STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS ASYNCHRONOUS AND SYNCHRONOUS TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS IN A TOEIC PREPARATION CLASS

Dianita
dhe.damayanti@gmail.com
Politeknik Pajajaran

Levita Dwinaya
levitadwinaya26@gmail.com
Institut Teknologi Nasional Bandung

ABSTRACT

The globally spread Covid-19 pandemic has instantly changed the teaching and learning process. This study captures students' perspective towards asynchronous and synchronous teaching and learning process in a TOEIC preparation program. The data gathered for the study were collected through a questionnaire consisting of eight open ended questions, which were given to students of a higher educational vocational institution in Bandung previously taking a one month TOEIC preparation program. The result indicates that students involved in this study prefer asynchronous e-learning over synchronous because of the lack of infrastructure supports such as stable internet connection and big internet quota. However, generally students have positive perspective towards the use of both asynchronous and synchronous e-learning as those types of e-learning are proved to have good impact on their learning.

Keywords:TOEIC, synchronous learning, asynchronous learning, online learning, TEFL/TESL, Students' perspective, pandemic

I. INTRODUCTION

The globally spread pandemic, Covid-19 disease has created tremendous changes in almost every walk of life. As Ringel (2020)puts it succinctly, the pandemic has completely changed people's lives. This is also true in the field of education. Teaching and learning process which was previously held in traditional classrooms in which not only teachers but also students were present in the same exact location and time should be drastically changed into fully virtual classes where teachers and students arrange teaching and learning process from their own home due to the reduced mobility needed to slowdown the outbreak.

The sudden change coerced both teachers and students jump into novel teaching-learning environment without proper preparation, which continuously creates new problems to solve until now. One of the problems spotted is such as reported by Angdhiri (2020) that students underwent online learning program during the pandemic felt learning was more stressful than regular classrooms. Therefore, it is important to delve information regarding

students' perspective towards virtual classrooms made happened by the use of technology. Abundance of information related to students' perspective towards online learning-teaching process clearly helps educators, and also policy makers, arrange effective programs during pandemic.

Rigorous research is done during the pandemic to investigate students' perspective towards online teaching and learning process in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak. A qualitative study was employed by Sujarwo *et al.* (2020) regarding this topic and found out that online learning is favorable in term of its flexibility as students have powers to choose the place and time to study. Other study carried out in Surabaya by Wijayanengtias & Claretta(2020) mentioned that students of university in the region think online learning is effective to slow down outbreak yet feel less satisfied with the lack of online learning support facilities. Further, Nur Agung *et al.* (2020) found three major obstacles during online learning faced by the higher education students involved in their study, namely availability and sustainability of internet connection, accessibility of the teaching media and the compatibility of tools to access the media. These sample studies show that students' perspective towards online learning is along the positive and negative spectrums with variety of reasons as the foundation. Therefore, this study intends to find out more information about students' perspective towards online learning during the pandemic to enrich extant knowledge as it is carried out the context which is different from previous studies. The study investigates the perspective of higher education students having TOEIC preparation online class employing both asynchronous and synchronous types of learning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature used in this study is firstly related to TOEIC as the subject learning by students being investigated, and secondly to synchronous vs asynchronous teaching and learning process, the two basic types of e-learning environment (Hrastinski, 2008).

TOEIC standing for Test of English for International Communication is a standardized test aiming to assess test takers' ability in understanding English in a business context (Craven, 2012). The test designed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) measures English language skills such as listening and reading across a wide range of daily work situations and activities which may be experienced by persons working in companies or institutions used English as the medium of communication. The result of the testbasically reveals the language ability of people who are not native speakers of English in situations such as general business, office, eating out, travel, and entertainment.According to Im & Cheng(2019) TOEIC, then, can be used in the process of hiring, placing, promoting applicants, measuring English language proficiency, as well as evaluating progress in English.Therefore, having TOEIC certificate with high score means greater opportunity to work in international scale companies (Damayanti & Gafur, 2020).

The test itself is composed of two main sections each measures different English language skills. The first section aims at measuring listening comprehension skill. To measure this ability, the first section is divided into four different parts i.e. Photographs,

Question-Response, Short Conversation and Short Talks. In the Photographs section there are 10 questions related to the pictures displayed on the question papers, and in each of the three last section there are 30 questions to answer based on the recording played in the actual test. The total 100 questions takes approximately 45 minutes to complete this section.

