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# Vocational High School Students' Emotional Experiences of English



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**ABSTRACT:** The sudden shifting learning mode from conventional learning to prolonged online learning resulted in many challenges for educational institutions. The emotional state of the students became the root to overcome the hurdles. However, the high school students' emotions had not gained too much attention specifically during online English learning under the health emergency situation. This Narrative Study aimed to explore the features of students' emotional experiences and their strategies to overcome the challenges during online English learning. A semi-structural interview was conducted to obtain the data from three vocational high school students. The data analysis revealed that the students experienced positive emotions (e.g. enjoyment) which were provoked by learning style, the teacher's attitude, the value of materials and pleasant learning environment. The negative feelings such as confusion were caused by the absence of personal contact with the teacher, connectivity problems and insufficient knowledge dealing with technology for academic purposes. This study also revealed that social support from parents, peers, teacher and school played a significant role to maintain the students' English learning engagement during the 'forced' online learning.

KEYWORDS: Academic Emotions; English Learning; Online Learning; Vocational High School

# I. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government released 'Large-Scale Social Restriction' as a preventive effort to avoid the spread of coronavirus by lessening the social interaction which resulted people to be isolated and affected significantly the economic world and the educational system. This unprecedentedly strict isolation demands the educational institution to shift the face-to-face learning mode to an online environment (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Therefore, School From Home (SFH) system was launched as the solution for conducting learning practices during pandemic (Kemendikbud, 2020).

The 'forced' online learning during the COVID-19 crisis requires the teacher and the students to adapt to the new environment with its complexities and limitations (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Drane et al. (2020) argued that students encounter challenges in providing technological necessities and overcoming the emotional challenges. The prolonged school closure interfere social interaction resulted in fostering negative emotions due to the social and emotional loneliness (Händel et al., 2020). In Pro Help Center and Reis Community Counselor and Psychologist, Tristinarum, stated that inadequate socialization with peers leads to lose motivation or lose enthusiasm for learning (Susilawati D., Dwinanda, 2020). Hence, to minimize the disruption of the online learning process during the pandemic, UNESCO (2020) suggests prioritizing solutions to address students' psychosocial challenges.

Clark (2019) argued that numerous advantages offered by technology cannot replace human interaction as students are not being in person directly with the teachers and peers. Shahzad et al. (2020) discovered that regardless being happy, students showed their preference towards traditional learning over online learning. Prolonged online learning increases students' nervous, bored and tense feelings (Haider & Al-Salman, 2020). Sundarasen et al. (2020) revealed that 17 to 18 years old group students are more anxious which should be given priority by the educational institution. Vocational schools provide practical and contextual meaningful learning in regards to values of daily life to enhance students' capability and skills for survival and development (Kholifah et al., 2020), thus, carrying out online learning will be more challenging. Finally, addressing the above-mentioned issues, the present study proposes the following research questions:

- a) How are the features of the vocational high school students' emotional experiences in the learning of English during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- b) b)How do vocational high school students overcome their emotional challenges arising from online English learning?

# **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Emotion becomes the primary aspects of human interaction which frequently come up in verbal interaction and emphasize its focal role in linguistics (Pérez-García & Sánchez, 2020). The classroom perceives as an emotional place where students experience

diversity of emotional responses (Corno & Anderman, n.d.). The term academic emotions were proposed to denote such emotions that can influence cognitive process and performance of students, (Pekrun et al., 2002).

Pekrun (2014) proposed four groups of academic emotions that relevant for students' learning. The first category is achievement emotions which refer to students' emotions during the learning process, attending class, taking exams and the outcomes of activities assessed within competence-based standards of quality. Achievement emotions include activity emotions, such as boredom and enjoyment, and outcomes emotions that relate to upcoming (prospective) and past (retrospective) success and failure, such as hope (prospective) and pride (retrospective) that are tied to success and anxiety (prospective), disappointment and shame (retrospective) that are tied to failure. Pekrun (2014) also proposed a Control-Value Theory that is related to appraisals of achievement-related control and value (Shao et al., 2020).

The second category was epistemic emotions that associated with cognitive issues of tasks and activities such as unfamiliar information and non-solved tasks during the learning process which triggered curiosity, surprise, anxiety, enjoyment, and frustration. The third category of emotions, topic emotions, linked to emotions of the certain topic of learning materials for instance students might feel disgusted reading the blood-thingy stories which influenced students' interest and motivation to engage in learning activities. The last category was social emotions which related to the interaction of teacher-students and peers during the learning process.

