
WHATSAPP GROUP-BASED ENGLISH SCHOOL IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract:

This study describes the members' motivation and learning process in WhatsApp Group-based English School (WG-ES) as a unique platform to organize self-productivity during COVID-19. This study used the qualitative method. Fifty-one members participated. The instruments used were Google forms, observations, and documents. The data were analyzed using adopted six approaches by Creswell. The results indicated that the participants joined WG-ES based on their desires and awareness. Their motivations for joining WG-ES were divided into English-based and non-English-based motivations. Most participants were motivated to improve their English skills, specifically communication skills. The other motivations were the expectation to expand networking, get experience, and find an opportunity to study abroad. In WG-ES, the learning programs were divided into two main activities, daily chitchat and focused learning. WG-ES had rules, study schedules, and flexible curriculums. Therefore, the participants seemed more comfortable studying English through WG-ES.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menggambarkan motivasi dan proses belajar anggota di Sekolah Bahasa Inggris berbasis Grup WhatsApp sebagai platform yang produktif selama COVID-19. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif. Lima puluh satu anggota berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah Google-form, observasi, dan dokumen. Data dianalisis menggunakan enam pendekatan yang diadopsi oleh Creswell. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa peserta mengikuti Grup WhatsApp berdasarkan keinginan dan kesadaran mereka. Motivasi untuk bergabung Grup WhatsApp terbagi menjadi motivasi berbasis bahasa Inggris dan non-bahasa Inggris. Sebagian besar peserta termotivasi untuk meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris, khususnya keterampilan komunikasi. Motivasi lainnya adalah harapan untuk memperluas jaringan, mendapatkan pengalaman, dan menemukan kesempatan untuk belajar di luar negeri. Dalam Grup WhatsApp ini, program pembelajaran dibagi menjadi dua kegiatan utama, yaitu obrolan harian dan pembelajaran terfokus. Sekolah Bahasa Inggris berbasis Grup WhatsApp ini memiliki aturan, jadwal belajar, dan kurikulum yang fleksibel. Oleh karena itu, para peserta lebih nyaman belajar bahasa Inggris melalui Sekolah Bahasa Inggris berbasis Grup WhatsApp.

Keywords:

WhatsApp, English School, COVID-19, Productive

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INTRODUCTION

The epidemic of COVID-19 in Wuhan province at the end of 2019 impacted the significant crisis of all countries worldwide (Singhal, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) has informed the outbreak of COVID-19 as a global pandemic since March 11, 2020. Due to its status as a global pandemic, this also affects Indonesia.

In response to the global pandemic, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, through a Press Conference on March 15, 2020, appealed to all citizens to conduct social distancing by studying, working, and praying from home (Purwanto, Asbari, Fahlevi, & Mufid, 2020). Social distancing is one step to prevent and control Coronavirus infection by encouraging people to limit visits to crowded places and direct contact with others. The term social distancing is then replaced by physical distancing. According to Romania (2020), Maria Van Kerkhove, head of the Zoonosis and Disease unit of WHO, explained that changing the word social to physical was intended to clarify that staying at home did not mean cutting off social contact with friends or family. It was to ensure that people maintain physical distance from each other to prevent the increasingly widespread COVID-19.

The government made policies regarding social distancing as the most appropriate step implemented to prevent people from being close and in touch for fear of contracting COVID 19. However, the community must support its positive attitude in complying with established protocols such as raising awareness and discipline. In line with the government policies, Rafikasari (2020) stated that to fight against this coronavirus requires community participation to live healthily and obey authorities' regulations.

Making peace with COVID-19 does not mean giving up. It means that societies are expected to sustain productivity while safe from COVID-19. People must continue to apply fashionable ways of life with new thinking patterns, attitudes, and experiences. They are always instructed to maintain personal hygiene, wash hands with soap, wear masks, avoid crowds, and not travel for the unurgent need.

