

# Students' Challenges During Online Learning in English Correspondence Subject

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the challenges faced by English education students of the PGRI University of West Sumatra class of 2021 in the English correspondence course. Participants in this study are students who undergo online learning for six months using the Zoom platform and e-learning in the English correspondence course. The method used in this study is qualitative with a phenomenological approach, which involves interviews to collect data on student experiences. The sample of this study consists of 9 students of the class of 2021 who were selected through purposive sampling with specific criteria, namely participating in practice teaching as a pre-service teacher at the same time as online learning in the English Correspondence course. The results of the study show that the main challenges faced include unstable internet connection problems, lack of self-discipline and motivation, and lack of face-to-face interaction. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of digital pedagogy and improve the quality of online English learning as well as become a reference for educational institutions in designing curricula that are more responsive to student needs.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Online learning has greatly increased flexibility in higher education, but also poses unique challenges especially in subject that strongly depend on interaction, like English language education. The efficiency of the learning process might be impacted by problem that students regularly face, such as technical limitations, a lack of direct interaction with teachers and classmates, and difficulty managing motivation (Yufhita et al., 2023). For students taking on multiple academic responsibilities like pre-service teachers participating in practice teaching at school, this scenario becomes even more complicated. This combined position of participating in activities as a pre-service teacher at school and having to take part in online learning becomes very difficult because it is exacerbated by the clash of time commitments as well as physical and emotional limitations.

Although a lot of study has been done on the general difficulties of online learning, there is still a specific knowledge gap regarding the complex experiences of pre-service teachers who must manage specific online education with extensive, required fieldwork. The majority of prior research often overlooks the specific pedagogical requirements of language acquisition and the unique demands faced by students in English education programs, instead generalizing the online learning experience or focusing

solely on technical challenges. "What challenges are faced by English students' registered in the 2021 academic year who took English correspondence subject during online learning?" is the specific issue statement that this study aims to solve.

The purpose of this study is to determine the challenges they faced when learning online. This study focused on finding out the challenges they experienced when using Zoom to participate in online sessions for experience teaching English correspondence courses. This study specifically focuses on identifying the technical, pedagogical, and interactional problems that students encounter when learning online and investigating the impact of these challenges on their engagement and learning results.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the challenges faced by English education students in online learning. This approach was chosen because it emphasizes depth of understanding and aims to explore the subjective meaning of human experiences in depth (Saad Ali Al-Sherbiny Associate Professor, n.d.). Because it focuses on capturing the essence of users' real experiences throughout online learning, the phenomenological design is especially appropriate.

English education students from the University of PGRI West Sumatra's 2021 class were used as the research subjects. They took part in online classes for the English Correspondence course throughout their seventh semester teaching practice, which lasted roughly six months, from July to December 2024. Using purposive sampling, the researcher chose nine students (three students each class) from a population of 63 students based on specific criteria: they had to be from the 2021 cohort, participate in the online English Correspondence subject, and be actively engaged in teaching practice as pre-service teachers.

Structured interviews lasting three to five minutes each were videotaped with participant agreement in order to collect data on July 14-16. The interview guide was developed based on indicators adapted from Culduz (2024). The interview guide consisted of five main indicators: lack of direct feedback and personal support, limitation face-to-face interaction, need for high discipline and self-motivation, technical issues, quality management and participant engagement. The stages of qualitative data analysis described by Creswell (2009) were followed in the data analysis process. These stages included transcription and data organization, data exploration and reduction, coding based on five primary indicators, and interpretation and reporting of findings in narrative format, emphasizing important themes, participant quotes, and implications for enhancing online learning experiences for English education students.

## 3. RESULTS

This study identifies five main challenges faced by students in online learning of English Correspondence courses: lack of direct feedback and personalized support, limitations of face-to-face interaction, high discipline and self-motivation, technical issues, and quality management & participant engagement.

### **3.1. Lack of Direct Feedback and Personalized Support**

This study explored students' perceptions of feedback and personalized support during online learning via Zoom in practice teaching English correspondence courses. Data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with students and analyzed thematically.

The results show that during online sessions, lecturer regularly called students by name. In addition to being a way to record attendance, this practice served as a tactic to keep students interested and involved. According to one participant, "the lecturer usually calls my name to ask whether I understand or not" (Student 1), lecturer frequently called students' names at the start of class and throughout explanations to verify understanding. In a similar vein, another participant described how lecturer called students by name during Q&A sessions or explanations, which encouraged continued engagement (Student 2). These answers imply that lecturer made an effort to promote more personalized connection in order to reduce the impersonality of online learning.

