# The Efl Rural Student's Exspreinces in Coping With Online learning during The Covid -19 Pandemic

*by* Toni Indrayadi

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# The EFL Rural Students' Experiences in Coping with Online Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore the learning experiences of the Indonesian rural students during the Covid-19 pandemic which had transitioned to online learning and solutions. A phenomenological approach was used as a research methodology using semi-structured interviews for the data collection. This study was conducted in one Islamic higher education with seven participants. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis by comparing each participant's interview result in the form of research themes. The five themes that emerged in this study are: adapting to online learning, internet access, learning environment, and learning autonomy. The findings of the study indicate that online learning is a problem for the participants who live in rural areas. These problems were caused by unfamiliarity with the online learning method, unstable internet connection, lack of parents' support, and learning autonomy. However, all challenges can be solved by students. The findings of the study have implications for government and higher education stakeholders to provide enough facilities for online learning for rural students to participate in the learning process smoothly.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, English students, online learning, learning, rural area

## Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman belajar siswa daerah terpencil Indonesia selama Covid-19 yang berfokus pada tantangan dan solusi pembelajaran online dari siswa. Pendekatan fenomenologi digunakan sebagai metodologi penelitian dengan menggunakan wawancara semi terstruktur untuk pengumpulan data. Penelitian ini dilakukan di salah satu Perguruan Tinggi Islam dengan jumlah peserta tujuh orang. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dengan membandingkan hasil wawancara masing-masing partisipan dalam bentuk tema penelitian. Lima tema yang muncul dalam penelitian ini adalah adaptasi pembelajaran online, akses internet, lingkungan belajar, dan kemandirian belajar. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran online merupakan masalah bagi peserta yang tinggal di daerah terpencil. Permasalahan tersebut disebabkan oleh ketidaktahuan terhadap metode pembelajaran online, koneksi internet yang tidak stabil, kurangnya dukungan orang tua, dan kemandirian belajar. Namun, semua tantangan dapat diselesaikan oleh siswa. Temuan penelitian ini berimplikasi kepada pemerintah dan pemangku kepentingan pendidikan tinggi untuk menyediakan fasilitas pembelajaran online yang cukup bagi siswa daerah terpencil untuk berpartisipasi dalam proses pembelajaran dengan lancar.*

***Kata Kunci:*** *Covid 19, mahasiswa bahasa Inggris, pembelajaran online, pembelajaran, daerah terpencil*

## Introduction

The spread of Covid-19 has changed almost all aspects of human life across the world. The pandemic is caused by a novel coronavirus that has killed almost 6.3 million people worldwide.[1] It has affected all sectors of human activity, including

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[1] Stefan E. Pambuccian, 'The COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for the Cytology Laboratory', *Journal of the American Society of Cytopathology*, 9.3 (2020), 202–11 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasc.2020.03.001>.

education.[2] [3] [4] The pandemic has closed schools and higher education activities across the world.[5] Governments have enacted policies to reduce its spread through social distancing policy, work from home orders, lockdown, and quarantines.[6] [7] [8]. Government policies also imposed teaching and learning from home through the use of Information Communications Technology (ICT).[9] ICT plays an important role in online learning.[10] [11] It has made the learning process more interesting, and students can still follow the lesson even from home.[12] It will continue to be used during and after school closures.[13]

In Indonesia, the government also imposes remote learning on all education levels.[14] This educational policy was mentioned in the Circular Letter of the Ministry of Education and Indonesia Number 4, 2020.[15] [16] [17] The teaching and learning from home meant in this study is the OL method, which is designed as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic.[18] [19] This learning method is the combination of electronic technology and internet-

[2] Marko Teräs and others, 'Post-Covid-19 Education and Education Technology "Solutionism": A Seller's Market', *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2.3 (2020), 863–78 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00164-x>.

