
Appraising Students' Attitude towards Online Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at evaluating the students' attitude toward online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic within the written discourse by using the Appraisal Theory arranged by Martin & White, under the region of appreciation. Appreciation dealt with the evaluation of semiotic and natural phenomena. The realization of appraising item was adjectival that might have either positive or negative meaning. The data were obtained from the essays written by 25 students who joined the conversation subject through the online classroom. This study engaged with the qualitative descriptive method. The objectives of this study were three extents: (a) to find out the most predominant appreciation items the students tried to convey, (b) to find out the students' value position, and (c) to give the pedagogical suggestion on the online learning. The result of the analysis showed that within 137 appraising items found, the positive appraising item exceeded the account of 52,5%. It reflected that the students had positive attitude toward online learning activities. Moreover, the students presented their value position as agreeing with the activity of online learning. Therefore, constructive pedagogical suggestions were given to the lecturers, the students, and the institution stakeholders.

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1. Introduction

The rapid spread of Corona Virus Disease-19 (Covid-19) throughout the world at the beginning of 2020 has gravely changed the common ways of peoples' lives. By seeing at its contagious disease and the vastly increasing numbers of the dead and the affected, the Minister of Health – Republic of Indonesia has issued a regulation number 9 of 2020 about large-scale social restriction guidelines in accelerated handling of Covid-19. It causes the prohibition in any kind of face-to-face and direct-contact activities outside the residence. In line with this regulation, the Minister of Education and Culture – Republic of Indonesia has also taken immediate actions to stop the activities of conventional direct learning at schools and even at campuses/universities. Considering that those are public places and the fertile locations for the virus transmission, so forth those are sealed off. Automatically, this regulation has given inconceivable impacts on almost every aspect of life, such as politics, economics, cultural, social, defence and security, public welfare, and education in Indonesia.

However, although the period of Covid-19 transmission remains unknown, the teaching-learning process must be held continuously, thus holding online learning has become the best solution. This learning activity is called PJJ (Distance Education), while at universities it is known as e-learning or online learning. To succeed in online learning, learners have to be self-regulated in online activities (Rifiyanti, 2020). Hadiani & Arisandi (2020) define online learning as the process of learning which is conducted in such a networking environment. Dhull and Sakshi (2017) states that online learning encompasses a range of technologies such as the world wide web, email, chat, new groups and texts, audio and video conferencing delivered over computer networks to impart education. So forth, the

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online learning is the current method of learning that is held virtually and dependent on the internet.

For the Covid-19 outbreak, consequently, any kinds of subjects or lessons are taught in the online learning platform, including English language learning. It is one of the subjects that have experienced a new way of learning. Yet, the use of technology for educational purposes has been ubiquitous, especially at the university level (Ellis & Bliuc, 2019). Ideal online learning requires the readiness of all aspects related to the learning process, from teachers, students, stakeholders, facilities, as well as environments. But, online learning activities during the COVID-19 pandemic are a less-ideal one, (Permatasari & Oktawati, 2021). Because, several aspects are not ready yet, such as unstable internet connection and limited internet data package, (Jamaluddin, et.al, 2020).

Therefore, no wonder if English language learning through the online classroom in the pandemic era has been quite challenging for the EFL learners in particular, as it is normally taught in the direct classroom, where the teacher and the students can communicate and interact directly. Piller, et.al (2020) state that the pandemic has exposed the fallacy of the belief in English as the universal solution to global communication problems in an unprecedented way. The challenge becomes bigger when they are learning the conversation online. It is also experienced by the college-level students. The researcher herself who is an English language lecturer at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Manajemen Sukma finds that the students frequently complain. Although sorts of online classroom platforms can be used to study, in terms of video conference-based, such as Zoom, Cloud-X, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams, yet the students face some difficulties in learning conversation online, such as the network problem, inadequate time allocation, less audible voice, or even miscommunication. The students are in their first year at the college, thus they apparently may find it shocking to study online. But, several other students find this kind of online learning helpful and interesting, because they think it is efficient of money and time-saving. From a prior observation, it can be seen that some students are comfortable with this online learning and some are not. Some like it and some do not. These situations bear different changes in some aspects of education, so does the learners' attitude toward the teaching-learning process.