Regarding students' comprehension of the course topics, the majority of participants stated that they typically understood the lecturer' explanations during Zoom sessions. Clear explanations were shown to be a crucial component of understanding assistance. "I can understand the material because the lecturer usually gives clear explanations," said one student (Student 1). But comprehension varied depending on the subject. A student noted that "there are some materials I understand quickly, and some that I do not understand very well" (Student 4). Other participants stated that their comprehension varied depending on the topic. (Student 5) said that "I understand, but not as deeply as when learning in person," emphasizing that while comprehension was attained, it was not as deep as in the classroom. These answers suggest that although online education might help with comprehension, it may restrict comprehension's depth and consistency.

In terms of lecturer response, the results demonstrate that during online lectures, lecturer swiftly addressed students' inquiries. When questions were posed, students consistently reported receiving prompt responses. While one student noted that lecturer continued to explain "until we understood," another said, "the lecturer answered my question immediately" (Student 3). This implies that despite the virtual environment, lecturer continued to communicate actively and gave students' comprehension top priority.

Lastly, the findings show that lecturer frequently gave students prompt feedback on their tasks. Students stated that timely and consistent feedback was provided. One student clarified that "the lecturer always provides feedback on my assignments" (Student 5), while another emphasized the feedback's quickness, saying that "the lecturer always gives quick feedback" (Student 1). These answers show how important prompt feedback was in helping students learn and making up for the lack of direct, in-person instruction.

Overall, the results demonstrate that lecturer made significant attempts to address these concerns through frequent engagement, prompt replies, and consistent feedback, even though online learning offers obstacles relating to restricted direct

feedback and tailored assistance. However, student narratives show that online learning still has drawbacks, especially when it comes to reaching the same level of comprehension as in-person education.

### **3.2. Limitation of face-to-face Interaction**

The results demonstrate that during Zoom sessions, lecturer frequently displayed her/his faces. Every students stated the lecturer were visually present for the whole lesson. "The lecturer fully shows his/her face during Zoom sessions," according to one participant (Student 5), while other students (Students 6 and 9) also agreed that lecturer were constantly on camera. Students believed that this visual presence was crucial to fostering a feeling of intimacy and involvement. Observing the lecturer's facial expressions enhanced comprehension through nonverbal clues and lessened the impersonality of online learning.

On the other hand, there was inconsistent utilization of cameras by students during Zoom sessions. According to the participants, many students choose to turn off their cameras for situational and motivational reasons, but some turned them on out of respect for their lecturer. While many students switched off the camera because they were on the go or participating in practice teaching activities, one student clarified that the purpose of turning on the camera was "to appreciate the lecturer" (Student 1). "Some students do not turn on their cameras because they are lazy, such as sleeping in their rooms," according to another participant, who stated that some students turned off their cameras because they lacked motivation (Student 2). These narratives suggest that online learning allows limited control over students' learning environments, which affects engagement and interaction.

Additionally, there was a wide variation in the number of students that engaged visually during Zoom sessions. According to some participants, "only about five students showing their faces during Zoom classes" (Student 1), indicating extremely low visible involvement. Some reported greater levels of involvement, saying that "three-quarters of students activated their cameras" (Student 5). Student 8 had a more balanced stance, pointing out that while participation was comparatively high, it was incomplete since some students were unable to connect or activate cameras because of "signal problems or limited internet data."

These results show that face-to-face engagement during online learning has limits that are not just pedagogical but also technological and environmental. While students' inconsistent camera use limits nonverbal communication, impromptu conversation, and peer social connection, lecturers' constant visual presence fosters engagement. These difficulties are made worse by technical limitations, multitasking during practice instruction, and diminished motivation. Overall, the findings show that Zoom-based online learning is unable to completely mimic the interactive dynamics of in-person classrooms, especially when it comes to encouraging regular visual engagement and interpersonal ties among students.

### **3.3. High Discipline and Self-Motivation**

The results show that students' self-motivation and discipline were critical to the success of Zoom-based online learning. Interview data show differences in

perseverance, class continuity, and punctuality that are impacted by motivational, technical, and personal variables.

Some students showed excellent self-discipline in terms of punctuality by regularly arriving on time for Zoom courses. "I always join Zoom quickly when the class starts," said one participant (Student 1), while another (Student 4) attested to being "on time." On the other hand, exhaustion, conflicting activities, and technological problems caused problems for other students. One student said that "many students fall asleep and are often late," which made afternoon sessions difficult because students were frequently exhausted and forgot the timetable (Student 2). Punctuality was also impacted by internet access, with delays happening when "the signal is weak" (Student 8).

In terms of class continuity, almost all of participants stated that they had at least once left Zoom sessions before the end of the course. Unreliable internet connections were the main cause. Particularly in rural locations, students reported frequent disruptions brought on by low network quality, such as "the network in my village is often unstable, especially when it rains" (Student 1). One participant acknowledged quitting class "because I got bored" (Student 2), showing decreased participation in online learning, in addition to technical issues. It was discovered that persistence in remaining till the end of the class was conditional. When there were no technical issues, several students stayed until the end of the lesson, saying "If there are no signal problems, I always stay until the class ends" (Student 7). However, the roles that students played during the class determined how engaged they were. As one student put it, "when I am presenting, I stay until the end, but when I am only an audience member, I tend to leave earlier" (Student 5), active participation boosted perseverance.

