



The Effectiveness of The Digital Platform on ELT in Remote Area

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Abstract

Pandemic has changed people's ways of life; one of them is the usage of digital learning. It gives a new habit for the teacher in delivering material and giving assignments. Over a year's teaching learning process is done via online since the government does not give any permission to conduct face-to-face learning activity. Therefore, teachers and students have to deal with digital platforms like Google Classroom, Google Meet, Youtube, Zoom and Whatsapp. Those who have good access and facilities would not have any problem, but how about people in remote areas? They face some barriers such as the internet connection problem, the electricity availability, students' mobile phone availability and the ability to provide internet data. This paper aims to show how effective the digital platform for teaching and learning activities in remote areas is. The data is collected from a survey that is distributed via Google form to the English teachers who teach in remote areas. Most of them say that the messenger application, Whatsapp, has become the most effective in online teaching.

Key words: Digital platform, ELT, remote area, online learning, Whatsapp.

Introduction

Digital platform was first recognized widely as a transportation application. Their coming makes people feel easier in doing daily activities, and then it grows to be food delivery. In a research of digital platform, a study about digital platforms and found that it led to a growing interest in research on this topic amongst IS scholars [1]. It shows us that nowadays digital platforms are widely used among educational institutions. Digital platforms are now increasingly being used in all kinds of activities, one of which is used in the learning process at school. Even before the pandemic, lots of schools used the digital platform in the teaching and learning process. The world is changing and people are constantly connected to the online world and use digital technology to find the information they need. In other words, the digital generation uses the digital media as an integral part of their lives [2].

Indonesia, before the pandemic, was not used to living with online activity. When Covid-19 came, we began to adapt to the online. The government allows people to do activities online, including working and going to school, later it is called by working from home. This policy aims to curb the widespread of the virus and to reduce the transmission and the number of cases [3]. To be sure, it is not difficult for a big school downtown, with their lab facilities, good internet connection and the nature of students who use mobile phones every day, to carry out online learning. They can choose what platform they want to use without any problem. This situation allows them to study well. Digital platform turns out into a learning center. Platforms are relationally and powerfully affecting teaching and learning settings [4]. However, this contrast is found in remote areas, where only a few students have their own mobile phone.

The problems do not stop here, the availability of electricity and signal stability add to the list of barriers that must be faced by teachers and students.

Indonesia nowadays still has 62 regencies that are included into remote area category decided by the Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration [5]. The data is published in a village building index book that shows all of the areas in Indonesia from Sabang to Merauke. But then, this paper includes regency that is a developed area based on the internet connection from no signal and less signal stability. Indirectly, these conditions represent that in this digital age, there are plentiful students who cannot get the online learning experience well. The result of this paper tells us that the messenger application, Whatsapp, is the most effective in the online teaching learning process. WhatsApp is the best selected application to be used for teaching in the remote areas since it has the highest agreement for all criteria (the effectiveness, practicality and low budget data) [6]. In that research it is selected 15 students who lived in remote areas by looking at their difficulties in attending the meeting due to lack of signal.

Key finding of this paper is that despite Whatsapp being widely used in remote areas even the student has the application; the signal stability makes the learning process disturbed. Not every student's house has a good internet connection. That is why sometimes the students get miscommunication in receiving the material and assignment. Meanwhile, other digital platforms such as YouTube, Google Classroom, Google Meet and Zoom are used a very few times due to poor internet connectivity. The most important finding of this paper is that there are some areas that still have no signal so that they cannot conduct online teaching and learning processes. The students need to come to school to get the module and assignments to be submitted at the next meeting.

The rest of the study shows the government that there are many areas that have poor internet connection and even no signal. This kind of situation needs to be solved since the digital age has come and it will be our future activity, teaching and learning in particular. Effective English language teaching needs to capture the key aspects of changes in digital practices [7]. The pandemic has forced us to have digital skills in every life sector. As the implication, Indonesia needs to improve the digitized ability so that we do not leave behind other countries.