Marsakawati (2016) evaluates the interpersonal meanings of an article published in the Jakarta Post entitled *Ending Poverty, Ending Violence against Women* by using the appraisal theory. The result shows that appreciation, affect, judgment, and amplification are used in the article; and the most dominant category used is judgment. This implies that in writing articles in newspapers, the writers tend to give judgment on the issues discussed. Dong & Lin (2018) explore the distribution of appraisal resources in the English versions of Li Bai's poem *Changgan Xing* which were translated by Ezra Pound and Xu Yuanhong. The distribution of attitudinal resources in the two English versions has been analysed under the attitude system from three aspects: affect, judgment and appreciation. Through revealing the similarities and differences of the attitudinal resources, this study shows the applicability of the Appraisal Theory in the comparative studies of Chinese-English poems. Chalimah, et.al (2018) evaluate the social culture in terms of conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian, obtained from the CNN within the appraisal study. The findings show that that the text has applied negative feeling on unhappiness: antipathy of Israel to Palestinians and security: confidence between them who both of them feel strongly confident in each deed. Jin (2019) has evaluated the political relationship between China, the United States, and North Korea. The data is retrieved from the news discourse of the New York Times' report on China-DPRK relations. The study finds that most of the attitude resources are affect (which are always negative affect), which are mainly realized through such means as lexical, syntactical, and rhetorical strategies implicitly or explicitly. All these negative evaluations build a reflection that The United States wants to tarnish the image of China and destroy the relationship between China and North Korea by its political news discourse. Pasaribu (2020) evaluates the attitudinal resources used by students in the Play Performance class entitled "Mice and Men" through an appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005). The findings show that although students experience a certain degree of insecurity [-security], they reveal a positive inclination [+inclination] towards the production process. The judgment and appreciation resources are used to evaluate the behaviour and learning processes. This study implies that the appraisal framework can be one of the considerations in evaluating learners' performance. Those previous researches on attitudinal meaning have become the inspiration for this research to be conducted. Yet, this research presents a different aspect of items to be analysed, in terms of evaluating the attitudinal meaning of the students' online learning experience during the existing Covid-19 Pandemic, under the appreciation region in particular.

By seeing this phenomenon, the researcher assumes that it is urgent to look beyond the students' attitude in learning English online. Their attitude will be evaluated by using the appraisal resources under the attitude domain which is arranged by Martin & White in 2005. As Martin & White (2005) state attitudinal evaluation does not only reveal the speaker's/writer's feelings and values but also their expression can be related to the speaker's/writer status or authority as construed by the text. So forth, the result of the evaluation may inform the lecturer about what the students try to express and what value position they try to convey. Further, the information later can be used by the related lecturer to adjust and optimize the method of teaching the English language online learning during the pandemic. Accordingly, the researcher chooses to analyse the attitude of her students who take the conversation subject which was entirely held through the online classroom during the first semester. Attitude as Martin and White (2005) explain concerns with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgments of behaviour, and evaluation of things. The attitude itself is divided into three regions of feeling, 'affect (positive and negative feeling)', 'judgment (attitudes towards behaviour)' and 'appreciation (evaluation of semiotic and natural phenomena)'. The framework of the appraisal is illustrated in figure 1 below.

