

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE LECTURER'S EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN ONLINE LEARNING

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**Abstract:** Online learning enforces most direct instruction into online and distance learning. However, good preparation and readiness in online learning is necessary in order to be effectively implemented. The transition from traditional to virtual classrooms, gives some challenges in maintaining social and emotional competencies for the continuation of good relationships in learning. Therefore, the researcher is interested in conducting a study about what kinds of emotional support provided by lecturers in online learning based on students' perception as well as the students' expectation of lecturers' emotional support in online learning. This research is conducted using descriptive qualitative on 10 students from the 7th semester in English language department at the University of Islam Malang because at 7th semester using self-constructed semi-structured interviews consisting of 10 interview questions. The data collected via online interview through Zoom twice and analyzed by qualitative data analysis that include reduction, coding, organizing, synthesize, and interpretation. The result indicated that the lecturers provide emotional support by actively motivate, give constructive feedback about the students' learning competence, try to maintain the class equity, guide the students about respect and pay attention to students' learning attitude, guiding the students about being responsible, and involving the students in discussion and decision making. The students believe that good emotional support should reflect a good relationship between the lecturers and students as well as make the class more enjoyable. Moreover, good emotional support can be established if motivation, attention, feedback, respect, equality, responsibility, attitude, and appreciation as well as communication are emotionally supported by the lecturers. Other than that, it is important to consider students' learning difficulties and individual difference to maintain harmony in the classroom.

**Key Words:** : *Emotional support, online learning, perception.*

### INTRODUCTION

The advancement of the internet and technology has brought some changes in many sectors of life including education. The Internet opens new opportunities and possibilities for the development of education. According to

Evans & Haase (2001), online learning is the form of distance courses that has long been adopted in the education system in many developed countries. Online learning has become of great importance following the spread of Covid 19 in late 2019 enforces most direct instruction into online and distance learning. However, online learning also requires good preparation and readiness in order to be effectively implemented. According to Hagenauer & Volet, (2014) Teaching is a complex personal and social cognitive process that depends on effective communication and relationships between instructors and learners as an emotional experience.

The transition from traditional to virtual classrooms, gives some challenges in maintaining social and emotional competencies for the continuation of good relationships in learning. One factor that has a significant role in maintaining classroom relationships is the instructor's emotional support. Emotions are known to influence the well-being, achievement, and teachers' emotional ties with students that influence the decisions, teaching strategies, material selection, and lesson planning (Naylor & Nyanjom, 2020). Teacher emotional support comprises teachers' demonstration of genuine concern for and cares about their students, respect for their students, desire to understand students' feelings and points of view, and dependability (Ruzek, et al, 2016). Moreover, Ruzek, et al also explained that emotional support refers to a teacher's capacity to pay attention to each student's general emotional needs, focus on how children react, and willingness to consider students' opinions and points of view. Therefore, it can be assumed that emotion not only affects the relationship between instructors and learners but also influence many aspects of teaching and learning.

Teacher emotional support comprises teachers' demonstration of genuine concern for and cares about their students, respect for their students, desire to understand students' feelings and points of view, and dependability (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). As stated by Ruzek et al (2016) that emotionally-supportive teachers reported an increase in their students' behavioral engagement and

motivation. In order to teach effectively, it is necessary for the teacher to not only transfer the knowledge but also facilitate the learner's instructional and emotional (Lloyd-Jones, 2021). Instructional and emotional learning support is the key to learners' success in online learning contexts where scaffolded support is essential for learners (Zhang, Liu & Wang, 2017). Gasser, Grütter, Buholzer, and Wettstein (2018) describe emotional instructor support as another way of describing the care that can be applied in this case as it relates to positive reactions necessary to support human development in any learning context. Moreover, it is more demand, particularly in a crisis where there are actual challenges or threats such as COVID-19 within an unprecedented and widely unknown context (Lloyd-Jones, 2021).

Currently, there are few studies related to emotional support in learning, for example, Frisby (2019) confirms that there is a correlation between emotional contagion and relationship with instructors but it is not related to emotional support from instructors. Another study by Romano et al (2021) found that the students' burnout and exhaustion are also caused by insufficient emotional support by the teacher. Moreover, Jiang (2019) found that students have emotional needs in the form of communication about their learning outcomes. Ruzek et al (2016) indicate that an instructor's emotional support in online learning is another way of describing care for the students that can be applied as it relates to positive reactions necessary to support students' learning experience. Considering the importance of emotional support in online learning in higher education, the researcher is interested in conducting a study about what kinds of emotional support provided by lecturers in online learning based on students' perception as well as the students' expectation of lecturers' emotional support in online learning.