Theoretical Reviews

Digital Platform

At first, Indonesian people started to recognize transportation applications (e.g. Grab, Gojek and Uber) that are fast spread among society. This is a start for Indonesia to get used to doing activities online. People are getting used to doing road trips just by ordering on the application and it has developed into a platform to order food. We can send food to anyone and anywhere from this application. Since then, Indonesians have started using various applications to make their activities easier, such as ordering a massage therapist, house cleaners and spring bed cleaning services. All of these applications are called digital platforms, which are things that allow people to interact. A digital platform refers to the software or hardware of a website allowing for the interaction of its users [8]. The core of the digital platform was initially interaction and transactions, it is a digital space that provides facilities for users to do collaboration, interaction or transact digitally [9]. Digital platforms support new ways of interacting within communities. Here, we can say that a digital platform is a media for people to meet, interact and transact something [10].

When the pandemic came in early 2020, like it or not, people were forced to carry out activities online, something that had never been imagined before. The government restricts the movement of people to control the rate of the virus so that it does not spread further. What happened then? People are panicking because they have to adapt to new things, working from home for workers and students. In the context of education, the educational institutions organize online learning using a digital platform. A digital platform is as an avenue to create a virtual classroom for educators and their students [11]. It is used as a way to conduct the learning process by creating a positive atmosphere in teaching and learning English. Digital tools facilitate the teachers in applying digital teaching [12].

Digital age has applied in Indonesia's learning process. It is increasingly widespread in the pandemic and new normal era. Each school has a different policy in using digital platforms used in the learning process. There are a number of schools which require a video meeting at every class. Of course, this can only be done by some schools, considering that internet access in Indonesia is not evenly distributed. Internet access is the main problem students have to face during online learning. Some of the digital platforms that are often used are Google Classroom, Google Meet, Zoom, YouTube and Whatsapp. Before this platform was used, we got to know Edmodo, which is a global education network that helps connect all learners with the people and resources needed to reach their full potential [13].

Of all the digital platforms mentioned, Whatsapp is the most favorite application used in online learning activities. This messenger application is very easy to use and every student has it on their mobile phone, even though it has its weaknesses, especially in giving assignments. When students want to submit their work by taking a photo or attaching a document, they need to have an internet quota. In fact, not all children get an internet data package quota

every month. The economic level of the society, which is below the standard, makes it difficult to organize online learning.

Indonesia's Remote Area

Every year, the Indonesian government releases the latest village building index (IDM) data in each region. Based on Presidential Regulation (Perpres) Number 63 of 2020 concerning the determination of underdeveloped regions in 2020–2024, there are 62 regions that are determined to be underdeveloped.

In determining an area as developed or underdeveloped, the Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration prepares Standard Operational Procedures for Updating IDM Village Development Status as a basic guide for stakeholders. There are 3 indexes that must be assessed, namely the social resilience index, the economic resilience index and the environmental resilience index. Each index has several dimensions. The social resilience index assesses: the dimensions of health, the dimensions of education, the dimensions of social capital and the dimensions of settlements.

The economic resilience index assesses: the dimensions of production diversity, the dimensions of trade, the dimensions of distribution access, the dimensions of credit access, the dimensions of economic institutions and the dimensions of regional openness.

Meanwhile, the environmental resilience index assesses several dimensions, namely: the dimensions of environmental quality and the dimensions of potential and disaster response.

Implementing online learning in Indonesia seems rudimentary when compared to other countries. The availability of facilities and human resource skills is still deficient. In remote areas, internet access and electricity are the main problems in the implementation of online schools. At school, the signal may be good, but students experience internet access problems in their homes.

Methodology

This paper uses a quantitative method with purposive sampling technique in obtaining research data. The survey was given to English teachers who teach in remote areas and non-remote areas (poor internet access and electricity) in the form of a Google Form.

