RETURNING TO OFFLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING: WHAT IT MEANS FOR INDONESIAN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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Abstract

During the early pandemic, teachers and students were abruptly forced to conduct teaching and learning remotely. Both were struggling to cope with the challenges in the emergency remote teaching (ERT) situation. It was quite common to hear students and teachers wishing to go back to school immediately for various reasons. After two years of remote teaching, some schools begin to open for face-to-face or offline learning. It is then interesting to know how the students and teachers responded to the school/ campus opening. This paper reports a small-scale survey involving 110 respondents, both teachers, and students at the secondary and tertiary levels. Thematic coding analysis was carried out to analyze the participants' responses. This study revealed that 80% of the respondents opted for online distance learning over offline learning during the pandemic although they reported challenges of teaching and learning within the online mode. The percentage shifted after two years of distance learning. In terms of mode preference, 56% of respondents prefer to go back to offline mode but the remaining 44% want to stay in the online remote mode of teaching and learning. While the majority chose offline learning, several themes of concern emerged from the responses, and reverse eco-shock is the most prominent. As the students and teachers acknowledged the benefits and build comfort in the online teaching and learning environment, they indicate the reimaging of offline teaching and learning. It implies that the practice of offline learning will not be similar to that before the pandemic.

Keywords: in person teaching and learning, online distance learning, post-pandemic, reverse eco-shock, school reopening

INTRODUCTION

The reopening of schools and campuses after being closed for two years due to the pandemic invites a warm discussion. Some people express excitement but some others admit concerns. While offline learning is not something new, the fact that both teachers and students are already building a new normal habit within the online mode makes the re-transition a bit challenging for some (Amri, et al., 2021).

During the early pandemic, the sudden change from offline to online teaching confused both teachers and students. Navigating learning and teaching in a completely new and unpredictable situation with lack or no preparation has been quite overwhelming. Numerous studies in different contexts (Russell, 2020; Zhang, Liu, & Lee, 2021, and Liang et al., 2020)

have reported that teachers and students were struggling with a poor internet connection, complex home situations, low engagement/ participation, low motivation, lack of confidence and digital readiness, and mental health issues. Some teachers perceive the abrupt mode of migration as an unwelcome experience and cause disorientation, stress, and other negative emotion (Yandell, 2020; Moser, Wei, & Brenner, 2021, MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020). Teachers also developed feelings of being marginalized and vulnerable due to a lack of interaction and doubts about online learning. (Song, 2022).

Gradually, the students and teachers seem to be able to adapt to the new normal. The adaptation is reflected in the number of studies that highlight teachers' efforts to make online learning work. Yan and Wang, 2022, for example, portrayed the experiences of three teachers in China when switching to online teaching. The study presented not only the teachers' experiences in dealing with issues such as low motivation and collapsed networks but also how teachers started to explore more powerful social media applications and learned from online teacher development activities during the pandemic. Yan and Wang (2022) reported that through several mechanisms, teachers underwent three stages of online shift, involving preparing, adapting, and stabilizing stages. Research databases also record plenty of classroom research focusing on teaching strategies and the use of ICT or digital teaching tools (e.g. Nurliana, 2022, Pahamzah, 2022, Suadi, 2021, Suci, et al., 2021, Kusuma et al, 2021). Webinars and training as initiated by ed-tech enthusiasts, associations, or communities such as Indonesia Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (ITELL), Kelas Kreatif (KK), and research groups from various universities are usually packed with teachers-participants. These are positive indicators of teachers' resilience; not only do they survive but also thrive during an uncertain time. In the meantime, the students also began to acknowledge some benefits of online learning despite its challenges. Studies capturing students' perceptions revealed that they find online teaching and learning beneficial e.g. more resourceful (de Freitas et al., 2021), more autonomous, flexible, and accessible (Suharsi and Wijayanti, 2021, Yulianto, Setyaningsih, and Sumardi, 2021), more effective, efficient, and safe (Asrobi, Surraya, Prasetyaningrum, 2021). All in all, a wide range of teaching resources and platforms allows teacher and students to extend their learning beyond class sessions with less hassle and is more cost-efficient. While taking quite a bit of time, teachers and students seem to build a certain degree of comfort in online teaching.