Amid the physical distancing policy, it cannot be denied that remaining at home for several months is not easy, and this is a challenging phenomenon. Under dense and diverse human activities, staying at home, doing less exercise, and minor social communications impact emotional and physical wellness in the millennial era. Besides, conforming to a new and abnormal life cycle can threaten psychological prosperity (Patel, 2020). As a result, some people experience culture shock. It certainly will cause emotional obstacles in doing primary activities, such as work or school. And, of course, it should be solved.

Patel (2020) argues that many people can fight boredom by doing productive, fun, and positive things. Being productive can help avoid monotony activities, improve our personality and special skills, and entertain ourselves. Social distancing can be used to do business and sell products online. This method is undoubtedly more productive, saving time and energy than selling offline. Through social media communication, everyone can share ideas and exchange information in virtual communities and networks (Sakkir, Rahman, & Salija, 2016). Someone can tell the activities done and the work produced

while staying at home. Indirectly, this raises motivation and encouragement to others to do productive things under their respective hobbies. Besides, this method can also treat longing to do the activities with friends that are often done before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Activities are primarily carried out through social media in applying work and study from home. Maintaining communication and social relationships with others through social media is an effective way to fight boredom. Conducting meetings, discussions, group work, coordination, singing with friends online are enjoyable activities. In addition, some applications perform various online activities such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Google Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom, etc. People can do voice calls, chat/text messengers, and audio/video conference calls from these applications.

The researchers found something unique to explore during the COVID-19 pandemic relating to social media. Some people initiated a free English learning platform using WhatsApp media (WhatsApp Group-based English School). WhatsApp is a social media that has many benefits for students to improve their English skills, especially speaking (Maulina, Noni, & Basri, 2019). These productive people formed a WhatsApp group. They promote beneficial activities by inviting others to join the WhatsApp group they have created to learn English. One of them is Rumah Produktif Indonesia-English School (RPI-ES). The WhatsApp Group-based English School (WA-EG) members are people across Indonesia who joined a group to learn English. This unique productive activity raises the researchers' interest to study it deeply. Therefore, this study aimed to promote this WhatsApp Group-Based English School as a new platform to help people stay productive in the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, two points were explored in this research as the reference people worldwide to do a similar way; the members' motivation and the learning process in WhatsApp Group-Based English School (WG-ES).

RESEARCH METHOD

Two points were explored in this research: the members' motivation to join WhatsApp Group-Based English School and the learning process. The researchers applied qualitative design by distributing Google forms, conducting participant observations, and utilizing supporting documents, such as photos of the material, screenshot group conversation, group regulation, etc., as the instruments of the study. Fifty-one members participated in this study. The participants were the members who responded to the Google form distributed.

Google form was allocated as the survey to find out the members' origin, gender, activity, and motivations in joining WhatsApp Group-based English School (WG-ES) amid the COVID-19. The researchers were also in the WhatsApp Group as a participant-observer to explore the learning process. Guest, Namey, & Mitchell (2013) claimed that participant observation associated the researcher with the most fundamental human experiences, catching through the participation and direct immersion in how and why the objects behave in a context. The researchers investigated the whole conversation and activity, including the implementation of everyday chitchat and focused learning through

this WhatsApp Group, supported by some documents. Daily chitchat activity did not have a schedule, and the conversation could be made at any time. Participants were free to discuss any topics that contained positive values. Some members discussed the issues in written form, and some sent voice records. While, in the focused learning implementation, the members also communicated through written form and voice record.

In daily chitchat, the researchers concerned the members' responses to any topics discussed and how they obeyed the English school's regulations. In comparison, the focused-learning process was well organized completed by a schedule for its' programs. This kind of learning process had some material distributed by administrators. The board of experts designed the materials. In this study, the researchers focused on materials' quality, the members' responses, and their motivation to submit the tasks on time. Overall, the researchers observed the role of group administrators, the materials, and the group's regulations interconnected to alive the WhatsApp group and motivated the members to be active in this group.

In analyzing the data, the researchers adopted six approaches by Cresswell (2014). They were (1) organizing and preparing the data to analyze, (2) Reading and looking at all the data, (3) starting a detailed analysis by coding all the data, (4) using the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people and categories or theme for analysis, (5) advancing how the description and themes presented in the qualitative narrative, and (6) the final step involved interpreting qualitative research of the findings or results by taking a conclusion on what the lessons had been learned by conducting this research study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate two primary pieces of information; the members' motivation and the learning process in WhatsApp Group-Based English School.