## **METHOD**

This research was implemented in a descriptive qualitative design to focus on specific detail and explicit on measuring statistics. The qualitative research design was the natural research that purposes conjugate phenomenon which happens and done by involving the various taught method. Through the qualitative descriptive method, it was hoped that the data from the field could be written naturally as the reality. The study was conducted at 7<sup>th</sup> semester students at the University of Islam Malang or Unisma. The researcher focused the research at Teacher Training and Education faculty have an English Education department as this research focused on the English Education department. The target participants are one translation class at the 7<sup>th</sup> semester of the English Education Department in UNISMA consisting of 10 students. Those 10 students were selected because at 7<sup>th</sup> semester, the students have experienced more online learning with the lecturers and understand more about the emotional support the lecturers provide. The criteria of the selection are: (1) the participants have reached 7<sup>th</sup> semester, and (2) the participants willing to participate in this study.

The instruments used in the study is semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide was developed by the researcher based on the emotional support theory from Ruzek, et al (2016). 10 questions include 8 items covering aspects of emotional support such as motivation, feedback, the feeling of belonging, attitude, responsibility, respect, appreciation and maintain good relationship in the class environment while 2 items are used to identify the students' expectation on good emotional support. The data were collected by making agreements with the targeted interviewee consisting of 5 males and 5 females from 7<sup>th</sup>-semester students. The agreement is the participants should be cooperative during the interviews including follow-up with the interviewer, and the participants was compensated for their cooperation accordingly. the data in this study was collected via online semi-structured interviews through Zoom Apps and have been recorded and written into transcripts for the data analysis. The link was distributed via WhatsApp message to make it easier for the participants. Before the interview, the researcher explained about emotional support so the interviewee understands

the topic of the interview. Each interview lasted for about 15-30 minutes and some interviewee was contacted by the researcher to gather any additional information from their responses. The researcher allocated the time to interview all the participants in two weeks.

The data analyzed the data obtained from interview questions shared through an online platform. The data are analyzed by descriptive qualitative data analysis based on Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2013) which organizes the data into whole meaningful data for presentation. there are steps that allow the researchers to interpret the data information more effectively, those are data arrangement, coding, description, and summary. Data arrangement is managing the data which in this study is interview transcripts by eliminating unnecessary data and grouping based on the theme of the research problems. coding the transcript, which involves labeling parts of the transcript, based on what is required in the study. After the data is organized, the next step is giving the descriptive interpretation of the data as this study focuses on descriptive qualitative, then the researcher arranges the descriptive data to be presented in the finding, this process involves presenting the data in a way that the researcher intended in the descriptive design. After all the required data are interpreted in a meaningful whole to answer the research problems, the researcher confirms or compares the descriptive result with the theories and the common existing literature which is then presented in the conclusion.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

In answering the first research problem, the researcher studied about how students' perceive the emotional support provided by the lecturers as well as the students' expectation on good emotional support. For the first research question, it is found that the lecturers motivate their students in different ways, such as giving concerns about students' health and condition, motivating them to keep learning even in the pandemic situation, and sharing their own motivating stories and

experiences. This is in line with the current study as the lecturer motivates the students in online learning classes with various approaches from the beginning to the end of the class by Ruzek, et al (2016). Moreover, Romano et al (2021) also stated that the teachers and policymakers should empower the role of motivating as well as making good relationships with students from the beginning.

In terms of giving feedback, the result shows that some lecturers inform the students about the error they make and suggests to the students what they should do. Moreover, the lecturer also tests the students to make the students understand their abilities on their own. This is in line with Lloyd-Jones (2021) that social connectedness and interaction provide support for developing the feeling of belonging and understanding of oneself and others. The other emotional support to discuss is how the lecturer makes the students feel belong to the class. The result shows that most lecturers give the same attention to all students, but a student also mentioned that some lecturer pays more attention to those who need it. This is in line with Biega (2018) that individual differences of the students enforce the teachers to treat the students equally with little attention to individual differences. Aside of its difficulties, the lecturers can still make the students feel that they belong to the class by providing an enjoyable learning experience. According to Romano et al (2021) establishing a relationship with the students helps them to develop the feeling of belonging in the class.

Regarding how the lecturer guides the students to the concept of respect, the lecturer guides the students to respect the agreement that is made together and provides a good example to the students by respecting that agreement too. A study by Frisby (2019) indicated that instructors' prejudice in making the decision and lack of communication triggered problems regarding emotional support that causes emotional contagion among the students. Another aspect of emotional support to be discussed is attitude. The result shows that the student's attitude is often unnoticed in online learning as learning activities are done online. This is in line with the statement of Ruzek et al (2016) that relatedness and connection mediate the relationship between teachers' emotional support and students'

behavioral engagement. However, there is some attitudes that are being concerned by lecturers such as students' attitude in communication including paying attention, not interfering when the others are talking, and being polite when contacting the lecturer. This shows that the teacher provides good attention and emotional support to their students. According to Mikami, Boucher, and Humphreys (2005) in Ruzek et al (2016) the teacher's inclination in assessing whether their classroom interacted with them in a supportive, positive, and respectful manner is considered emotionally supportive behavior.

