INDONESIAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN ONLINE LEARNING PROCESS AND INTERACTION DURING COVID-19

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Abstract

Since the beginning of 2020, Covid-19 has changed the face of global education. Online learning becomes the only feasible solution, albeit with the emergency nature in this crisis condition. Specifically in Indonesia, many elementary and middle school students struggle to cope with it and feel frustrated (Megawanti, Megawati, & Nurkhafifah, 2020). This paper observes such a phenomenon as this in Charis High School in Malang, Indonesia. It aims to identify students' perceptions regarding the online learning process, as well as their perceptions regarding their interaction with the teacher and their peers. A 4-scale Likert-like questionnaire was distributed to 175 students of Charis High School. As many as 127 students responded. Overall, they did not have any problem with gadgets and internet connection. In general, the respondents had a good experience during their online learning period. They knew whether their study time is sufficient, and when they feel the need to, they did independent study outside of school period. This is even though, like many other students, some of them might get distracted during the study. They could conduct their learning smoothly from their home and their gadgets, although the internet connection might be an occasional hindrance. The students also enjoyed various learning methods and media provided by the teacher, while still wishing for other possible alternatives. Communication-wise, they had no problem while still missing having direct face-to-face communication again, especially with their peers.

Subject Area is English Language Teaching (ELT), Online Learning

Keywords: Students' Experience, Online Learning Process, Interaction

1 Introduction

From early 2020 until the writing of this article, Covid-19 has been changing our lives, including the face of global education. Students in most parts of the world still study from home as the schools are closed for safety (UNICEF, 2020). The online learning system, which was actually introduced approximately 30 years ago (Mayer, 2019), is now the only available and feasible option.

Historically, online learning is a further development of distance learning efforts by many educational institutions. The initial historical record of distance learning was the correspondence education programs, which used postal service to send required books to learners at home (Boston Public Library, 2021). Later, educational materials were televised and, with the rise of ICT, computerized and interconnected with the Internet (OnlineSchools.org, 2021).

However, there is an inherent difference between planned online learning and emergency online learning. Pedagogy experts state that what happens in the pandemic today is "emergency remote teaching (ERT)" (Hodges et al, 2020), which is a temporary shift of instructional delivery because of crisis. The interchangeable use of the term "online learning" and "emergency teaching", possibly due to lack of understanding, leads to the growing stigma of online learning as having lower quality than face-to-face learning (Manfuso, 2020). Whereas, the success of an online learning implementation is largely dependent on three factors: design, time, and expectations. Ally (2008) mentioned that online

learning affords great benefits when the designing of the lesson delivery and consideration of students as the center of the learning is properly heeded.

University of the People (n.d.) wrote that an online learning arrangement is essentially purposely designed to function in any condition, including a "normal" one. It is also meant to be a long-term program, where students can voluntarily choose whether to join the program or not. The institution usually also provides the students with sufficient, if not full, access to learning resources. On the other hand, emergency teaching is a response built as a way to avoid the loss of education in an urgent situation. Students have no option other than to follow the arrangement. This is supposed to be a temporary mechanism. As a consequence, resources may be lacking and the system is not very well-planned.

In Indonesia, elementary and middle school students have been struggling to cope with the crisis and emergency teaching, with many of them expressing their frustration (Megawanti, Megawati, Nurkhafifah, 2020). Teachers have had to confront the unprecedented situation which requires them to make considerable efforts and struggle to teach online since they have not been prepared beforehand nor have they been adequately equipped (Angdhiri, 2020).

Charis National Academy is a private early, elementary, and high education institution in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, that operates under the supervision of Yayasan Charis. According to its website (n.d.), the foundation and the school were founded by Paul Richardson in 2001 as a way "to create an Indonesian Christian school that would raise leaders for the future of Indonesia and serves as a training center for many other Christian schools to come." Currently, the foundation oversees the operation of a preschool and kindergarten (listed as TK Charis National Academy in the Ministry of Education and Culture's database), an elementary school (listed as SD Kristen Charis in the Ministry of Education and Culture's database), a junior high school (listed as SMP Charis in the Ministry of Education and Culture's database), and a high school (listed as SMAS Charis in the Ministry of Education and Culture's database).

As a private institution, Charis National Academy set itself apart from the majority of schools in Malang, in terms of the learning process. It is one of the institutions that already integrate ICT into its learning process both inside and outside the classroom (Ovilia & Asfina, 2017) long before the pandemic takes over the world. Google Classroom, email, web browser, social media, and various downloadable apps have accompanied students and teachers in learning.