Demographic Information of Participants

WhatsApp Group-based English School of Rumah Produktif Indonesia is an informal school founded in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis that hit the world. It was on May 2, 2020. Members who joined this school were those who had an interest in learning English. The members studied for free and had no special requirements to participate in the group.

There were no teachers and students in this WhatsApp Group-based English School (WG-ES). All the members were learners who wanted to learn together to increase self-productivity. Therefore, the director had a big responsibility to control and manage the school. In maintaining the group's stability, the director was helped by some administrators and a board of experts in Teaching English as a Foreign language. The administrators also took turns directing the course of learning activities.

The expert councils gave ideas about program design, curriculum development, and other things related to innovations to improve the school's quality. They also helped

administrators direct and guide the learning process and evaluate the members' assignments if needed.

Eighty people joined WG-ES. However, not all of them participated in this study. Figure 1 represents the information of the group with the diversity of members.

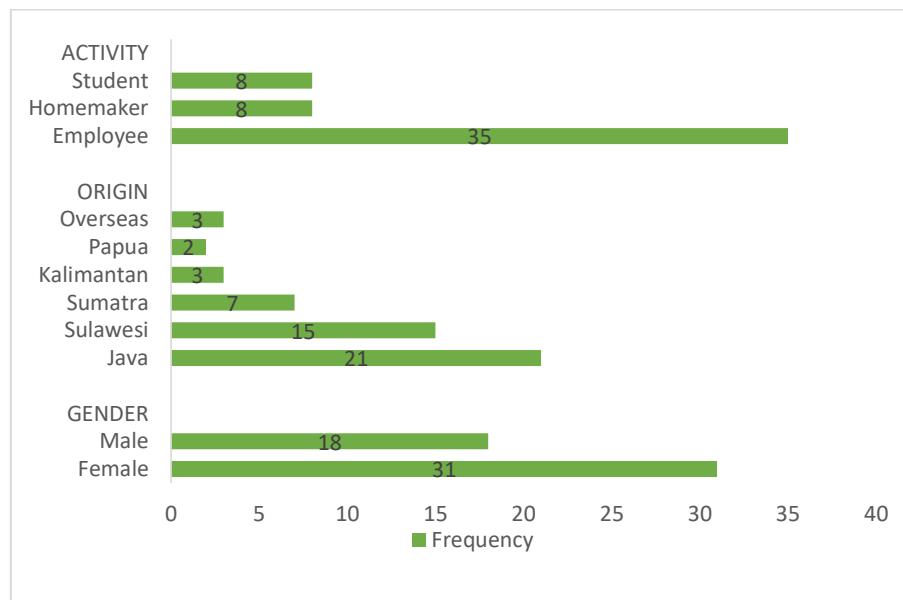


Figure 1. Demographic Members' Information

Fifty-one members accessed the Google form link that was shared. The survey results from 51 participants showed that at least 18 men and 35 women joined the group. Of the total participants, 21 were from Java Island, 15 were from Sulawesi, seven were from Sumatra, three were from Kalimantan, and two were from Papua, the eastern part of Indonesia. This data was sufficient to represent that the group members were from Indonesia. Besides, three participants were also identified as staying overseas. They were Indonesian people who studied and worked in Malaysia, Australia, and USA.

The Republic of Indonesia consists of five large islands and thousands of small islands stretching from the West to the East. Therefore, Indonesia involves various tribes, races, religions, and ethnic groups on islands that spread from Sabang to Merauke (Noor & Sugito, 2019). The diversity and wealth of ethnic should be an advantage to unite the nation, including the education field. The experience of learning English in Java may be different from other islands. Therefore, members are expected to share information related to English by being in the same group.