Meanwhile, the last section of the test intended to measure the ability in comprehending written texts. The reading section is divided into three sub sections: Incomplete Sentence, Text Completion and Reading comprehension with total questions in each section 40, 12 and 48 questions consecutively. To complete this section, test takers spend 75 minutes.

All the questions in the test are in form of multiple choice and the number of correct answers in each of the 2 sections are converted into scale scores. Thus, the total score is the result of the addition of those two scale scores. However, test takers receive not only the total sum of the 2 scores which range from 10 to 990 but also independent scores for both Listening and Reading Comprehension section on a scale ranged from 5 to 495 points.

To interpret test result, ETS as the international institution that provides TOEIC test has issued a guideline which can be used to correspond TOEIC score to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. The CEFR for languages developed by a Council of Europe international working party between 1993 and 1996 centers on a descriptive scheme and a set of common reference levels (North, 2007). The descriptive scheme defines relevant activities as well as relevant qualities of language meanwhile common reference levels categorize proficiency into six levels. These levels can be used to measure language learners' achievement in communicative language activities and competence. Therefore, corresponding TOEIC score to the CEFR helps defining English language ability of a test taker in daily communicationespecially in the context of workplace based on his/her score.

Due to its capability in revealing test takers' English language skills to carry out specific job tasks as well as to both work and interact successfully if they are assigned in an English-speaking country, TOEIC score becomes a requirement for students of universities or higher education institutions to graduate. Setting this requirement, the institutions believe that students equipped with above average test score will have better chance at finding job in both local and international companies. More often than not, higher education institutions requiring TOEIC score prior to graduation arrange preparation class for students to attend before they take actual TOEIC test. This type of preparation class is aimed at brushing up students' English knowledge as well as skills and mainly at getting their students familiar with the types of questions asked in the test. This is understandable as Zahruni*et al.* (2020)point out that one of the obstacles test takers face when having TOIEC test is that they do not understand the TOEIC test format clearly. By obliging students to take TOEIC preparation class, those institutions providing knowledge, practices as well as experience to do the test well.

Conventionally, test preparation program is carried out in a face-to-face class where both teachers and students are present in the same room at the same time. Due to the Covid-

19 pandemic outbreak, fully online learning is imperative to maintain distance, one of the known way to prevent the fast spreading disease. Online learning is a form of distance education delivered over the internet (Nguyen, 2015). Online learning makes use of the Web which may contain written text, audio, graphics or pictures and/or video. It is often considered as learning format which is opposed to traditional face-to-face class. However, online learning may also be an umbrella term for hybrid or blended learningwhich combines three (3) learning formats: face-to-face class, learning over the internet and learning mediated by technologies.

The term online learning is sometimes also used interchangeably with e-learning term. According to Basak *et al.* (2018)e-learning is a type of learning which is supported by digital electronic tools and media. As such, e-learning does not only put emphasize on the importance of the World Wide Web but also utilize a wide range of applications of electronic technologies for instanceTV, radio, CD-Room, computer, laptop, and smart phone.Furthermore, e-learning as a type of learning tools owns four fundamental perspectives which are interdependent yet equally important (Basak, Wotto, & Belanger, 2018). The first is cognitive perspective which relates to the cognitive processes involving in learning and the way brain works. Meanwhile, the second is emotional perspective focusses on the emotional aspect of learning such as motivation and engagement. The third is behavioral perspective which addresses the skills and behavioral outcomes of learning process. Lastly, the contextual perspective pinpoints the environmental and social aspects functioning as stimulation for learning to happen.

Moreover, there are two basic types of e-learning, namely asynchronous and synchronous. Asynchronous e-learning is commonly facilitated by media such as e-mail and discussions boards (Hrastinski, 2008). Thus blogging, *Whatsapp* group chat, Google Class, and Moodle fall into this category. This type of e-learning facilitates work relations among learners and with teachers in a certain course even though they are not able to be online at the same time. Therefore, asynchronous e-learning is characterized by its flexibility, for in this type of learning learners are given the choice to log on to e-learning environment any time and any where they can. Despite its well-known flexibility, asynchronous e-learning also has drawbacks such as the isolated feeling learners resulted from the lack of face-to-face interaction may hinder collaboration and learning itself.