[3] Ni Luh Sakinah Nuraini and others, 'Distance Learning Strategy in COVID-19', *Proceeding International Webinar Series – Educational Revolution in Post Covid Era*, 2020.April 2020 (2020), 107–16.

[4] Ro'fah Ro'fah, Astri Hanjarwati, and Jamil Suprihatiningrum, *Is Online Learning Accessible During COVID-19 Pandemic? Voices and Experiences of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Students with Disabilities*, *Nadwa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2020, XIV <https://doi.org/10.21580/nw.2020.14.1.5672>.

[5] Anna Dabrowski, 'Teacher Wellbeing During a Pandemic: Surviving or Thriving?', *Social Education Research*, 2.1 (2020), 35–40 <https://doi.org/10.37256/ser.212021588>.

[6] Abdullah M. Al-Ansi, Askar Garad, and Ahmed Al-Ansi, 'ICT-Based Learning During Covid-19 Outbreak: Advantages, Opportunities and Challenges', *Gagasan Pendidikan Indonesia*, 2.1 (2021), 10 <https://doi.org/10.30870/gpi.v2i1.10176>.

[7] Wasilatul Murtafiah and others, 'E-Learning Based on Video Presentations to Enhances Attitudes, Skills, and Pedagogical Knowledge of Prospective Teacher Students During the Covid-19 Pandemic', *JPI (Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia)*, 10.4 (2021), 643–55 <https://doi.org/10.23887/jpi-undiksha.v10i4.33508>.

[8] Pambuccian.

[9] Luis Espino-Díaz and others, 'Analyzing the Impact of COVID-19 on Education Professionals. Toward a Paradigm Shift: ICT and Neuroeducation as a Binomial of Action', *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 12.14 (2020), 1–10 <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12145646>.

[10] Al-Ansi, Garad, and Al-Ansi, 'ICT-Based Learning During Covid-19 Outbreak: Advantages, Opportunities and Challenges', *Gagasan Pendidikan Indonesia*, 2.1 (2021).

[11] Charles Dziuban and others, 'Blended Learning: The New Normal and Emerging Technologies', *International*

*Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 15.1 (2018), 1–16 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-017-0087-5>.

[12] Phraratsutaporn, Lampong Klomkul, 'Technological Innovation for Online Learning during the Situation of COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand', *Psychology and Education Journal*, 58.1 (2021), 1578–84 <https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i1.949>.

[13] Al-Ansi, Garad, and Al-Ansi, 'ICT-Based Learning During Covid-19 Outbreak: Advantages, Opportunities and Challenges', *Gagasan Pendidikan Indonesia*, 2.1 (2021).

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[17] Retno Puji Rahayu and Yanty Wirza, 'Teachers' Perception of Online Learning during Pandemic Covid-19', *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*, 20.3 (2020), 392–406 <https://doi.org/10.17509/jpp.v20i3.29226>.

[18] Lina Ahmad, Marco Sosa, and Karim Musfy, 'Interior Design Teaching Methodology during the Global COVID-19 Pandemic', *Interiority*, 3.2 (2020), 163–84 <https://doi.org/10.7454/in.v3i2.100>.

[19] Irtifa Mukhter and Richa Chowdhary, 'Teaching during Covid-19: Teacher and Students' Experience', *Space and Culture, India*, 8.2 (2020), 25–35 <https://doi.org/10.20896/saci.v8i2.1068>.

based technology and distance education.[20][21][22] It is an alternative for the lecturers and students to continue the teaching and learning process when a face-to-face meeting is not possible.[23][24] It also provides flexible access to instruction at any time and any place as long as they can access the internet.[25] Moreover, this learning method can encourage lecturers and students geographical distance to study wherever they live with time independence.[26]

