Indonesian Higher Education of Innovation in Learning English in The Pandemic and New Normal Period

Abstract

Innovation of learning activities in universities is a necessity because they are considered as actors of innovation itself. This paper aims to explore higher education innovations in Indonesia during the pandemic and post-pandemic that can be utilized in English learning activities. This research is a literature study by utilizing data obtained from online journals, books, and government regulations as analysis material. Higher education innovations can be seen in the government's new concepts and policies that are relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the innovation of learning platforms, including digital learning media, is very appropriate to use in online English learning activities from home. These two major innovations, besides being useful for responding to educational challenges during the pandemic, are also a medium for developing independence in student learning.

Keywords: English language learning, innovation, higher education
A. Introduction

Conceptually, the function and role of higher education in Indonesia has been stated in Law No. 20 of 2012 concerning higher education. Regarding the function of developing an innovative academic community, it is stated in article 4b, that “the function of higher education is to develop an innovative, responsive, creative, skilled, competitive, and cooperative academic community through the implementation of the three main roles of university; education, research and community services”. In line with this concept, the behavioristic paradigm in higher education is shifting towards a constructivist paradigm, namely that the central point of learning activities is the student. With this paradigm, students themselves give meaning to learning activities that determine their attitudes and actions (Taufiq, 2018). In learning activities, the principles of student center learning are applied systematically by the teaching staff through utilizing various learning models that have been proven to be effective.

In order for the implementation of student-centered learning to be truly effective, strategies are needed, for example by changing the paradigm of lecturers and students at the applicative level, revising the content and process of curriculum delivery and increasing the pedagogic competence of lecturers (Elizar, 2018). Likewise, do English learning activities at the university level. Students study English in order to have language skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing) which in the next stage students have the potential for competitiveness both nationally and internationally.

However, it is clear that there are many obstacles and barriers to achieving learning objectives. These obstacles can be related to the competence of lecturers, students' motivation and commitment to learning, learning facilities and infrastructure and other resources that contribute to the achievement of English language learning objectives in higher education. During this Covid-19 pandemic, these obstacles are further exacerbated by the unpreparedness of higher education to adapt to new learning patterns and systems, namely the implementation of learning from home by utilizing digital technology platforms.

There are some challenges or obstacles that have been identified through several previous studies, including, 1) Lack of learning facilities that support the application of online learning from home such as the availability of internet data, cellphones or laptops as learning media. Another problem is the existence of students living in remote areas who do not have an internet network (Efriana, 2021; Ariyanti, 2020). 2) The ability of teaching staff to operate digital technology. Teaching staff do not yet have adequate skills and abilities to operate digital devices (Lie et al., 2020). The consequence is that they cannot access information that is openly available on the internet as a learning resource during the pandemic (Fitria, 2020). This happens because some of the teachers are those who have been overage. They do not have the motivation to learn these digital technology devices (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020).

Other obstacles dealing with preparing learning materials in accordance with the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic condition. Teaching staff have difficulty adapting to the learning needs of students who generally use digital technology as a medium as well as a source of their learning. The consequence is that teaching staff face obstacles in encouraging students to become independent learners (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020; Gureckis & Markant, 2014; Nugroho, Ilmiani, & Rekha, 2021). Moreover, students have difficulty understanding the material being studied. Efriana (2021) in his research states that by using an online learning platform students understand learning materials according to their own understanding. This happens because of the lack of interaction between students and their lecturers, as well as the lack of feedback given (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Therefore, students contacted the teachers via Whatsapp to ask again about the material they did not understand.

However, There is a question that needs to be answered. Is higher education in Indonesia only struggling with challenges and problems during the Covid-19 pandemic? Or in the face of this pandemic, universities actually innovate in their learning activities? This question needs to be answered with scientific evidence as a basis for critical and logical thinking so that it can provide answers to the existence of the Indonesian education ecosystem which has characteristics as an actor of innovation both in the field of learning for the needs of higher education itself and in the field of community service. By referring to some studies on the advantage resulted from encountering this pandemic, The hypothesis that is proposed is that there are some innovations made by higher education in Indonesia to make teaching and learning process run well. With this basis in mind, the purpose of
writing this article is to explore what innovations are in the body of higher education during the pandemic as a positive impact on the ability to take advantage of challenges as opportunities to produce new findings for the benefit of learning activities and the interests of the community as users of university graduates. This is important to be explored in order to provide a picture of the face of universities as innovation actors as well as a source of information about the results of Indonesian higher education innovations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

B. Methodology

1. Research Design
   The type of this research is literature study. The study is undertaken to obtain the necessary data by reading the literature sources related to the research topic. The data were obtained from articles of online journals, printed textbooks, e-book, law regulations, and other relevant sources.

