

Synchronous and Asynchronous Approach to EFL Teaching during Covid-19 Pandemic: Enactment and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 outbreak brings impacts on the teaching and learning process, and the use of technology is inevitable in the situation including in EFL teaching. The study concerning the implementation and challenges of online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic is still under explored, especially in EFL teaching context. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the implementation and challenges of English teachers using synchronous and asynchronous approach for online teaching during COVID-19 outbreak. This research used qualitative case study with data collection techniques through interviews with English teachers, observations, and documents as the data source triangulation. The study was conducted at one of private schools in Indonesia. To analyze the data, the researchers used thematic analysis. The result emerges several themes regarding the implementation of synchronous and asynchronous approach to English online teaching covering the teachers' teaching instructions, media used in English online teaching, and impacts of online classroom. A dominant use of asynchronous approach done by the teachers and limited teaching and learning activities in online classroom were found in the study. In addition, concerning its challenges, the result indicated the problems of the teachers included their qualification in utilizing technology and the students' availability to access the Internet. However, teachers offered some solutions in terms of self-improvement and personal approaches to students.

Keywords: EFL Online Teaching, Synchronous and Asynchronous Approach, COVID-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the corona virus disease COVID-19 has given rise to many causes for changes in teaching and learning activities due to the fact that physical distancing policies are applied in various countries to reduce the spread of Covid-19. School teaching learning activities have also turned into home-study activities. COVID-19 made changes in the aspects of students' life, so knowledge of COVID-19 became an important aspect of learning (Ichsan, et. al, 2020).

Since the changes in conditions of COVID-19 outbreak, teachers have their own challenges in implementing existing online media learning. E-learning systems are big issues for online learning to take place. Online learning can use synchronous and asynchronous approaches (Hrastinski, 2008; Alenzuela & Kamilova, 2018). In the organization of e-learning systems, synchronous e-learning refers to learning or teaching through electronic media. A synchronized voice chat room or text provides opportunities for the interaction of students and teachers. Besides chat, video conference facilitates face-to-face communication. Web conferences through surveys, polls and question and question sessions can turn into more interactive than video conferences. However, in implementing English online learning, teachers are required to be able to teach through asynchronous and synchronous approaches. So, teachers are required to be able to understand online media related to the online teaching and learning process (Park & Bonk, 2007).

Some of the challenges of synchronous education can be the needs of students at a given time and the availability of good Internet, carefully designed instructions are needed because pedagogies are more important than technologically facilitating media (Murphy et al., 2011). Asynchronous e-learning can be a challenge because only a series of carefully designed strategies can keep students involved and interested in this kind of learning environment to facilitate motivations, confidence, participation, problem solving, analytical thinking capabilities and high levels (Martin & Parker, 2014). However, it can have positive impact in teaching and learning process including students' self-regulation, motivation, and collaboration (Moallem, 2015) .

There are several studies related to EFL teaching during COVID-19 pandemic (Nikmah & Azimah, 2020; Libasin et al., 2021); however, to date, research concerning the online learning through asynchronous and synchronous approaches especially in EFL context is still under explored. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the implementation and challenges of EFL teaching through asynchronous and synchronous approaches during the COVID-19 outbreak from the English teachers' perspectives.

RESEARCH METHOD

Approach of the Study

This research is a qualitative case study that facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon in its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that problems are not explored through a

single lens but rather lenses that allow various aspects of the phenomenon to unfold and to be understood.

Data and Source of Data

In this study, the qualitative data were obtained by researchers through interviews of four English teachers who are teaching at State Junior High School (SMPN) 2 Taman Sidoarjo, East Java, Indonesia. Besides the researchers' familiarity with the school, the school was selected because it has been implementing distance learning during Covid-19 pandemic. The interviews questions consisted of some items related to the implementation of online English teaching and learning using synchronous and asynchronous approaches as well as the teachers' challenges. To support the main data, observations with field notes and study documents of teachers' lesson plans were also conducted. The researchers used data source triangulation for data validity.

Data Collection Technique

To collect the data, the researchers did several activities including designing the research instruments, interviewing the teachers about the implementation and challenges of their online teaching, doing interviews transcription, observing the teacher's practices in English online teaching, doing observations with field notes. In addition, study documents were also done to support the data. The collected data were stored in a safe place.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the data were then analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative study of methods that can be used extensively in various epistemology and research questions. It is a method of identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting a theme found in data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a way to analyze data with the aim of identifying patterns and finding themes through the data that the researcher has collected. Thematic analysis has been used in several social sciences research, including library and information science.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The result emerges several themes regarding the implementation of synchronous and asynchronous approach to English online teaching covering the teachers' teaching instructions, media used in English online teaching, and impacts of online classroom.

