ELT IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC: NEW APPROACHES AND NEW CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The covid-19 pandemic has brought a lot of impacts in various aspects of life in many different countries. In Indonesia, the pandemic has been happening for a year. However it has not been successfully handled. There are still many cases of covid-19 these days and citizen are urged to keep wearing masks and following the health protocol in their day to day activities. In Indonesian Educational institutions, the most obvious effect of the covid-19 pandemic is the shift from offline teaching and learning activities into the online ones. Teachers and students have to adapt to new ways of teaching and learning in their online classes. This also applies to English teachers and students. English Language Teaching (ELT) in the pandemic time becomes both new approaches and new challenges for teachers and students since it involves some new characteristics of teaching and learning activities and at the same time it presents diverse teaching and learning challenges for teachers and students where some problems remain unsolved even after one year of online teaching implementation.

Keywords: ELT, Pandemic, Approaches, Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The covid-19 Pandemic has affected our lives greatly. The spread of covid-19 has limited the mobility of people from one area to another area inside and outside the countries. Not only restricting individual's travelling activities, the spread of covid-19 also brings huge impacts on human's economic and social activities. Many effects of the pandemic are also found on the educational practices in different parts of the world including in Indonesia.

Indonesia is one of the countries which are still struggling to handle the covid-19. Many cases of covid-19 are still found although the government has promoted social and physical distancing. New variants of the covid-19 have also been found infecting citizens and it is still unclear when the pandemic is actually going to an end. With this situation, the educational institutions in the high risk area of covid-19 spread in Indonesia are required to implement online teaching and learning activities.

The moves from traditional classroom into online classroom can be seen as new approaches in the educational practices in many schools in Indonesia. The use of ICT to facilitate the teaching and learning activities brings the new enthusiasm and create new learning atmosphere for teachers and students. Online learning also requires students to have more independent study skills. Students are required to be more active in their independent learning as their teachers are not with them physically. With the use of ICT students are also able to access unlimited learning resources. They can learn from many different resources and media. In addition, they have the freedom on how, where and when to learn as the online learning resources can be accessed at any time from any places. With these

characteristics, online learning can foster the development of learner autonomy.

Online learning also calls for more supports and involvement of the parents especially for students in lower level of education like elementary schools and junior high schools. Young learners need parents' guidance and supervision more than the older learners. With parent's guidance and supervision, students can be taught on how to use the internet wisely. The screen time can also be monitored by parents and thus the risk for surfing inappropriate contents will be put into minimum.

The online educational practices during the pandemic time also teaches the students to grow more awareness to contribute to their own safety as well as the safety of the family, school members, and the whole society. Online learning is done to stop the spread of covid-19 among the community members. Students and teachers stay at home with the hope that they will not be infected by the virus and thus the case of covid-19 will not increase and can be minimized. In other words, the online learning in the pandemic time becomes the new approach in education which prioritizes the safety and health of the community.

However, the shift from offline and online teaching is not always perceived positively by both teachers and students in Indonesia. Many research reports have revealed that online teaching and learning activities did not always run well due to various barriers in their implementation. Those barriers always result from various sources like teachers, parents, students and the learning facilities.

Zamroni (2020) mentioned that online classes in Indonesia did not run well. Similarly Abidah et al (2020) and Rosyidi (2020) found out that the online classes were not effective. The minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia also acknowledged in August 2020 that online

teaching and learning activities implemented in Indonesian schools have not been as effective as offline teaching and learning activities. The lack of success of the online classes was due to a wide range of challenges emerged in the implementation of online classes.

Among the barriers within the implementation of online classes in Indonesia were the bad signal and expensive internet data package (Rasmitadila et al, 2020). A lot of tasks, noisy home, and technological barriers are some other challenges (Rahiem, 2020). In addition, Limited IT infrastructure, limited knowledge and skills on using IT, and limited internet access also contribute to the challenges faced within the online class implementation (Aji, 2020).

These findings of online learning barriers above are in line with the previous literature on barriers of online teaching activities. Moorhouse (2020) found out that the main barriers within online classrooms were the limited interaction between tutor and students and the lack of tutor's experience and skills in using Video Conferencing System to teach. In the older literature, Pelgrum (2001) divided the barriers of online teaching and learning into material barriers (lack of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) resources) and non-material barriers (teachers' knowledge and skill). Balanskat, Blamire and Kefafa (2006) divided the barriers into three namely teacher level barriers, school level barriers and system level barriers. Among those barriers, Mailizar et al (2020) found in their research that the most significant e-learning barrier was at the student level. Technical obstacles, student conditioning, the participation of students, and online teaching experience are the challenges in online classes (Rasmitadila et al, 2020). These all seem to be found as well in Indonesian contexts. With all kinds of obstacles above, it is unsurprising that

many teachers and students doubted the online classes. Daniel (2020) argued reassuring students and parents now becomes an important part of institutional responses.

In English language teaching (ELT), the adaptation has also happened. English teachers and students have to cope with the requirements for having online classes. Apart from those feeling positive about implementing online classes, many other teachers and students have less positive views about online classes due to the challenges faced in their implementation. Like the teaching of any other subjects during the pandemic time, the ELT in the pandemic time can also be seen as both new approaches and new challenges.