WhatsApp group-based English School consists of the millennial generation who are students of formal school and over 30 years old. In daily life, they have different activities. Figure 1 shows that 35 participants were employees, eight were homemakers, and eight were students. The employees worked as Lecturers, entrepreneurs, government officers, lawyers, risk management consultants, IT consultants, programmers, etc. This survey proved that this English School is intended for all ages and professions. Figure 2 displays the front view of the group and the number of members.

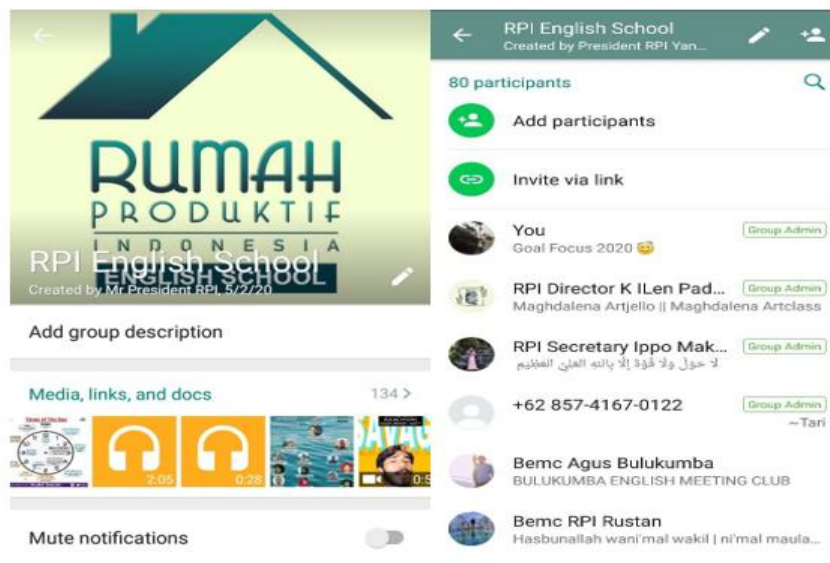


Figure 2. Whatsapp Group Display

Motivation to Join Rumah Produktif Indonesia English School

Many people assume that the English language is hard to learn. They express this opinion by talking about that and writing about that on Twitter and blogs (Chirea-Ungureanu, 2015). Nevertheless, the fact reveals that English knowledge becomes necessary for people who want to come up in life because it is the modern world's gate (Nishanti, 2018). The importance of English cannot be denied and ignored since it is an essential key in this industrial 4.0 era and the most magnificent spoken language universally. Therefore, it requires a motivation to change one's mindset to be happy with English. Motivation is a thing that can improve students' interest and determination in learning the language (Chilingaryan & Gorbatenko, 2015). This motivation can be a language learning strategy training, a new teaching model utilizing technology, or other fashionable variations to ease learners mastering English.

WhatsApp Group-based English School is a new application-based English learning innovation that utilizes technological developments. This kind of English school has no connection with the formal school curriculum. The group was formed based on the awareness and self-initiation of being productive people. This group gives citizens space and opportunity to increase their potential by joining and learning together for a specific purpose. Figure 3 shows the motivation of members to take part in Rumah Produktif Indonesia English School.



Figure 3. Motivation to Join WG-ES

Figure 3 demonstrates ten specific reasons people joined WhatsApp group-based English School. Those reasons were divided into two kinds of motivation: English-based motivation and non-English-based motivation or general motivation. According to the survey, the members' primary reasons for participating in this school were based on English motivation.

There were several reasons for the English-based motivations of members. Twenty-seven participants joined the group because they wanted to learn and improve their English, followed by the willingness to practice their speaking skills. In the highest curve, members were not only concerned about improving their speaking skills, but they expected to learn all integrated English language skills. While in the second-highest curve, the members focused on enhancing their English verbal production. A participant stated that he/she wanted to travel to many countries by mastering English. Another said he/she wanted to practice confidence and courage to speak English. One also said he/she wanted to learn how to improve English ability. In addition, one participant revealed he/she united in the group because of wanting to find opportunities to study abroad.