In English learning, Piniel & Albert (2018) showed that enjoyment and anxiety were constantly mentioned in all categories as well as freedom which was provoked by students' control over their language learning engagement. Whenever the students were in control over their learning and value the achievement, positive emotions would be emerged while negative emotions would be decreased (Shao et al., 2020). Pavelescu (2019) revealed that students' emotions were closely related to their motivation in learning English and the influences of sociocultural context. Student' positive emotions motivated them to learn English. The personal history, social condition, and future wishes also emotionally affected her pride to achieve high scores as abundant praises promoting her motivation. Moreover, less enthusiastic attitude towards English learning was influenced by the discouragement and offense from teacher and relatives, lack of confidence, and less English-oriented future. These evidences demonstrate that positive emotions were positively related to students' effort and self-regulation while negative emotions were linked to students' low (Pekrun et al., 2011).

Online learning perceives as learning practices carried out remotely assisted by electronic devices with internet access (Gonzalez & St.Louis, 2018) which enabled students and teacher to share resources, manage learning activities, and communicate with each other (Mosquera, 2017). Internet facilitated learning activities and fostered English learners' self-discovery in regards to supplementary sources, information, and virtual educational platform armed with sophisticated communication mechanisms (Dudeney & Hockly, 2012).

The distance learning demands the students to have sufficient internet connection, and adequate technological devices so that poor connectivity and low computer literacy mainly disrupt distance learning implementation (Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Shahzad et al., 2020). Kholifah et al. (2020) findings revealed that monotonous and unattractive with narrow detailed explanations bring confusion to materials understanding and task accomplishment which provoked the students' negative feelings. Rasmitadila et al. (2020) demonstrated that students' enthusiasm was continuously weakened over time caused by the students' low motivation and boredom. Therefore, students' attitudes towards English learning were based on values as positive emotions can be triggered by giving priority and importance to learn.

Furthermore, students encountered negative emotional state in 'forced' virtual learning such as confusion, sadness, disappointment, boredom, anxiety, anger, insecurity and stress which contradicted their expectations (Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Setyaningrum & Pangesti, 2020). Haider & Al-Salman (2020) found out that students admitted that online learning was an unhealthy activity and prolonged use of e- learning tools lead to nervousness, boredom, and tension. Moreover, (Supiani et al., 2020) claimed that the lack of personal direct face-to-face engagement with the lecturer promote students' insecurities and demotivated feelings. Stephan et al. (2019) also reported students' anger was evoked by the absence of personal contact with the teacher and peers. Pavelescu, (2019) pointed out that students' motivation can be promoted by strong positive emotions and will be discouraged by negative emotions. However, students also have ability to transform their negative feelings into positive feelings with social and cultural intervention such as teacher's affection and personal family background (Pavelescu, 2019). Supiani et al. (2020) also found out that individual independence and the emotional support from family, society, and university decrease students' anxiety and stress.

# III. METHODOLOGY

# A. Research design

This present study used Narrative Inquiry Design to examine the students' emotional experiences and their coping strategies during learning English through an online learning mode during the Covid-19 pandemic. A narrative research methodology can be appropriately used to investigate somebody's emotions and beliefs. Besides, as an approach, it is able to unveil a phenomenon of study like one's experiences, also as a strategy, it possibly used for researching practice (Aragão, 2011). In this case, the intended

Narrative Inquiry Design typically focuses on obtaining data through compiling stories, reporting on individual experiences, and discussing the meanings revealed from those experiences (Creswell, 2012). The experiences of this study related to either positive or negative emotions that emerges from the students' perspectives during the implementation of online learning mode as well as their strategies to overcome the emotional challenges throughout the learning process.

#### **B. Research Site and Participants**

The study was conducted in a public vocational high school in the Province of East Java which was appointed by the Governor of East Java as one of the experimental schools to conduct face-to-face learning under the Covid-19 crisis. The availability of adequate technological facilities has become the consideration. This privilege leads the students to experience both virtual and conventional learning modes which can expand their perspectives towards the learning practice.

In selecting the participants, the researcher used purposeful sampling which appointed intentionally the individuals who could help the best providing detailed information to the certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, there were three students majoring in Computer and Network Engineering had been stipulated purposefully as the research participants. There were three female students with ages ranging from 17-18 years old. These students were purposefully selected based on the following considerations: (1) They were willing to provide and reveal information relating to their emotional experiences while attending English course in an online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) They had sufficient English language learning experiences or had huge interest on learning English as they were expected to come up with adequate and pinpoint information regarding their emotions during learning English; (3) They actively participated and engaged in this research.