DISCUSSION

In discussing the ELT as new approaches and new challenges, several research findings are presented here. Three studies done during the pandemic time are presented one by one. Referring to these research findings, the conclusion is then drawn and suggestions for the practice of ELT during the pandemic time are offered.

The first research was done in the English Language Education Department of Pekalongan University Indonesia in the early pandemic time in 2020. The study was conducted by Agustina, Matra and Karimah (2020) through the use of student survey. The study was done since online classes were implemented in the university in such a sudden due to the spread of covid-19. Regardless of the readiness of both the lecturers and students, online classes were implemented to the end of the semester. At the end of semester, 85 students were surveyed about the challenges that students faced in the new online learning system. The data were then analysed by using thematic content analysis and the writers found 166 codes which were categorized further into 34 sub-categories, 15 categories, 9 sub-themes and 6 themes.

These six themes cover the main challenges faced by the students in joining the online classes namely: lecturers' poor performance, students' poor independent study skills, technical issues with the use of technology, heavy tasks, students' low motivation, and unsupportive environment. With the challenges that the students faced, the students had less positive perceptions on their online classrooms. They really felt the heavy burden in their online classes. Many of their lecturers gave daily assignments and students disliked those assignments. They also felt that the lecturers were not fully-hearted in teaching them. Some just sent the materials and asked the students to learn on their own. Lecturers were also perceived as impatience. Apart from that, the bad internet connection, the unsupportive gadgets and environments, as well as the lack of independent study skills also made them dissatisfied with their online classes.

The second study was conducted by the writer in the mid pandemic time by involving parents of younger students. The study aimed at revealing parents' perceptions about online classes as the replacement of offline classes in the pandemic time. By using online survey, the writer found out that from 50 parents involved in the survey, only 4% from the total respondents felt positive about online learning as parents believed that online learning would make their children more independent. The other 96% of the respondent felt negative about online learning. Parents admitted that they struggled in helping their children learn at home. They did not really master the subjects and they sometimes found out that the teachers' instructions were unclear. Parents also reported that online learning done at home gave little opportunities for their children to learn. Their children liked playing better than studying. Sometimes parents and children were quarrelling about the children's study and the children

learning activities were not smoothly done. The other parents expressed their concern on the high cost of online learning. For many parents, internet data were not really affordable. Parents felt that they had to pay double, for the school fee and also for the internet costs, and they felt it as burdening their finance.

The third study was done by the writer and her colleagues in 2020 – 2021 and this was still an ongoing study. The study aims at revealing the challenges of online teaching in various educational levels like universities, senior high schools, junior high schools and elementary schools in Pekalongan municipality, Central Java Indonesia by involving 179 teachers and lecturers. The study reveals initial interesting findings as teachers at different teaching settings faced multiple problems. First, in university level, the data show that the main problems in online teaching at universities cover bad internet connection, lack of interaction between lecturers and students, students' lack of participation in class, students' low motivation and interest, and high level of teachers' boredom. Second, in senior high school level, the five main issues are the students' lack of motivation and interest, the lack of interaction between the teachers and the students, bad internet connection, students' lack of active participation in the class, and the limited internet data package. Third, in junior high school level, the five main problems are students' lack of motivation and interest, the limited internet data package, the lack of interaction between teachers and students, students' lack of independent study skills, and teachers' limited knowledge of technology. Finally, in elementary school level, the five main problems were students' lack of motivation, students' lack of independent study skills, the lack of teachers and students' interaction, the limited internet data package and the lack of trust on the online class effectiveness. The following is the comparison of the challenges in online teaching in four different educational level.

Table 1. The Comparison of Challenges in Online Teaching Across Educational Levels

Problems	University level	SHS Level	JHS level	Elementary school level
Lack of interaction between teacher & students	V	V	V	V
Lack of students' motivation & interest	V	V	V	V
Limited internet data package		V	V	V
Lack of students' independent study skills			V	V

The table shows that the problems faced in all educational levels were the lack of interaction between teacher and students and the lack of students' motivation and interest. Limited internet data package was not an issue in university level, but it was a problem for those in high schools and elementary schools. The last problem, the lack of students' independent study skills turned out to be the main problems within the online teaching in junior high school levels and in elementary school levels.

With those various problems, it is clear that the online teaching is still problematic in our contexts. Some measures really need to be taken to help teachers minimize those problems. In the next section the writer presents the conclusion and some suggestions relevant to those problems.

CONCLUSION

Online classes in Indonesian contexts are still not free from problems. Although many teachers and students love the new class atmosphere and love the use of technology in the online classes, at the same time, many of them still face diverse problems. It thus becomes our homework to help teachers to solve the problems. Among some of the solutions offered here to create better learning situations are to increase

students' motivation and interest, create more interaction in the class, reduce teachers' dominance, involve students more in making class decision, and train students the skills to do independent study. Yet, there is still an unresolved issue of the internet costs. It remains unclear in the time of the writing of this paper, who should be responsible for providing and paying the internet data needed in the online classes especially when the internet data provided by the government is not sufficient or unreceived by teachers and students. This strengthens the idea that online teaching in the pandemic time introduces not only new approaches but also new challenges.

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