Despite that, with the global crisis requiring schools to completely do their learning process from home through online media, there is a question of whether Charis' students are affected by it. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out how Indonesian upper secondary students, i.e. students of SMA Charis, find their experience in the online learning process and interaction during Covid-19.

2 Literature Review

Online teaching deals with the carrying out of the teaching and learning process either partially or fully through the Internet as a means of communication. The interface bridges the geographical divide as individuals can get connected to others in a virtual classroom (Ko & Rossen, 2010). Online teaching can be synchronous where teachers and students are engaged in real-time interaction and communication (Ally, 2008; Salmon, 2013). The assembly of students requires them to be present in a way that simulates face-to-face scenarios (Ally, 2008). This means that the live interaction is bounded by time. In the learning process multimodal needs of students are catered to using the audio or video for content delivery that leads to the reciprocal discussion (Li, 2016). The interaction gives rise to the possibility of simultaneous and collaborative work such as discussing the session, group project, and presentation (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010).

Another mode of online teaching is asynchronous that allows students to access materials and resources for specific assignments at their convenience and their pace (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010). As the accessibility knows no time constraint, students are given more freedom (Perveen, 2016). Students' interaction works in a more casual manner (Faloon, 2011) as their presence is expected to

engage them directly to respond to discussion or question and answer sessions. Students find themselves flexible to access the resources given which gives them ample space to work on their own (Costley& Lange, 2018). Students may work on their cognitive knowledge as they have more time to reflect before they make responses or comments (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010)

Students' experience in online learning hinges heavily on the extent to which they are engaged in the learning as evidenced by the level of interaction they have with their time and learning (Lewis, Huebner, Malone, & Valois, 2011). Students will demonstrate active participation in the learning when they are engaged which leads to the acquisition or development of their knowledge because they can get the most out of the interaction (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). In online learning students' experience will lead to satisfaction when they develop adequate interaction with the content, teacher-student communication, and the way the means of learning is put to good use, in this regard, web-based technology (Estelami, 2012). Students' involvement is so vitally determined by the structured or the unstructured nature of the communication of the teaching that leads to students' inclination toward the interaction with the teacher or the content through the use of the platform used (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004).

Gudea (2008) disclosed the fact that students' participation was found to be irregular in the asynchronous mode of communication in online learning due to the intrusive nature of learning. They seemed to dread taking part in the structured scenario of learning which demands students to immediately respond instead of allowing them to take time to reflect. This is upheld by the finding of the study conducted by Perveen (2016) that the majority of students learning English at the Virtual University of Pakistan failed to participate in the synchronous mode of learning in the virtual classroom because their lack of exposure to English might have affected their confidence in thinking out aloud. Therefore, they preferred to have a mix of synchronous and asynchronous modes of teaching.

Meanwhile, in the context of online learning in Indonesia during Covid-19, the findings of the research conducted by Krishnapatria (2020) reveal that some students found online learning favorable because they did not have sufficient knowledge and firsthand experience with online learning. This is in line with Perveen's finding that students' interaction may affect their experience in online learning. With the unprecedented pandemic taking place, the drastic shift into online learning has been inevitable.

3 Methodology

The descriptive research which was conducted was aimed to ascertain students' experience in online learning and interaction through online survey and observation. The population was 175 upper secondary students of Charis in Malang. The pandemic necessitates physical and social distancing which leads to the distribution of questionnaires through Google form to 127 students as the sample of the population On December 7-8, 2020.

The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions in 4 sections namely, students' experience regarding the learning process (9 questions), the gadget and internet connection (8 questions), learning method and media (9 questions), and students' experience in interaction with the teacher, and student to student interaction (9 questions). The close-ended questions are pre-determined to elicit the intended information (Creswell, 2012). The weight of question items was designated by the 4 Likert-like scales comprising Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 Points, Disagree (D) = 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point.

The observation was conducted by recording the online learning process in which the researcher participated to come up with descriptive notes concerning students' behaviors, actions, and interactions (Creswell, 2013). The data were then analyzed descriptively through the means score of each item and summarized in an attempt to describe what activities unfolded regarding students' experience and interaction in the synchronous learning process throughout the five months of online learning in 2020.