#### IV. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study employed semi-structured interview (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013) in virtual environment mediated with Zoom Meeting and Google Duo to unveil students' emotional experiences and their coping strategies. This study used a set of open-ended questions for interview guides and focused on: (1) the students' emotional experiences within four academic emotions proposed by Pekrun (2014); and (2) the students coping strategies as well as the influenced factors to maintain the learning engagement dealing with the technical issues, the cognitive issues and the social issues. A set of open-ended interview questions were virtually administered to the three female students. Next, the data analysis to identify, analyze, and report themes derived from the data were executed by using a Thematic Analysis of Braun & Clarke (2008).

#### V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Finding

From Braun&Clarke's Thematic Analysis, two categories of themes emerged as follows: (1) the students' positive and negative emotional experiences within four categories of academic emotions including achieve, epistemic, topic, and social emotions, and (2) the strategies to overcome students' emotional challenges illustrated from three categories covering of technical, cognitive, and social challenges.

#### **B.** Discussion

The discussion presents the analysis on the two important findings. First are evidences of the students' positive and negative emotional experiences within four categories of academic emotions which support the statements of their agreement or disagreement toward the Online Learning implementation. Last concerns with the discussion that disputes the students' preferred strategies which are believed appropriately to overcome their emotional challenges in joining the Online Learning Class.

# 1. Students' Emotional Experiences Conveying Positive and Negative Emotions

In term of learning activities and the outcomes in achievement emotion, the students expressed positive emotions such as enjoyment, love, hope, pride, and gratitude. Enjoyment feelings were portrayed through the useful English materials for their future career. The love feelings toward English enhance their motivation to engage during the learning process. The encouragement of the teacher during learning activities provoked students' pride to compete with each other. Students' belief and desire to have good achievement encourage the students to positively perceive the learning activities. Students also expressed their gratitude towards the abundance resources from the internet.

"As the international language, English is very important and becomes one of the considerations while looking for a job. I want to get a high rank so I have to accomplish every assignment".

Student 1 : "I am in love English and always excited about attending the lesson."

Student 2 : "I am so happy because we are competing with each other's opinions during discussion".

Student 3 : "It's easy to learn English online because you can find answers on the internet".

On the contrary, the students experienced boredom, disappointment, confusion, and hopelessness. Excessive usage of technological devices evoked students' boredom. The students stated that understanding the materials in traditional setting is more comfortable and easier. These perspectives provoked students' hopelessness and anxiety in achieving good grades.

- Student 1 : "I am so bored because I have to constantly stare at the screen. In online learning, we often use cell phones, so we are lazy to learn because we continue to hold our cell phones"
- Student 2: "If I don't understand or the lesson is difficult and can ask the teacher virtually, it will be easier for me to understand direct explanation."
- Student 3 : "It is difficult having online learning as the explanations are unclear. I wanted to get a good grade, but getting considering this challenge I think it will be difficult"

Poor connectivity led to frequent accusations of the students' being intentionally absent resulted in students who was being afraid, anxious and panicked. Another student felt hopeless as she has to assist her parents in the morning leading to lack of attending class. One student also expressed her neutral feelings in having online tests by stating

- Student 1 : "Many friends and I had difficulties in using Zoom and the students were often mistaken for not taking lessons by the teacher"
- Student 2 : "This is quite unsettling and makes me uncomfortable because if the internet connection is interrupted I will be late for the attendance. It feels neutral as it is an individual exam which is similar to traditional setting". "I was panicked whenever having connectivity problem as the teacher would consider me being absent".
- Studets 3 : "I was panicked every time I got trouble in connectivity as the teacher would consider not joining the class. I also had to help my parents in the morning resulted in missing the lessons so often".

Dealing with epistemic emotions, enjoyment emerged during the delivery of English materials because of the teacher's pleasant attitude and fun explanation. Nevertheless, the students also felt confused in understanding the teacher's explanation and unclear instruction as the low flexibility in asking teacher personally through online platform.

Student 1 : "The teacher's way of delivering material is very pleasant and detailed. I also have difficulty in understanding the questions as the instructions are unclear and make me confused".

Student 2 : "I am happy because the teacher is fun and the way she delivers the material is easy to understand"

Student 3 : "I am confused with the context of the question".

With regard to topic emotions, the students expressed positive emotions such as interest and enjoyment related to the certain topic that the students read about, discuss and write about. The neutral feelings emerged towards the topic across entire learning materials. Furthermore, the reduction of the material in online setting provoked disappointment feelings as stated by the following students.