In terms of how the lecturer guides the students about the concept of responsibility, the result shows that the lecturer emphasized how the students are responsible for their role, task, and decision that they make. This is in line with the study by Romano et al (2021) indicated that the role of teacher emotional support in controlling exhaustion needs to be improved in order to shield students from later burnout. Moreover, the lecturer is also concerned about the students' social responsibility such as in groups or in the class. According to Jiang (2020), the emotional presence of the instructor and peers in the social learning activity is a significant predictor of non-traditional graduate students' satisfaction with online learning. Regarding how the lecturers maintain a good relationship with the students, the result shows that most of the lecturers use jokes and sharing experiences as the common method to get close to the students. In a study by Ruzek, et al (2016) it is assumed that emotion not only affects the relationship between instructors and learners but also influences many aspects of teaching and learning.

In terms of how the lecturers appreciate the students, the result shows that the lecturers pay good attention when the students share their opinion. Moreover, the lecturer also considers the student's opinion and let the students share their opinion before the lecturer concludes the discussion. Other than that, the lecturer also involves the students in making the decision. These findings are in line with Ruzek et al (2016) that the teacher's regard for students' perspectives that demonstrated through encouragement and following of students' ideas and

opinions, providing meaningful choices and opportunities to take leadership roles and incorporating meaningful interactions into classroom activities.

In regards to students' expectation of the positive aspect of emotional support provided by the lecturer, the result shows that an enjoyable and relaxed class environment is needed for the students because the students feel that pressure makes them focused on when the class ends and not on learning. Moreover, it is also important for the lecturer to not show the personal problem in the class to maintain a good class environment. Related to this result, Jiang (2020) found that it is reasonable to assume that emotional presence and support play significant roles in the online learning environment.

It is also showing that all aspects mentioned by the researcher such as motivation, respect, attention, being fair, responsibility, and appreciation of students' thoughts as well as communication as the addition should be maintained or improved. This is in line with the findings from Ruzek et al (2016) that an emotionally supportive teacher classroom environment helps the student to develop in day-to-day learning activities as well as develop the relationship between teacher and students. As Ruzek stated that teacher emotional support comprises teachers' demonstration of genuine concern for and care about their students, respect for their students, desire to understand students' feelings and points of view, and dependability. It is also important to consider students' learning difficulties, especially with too many assignments. This is in line with the study of Romano, et al (2021) that teachers' lack of attention to emotional support, the emotional state of the students, and individual differences of the students influence students' burnout related to exhaustion.

In terms of students' perception of how good emotional support should have been, the result shows that good emotional support can be realized if the student and the lecturer understand their role and understands each other. Other than that good communication, relationship, and an enjoyable environment, as well as the lecturer's example as a good role model, should be established for



good emotional support to happen. This is in line with the statement of Romano, et al (2021) that teachers' awareness of their role in supporting students' emotional needs progressively influences the degree of student responsiveness and openness to the teacher.

For learning purposes, good emotional support can be established by balancing students' ability with the material and the number of assignments. Moreover, it is important to guide the students thoroughly when giving feedback such as giving the students solutions to their learning problems and not only telling the students about the error they make. A study by Frisby (2019) also shows that a teacher's attention to providing emotionally productive feedback is beneficial for the students in understanding their abilities and reduces the tendency of emotional contagion in the class. Other than that, good communication and instruction in learning are necessary for the students because the students cannot be fully independent in learning, and the lecturer's guidance is still necessary. This is in line with the statement of Ruzek, et al (2016) that emotionally supportive teachers actively engage in communication with the students about their emotional needs beyond the classroom activities. It is also necessary to pay attention to students who are left behind because they need more attention for the lecturer.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the result of the study, it is concluded that the lecturers actively motivate to give emotional support. Moreover, the lecturers also give constructive feedback to make the students' understand about their learning competence. The lecturer also tried to maintain the class equity by both treating all the students equally and treating the students with special needs. Moreover, the lecturer also guide the students about respect and pay attention to students' learning attitude despite the difficulties in monitoring attitude in online learning. The lecturers also guide the students about being responsible, for themselves as well as in a group and involve the students in discussion and decision making.

In terms of students' perception of good emotional support, the students believe that good emotional support should reflect a good relationship and understanding between the lecturers and students as well as make the class more enjoyable and relaxed learning environment. Moreover, good emotional support can be established if motivation, attention, feedback, respect, equality, responsibility, attitude, and appreciation as well as communication are emotionally supported by the lecturers. Other than that, from the students' suggestion and expectation it is important to consider students' learning difficulties and individual difference to maintain harmony in the classroom.

From the conclusion of the study, it is suggested for the teacher and lecturer to pay more attention to students' individual needs, because some students require more support, especially those that are related to learning such as feedback and encouragement while the others would be fine with less attention and emotional support. It is also suggested to consider students' learning difficulties and emotional states to provide suitable and efficient emotional support based on students' needs. For the next researcher, it is suggested to study deeper how emotional support is implemented based on students' individual differences and emotional needs. It is also suggested to use a questionnaire prior to the interview to cover more students and reflects students' emotional needs in a wider population.

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