4 Results and Findings

The questionnaire was classified into two sub-themes: students' experience regarding their learning process and students' experience regarding their interaction with peers and teachers. The first sub-theme was further classified into their opinion about the sufficiency of their study time, their gadget and internet connection, and the learning media and method that they received. The Likert-like scales provided were ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD, colored blue in the chart), Disagree (D, colored red in the chart), Agree (A, colored orange in the chart), to Strongly Agree (SA, colored green in the chart). Out of 175 students to which the questionnaire was distributed, 127 of them responded. Nine pie charts below reflect the responses to the first sub-subtheme, i.e. sufficiency of study time.

Overall, I spend enough time going online to study.
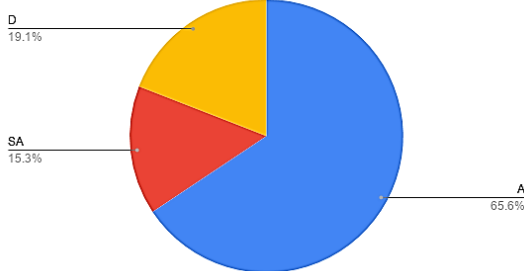
D 19.1%
SA 15.3%
A 65.6%
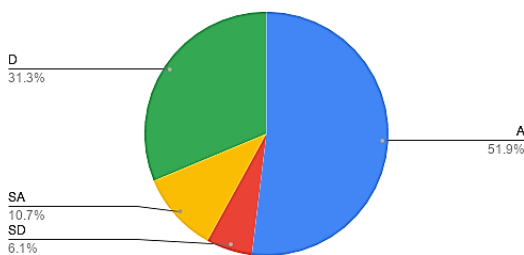
I study online only when required by my teacher.

SD 9.9%
A 37.4%
D 45.8%
SA 6.9%
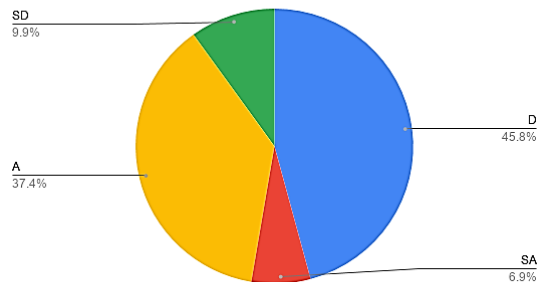
When going online, I can manage my time between studying and having entertainment (gaming, going through socmed, etc.)
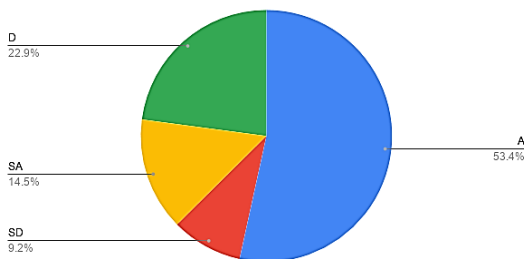
D 22.9%
SA 14.5%
SD 9.2%
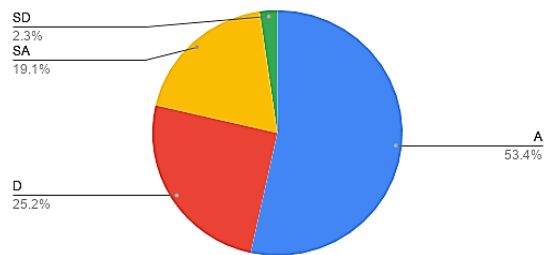A 53.4%

Outside school period, I go online for recreational/entertainment activities more than for

SD 3.1%
SA 22.1%
A 53.4%
D 21.4%

When going online, I can focus on the lesson or the assigned tasks.

D 31.3%
SA 10.7%
SD 6.1%
A 51.9%

I go online to study independently if there is something I do not understand or I need to know more.

SD 2.3%
SA 19.1%
D 25.2%
A 53.4%

I open both the websites/apps for studying and those for entertainment.

SD 6.1%
SA 12.2%
D 25.2%
A 56.5%

I need to spend more time to study online.