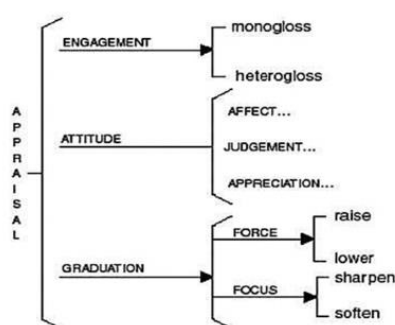


Figure 1. Appraisal Framework (Martin & White, 2005)

Yet, this research will focus only on appreciation meaning. As appreciation involves evaluations of semiotics and natural phenomena, according to how they are valued or not in a given field. In line with the phenomenon of Covid-19, therefore the researcher will evaluate the students' appreciative meaning toward online learning. In evaluating it, the researcher has assigned the students to write an essay about their experience in learning online during the pandemic. The results of the essays have become the appraisal resources in this research. Furthermore, the objectives of this research are three extents: (a) to find out the most predominant appreciation items the students try to convey, (b) to find out the students' value position, and (c) to give the pedagogical suggestion on the online learning.

2. Methods

This was a qualitative descriptive research. The qualitative one was used to explore the appraising items embedded in the text discourse, whether positive or negative realization. Meanwhile, the descriptive method was employed to describe the realization. To obey the health protocol in this pandemic situation that does not allow any direct interaction, hence the researcher used technology assistance, namely the Google Form application as the instrument of collecting data. The content of the form was designed by the researcher herself, adjusted to the need of analysis. The required field contained the name, student registration number, class, and instruction for writing the essay. The form was distributed to 25 students of management studies who enrolled in conversation classes of the first semester in the academic year of 2020/2021 at STIM Sukma Medan. After all of the forms were completed using the English language, then it came to the procedure of analysis respectively as followings; at first, the students' essays were read entirely to find the appreciation items in it; secondly, a distribution table was made for each student's essay text. The distribution table was categorized into three columns due to the subtypes of appreciation items whether reaction, composition, or valuation; then, each subtype was also divided into positive or negative meaning; and finally, the occurrence of appreciation item was quantified as the indicator meaning realization.

3. Results and Discussion

This section provides the process of appreciation analysis and its results. In which the data were obtained from 25 essays written by the students who take conversation subjects in the first semester in the academic year of 2020/2021 at STIM Sukma Medan. Afterward, the researcher read all the essays and starts marking any appreciation items that occur, whether it is positive or negative meaning. Then, the found appreciation items are classified according to their subtypes whether reaction, composition, or valuation. The appreciation items are in the adjective forms. They are input in the distribution table that has been designed accordingly to the analysis process of appraisal theory. Regarding the appreciation items analysis, the distribution table is created to accommodate the researcher in classifying, counting the numbers of occurrence, and presenting a clear sight of the analysis process. At last, the final data were obtained and the description was made to correlate the result of findings and the theory of attitudinal system developed by Martin & White in 2005. Table 1 below presents the example of the process of inputting the appraising items found in each student's essay into the distribution table.

Table 1. Example of the process of analysis in the distribution table

No.	Initial	Appraising Items	Appreciation					
			Reaction		Composition		Valuation	
			+	-	+	-	+	-
1	NL	not conducive	-	-	-	-	-	1
		convenience	1	-	-	-	-	-
		lack of focus	-	-	-	1	-	-
		lack of understanding	-	-	-	1	-	-
		not maximal	-	-	-	-	-	1
		easier	-	-	1	-	-	-

The student's initial represents the student's name whose essay is analysed. Twenty five students write the essays which means there are 25 sources of data in this research. Appraising items represent the adjective realization of appreciation which is found in the students' essay. The appreciation items are classified according to their subtypes whether reaction, composition, or valuation, and according to its meaning realization whether positive (+) or negative (-). The number above represents the frequency of certain adjectives found in the essays. In the end, after analysing the entire essay, the total number of attitudinal meanings is gained. Furthermore, the section below is presented as the projection of appreciation evaluation, in terms of its three subtypes.

3.1. Reaction

The first subtype of the appreciation region is the reaction. It is related to affection (emotive and desiderative). The analysis of the reaction subtype is presented in table 2 shown below.

