EFL LECTURERS' CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS IN THE ONLINE TEACHING: VOICES FROM INDONESIAN SMALL PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: Online EFL teaching and learning in universities has been conducted for two years during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the EFL lecturers' challenges in small private universities in Indonesia are still scarcely investigated. Therefore, this research was conducted with the purpose to describe the Indonesian EFL lecturers' challenges in their online teaching in the small private universities where they teach English. This was a qualitative research which used online semi-structured interview to six EFL lecturers from six different private universities in East Java to collect the data. Meanwhile, those six private universities did not have the official online platform for online teaching yet. The theory of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana was used to analyze the data. The result was that they faced some challenges in their online EFL teaching related to their students' presence, the bad internet connection, the unconducive home condition, and the very slow students' responses. Besides, they suggested to the universities to provide the official online learning platform which is completed with the places for storing their teaching administration archives. Hopefully, these research results can be the consideration for the university policy makers when deciding the guidelines of the online teaching and learning in the universities.

Keywords: *challenges, efl online teaching, private universities, suggestions*

INTRODUCTION

Since March 2020, the education system in Indonesia has changed due to the pandemic of COVID-19. The Indonesian government, through the Minister of Education and Culture, made a policy not to conduct face-to-face teaching and learning processes in the classrooms. The students are instructed to learn from home and the teachers are demanded to teach from home using online learning. Both the students and the teachers are forbidden to do the learning activities offline leading the crowds (Permendikbud No. 3, 2020). This policy has to be done at all levels of education, including at the university level.

However, the teaching and learning process in universities must go on by using online learning. The lecturers are challenged to teach their courses in online classrooms. Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2021) argue that EFL lecturers have to be familiar with the online teaching platforms and applications. Besides, they have to have a good capacity to conduct the online platforms and applications for their online classes. Additionally, they have to be able to select the suitable platform or application for the courses that they are teaching (Ariyanti, 2020). Then, they also must consider their students' ability in using the online platform or application. This is what all the lecturers experience when teaching online including teaching English.

Some studies have explored the Indonesian EFL teachers' challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) investigated the various applications and platforms used and the problems faced by Indonesian secondary EFL teachers in their remote EFL classes. Next, Tukan (2020) found that Indonesian EFL teachers at senior high schools got some problems operating the online applications, developing their online materials, assessing their online teaching and learning, evaluating their online EFL classes, creating the various methods of teaching, and motivate the students and their parents. Then, the study by Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2021) informed that EFL teachers of Indonesian secondary school years 7-9 experienced disruption in their online EFL teaching and learning because of the poor signal internet in Indonesia. Thus, they suggested the Indonesian government provide a stable internet connection as their priority. In addition, Rinekso et al. (2021) confirmed that commonly Indonesian EFL teachers at secondary schools faced online EFL learning problems related to a technical problem and home situation which was not conducive. Meanwhile, Saputra et al. (2022) found that the highest challenge faced by Indonesian EFL teachers at secondary school was about assessing the students' achievement in their online EFL learning.

However, the studies exploring the EFL lecturers' challenges in small private universities in Indonesia are still scarce. That is why the researcher is interested in investigating the EFL lecturers' challenges in small private universities in Indonesia. This research is very urgent to be conducted because small private universities usually do not have complete facilities to conduct online learning in this COVID-19 pandemic so it is very challenging for the EFL lecturers to run their online EFL learning.

Meanwhile, the purpose of this research is to describe the Indonesian EFL lecturers' challenges and suggestions for the private universities where they work.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Online Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the use of online learning. According to Luthfiyyah et al. (2021), online learning integrates the materials of learning and technology so that the teaching and learning activities never stop because of this COVID-19 pandemic. Dealing with this, Rinekso et al. (2021) state that online learning enables the teachers and the students to do the activities of teaching and learning without being restricted by the time and the location. The teaching and learning process in this case can be done every time and everywhere. It is the only best solution for teaching and learning during this pandemic because this pandemic has prohibited us to be the near distance (Saputra et al., 2022). In addition, Huang, et al. (2020) state that the students get to benefit from this online learning in which they can get their learning materials provided in the form of videos, audio, and documents easily. The students just need to open the websites or the links shared by their teachers and directly they can download or read or listen to their learning materials.