SD 3.8%
SA 16.8%
A 45.8%
D 33.6%

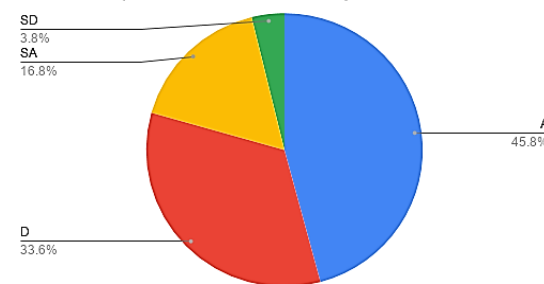I spend too much time online for studying.
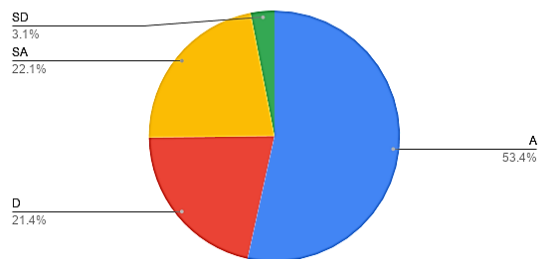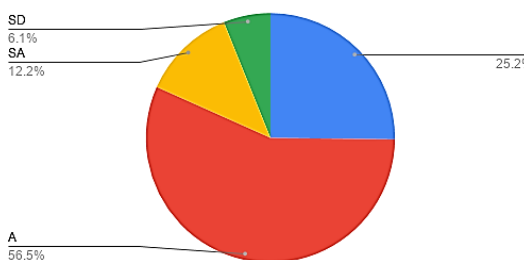
Fig 1. Students' responses to statements about their study time

As pictured in Figure 1, in the sub-subtheme of the sufficiency of students' study time, there were nine statements for the respondents to comment on, using the aforementioned four Likert-like scales. The respondents generally agreed to the statements of "Overall, I spend enough time going online to study" (65.6% agreed and 15.3% strongly agreed). Meanwhile, there were some interesting results for the statements "I need to spend more time to study online" (45.8% agreed and 33.6% disagreed) and "I spend too much time online for studying" (49.6% disagreed and 26% agreed). This divided opinion is somewhat similar to that of Pakistani higher education students (Adnan & Anwar, 2020), who felt that they easily finished assignments on schedule, but could not complete the whole courses on time. The feeling of having enough time might come from the fact that they already spent several hours in front of their laptop or smartphone. At the same time, it is possible that some of them felt the need to spend more online time to make up for the interpersonal relations that used to be provided by face-to-face learning (Paechter & Maier, 2010).

As many as 45.8% of students disagreed and 9.9% strongly disagreed with the statement "I study online only when required by my teacher" and 53.4% of them agreed to "I go online to study independently if there is something I do not understand or I need to know more". This shows that many students already demonstrated learner autonomy to help them study in various situations, including the fully online one. Regarding their time management, the majority of the respondents (53.4%) agreed to the statement "When going online, I can manage my time between studying and having entertainment (gaming, going through social media, etc.)". Nonetheless, the majority also agreed to the statement "Outside school period, I go online for recreational/entertainment activities more than for studying". This might indicate that the students' daily screen time considerably increased. Their free time (outside school period) was utilized not just for doing independent study, but also (even longer) for recreational purposes.

