Students' Perceptions of English Language Training Organized by Higher Education Language Centers During the Covid 19 Pandemic

[1]Siminto Siminto, [2]Soesanto Soesanto, [3]Joko Sutarto, [4]Eko Handoyo

[1]*Universitas Negeri Semarang, siminto@students.unnes.ac.id*
[2]*Universitas Negeri Semarang, soesanto@mail.unnes.ac.id*
[3]*Universitas Negeri Semarang, jokotarto@mail.unnes.ac.id*
[4]*Universitas Negeri Semarang, eko.handoyo@mail.unnes.ac.id*

Abstract

The language centers at the university provides services in the form of English language training. English training becomes different when it is carried out in the covid 19 pandemic situation. Online training is a solution so that the program planned by this language service unit can run. Through this article, it will be explained about the students' perceptions of the English language training held by the language center during the Covid 19 pandemic. This article is the feedback for the improvement of the relevant language center. Qualitative by descriptive research design is used in this article. The research subjects were the UNIMUS students from the various departments and faculties. Data collection techniques used are questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The advanced technique used is the observation technique by directly observing the service pattern of the language center and the implementation of English training. These three steps are a form of method/technique triangulation, which is carried out by using the various techniques in data collection, to ensure the data validity. The results of interviews and questionnaires are related to the results of observations. The English language training managed by the UNIMUS Language Center is in line with the university's vision and mission. It is also in line with the theory of training material design and accommodates student needs. However, in its management, there are still many weaknesses and shortcomings. The training materials of the UNIMUS Language Center designed is not yet referring to the curriculum or academic text because it does not yet have an academic text. The design of training materials is based on the needs of service recipients, in this case students. 54% of respondents stated that the material related to the English Proficiency Course they needed for the TOEFL test.

Keywords: Student Perceptions, Language Centers, Material Organization; Training Evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities in Indonesia have begun to set their mission as global universities. Strengthening foreign language competence by students and graduates in international communication requires becoming a global university (1). Supporting students' mastery of foreign languages, especially English, is one of the efforts to achieve the best graduates. They are competitive in the local, national, and global or international scope. Their potential needs to be developed to have the global competitiveness of university graduates. Because of that, competition occurs between alumni of domestic universities and competition with foreign communities (2). Strengthening foreign languages program is also one of the mandates of the Law of the Republic of Indonesia number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System to formulate the functions and objectives of

national education that must be used in developing the educational efforts in Indonesia.

Getting graduates who can use them as good English users, it is necessary to organize teaching that allows the formation of English language skills by the demands of the job market. This effort needs to be taken continuously (intensively) throughout the student's study period by creating a supportive atmosphere and encouraging the active use of English (3). In line with this, it has become a necessity that language skills, not only English and other foreign languages but also mainly in Indonesian and local languages, are part of character building and nation-building to achieve future competence and form moral people (4).

One of the efforts to get foreign language graduates is necessary to strengthen the foreign language programs, especially English for students. Universities provide the technical implementing units or particular institutions that provide language services. This special institution in higher education is usually called the specialized implementing unit of the language center. If the languages center was defined as a means for testing in the past, then right now, the definition has undergone a shift. The current language center refers to a collection of information managed systematically by a professional manager and served its users well. The languages center is a center for collecting data, disseminating information, learning resources, and supporting foreign language learning, especially English (5). Good performance of the language center is indicated by good service. The university language center is an essential element in the implementation of the learning process. The language center is now not only support but also a significant factor in the success of the educational process (5).

Language centers at universities provide services in the form of foreign language training, especially English. English language training is different when it is carried out in the covid 19 pandemic situation. Online training is a solution so that the program that the language service unit has planned can run. This online learning has become an inevitable choice for educational institutions in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. Online learning is identical to internet-based technology features,

which are highly dependent on the availability of information technology (6). This online English training gave a reaction that gave rise to various suggestions and criticisms from the students as the users of the language center service.