There were 20 junior high school English teachers who filled out this research survey. They come from several region: Aceh Tengah, Pesisir Barat (Lampung), Bengkalis (Riau), Ketapang (West Kalimantan), Pandeglang and West Bandung (West Java), Sumba Barat Daya and Alor (East Nusa Tenggara), Yalimo (Papua) and South Sorong (West Papua).

Several areas that are not remote areas according to the village building index become one of the targets of this study due to the absence of a signal and unstable electricity

Findings and Discussion

As shown in Figure 1, most students have a mobile phone (63.2%) and it is used during the learning process. It should be good news that online learning is running well. Unfortunately, in fact, not all children get an internet data package quota every month. The economic level of the society, which is below the standard, makes it difficult to organize online learning. Even to access the website, sometimes students cannot do it because they do not have internet quota.

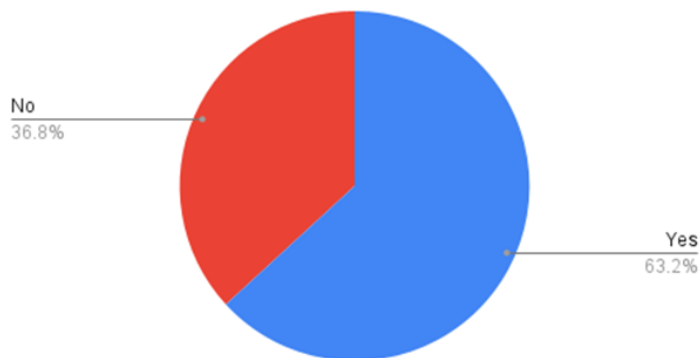


Figure 1. Students Rate On Having Mobile Phone

Since the pandemic, the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education has distributed internet quota support to students in Indonesia. Unfortunately, in obtaining that program, we must begin with data verification by school operators, which is wasting time and energy. Moreover, the process also requires internet access, and again, not all areas have good access. At the author's school, which incidentally does not fall into the remote area category, internet access and electricity are still barriers to online learning. When the rainy season arrives, the electricity can suddenly go out for a long time. The internet quota support received by students is not optimal because their access is limited. The goal is good, it makes the students not able to access websites outside the context of learning. However, this becomes ineffective when students, in certain situations, have to access the website, and they cannot even fill out Google Form-based questions. This situation happened to Papua's students who do not have internet quota to access websites.

Signal stability is also an obstacle in implementing online learning. As many as 63.2% said the area was less stable which of course had an impact on the learning process. As one respondent stated:

Digitization for our school has not been really felt enough because even though some students already have smartphones, the network/signal infrastructure is still very bad. (BHS)

The existence of an internet signal that tends to be unstable makes it difficult for teachers to deliver material. Digital platforms that require good signal stability are Zoom and Google Meet because the process is in the form of video meetings. This factor causes not all schools to require students to conduct video meetings.

Meanwhile, 21.1% of respondents said that their area did not have a signal. This problem can be solved by installing an internet router like the respondent in Sumba Barat Daya (NTT). It is a kind of network hardware that connects a local network to the internet. However, the results are not optimal because the problem of the internet network can be solved by building a tower.

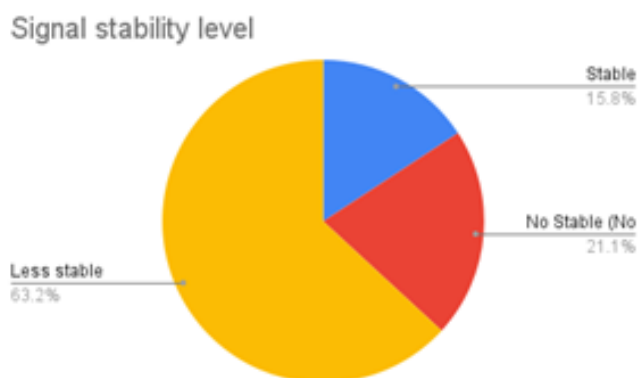


Figure 2. Internet Access Condition

The survey results (Figure 3) as many as 38.89% use Whatsapp in the learning process. This messenger application has almost become a compulsory application on every mobile phone that is why it is not difficult to ask students to use Whatsapp while studying. The next most widely used digital platform is YouTube (19.4%) followed by Google Classroom as much as 13.89%. The rest use Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams while studying online.