However, when the teachers and students began to gain a sense of comfort amidst the limitation of online learning, schools and campuses are ready to welcome them back to physical classrooms, after strong signals that the pandemic is coming to its end. This shift is not as abrupt as that at the beginning of the pandemic. In Indonesia, for example, the government took the necessary steps to anticipate the re-migration to offline classes. To a certain varying degree, preparation steps have been taken. For example, many schools in Indonesia are already setting the class, facilities, and regulations to maintain health protocol for the coming offline classes. Moreover, students and teachers are not going to enter a completely new teaching and learning environment as they did two years ago. Thus, it is fair to say that all parties are somewhat familiar with the upcoming environment.

Regardless, the coming back to (physical) school/ campus could not be viewed as returning to old practices. Both teachers and students have picked and packed up a lot of new experiences during online learning and have built new ways of doing things. To a certain degree, comfort is already built, and to leave that comfort zone certain degree of re-navigation will be required. It is, therefore, crucial to dig into how teachers and students respond to the reopening of schools/campuses and capture their concerns and strategies for coping with the possible reverse eco-shock.

METHOD

This study takes the design of a survey. It is approached quantitatively and qualitatively. To obtain the data, both close and open-ended questions were asked in the questionnaire that was sent online via a Google form. The close ended-question aims to gain a descriptive quantitative percentage of the respondents' preferences for online and offline modes. The open-ended questions elicit the issues or concerns and their plans related to the preferences.

To ensure its face validity, the questionnaire was tried out on a small group of respondents to see if they can answer the questions as they are expected to measure. Reformulation of some questions was made to eliminate ambiguity. Meanwhile, the content validity checking was conducted by consulting a state university research group to make sure that the survey contains questions that cover all the targeted aspects. The revised questionnaire was then distributed through several WhatsApp Groups of teachers, lecturers, and students at secondary schools and universities in three different regions in Indonesia.

A number of 110 respondents filled out the questionnaire and they were comprised of 87 students (79 percent) and 23 teachers/ lecturers (21 percent). The respondents coming from universities made up 86 percent of the total participants. As many as 88 respondents (80) percent of the respondents are female and 22 (20 percent) are male. The age ranges from 11 to above 46 but most respondents were between 16-24 years old.

Thematic analysis coding was carried out to find recurring patterns and themes from the questionnaire responses. In this case, deductive coding was applied. At the initial stage, the responses collected from the survey were tabulated and coded in a spreadsheet. The type of coding was simultaneous or multiple which means a single-entry qualitative datum may have two or more codes. This multiple coding was considered the most appropriate due to the participants' responses suggesting multiple meanings (of experiences, feelings, and perspectives). Giving a single code to an entry results in a loss of comprehensive description and inferences of the datum. Here is an example of how an entry is coded.

Entry	Code
"Going back to before pandemic-routine (allotting travel time from home to office, fixed schedule and less flexible time to conduct teaching and learning). Perhaps, I have to make direct interaction to other people and I felt that is too risky for my health. Also, I feel that my interaction skills decreased during the pandemic."	READAPTATION-REVERSE ECO SHOCK HEALTH SOCIALIZATION

After each entry was coded, patterns of recurring code were identified. The identification was aided with the use of color code instead of counting. Since the data were analyzed manually instead of computed, the use of color code or block was considered more time-efficient to identify the major clusters/ categories. From this, patterns were identified and themes were drawn.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the themes that emerged from the questionnaire responses. To give a better picture of the changes in the respondents' concerns, the presentation is divided into two main subsections: the early pandemic and the post-pandemic.

1. Early pandemic preferred mode and issues: The eco-shock.

The survey begins by asking the respondents to recall their preferred mode at the beginning of the pandemic and the result shows that 80 percent of the respondents preferred online/

distance to offline' face-to-face learning. A few students reported enjoyment in the transition because the lesson can be accessed anywhere, allowing them to spend more time with their families and do other activities. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents mainly reported discomfort, confusion, and other negative experiences at the initial stage of the mode transition. The sudden shift of teaching and learning mode created an emergency in which all parties had to optimize whatever they have in hand which often resulted in lacks and flaws. Both teachers and students admitted a certain degree of shock after entering a situation that they were not familiar with and were not prepared for. The eco-shock is manifested in the following issues:

a. Poor internet connection/ unavailable device

This issue dominated the respondent response as shown in these three sample data excerpts:

"At the early pandemic, I was worried that my students did not have the device for distance learning. Their parents were mostly unable to provide the device because of effect of the pandemic on economy." (Teacher A)

"At the beginning of the shift to online learning, I was a bit disturbed because of the poor internet signal at my place. I had to move around and went to internet café. Unfortunately the internet café is close to a busy highway and it was really noisy" (Student H)

b. Hard to deliver/ understand the material

Teacher -respondents admitted problems in delivering the teaching material, and in doing their work in general, in the new environment due to the unfamiliarity with technology as reflected in the following data excerpts.