Meanwhile, based on the data, there were four reasons for non-English-based or general motivation. Getting knowledge and experience were revealed by six learners. Seven of them uttered they wanted to expand the networking and make many friends. Two members stated that they joined the group to share knowledge and positive values with other members. Also, one of them explained, he/she would find something exciting and fun when joining the group.

WhatsApp had the potential of natural educational technology and a positive impact on success. Its use was welcomed extensively because the messages with images were more effective for learning. Through this technology application, learning could occur subconsciously. Kheryadi (2017) supported the statement that WhatsApp was one of the beneficial devices to help learners in communicative language learning. It allowed

them to engage actively in online conversation. It stimulated confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm to learn and use English in daily communication. Thus, WhatsApp could be used in language teaching. Besides, WhatsApp also made learners feel independent and have a positive attitude in learning. Learners could interact to discuss curious interesting topics, whereas teachers or facilitators were not involved in their online dialogues. From these opinions, it was expected that WG-ES members could improve their English, especially speaking skills, because fellow members could support and encourage each other. They could also share anything related to English, whether the English podcast, English idiom, strategy to improve English ability, the way to find a scholarship for studying abroad, being a confident English speaker, etc.

All members could expand networking. Sakkir, Rahman, & Salija (2016) stated that internet networks through this kind of social media could connect people in a minute worldwide. Having new friends with different cultures and professions opened a significant opportunity to find fantastic experiences, new knowledge, and broader information. Members who studied and stayed overseas could share information about the way of life in other countries. Besides, the group members were trained to respect each other. Thus, it could grow cultural understanding among the members.

Learning Process in WhatsApp Group-based English School

WhatsApp Group-based English School of Rumah Produktif Indonesia is an independent organization. Although this WhatsApp group is education-based, it is not bound by the school curriculum. This WG-ES has rules, study schedules, and curriculum arranged by the group administrators involving a board of experts experiencing TEFL. Although this WhatsApp Group-based English School is informal, group rules and study schedules need to be organized like formal schools. It aims to discipline group members and clarify the direction of learning to achieve the expected goals. The difference is that learning English in school tends to be a burden for students with the necessity to pass this compulsory subject. Silalahi (2016) reveals that English is a mandatory subject for all educational levels and national examinations.

Establishing WG-ES facilitates Indonesian people who want to increase their self-productivity, especially in English. The members who learn English in this WG-ES are based on their desires and awareness, and they seem more comfortable. Participants who break the rules or do not participate in the scheduled study at a particular time are not sanctioned as in regular schools. Therefore, those who disobey the group's rules will impact themselves.

WG-ES Regulations

The new members who join the group will be told about the school regulations. They should follow eight rules. First, members are expected to use English to communicate in learning programs and daily chitchats in the group. Second, Bahasa is allowed with a code-switching system when they find obstacles in expressing something in English, but they must use quotation marks to the Indonesian words/sentences. Third, the Person in Charge (PIC) who is alternately entrusted to lead and guide the learning

process must be fully responsible for carrying out the obligations. Suppose the PIC cannot conduct the learning course at a particular time; in this case, they can contact others to take on their responsibilities so that learning activities can be continued. Fourth, all members can share knowledge and positive information, such as articles, idioms, jokes, but it does not contain pornographic or other harmful content. Fifth, each group member has the freedom to respond to every piece of shared information. These responses can be giving questions, gathering tasks, or giving advice. Sixth, participants must spread positive, productive, and mutual support among fellow group members. Seventh, group members are not allowed to bully or demean others with lower English proficiency. Eighth, learners in the group must commit to obeying all the rules and try to participate in daily chitchats and scheduled learning activities. Ninth, if members cannot participate in learning at a particular time, they can collect assignments the next day.

Kinds of Activities

The WhatsApp Group-based English School activities were divided into two types, namely, focused-activity and free-activity. The focused activity was the discussion of certain learning materials at the scheduled time. The learning materials were divided into writing, reading, speaking, and listening. The purposes were to improve these four English skills. A Person in Charge (PIC) guided and directed this activity. PICs were usually those who became the daily administrators of the group and several expert boards in TEFL. Besides, several other group members were scheduled to guide the learning process voluntarily. PICs did not mean they were more proficient in English. Therefore, they did not teach. They only guided the learning flow to be more directed. They also motivated participants who were less active not to worry about making grammar mistakes and inserting the Indonesian words by referring to the school's second regulation, using quotation marks. They were also encouraged to be more involved and participated in expressing opinions and gathering assignments.

