

ELT Research in Covid-19 Pandemic Era: Policy, Problem, and Possibility

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Abstract: The spread of Covid-19 pandemic since the beginning of 2020 has made many changes to human life across the globe. It has dramatically given impacts on various sectors such as government, health, business, and education. In education sector for instance, Covid-19 pandemic has made Indonesian government launched policy related to schooling system, funding reallocation, and teaching and learning implementation. The school system has been adjusted to suit the pandemic, education funding has been reallocated and teaching and learning activity has been shifted to online mode. In higher education, one of the impacts that is encountered by students is related to ELT research. Conducting research as a partial fulfilment of the requirements of obtaining degree needs to be carried out while data collection on research site would hardly be done due to space constraint implemented since the pandemic outbreak. This article discusses the problems emerge during Covid-19 pandemic and the possibility of conducting ELT research in relation to the educational policy Indonesian government has taken.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, ELT research, policy, problem, possibility

Abstrak: Menyebarnya pandemi Covid-19 sejak awal tahun 2020 telah membuat banyak perubahan terhadap kehidupan manusia di seluruh belahan dunia. Hal itu secara dramatis telah memberikan dampak terhadap berbagai sektor seperti pemerintahan, kesehatan, bisnis, dan pendidikan. Pada sektor pendidikan contohnya, pandemic Covid-19 telah membuat pemerintah Indonesia mengeluarkan kebijakan yang berhubungan dengan sistem persekolahan, realokasi pendanaan, dan pelaksanaan kegiatan belajar mengajar. Sistem persekolahan disesuaikan untuk mencocoki kondisi saat pandemi, pendanaan pendidikan telah direalokasi, dan aktivitas belajar mengajar beralih ke moda daring. Pada pendidikan tinggi, salah satu dampak yang dirasakan mahasiswa terkait pelaksanaan penelitian pendidikan dibidang Bahasa Inggris. Melaksanakan penelitian yang merupakan salah satu syarat untuk menyelesaikan studi harus dilakukan sementara pengumpulan data di lokasi penelitian sangatlah sulit untuk dilakukan disebabkan kebijakan jaga jarak yang diterapkan selama masa pandemi. Artikel ini membahas permasalahan yang muncul sejak masa pandemi dan kemungkinan melaksanakan penelitian pendidikan di bidang Bahasa Inggris sehubungan dengan kebijakan di bidang pendidikan yang telah diambil pemerintah Indonesia.

Kata-kata Kunci: Pandemi Covid-19, penelitian ELT, kebijakan, masalah, kemungkinan

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Since the outbreak of corona virus pandemic at the late of 2019 and its spread at the beginning of 2020 there have been a lot of changes in human life all over the world. It has killed millions of people in many countries and has infected many others. It does not only take human life, it also makes people shock with serious damage it causes to almost every aspect of their life. Corona kills everything (Inventure Knowledge, 2020). It kills products such as film and TV production, hotel and homestay, air pollution; business, such as airlines, restaurant, sport events, department stores, travel agent; and habits, such as handshake, consumer confidence, work hour, vacation, etc. In short, it has become the disruptor of the 21st century.

In Indonesia, the impact of Covid-19 pandemic was recorded in Snapcart survey—an online survey through mobile application, conducted during 17 to 28 March 2020 (Kurniawan, 2020). Two thousand people between 15 to 50 years from various big cities in Indonesia such as Manado, Palembang, Bandung, Semarang, Medan, Makassar, Surabaya, and Jakarta took part in the study. Findings of this survey revealed that Covid-19 has given impact on Indonesian people's life in many sectors such as study (17%), shopping habit (24%), religious activity (31%), travel plan (39%), job and career (44%), and social life (48%).

It is apparent that this pandemic has dramatically given serious impact on various sectors of human life, such as government, business, and education. In education sector for instance, Covid-19 pandemic has made Indonesian government took necessary actions to cope with its impacts. Educational policy related to schooling system, funding reallocation, and teaching and learning implementation has recently been made. There are some adjustments in the school system following Covid-19 pandemic, reallocation of education funding, and shifting in teaching and learning activity from offline to online mode. These are among other efforts the government did in handling the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic in education sector. In higher education, one of the challenges that students face concerns with conducting English language teaching (ELT) research. As one of the requirements of obtaining academic degree, students are required to carry out research and write thesis. Since the pandemic, it is hardly possible to do data collection on research site due to space constraint implemented in many areas

including school and universities where ELT research commonly takes place.

