EFL WRITTEN ONLINE DISCUSSION ABOUT VIRAL TOPICS ON PADLET DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected the EFL learning system. With the support of advanced technology, students and educators now have a limitless concept of time and space for learning. One of the worthy web tools for learning is padlet. This research aims to project the students' perception of what they liked and disliked from the online discussion conducted through padlet. The research participants were 130 non-English students from one of the private universities in Yogyakarta. This study used the qualitative descriptive method and employed thematic data analysis. The data collecting method used open-ended questionnaires. Based on the research findings, the positive things students liked from padlet online discussion on the viral topics are: (1) it improves their skills and knowledge, (2) it creates an enjoyable learning atmosphere, (3) serves practicality. The negative things that the students dislike from an padlet online discussion on viral topics are (1) internet connection issue, (2) shallow and monotonous discussion results, (3) creating the feeling of missing out.

Keywords: EFL, Online Discussion, Padlet, Viral, Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

The covid-19 pandemic has massively transformed the education system in all countries. The transition from regular face-to-face learning has to be changed to online learning. Some alternative methods for teaching has been implemented during this pandemic situation, one of them is online learning (Haratikka, 2022). It forces various parties to give extra effort to conduct the new online learning system so that education continues to run well (Muslimin & Harintama, 2020). To achieve learning success, students must take the initiative by reading any supporting materials to broaden their knowledge, ask assistance from teachers, peers, and others (Fidyati, 2016). Students' learning initiatives support learning achievement because they attempt to adjust how they effectively learn something.

Nowadays, students are proficient in using technologies. However, it requires them to be good strategic thinkers and problem-solvers (Anstey, M. & Bull G. as cited in (Feito & Brown, 2018)). Students face some challenges towards the online education system and teachers do. Teachers must improvise to the new situation of the pandemic. The shift from face-to-face to online classes requires teachers to plan and set the learning into digital education. For English teachers, the online class gives them more difficulties in managing students, especially huge classes in which the students come from various backgrounds, with different English proficiency, diverse interest, and various internet connection conditions (Felder & Brent as cited in (Swaran et al., 2020)).

Writing skills
Facing various challenges on online teaching and learning, students and teachers must continue to run educational activities. One of the activities in English education is writing. Writing is a

productive skill that becomes a medium of expression to convey messages, ideas, and thoughts in words and sentences to the readers. The students' writing ability is essential for communication in the global community (Dollah et al., 2021). Due to that reason, teachers must enhance the teaching instruction for improving the students' ability to write in English.

In English class, students have to be actively engaged in sharing their ideas, feelings and whatever they think. Thus, writing is considered a communication way that is fundamental for our lives, either professionally or personally (Fadillah, 2021).

Online Discussion on Viral Topics
Recent research has claimed that teaching English by fostering students' higher-order thinking becomes an education target in this era (Ganapathy et al., 2017). It can be achieved when teachers create a learning environment that promotes and boosts students' way of life thinking to the next level (Swaran et al., 2020). One of the methods to achieve that goal is by conducting an online discussion. Online discussion creates an atmosphere of unusual learning. The online discussion gives flexibility, and it eliminates the barrier of communication so that students can freely express their opinion and share their knowledge (Premagowrie et al., 2014). Students can drive the learning process by exploring the knowledge of the given topic, and they can develop their higher-order thinking skills. The learning process provides fruitful discussion to the students and their peers (Balaji & Diganta, 2010).

Online discussion in English class emerged as an engaging forum for the students to post their opinions, see their peers' opinions and get feedback from the lecturer (Onyema et al., 2019). Moreover, the online discussion provides different nuance compared to the face-to-face discussion. It creates a motivational environment of learning to express their opinions, ideas, thoughts more confidently with less pressure and less anxiety (Balaji & Diganta, 2010). It also supports the involvement of shy or introverted students. Shy or introverted students feel comfortable participating in the online discussion because they can share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions from any location with less pressure environment (Onyema et al., 2019). In addition, online discussion leads to better English class activity because students can be engaged with their peers virtually and be motivated with the support of their peers that present in the online discussion (Premagowrie et al., 2014).The comfort that the students feel on the online discussion activity creates learning satisfaction that is positive to support them in improving their learning outcomes.