On the other hand, synchronous e-learning made possible by the fast improvements in technology as well as the increase of bandwidth capabilities offers real time interaction among learners and with teachers mediated by videoconferencing applications (Hrastinski, 2008). As opposed to synchronous e-learning, this type of learning is more social, in which learners feel like participants in the learning process. It is thought that synchronous communication during e-learning increases motivation to learn as through synchronous media learners are able to convey as well as observe body language. Despite its benefits to learning, synchronous e-learning is less often chosen as it requires stable internet connection as well as big internet data. Therefore, combining the two types of e-learning based on the real context of each class will benefit teaching and learning process.

III. METHOD

This study based on an exploratory interpretive paradigm seeks to understand the participants' perceptions of TOEIC preparation program which was carried out fully online due to the vast spreading pandemic. It is qualitative in nature as it tries to describe the thought, feeling and action of the participants involved in this study towards the phenomena being revealed from their own unique point of view.

The participants of this study are students of a higher educational vocational institution in Bandung majoring Accounting. Prior to the study, they signed up TOEIC preparation program as a requirement totake a TOEIC test arranged by their institution in collaboration with an international testing center. The program lasted for a month covering 2 meetings per week and each meeting lasted 4 hours with a 30-minute-break hour in the middle of each meeting.

The program was unexpectedly carried out fully online due to the overreaching spread of Covid-19 disease. It was held in July 2020, approximately four (4) months after the Government announced school from home program, in which technology based teaching and learning process suddenly became a must. In this context, both teachers and students were under prepared thus they went into it with lack of skills and experiences. It is also worth to mention that the availability and readiness of infrastructures was also a major obstacle.

The instrument used to gather data was a questionnaire consisting of eight (8) open ended questions made in *Google Forms*. The questionswere asked to reveal the participants' perspective towards the use of three applications namely *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*in the teaching-learning process during the online TOEIC preparation program. *Google Forms* was mainly used to do tests and practices as it has quiz feature. Meanwhile, *Whatsapp* was used to deliver materials asynchronously, discussion of materials, as well as general interactions related to class tasks and activities. *Google Meet* was used to deliver materials synchronously along with discussion and practices.

At the end of the program, the questionnaire was distributed to a class consisting of 20 students and there were 10 students willingly participated in the study by answering the questions and returning the questionnaire. Students' answers for each question were then classified and tallied. The result of the tally was counted and analyzed descriptively.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part of the writing presents the result of the study and the discussion related to the result. The collected data from each question will consecutively be displayed first followed by the discussion to understand the result.

1. **The use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp*, and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program**

The following is the pie chart showing the result achieved from the collected data for the first question in the questionnaire.
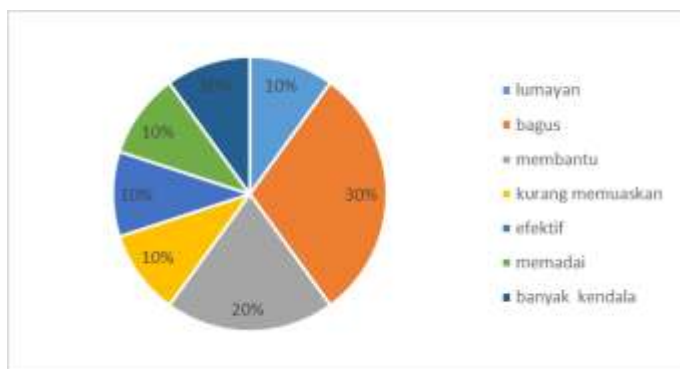

Figure 1. Student responses to the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp*, and *Google Meet*

This graph shows the results of the first question in the questionnaire in which final-year students and over were asked about the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp*, and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program. The students mention two main responses in their answers *i.e* good and helping.

From the pie chart, it is clear that the majority of the students enjoy TOIEC learning through *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*as thirty percent (30%) of them think that the use of those media is a good thing. Nearly twenty percent (20%) of the students involved in this research say that *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*is helpful for them to learn strategies needed to answer questions usually asked in TOEIC test. The rest fifty percent (50%) of the students are divided into five (5) different answers with ten percent (10%) in each saying that using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*in TOEIC preparation program iseffective, enough, not bad, unsatisfactory as well as problematic.