2. Data Collection Procedures
   This literature study aims at exploring English language learning innovation of higher education in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic and new normal period. The data of the study were obtained from online journal articles, electronic books, government regulations, and other references related to the topic of the research. The search keywords include online learning during the covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, learning innovation of higher education in Indonesia during covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The inclusion criteria used in this study were online English teaching and learning journals during the covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, published 2019-2021. However, it is also open to journals or e-books published in 2010 - 2019. Data were obtained from national and international journals.

3. Data Analysis
   The data of this study were analyzed by following the steps of analysis developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The researcher collected the online journals articles, e-book and regulation related to learning process and learning innovation of higher education in Indonesia in the period of Covid-19 pandemic. Then the data coding were done by classifying the data into categories, and giving the code to each of them. There were four categories, namely journals discussed about the challenges of online learning in the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia (JC), Journals discussed about learning innovation in pandemic in Indonesia (JLI), E-book discussed about learning innovation (EBLI), and government regulation related to teaching and learning in the period of covid-19 pandemic (GR). Then the data were reduced by focusing on the data to answers to the research questions. At the next step, the data are presented in the form of a descriptive text. The final step is drawing conclusion.

C. Findings and Discussion

In this section, using literature review research from various research results that have been published in books, nationally accredited, nationally and internationally indexed journals, it is explained about university innovations in responding to the problem of students' English learning needs both during pandemics and during new normal period. By referring to the three innovation components presented by Kamdi (2016), namely product innovation, platform innovation and process innovation, the discussion in this section is limited to platform innovation and process innovation used by universities in English learning activities during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. Based on the results of data collection, in general, there are two higher education innovations that have been implemented in learning activities to date.

1. Process Innovation
   Miles (1964) in Syafaruddin, Asrul, Mesiono (2012) defines innovation as a species of the “change” genus. Here, innovation is considered as something that is intentional, new, with changes that are more specific and more useful in achieving a goal. From this point of
view, innovation is seen as something that is carefully planned, so that it is not obtained in a haphazard way.

The Policy of “Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka” freedom of learning, launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education in 2020 has been systematically designed to address the learning needs of today’s students. This policy has implications for the emergence of several applicable policies as the elaboration of the big policy. This policy was inspired by the flow of John Dewey’s progressivism which emphasized the importance of the basics of independence and freedom to students (Mustaghfiroh, 2020). One of the implementations of this policy is doing the learning activity outside the study program or campus as an effort to provide opportunities for students to experience real life experiences firsthand. Students are given the freedom to develop their hidden talents and abilities without being hampered by formal rules which sometimes actually shackle their creativity and thinking power to develop for the better (Mustaghfiroh, 2020). In the context of higher education in Indonesia, the concept of “Kampus Merdeka” is seen as a major innovative policy to make education in Indonesia better and more advanced.

Based on the real situation faced by the students during this pandemic, the writer urges that This policy is very relevant to the needs and problems of higher education in the midst of a pandemic as well as the answer to the demands of higher education in the midst of competition that emphasizes the achievement of 21st century skills, namely critical thinking skills, communication and collaboration.

As one of the new concepts, it cannot be denied that the free learning policy certainly experiences obstacles and in its implementation, for instance, there are questions from various perspectives, especially related to the implementation of mechanism and quality assurance of the supervision of the policy. There are also several obstacles related to the limited number of collaborations between campuses and the limited number of campus collaborations with industry (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021). However, it’s clear that all types of implementation activities in the program of “Merdeka Belajar” are the answers to the progress and development that require various skills to be adaptive (Nanggala and, & Suryadi, 2021).

In the view of humanism, the innovation in the “Kampus Merdeka” policy provides opportunities for students to study autonomously or independently. In addition, students learn to be responsible for themselves. Students have the right to take part in learning outside the study program or campus in various activities. This is an innovation in the body of higher education in order to provide a learning experience as a provision for life in the future (Susilawati, 2021).

By taking advantage of the “Merdeka Belajar” policy, English learning activities in higher education have dimensions and opportunities that are large enough to prepare students to have communication skills in English. Students who choose to study English through certain courses for a certain period of time, for example one semester, have plenty of time to implement collaborative learning. It is the application of independent and guided learning patterns through direct experiences in the context of interactions that use English as a medium of communication.