It is quite difficult to conduct a video meeting with students in their home. If it is conducted, the learning process is obstructed. The poor internet connection makes the audio delayed and it really disturbs the students' focus. What about YouTube? Some respondents use it as a learning media. YouTube is one of the best choices for students to get English video material beside the teachers' explanation. Due to the limited direct meeting, students have to get other material.

Google Classroom is like a virtual classroom where the students get the material and assignment. It allows the students to access the material, study by themselves and do the assignment with a due date. However, not all students notice this platform and even ignore it. It has a similar function as Whatsapp. This messenger application allows the teachers to give the material through a file, photo and voice note. Unfortunately, a few students have limited internet quota so that they cannot access the teacher's attachment.

However, there are also those who cannot hold online learning because there is no signal in their area. So that learning is done in a limited way. The teacher prepares the module for students and the assignments are submitted next week. This kind of learning process is quite common in Indonesia during the pandemic and new normal era. In addition to the limitations of internet access, students prefer to take modules to school because they are bored while studying at home.

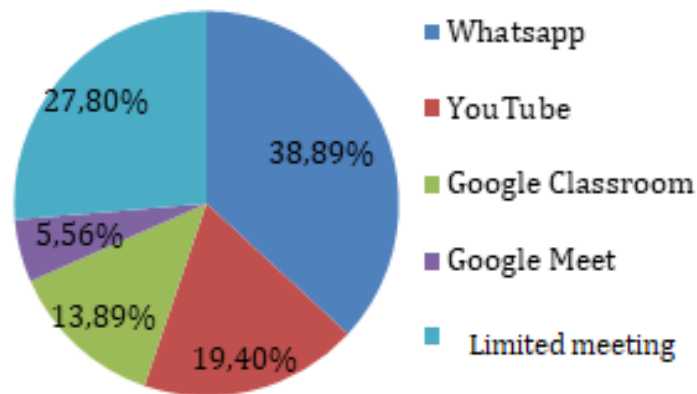


Figure 3. Digital Platform in Use

For the level of effectiveness and practicality (shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5), as many as 60% respondents said that the digital platform used was effective and practical in the learning process. They are also helped by the existence of the digital platform. As one respondent said:

For a year online for learning at school we use Google Classroom and the YouTube application. This is very helpful for us because it is very practical and efficient. It is just the signal that being less stable sometimes hinder the delivery of student assignments. (HP)

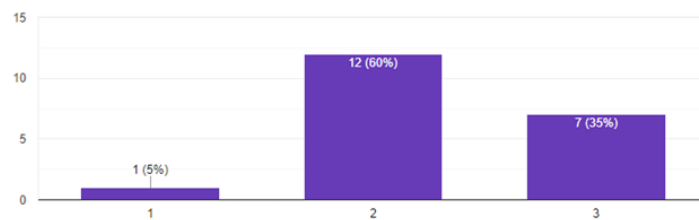


Figure 4. Platform Efficiency

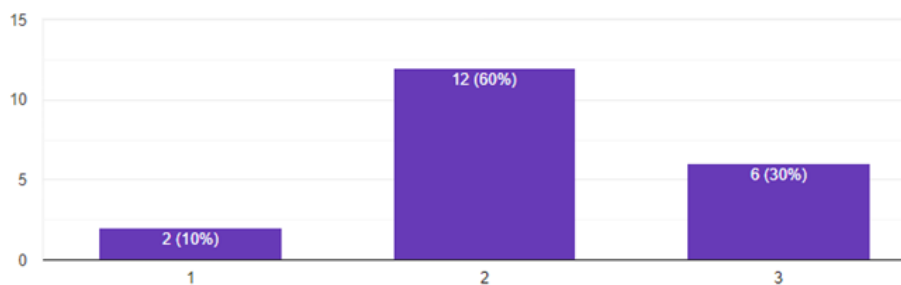


Figure 5. Platform Practicality

Another respondent experienced a different condition who said that the distribution of mobile phone ownership was minimal and signal coverage was not good, causing the acceptance of learning materials that were not optimal and even tended to fail.