This article discusses educational policy related to Covid-19 pandemic, the problems university students encountered, and the possibility of conducting ELT research. It also tries to offer possible research topics to do during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Government Policy in Education

In relation to the impacts caused by Covid-19 pandemic, Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education and Culture has issued a circular letter on March 9, 2020 related to the health and safety which states that health and safety is the priority for students, teachers, educational staff, and all members of school. This circular letter recommends that working, studying, and doing prayer activities are carried out from home (Kemdikbud, 2020).

Particularly, the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE), Ministry of Education and Culture has also taken some steps related to the efficiency and funding reallocation to support the pandemic mitigation, such as for the Faculty of Medicine at university and Hospital to cope with the pandemic and also budget cut to accelerate the pandemic handling. There have been at least six steps taken by DGHE during March and April this year (Kemdikbud, 2020), such as DGHE negotiated cheap package with the internet provider and the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (17 March 2020), pandemic era teaching and learning process and *Merdeka Belajar* program (Freedom of Learning) (23 March 2020), academic schedule relaxation, drop out deadline extension, helping needed students through efficiency (31 March 2020), Ministry of Education and Culture budget cut in the amount of 4.9 T for the acceleration of pandemic handling (9 April 2020), and State University Rector Deliberation agrees upon four mechanisms for tuition fee payment: postponement, installment, level downgrade, and scholarship based on parent economic condition (22 April 2020).

Following the steps taken by DGHE, universities also take necessary step related to student learning, that is fulfilling students' learning right through online platform and Freedom of Learning scheme. In this case, DGHE provide free access to learning online sites, strengthen SPADA platform, make free Moodle-based Learning Management System (LMS) and Google Classroom, and

share access among universities. In addition, assistance in terms of internet credit for students, logistic provision for those in need, tuition fee easy payment, and part time job provision are also established.

Among policy implementation adopted by universities are learning from home, online learning, online administration service, online student academic advisory, online student thesis advisory, online graduation ceremony, online practicum and assignment. If practicum and assignment are not possibly carried out online, they are moved to the end of the semester, following tight Covid-19 protocol. Also, final project or thesis exam is directed to use secondary data; should the laboratory be used, tight Covid-19 protocol applied. The underlying reason of this decision making is that students, teachers, and education staff healthy and safety must become priority and university campus must not become a new cluster of Covid-19 spread.

Problems in Conducting ELT Research in Covid-19 Pandemic Era

One of the most commonly used terms during the Covid-19 pandemic is physical distancing. It is also one mostly recommended action to do during Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in order not to get infected or to stop the spread of the virus. This physical distancing policy certainly gives consequence to students who are going to conduct ELT research. Conducting ELT research seems impossible to do since collecting data on research site is difficult to do, doing direct intervention to students is not possible, conducting direct observation or interview is constrained, and decreasing subject participation. In other words, students will find it difficult to carry out ELT research due to some constraints in relation to physical distancing policy applied in school and public space. Concerning this phenomenon, a question that is necessary to ask is 'Should ELT research be stopped?'

Certainly ELT research cannot be stopped. No matter how difficult the condition to do research is, students are still required to carry out research and write thesis in order to complete their study. In addition, ELT research is required since new problems in ELT need solution, ELT needs continuing innovation, other problems need assistance from ELT research, and scientific responsibility requires students, teachers, and lecturers to do research continuously. If that is the case, how is research conducted

during the Covid-19 Pandemic era? 'Which kind of research that can be conducted in the Covid-19 Pandemic?' In line with the physical distancing policy, it is crucial to put in mind that conducting ELT research in Covid-19 pandemic era must avoid three conditions: closed space, closed contact, and crowded place. Fulfilling these conditions could make students possible to carry out ELT research in the Covid-19 pandemic.

How is Research Conducted during Covid-19 Pandemic Era?

Due to physical distancing constraint, collecting research data directly in research site would hardly be done. There should be a way to gather data without direct physical contact with the respondents and this is possible to do through internet-based research. In this case, internet is utilized as a tool to do research and as a place to do research. Students can use information available in the internet without direct physical interaction with human subject. They can also use internet as a means of intervention, to recruit research subject, or even research about internet and its impact on the users of internet.