The online discussion serves flexibility and convenience to students and teachers (Premagowrie et al., 2014). Besides, students and teachers can get involved in the online discussion from their respective homes. It becomes a significant benefit for the process of learning during the covid-19 pandemic. Online discussion activity becomes the alternative solution for English learning to provide an effective and convenient learning environment. It does not require any face-to-face interaction from its participants, so it is suitable to lessen the spread of the covid-19 virus.

Regarding the topic of the online discussion, it must be in line with the university students' characteristics and needs. At the university level, the pedagogy system of teaching English must be adjusted to the popular culture trends because university students are critical and cognizant of the issues around them (Sanderson & Browning, 2015). Thus, the selection of viral topics as online discussion topics is expected to stimulate students to think independently and improve the students' learning experiences (Premagowrie et al., 2014).

Padlet for Writing Activity

Padlet is a useful platform that supports the learning process of writing. The research finding conducted by Awaludin et al., 2017 revealed that Padlet had successfully helped the university students obtain a good performance of writing. It is also supported by Lestari, 2017 saying that the writing performance of the non-English students has proven to be improved after they get involved in the learning activity on Padlet. Moreover, the online discussion that is done with collaborative learning is believed to improve memory and motivate students; however, it may be greatly affected by the background factors such as age, activeness, internal factors like leadership, communication that will determine the flow of group online discussion interaction (Alvarez & Navarro, 2020). Dewitt et al., 2015 adds that the interaction in collaborative learning through padlet online discussion creates a space for transferring knowledge through sharing experiences and thoughts of the students involved.

According to some prior research aforementioned, there is still no research that focuses on the padlet online discussion on the viral topics. Thus, this research attempt to shed light on the perceptions of non-English students on the activity of online discussion on Padlet that discusses viral topics. Two research questions are formulated:
1. What are the positive things that the students like from the online discussion on Padlet?
2. What are the negative things that the students dislike from the online discussion on Padlet?

METHOD

The method used in this research was a qualitative descriptive method. It became the common procedure for analyzing research in many disciplines, including the educational field. The goal of using the qualitative descriptive method was to describe the EFL students' perception of the written online discussion learning activity conducted through padlet. The data collecting method used open-ended questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to the research participants through the online system. The data were collected in the form of phrases, sentences and paragraphs. Then, the researcher analyzed the data by using thematic data analysis procedures proposed by Braun & Clarke as cited in (Muslimin & Harintama, 2020). The thematic data analysis began with self-familiarity with the data, coding, analyzing the theme, reviewing the theme, naming and reporting the analysis.

The research participants were 130 non-English major students of Sanata Dharma University who took General English class. They were first-semester students and belonged to three different classes. The research participants' age ranged from 19-21 years old and consisted of 88 female students and 42 male students. According to CEFR Englih level, those students were classified into B2 Intermediate level. They could build conversation with wider range context covering personal opinions and other informal discussion, though errors are frequently appread in complex sentences. The research was conducted in 2021, when the covid-19 pandemic still occurred. The online learning system was implemented in the General English class.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research data was obtained from the 130 non-English students' perspectives on the online discussion through padlet. The online discussion was conducted in every meeting of the General English course through padlet platform. Then, the students were divided into groups of four. They had a task to lead a discussion by posting viral images on the padlet platform. Then, their

classmates were invited to give an opinion to the presented images based on the given time. The discussion was conducted in padlet by using chatroom or backchannel mode. It was a written online discussion that the students had to join and post on the padlet platform to participate in the discussion.

Positive things that the students liked from the Padlet online discussion on viral topics
To address the first research question, asking what the students liked from the online discussion on padlet, the researcher analyzed the research data and found out three categories: improving skills and knowledge, enjoyable atmosphere, and practicality. The first category was improving their English skills. The detailed elaboration of the category is described in table 1.

Table 1
Improving Skills and Knowledge

Students' perception	Frequency
Improving writing skills	17
Improving critical thinking	18
Improving knowledge and insight	25
Total	60

Table 1 revealed the research results with the category of positive things that the students' liked from the online discussion on padlet, improving their skills and knowledge. The most prominent data showed that 25 students perceived that padlet online discussion on viral topics increased their knowledge. The students stated that the discussion topics increased their insights related to the current and viral topics in society. Moreover, they also stated that their classmates' opinion presented in the online discussion on padlet enhanced their insights about the viral topics. The next finding showed that 18 students perceived that they could improve critical thinking skills through padlet online discussion on viral topics. They admitted that they could be more sensitive, critical and aware of the situation related to the viral topics given. The viral issues presented along the discussion stimulated the students' critical thinking, triggering them to express their opinions actively. Afterwards, 17 students considered that the online discussion on padlet improved their writing skills. The online discussion activity on the padlet platform improved students' writing skills, including spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and word order.

