THE EFL TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN TEACHING SPEAKING ONLINE: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This article presents English teacher's challenges in teaching speaking online at one *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia. A qualitative *case study* was employed in conducting this research. Data were collected by using semi-structured interview with the English teacher through a set of open-ended questions. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and describe the obtained data in the process of selecting codes and constructing themes. The results revealed that the teacher faced some main challenges in teaching speaking online, as follows: (a) lack of students' confidence in speaking English, (b) internet connection issues, (c) lack of students' learning interactions and participations, (d) difficulty in designing/developing speaking materials for online class, (e) difficulty in managing the time, and (f) unreliable online teaching and learning devices. These challenges should be considered and anticipated by the teachers and other pertinent parties to get the alternatives for solutions.

Keywords: speaking, teacher's challenges, teaching speaking online

Introduction

Speaking is an important aspect in students' language learning. It helps students express their thoughts or feelings and have conversations with others in this global era (Erlina et al., 2019; Haryanto & Mukminin, 2012; Mukminin et al., 2019). In EFL context, mastery of English speaking skills is a priority for many second or foreign language students (Nunan, 2003; Richards, 2008). In fact, speaking skills are one of the most difficult skills that EFL students face (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). In this case, teaching speaking might be challenging for the teachers (Mukminin et al., 2015). They should have appropriate teaching strategies, especially in teaching online classes during the pandemic of COVID-19.

This COVID-19 pandemic has forced the schools and universities worldwide to shift their teaching and learning activities from offline to online to avoid the rapid spread of COVID-19 in schools. In Indonesia, the Minister of Education and Culture stated that face-to-face teaching and learning activities were temporarily suspended and replaced with teaching and learning online as of March 17, 2020 (Kemendikbud, 2020). This requires internet network, computers, laptops, or smart phones to connect teachers and students for distance learning. Persico, Pozzi, and Sarti (2010) mentioned that online teaching is applied to reach the presence of students who must take part in learning activities from home.

Online teaching that allows real time participation and synchronous interaction can be made possible with the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Navarro and Shoemaker (2020), claimed that the use of ICT in education during the pandemic has become integral to the teaching and learning interaction. Prasojo, Habibi, Mukminin, and Marzulina (2018) also mentioned that teachers and students are currently in an environment that supports the integration of technology which is part of teaching. Therefore, teachers often face some challenges related to the use of ICT in the forms of various applications or learning system management tools such as WhatsApp, Zoom, Google Classroom, e-learning, Google Meet, and others to teach online classes (Habibi et al., 2019; Hadiyanto et al., 2013).

The sudden change from in-class learning settings to online learning settings affects teacher teaching readiness, this is because teaching online is still relatively new, particularly in Indonesia. Previous studies reported that online classrooms certainly have some challenges for teachers and students in carrying out the online teaching and teaching activities (Cao, Fang, Hou, Han, Xu, Dong, & Zheng, 2020). Gonzalez and St.Louis (2018) mentioned in their studies, the method of delivering material in online teaching must be appropriate and interesting for students; it will be useful to motivate students to take online classes. In the same manner, Priyanto (2009) in his research found that many schools in Indonesia do not have experience in online teaching because there is no previous online teaching arrangement. Therefore, teachers' challenges in teaching online classes during the pandemic are important to investigate.

The results of our preliminary study conducted at one *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia showed that the English teacher encountered several challenges in teaching speaking through the online platform. The teacher cannot observe the students' speaking ability, eye contact, gestures, and appearances directly in teaching and learning process. Indeed, online learning brings different social attitudes due to limited teaching and learning interactions (Siemens, 2005). Related to the description above, this study focused on the online

teaching challenges and aimed at describing those challenges to be considered in identifying and determining alternative strategies for solutions.

Literature Review

Teaching online

Teaching online is a learning process that does not require a face-to-face process between teachers and students which is carried out remotely, need the technology or ICT, and requires media or electronic devices to support the learning process. Technology and information support and make it easier for teachers and students to carry out daily activities, ranging from sending messages, school assignments, and online communication through messages and improving several things in online learning. Online learning often occurs through the internet which is also called e-learning or distance learning. Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020) mentioned that the teaching process in the classroom can use ICT as a source of learning materials. Therefore, teachers should have skills for using ICT for teaching online.

Teaching speaking

Teaching cannot be separated from the learning process which means guiding and facilitating learning, enabling learners to learn, and managing appropriate learning conditions (Brown, 2000). It is in line with research conducted by Rasyid (2016) found that in teaching English, the ability of English teacher is needed who can form and maintain effective and interesting classroom conditions or situations so that students can enjoy the learning process in class, so it is hoped that they will practice speaking skills. There are several things in teaching speaking to students, namely to be able to use word stress and sentences correctly, the language used as a tool to express assessment or show assessment, and to produce sounds or speech patterns in good English (Nunan, 2003; Mukminin et al, 2018). Teaching speaking is not only about presenting language but requires communicative oral communication actions (Wenxia, 2008; Mukminin et al., 2015). A person should know some aspects of speaking to have good speaking skills. Brown (2001) described the speaking aspects as vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and accuracy.

