



Online EFL Teaching and Learning: Different skills, Different Challenges

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Abstract

Online EFL teaching and learning has been described as a viable method of dealing with the pandemic. Only a few studies have focused on teachers' expectations as an important component of teaching effectiveness. As a result, the aim of this study is to ascertain teachers' perceptions of teaching English skills digitally, as well as their difficulties in dealing with them. The qualitative analysis approach was used in this sample, with three English teachers serving as respondents. It collects data through in-depth interviews. Data is compiled, transcribed, and sorted according to the primary topic of each sentence. The findings revealed that EFL teachers faced a number of difficulties when teaching English skills online. Teachers struggle to find adequate resources for listening, depend exclusively on YouTube, have difficulty recognizing students' comprehension, and do not consider last-year students to be relevant. In general, the internal network does not accept video conferences, there is a lack of feedback, and it is a time-consuming operation. Teachers find it difficult to monitor their students' reading activity, loss of reading abilities, more student-centered attitude, and poor attendance in class when it comes to reading. Finally, pupils are unable to write proper sentences, and teachers do not provide any critical thinking activities. It has also been discovered that the receptive abilities of listening and reading are the most difficult to develop in relation to online learning.

Keywords: Challenges, English Skills, Online Learning

Introduction

A series of studies on online learning after the Covid-19 pandemic discovered many challenges for teachers, pupils, and parents (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Morgan, 2020). They are difficulties ranged from a lack of infrastructure readiness to facilitate online learning to a lack of qualified human capital to carry out online learning (Ermawati & Umar, 2020). Any topic in school presents unique difficulties when it comes to teaching through online learning. Different features must be taught while teaching math, chemistry, social sciences, or language. English, for example, has four distinct skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, and three components, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. To provide those skills and components in online learning, different methods are needed. Some of them may be more difficult for face-to-face instruction, and others may be more difficult for online learning.

Despite the numerous concerns about online schooling after the pandemic, it does have benefits. As a distance learning option, online learning is available (Kaharuddin et al., 2020; Leonard & Guha, 2001; Morgan, 2020). Online studying in the area of English as a foreign language is nothing new. There have been a bunch of online activities and teaching materials which spread in various digital platforms. However, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning was most often used as a supplement to face-to-face learning. In Indonesia, online learning was not the only paradigm for teaching and learning in schools. Nonetheless, many educational institutions, such as Open University, use absolute online instruction. The teachers often combined online and in-person instruction. Online and face-to-face experiences must be balanced in blended learning (Smith, 2013). The presence of the Covid-19 pandemic radically alters the learning environment. Teachers must teach electronically for months, and students must study entirely online. Online education and studying can no longer be avoided by both teachers and students. Their literacy is being assessed and requested to improve.

In the transition from face-to-face to online learning, EFL teachers must find productive and efficient ways to teach four English skills when working under constraints (Alhamami, 2018). English teachers must convert their instructional materials to digital formats so that they can be accessed online (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020). They must also choose the best forum for teaching and evaluating by taking into account the challenges that their students face. Teachers of English must consider the standard of online learning. Direct contact between students and teachers, as well as among students, is reduced by online learning. They should be able to maintain students' desire to learn during online learning because it often bores students (Widjaja & Chen, 2017). They are required to specifically plan their online instruction in order to ensure that the learning goals are met.

At the same time, students also encountered several challenges during online learning (Hoq, 2020). They have to provide facilities to follow the online classes (Ermawati & Umar, 2020). They must also learn how to use the new tools used by teachers to educate. Many with financial difficulties face additional obstacles

because online learning is very costly (Anggraeni, 2014). Students must ensure that they have enough internet quota to join the online courses. Each digital network consumes a unique amount of internet bandwidth. Video conferencing via Zoom, for example, consumes more of a student's internet quota than Whatsapp. However, it is undeniable that the success of their application varies.

Both students and teachers are expected to accelerate and respond to the situation of online learning (Onyema et al., 2020). The digital literacy gap between students and teachers also triggers enormous challenges in online learning (Ermawati & Umar, 2020). Parents who are accompanying students studying at home during a pandemic must also be technologically literate. This is a difficult scenario for everyone because the presence of Covid-19, which has an effect on school closing, is too abrupt. This is not the same as online preparation that has been scheduled since the semester begins. As a result, for online learning to be effective, both parties must work together.