Internet-based research or digitized research can be an alternative chosen either as a means to do research, place to do research, or topic to research for. As a means to do research, internet can be used to collect research data, such as online survey through email, survey through web, survey through google form, online focus group discussion, online interview, online observation, and online test. As a place to do research, internet functions as online library where sources can be accessed, read, or downloaded. As a topic about research students can study internet application as one variable of research dealing with ELT. There are some benefits of conducting research through internet, viz: the availability of many data that can be easily accessed, internet can speed up sample selection process because it provides various group of participants who can be accessed, many platforms that can facilitate cheap research practice, user-friendly, and sophisticated to collect and analyze data such as Google scholar, Microsoft Academic, Academia, Research Gate, etc., and provides new opportunities to do various observational research by looking at people online behaviour. However, some drawbacks in internet-based research are also apparent. Such issues as many inaccurate

information, internal validity problem, and low response rate may be met. To cope with inaccurate information issue, students can combine internet data with offline source or use various kinds of sources such as iSEEK, Refseek, academic index, etc. To deal with internal validity problem such as sample characteristics and instrumentation, students can get sample through various online sources and use anonym questionnaire. Low response rate can also be handled through sending message personally to respondents if collective online questions are not answered.

As a possible research method to implement during Covid-19 pandemic, internet-based research could solve students' problem in doing ELT research. Therefore, students need to get used to internet. If they have planned research in offline mode before the pandemic, then they need to reschedule it, modify research method if direct data collection on site is not possible, or even they need to modify data analysis method.

Possibility of Conducting ELT Research in Covid-19 Pandemic Era

Internet-based research could be applied in any research method—quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods with appropriate research design, such as survey, correlational, experimental, case study, ethnography, autoethnography, narrative inquiry, phenomenology, researching texts and documents such as discourse analysis, content analysis, etc. It could also be conducted using any instrumentation such as test, questionnaire, observation, documentation, interview, and focus group discussion depending on the need of how data should be collected as long as it is possible to get them using online mode. Some of the data collection techniques are using a platform for online discussion, doing elicitation using photo, video, voice, using mobile probes (in terms of data to complete), completing story online, using group in Facebook, using Google Form, etc.

Which research method to use, what design is chosen, and how data are collected and analyzed will be determined by the research questions of the problems that are going to solve. In doing ELT research in Covid-19 pandemic, students need to consider the topics that are researchable in a given area. The following are some possible topics to scrutinize in Covid-19 pandemic in the area of ELT, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, linguistics, and discourse analysis:

1. Problems of English language teaching during learning from home (ELT)
2. Parents' tension in preparing and assisting children in online classroom during Covid-19 (Applied linguistics)
3. Power of knowledge and community social class above Covid-19 pandemic information on social media (Sociolinguistics)
4. EFL class must go online: teaching-learning activities and challenges during Covid-19 (ELT)
5. In search of the most appropriate online platform to learn English during Covid-19 pandemic (ELT)
6. Increasing students' writing ability in online learning through Google Classroom (ELT)
7. The role of media and their impacts on society fear about Covid-19 pandemic (Discourse analysis)
8. Linguistics study on new terminologies related to Covid-19 pandemic (Morphology)
9. Discourse war between hoax and factual news about Covid-19 and its impact on society social attitude (Critical discourse analysis)

There were many studies conducted using online mode in different methods, designs, and instrumentations that students can review and learn. Reviewing these studies could give students ideas why and how they were conducted. To mention some let us take a look at them one by one.

First, Zhai et al. (2017) did a survey to 178 undergraduate students who participated in 32-week English flipped classes in a central Mainland China. They studied experiential learning perspective on students' satisfaction model in a flipped classroom context. The measurements of Prior Learning Experience were collected and coded before the beginning of the class; after the 32-week (2 semesters), the participants were asked to complete the questionnaires. The results indicated that, compared with the designs of Personalized Learning Climate, learners' Prior Learning Experience was a far more significant antecedent for predicting students' satisfaction.