Various platforms, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Zoom meeting, Goggle meeting, Google classroom, and Edmodo were harnessed to support remote learning during the pandemic.[27][28] These learning applications and platforms were supported by computers that connect to the internet network.[29] Thus, the ability to choose appropriate applications can influence the process of teaching and learning success during the Pandemic.[30] To achieve satisfying results, the learning must be well-prepared by providing the learning materials and facilitating the teaching and

learning activities.[31] Both lecturers and students must have technological knowledge before teaching[32][33]. This requirement is the basis that must be secured by the teachers and students to achieve teaching and learning success.[34] Practically, the students must be taught how to use the technological devices to maintain the effectiveness of the learning process, such as presenting a computer or laptop, switching the views, and sending the messages through a chat box.[35] These should be introduced and practiced first before starting to teach so that students know the functions of the device, such as how to share screens from a computer and write messages by typing on the chat box.[36]

The implementation of the online learning method during the Covid-19 outbreak has become

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[20] Mahmoud Al-Balas and others, 'Correction to: Distance Learning in Clinical Medical Education amid COVID-19 Pandemic in Jordan: Current Situation, Challenges, and Perspectives (BMC Medical Education, (2020), 20, 1, (341), 10.1186/S12909-020-02257-4)', *BMC Medical Education*, 20.1 (2020), 1–7 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02428-3>.

[21] Leli Efriana, 'Problems of Online Learning during Covid-19 Pandemic in EFL Classroom and the Solution', *JELITA: Journal of English Language Teaching and Literature*, 2.1 (2021), 2721–1916.

[22] Mukhter and Chowdhary, 'Teaching during Covid-19: Teacher and Students' Experience', *Space and Culture*, 8.2 (2020).

[23] Nadia Hanoum and Hana Silvana, 'Instructional Needs Analysis and Cultural Values in Online Learning', International Journal of Education, 12.1 (2019), 9–15.

[24] Samta Jain, Marie Lall, and Anviti Singh, 'Teachers' Voices on the Impact of COVID-19 on School Education: Are Ed-Tech Companies Really the Panacea?', Contemporary Education Dialogue, 18.1 (2021), 58–89.

[25] Henny Yulia, 'Online Learning to Prevent the Spread of Pandemic Corona Virus in Indonesia', ETERNAL (English Teaching Journal), 11.1 (2020), 48–56.

[26] Teräs and others.

[27] Efriana, 'Problems of Online Learning during Covid-19 Pandemic in EFL Classroom and the Solution', *JELITA: Journal of English Language Teaching and Literature*, 2.1 (2021).

[28] Rahayu and Wirza, 'Teachers' Perception of Online Learning during Pandemic Covid-19,' *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*, 20.3 (2020).

[29] Efriana, 'Problems of Online Learning during Covid-19 Pandemic in EFL Classroom and the Solution', JELITA: Journal of English Language Teaching and Literature, 2.1 (2021).

[30] Rahayu and Wirza.

[31] Qurotul Aini and others, 'Exploring E-Learning Challenges During the Global COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review', *Jurnal Sistem Informasi*, 16.2 (2020), 57–65 <https://doi.org/10.21609/jsi.v16i2.1011>.

[32] Sin Wang Chong and Hayo Reinders, 'Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching: A Qualitative Research Synthesis', *Language Learning and Technology*, 24.3 (2020), 70–86.

[33] Johannes König, Daniela J. Jäger-Biela, and Nina Glutsch, 'Adapting to Online Teaching during COVID-19 School Closure: Teacher Education and Teacher Competence Effects among Early Career Teachers in Germany', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43.4 (2020), 608–22 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1809650>.

[34] Muhammad Giatman, Sri Siswati, and Irma Yulia Basri, 'Online Learning Quality Control in the Pandemic Covid-19 Era in Indonesia', *Journal of Nonformal Education*, 6.2 (2020), 168–75 <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/nju/index.php/jne>.

[35] Spring Yan, 'COVID-19 and Technology Use by Teenagers: A Case Study', *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 3.1 (2021), 185–93.