The responses for the statement "When going online, I can focus on the lesson or the assigned tasks" were 51.9% agreed and 10.7% strongly agreed. Yet, interestingly, 56.5% agreed and 12.2% strongly agreed to the next statement ("I open both the websites/apps for studying and those for entertainment"). The respondents felt that they already gave their focus on the lesson or tasks at hand, but as evident in other cases (Hussein, Daoud, Alrabaiah, & Badawi, 2020; Nambiar, 2020), being engaged in online learning is very prone to distraction as the classroom situation and the learning atmosphere might not be felt physically. In this case, the students did not just access applications and websites related to their study, but also those for recreational purposes.
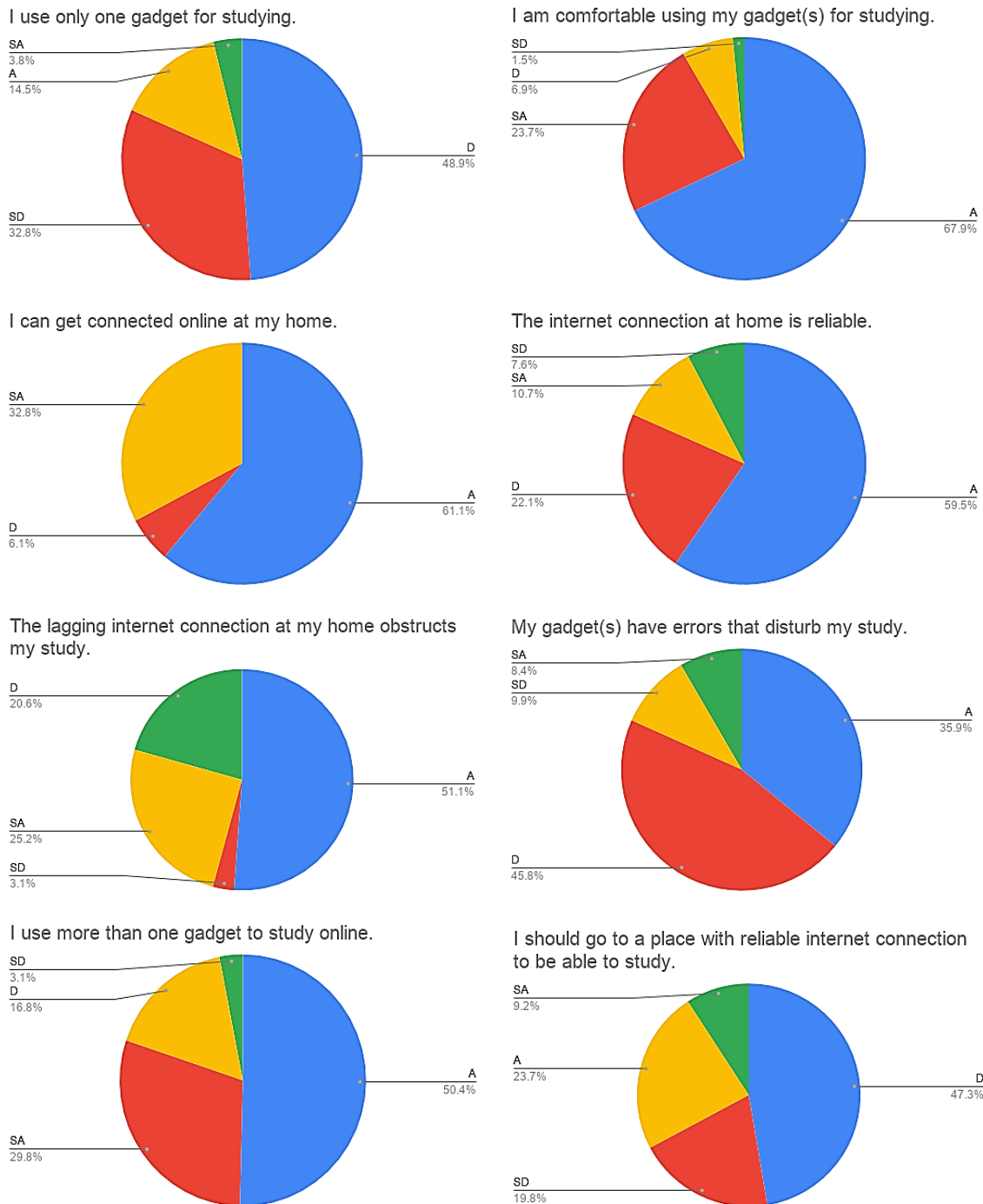
Fig 2. Students' responses to statements about gadgets and internet connection

Figure 2 depicts the respondents' responses to eight statements about their opinion regarding the gadgets and internet connection that they used for studying online. Most of the respondents used more than one gadgets to study (majority agreed and strongly agreed to "I use only one gadget for studying" as well as disagreed and strongly disagreed to "I use more than one gadget to study online"), which might be in the form of laptops, smartphones, or tablets. The level of comfort with their gadget's performance and internet connection reliability was also high. There were 59.5% respondents agreeing and 23.7% strongly agree with the statement "I am comfortable using my gadget(s) for studying," whereas 61.1% of them agreed and 32.8% strongly agreed to "I can get connected online at my home." As Paechter & Maier (2010) stated, students' satisfaction in online learning is also affected by the supporting infrastructure, like gadgets and internet connection.