Second, Ge (2012) carried out an experimental study comparing Cyber Asynchronous versus Blended Cyber Approach in Distance English Learning. Two classes were given intervention within four months. One class was taught English through blended approach while the other

was taught through asynchronous approach. The data were collected using pre-test and post-test. It was proven that both approaches improved students' performance where blended approach brought significantly better result than the single cyber asynchronous approach for e-learners in studying English.

Third, Perveen (2016) conducted a case study evaluating the impact of synchronous and asynchronous e-language learning activities at Virtual University of Pakistan. The objective of the study was to assess e-language learning analytics. Data collection involved observation of the communication and performance on given channels, students' opinion on Graded Discussion Board, and a survey questionnaire responded by 1025 students. The findings revealed that students found asynchronous e-language learning was quite beneficial, but with some limitations which could be scaffolded by synchronous sessions. Based on the findings, the researcher suggested a blend of both synchronous and asynchronous paradigms to create an ideal environment for e-language learning in Pakistan.

Fourth, Clark and Gruba (2010) did autoethnography examining the use of social networking *Livemocha* sites for foreign language learning to study Korean from their perspectives as native speakers and experienced teachers of English. This study included self-aware participation, learner diaries and peer debriefing. The findings indicated that the site had number of counter-productive pedagogical impediments to language learning that included, for example, flaws in site design. They suggested that improvement in foreign language learning can be done through social networking sites.

Fifth, Kulavuz-Onal (2015) conducted netnography on online language teaching communities. Engaging in online participant observation, he connected to the online community through computer screen. He provided detailed explanations of his experience during data collection. He provided discussion of benefits of participant observer approach in understanding the culture of online language teaching communities, and invite CALL researchers to consider netnography and online participant observation in their future studies.

Sixth, Rodesiler and Pace (2015) investigated English teachers' experience participating teaching online through some platforms such as blogs, microblogs, and social network sites in a narrative study.

Data were collected through online interview and analyzed using thematic analysis. Respondents constructed narratives that revealed some themes such as addressing shifts in their teaching practices, their sense of isolation, and their identities as writers.

Seventh, Bawa and Watson (2017) conducted phenomenology study of five Chinese students' who were looking for learning opportunities in USA. They had serious English writing deficiencies. They explored the students' experience in English writing. Data were gathered through semi-structured interview and participants' writing samples/written tasks. The findings revealed that the students lacked of structured English language instructional system. It was found that students encountered some challenges and needed some supports to improve their writing skill.

Eight, Sulistyanyngyas, Jaelani, and Suryani (2020) studied power of knowledge and community social class above Covid-19 pandemic information on social media. Although data were available in mainstream media, alternative media, social media, and daily conversation, they focused only on social media. Data were collected through documentation (texts in IG and WhatsApp). They used critical discourse analysis as a method in analyzing the data. Findings showed that information about Covid-19 in social media was class bias. Middle class groups circulated information in formal language, while laymen presented alternative information through memes, jokes, and funny content.

Ninth, Prayoga (2020) examined written communication made by Indonesian leader related to Covid-19 pandemic issue through content analysis. He particularly focused on President Jokowi tweets from January 1, 2020 to April 30, 2020 collected automatically using Ncapture. He analyzed 150 tweets related to Coronavirus from a total of 290 tweets which were collected through documentation. The findings uncovered that Jokowi used various information ranging from Covid-19 handling policy socialization to affected patients condolence expression. Sadly, communication was actively made only after the pandemic had taken many victims.

The above highlighted studies could possibly provide some ideas and show examples to students that ELT research are possibly carried out using internet-based research where data collection are commonly

obtained via online. This alternative research method could be taken as realistic option of conducting ELT research during the Covid-19 pandemic era.

CONCLUSION

Covid-19 pandemic has made a lot of changes to people across the globe. It has given impacts to many sectors of human life. Since the pandemic outbreak, human physical activities were constraint as the result of physical distancing policy implemented everywhere. This condition certainly limits students' mobility to carry out ELT research at schools or universities where as it was commonly conducted. In one hand, students are required to carry out research as a prerequisite of completing degree; on the other hand, they were restricted by direct contact in data collection. This adversity can be met by conducting internet-based research where data can be obtained via online. Internet can be a tool to do research, a place to do research, or topic to do research. It goes back to students to wisely think and decide what to research, where to do ELT research, and how to do ELT research.

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