

# An Exploration of Lecturer Strategies in Managing Language Skills Courses Using Online Learning during the Pandemic Covid-19: A Case of Brawijaya University-Indonesia

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## Abstract

This article describes the online learning strategy for language skills in the English Language Education Study Program of Brawijaya University-Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research is exploratory qualitative research that uses observation and interviews as a way to obtain data. The data and information obtained are used as a basis in discussing this research problem with descriptive analysis. All lecturers take advantage of the available learning facilities by implementing synchronous and asynchronous learning sessions. Some information was obtained from interviews with lecturers stating that in using synchronous sessions, the lecturers use the Zoom, Google Meet, and VLM facilities to manage teleconference model lectures. Meanwhile, lecturers use the Google Classroom facility to carry out various activities in using asynchronous sessions, including sending reading assignments, projects, online discussions, and sending asynchronous class schedules. One of the learning strategies in this research is the strategy of managing the online learning process. In the strategy of managing learning, creating student discipline, in this case, so that students actively participate by turning on the camera in a synchronous session, is needed to create meaningful interactions. At last, the researcher suggests further research to develop language skills courses and pedagogy courses.

**Keywords:** language skills, courses, strategies, online, managing skill

## Introduction

The Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak that attacked several countries in the world, including Indonesia, in early 2020 has changed many aspects of human life, including learning. Almost all learning activities transform from a conventional way to an online learning model. In Brawijaya University, this online learning model is applied in all schools based on the decision of the Rector of Brawijaya University. The first decision was the Socialization of the Chancellor of the Brawijaya University Number 2844/UN10/2020 regarding the Prevention of COVID-19 in Brawijaya University, which was later strengthened by the second decision, namely Rector Letter Number 3018/UN10/HK.05.4/2020, which stated that all forms of learning and examinations must be done online. At the school level, the Faculty of Cultural Studies conducts online learning based on Circular Number: 559/UN10./F12/TU/1/2020 concerning Prevention of the Spread of COVID-19 in the Faculty of Cultural Studies.

In line with advances in other areas of learning, the last decade has seen a significant increase in online language learning offered by learning institutions or by specialized platforms. The perceived improvement of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in different periods, both in foreign languages and online, has

represented the core of much research. Research conducted has emphasized both the strengths and weaknesses of integrating ICT in language learning, for example, offering an overview of studies conducted between 1981 and 2005 on the use of CALL in language learning at all levels of learning, a previous study highlighted the positive effects in terms of writing quality (fluency, spelling, use of registers, audience awareness), reading and listening skills, as well as in relation to student's involvement in foreign language classes and to their attitudes towards the use of ICT, provided that stability and technological support are ensured. In higher learning, the benefits of implementing online foreign language teaching relate to distance learning and face-to-face language teaching and learning where ICT-based synchronous or asynchronous activities are introduced.

In distance learning for foreign languages, where student's communication with teachers and peers has been hindered for years, the pioneering use of synchronous teaching methods soon after 2000 offered a paradigm shift for foreign language teaching and learning. Distance learning students are offered the opportunity to practice and develop their speaking skills during class, communicate in writing, benefit from direct feedback from the teacher, and have an enjoyable class. Several studies focusing on full-time face-to-face learning show that online approaches make foreign language teaching and learning more flexible and

individualized, based on authentic material, leading to increased attendance and engagement.

### **Background**

Online mode learning is the use of the internet network by students in the learning process. The online mode of learning approach has the following characteristics: First, it requires learners to build and create knowledge independently (constructivism); Second, learners will collaborate with other learners in building their knowledge and solving problems together (social constructivism); Third, forming an inclusive community of learners; Fourth, utilizing web media that can be accessed via the internet, computer-based learning, virtual classes, and/or digital classes; and fifth, interactivity, independence, accessibility, and enrichment (Guideline of Online Education Implementation, Directorate General of Learning and Higher Education, Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education 2016:6).