- Student 1 : "The materials are easy to understand and useful as it will be beneficial for my future. However, during the pandemic there were online few materials were taught. As a final year student, this is very detrimental because we are going to have a final test".
- Student 2 :"During online learning, the teacher only delivers the material, but in conventional learning, the teacher immediately demonstrates directly, such as in job interview material."
- Student 3 : "It feels normal as the materials that were delivered online didn't make me as motivated as the direct utterances".

In association with social emotions, enjoyment and happiness were emerged due to the relaxing atmosphere in material delivery and useful virtual discussion as stated by the following students.

- Student 1 : "The discussions were interspersed with jokes, so I felt comfortable".
- Student 2 : "Discuss with teachers and peers makes it easier for me to complete assignments."
- Student 3 :"During the process of discussing the material, I felt excited and happy because it looked like we were trying to express our respective opinions."

In contrast, the students also expressed inconveniences because of lacks of freedom in stating opinion and asking teacher frequently via chatting. Furthermore, virtual discussion distracts the students to talk about another topic as stated by the students below.

- Student 1 : "There is not enough freedom in expressing ideas. I also hesitate to frequently ask the teacher virtually compared to asking her directly. Using cell phone also led us to gossiping rather than discussing materials.".
- Student 2 : "Learning through discussion through the comments column in Google Classroom is uncomfortable due to the restricted communication with the teacher".

Student 3 : "Using online platform, my friends were rarely responsive and also often misunderstand the questions".

As a consequence, these findings showed that the students' high controllability and high positive value over academic activities or outcomes stimulate the pleasant achievement emotions. The positive emotions emerge if the students are interested and confident in learning material (Shao et al., 2020). The positive emotions emerged if the students" high controllability and high positive value over academic activities or outcomes stimulates the pleasant achievement emotions. The positive emotions emerged if the students is interested in learning the material and is confident in mastering it (Shao et al., 2020). Enjoyment was provoked by the importance of English because vocational students are trained for working world (Kholifah et al., 2020). English as the international language becomes the needs for students' future, thus they put priority on learning English compared to other foreign languages (Shahzad et al., 2020). The numerous resources provided through the internet assisted the students to subside the burden

in learning as they can access the resources permanently (Mosquera, 2017). On the contrary with Stephan et al.'s (2019) results, the findings of this study reveal that virtual interaction still maintains students' pride as the teacher continually encourages the students to engage with class discussion.

The virtual communication restricted students' freedom to interact with teachers and peers as the habits of society still rely on face-to-face interaction (Febrianto et al., 2020). The traditional classroom serves spontaneity in communication in the light of the probability of having causal conversations about schoolwork and conveying ideas around (Yates et al., 2021). This study reinforces that technology cannot replace the relational nature of traditional teaching that promotes human relationships as the crucial factor to good teaching (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020) and teachers can promote positive emotional responses by pointing up the urgency for organized instructional design and communication clarity in carrying out online learning (Brooks & Young, 2015).

On the report of the data derived from the findings, however, the emergence of neutral feelings could not be fit within these boundaries. The students' special feelings during foreign language learning which clearly valued positive emotions generated their difficulty in identifying the emotions (Piniel & Albert, 2018). The lack of feelings during language learning affirms the findings of Piniel & Albert (2018) that further interpretation and possible inclusion were required for Pekrun's academic emotion framework.

Furthermore, the insufficiency of technology items triggered students' perplexity as they had no proper training and ample IT facilities (Shahzad et al., 2020). The findings also affirm that excessive use of the internet distracts the students from learning because of the inevitable use of entertainment platforms (Hollis & Was, 2016). The students also distracted with responsibility at home which causes hopelessness and affirms that students were lack of engagement and motivation due to contextual issues such as family obligations (Yates et al., 2021).

#### 2. Students' Strategies to Overcome Emotional Challenges

Dealing with connectivity and the power outage interruption, students performed several strategies to maintain their online learning such as borrowing their family's gadgets or stopping by a friend's house that had more adequate facilities and good electrical conditions as stated by the students below.

Student 1 : "I encountered an unstable internet connection so I had to use quota and network from someone else's cell phone".

Student 2 : "The problem that I experienced was the poor internet connection and I borrowed my parent's cell phone and contacted the teacher informing that I was having a problem".

Student 3 : "I encountered unstable internet connections and power outages. I had to go to a friend's house with Wi-Fi or no black out occurred".

Regarding the cognitive issues, the students actively communicated with peers and the teacher helped understanding materials and accomplishing assignments. One of the students also revealed that she would consult the people who were proficient in English.

Student 1: "Whenever I found difficulties in understanding the material, I looked for references on the internet and asked the teacher or my friends".

Student 2 : "Whenever I had difficulty, firstly I asked my friends before asked the teacher."