Theme 1. The Teachers' Teaching Instructions

Dominant Use of Asynchronous Approach Done by the Teachers

English teachers at SMPN 2 Taman used Google Classroom and WhatsApp in conducting online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Google Classroom is an LMS platform that can be used in the online learning process that has been agreed upon by the school. Based on the results of the interview from the English teachers' at SMPN 2 Taman, it was found that online English learning was carried out using Google Classroom and WhatsApp because Google Classroom and WhatsApp were simple, easy, and familiar media. A teacher stated, "There are Google Meet and Zoom. I never use them. I only use Google Classroom" (T1). This can be seen that Google Classroom features provide virtual classrooms such as features for communication and classwork features for providing material, questions, assignments, assessments, and person or profile features to get to know class members. According to the

results of the interview, a teacher told, “I use WhatsApp. Besides, our school agreement is using Google Classroom but sometimes we use Google Drive for examination” (T. 1).

This finding was also supported by the data of observation and the teachers’ document in the form of teachers’ lesson plans. It was found that teachers used the media of Google Classroom and WhatsApp in their teaching and learning process.

Limited Teaching and Learning Activities in Online Classroom

The teacher provided learning material through Google Classroom. In each meeting, teachers provided material based on the lesson plan. Materials are sent in the form of PowerPoint presentations, and the videos were sent in the materials feature in Google Classroom. The teachers gave assignments as evidence of student learning activities at home. In the assignments, the teachers provided a predetermined grace period. However, students were required to fill in attendance before the class ended. Every activity was recorded in the Google Classroom. In the process of interacting or communicating with the teacher, they were open in responding to students’ responses, or they responded via WhatsApp. The teacher explained:

So, WhatsApp is a means of conveying information to students. For delivering assignments and materials, I use Google Classroom. It is based on school agreement. It is needed to make the same media for classroom. The agreement is that teachers should use WhatsApp group and Google Classroom. (T4).

Theme 2. Involvement of Asynchronous Media

The teacher provided practical questions or assignments in the form of Quizzes on Google Form or practical questions written directly in the question feature in Google Classroom. Students were able to immediately see the value of the assignment they had completed. From the results of interviews with English teachers, it was concluded that Google Classroom is a platform that is easy to use and familiar to teachers and students. The available features supported teachers in carrying out learning such as providing material, assignments, and score. A teacher stated:

They send the assignment via Google Classroom. They asked questions but then after a while they do not want to know further. They just submitted assignments, collected, and that’s all. And most of the answers were almost the same. (T3).

Theme 3. Issues of Synchronous and Asynchronous Approach to English Online Teaching

The English teachers’ at SMPN 2 Taman considered various things in providing materials, assignments, and score during COVID-19 pandemic. This is to say, there were many obstacles that needed to be anticipated. Therefore, the English teachers’ team agreed to upgrade their marks to students who have problems taking online classes.

The teachers monitored the activities and attendance of students in class in taking part in online learning so that the teachers knew which students were active and passive. The teachers investigated the reasons why the students did not attend the online classes. Some of the reasons found included that they did not have smartphones. Another reason was that they did not have internet data. Moreover, their smartphones were not supported by the Google Classroom application. One of the biggest impacts is that the students were demotivated. This statement is supported by the teacher:

The first difficulty is that the students sometimes do not focus to the lesson. They seemed to be not motivated. Second, it is difficult when they want to ask us question because there are many kinds of questions, and they have variety of questions. Third, the duration of explaining the material is very limited, right? so we cannot explain it

freely. Besides, technical difficulties are found. For example, the WIFI or maybe students that do not have handphones and laptops. (T3).

Concerning the challenges of synchronous and asynchronous approach to English online teaching, the themes were found concerning with the teachers' challenges and their dealing with synchronous and asynchronous approach to English online teaching

Theme 1. The Challenges of EFL Online Teaching

The obstacle faced by English teachers in conducting distance learning is the limitations in using learning methods. The teachers presented the material in written form because of the limited use of technology. Apart from that, from the results of the interviews, there were several teachers who conveyed some of the obstacles they faced, including the availability of smartphone and internet connection as a teacher said, "For example, the WIFI or maybe students which do not have handphones and laptops" (T3). In addition, it was found that the characteristics of the students were different. Another teacher said, "Well, the students' abilities are not same. For English teachers, maybe you can feel it later. By using online media, sometimes students were getting lazy and bored" (T1).

Not all students have good literacy skills, especially in understanding the material presented in written form. The learning atmosphere at home tended to make students more relaxed, and students lacked motivation. Another obstacle is the lack of student communication tools, so that the teachers had difficulty in getting information about students who did not submit assignments. As a result of these obstacles, the learning evaluation process becomes obstructed. As the teacher responded:

The problem was that the students did not have any internet data, but now it has been resolved by the government, but even so, they were still like that. Second, some students are active, and some are not active at home. Third, the internet connection. (T2).