It has been known that there are two modes of conducting online learning, namely synchronous learning and asynchronous learning. In synchronous learning, the teachers and the students meet at the same time. Riwayatiningsih and Sulistyani (2020) argue that the teachers and the students interact with one another in real time so that the students can ask questions directly to the teachers. Additionally, Rinekso and Muslim (2020) explain that teachers can give direct answers to their students' questions as well as direct feedback on their students' work. Meanwhile, Perveen (2016) states that asynchronous learning creates a flexible online learning environment because the teachers and the students do not meet and interact at the same time. The teaching and learning activities are not bounded by time. Dealing with these two modes of online learning, the Indonesian minister of education and culture allows the teachers whether to use the synchronous learning or the asynchronous learning (Rinekso et al., 2021).

The Policy of Learning from Home in Indonesia

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the government of Indonesia not to open all educational institutions. All the activities in the process of teaching and learning have to be done online from home. Furthermore, the guidelines for learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic have been released by the ministry of education and culture (Kemdikbud, 2020). Remote online learning should be facilitated for the students to keep them away from the COVID-19 virus so that their safety and health are maintained. The ministry of education and culture also issued the policy to provide the internet quota for the teachers and the students starting from students and teachers of early age school students up to the university lecturers and students (Permendikbud No. 20, 2020).

Then, in 2021 the Minister of Education and Culture, the Minister of Religion, the Minister of Health, and the Minister of Home Affairs released the joint decision related to the policy to run the teaching and learning activities in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the joint decision of the four ministers in 2021, the teaching and learning process could be done face-to-face offline with some restrictions and health protocols and or online, then, all the teachers and the school or university staff should have been vaccinated for COVID-19 disease for twice. Besides, the parents also could select whether their children would join limited face-to-face offline teaching and learning or online teaching and learning (SKB 4 Menteri No. 03, 2021). Furthermore, in 2022 the minister of education, culture, research, and technology declares the policy that limited face-to-face online teaching and learning can be done with the condition that the number of students in the class is only fifty percent of the normal room capacity (SE Mendikbudristek No. 2, 2022).

METHOD

Research Design

This research used a qualitative research design in which the purpose of it was to describe the challenges faced by the EFL lecturers at Indonesian private universities and their suggestions during their online teaching in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yin (2015) explains that the researchers can make the portrait, the summary as well as description of their understanding of the ongoing phenomenon.

Site and Participants

The subject of this research was six EFL lecturers from six different private universities in East Java. Those six private universities taken in this research were categorized as small private universities not having their own official online learning platform. The participants consisted of three females and three males.

Instruments

In collecting the data, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. The six participants in the semi-structured interview were selected using the considerations, such as their closeness and emotional relationship with their researcher and their willingness to join the interview. Then, this semi-structured interview was conducted online using Whatsapp Voice Notes for around thirty minutes for each participant.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the researcher used the theory of Miles et al. (2014) about the three steps of qualitative data analysis consisting of condensing the data, displaying the data, and drawing the conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Q1: Do you face challenges with your students' presence when teaching online during this COVID-19 pandemic? Would you please explain your answer!

All six EFL lecturers confirmed that they faced challenges to communicate with their students in their online EFL classes during this COVID-19 pandemic. Their challenges were that: (1) they could not see whether their students joined the class or not because of their unmuted videos when they were in the video conferences, and (2) they often wasted a few minutes waiting for the students to join the online class, and (3) they were not sure that all the students could hear their explanation, answers, and feedback because of the unstable internet connection from the lecturers and the students.

Q2: Do you have any problem using online platforms for handling your online EFL classes? Would you please explain your answer!

All of the participants of this research could operate and use the online platforms for their online EFL classes well. It was because the universities where they taught gave them the freedom to use any online learning platforms and applications for their classes.