Student 3 : "I summarized the material by myself first then asked friends and teachers later. I also asked someone who is more fluent in English".

The intervention of surrounding social environment encourages the students' motivation. The supports from the family, school, teacher, and peers in forms of technological equipment supports, materials, discussions, and the encouragements from the teacher also contributed as extrinsic factors to enhance students' engagement during the online English learning, as stated by the following students.

Student 1 : "My parents were not happy because it was unhealthy that I was always busy with cellphones. Teacher kept motivating us by reminding the unfinished assignments. I also met my friends to work together".

Student 2 : "The school gave the data package for learning. Teachers and friends also helped me in understanding the materials. My friends and I often worked together to complete the assignments".

Student 3 : "I was motivated by my parents. Sometimes, I also visited my friends to work together accomplishing the assignment". The results of the findings above revealed that technical issues emerged in performing online learning due to the power outage and the dependence on internet connection. This study indicated that the poor internet connection promoted the students' anxiety associated with attending the class and taking exams. To keep up the motivation of the students, the school already determined the funds for the students such as data packages to support the online instructional activities. In line with several previous studies, this finding revealed that the support from school indeed helped the students to maintain their online learning (Supiani et al., 2020; Taloko & Putra, 2020). Besides, the family and peers also helped the students in fulfilling the technological needs. Furthermore, the students also admitted that they could overcome difficulties in understanding the material by asking peers and the teacher. This finding affirmed that negative feelings during the online learning process could be managed with the influence of the family, school, teacher and peers' supports (Nurfaidah et al., 2020; Puspitasari & Rahayu, 2020; Supiani et al., 2020).

Moreover, the students were able to maintain their intrinsic motivation through their desire to have great achievement and their selfawareness of being the final year students. Furthermore, the behavior of the teacher in encouraging the students to complete the assignment also motivated the students. It showed that teachers' behaviors could influence the students' emotion during the implementation of online learning (Brooks & Young, 2015). This study underlined the ideas of Brook and Young (2015) that teachers could promote positive emotional responses by pointing up the urgency for organized instructional design and communication clarity in carrying out online learning. The supports from peers played a significant role in the students' emotional responses during online learning. Meeting with peers for accomplishing the assignment together helped the students overcome the boredom. This kind of social group could enhance the students' motivation during prolonged online learning (Taloko & Putra, 2020).

At the beginning of the virtual learning, the parents may show enthusiasm. After more than a month, however, several issues may arise such as financial problems (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). The present study expanded the challenges by exposing the parental concerns about the health of their children as online learning demanded frequent engagement with gadget screens which probably harmed their health condition. Sundarasen et al. (2020) asserted that some students attended 6–8 hours of daily online classes employing their mobile phones which further increased overwhelming stress and health problems.

#### VI. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

#### A. Conclusion

In relation to the research questions, the results indicated that vocational high school students experienced positive, negative and neutral emotions related to online English learning. The positive feelings were provoked by the students' desire to have good achievement, the value of English materials, teacher's learning method and attitude, abundant resources on internet and confidence in mastering the materials. The negative emotions were caused by connectivity problems, the lack of personal contact, frequent use of online platform, and insufficient knowledge regarding academic technology. The positive responses promoted students' motivation while negative emotions tended to demotivate them. Moreover, the students also experienced neutral emotions provoked by the unidentified feelings towards having exams and indirect materials delivery in online learning.

Furthermore, the results indicated that despite encountering many challenges in having online English learning, the students managed to maintain their learning engagement through several strategies. They were able to cope with their emotional challenges by the involvement of the family, teacher, school, and peers in supporting and assisting the students to constantly maintain their motivation during online English learning. Additionally, the intrinsic factor such as students' desire to have great achievement and their awareness of being final year students also fostered students' motivation.

The findings of this study revealed that the students' positive emotions were promoted by the useful materials, pleasurable way of delivering the materials, and pleasant teacher attitude in embracing students' engagement in online learning. Taking these into account, the teacher should maintain the students' positive emotions by establishing a meaningful language learning experience as suggested by The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia (Rasmitadila et al., 2020) so that the students would put importance on learning the materials. Besides, the restricted personal contact with the teacher triggered students' negative emotions. Therefore, synchronous and creative learning activities such as using Zoom meetings should be emphasized in carrying out the online learning. The teacher also needed to take into account the students' psychological state by being attentive and giving soothing responses in communicating with the students.

#### **B.** Suggestions

Further, studies can be conducted to draw the comparison of emotional experiences and the coping strategies between male and female students. Lastly, research focusing on the language teaching method used by the teacher that is associated with students' motivation and learning outcomes during online learning should be intensified.

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