Overall, the findings show that although some students demonstrated excellent self-motivation and discipline, online learning necessitates significant self-regulation to overcome obstacles including weariness, erratic internet connectivity, and low interest. These results imply that disciplined students, dependable technology, and engaging teaching methods are all necessary for successful online learning.

### 3.4. Technical Issues

The efficacy of Zoom-based online learning has been found to be significantly impacted by technical problems. According to the results of the interviews, erratic internet connections, inadequate infrastructure, and bandwidth limitations regularly interfered with the learning process and increased student annoyance. Many students, especially those who lived in remote or rural regions, experienced unreliable internet access. "Sometimes the connection is stable, sometimes it is not, because I live in a village," one participant clarified (Student 1). "When the electricity goes out, the internet is lost, and I cannot attend the class," according to another student who detailed more dire circumstances (Student 2). These accounts demonstrate a glaring digital gap, with institutional obstacles preventing students in remote locations from regularly engaging in online education.

Apart from geographical restrictions, technological issues like sluggish or sporadic connectivity were also encountered. Due to shared WIFI usage and bandwidth constraints, students experienced frequent interruptions. While some participants

reported "slow" or "intermittent" signals during Zoom sessions, others (Students 7 and 8) reported that "the network becomes very difficult because the WIFI is used by many people" (Student 6). The fact that these interruptions have grown commonplace indicates that students' online learning experiences now frequently involve technological issues. The majority of students stated that their gadgets were typically sufficient for online study, despite connectivity issues. Those who used computers or cellphones said they were enough helpful. "I use a laptop, and it supports my online learning," said one student (Student 1), while another (Student 3) affirmed that using a smartphone was equally "supportive." "Alhamdulillah, the device is enough" (Student 5), a participant's statement of thankfulness, shows knowledge of uneven access to technology as well as acceptance of current circumstances.

Overall, the results show that although students have adjusted to utilizing the devices that are accessible, technological problems especially erratic internet connections and inadequate infrastructure remain major barriers to successful online learning. These issues highlight the need for more inclusive technology assistance and adaptable learning designs that take into account different levels of access, since they not only interfere with instructional continuity but also run the danger of lowering students' motivation and learning results.

### **3.5. Quality Management and Participant Engagement**

This subject discusses how student participation in Zoom-based online learning is impacted by participant management. According to the results of the interviews, lecturer made a concerted effort to involve students by often asking for their thoughts and input, even if huge class numbers made it difficult to provide customized attention.

According to student reports, lecturer frequently asked students to participate in Zoom sessions. "Lecturer are active in asking for feedback because they understand that students are often tired after practice teaching," according to one participant (Student 5). "The lecturer frequently asks for feedback during attendance-taking or question-and-answer sessions" according to another participant (Student 6). These answers imply that lecturer often included feedback-seeking into their lesson plans as a tactic to keep students interested. Overall, the findings show that lecturer made deliberate efforts to manage participant engagement by encouraging interaction, despite the challenges posed by large numbers of students in online classes. However, while such practices supported participation, the effectiveness of interaction remained constrained by limited opportunities for personalized attention in a virtual learning environment.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

According to the study's findings, English Education students at the University of PGRI West Sumatra (Class of 2021) had significant difficulties when taking the English Correspondence course online. The results show five primary markers of difficulty: technological problems, little in-person engagement, limitations in immediate feedback, difficulties with motivation and self-control, and participant management. Among them,

the most prevalent barriers were constraints in face-to-face interaction, significant demands on motivation and self-discipline, and technological problems.

Despite lecturer' best attempts to offer direction, engagement, and feedback, challenges including erratic internet access and limited contact persisted. The unique circumstances of the students, especially the overlap between online learning and practice teaching activities in schools, exacerbated the difficulties and had a detrimental impact on motivation, attendance, and attention. Overall, the results indicate that students' personal and contextual circumstances have an impact on successful online learning in addition to pedagogical and technological elements.

Several recommendations are put out in light of these findings. To guarantee that students can concentrate completely on each task, academic programs are advised not to schedule online courses concurrently with practice teaching activities. Students are encouraged to take more initiative in class participation, especially during discussion sessions, to actively express technical concerns to lecturers, and to develop time management skills. It is advised that future academics look at practical ways to deal with these issues, carry out studies with bigger sample sizes, look at lecturers' viewpoints, or do comparison studies to understand more about how practice teaching affects online learning.

#### **Authors' contribution**

[Author 1] Write scripts, and collect data. [Author 2] Provide ideas and check scripts. [Author 3] Providing ideas and proofreading the manuscript

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