In all, generally students involved in this study have positive view towards the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*in TOEIC preparation program. This is line with (Hrastinski, 2008)mentioning both types of e-learning *i.e.* asynchronous and synchronous serve different purposes. Therefore the combination of both types of learning provides teachers and students with options which can be selected based on their needs.

2. **The favorable reasons in using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program.**

The result for the second question in the questionnaire is shown in the following pie chart.
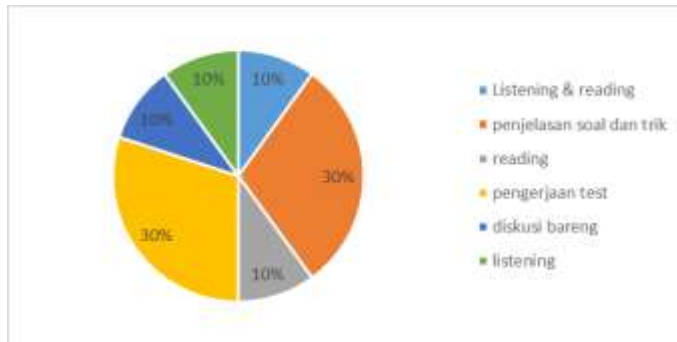
Figure 2. Students' interest in the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*

The chart illustrates the primary reasons that students like to use *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC learning. At first glance, it is clear that the main factor triggering students' interest in the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*in TOEIC preparation programis that they viewthose applications facilitate them to learn TOIEC tips and tricks and the TOEIC test process. Both reasons are rated thirty percent (30%) by the students involved in this study.

Interestingly, the rest of the students are divided into four (4) different reasons, each equally rated ten percent(10%), putting emphasis that those applicationshelp them learning language skills tested in TOEIC test *i.e.* reading and listening, and also mentioning the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*in TOEIC preparation program facilitates group discussion.

From this it can be conclude that the students involved in this study view positively towards the usefulness of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*in helping them learn both test strategies and language skills tested in the TOEIC test. Therefore, the use of those applications may help overcome one of the obstacles faced by TOEIC test takers mentioned by Zahruni *at al.*(2020) that they do not understand TOEIC test format. Moreover, even though it is minority, *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*actually encourage social interaction in form of discussion. The nature is also mentioned by (Hrastinski, 2008) that both synchronous and asynchronous e-learning facilitate social interaction albeit asynchronous supports cognitive participation yet synchronous personal one.

3. **The unfavorable reasons in using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program.**

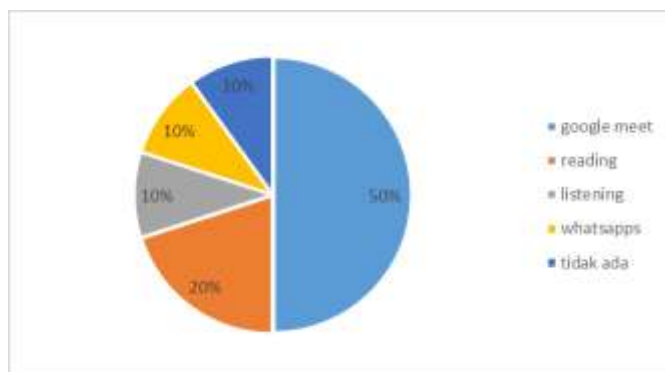Following is the chart showing the result from the third question asked in the questionnaire.

Figure 3. Students' dislike in the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*

This chart shows that the students involved in this study have various views towards the question what part of the use of*Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC program they do not like. Some students mention the application itself (*Google Meet* by 50% and *Whatsapp* by 10%) while some others mention the language skills they think the applications fail to boost up their motivation to learn of (reading by 20% and listening by 10%).

*Google Meet*which falls into synchronous e-learning category is disliked by half of the students involved in this study. It is because videoconferencing requires bigger internet quota, the longer the learning hours the higher fee students spend to buy internet quota. Even though learning synchronously has proven attaining better result than asynchronously (Lofti, 2019), in developing or under developed countries synchronous e-learning is less favorable as it requires advanced communication infrastructures, which they rarely have, and bigger money allotment, which becomes major obstacle as many of them fall into middle to low social status group.