Students as the users of the language center service are expected to be able to give criticism, suggestions, and feedback to respond to the satisfaction of the service. Students' expectations of getting benefits in English language training and the actual results experienced by them will affect their assessment of the quality service delivery. Providing good service quality is very important to maintain existing and attract prospective trainees to focus on quality (7). Service quality can be seen from the perspective of users, in this case, students, because they are involved in various services provided by the university. Sensitivity to student needs should be prioritized when providing services (8). In other words, to get the best benchmark for service quality, it needs some comments and suggestions from students (9). This article will explain the students' perceptions of English training held by the language center during the Covid 19 pandemic. The discussion of this article is an input for improvement for the relevant language center.

2. Methods

The writing of this article uses a descriptive research design (10). It is used to describe the students' perceptions of the English language training organized by the language center during the Covid 19 pandemic. The research subjects were the University of Muhammadiyah Semarang (UNIMUS) students from the various departments and faculties.

Data collection techniques used are questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The advanced technique used is the observation technique by directly observing the service pattern of the language center and the implementation of English training. These three steps are in the form of method/technique triangulation, which is carried out using various techniques in data collection. They were used to ensure the validity of the data.

3. Results and Discussion

Good service theoretically shows the performance of a good language center as well. The language center of a university is an essential element in the implementation of the learning process. The language center not only supports but is also a significant factor in the success of the educational process, especially those related to language. Language center officers must provide excellent, precise, fast, friendly service and always keep the development of the information technology. The language center in the process of service to users must embody some ideal characteristics (5). The implementation of adequate English language training is one of the indicators of a good language center service.

The training design process includes the needs diagnosis, goal formulation, content selection, content organization, learning experience selection, and determining what will be evaluated. It may also have five main steps: situation analysis, formulation of objectives, content derivation, selection of appropriate methods and media, and establishment of evaluation procedures and schedules. While the more comprehensive training design process consists of situational analysis, needs diagnosis, goal formulation, content selection and organization, selection and organization of learning experiences, selection of appropriate methods and media, and determination of what will be evaluated and schedule (11).

3.1 The Need Diagnosis and The Formulation of the Training Goal

The preparation of the English language training program for UNIMUS students carried out aims to support UNIMUS's vision to become a superior university with a technology-based character and an international perspective. 56% of respondents assessed that the English language training was by their goals for participating in it. The purpose of organizing English language training is considered to support the university's vision and mission and improve students' English mastery. Mastery of English will improve the quality of students so that they can compete in the world of work.

The English language training managed by 23% of the respondents was considered sufficient to support UNIMUS' vision to become the best university with a technology-based character and an international perspective. The students see that UNIMUS's vision will be achieved, one of which is if English language training increases and students' interest in participating in the training also increases. Information on training is carried out more intensively and reaches students to take part in English language training to achieve the training objectives.

Meanwhile, 21% of respondents stated that the English language training conducted by the language center had no connection with efforts to achieve UNIMUS's vision and mission. They assessed that the English language training managed by the language center had not succeeded in reaching the expected goals because the language center had not carried out intensive training. It was incidental, so that it did not provide benefits for students.

UNIMUS Language Center organizes English language training according to student needs, which is in line with questionnaires and interviews with students. 34% of respondents need English language training to prepare for the TOEFL test (English Proficiency Course). This training is the most needed by students because the TOEFL test is required as a mandatory requirement for graduation. 19% of respondents need the training to strengthen four English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). This is very necessary to support students' communicative and receptive skills.

Furthermore, 19% of respondents need in-depth training on grammar (grammar). Grammar is needed by students to be able to speak English properly and correctly. 19% of respondents need public speaking training. This training with public speaking material is needed by students as a provision to enter the world of work. The remaining 9% of respondents did not know the required English language training materials. Coincidentally, this student is a new student who has not taken English courses.

The results of the interviews and questionnaires are related to the effects of observations. Thus, it can be concluded that the English language training managed by the UNIMUS Language Center is in line with the university's vision and mission, in line with the theory of training material design, and accommodates student

needs. However, in its management, there are still many weaknesses and shortcomings.