Theme 2. Teachers' Dealing with Synchronous and Asynchronous Approach to English Online Teaching

Teacher's Self Development

Using Google Classroom made it easier for teachers to share material, give assignments, and at the same time carry out evaluations. The COVID-19 pandemic, which is increasingly worrying because of the wider spread of the virus, has resulted in all teaching and learning activities to be carried out at home via online. Distance learning is a learning activity carried out by students and teachers' which are not carried out in school face-to-face but through communication technology, information and other media using various communication tools for learning. From this, teachers were forced to improve their skills and qualification related to the use of media to support the learning process. A teacher expressed:

As the teacher, it is a challenge. However, we must go on. We have to learn, especially how to use the technology. We have to give all our effort for them. We discuss the difficulties together. Don't give up! The difficulties are conveyed to schools and so on. We work 24 hours. Sometimes we chased the students, in the morning, afternoon, and night. Sometimes we still give directions to collect their assignments quickly. (T4).

Teachers' Personal Approach to Students

During this COVID-19 pandemic, online learning has become a solution to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. The current situation and condition are disastrous so that learning targets are not burdened to meet the curriculum achievement targets, but rather to give

simple assignments and easy through Google Classroom which is familiar to students and teachers. Based on the interview that was done, the teachers' said:

Absolutely, it is very different between face-to-face and not face-to-face class. If face-to-face class, we can directly call the students' name. We ask questions about which one is not understood. Because we also should not invite them to come to the school, so the most important is that we have tried to remind and provide material to make them understand. Giving them tasks that they can do that does not make it difficult for parents and students. We also some time have to ask them personally if they have problem or not. (T4).

Since online learning brought several issues including the problems in giving explanation and lack of direct interaction between the teacher and students, there were lots of efforts made by English teachers to improve the quality of students' understanding during the online learning process. A teacher said, "...for online learning, the job is actually chasing, waking students up, and reminding them to join the class on time" (T2).

Discussion

Online English learning brought several problems. In general, the curriculum planning design strategy needs to be updated to suit the needs of language development. In Indonesia, these adjustments are related to the learning design as stated in the 2013 Curriculum. Specifically, the world is facing a COVID-19 pandemic which affects the application of the online learning system.

In the pandemic era, online learning has become an inseparable part of the education system. Soliman (2014) believed that learning in the pandemic era is basically web-based and relies on the internet. The classroom environment is virtual, meaning that there is no face-to-face communication between the teacher and the student. The way teachers and students interact can be synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronization indicates that students and instructors are engaged in learning activities at the same time; asynchronous is used where students have the option to choose the right time for their learning experience. For this purpose, a teacher must be skilled in online technology and innovative in learning media (Park & Bonk, 2007).

The implementation of synchronous and asynchronous approaches not only brought positive impacts but also several issues. The study is in line with the research conducted by Murphy et al. (2011) stating that asynchronous and synchronous online teaching should consider several aspects covering the degree of use, the media, contexts, students' preference, and limitation. In addition, pedagogy was more important than the media in online teaching. However, Perveen (2016) argued that asynchronous online language learning was beneficial for second language learning, but with several limitations that can be supported by synchronous learning. Therefore, he suggested to use both synchronous and asynchronous approach to create ideal online learning environment.

The study revealed the dominant use of asynchronous approach in online language learning due to the school policy and the disparity of Internet access. The result challenged the study that students were found to have more interest on synchronous learning than asynchronous one, also the was statistically significant difference in students' responses regarding effectiveness of synchronous and asynchronous e-learning activities (Malik et al., 2017). Moreover, A study by Lotfi & Hosseini Pozveh (2019) revealed that synchronous

language learning was proven to be more effective than asynchronous activities. This finding was supported by research conducted by Libasin et al. (2021) indicating that online synchronous activities provided better academic performances than asynchronous approach.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Based on the results of research, it can be concluded that the implementation of EFL online learning was dominantly carried out using asynchronous media such as WhatsApp and Google Classroom applications. Therefore, the teaching and learning process tended to be less variative. The use of technology brought several challenges concerning the digital literacy and availability of learning devices. However, the situation has forced the teachers to improve their qualification and managed several issues related to the students in the EFL classroom interaction.

Suggestion

Based on the result of this study, the researchers suggest that the existence of asynchronous and synchronous approaches helps teachers in delivering online learning. In the future, it is hoped that teachers will be more aware of technology as a medium of learning in the COVID-19 outbreak, not only using asynchronous approach, but also developing skills in using online synchronous media as well as more understanding and creative in its use.

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