Yet, many respondents (51.1%) agreed to the statement "The lagging internet connection at my home obstructs my study." It should be noted that Indonesia's internet connection rate still qualifies as one of the lowest (AsiaQuest Indonesia, 2020). In terms of hardware error, the responses were split, with 35.9% agreed and 45.8% disagreed with the statement "My gadget(s) have errors that disturb my study."
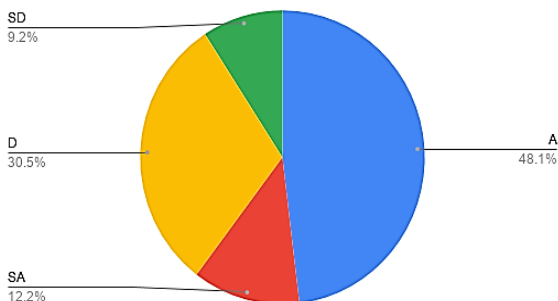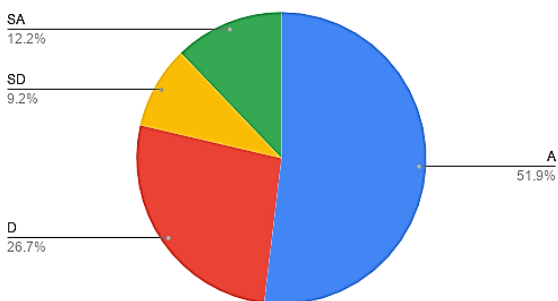
I enjoy studying with Zoom.

SD 3.8%
D 23.7%
A 54.2%
SA 18.3%
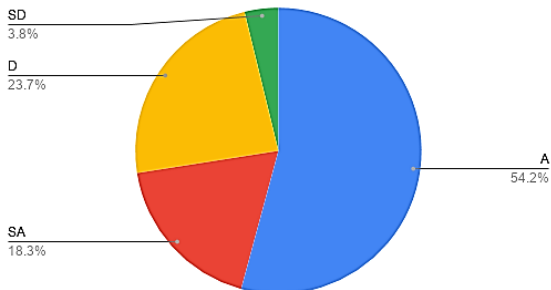
I enjoy studying with Google Classroom.

SD 2.3%
SA 31.3%
A 54.2%
D 12.2%
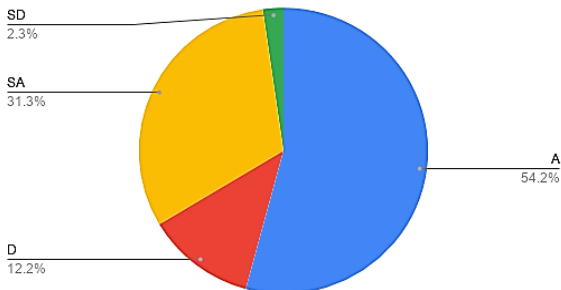
I enjoy studying in break out room (discussion board)

SD 9.2%
D 30.5%
A 48.1%
SA 12.2%

I enjoy studying through giving presentation.

SA 12.2%
SD 9.2%
A 51.9%
D 26.7%

I enjoy studying through doing group work in Google Docs.

SD 7.6%
D 29.8%
A 50.4%
SA 12.2%
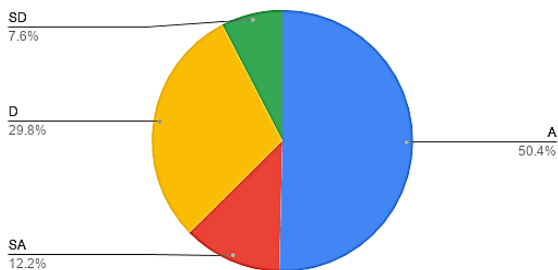
I enjoy studying through live chat.

SA 9.2%
SD 6.1%
A 54.2%
D 30.5%
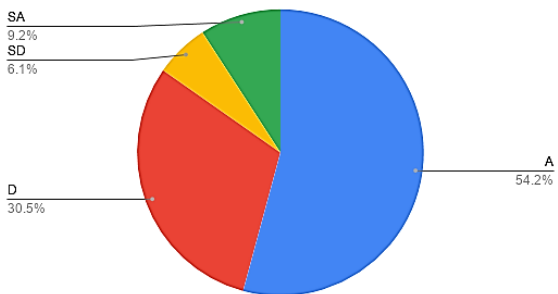
I enjoy studying through doing projects.

SD 3.1%
SA 35.9%
A 52.7%
D 8.4%
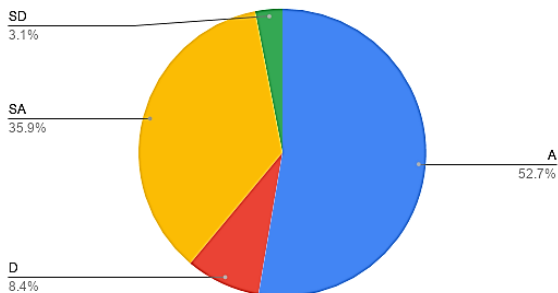
I enjoy studying through listening to my teachers' explanation.