[36] Jinyoung Kim, 'Learning and Teaching Online During Covid-19: Experiences of Student Teachers in an Early Childhood Education Practicum', International Journal of Early Childhood, 52.2 (2020), 145–58.

the focus of previous studies[37][38][39]. However, only a few studies have been conducted on rural students' struggle in learning during this period. Therefore, this study aims at examining the struggle of rural students in learning English during the Covid-19 pandemic at an Islamic institute in Jambi, Indonesia. Participants in this study were obligated by their lecturers to use Zoom meetings during the pandemic. This research is very important because it is related to the students' experience of using electronic devices which is still rarely conducted in universities, especially in Islamic universities in Indonesia. To guide this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What challenges did EFL rural students face in learning English during the pandemic?
2. How did EFL rural students solve online learning challenges during the pandemic?

## Method

This study has adopted a phenomenological approach to gain knowledge of a phenomenon as experienced by the individual [40]. The experiences of the participants are the focus of this research methodology [41]. The phenomenon investigated in this study is the experience of EFL rural students in learning English during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Seven students of the English department who live in rural areas agreed to participate in this study. The participants were selected using the purposive sampling technique. Through this sampling technique, potential participants were gathered according to the needs of the research[42][43]. They were informed through the WhatsApp platform about their participation in the research. However, we did not force them to participate in our research if they are not willing to. The data of the participants related to the topic of the research was gathered from the head of the English department. Therefore, seven students from the English department were selected as the participants in the study. Pseudonyms were used for the participants.

### Table 1. Demographic of Seven EFL Rural Students

| Pseudonyms | Major | Semester | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jane | English | 2 | Female |
| Linda | English | 4 | Female |
| Jacky | English | 2 | Male |
| Ann | English | 4 | Female |
| Bill | English | 4 | Male |
| Winslet | English | 2 | Female |
| Andrew | English | 6 | Male |

Data were collected in July 2021, by conducting a series of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were undertaken to gain deep and relevant information related to students' online learning experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to answer questions without being limited by definite questions.[44] In this study, the interview was conducted using the Zoom meeting platform and mobile phone in order to avoid the spread of Covid-19. In conducting the interview,

[37] Ahmad, Sosa, and Musfy, 'Interior design teaching methodology during the global COVID-19 pandemic', *Interriority,* 3.2 (2020), 163-184;

[38] Anna Dabrowski, 'Teacher Wellbeing During a Pandemic: Surviving or Thriving?', *Social Education Research,* 2.1 (2020), 35-40.

[39] Giatman, Siswati, and Basri, 'Social Education Research', *Journal of Nonformal Education,* 6.2 (2020), 168-175.

[40] Sanjay Bhattacharya and Hirak Dasgupta, 'Emotional Labour in the Lifeworld of Indian Hospitality Employees: A Phenomenological Inquiry', *Qualitative Report,* 26.8 (2021), 2361–81 <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4779>.

[41] Catroina Keane and others, 'Exploring the Experience of Anxiety Among Final Year Students at University: A Thematic Analysis', *The Qualitative Report*, 26.8

(2021), 2621–30 <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4874>.

[42] M. Fadlillah, Rochmat Wahab, and Yulia Ayriza, 'Understanding the Experience of Early Childhood Education Teachers in Teaching and Training Student Independence at School', Qualitative Report, 25.6 (2020), 1461–72.

[43] Toni Indrayadi and others, 'Indonesian Efl Students' Difficulties in Recognizing English Letters', *Qualitative Report*, 26.11 (2021), 3476–91 <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4846>.