So that these EFL lecturers chose the platforms and applications which they were familiar with. In addition, the students' easiness and convenience became the consideration of the lecturers in selecting the online platforms and applications that they used.

Q3: Is there any problem with your internet connection during your online teaching? Would you please explain your answer!

Five out of six EFL lecturers sometimes got internet connection problems. This unpredictable condition happened to both the lecturers and the students. Suddenly both of them lost their connection. As a result, the lecturers could not know their students' responses completely as well as the students could not get a complete explanation of the materials being studied. Yet, one of these six EFL lecturers had no problem at all related to the internet connection because she lived in such a big city.

Q4: How is your readiness for teaching EFL classes online? Would you please explain your answer!

All of the EFL lecturers being interviewed informed that they were ready to teach their online EFL classes. They prepared the materials on the PowerPoints as what they did when they carried out face-to-face EFL classes. They also created their videos containing the material explanations although it needed more time. Besides, they took the videos from Youtube for their materials. However, they got the problem of the course needing more practice. Then, they sometimes found that their home situation was not conducive enough to carry out the teaching and learning process.

Q5: What are your problems related to your students' responses during your online EFL classes? Would you please explain your answer!

All of them complained about their students' attitudes and responses in their online EFL classes. When having video conferences, all the students did not turn on their cameras for the reason that they would use more internet data. Unfortunately, it was often experienced that they did not answer their lecturers' calls in their video conferences. The fact was that their user names only joined the class but not the people. Next, the online class felt not interactive enough when the teaching and learning process was running but when the lecturers would end the class and say the closing greeting, most of them answered that closing greeting. Afterward, they often said that they have

understood the materials being studied, but they also often still asked for more explanations about the course from the lecturers by sending Whatsapp messages.

Q6: What are your suggestions for your universities so that you can run the online EFL teaching? Would you please explain your answer!

All the participants agreed that the policy and the facilities provided by the universities determined the running of the online EFL teaching and learning. In terms of the university policy, it is already clear that the EFL lecturers should combine the use of the two online learning modes (synchronous and asynchronous modes) and use more fun media so that the students can be interactive and enjoy the class. However, because the universities where the participant's work do not have a special platform for online learning, they suggest that the universities should provide an official platform, which is completed with an attendance list and some media (i.e. zoom, google meet) to ease the teaching and learning activities and also for saving some administration archives.

Discussion

The shifting of face-to-face EFL learning into online EFL learning at the university level during the COVID-19 pandemic is very challenging for the EFL lecturers. The EFL lecturers got problems with their students' presence in their online classes. When conducting video conferences, the students preferred not to turn on their videos so that the lecturers could not see their students. The reason why the students did so was that they could economize their internet data. Dealing with this problem, the minister of education and culture has given free internet data for the students for their online learning since 2020 (Permendikbud No. 20, 2020). Another challenge faced by the EFL lecturers in their online classes was that they could not start their teaching on time because some students did not join the class yet. It is in line with the study result by Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2021) informing that some students were always late to join the video conferences. To go further, the EFL lecturers also felt not sure whether their students could catch all the information having been explained because of the unstable internet connection. The connection to the internet which was not stable is one of the challenges for EFL lecturers in running their remote EFL classes. The poor internet connection in Indonesia becomes the challenge for running the remote Indonesian EFL classes (Ariyanti, 2020; Hardiyanty et al., 2021; Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2021).

For the teaching readiness, all of the EFL lecturers were ready to teach their online EFL classes. They prepared the materials for their teaching before the time to teach. In this case, they took longer teaching preparations for their online teaching. It deals with the findings of the previous studies explaining that the EFL teachers needed more time to prepare their materials for their online EFL classes (Nugroho et al., 2020; Nugroho & Mutiaraningrum, 2020). In addition, they also got the challenge related to their home condition which was not conducive for teaching even though the lecturers had already been ready to teach. The result of the study by Rinekso et al. (2021) shared the same thing in which the online EFL teaching and learning process was disturbed by the unconducive home situation. Besides, they found it difficult to prepare the course materials needing more practice so they had to be creative. Dealing with this, Zuhriyah & Fajarina (2021) state that the EFL lecturers should use their creativity in handling their online learning. Fortunately, they got no problem using the online platforms and applications for teaching their English courses. They usually used the platforms or applications which they were familiar with and their students were easy to use those tools. This finding is in contrast to the research finding by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) explaining that the EFL teachers got unfamiliar with how to operate the online platforms and applications for their online English classes.