Free activities were day-to-day chitchat with various topics. Members could greet each other by saying "hello" or "good morning." Old members also often greeted new members by saying "welcome" or "enjoy the group," followed by questions about identity and making an appointment to meet after the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of them became closer, and they continued to chat in private. The group sometimes discussed the trending topics interspersed with jokes to create a relaxed, comfortable, and flexible atmosphere. All conversations are conducted in English. It is intended to change the Indonesian people's mindset who consider English complicated, burdensome, and boring (Fahri, 2018).

Learning Schedule

In general, all WhatsApp group-based English school activities improved English language skills because the group members used this foreign language in communication. Daily chitchat activity did not have a schedule, and the conversation could be made at any time. There was no Person in Charge (PIC) in this casual talking. Members were free to discuss any topics that contained positive values. Participants who sent a text could

increase their writing skills and English processing words competency. Those who read the argument could improve their reading skills even though they did not actively comment on the information.

In contrast, members who sent messages through voice recordings could improve their speaking skills, and members who clicked sound recordings could develop their listening skills. The whole activity in this group, whether in sending or receiving the information, could enlarge the members' vocabulary. Thus, group members had the opportunity to improve their overall English skills wherever and whenever they were. According to Maulina, Noni, & Basri (2019) this learning process model was mobile learning. Her finding supported this study. She claimed that WhatsApp was a social media that improved students' English proficiency and encouraged them to speak. Figure 4 presents the members' daily chitchat activities.

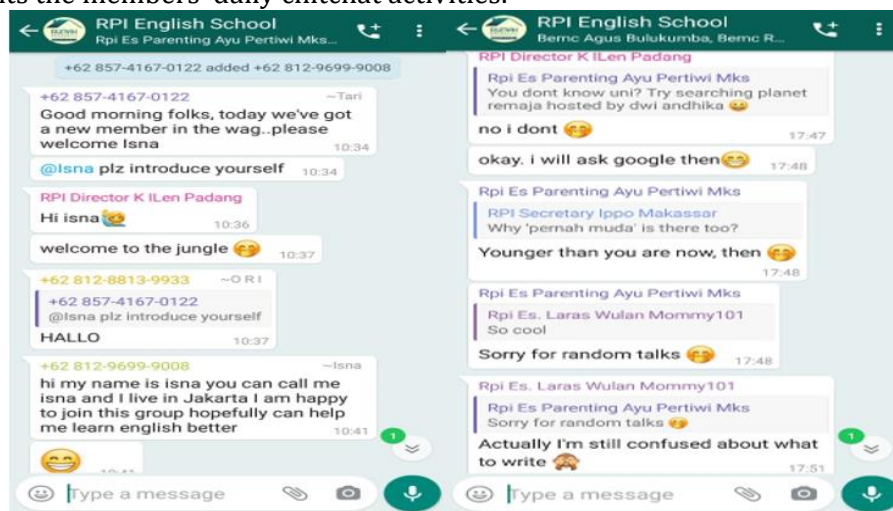


Figure 4. Members' Daily Chitchat

Compared with casual chat activities, focused-learning activities were well organized to create an academic atmosphere with weighted learning material. Thus, even though it seems relaxed, students must prepare time to study seriously according to the director of deputy's schedule. The study schedule is shown in the following table.

Table 1. The Schedule of Focused Learning Activities

No	Learning-Focused	Program	Time	Platform
1.	Writing and Reading Skills	Let's Write and Read	Tuesday (One day)	WhatsApp Group
2.	Listening Skill	Let's Listen	Friday (One Day)	WhatsApp Group
3.	Speaking Skill	Let's Speak	Sunday (10.00 – 12.00 am)	Google Meet or Zoom

The administrators scheduled the focused learning activities in three days. Let's Write and Read programs were conducted on Tuesday through WhatsApp group. The purpose was to increase writing and reading competence. The learners were trained to

write one or more paragraphs according to the theme given by the Person in Charge (PIC). The text could describe a picture, tell an experience, or provide an opinion on a trending topic. Then, they could read all the paragraphs shared due to a writing exercise.