4. **The advantages of using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program**

The fourth question of the questionnaire asks the advantages of using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*in TOEIC preparation program and the result is displayed using the following pie chart.
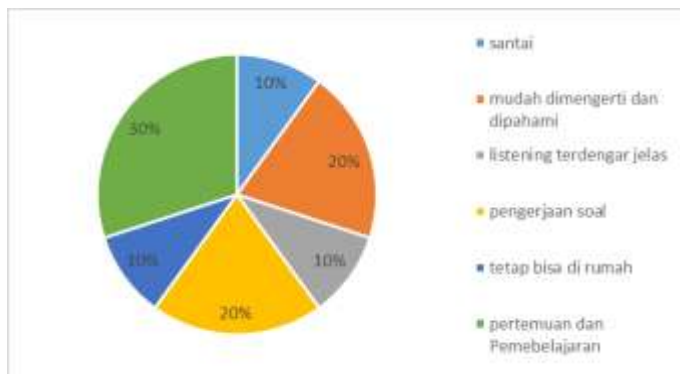
Figure 4. The advantages of the use online learning of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*

The chart above shows the advantages of using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program. It is known that the majority of students involved in this study, that is 30% of thembelieve that the application is indeed useful in carrying out the teaching and learning process. Moreover, 20% of the students think they get better understanding of the materialsdelivered through *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*and 20% other believe the use of those applications helps them understand how to answer TOEIC questions. The rest 30% point out they can learn wherever and whenever they can. This is because e-learning owns four fundamental perspectives (Basak, Wotto, & Belanger, 2018)that the use of both of asynchronous and synchronous types reaps abundance advantages for learning.

5. **The disadvantages of using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program**

The following pie chart shows the result from the fifth question asking the disadvantages of the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*in TOEIC preparation program.
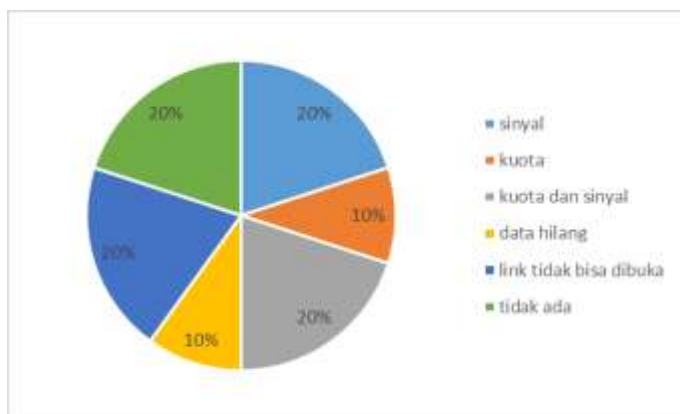

Figure 5. The disadvantages of the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*

This chart shows the proportion of disadvantages in using of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program. Even though there are a variety of answers, the root of the answers such as signal (20%),broken link (20%), internet quota (10%), both signal and internet quota (20%) and missing data (10%) is similar that is the lack of infrastructure supports. This finding is in line with many of studies related to online or e-learning during pandemic in Indonesia. One of them is a study by (Febrianto, Mas'udah, & Megasari, 2020) mentioning that even though the participants of their study are willing to welcome the latest learning approach employing advanced technology, the lack of access to internet is still the major obstacle especially for students coming from lower-middle income families.

6. **The impact of using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program**

The following chart shows students' answer to question about whether or not the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*in TOEIC preparation program has impact to their learning process.
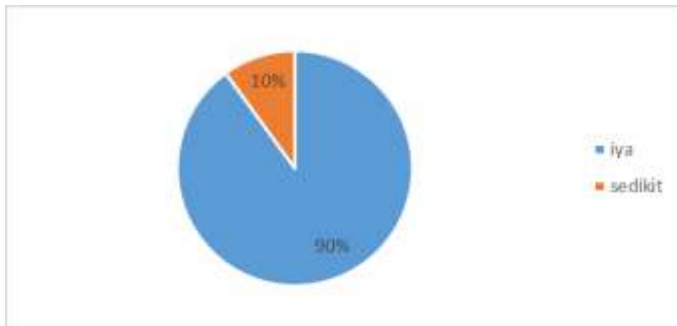

Figure 6. The impact of using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*