1. Vocabulary
   Vocabulary is a core part of language acquisition. Having good vocabulary skills makes it easier for students and makes it easier for students on how to speak, listen, write, and read (Renandya & Richards, 2002). Without knowing a large number of large vocabularies, a person may experience difficulties in following or learning English.

2. Pronunciation
   Pronunciation is away for someone to be able to produce words that are spoken clearly and accurately when speaking (Kline, 2001). Furthermore, Fraser (2001) stated that pronunciation also includes several aspects of speech such as intonation, expression, rhythm, articulation and more peripheral eye contact, gestures or body language.

3. Fluency
   Fluency is something that can be seen from the extent to which a person can use language confidently, quickly, without any doubts or mistakes in choosing words (Nunan, 2003). Fluency is the ability of someone who is fluent in speaking coherently and using the correct words with a clear pronunciation of a person (Hedge, 2000). In this case, fluency can also be used to measure a person's ability to speak and also to use language.

4. Accuracy
    Accuracy is something that leads to the extent to which one's speech can be accepted grammatically, with clear and precise pronunciation (Nunan, 2015). Furthermore, Thornbury (2005), accuracy is very important for students to pay attention to in learning because the correct use of grammatical structures requires length, complexity of speech and well-structured clauses.

Media in teaching speaking online

There are several media platforms to support the online teaching and learning process:
1. WhatsApp (WA)
    WhatsApp is an application that can be used to communicate between one person and another. WA is an easy-to-use application and in the online classroom teachers and students can use the WA application to communicate with students during teaching online. In the WA application there is a group feature that is connected to instant messaging can easily share learning objects through comments, messages, and students can use voice note fitur or send the video for speaking class. This group feature can be used by teachers and students to discuss the learning materials taught in class. WA gives students the ability to create class publications of their assignments in groups (Barhoumi, 2015). Information and knowledge is easy to create and share via WA instant messaging. WA has many conveniences for students and teachers to use as a medium for online teaching speaking during the pandemic.
2. ZOOM
    Zoom is a cloud-based service that offers online meetings, webinars, and meetings as well as providing content sharing and online video conferencing capabilities. Zoom can help the learning process, for example, English teachers unite their students in an online space then the teacher can explain the material as in a face-to-face class. Zoom is a very useful and effective platform for teachers and students during online classes and can improve language skills appropriately, especially in speaking activity. The zoom platform is more motivating and interesting for students to use in learning the target language through technology (Ramadani, 2020).

Characteristic teaching speaking online

Teaching speaking online has a unique characteristic, namely as a network that allows teachers and students to communicate with each other without having in person meeting. According to Riyana (2020), there some characteristics of online learning, namely:
1. Using teaching materials that are made independently by the teacher and stored online, so that the teaching materials can be accessed by students via the internet without any limitations of place and time.
2. With the development of technology, it can make it easier for teachers and students to access schedules, curricula, learning activities and all things related to learning in the classroom.
3. Using internet network services in accordance with technological developments, teacher can teach speaking online use the platform without face-to-face.

Challenges in teaching speaking online

In this digital era, teachers must have the high level of creativity and innovation needed in the teaching process. In this case, teachers are required to always keep abreast of technological

developments. It is in line with research conducted by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020), which found that there are three challenges that teachers often face when online teaching:

1. The lack of experience and ability of teachers in teaching using online teaching models during the Covid-19 pandemic such as designing the material online for the students. This is because teachers are less prepared in implementing online teaching that is used when teaching during the pandemic.

2. Challenges in the problem of communication and interaction between teachers and students. There are several other factors including the limited time and place so that in this case the teacher is less flexible in explaining the subject matter when online classes take place, the student factor is the lack of focus and motivation in participating in the online teaching process, many students do not actively participate in the learning process and the difficulty of teachers in motivating them to be active in the online learning and teaching process.

3. Challenges in student participation in online teaching, many students are passive in participating in online teaching activities. Other contributing factors are unstable internet network, students do not have internet quota, do not have smartphones and difficulties in operating applications and platforms used during online classes.

Methodology

Research design

This research used a qualitative case study design. In qualitative research the researcher looks for the meaning of the phenomenon from the participant's point of view (Creswell, 2014). Case study method is an empirical investigation that investigates contemporary phenomena with real-life contexts, when the boundaries between phenomena and contexts are not clear, and sources of evidence are widely used (Yin, 2003). The qualitative case study approach applied in this study to determine the phenomena faced by the English teacher in teaching speaking online at one *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia.