English teachers must be concerned with four skills when teaching EFL. They are skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each capability has its own distinct set of characteristics. Of course, after months of going through online learning, teachers have found several adaptations in teaching and learning English skills. Centered on the experiences of English teachers at a Private Islamic Junior High School in Rappang, Indonesia, this study aims to explore the difficulties of teaching each English skill by online teaching and learning.

Method

The qualitative analysis approach was used in this study. The aim of this study was to better understand the social world of teachers' viewpoints on online teaching and learning (Brown & Coombe, 2015). As respondents, three English teachers from each grade level took part. They were 7th, 8th, and 9th grade English teachers. To collect data, the researchers used source triangulation. It sought to gather detailed information from various sources using the same method, namely a deep interview. The data were gathered and transcribed before being categorized into topics that corresponded to the study's objectives.

Results

Discussion

There are many ideas from teachers for teaching English skills that begin with listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Since teaching English in pandemic for several months, the teachers share their thoughts and experiences. They also identified some difficulties of adapting the instruction in online education and learning. The following are descriptions of English teaching and learning skills:

Listening

A teacher can create his or her own listening ability materials rather than

using materials from the internet. This is how the instructor conducted his online English class using listening materials. A instructor produces his or her own content by taking into account the exact materials from the school's curriculum as well as the students' standard. An observation should be performed to determine the students' needs and level in order to select appropriate materials for students in online learning. Any supplementary resources can be obtained from the internet to supplement the main text. This is emphasized by the teacher A who states:

“They are given some videos and asked to write materials. If they cannot access the youtube, they could write materials. In my previous observation, I ask them that which one they like, watching or reading and mostly like watching. In fact, even the teacher provides video to watch, not all students can watch it. Not all students are responding to the direction from the teachers. they mostly learn to listen from the video. I specifically create videos for learning like Mr. Z. then, the students listen it directly. But, when I evaluate the learning process in my daily assignment, most of the students are not able to answer the questions correctly. As I know, in junior high school, there is no specific materials for listening or any other skills, all the materials are integrated.”

Furthermore, teacher B recognizes several challenges in teaching listening online. They are unable to locate appropriate materials for the class subject assigned to them. They complained that the right resources for the subject were difficult to locate on the internet. The majority of them rely primarily on YouTube to provide authentic online materials for students. This leads them to believe that providing enough resources for the class depending on the curriculum is difficult, as this assertion emphasizes research by Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020). This is stated by the teacher:

“It is just very difficult to teach students online. When I teach English, I will just explain the material by voice note and send to students. While, in face to face meeting, this is easy to directly pronounce the words and they could repeat the word or we can directly communicate and ask their ideas about something. But, now in online, it is just hard to teach, we explain the materials and send it to the learners by voice note in WhatsApp group. But, I didn't know what they responded. I asked them, what do you understand from that? Only several students responded.”

Then, regarding to the materials, the teacher stated

“I think it is difficult to teach listening online. In classroom, in listening materials, I usually read the materials to students. I usually ask them to close the book and then read the text from the book and they listen to it. Then, I asked them, what can you get from what you hear? Or what is the conclusion? But now, in online learning, I usually try to find in youtube the materials, but it is difficult to get it. And the materials in youtube are

not suitable with the materials that must be taught because I truly relate the materials with the guide book. I ask them to open the certain page and try to explain it.

Teacher C, a last-year student teacher, does not have any special listening materials. When he lectures online, though, he will give students some videos containing the class content. This implicitly encourages students to listen to content that can help them develop their listening skills. The instructor is also very innovative in that he makes the videos himself so that he can produce videos based on the class curriculum.

"I don't have any special materials for listening only, but they will listen to some English materials from video I send to them. I asked them to write what they get from the video. They learn to improve their listening skill from the video. The video is made by me, myself. I ask them to write in their English book about the material I have given to you in video."

Different ideas were given from the students in the last year. He considers not to give special concerns on listening by relying on the goal of the last year students is to prepare for national exam which does not need any listening test. By considering this, the teacher should not prepare any listening materials, but focus much on the reading because the kind of the test in national exam is reading only. For the ninth grade, they are not given specific materials for listening because they have to focus on many exams that require the ability to answer various reading texts. That makes them force to teach reading materials much more.