There is no online learning here during the pandemic because not all students have mobile phones, there is no electricity (still using generators and not all families have personal generators and unstable T-sel signal conditions (sometimes lost for a few days). (KE)

During online learning, respondents answered that only 35% of students actively participated in learning through digital platforms. While 40% stated that they were less active and 25% of students were really not actively participating

in the lesson. Some respondents say that their students lose the curiosity of the learning material and become. Students who are not active are not entirely without a mobile phone. One respondent said that many of his students are addicted to online games. Students are less enthusiastic and less concerned about the importance of EFL literacy and task submission [14].

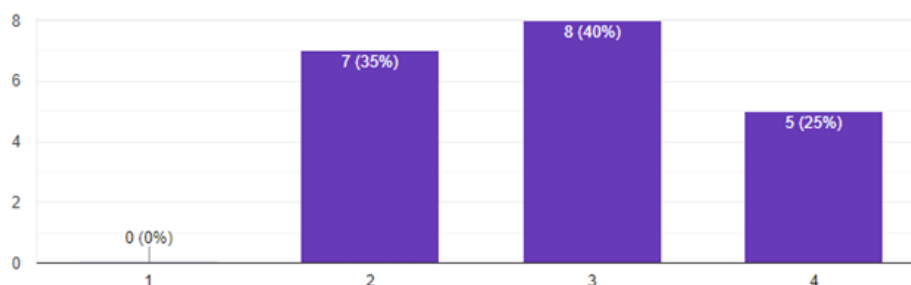


Figure 6. Students' Participation

The next challenges faced by teachers who teach in remote areas are low motivated students in online learning [15]. Most students have not been able to study independently, especially with the many online games on their mobile phones. One of the teachers who filled out the survey also said that online games distract children's learning concentration when online learning is done. The situation was very different when they studied together in the classroom. The atmosphere that students feel really helps them study well.

Are digital platforms still used today? Half of the respondents answered no (55%), even now that the government allows limited learning in schools with certain conditions. They said that digitalization is indeed good for supporting students' creative abilities, but in our school area and the area where students live, there is less signal, besides that electricity is not good in the area where students live, so there must be government concern regarding electricity facilities and signals must first be held to remote corners of the border, so that students will not miss the digitization process, especially since it is very important for our future.

Conclusion

This paper shows that the use of digital platforms in remote areas has not been fully implemented due to conditions of internet access, electricity and the availability of internet data. Government support for the internet quota cannot be fully utilized by students due to signal constraints and limited website access. In addition, students' nature shows that they have minimal adaptation to the online learning process. However, there are some effective digital platforms that can be used effectively in the teaching and learning process. Both teachers and students choose to use Whatsapp for its practicality and widely used among them. For the material, teachers use YouTube to conduct the interested learning and provide an individual learning process for the students. Other digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Google Meet and Zoom are not quite effective since they need large internet data and strong signals to be accessed.

Basically, both teachers and students are willing to carry out online learning with various available digital platforms. However, the various obstacles they experienced did not support the process. Finally, they carried out limited-way learning in the form of using modules and came to school with strict health protocols.

Limited access and area, this paper has not reached the 62 districts labeled remote area, so that further research can expand the coverage area. This paper can be used as a reference for the government that there are still areas that are not covered by the signal. This is a serious problem because we have entered the digital age. Indonesia must fix its infrastructure so that it does not lag behind other countries.

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