SD 2.3%
D 21.4%
A 54.2%
SA 22.1%
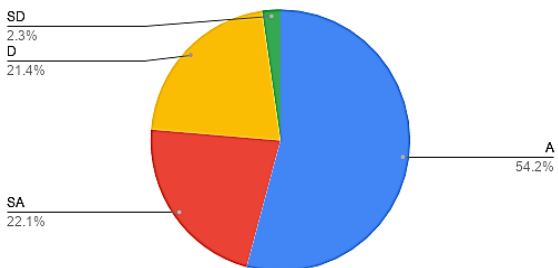
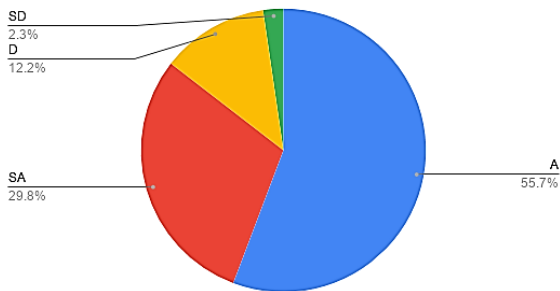I wish there is another media or method to study online.

Fig 3. Students' responses to statements about learning media and method

As seen in Figure 3, the respondents' generally agreed to all questions about the online learning media and method used by their teachers. They enjoyed studying with such platforms as Zoom Meeting (54.2% agreed/A and 18.3% strongly agreed/SA) and Google Classroom (54.2% A and 12.2% SA). Meanwhile, the responses were divided for the method of discussion in a break-out room. More than 50% of students agreed to the method of studying through giving a presentation, doing group work in Google Docs, using the live chat feature, doing projects, and listening to their teachers' explanations. However, they still hoped that there would be other alternatives for their learning media and method (55.7% A and 29.8% SA).
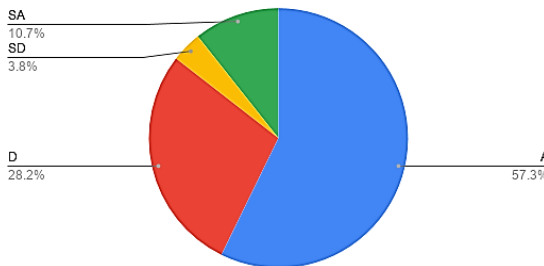
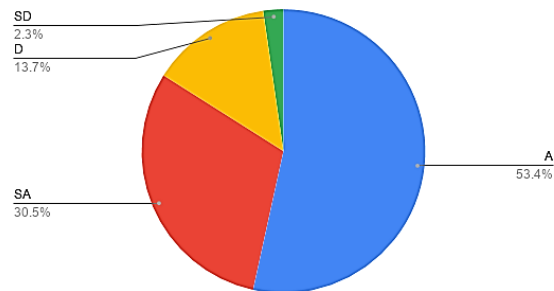My teacher can deliver the lesson well online.
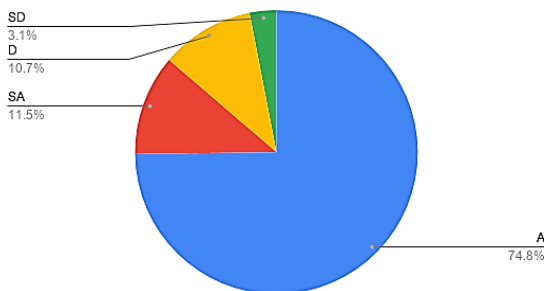
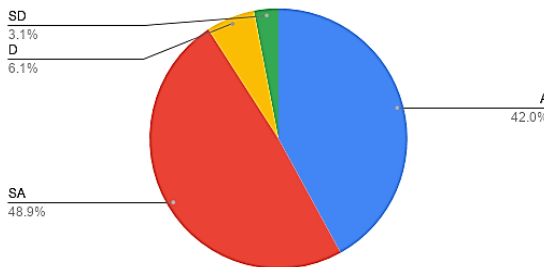My teacher motivates me to study either during class period or by myself.
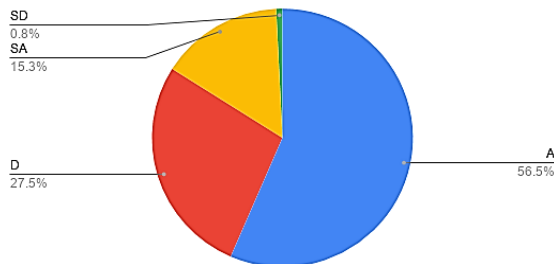
Although being done online, there is no communication problem with my teacher.
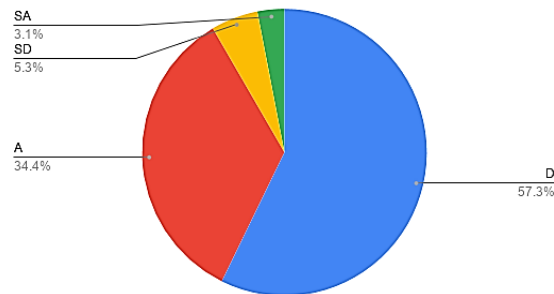