"I never teach listening or even speaking to students. Even though they listen to some materials, they just write down what material is in the video. Based on my experience the last year of students are required to pass the exams: Madrasah exam and national exam. there is material for listening, but I changed the listening material for listening to be reading by considering the needs of the ninth semester is mostly concerning on answering reading text."

Speaking

Teaching speaking is a complex job since their experience and expertise in English are identified by their speaking. It is simple to assess their potential as productive talents. However, teaching speaking can be challenging in this covid-19 epidemic because adequate internet connectivity and technologies should be necessary for learning.

"It is too difficult to teach speaking. We should have done video conference to check their speaking, but in fact, we never do it. I myself do the speaking activities and send it to students, but there is no feedback. We just give some assignments to do." (Teacher B)

Despite the fact that speaking can be easily applied when communicating with students, however, this is difficult due to the limitations of students' input on their

learning. The instructor may have used video conferencing to assess the students' abilities. In reality, they do not do so by taking a variety of factors into account, such as internet connectivity and a poor network.

To foresee issues with teaching speaking, another teacher suggests that students create a video by filming themselves doing self-introductions or other speaking exercises to encourage students to speak fluently and correctly.

"I ask them to make a video to do self introduction and send it to WA. It is about more than 1 minute. And they participate actively in this assignment. I never give them limited time, if they just can make it in 50 seconds, it is okay. The most important they can do the self introduction."(Teacher C)

Different techniques are used by teacher C to determine the level of speaking abilities of his pupils. This is necessary to ensure that the products are appropriate for their level. The instructor calls the students individually to assess the degree and to directly practice the speaking practices, and virtually corrects the students' mispronunciation. This may be time-consuming, but it is a practical virtual experience to solve the issues associated with the students' lack of direct involvement.

"I myself identify which students are better in speaking, because as the basic learner in English, I directly call them by phone to practice English and to determine their level. I remind them in online group about the materials and I tell them to be ready to be called. In result, some students are good. About 50% students can answer and respond in English well. And another 50% are still low level. And they have several problems in pronouncing word in English. And I directly correct their mistakes." (Teacher A).

Reading

One of the teachers assigns an activity to be repeated based on a recording that was shown to them. Unfortunately, this repetition is just for words, and there is no way to regulate the activity. The teacher is hesitant to allow the students to read the text on their own. This is in relation to his previous research, which found that most students in the classroom prior to Covid-19 were too shy to read aloud. The inability to interpret inhibits the teacher's capacity to explain much about comprehension as the simple reading dilemma remains unsolved. To truly engage a virtual class in reading, the instructor should have used a variety of exercises to engage students in learning that supports Ermawati's studies (2018). It is important to focus on the students' reading abilities before moving on to text comprehension.

"The students are afraid of reading the text loudly because they think they cannot read it perfectly. How can I lead them to understand the main idea, that to read the text itself, they are afraid of? While in the classroom, when I taught them, I sometimes read it and they repeated. I read the text and they listened, then they are asked to repeat after me for

each sentence. That is for seventh grade based on what I think they need. While, in online learning, that cannot be done. In the repetition activity video, that is only for word by word repetition. No controlling to their reading activities.” (Teacher A).

Students are compelled to be more student-centered as a result of online learning. This is not popular in Indonesia, where teachers normally encourage and instruct the whole class. Even if the instructor has produced a guidebook for the reading activities, only a few students are willing to participate. Since the teacher has limited contact with the pupils, she is unable to monitor the whole reading activity. The difficulty in teaching reading is exacerbated by the fact that students are not fully involved in the learning process.

Teacher B: in the classroom, I usually ask a student to read a text, and let other to listen and give comments according to their friends’ pronunciation, is there any mistake? While, in online class, I usually ask the students to open the text from the guide book that we are going to learn then ask them to focus only in conclusion of the text or in second paragraph, for example. That is I usually give them in reading activities. The problems are not all students are able to participate in online class.

The students have their own English textbook lent by the school.

Teacher C : “most of the teachers give the text book to the students. Because the books in the library are enough for students and it has many collections of the books”I usually teach them how to skim and scan text for preparing the national exam. In online class, I send the students materials, they write down the important points and give assignments. To submit the assignments, we once arrange a meeting at the school a day in a week to submit and check the assignments. There some students do not do it, do not bring anything to school at all. What the most important thing to do is they are able to show their effort on the assignment. They work on that better or not, we still appreciate, because what we want is they still keep studying in online learning. Because we cannot control the students at home, they are under control of the parents.”