The benefits of online language learning are obvious, but some research suggests that the positive effects may be limited by technical and personal issues, such as low student and teacher self-efficacy for online learning or computer use and, by student's low active participation or dominant intervention. The researchers also point to the challenges associated with selecting relevant activities and the balanced integration of all language skills into evaluation procedures and the way teaching materials are used online. Recent research conducted on online learning shows that student's preferences during the pandemic lead to teaching materials that can be found on e-learning platforms for a long time, for example, pre-recorded video lectures and that students can use on their own and in their own place. Convenience, thus meeting individual needs. Other studies have emphasized that online teaching is based on the transmission of knowledge and that teachers are more or less consciously trying to imitate old teaching and learning. In the current extreme conditions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers highlight that the use of this approach in foreign language teaching can facilitate adherence to the planned curriculum and overcome student's mixed feelings about the new learning environment or difficulties encountered. Nevertheless, the online teaching facilities that are most beneficial to foreign language students or most preferred have not been identified, such as the suitability or incompatibility in this case between foreign languages and other school subjects; for example, video conferencing is valued by foreign language students and fosters their language skills, but students in other subjects only partially recognize its benefits and also describe it as uncomfortable and self-conscious.

### **Evaluation of the Case**

The results of initial interviews with several lecturers who teach skills courses show that lecturers experience new obstacles in managing online learning. Some of these barriers are related to student discipline, student signal and network barriers, and difficulties in applying the principles of teaching foreign languages effectively.

In terms of difficulties in enforcing discipline, the lecturers found that it was quite difficult to monitor student activity considering a large number of students, more than 30 students in one frame. Lecturers often remind students to always be on camera, but not all students obey the lecturer's request. In addition, some student behavior in online learning sometimes does not uphold the ethics of learning when they display a profile photo in informal clothes or do not write down the student's real name as requested by the lecturer. The problem of timeliness is also an obstacle for lecturers in managing this online learning. Many students arrive late or go in and out of online classes without permission. Signal problems are also one of the lecturer's problems. Students who come from all over Indonesia are quite wide and varied, ranging from big cities to remote areas that do not have internet network access, which becomes an obstacle in managing online learning.

The difficulty of applying the principle of student-centered learning, especially the learner-centered principle, which requires

teachers to treat students according to their interests and learning needs, is also an obstacle. Sultanate teachers recognize the character, learning styles, and individual learning needs of students in online learning because there are no physical meetings and face-to-face classrooms. Another obstacle is the difficulty of asking students to be actively involved in learning, especially speaking learning, because students cannot communicate directly as in conventional learning.

Online teaching is based on the transmission of knowledge and that teachers are more or less consciously trying to imitate conventional teaching and learning, and in the current extreme conditions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers highlight that the use of this approach in foreign language teaching can facilitate compliance with the curriculum. Planned and address the mix of student's feelings about the new learning environment or the difficulties encountered. However, the online teaching facilities that are most beneficial to foreign language students or most preferred have not been identified, as is the suitability or incompatibility in this case between foreign languages and other school subjects. For example, video conferencing is valued by foreign language students and develops their language skills, but students in other subjects only partially recognize its benefits and also describe it as uncomfortable and self-conscious.

In addition to having teaching skills in delivering face-to-face learning content, teachers must also have knowledge and skills in developing computer-based learning resources such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint and skills to access the internet, then be able to combine two or more of these learning methods. A teacher can start learning with a structured face-to-face then proceed with computer-based learning of this foreign language and online learning. The combination of learning can also be applied to the integration of e-learning and online learning, using computers in class, and face-to-face learning in class. Tutoring needs to be given to students from the start so that students have combination learning skills from the start because this ability will be a learning tool in the future. The role of the teacher is very important because this requires a process of transforming content knowledge and online learning as a tool. With a better economic system and people's welfare, the world's population will also increase. Therefore it is necessary to do efficient learning in the use of resources; online learning-based learning is a necessity to be implemented in the learning system, especially in Indonesia. The key to all of this lies in the role of teachers who have the competence to manage online learning-based learning.