Participant of the study

The participant was selected using purposive sampling. The participant was selected based on the purpose of research to identify a lot of information and population particular characteristics (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). In this study, the English teacher's challenges in teaching speaking online were explored. In this case, one participant was selected with the characteristics of permanent and certified English teacher with more than five years of teaching experience. These criteria were important for this research to allow the researchers to gain informative data about the English teacher's challenges in teaching speaking online.

Data collection

To collect the data in this study, the researchers used one-on-one interviews. According to Creswell (2012), one-on-one interview is the process of collecting data in which the researcher asks questions to participant and records the answers from only one participant in the study at a time. The interviews involve unstructured and open-ended questions to elicit views and opinions from the research participant. Then, according to Creswell (2012) open-ended response to questions allows the participant to create the options for responding.

Data analysis

In analyzing the data, the researchers applied thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, and reporting pattern (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the researchers analyzed data about teacher's challenges in teaching speaking online based on some steps purposed by Creswell (2014). First, the researchers collected the data from interviews (transcriptions or typed notes). Second, the researchers put the data into computer files. Then, the researchers began to code the data related to the research question of this study. Last, the researcher made a personal communication as the final summary of data analysis.

Establishment trustworthiness

The trustworthiness was used to validate the data by applying member checking. According to Creswell (2014), member checking is a process to determine the accuracy of qualitative findings through taking a final report or description or certain theme back to participants and determining whether the participant feels the data is accurate. The researchers delivered transcripts and interpretations of the data to the research participant to verify the accuracy of the data.

Findings

The research findings presented in this study were the teacher's challenges in teaching speaking online at at one *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia. The following are the descriptions of the findings:

Teacher's challenges in teaching speaking online

The researchers discovered some challenges faced by the English teacher in teaching speaking online. Table 1 summarizes the themes and codes derived from the analysis of qualitative data obtained from interviews:

Table 1. *Themes and codes for teacher's challenges in teaching speaking online*

Themes	Codes
1. Lack of students' confidence in speaking English	A. Not fluent in English speaking English B. Afraid of making mistakes in speaking
2. Internet connection issues	C. The students are out the city D. Internet blackout or shutdown problems E. Poor internet connection
3. Lack of teaching and learning interactions	F. Lack of teacher-student interactions G. Lack of student-student interactions
4. Lack of students' participations in learning	H. Reluctant to ask and answer the questions I. Did not do and collect the assignments
5. Difficulty in developing speaking materials for online class	J. Difficulty in developing speaking materials in the forms of videos, presentation slides, and recordings.
6. Difficulty in managing the time	K. Lack of time to deliver the speaking materials during online class. L. Did not have enough time to give feedback on students speaking performance and assignments.
7. Lack of reliable online teaching and learning devices	M. Lack of computers (desktops and laptops) N. Unreliable internet devices O. Lack of webcam, microphone, and headset, LCD Projector

The themes and codes constructed from the interview data presented in the table 1 above were described as follows. One of the challenges faced by teacher in teaching online speaking class was related to students' speaking ability. Most of them were not fluent and had less courage in English speaking. It is supported by the teacher, "*The abilities of students are still lack in speaking, students face many difficulties such as they are not fluent in English speaking and do not have courage to show their abilities when the teacher asks them to speak in English*". Then*, "They have problem with speaking fluency. Some of them still have difficulty in pronouncing words*" (Interview, June 14, 2022).

Some of the students faced some difficulties to join the online class due to poor or unstable internet connection and quota to support the online speaking activities. As mentioned by the teacher "*The students complain about network problems, internet blackout when taking online classes because they live out of the city". "Students do not always have sufficient internet quota so they cannot join the online classes*". Then, "*Also, in online class we face problem with the signal because the signal is unstable*" (Interview, June 14, 2022).

Lack of teaching and learning interactions also complained by the teacher in teaching speaking online. It was difficult for the teacher to make the class interactive. The teacher cannot observe the students' abilities directly in online speaking class. As said by the teacher "*I cannot observe the students' English speaking abilities because most of them do not interact with the teacher and classmates*" (Interview, June 14, 2022).

Another difficulty faced by the teacher in teaching speaking online was the majority of students did not participate actively in learning. They were reluctant to practice speaking and do their speaking tasks. As said by the teacher "*Some of them are not interested in practicing their speaking skills*". Then, "*Some students do not submit their speaking assignments*"(Interview, June 14, 2022).

Difficulty in developing speaking materials for online class was also reported by the teacher. Selecting and developing speaking materials in the forms of videos, presentation slides, and recordings were quite challenging for the teacher. As mentioned by the teacher "*For the material in online classes, I think it is quite difficult to make material that is interesting, like video and recording to make the students enthusiastic in learning. I observed that some students are demotivated in practicing their speaking skills*" (Interview, June 14, 2022).