In the above chart, we can see the impact of using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*to students' learning process in TOEIC preparation program.As it is shown, those applications are viewed to be impactful as the majority of students involved in this study *i.e.*90% of them think that the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*giving positive impact to their learning process compared to 10% of the students who think those applications give less impact. Nonetheless, all the students actually say yes to this question and without doubt *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* have major impact on the students' increasing knowledge and ability in doing TOIEC test. As Basak, Wotto & Belanger (2018) mention that one of the fundamental perspectives possessed by e-learning is cognitive processes which relates to learning and how the brain works. Therefore, it is clearly that indeed the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*have positive impact to students' learning process in this TOEIC preparation program.

7. To use or not to use *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program

The result from the data collected for the 7th question in the questionnaire asking whether they choose to learn online using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* or to have face-to-face class is shown in the following pie chart.
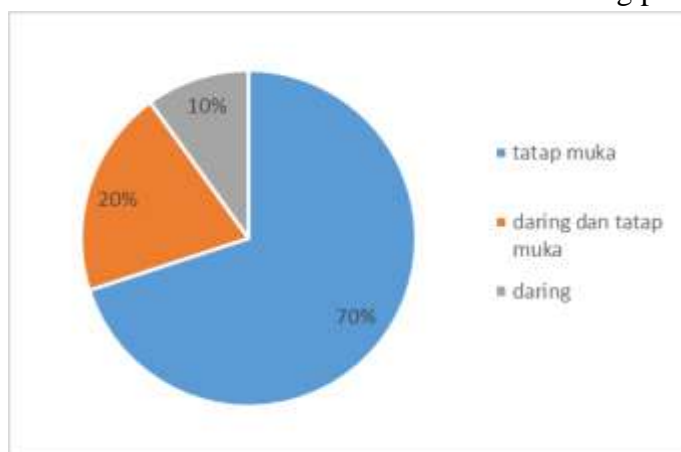

Figure 7. Students' choices of the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*

According to the graph, a significant amount of students choose the learning process in TOEIC learning to take place in the classroom, at 70%. They argue that the interactions happen in classroom made it easier for them to understand the material being studied more clearly. Interestingly, some students with a proportion of just about 20 % choose the combination of face-to-face classand online learning or blended learning. Meanwhile only the minority of students, *i.e.* 10 % of them choose pure online class using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*.

It is clear from the charts thatoffline learning in TOEIC preparation program is still the main choice for the students involved in this study. Even though both asynchronous and synchronous e-learning facilitate interaction among students and with teachers in different ways(Hrastinski, 2008) they can never capture the nature of offline interactions. However, it does not mean that offline class is the best environment to learning. It is only proved that rigorous efforts still need to be done to make purely online learning environment acceptable in Indonesian context especially in the setting of this study.

8. Suggestions related to the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet* in TOEIC preparation program

The following chart exhibits the result attained from the last question in the questionnaire asking for suggestions students have related to the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet.*
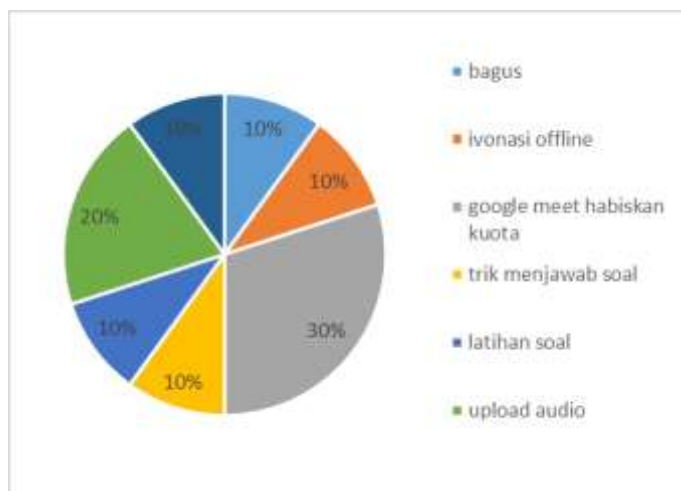
Figure 8. Students' suggestionsrelated to the use of *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*