3.2   Selection and Organization of Training Materials

One package of teaching materials contains training materials according to the needs of participants. Ideally, the teaching materials refer to the curriculum, and then the training teaching materials refer to the curriculum or academic texts. The curriculum or literary text defines the range of materials, skills, and values taught through the training program. Whatever the curriculum or academic text, it is the responsibility of the language center manager and instructor to ensure that designing the material leads to the achievement of the overall goals and objectives of the training. Adult training may require teaching materials to meet immediate survival needs and find employment (12).

The training materials designed by the UNIMUS Language Center have not referred to the curriculum or academic text because the language center does not yet have a literary text. The needs of service recipients, namely students, form the basis for the design of training materials. This is by the results of questionnaires and interviews with some students. 55% of respondents stated that they needed English Proficiency Course-related materials. This material is required to get a TOEFL score that refers to the criteria. This TOEFL is required by students as a graduation requirement, continuing their studies to the master's level, and looking for work. 36% of respondents or 19 students need material related to vocabulary, listening, and conversation. Students stated that they needed this material related to speech and dialogue to support English communicative skills. Meanwhile, 9% of respondents did not know the requirements of the English language training materials. Coincidentally, they are the new students who have not taken English courses yet.

The selection and organization of the training materials by the UNIMUS Language Center has not referred to the curriculum or academic text because it does not yet have a literary text. The design of training materials is based on student needs, namely focusing on fulfilling study needs and getting a job through the

English Proficiency Course to increase TOEFL scores.

3.3   Selection of Methods and Media

The English language training organized by the UNIMUS Language Center has taken place online since the Covid 19 pandemic. One of the most challenging aspects of online learning for both students and lecturers or instructors is the loss of personal interaction. Moreover, time management has become one of the biggest challenges of online learning. Time management provides an opportunity for students to practice essential life skills, namely time management skills, discipline, and motivation (13). Even though it runs online, it requires serious efforts to promote this training program to run, and the participant quota is fulfilled. The UNIMUS Language Center utilizes various information facilities to promote training programs. Students also access information related to training through information facilities, as shown in the following diagram.
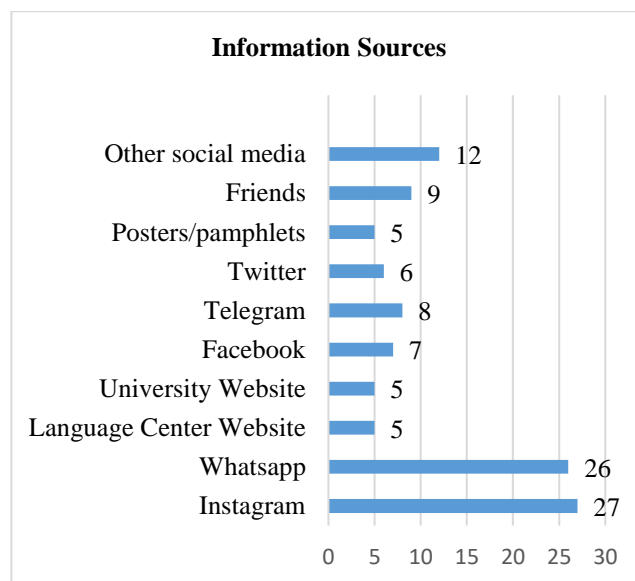

Figure 1. *Information Sources*

English training during the covid 19 pandemics has shifted to online or online training. Students gave various responses regarding online English training organized by UNIMUS Language Center. 65% of respondents submitted complaints related to the implementation of online activity that they felt were unsatisfactory. Students complained about several shortcomings, namely:

1.   The training was not well organized, and time was limited.

2.   The training timing collided with other activities, making it difficult for students to divide their time.

3.   Students think the language center is not intensively informing English training, so not many students participate in the activity.

4.   The language center can organize English language training if the number of participants meets the minimum quota. If it cannot meet the quota, the language center will postpone the training.

5.   Online training causes students to experience quota and internet signal constraints.

English training conducted online relies heavily on the internet. If internet access has problems, it will interfere with the activity. Meanwhile, 35% of respondents focused more on the training material that they felt was unsatisfactory. Online English training is felt to be very difficult and ineffective if the language of instruction in full training is in English so that it is difficult to understand. The limited quota and internet signal will cause the zoom meeting, the training medium to be disrupted, making it even more challenging to receive materials. Furthermore, students complained about the very few TOEFL practice questions given. Students feel less than optimal in understanding the material because of the limited practice of TOEFL questions. Understanding of the material becomes increasingly hampered by difficulties in understanding English grammar due to little vocabulary mastery.