The emergence of innovative new policies as mentioned above certainly has implications for other dimensions of the higher education system in Indonesia which also contribute to the development of effective and innovative English learning. Kamdi (2016) mentioned that curriculum innovation with a vision to broaden the perspective of competency achievement into capacity development is something that higher education needs to do to adapt to the development and learning needs of students and the community. Therefore, the policy of “Merdeka Belajar” has implications for the need for higher education curriculum innovation. The curriculum was redesigned so that it could describe and answer the learning needs of students oriented to the achievement of skills both academically and supporting skills when in the community. The curriculum redesign includes the structure, content and methods of delivering content to students. The following implication is to increase the capacity and capability of higher education institutions to continue to build collaboration and cooperation with other campuses and industry based on the principles and framework of improving the professionalism of the academic community (Susilawati, 2021).
2. Digital Media of Learning as Platform Innovation

Zaltman, Duncan (1977) in Syafaruddin, Asrul, Mesiono (2012) defines “innovation as an idea, practice, or artifact that is considered new by the relevant unit. Innovation is a change of object”. Change is part of the response to the situation, and it requires a creative process to produce an invention. In line with this definition, Kamdi (2016) said that platform level is another most important form of innovation. In technology, a "platform" is a hardware architecture, or software framework. It allows different manufacturers to create modular solutions that run on machines.

By referring to the definition of innovation presented by Zaltman, Duncan (1977) and Kamdi (2016), higher education in Indonesia has produced and used innovation in its learning activities. The innovation is the availability of various digital platforms that he uses in online learning activities during the Covid-19 pandemic. Several types of digital platforms that have been used massively by universities in Indonesia include Google Indonesia, Sekolahmu, Smart Classes, Zenius, Quipper, and Microsoft (Efriana, 2021). Even The Ministry of Education and Culture has joined forces with some online learning platforms such as Smart Classes, Quipper, Google Indonesia, Sekolahmu, Zenius, and Microsoft at the beginning phase of the pandemic period (Daar, 2021). In addition, universities use a learning management system as a medium for implementing learning activities during a pandemic, such as Moodle. Currently, the Directorate General of Higher Education has also created a new learning system during learning from home, namely the Indonesian Online Learning System (SPADA). By using the SPADA students have the opportunities to be able to take a course from another university. Their learning outcomes are recognized by the college where the student is registered (Sasmita, Swartika, Hasan, & Arisah, 2021). These innovations lead to more contextual student learning needs based on the development of issues in society.

With this innovation related to digital media of learning, universities in Indonesia have the opportunity to integrate technology into English classes. By using and integrating technology in everyday teaching and learning activity, it's considered that technology plays an important role in making education run well in facing problems of a pandemic. In the teaching and learning process, technology becomes an important thing (Fitria, 2020). The use of digital media provides a more flexible and fun learning atmosphere for students through the use of certain animations. It's obvious that by using digital media, English teacher could teach the students more joyfully. Using digital learning media can also invite the students to observe and have direct experience on how to use English in interaction. In this context, they will not only think or imagine but they will also use the material directly which can finally improve the quality of material learned (Suryani, 2016). In addition, there are several advantages of digital media of learning in learning English such as portability, support for the current generation of learning, the use of these devices can increase learning motivation, and affordable prices (Priyanti Nababan, 2020). This is in line with the study of Attewell (2005) which mentions the benefits of using mobile learning, including 1) Learning activities can be carried out anywhere, anytime, and are fascinated. 2) The use of mobile learning can add variety to conventional learning that is considered unattractive or scary. 3) Can help provide and support literacy, numeracy and language learning.

By utilizing various digital platforms as higher education innovations during the pandemic and post-pandemic, English teachers encourage the realization of student learning independence. By having independent learning, students consciously and planned to learn English through various digital platforms that are openly available so that the objectives of learning English, especially related to the ability to communicate as one of the demands of 21st century skills can be achieved.

3. Author’s view

Based on the above findings, the writer urges that Higher education in Indonesia is not only concerned with obstacles of learning activities during this pandemic. It is clear that higher education is actually active in making innovations to maximize student learning outcomes. These innovations can be seen in the commitment of policy makers to produce policies that allow students to learn independently to develop their knowledge and skills. This policy is then supported by the conditions of the 21st century that demand digital skills.

These innovations have a direct impact on students’ English learning activities. Students can take advantage of the free learning space to develop their knowledge and skills
in English. Furthermore, students and lecturers also take advantage of the various digital platforms available for the same purpose.

Apart from the innovations described above, it is clear that there are various problems in implementing independent learning and using various digital platforms in learning activities (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021; Rahayu & Wirza, 2020; Gureckis & Markant, 2014; Nugroho, Ilmiani, & Rekha, 2021). The author argues that these problems are both a challenge and an opportunity for higher education in Indonesia to continue to innovate in realizing its essence as an agent of innovation for the benefit of higher education itself and for the benefit of the community as users.

D. Conclusion

Based on the previous discussion, it can be concluded that higher education in Indonesia has undertaken the innovation in the teaching and learning activity including in English language teaching. The emergence of innovation helps the institutional education cope with the problems of the pandemic. The pandemic even has forced the invention of the innovation. By applying the other innovation, the activity English language learning can be utilized anywhere by the use of media technology of learning as long as the internet data is available. It’s obvious that students improve their digital skills as jointly with the improvement of their English communication ability if they possess self-directed learning as the result of “Merdeka Belajar” policy.

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