In teaching speaking online, it was also difficult for the teacher to give feedback on students' speaking performance. The teacher did not have enough time check and provide feedback on students speaking assignments. As mentioned by the teacher, "*There are so many students in the class that I am unable to manage or pay attention to students one by one during online classes, such as I cannot provide feedback on their video assignments. I think the time allocation is not enough to have various activities in online classes*" (Interview, June 14, 2022).

Unreliable online teaching and learning devices also a challenge for the teacher in teaching English speaking online, Lack of computers (desktops and laptops), unreliable internet devices, webcam, microphone, headset, and LCD projector in the school required the teacher to use their own laptop and internet data to conduct online class. As said by the teacher "*The school has some problems related to the facilities, such as computers that can be used by teachers to conduct online classes, we have computers at school but it is for the school operators". "We usually use our own laptop to do online classes*" (Interview, June 14, 2022).

Discussion

The first challenge mentioned by the teacher was the students' lack of confidence in speaking English. They were not fluent and afraid of making mistakes in speaking English. Mufanti

(2015) showed that the students felt anxious, worried, and shy to communicate in English. It was suggested to support the students to have the courage to communicate in English. Pronunciation problem might reduce the students' self-confidence in speaking and limit the students' interaction. Aulia (2018) added that many students are not confident in speaking in front of their friends. Therefore, teachers should apply various strategies to train the students to be more confident in speaking and communicating with others.

Internet connection issue was the second challenge encountered by the teacher in teaching speaking online. Poor or unstable internet connection was often caused by insufficient internet quota to have online classes. The finding showed that some of the students did not join online classes because they were out of the city and did not have a good signal for online class. Irawan, Dwisona, and Lestari (2020) also claimed that internet connection is one of the weaknesses of teaching speaking online. Unstable or poor internet network was one of the main obstacles for online learning in Indonesia.

The next challenge that the teacher faced was the lack of teaching and learning interaction, both teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction. In face-to-face classes, teachers and students can interact directly, but in online classes the interaction between teachers and students is limited. The findings showed that teacher had difficulty when online teaching speaking because she did not see students' abilities directly and there is no interaction between them. Lack of interaction in online learning becomes a big challenge for teacher. In addition, speaking requires intensive interaction between teacher and students. Interaction in this sense means face-to-face interaction at the same time in the same room. The teacher feels that the interaction through the online platform was not optimal for speaking practices. Eye contact, gestures and student appearances cannot be observed during the teaching and learning process, online learning brings different social attitudes due to limited student interaction (Siemens, 2005). In short, teachers must be able to build and maximize good interactions with students so that the online teaching and learning process can run smoothly.

The findings also indicated that the students were less motivated to participate in learning during online class. Poor internet access learning condition at home made them difficult to join online class smoothly and do their speaking assignment. Pambudi and Prasetyarini (2021) also emphasized that many students could not participate in many online lessons due to internet signal constraints. In such a condition, teachers' should use of various teaching methods to encourage students' participation in learning (Abdullah, Bakar, & Mahbob, 2012). Sometimes, teachers should make some repetitions in explaining the lessons and apply paired-work or group-work to have the students practice their speaking skills.

Difficulty in designing or developing appropriate speaking materials for online class was also challenging for the teacher. As asserted by Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020), suitable and interesting materials are required for effective online teaching and learning. Online class requires a greater investment than face-to-face class. The teachers need double effort and extra time to design their teaching materials to be more interactive (Green, 2016). In short, the teachers need to work over on their instructional materials to be shared and explained through online learning media and application.

The findings showed that the teacher had difficulty to handle online speaking class, especially in checking and providing feedback on students' works. In online teaching class, the teacher only had two hours a week to explain the materials and give feedback on students' assignments. Limited time allocation was one of teachers' obstacles in teaching speaking online. This

problem needs to be addressed because teacher's feedback on students' works is an essential part of learning process to bring about an improvement in students' performance and achievement (Hermansyah & Aridah, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). In addition, the teacher also had some problems related to learning facilities, such as computers (desktops and laptops), webcam, microphone, headset, and LCD projector that can be used by teacher to conduct online class. These devices are important elements to support effective online teaching and learning program.

Conclusion and implications

This study revealed that there were several challenges encountered by the teacher in teaching speaking online at one *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia. Those challenges are (a) lack of students' confidence in speaking English, (b) internet connection issues, (c) lack of learning interactions and participations, (d) difficulty in developing speaking materials for online class, (e) difficulty in managing the time, and (f) lack of reliable online teaching and learning devices. This study implies that teacher and other related parties are required to find out the appropriate solutions to address such kind of challenges for effective online teaching and learning program.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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