3.4 Evaluation

Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick argue that to analyze the effectiveness of the training, it is not possible to evaluate the final results alone, but rather to assess the participants' reactions, which will show the learning outcomes obtained. Then the learning outcomes are manifested in actions so that they can change behavior (14). The reaction level is the initial evaluation stage, which aims to measure the trainees' reaction to the training program experienced. If the training program gets a good response, there will be a learning process.

The reaction was measured by collecting data from the trainees by filling out an evaluation sheet at the end of the training. The evaluation sheet measures how well they think the activity has been carried out (14). Researchers use the reaction rate to measure the level of satisfaction of participants with the implementation of activities. The indicators used as a reference for this measurement are materials, facilities, consumption, and instructors during training (15).

The interviews and questionnaires to students on training participants showed that 37% of respondents stated that English language training was excellent. This excellent indicator leads to training instructors who are very competent in their fields and good at delivering material. Students feel their English language skills improve as a result of the ease of mastering the material. Furthermore, 33% of respondents stated that the English language training was of good quality. The indicator used is that English language training has been regularly scheduled. The presentation of this regularly scheduled training is fun so that the trainees more easily understand the training material. 15% of respondents stated that English language training is still not good. This is because the training carried out is incidental and not carried out intensively. In addition, the training participants are passive, not active, so that discussions do not occur and the implementation of the training becomes inefficient. The remaining 15% of respondents stated that English language training was not of good quality. This is because the implementation of online English training is very limited. This limitation is caused by the limited quota and internet signal from the students, as well as not many TOEFL practice questions so that students feel they do not understand the training material.

Based on the reactions of the students participating in this training, it can be seen that the English language training managed by the UNIMUS Language Center is considered to be of good quality. The quality of this training, which is considered good, still requires good management. Good management, according to student evaluations, includes (1) delivering material. Instructors must pay attention to heterogeneous students so that English can be understood. Not all students participating in the

training have a good basic knowledge of English. Submission of material with the English language of instruction is felt to be very difficult for students, so the material is not absorbed correctly. (2) updating the TOEFL practice questions is necessary so that students are more interested in learning English. Students complain that the number of practice questions is small and not varied, so it is considered boring and does not add new knowledge. (3) language centers must improve services to students to be more effective and efficient. Students highlighted that language centers often delay training because they wait for the minimum quota of participants to be met. English training is not on schedule, seems sudden, so it is not efficient. In addition, the lack of socialization and information on training programs to students is the reason why the minimum quota of participants is difficult to be fulfilled.

4. Conclusion

Students assess the English language training that went well even though it was online during this COVID-19 pandemic. Students also highlighted that the language center often delays English language training because it waits for the minimum quota of participants to be met. Some notes given by students to improve English training managed by the UNIMUS Language Center are as follows. They have limited human resources who work at the UNIMUS Language Center. This limitation of human resources is the cause of the implementation of the training, which is often incidental. Students expect English language training to be implemented more frequently and cover all faculties and continuously. The absence of regular and continuous training makes understanding of English lost in just one training. Students are less enthusiastic and find it difficult to understand the training material because it takes place online or online. Online training relies heavily on a solid internet signal and an adequate internet quota. Signal constraints and insufficient internet quota will hinder students from participating in online training. Furthermore, the students also regretted that the information about the training was not conveyed properly. UNIMUS Language Center always informs training activities through

social media Instagram, Facebook, and Whatsapp. Students rarely access this information, so they are always late in obtaining information. As a result, only a few students intend to register for the training, so the training is delayed because they wait until the quota of participants is fulfilled. The English language training which takes place online during the COVID-19 pandemic is highly dependent on the instructor's ability to present the material. Instructors are considered very competent in their fields, but they are not very good at delivering material. Poor presentation of the material makes the training feel less fun so that the trainee's understanding of the material being taught is also reduced.

5. Acknowledgments

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