Let's Listen program was held on Friday. Like Let's Write and Read programs, Let's Listen was also held on a full day via WhatsApp group. Participants listened to the shared audio then did assignments according to PIC's instructions. The sound could be a podcast, story, experience, or song. Members could retell what had been heard, answer some questions related to the material, and fill in the blank words in a text. The exercise could be in writing the text or recording the voice. They also could practice their speaking skills.

The general activities description of learning programs were as follow: 1) Person in Charge (PIC) gave direction, conveyed material, and instructed the task, 2) spreading of learning content was did on a Monday night or Tuesday in the morning, 3) delivering material began with greetings, provided motivation, and conveyed hopes, 4) group members responded early as a symbol of their understanding of the content and the instructed task, 5) group members completed and collected duties interspersed with casual chat and jokes, 6) the learning process took a day, and participants could submit the task until 7.00 pm, 7) PIC controlled the learning activities and kept motivating group members to participate, 8) PIC and other members gave positive responses to the tasks that were collected, 9) the activity ended by concluding the learning activities for a day, saying gratitude, and spreading enthusiasm, 10) if needed, one of the expert boards helped to evaluate several tasks as additional knowledge. The following figures show the screenshot of delivered material and task by PIC and the display of task submission from members.

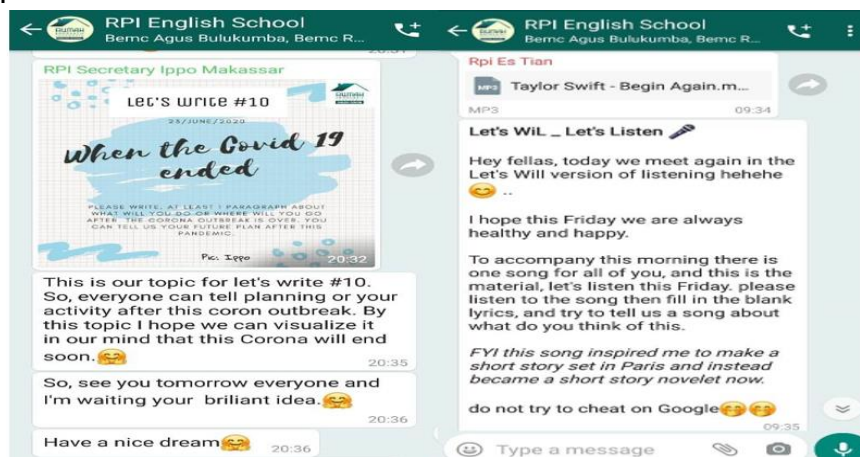


Figure 5. Instructional Model of WG-ES

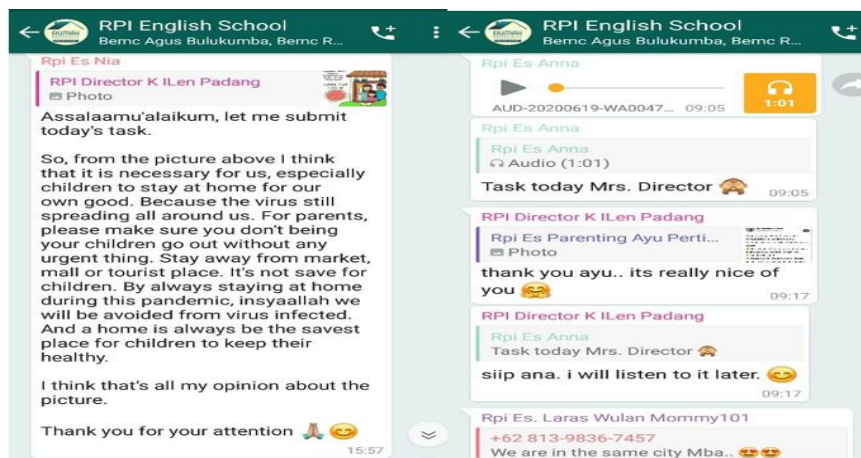


Figure 6. Task Submission

In contrast with the other programs, Let's Speak program was a bit different. Participants met face-to-face virtually through video conferencing, such as Google Meet or Zoom Meeting application. This activity was only scheduled for around two hours with more organized items. The purposes were to improve participants' speaking skill and stimulate their confidence to speak in public. Vurdien (2019) found that the learners who interacted virtually via videoconferencing outplayed those in face-to-face interaction. Videoconferencing like Zoom Meeting could be an assisting tool to motivate students to boost their self-confidence, negotiate the meaning, and