The second category of what the students liked from the online discussion on padlet was the enjoyable atmosphere. Table 2 describes the detailed data of it.

Table 2
Enjoyable atmosphere

Students' perception	Frequency
Less anxiety in expressing opinion	47
Interesting topics	12
Total	59

The data in table 2 revealed that 59 students perceived the enjoyable atmosphere of the online discussion on padlet. The enjoyable atmospheres were the atmosphere that created less anxiety

and excitement through the discussion topics given. Forty-seven students felt less anxious when they expressed their opinion on padlet. The process of written online discussion, which was held synchronously, created less tension for the students. They felt more comfortable posting written opinions on padlet rather than speaking it up directly. Then, the viral topics on padlet were perceived as interesting topics for the students. Their interest in the viral topics led to an enjoyable atmosphere during the discussion. It raised their enthusiasm to participate in the online discussion on padlet.

The third findings on what the students liked from the online discussion on padlet were the practicality. The students considered that the online discussion activity was a practical, internet connection and easy. The detailed data obtained for this category is illustrated in table 3.

Table 3
Practicality

Students' perception	Frequency
Can join anywhere	3
No need good internet connection	3
Easy to use	6
Total	12

Twelve students admitted that they liked the online discussion on padlet due to its practicality. Six of them said that padlet was easy to use. Even though the students used padlet for the first time, they had no difficulties using it. Then, three students liked the online discussion activity because they could participate in the discussion anywhere. The flexibility of time made them convenient in accessing padlet and being engaged in the discussion activity. Then, three students stated that they did not need a good internet connection to join the online discussion on padlet. It made them excited in joining the activity.

Negative things that the students disliked from the Padlet online discussion on viral topics

To answer the second research question, the researcher analyzed the data obtained from the open-ended questionnaires. The result showed three categories of negative things that the students disliked from the padlet online discussion on viral topics; namely technical problems, discussion results and feeling of missing out. The first category was the technical problem which became the most appearing thing that the students disliked from the learning activity. Table 4 presents the detailed research data of the technical problem category.

Table 4
Technical problem

Students' perception	Frequency
Too long process of loading the page	24
Total	24

The result showed that 24 students perceived that they did not like padlet online discussion due to loading the padlet platform that took a long time. It made them feel unpleasant in participating

in the online discussion because they missed the flow of the discussion. Moreover, they also felt they lagged during the discussion process due to the long process of padlet page loading.

The discussion results were the second finding related to the negative thing that the students disliked from the online discussion through padlet. Eight students reported that they did not feel satisfied with the discussion results.

Table 5
Discussion results

Students' perception	Frequency
Many students just describe the picture	3
Monotonous opinion	5
Total	8

Table 5 vividly shows the detailed data related to the discussion results. Five students did not like the padlet online discussion since students' opinions on padlet was monotonous. They considered that most of the opinion was similar to each other, making them feel bored. Then, three students stated that they did not like the discussion results since many students only described the topics. They expected to experience a discussion with much unique information and critical opinion. However, the fact showed that many students merely described the topics or images given.

The third research dealing with the negative thing that the students did not like from the padlet online discussion was the feeling of missing out. Fifteen students felt being missing out due to the state of not knowing the topics and not knowing what to say. Those data belonged to the feeling of missing out category.

Table 6
Feeling of Mission Out

Students' perception	Frequency
Do not know the topics	10
Do not know what to say	5
Total	15

Table 6 illustrates the data of the feeling of missing out on the category that consisted of two classifications. The first one was ten students who did not know the discussion topics. The students did not understand the viral topics that were brought up in the discussion. Some students did not catch up with the current and viral topics. Thus, it caused a feeling of missing out on the viral topics for the discussion. Next, five students said they did not know what to say related to the given topics. Those students did not have any idea and stayed silent without any opinion, so they felt bad about that situation.

Then, the fourth findings revealed that 83 students stated that they liked the padlet online discussion. They found out that though there were many limitations and obstacles in participating in the discussion process, they perceived that they still liked the activity. It was due to the positive impacts that they got during learning.