[44] Daler Bokiev and Lilliati Ismail, 'Malaysian ESL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Regarding the Use of Music and Songs in Second Language Teaching', Qualitative Report, 26.5 (2021), 1497–1521.

we implemented open-ended and follow-up questions, because they can enrich discussion on the issues being investigated.[45]

The preferred language for the interview is Bahasa Indonesia since it allows the participants to express their thoughts confidently. We asked for participants' basic demographic information before asking questions related to the themes of the study. First, we asked "how did you adapt to online learning?" to learn about their adaptation to the online learning method. Second, we asked "how far does internet access help you in online learning?" to learn how they obtain internet access. Third, we asked "how important is the home learning environment for you?" to learn about the home learning environment. In addition, we asked "how do you build learning autonomy" to learn learning autonomy building.

After transcribing the interviews, we read and reread the transcripts as the first step of data analysis. This technique helps us meet the participants' experiences.[46] Second, initial or open coding was first employed in this study. This coding process involved the establishment of any relevant data connected to the study research questions. In doing so, we identified participants' different words or statements related to experiences in using the online learning method. Then, we continued with pattern coding by grouping the data code in the initial coding into relevant categories under the research questions to help us to present the interpretation of participants' difficulties in recognizing English consonant silent letters. We believed that the coding process is an important step in thematic analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation and member reflection were employed.[47] First, the data of our observation and participants' knowledge were compared to avoid bias and to test the consistency of the findings in triangulation. For member reflection or member checking, we involved the participants to verify and clarify their interview results in the form of interview transcripts in hard copy. Participants' feedback was carried out to ensure that their views were not misprinted.

## Findings and Discussion
### Findings

In this section, the findings are presented in two parts based on the research questions. First, the experiences of the participants in using the technological learning method of all English subjects. Second, the problems faced by the participants in using online learning as the learning method. The four factors of online learning that emerged in this research were: adapting to online learning, internet access, learning environment, and learning autonomy. The result showed that our participants have few learning experiences.

### Adapting to Online Learning

The implementation of OL is a new experience for some higher education lecturers and students in Indonesia since the government has obligated them to learn from home (LFH) for the students. This policy was used to stop the spread of the Coronavirus which has killed many people in the world. Therefore, students must be able to adapt to advanced technological tools to support learning. The participants were uncomfortable with the method when it was first used by lecturers in presenting the English learning material. It was hard for them, because they were not accustomed to using the technology in the process of teaching and learning. Linda, Jacky, and Ann learned how to use the learning tools from their friends.

*I always try to learn using the Zoom Meeting application by learning from my friends and YouTube until I can use it either through a mobile*

[45] Blerta Mustafa and Yllkë Paçarizi, 'Exploring Teachers'' Perceptions of Professional Development: The Case of Kosova', Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 17.3 (2021), 1210–24.

[46] Vedrana Mirković and Ivan Jerković, 'Experiences of Mothers of LGBTQ Children in Serbia: What Comes after Coming Out?', Qualitative Report, 26.3 (2021), 652–73.

[47] Sarah J. Tracy, 'Qualitative Quality: Eight a"big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research', Qualitative Inquiry, 16.10 (2010), 837–51.

*phone or laptop. Technology is not a serious problem for me because I like it, especially when the lecturer explains the material using English slowly* (Ann)

While Jane, Winslet, just followed the guide from YouTube.

*"I was a little uncomfortable when the online learning method was first applied to all English classes because I was used to face-to-face learning that didn't require an internet connection. Therefore, I prepared myself by learning through Youtube"* (Jane).

A similar challenge was also faced by Bill and Andrew. However, they overcome it by searching how to join e-learning classes on the internet.

*"Although Zoom meeting is a new learning medium for me, I am trying to conform to the government policies. I downloaded the usage steps from the internet and then studied it myself"* (Andrew).

The excerpt above shows the difficulties experienced by students at the beginning of the application of online learning by lecturers in delivering English learning materials. but they can handle everything because there is a strong urge to follow the teaching and learning process.

### İnternet Access

The availability of internet access is very important to support learning from home because learning success depends on how far the students can access the learning tool with the internet. All participants faced difficulties in having a stable connection when it rained because in such conditions they were not following the lessons. Linda, Ann, Winslet, and Andrew tried to find a stable internet connection to keep learning during Covid-19.