Table 2. Analysis of Reaction Subtype

Appreciation - Reaction			
Appraising Item	+	Appraising Item	-
better	10	less satisfactory	1
convenient	3	less comfortable	1
seriously	1	not satisfied	1
more enthusiastic	1	less rushed	1
more relaxed	2	lack of enthusiasm	1
more interesting	1	late	2
pleasant	1	poor	2
free	1	lack of understanding	1
good	3	blackout	1
more quickly	1	distracted	1
funny	1	very slow	1
faster	3	bad network	1
accelerated	1	less clear	1

interested	1	not possible	1
		less optimal	1
		saturated	1
		embarrassed	1
Total	30	Total	19

From the table above it is gained that the reaction subtype construes 30 positive meanings and 19 negative meanings. Therefore, the analysis of reaction is dominated by positive appreciation items.

3.2. Composition

The second subtype is composition. It is related to perception (our view of order). The analysis of composition is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Analysis of Composition Subtype

Appreciation - Composition			
Appraising Item	+	Appraising Item	-
easier	15	difficult	15
more easily	1	different	1
fluent	1	lack of focus	1
easy	4	lack of understanding	1
more fluent	2	intermittent	2
offset	1	intermittently	1
very easy	1	not very audible	1
calmer	1	hard	1
fluently	2	not supportive	1
more focused	1	not as easy as	1
		not as stable as	1
		unstable	3
		not easy	1
		quite lower	1
		not straightforward	1
		not clear	1
Total	29	Total	33

The table shows that the composition subtype construes 29 positive meanings and 33 negative meanings. The analysis of reaction is dominated by negative appreciation items.

3.3. Valuation

The third subtype is valuation. It is related to cognition (our considered opinions). The analysis of valuation is presented in table 4 below.

Table 4. Analysis of Valuation Subtype

Appreciation - Valuation			
Appraising Item	+	Appraising Item	-
important	1	not conducive	1
correct	1	not maximal	1
widely used	1	wrong	1
efficient	1	more dangerous	1
effective	2	far	2
useful	1	very constrained	1
normal	1	not sufficient	1
as usual	1	limited	1
very useful	1	not effective	1
professional	1	uncomfortable	1
comfortable	1	not comfortable	1
more efficient	1	embarrassed	1
Total	13	Total	13

The result of the analysis above shows that the valuation subtype construes the same amount of 13 positive meanings and 13 negative meanings. Afterward, the numbers of occurrences are systematically presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Total number of appreciation occurrences

Attitude- Appreciation					
Reaction		Composition		Valuation	
+	-	+	-	+	-
30	19	29	33	13	13
137					

From the entire analysis result, it is found 137 numbers appraising items contain 72 (52,5%) positive meanings and 65 (47,5%) negative meanings. Thus, the most predominant appreciation the students try to convey is positive meaning. These results of analysis have revealed the tendency of students' attitude in following the online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, a discussion of these results of the analysis is necessary to be brought out as the complete description of the students' attitude. Regarding the reaction with positive meaning, here are several clauses the students write in their essays.

-“Because it relates to the current condition, which is pandemic, in my opinion, it is *better*.”

The word *better* on the clause reflects the student's opinion in appreciating the condition of pandemic and the choice of holding the online learning. In this clause, the student presents himself as supporting the activity of online learning.

-“Hopefully the conversation will be *better*, and easy to understand.”

The word *better* on the clause above represents the student's expectation that by learning conversation online, the quality of his conversation skill will improve. Here, he shows his position as agreeing with online learning during the pandemic.

-“The thing that I feel is quite *pleasant* as long as there are no network problems.”

The student feels pleasant if there is no problem with the network while joining the online learning. The word *pleasant* represents the student's attitude of showing the positive impact he feels during learning online. The reaction with negative meaning is presented as followings:

-“*Poor* network access problem.”