Discussion

This research had contributed to revealing the students' liked and dislikes on the online discussion of viral topics conducted through padlet. The researcher found out three categories of the things liked by the students from the padlet online discussion. The first one was improving skills and knowledge. The students admitted that online discussion on padlet improved their writing skills. It was supported by the research finding Awaludin et al., 2017 reporting that padlet was proven to be successful in helping university students gain excellent writing performance. Then, the next finding showed that the students felt that they could improve their critical thinking. Besides, they also stated that it increases their critical thinking skill and knowledge or insight. This finding was strengthened by (Alvarez & Navarro, 2020). Dewitt et al., 2015 states that the collaborative interaction established among the students built a space for knowledge transferring through the experiences shared during the padlet online discussion.

The second finding showed that the students perceived less anxiety in giving an opinion. It was in line with Premagowrie et al., 2014 reporting that online discussion created an atmosphere of unusual learning that made the students give their opinions under less pressure. They felt to have more freedom in expressing their ideas freely since there was less communication barrier. The communication barrier, anxiety, was no longer a big obstacle for the students to speak up their minds. Furthermore, the online discussion was also suitable for shy and introverted students. Those students would have more chances to speak up in a convenient learning space (Onyema et al., 2019). Then, the third finding described that the selection of viral topics for discussion positively impacted the students' performance. They were more driven to say something on the viral topics given since they were intrigued. It was agreed by Sanderson & Browning, 2015 who conducted a study and revealed a similar finding that the university students were so cognizant and critical of the viral issues happening around them.

One of the prominent impacts of padlet online discussion was practicality. It served as a convenient atmosphere for the students to practice English. The students stated that they liked padlet online discussion due to the practicality of the place, the easiness of use and fair internet connection. That research finding was supported by a study conducted by Premagowrie et al., 2014 revealing that padlet online discussion created a learning atmosphere that was comfortable, flexible and practical for both students and teachers.

Another found that the researcher sought to answer was the students' dislike of the padlet online discussion. The research finding reported that the most prominent students' issue was the page-loading process that was too long sometimes. This research finding was similar to many other pieces of research stating that internet connection became the most appearing problem during online learning. One of them revealed that the students got very frustrated when they had a problem accessing the padlet platform due to the internet connection (Syahrizal & Rahayu, 2020). As a result, the students felt uncomfortable joining padlet online discussion; even some of them made excuses not to join the discussion due to that issue.

The issues dealing with the discussion results made some students dislike padlet online discussion. Some of them said that some of their classmates merely described the pictures or the topics given. Those students were classified as low critical thinkers. For low critical thinkers, the quality of the opinion was still shallow. It did not contain or contain only little analysis of deep thinking. It was supported by Golpour, 2014 ensuring that the quality of their writing was also low for low critical students. Thus, it was undeniable to see the fact that the

students disliked the quality of the discussion since some opinions only described the things that they had already known. Moreover, the other researchers found that some students did not like the discussion results since they were monotonous opinions. There was a lot of student's opinion that was similar. It was in line with the research finding conducted by Wulandari, 2018 showing that copying-pasting sometimes occurred on the padlet learning activities, and some students depended on seeing the other students' opinions.

The last finding of this research described the feeling of missing out that was disliked by the students. The students did not like when they did not know the discussion topics and did not know what to say. This feeling was correlated with the feeling of missing out that hindered the process of learning. It was supported by a study conducted by Al-Furaih & Al-Awidi, 2021, proposing that the level of fear of missing out among university students affected their engagement in learning. Thus, the lecturer must be aware of this situation so that the feeling of missing out could be minimized during the learning process.

CONCLUSION

Padlet is an online platform that provides various benefits and limitations perceived by EFL students. One of them is the role of padlet for EFL online discussion activity. This research found three things that students liked and three things that the students disliked from padlet online discussion on viral topics. Their positive opinions in the use of padlet for online discussion is by three things; first, improving skills and knowledge; second, creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere; third, providing practicality. In contrast, padlet online discussion on viral topics was considered to have some limitations for learning; first, technical problem dealing with internet connection; second, the discussion results that is shallow and monotonous; third, it causes a feeling of missing out. According to the research findings, there is a potential chance to see how the students' responses to the English activities in other language skills such as listening, reading and speaking. Thus, it was suggested for future researchers to investigate the students' perception of the use of padlet for EFL learning in listening, reading and speaking activities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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