"At the early pandemic, I find it really hard to teach without the whiteboard. I wasn't skillfull to use distance learning" (Teacher W).

"Early on, I experienced difficulties to operate online learning platform and media. I had never taught online, let alone synchronously. My only experience with online learning was limited to uploading learning material to an LMS. In addition to the technical issue, I feel that the amount of material that I delivered decreased significantly in online teaching compared to the in-person teaching." (Teacher F)

In contrast, the student-respondents did not mention any issue related to their capacity in using technology/tools. Nevertheless, they admitted they had difficulty understanding the learning material.

"At the beginning of the distance learning, I couldn't catch up on the learning material. I don't understand a lot of things and I think that's because my teacher did not deliver the material well during the online teaching." (Student M)

"At the beginning of the pandemic, my understanding on the lessons dropped. I was lazy to join classes and these made my study result was poor. [I think] it's because the teaching and learning was conducted under a lot of limitations." (Student S)

As observed, the teachers' difficulty in delivering the material partly affected the students' learning. This is evident in the following datum in which the student reported that her learning experience was more positive when she was learning with a teacher who was better at using technology.

At the early times of distance learning, I faced a lot of difficulties to understand the lesson because my high school teacher only provided lots of assignments through WhatsApp as the only platform of communication and learning. However, when I started studying in a University, I felt that the lessons were more enjoyable, likely because the lecturers were more skillful at using technology in their teaching, and thus the materials were easier to understand. (Student BP)

Another identified reason that could explain the students' difficulty to understand the material was the poor internet connection.

> *"…..*Poor internet connection added up the problem. I was in bad mood most of the time. I felt irritated because the poor signal interrupted my teacher's explanation during the session." (Student BA)

    c. Psychological issues

The respondents also expressed some psychological issues because of the sudden change. They felt (1) confused ("I felt so confused…this change of learning mode is alien to me. Learning that is mediated only by gadget felt strange.*-Teacher DW*"), (2) bored, ("I felt bored simply because online learning is freaking boring" *-Student F*), (3) lonely ("I felt lonely. I used to meet my friends [in-person] at school but then we met online only". *-Student AH)*, (4) worried ("I was always worried whether my students understand the materials, whether my students could engage in the lesson, and whether they cheated or not" *-Teacher HF),* and even (5) depressed ("At the early distance learning, at the beginning of the pandemic, I felt a bit depressed since most of my lecturers focused more on giving assignments as their method of teaching" *-Students SY)*

In addition, some students also mentioned they were losing focus and interest or motivation. Some because they felt that the teachers were not watching/ supervising them and some because of the poor signal and unconducive home situation.

> "At the beginning of distance learning due to the pandemic, I felt super lazy and my participation in class sessions dropped significantly. The bad connection was annoying and ruined my mood for learning. It's just not easy because the lecturers explanation was interrupted several times due to the connection." *(Student J)*

These issues that were found at the early pandemic stage resound those that have been reported by numerous studies highlighting teaching and learning during the pandemic. (E.g. Yulianto, Setyaningsih, and Sumardi, 2021). Negative experiences are commonly felt when a person enters a new environment, particularly if she/ he is not prepared for it. Redmond (2015) mentioned that moving from traditional face-to-face teaching to online language teaching is a 'lengthy continuum'. This implies that the transition, ideally should not be conducted abruptly. Sockman & Sharma, 2008; Palloff & Pratt, 2013 argued that with the move, emotional resistance such as frustration, anxiety, withdrawal, nervousness, fatigue, and a strong desire to return to their comfort zone can incur as the manifestation of the eco-shock.

In the early stage, it is often found that the resistance caused teachers and students to replicate what they did face-to-face within the online mode. And since some aspects may not be compatible, teachers and students experience more severe issues. In this study, some students reported that they felt lazy and lost interest because the teachers were not 'there' physically. Turning off the camera during zoom sessions were often done not because of technical issue but to 'hide' from the teacher. On the other hand, the teacher reported in the survey that because they could not see the students, they lost grip on whether or not the students understood the material. Both parties, in this case, were still relying on 'old practices' in the new environment, and turned out that they did not work.

