run online. The condition of these two realms makes there are students who take face-to-face learnings in class, but there are also those who attend online as well as from home. The process of changing this situation, especially for students who were initially online and then chose face-to-face learnings, made them need certain adaptations, especially for the class of 2020.

Adaptation to changing situations

For students of the class of 2020, a change to a hybrid system that allows students to carry out the learning process face-to-face means that they need certain adaptations. The simplest is an adjustment in terms of preparation when starting learnings such as self-preparation. This was stated by G, a class of 2020 student who stated:

"It is the adaptation in the preparing time Sir. When it is online, we do not need to take any preparation. We can wake up like 5 minutes before the class begins and then turn on the laptop. But now we have to prepare at home and there is also time from home to college. So it takes longer time and we are not used to this."

The learning process which is mediated by devices with certain facilities makes it possible for students to carry out the recording process of the material. So there is a possibility for students to be able to recall the material because they can revisit the recording. However, when the learning process is carried out directly, the recall process for the material that has been delivered by the learningr becomes difficult to do. This was stated by respondent T, a class of 2020 students as follows:

"In online class, we can record so we can re run the record if we forget things. In offline class, if we cannot get one thing, then we do not get it until the end."

When the face-to-face learning process takes place for the class of 2020 students, they also experience unique social conditions. In terms of the learning process they feel something that they do not experience when everything is done virtually. For example SP, a class of 2020 student who feels the positive side as well as the side that surprises him from class interactions carried out face-to-face. He stated in the following statement:

"For the learning process itself, there were both plus – minus things. If we are in face to face class, we listen to the lecturer better and if there is something we do not understand, we can ask directly but when our face shows any confused expression, we are directly ask , "You don't get it yet, do you?"

S, the class of 2020 students felt the symptom of a social butterfly when they first started to enter campus. He met a lot of people that he had not met before but felt familiar with him. This happens because many virtual activities occur but do not require him to interact with other people directly. He states in the following argument:

"First thing I experienced in Hybrid class, umm I think it's a social butterfly. For example, because of we are in one UKM in college, there are many videos uploaded on Youtube. Sometimes when there is an event shared on Youtube, many persons that I don't know yet says hello and I wonder who they are"

Aspects of social relations with fellow students also become closer when they can interact directly. G, the class of 2020 students feel that the bonds between students are getting closer because of other activities that can be done directly apart from learnings. He stated in the following statement:

"It may be better in face to face class. We can have break and luch time together therefore the bonding also can be strong here."

Regarding adaptation in the learning process, most of the 2019 batch felt no need for significant adaptation when they returned to hybrid and face-to-face learning. This is because they have experienced with the face-to-face process earlier. This can be seen from several statements of student informants from the class of 2019 as follows:

"I don't need to adapt, it may because I'm glad to meet people so I really do not feel shy to meet people after almost 2 years I do not meet people but then I automatically become so excited when I meet people. Besides, I do not hesitate to come to collage or having any thought on many things such as how or what to prepare. I just come and following the lecture and yes I feel it is more effective to learn face to face at class room. So it is really secure, there is no hybrid anymore."(MG, student of 2019)

"Personally, I don't have any adaptation since I already familiar with online and then offline for a while, I ever came to Surabaya so I stay online too. So, I don't feel any inconvenience." "(RE, student of 2019)

Hybrid as a alternative solution

Related to the practice of hybrid learnings. Most of the students stated that they preferred the hybrid pattern. According to them, this hybrid pattern has a flexibility side. This flexibility side means that they can attend learnings when they have to do with other activities or other reasons that make them unable to come directly to campus. This was stated by T, a 2020 student who argued as follows:

"I tend to choose hybrid because there is any chance for us to choose online. For example, if we do not feel well or we have any urgent and unpredictable activity or moment that may distract the class, we still have any chance to attend the class online. However there is plus or minus side, especially for students of Communication, it is better to meet and talk face to face. Also, the practices will be done on –site but it also open for any chance with this Hybrid."

The positive aspect of implementing this Hybrid was observed by GT, a2019 student. According to her, this hybrid brings a side of flexibility that makes many things can be done simultaneously and can be more effective. She states in the following argument:

"For me,I prefer Hybrid among the offline, online and Hybrid. I think Hybrid is more flexible because when it's on-site we are more rigid. For the hybrid, we can have both the positif and negatif sides. For example, if today there will be many activities to do, and it is impossible to come to college, it means there will be certain activity to cancel or to be done yet there are more tasks since I'm a type of multitasking person . so, if in urgent situation and I have to do many things at the same time, I ask permission to the lecturer that today I will attend the class online and I will keep listening to the lecturer while I work on other thing at the same time so both activities can be done and get maximum result. No time wasting or whatever."

However, G, has another opinion about this hybrid method. He personally still believes that face-to-face learning will be more effective. He states in the following argument:

"Personally, I prefer full offline although the Hybrid also provides any conveniences for us especially when we have family gathering or other activities, we can attend the online class. However, personally, it sometimes makes us use it when we are not willing to college."

For 2019 students who had a face-to-face meeting and then turned fully online and turned back online,they felt some difficulties when trying to hybrid. GT, who was trying a hybrid, once took an online class due to an activity, felt that he didn't get the material optimally when he returned to online learning during the hybrid period. He states in the following argument:

"however there was one day I ask permission to attend the class online and at that moment I felt it was more difficult because the lecturer tend to be focus on the on-site class. So, students who attend online class feel it is more difficult to understand especially when the lecturer stands far from the camera and the voice becomes not clear enough to listen. So, it is more difficult when we choose online in Hybrid class because the lecturer tend to focus more on the off-site class."

VR, class of 2019 students also agree that the hybrid mode is more beneficial. He argues through the following statement:

"I prefer Hybrid one. For me, it is ourselves who know the moment when our body is not in good condition or if we have urgent moment, we do not need to take our absence choice."

CONCLUSION

The learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic is a unique process. In the eyes of students, the online learning process has interesting sides based on what they have experienced. For students of the class of 2020, they don't have an idea and are confused about the online learning process at first. The learning process becomes something informal for them regarding how they perceive the learning process when it can be done from anywhere, for example from home. Disturbances and difficulty in focusing when studying were felt by most of the students in both the 2019 and 2020 classes regarding the full online learning process. The phenomenon of dual device and multi-tasking is something that happens when the recovery process is done online. When there is a process of policy change from online to hybrid, certain adaptations and adjustments are needed for students of the class of 2020 but not for students of class 2019. Most students who become informants, when they have gone through the online or hybrid learning process feel that the hybrid system offers a flexible side for students.

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