The clause shows that the student finds such networking obstacles while joining online learning. The word *poor* reflect his dislike of the situation of having an internet network problem. Moreover, he presents himself as rejecting the condition of bad/poor network.

-“I am *not satisfied* with learning through online.”

On the clause above, the student firmly confirms his unsatisfactory to learn online by writing the word *not satisfied*. He presents himself as rejecting the online learning process. Therefore, it obviously shows his negative attitude toward online learning.

-“I am *distracted* and don't fully understand the material,”

As shown by the clause above the online learning gives a negative impact on the related student for he cannot be focused and get distracted easily. Here he shows his inconvenience in learning online. Thus, he seems to disagree with online learning.

Seen from the result of reaction subtype analysis that is dominated 30 positive meanings, it confirms that the students react positively toward the online learning and they want to join the online learning with no big deal. The adjective realization that the students use also shows that affectively they agree with online learning. The composition subtype with positive meaning is also expressed by the students in their essays, exemplified in these clauses.

-“What I feel is that it is *easier* to study because it can be studied anywhere when class starts and it is calmer.”

The word *easier* appears 15 times in the students' essays, and on the clause above, it is related to the student's positive perception in appreciating online learning. He argues that online learning facilitates him to be able to study anywhere. Then, it shows that he presents himself as supporting online learning.

-“...*easy* to understand and *easy* to access.”

The word *easy* expressed by the student shows his perception that online learning is not hard to follow. Through online learning, he still can understand the lesson, and easy to access the classroom. In this adjective choice, he conveys his position as supporting online learning. The composition with negative meaning is described as followings:

-“I think this learning virtually can even decrease because it's very *difficult* to understand and can't to practice the skill.”

The word *difficult* exceeds the number of negative compositions for 15 occurrences. It shows that the students express their difficulties in learning online within different problems. For the clause above, the student tries to express his thought that online learning makes him difficult to understand the lesson. Here, he presents himself as disliking online learning.

-“I find it very difficult, because I have to study online, especially because of the *unstable* network constraints.”

The word *unstable* occurs three times. Most of the problem with this word is related to the internet network condition which sometimes is interrupted or error. In the clause above, the student expresses his difficulty in online learning when an unstable network happens. He also assumes that it can bother his learning activity. Then, it shows that he presents himself as contradictory to online learning.

“In my opinion, one of the learning online obstacles is the *intermittent* network so that what is conveyed by the lecturer is not understood by the students.”

The word *intermittent* is also related to the internet network. The student finds that the intermittent network can disrupt his learning activity that results in lesson obscurity. Seeing the clause above, it is clear that the student does not support the online learning activity.

The analysis result of the composition subtype is dominated by 33 negative meanings; it construes that the students evaluate negatively toward the online learning. The adjective realization that the students use also shows that they have a negative perception of online learning for different reasons they have. Furthermore, the last subtype of appreciation, valuation, and the description of its positive meaning are presented below.

-“I finished work at 6:00 p.m., and conducting lectures using the online classroom method was very *efficient* and *effective* in my time management.”

The student writes two positive appraising items in one clause above, *efficient* and *effective*. He argues that online learning is very *efficient* yet *effective* to his time management, as he is a working student. The working students may easily get late to come into the classroom for several factors such as traffic jams, overtime work, or even fatigue. But, due to the current online learning, the working students are assisted in time and access. Related to those positive meanings, the student here presents himself as really supporting the online learning activity.

- “...but at least for us Rupiah fighters it is *useful*.”

The student expresses that online learning is useful for him because he is also working. Therefore, he is disposed to join online learning. The valuation with negative meaning is described as followings:

- “...less than optimal in teaching and learning activities, unstable network, *limited* internet quota.”

The student expresses that he finds an obstacle in terms of the limitation of internet balance which can disturb his learning process online. By using that word, it is reflected that the student anticipates the

issue of online learning.

- "...very *uncomfortable* and lacklustre."