    2. Post pandemic preferred mode and issues: The reverse eco-shock

After two years of distance/ online learning, the survey revealed that the majority of the respondents choose to go back to offline learning with the upcoming school/ campus opening. Interestingly there is a big disparity between the proportion at the beginning of the pandemic and after the pandemic. Early on, 80% chose online learning and only 20 percent

chose offline learning. The gap is relatively huge. Regardless of the solid proportion of those who chose online learning, the majority of the respondents reported negative feelings and experiences with the chosen mode in the early phase of the transition. This is in contrast to the result of the survey asking about their current choice. The number of respondents choosing offline learning rose to 56 percent compared to those 46 percent who chose online learning. This is a near half-half proportion. The open-ended questionnaire also revealed a contrasting picture. The majority of the respondents tended to give a more positive tone toward online/ distance learning while still admitting that some issues of online learning persisted, such as the difficulty to comprehend and deliver the learning material.

> "...online learning is hard for me because I realized that my brain just can't process and comprehend the material that is delivered online. I feel that my understanding is just superficial." (Student K)

> "I prefer offline learning because I think it is more effective to deliver the material to my students. More, I can directly observe my students' condition and the understanding of the material during the instructional process." (Teacher FS)

Another reason that is mentioned by the respondents who chose offline learning is related to equity. Online learning for some respondents is considered marginalized students who have limited access to gadgets and internet connections. Teacher EP in her response mentioned that students from all socioeconomic backgrounds have the same opportunity to access classes in offline classes.

Apart from persisting issue of online learning, other themes that emerged from the responses signal the phenomenon of reverse eco-shock. The students and teachers expressed their concerns when they have to return to offline or face-to-face teaching and learning.

a. Losing socialization and interaction skills

The respondents stated that they doubt their social skills after two years of distance learning. They admitted that they become quieter and thought that it would be awkward to have a direct face-to-face interaction.

> "Online teaching and learning made me an introvert. Now I feel not confident and shy to meet my friends in person." (Student R)

> "All these times, I am getting used to distance learning. I am accustomed to learn with my lecturers on my screen. So, now when I have to see them I person, I felt anxious, panic, and strange." (Student M)

b. Missing the efficiency and productivity

Another strong indication of reverse eco-shock is manifested in the respondents' concern about losing the efficiency and productivity that they enjoyed during distance learning. This concern is the major reason forwarded by those who choose to stay in the online learning even when school/ campus is open for face-to-face teaching and learning. They mentioned that online learning is more time and cost-efficient.

> "After two years, the university started to understand the challenges and mitigate the difficulties of online learning. It's getting more comfortable because the necessary facilities and system are provided. Online teaching and learning save time, cost, and energy. Activities can be carried out effectively and efficiently." (Teacher EL)

> "I prefer online because my worries turn out to be wrong. I was worried that the material couldn't be delivered well because of the limitations in terms of the gadget [technology]. But its impact to understanding was actually insignificant. Instead, with online learning, managing time and space for teaching and learning become more efficient and effective." (Teacher D)

  c. Leaving the comfort zone: again.

In a more general way, the students and teachers also mentioned they have developed a certain degree of comfort and are reluctant to leave the newly build comfort zone.

> "Having conducted online learning [for two years], I felt comfortable and I could overcome the issues that emerged during online teaching and learning." (Teacher FS)

> "It's not that I don't want to have offline learning, but I don't want to let go the comfy online classes, lol. I live in Depok and it's far away from campus, and distance is my biggest obstacle to attend offline classes. Other than that, "culture shock" will likely occur to me who have never had in person class since the beginning of my study in university. I feel that I have to readapt to the old routines of having offline classes such as wake up early, take a bath, and have breakfast and other preparation for class. I have a feeling that it's going to be challenging for me. I am already used to, enjoyed, and comfortable with distance learning" [grin, smiley emoticon] (Student SK)

  3. Post Pandemic Teaching and Learning Plan: Reimaging teaching and learning

In anticipating the reopening of school and campus, teachers and students mentioned the following strategies.

  a. Readapt to the new 'old'

This strategy is the most frequently mentioned by the respondents. Both teachers and students feel the urgency to readapt to the old practices as shown in the following excerpt:

> "Readapting is the only way to do. Just like when adapting to online distance learning, I will also try to readapt to the post-pandemic instruction." (Teacher HF)