From the chart above it can be seen that almost one third students involved in this study suggest not to use *Google Meet* quite often. However, the reasons students mention in the questionnaire indicate that it is not because of the lack of ability of *Google Meet* to facilitate learning, but it is more because videoconferencing facilitated by *Google Meet* as a synchronous type of e-learningrequires stable internet connection as well as bigger allotment of spending to buy internet quota. This is proved by the reason to the answer mentioned by one of the students who say he faced quite a lot of obstacles when having class via *Google Meet* such as bad signal and lack of internet quota. Other students also mention that the process of learning using *Google Meet* is quite good yet he is complaining that his internet quota decreases fast. Therefore, in this type of context asynchronous type of e-learning *Whatsapp* group chat and *Google Forms* for practicing answering TOEIC questions is more preferable.

Furthermore, the students in this study also give suggestions related to the teacher's skill in using technology such as create learning innovation so that the materials can be accessed offline, how to upload audio materials so they can be easily access and finding more ways to increase the number of practices as well as strategies to answer TOEIC questions.Therefore, to improve teaching and learning process employing both asynchronous and synchronous e-learning, teacher must be equipped with technological knowledge and skills.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results above, despite the challenges that the students face in using *Google Forms*, *Whatsapp* and *Google Meet*when they have TOIEC preparation program, it can be concluded that the students have favorable perspectives on the use of those applications. They consider them to be helpfulalthough they think the use of synchronous

type of e-learning is not entirely effective because of the lack of infrastructure supports. Therefore, the combination of asynchronous and synchronous e-learning is suggested to facilitate test preparation program with the portion for asynchronous is bigger than the synchronous type.

As this study was conducted at the early stage of pandemic in Indonesia, it is understandable that students found synchronous e-learning, in this case using videoconferencing provided by *Google Meet,* was frustrating. Therefore it is interesting to investigate further whether or not asynchronous e-learning is still more favorable than synchronous e-learning after the Government issues education policies related to School from Home program such as free internet quota for teachers and students.

REFERENCES

Agung, A. S. N., Surtikanti, M. W., & Quinones, C. A. (2020). Students' Perception of Online Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study on the English Students of STKIP Pamane Talino. *Soshum: Jurnal Sosial dan Humaniora*, *10*(2), 225-235.

Angdhiri, R. P. (2020). Challenges of home learning during a pandemic through the eyes of a student. *Jakarta Post, Jakarta*.

Craven, Miles. (2012). Pass the TOEIC Test: Intermediate Course. Britain: First Press ELT.

Damayanti, L., & Gafur, A. (2020). English Proficiency of Students at Politeknik Negeri Balikpapan Based on TOEIC. *Teknosastik*, *18*(1), 50-58.

Febrianto, P. T., Mas' udah, S., & Megasari, L. A. (2020). Implementation of Online Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic on Madura Island, Indonesia. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, *19*(8).

Hrastinski, S. (2008). Asynchronous and synchronous e-learning. *Educause quarterly*, *31*(4), 51-55.

Im, G. H., & Cheng, L. (2019). The test of English for international communication (TOEIC®). *Language Testing*, *36*(2), 315-324.

Kumar Basak, S., Wotto, M., & Belanger, P. (2018). E-learning, M-learning and D-learning: Conceptual definition and comparative analysis. *E-Learning and Digital Media*, *15*(4), 191-216.

Nguyen, T. (2015). The effectiveness of online learning: Beyond no significant difference and future horizons. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, *11*(2), 309-319.

North, B. (2007). The CEFR illustrative descriptor scales. *The Modern Language Journal*, *91*(4), 656-659.

Ringel, F. (2020). Coronavirus: How the pandemic has changed our perception of time. *The Conversation*, *28*.

Sujarwo, S., Sukmawati, S., Akhiruddin, A., Ridwan, R., & Siradjuddin, S. S. S. (2020). An Analysis of University Students' Perspective on Online Learning in the Midst of Covid-19 Pandemic. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran*, *53*(2), 125-137.

Wijayanengtias, M., & Claretta, D. (2020). Student Perceptions of Online Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Kanal: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, *9*(1), 16-21.

Zahruni, N. A., Fahmi, F., & Pratolo, B. W. (2020). The Challenges of Taking TOEIC Test and How to Overcome: Perception of Indonesian Vocational Students. *Ethical Lingua: Journal of Language Teaching and Literature*, *7*(1), 82-91.