Writing

Writing is a productive ability that students are working on to become more proficient in using English. A writing ability can be enhanced by writing a variety of items, such as emails, essays, or basic writing, such as homework, explanations, and so on. Writing is a necessary ability in order to pass every English course in education. This demonstrates how the students articulate themselves by writing. Considering the value of writing skills, many teachers discovered that teaching writing can be more difficult while teaching online. This is evident from the teacher’s statements:

Teacher C : I ask them to write the text of self introduction. The text itself is in the text book. Even they can see the book to write the text, they still have typo in their writing. Then I think, learning in classroom is a better way to make it more effective. there is also a case, a student did not have a phone to learn online, because it was taken by his mother. His mother was angry at him for always playing online game. So that, he came to school to study for a week. If a student has no internet data, they can submit the assignment when they have got any internet connection.

Teachers do not pay attention in this simulated teaching to teaching writing, which should include improving students' linguistics and communicative competence. If the teacher just wants students to write everything in the textbook, they will not be able to develop their higher order reasoning skills in developing their ideas in text types. During the teaching process, the teacher should be responsible for the progress of the pupils. It is hoped that the students' English proficiency and writing skills would improve. This support study by Hidayati (2018). This can be seen from Teacher B's statement:

"I usually ask them to write some texts from their guide book in specific page, then I asked them to upload their writing in e-learning about the main points of the reading text, but only several students are able to upload it. When I asked why they didn't upload it, they said they got sick, I had no internet data, their neighbor got married. To solve the problem of not submitting the assignments: if they do not have phone at all, they can come to school and learn from the teacher."

When looking at the teacher methods for teaching writing, it is clear that the teacher is already using the Grammar Translation Approach as a method for teaching writing and strengthening students' confidence when teaching writing. The statement from the teacher is also related with the study of Widjaja and Chen (2017) which consider the importance of motivation in teaching. The statement is stated by Teacher A below.

"Students have any mistakes in their grammar. Sometimes they write two verbs in a sentence. That looks redundant. But, I do not force them to be master in English if they have any other interest in other subject, such as sport. But, if they are good at English, I support them and remind not to forget any other materials"

Based on some comments from teachers about teaching all the skills in English, we ask them to identify some of the skills that are most challenging in teaching. From the teachers' perspectives, below are the comments on that.

Teacher B: *"I think it is listening."*

Teacher A : *"listening and reading"*

Teacher C : *"reading"*

This becomes important to consider. The reason an instructor believes complex materials are difficult to teach is because of receptive abilities. Logically, if

students' receptive skills are impaired, they can struggle to produce language.

Conclusion

The majority of the studies reported that using online learning as a solution to the Coronavirus was successful. The significance of online learning and instruction in the Covid-19 epidemic cannot be overstated. Several difficulties in teaching English skills have been found in a private school in Sidenreng Rappang, Indonesia. The difficulty in locating appropriate resources that are precisely right as in the program, the teacher relies heavily on Youtube to find materials, the weakness in determining their comprehension of the listening materials, and for the final-year students, it is not considered necessary to teach special skills on listening. Next, teaching speaking is considered difficult due to a variety of reasons. It is easy to identify skills that the internet supply is not running well, a lack of input from students, and a time-consuming task that requires more internet data. Reading is another skill. This is also the most difficult skill to learn in this virtual program. It is due to the limitations of controlling students to read, students' lack of reading abilities, this challenging student-centered approach that is not widely seen in Indonesia, and poor participation in online classes. The last skill to be learned is writing. Teaching writing can be overwhelming due to the large number of typos in the text they possess. Also with the book in front of them, it is difficult for them to compose text correctly. The teacher only asks students to compose the text from the textbook in this activity, which does not have any critical thinking exercises. Furthermore, another teacher is more concerned with the syntax of the prose. As a result, it is essential to note the difficulties in teaching English skills in order to cope with them and to determine the best methods and applications to use online. This is critical to decide because students can become bored or disinterested in online learning if teachers are unable to identify appropriate techniques to use in the online class.

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