I can still communicate well with my classmates online.

I miss having direct face-to-face interaction with my classmates.

I cannot communicate well with my teacher online.

My teacher does not encourage me to study online.

A
6.9%

SD
22.1%

D
71.0%

The online lesson delivery is lacking.
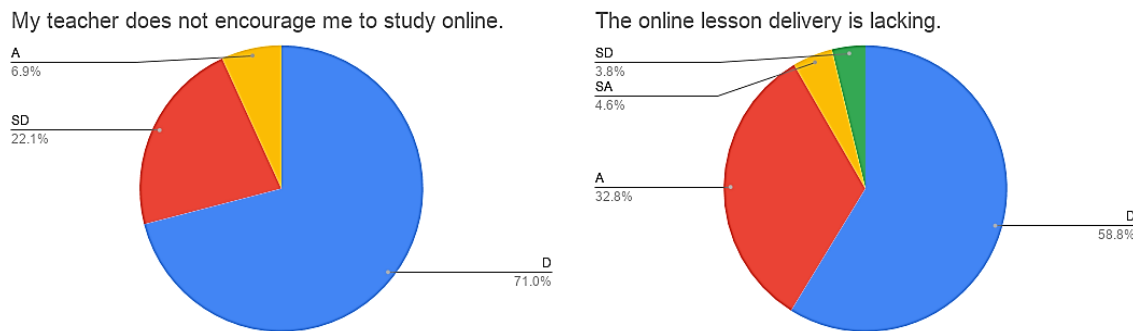
SD
3.8%

SA
4.6%

A
32.8%

D
58.8%

Fig 4. Students' responses about their interaction with teacher and peers

The second sub-theme of the questionnaire was about students' experience regarding their interaction with peers and teachers. In terms of their communication with teachers, the respondents generally had a good impression. The responses for "My teacher can deliver the lesson well online" were 74.8% A and 11.5% SA, and the one for "My teacher motivates me to study either during the class period or by myself" was 56.5% A and 15.3% SA. The majority of students felt there was no communication problem with the teachers although being done online. The same thing also applied to the communication with their peers, although they missed very much having direct face-to-face communication with their schoolmates (48.9% SA and 42% A). The majority of the respondents also disagreed with "I cannot communicate well with my teacher online" and "The online lesson delivery is lacking". Interestingly, there were still 34.4% of respondents who felt they could not communicate well with their teacher online. Again, interpersonal relation is the vital point of face-to-face interaction that no online platform can replace.

The results of the observation in general confirm the findings from the questionnaire. The students showed enthusiasm in doing group works and actively participated in class activities. They shared ideas during the discussion in break-out rooms and collaborative assignments in Google Docs. Very few students were still reluctant to turn on their cameras while speaking during lessons.

5 Conclusion

In general, the respondents had a good experience during their online learning period. They knew whether their study time is sufficient, and when they feel the need to, they did independent study outside of school period. This is despite the fact that, like many other students, some of them might get distracted during the study. They could conduct their learning smoothly from their home and their gadgets, although the internet connection might be an occasional hindrance. The students also enjoyed various learning methods and media provided by the teacher, while still wishing for other possible alternatives. Communication-wise, they had no problem while still missing having direct face-to-face communication again, especially with their peers.

This study is far from perfect. Some limitations affect the process and the end-product of this study, such as time constraints, respondents of the study, and the limited instruments used. Despite the shortcomings, this study can be a good start for the researchers, readers, and future researchers to dig deeper into this topic. Since the Covid-19 pandemic is (by the time of writing) still looming over us, it is quite advantageous for both students and teachers to do reflect upon the learning process and interaction in their school.

Future researches might be done by using such instruments as observation, interview, focus group discussion, as well as document study. A more comprehensive study can also be conducted to include more high schools in the same area or city, or even within the East Java province of Indonesia.

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