The student tells that he feels uncomfortable joining online learning. This word reflects that the student presents himself as refusing online learning.

- "...difficult and *embarrassed* to express opinions."

The word *embarrassed* above shows that in online learning, the student gets embarrassed to express his opinion. He does not clearly state whether he agrees or disagrees with online learning, but, seeing the negative meaning he writes, it is argued that he presents himself as disagreeing online learning.

The analysis result of the valuation subtype is balanced by 13 positive meanings and 13 negative meanings. It reflects that to the students, online learning is good enough and not good enough at the same time. The students' opinions in appraising online learning may diverse, but there must be an outline to unite this diversity. Therefore, taken from table 5, it is obtained that the positive appraising items exceed the negative ones with 72:65 (52,5%:47,5%). In other words, the most predominant appreciation item the students try to convey in their essays is the positive meaning. It implicates that the students have a good appreciation towards online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Related to the appraisal theory, in which positive realization causes positive meaning, and negative realization causes negative meaning, it draws the students' value position that they present themselves as agreeing with the activity of online learning. The agreement is also shown by the appraising items that they use in their essays.

Yet, it is still unknown till when online learning is held, as the pandemic still exists today. Due to this fact, then, the researcher tries to give the pedagogical suggestion to the lecturers, the students, and the institution stakeholders to enhance the success of online learning. It is suggested to the lecturers who conduct the lecture through online learning to self-evaluate the strength and the weakness of the online learning according to the lesson being taught, listen to the students' opinion and grievance about the eases and difficulties in joining the online learning, provide interactive activities for teaching such as, icebreaking, brainstorming, puzzle, crosswords, games or pop-up quiz, monitoring the students' activities either in the online classroom or in the group chat, give the possible-to-do assignment or project, preparing the adjustable syllabus and lesson plan, have a discussion with the teaching partners, hold a direct class for the practical lesson, but still must obey the health protocol, and the last is seek for the students' feedback. For the students, it is suggested to join the online learning as enthusiastic as joining the offline classroom, do the things according to the lecturer's instruction, keep the online learning process conducive, make sure to have a stable internet network before the class starts, have constructive discussion and sharing session with another student, give the real feedback about the learning process to the lecturer. Moreover, to the stakeholders of the institution, they cannot take for granted the result of this research, for it can give a rich consideration to arrange the institution academic rules, such as in the making of curriculum or the instruction of teaching-learning process during the pandemic. The stakeholders are also suggested to be more aware of problems the students may face, by promoting a more frequent online guidance with the students.

5. Conclusions

The appraisal theory under the domain of appreciation is divided into three regions namely, affect, judgment and appreciation. This research is only focused on the appreciation one as it construes the natural phenomena in which correlated with the Covid-19 pandemic phenomenon that attacks the world today. After analysing the 25 students' attitudes reflected in the essays they write, it is obtained that the students' attitudes towards online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic is dominated by the positive appreciation item with the account of 52,5%, meanwhile, the negative appreciation item occurs with the account of 47,5%. This result shows that the students have a positive attitude toward online learning, and they appreciate that activity positively. Besides, the positive appraising items that they use show their value position as agreeing with the activity of online learning. Meanwhile, regarding the negative appreciation item found, it does not give a significant impact on the online teaching-learning process.

The analysis of the students' attitude toward online learning in the Covid-19 pandemic results in a novelty in the language field, particularly in the appraisal theory. Although this research only analyses the attitude domain under the appreciation, it is still possible to do such research on another domain of appraisal. Besides, by conducting this research, it is known how the students feel and think about online learning. Yet, the analysis of appraisal is a wide-range scale and can be implemented to the written discourse such as movie script, song lyric, sermon text, news article, and so on. And for the spoken discourse, the analysis can be used to evaluate the speech text, debate transcription, scientific oration, and so on. The appraisal theory is also can be applied to evaluate another language other than English.

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