While most respondents do not specify the re-adaptation plan, one respondent mentioned that he had taken a concrete step by visiting the city in which his campus is located. He noted that he would do further re-adaptation action once there is an official statement for offline learning. Some other respondents mentioned that they would have to readjust their habits and schedule. (E.g. allotting travel time to school/ campus, getting up earlier, and arranging the to-do list).

  b. Relearn and reinforce pedagogical skill

Another recurring data code related to teachers' plans when they are returning to offline teaching is relearning and reinforcing the pedagogical skill. The teachers signal awareness that online and offline teaching requires different 'ways of doing'. And since it has been more than two years, the teachers were worried about losing their offline teaching skills. Teacher W mentioned that she will reread the relevant literature to recall the teaching strategies to be applied in the class. (I'll re-read the literatures on teaching strategies to recall things so I can apply them later on in my offline classes-*teacher EP*). Meanwhile, teacher J mentioned that she would develop material and activities that she thinks would attract students and enhance their motivation.

> "The first thing that I will do for post pandemic teaching is writing interesting material and designing learning activities that could boost students' motivation and interest to learn. Because the they have been spoilt by [the comfort of] distance learning, lots of materials were not well mastered by the students." (Teacher FS)

  c. Reimaging teaching with technology

This final theme is the pinnacle of the recurring data in this study. Both the teachers and students have strongly indicated possible reverse eco-shock when the teaching and learning return back to offline/ face-to-face mode. And the obtained data show that they will not likely return to the old practices as they were. During the pandemic, teachers and students

grew familiar (competent) with the use of educational-technological tools/applications and some began to wonder how they would be teaching without it in the offline mode.

> "[I'm] worried that the lesson previously available [presented] in online learning will be completely different when delivered offline." (Teacher AS)

> "Honestly my biggest worry is my degrading teaching skill when I have to teach in front of the [physical] classroom. It's because I already felt too comfortable teaching through screen, let alone, the supporting facilities are available." (Teacher D)

As teachers grew comfortable with the use of technology, they began to acknowledge the benefits and how the tools made teaching easier and more interesting.

> "I have found the pattern that I feel suitable for online learning. Students' internet connection is no longer an obstacle; the students already adjusted well to online learning. Assignments/ exercises/ and evaluation that are conducted online could encourage the students to be punctual in doing and submitting tasks." (Teacher EP)

> "There're more interesting technologies [when teaching online]. Moreover when sharing materials through Zoom screenshare feature, both teacher and students could express [or communicate] anything without having to set up the LCD projector and screen like in offline teaching." (Teacher FS)

Several teachers explicitly mentioned that they would continue using the technology in their work. (E.g. I will continue using the technology that I have learned and been using to make my work more time efficient-*Teacher EP)*

The data of the study exemplify the three stages of online shift found in Wang and Yan (2020) study. While the preparation and adaptation stages were rough during ERT, eventually the teachers and students reached the stabilizing stage. The online migration has also showcased teachers' resilience. Wang and Yan (2020) argued that from a positive perspective, the migration can be perceived 'a digital renaissance' which provides opportunities for teachers' pedagogical reinvention, improvement of digital competence, and personality.

CONCLUSION

Navigating teaching and learning in a new environment/ context has always been challenging. The abrupt change at the beginning of the pandemic was admittedly overwhelming for both teachers and students. Both prefer to leave offline and shift to online mode mainly for health reasons. Issues that emerges at the early stage of the shift were frustrating for some. Rooted at the unavailable or limited facilities and lack of sufficient skills and experience for conducting online teaching and learning, teachers and students experienced relatively severe eco-shock. However, after two years of school and campus closing, teachers and students showcase their resilience. Both do not only survive but also thrive during the pandemic. Now with a strong belief that the pandemic is close to its end, both teachers and students, once again, have to deal with changes of mode. The difference is that now, they are transitioning back to the old practice which they know will never be the same. Reverse eco-shock awaits and plans are required to face it. Some of the elicited plan in this study are relatively plain general and normative. However, based on the previous experience of navigating in the new environment and how teachers' and students' resilience have been roughly tested in ERT, it is fair to believe that this year back to school/ campus will be dealt with better response and adaptation will hopefully run faster. It is highly anticipated that some new blending of online and offline teaching is underway.

Future investigation could focus on this new blending and how both teacher and students optimize their familiarity to educational technology to aid learning. A detailed look into the

degree of technology integration during the post pandemic using frame such as SAMR and Technology Acceptance Model would provide useful information for projecting future teachers' practices and to help teacher training department to review their curriculum.

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