construct knowledge, thereby developing their communicative competence. Let's Speak program was available to be participated by broader society. To join this activity, people could access the link shared by administrators on some social media. The program was handled by a Master of Ceremony (MC). Besides MC, there were also the main speaker and supporting speakers. The main speaker presented a specific topic in 20 minutes, and three participants delivered a five-minute self-introduction.

Some steps were done in running the Let's Speak program as follow: 1) MC opened the event by saying welcome and gratitude to the participants, conveying the motivation and purpose of the activity, 2) MC communicated a rundown of activities, 3) MC invited members to introduce themselves and opened a question and answer session which ended with gratitude to the speaker and the questioner, 4) MC let the speaker delivering the material and opened a question and answer session, 5) MC conveyed the conclusion and gratitude to the keynote speaker and participants who ask questions, 6) MC sent enthusiasm and hopes, 7) MC closed the activity with gratitude for participants' attention and said greetings. The following Figure 7 shows the activity and material presented in Google Meet.

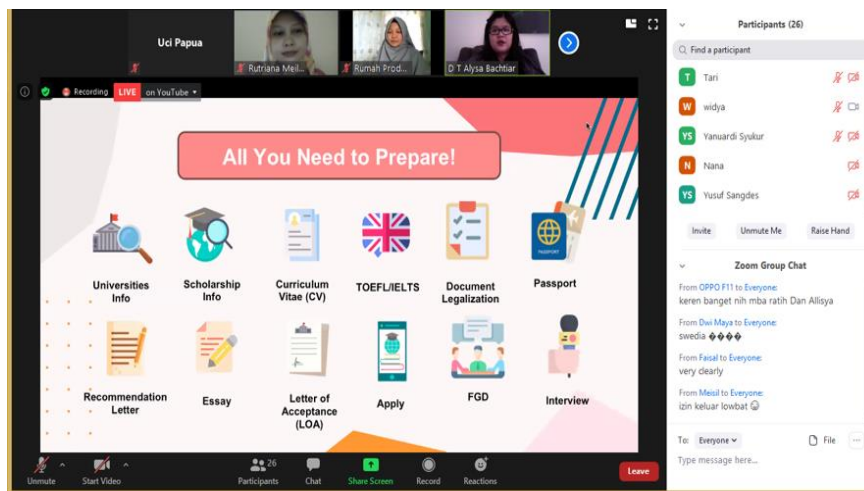


Figure 7. Video Conference of Let's Speak Program

CONCLUSION

WhatsApp Group-based English School (WG-ES) of Rumah Produktif Indonesia was established to motivate the members to remain productive, think positive, do something useful, produce fantastic work, and not be frustrated amid social distancing. Based on the observations, results of Google forms, and document examinations, participants who learned English in the WG-ES were based on their desires and awareness. Their motivations for joining WG-ES were divided into English-based motivation and non-English-based motivation or general motivation. Most participants were motivated to improve their English skills, specifically communication skills. The other motivations were the expectation to expand networking, get experience, and find the opportunity to study abroad. In WG-ES, some learning programs were offered, divided into two main activities, daily chitchat and focused learning. WG-ES had rules, study schedules, and flexible curriculums. Therefore, the participants seemed more comfortable studying English through WG-ES.

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