Meanwhile, the students' responses during their online EFL learning also became the other challenge. Most of the students gave very slow responses, moreover, no response at all to the lecturers' instructions or questions. It could be because their internet connection was bad so there was a delay in a few minutes for the students to give the responses. Or, it could happen because actually their body was not present in their online class but their usernames only joined the class. But, suddenly the situation changed when the lecturers gave a closing greeting as a sign that the teaching and learning process would end. Most of them replied with that closing greeting. To sum up, the students gave very fast responses when the lecturers wanted to end their teaching but they had slow responses and were less interactive when their lecturers instructed and asked something related to the learning materials. It is similar to the study results by Nartiningrum & Nugroho (2021) and Nugroho et al. (2021) confirming that the student's responses to online teaching were slow.

Regarding the universities which do not have official online teaching and learning platforms yet, the participants suggested providing an online teaching platform that can serve the video conferences and store the teaching and learning administration archives, such as the attendance list of the students and the lecturers. These archives are needed as proof that the university has conducted the university tri dharma, especially in the field of education (Perka Arsip Nasional RI No. 24, 2011). According to Taib (2021), the archives created can describe all aspects of activities that occur in universities, both as scientific institutions and research institutions as well as public service institutions.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

During the pandemic of COVID-19, the EFL lecturers at small private universities faced challenges in running their remote EFL teaching. Their challenges were about getting difficulty in detecting their students' presence, having a not good internet connection, experiencing not conducive home conditions for teaching, and getting very slow and even no responses from their students. Regarding the unavailability of the official online platforms in the universities where they work, they suggested to the universities provide the official online learning platform completed with administration archives for teaching and learning.

Suggestions

The findings of this research can be used as a reference for the university policymakers to determine the guidelines of online teaching and learning activities generally and especially remote EFL learning activities. There are still many topics that can be explored further from this study, such as how to motivate and engage university students in their online EFL learning.

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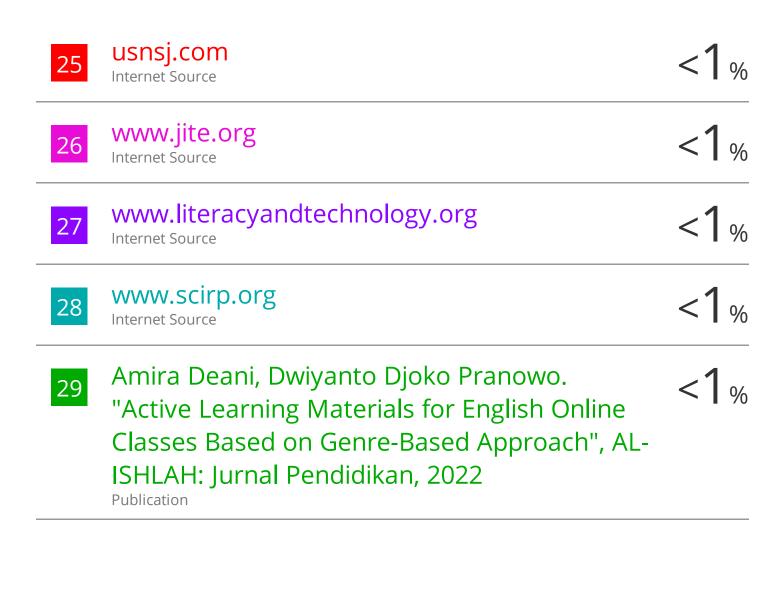
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