*"I have experienced several times that there was no internet connection at all an hour before the lesson started, namely in pronunciation, listening, and speaking classes. To keep learning, I looked*

*for a location where the internet connection was stable and safe"* (Linda).

However, Jacky and Bill prefer to be around campus to participate in the learning process by using the internet facilities that have been provided. they do this because of the bad experiences they had when learning from home

*"The bad experience of internet network disruption four times while studying forced me to come to campus to keep studying and to be able to use the internet easily and freely with social distancing to avoid the transmission of Covid-19"* (Bill).

Although the participants were faced with an unstable internet connection which made it difficult for them to follow the learning process, this challenge did not make them give up. They still try to find a good connection to the internet.

### Learning Environment

The home learning environment also influences the students' learning success. It can support them in following the process of learning compared to the students with an unsupported learning environment. All participants stated that they were not supported by their parents to provide an internet quota at the beginning of the implementation of online learning. The participants, however, never stop trying to convince their parents to overcome the problem.

*"When online learning was first implemented in all my English classes, I did not get support from my parents because they did not know that I needed an additional internet quota to join classes, but after receiving an explanation from me that the data package provided by the government was not sufficient for my needs for one month, they immediately prepared the budget"* (Ann).

The excerpt shows clear evidence that parents do not understand the learning system that is being implemented by the government during the pandemic. Thus, they disrupt the teaching and

learning process that is being followed by participants

**Learning Autonomy**

Learning autonomy is defined as active learning activities of the students to achieve learning objectives [48]. Autonomous learners will search for additional material from other sources to support their learning [49]. Our study findings indicate that participants sought an explanation from their lecturers related to the material for each meeting. Jane, Bill, and Winslet searched for and downloaded learning materials a few days before class started from the internet.

> *"The pandemic made me unable to study face-to-face with lecturers and discuss directly with my classmates as in a normal situation. Therefore, I searched and downloaded additional material from the internet related to the topic for the next meeting two days before the meeting started from a place that was easy to access the internet. I do it for every subject"* (Winslet).

Linda, Jacky, Ann, and Andrew expressed different challenges.

> *"The policy of learning from home made it difficult for me to study optimally as before. I sometimes ask my classmates to re-explain the previous material through WhatsApp"* (Andre).

The excerpt shows that participants are still trying to find and read material from other sources to gain more understanding in addition to listening to presentations made by lecturers.

*Discussion*

Referring to research questions and objectives, this section will present two findings, the challenges faced by EFL rural students during the pandemic and the way they solved them. Based on the result of the interview analysis, all participants faced trouble in adapting to online learning, accessing the internet at home, getting support from the environment, and building autonomy. However, they could solve the problems.

Concerning the first indicator of adopting online learning, students difficult to understand the learning method that is used in the process of teaching and learning. The use of a new teaching and learning technology made it hard for them to get involved in the class. The result findings are similar to what has been founded by Al Ghazali[50] and Kusuma[51]. OL method is strange for students even though they are proficient in using social media. The second indicator concerns internet access. The finding shows that the students faced unstable internet connections in their living area which sometimes disrupt the learning process. This confirms the research result conducted by Belay[52], that Ethiopians with no electricity and a parental school background face a serious problem with distance learning which requires an internet connection because the internet impacts smooth learning[53]. The third indicator of the learning environment is that students have not been supported by their parents during learning, because they have no knowledge of the learning system. It is in line with Barrot, et al[54], that in the

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[48] Aydan Irgatoğlu and others, 'Learner Autonomy and Learning Strategy Use before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Sustainability*, 14.10 (2022), 6118 <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14106118>.

[49] Gülten Genç, 'Autonomous Learning Capacity of Efl Student Teachers', *International Journal of Languages' Education*, 1.Volume 6 (2015), 23–23 <https://doi.org/10.18298/ijlet.483>.

[50] Fawzi Al Ghazali, 'Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal', *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 11.3 (2020), 114–27 <https://doi.org/10.37237/110302>.

[51] I. Putu Indra Kusuma, 'EFL Teachers' Online Teaching in Rural Schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Stories from Indonesia', *Studies in English Language and*

*Education*, 9.1 (2022), 203–21 <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v9i1.21239>.

[52] Degwale Gebeyehu Belay, 'COVID-19, Distance Learning and Educational Inequality in Rural Ethiopia', *Pedagogical Research*, 5.4 (2020), em0082 <https://doi.org/10.29333/pr/9133>.

[53] Thessalou E. Gocotano and others, 'Higher Education Students' Challenges on Flexible Online Learning Implementation in the Rural Areas: A Philippine Case', *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 20.7 (2021), 262–90 <https://doi.org/10.26803/IJLTER.20.7.15>.

[54] Jessie S. Barrot, Ian I. Llenares, and Leo S. del Rosario, 'Students' Online Learning Challenges during the

Philippines private higher education students were not provided with enough comfortable place to study at home by their parents during the pandemic. Family support greatly influences the quality of the students online learning access [55]. The last indicator is learning autonomy. Students find it difficult to discuss the learning material with lecturers and classmates to deepen their understanding as they did face-to-face before the pandemic. This is consistent with the study finding from Mulyati [56], that students are not comfortable learning through technology tools during the pandemic because they are used to relying on guidance from lecturers.

Then, other findings of the study indicated that students were able to overcome all challenges they faced. They adapted to online learning by teaching themselves how to use the online tools. This confirms the study conducted by Biwer, et al [57], that Maastricht University students were not successfully adapted to the online learning system instructed by the government. Internet access issues were eventually solved by the students by finding stable internet far from their living area. Consistently, the result findings from Dube [58] and Rahiem [59] highlighted that students look for a stable internet connection to keep joining the learning process. However, a different effort was done by students of Kwazulu Natal in which they used WhatsApp as the solution to internet connection problems [60]. Third, the findings show that students tried to get their parents' support to provide supplementary internet quota. This finding is similar to Wargadinata, et al [61] that learning through zoom meetings requires more internet quota. In addition, in building learning autonomy, students looked for additional learning resources by themselves by searching the internet. This finding was supported by Ariebowo [62] and Keane, et al [63], that students were allowed to choose and decide to learn by themselves to select learning materials, make decisions, and act independently.

## Conclusion

Based on the study findings, we conclude that participants faced challenges of OL, starting from difficulty adapting to technological platforms, unstable internet connection, no background learning environment, and limited time to discuss the learning material with lecturers. This made the students struggle to overcome the problems of online learning during the pandemic. The study findings have shown that the students

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performed self-learning to overcome the problems, looked for a secure place to maintain an internet connection, explained to their parents the learning system during the pandemic, and were not too dependent on the lecturers' presentation.

This study has several methodological limitations. The case study approach was used in this study to help us to get rich data on the students' struggle in learning English during the pandemic. The sample used in this study was only the English department students who live in rural areas in Jambi, Indonesia. We have found that these students an uphill struggle to maintain online learning. Gathering the data on the students' online learning struggle was achieved through the semi-structured interview that is usually used in qualitative research.

The conclusion has shown that the implementation of online a learning method during the Covid-19 pandemic was not effective for students in Indonesia, especially for students who live in rural areas. It was hard for them to follow the learning process compared to classmates who live with stable internet connections and a well-off family. In doing so, they have to struggle to find a place with good internet access and convince their parents to supplement their internet quota. Therefore, the government must make the efforts to provide enough internet access in rural areas, to provide training for lecturers and students in using online learning tools, and to socialize the online learning method to the parents about the required tools of learning. We believe this study can provide additional data about the challenge of rural students in Indonesia in learning, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Acknowledgement

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