This research is exploratory qualitative research that uses observation and interviews as a way to obtain data. The data and information obtained are used as a basis in discussing this research problem with descriptive analysis. Sugiyono (2013:206) explains that the descriptive analysis method is used to analyze data by describing or describing the data that has been collected as it is without intending to make conclusions that apply to the public or generalizations. This study did not give any treatment to the respondents; only collected data using standardized instruments, such as interviews, observations, document reviews, and so on.

First, collecting data on the implementation of online learning through interviews and reviewing documents on faculty academic policies in supporting the implementation of online learning, lecturer's readiness in responding to university policies in online learning implementation, perceptions, and experiences of lecturer's teaching strategies related to lectures with online learning models. Second, editing is done on the results of interviews that are structured and which are filled in through formal interviews. In the editing process, this is corrected again. The data analysis technique in this study was carried out in three stages, namely data reduction, presentation, data, and conclusion drawing. Done to sharpen, classify, direct, discard unnecessary and organize data in such a way that conclusions can be drawn and verified (Miles & Huberman, 1992:15). After classifying the data on the basis of the theme, the researcher abstracted the rough data into a brief description. Data obtained from document review and results of in-depth interviews with respondents were collected to draw conclusions so that they can be used as descriptive narratives; finally, the submission of recommendations that are in

accordance with the pedagogical study and the context of Brawijaya University. In developing this model, the selection of the right model in the right socialization strategy will be carried out in introducing online learning to the academic community.

### Proposed Solution

This article tries to describe the online learning strategy for language skills in the English Language Education Study Program of Brawijaya University-Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The solution offered in this research was based on the data collected through interviews with lecturers and curriculum documents. The proposed solution is also theory-based, driven from the references dealing with theory and practices of language teaching methodology.

Vale et al. (1991: 28-31) say that there are principles of language teaching that become condition variables for student's foreign language learning outcomes. The first principle states that students will learn a foreign language best if they are treated as individuals with their own needs and interests. This principle is called the learner-centered principle. In one class, of course, there are students with learning experience backgrounds, interest in language skills or micro-skills, learning motivation, talents and abilities, cognitive, affective, maturity, and different learning styles. The background of the foreign language learning experience and the student's initial abilities can be easily observed by the teacher by making a few observations, or if necessary, a placement test and questionnaires are carried out at the beginning of the learning process.

Secondly, students will learn a foreign language best if they are given the opportunity to participate in communication using that language in a variety of activities. This principle is called the active involvement principle. Nelson and Carol's research (in Vale, Scarino, and McKay, 1991) shows that the greater the opportunity given to students to participate in communication using a foreign language, the more their foreign language skills will increase.

And the last, students will learn a foreign language best if the communicative activities given to them are comprehensive and relevant to their needs and interests. This principle is called the immersion principle. By applying constructivist theory, teachers must realize that students also have their way of constructing the use of communicative activities; namely, they will learn gradually and integrate with their mother tongue system. Selinker (in Vale, Scarino, & McKay, 1991) says that there is a certain period in which students will confuse the system in their mother tongue with a foreign language system in communicating, which is called inter language.

As a study program for producing prospective English language teachers, in the English Education Study Program, there are three major groups of subjects. First, language skills courses, second pedagogy or education courses, and third general courses. In language skills courses, the courses aimed at improving English language skills include reading, writing, listening, speaking and grammar, as well as integration courses from other courses. These language skills (integrated skills). The followings are the description of language skills courses chosen in this research:

#### 1. Intensive Reading

This course is taught in semester 2 with a weight of 2 credits. In this course, the lecturer gives a reading text with a new theme, tries to carry out the process of eliciting (finding out) student's general knowledge related to the theme by asking questions or asking their opinion about the theme so that students can make estimates or estimates about what will be discussed in the ongoing face-to-face. In the process of making estimates about the theme, students relate it to sensory experiences related to the theme so that it can help in understanding the reading. This method seeks to make students interested in reading material, invites students to estimate the content of reading and provides motivation to read. Lecturer creativity is needed in determining the right learning method for students. This course is one of the ways to improve the ability to understand written discourse in English as a basis for following the next course.

#### 2. Academic Speaking

In this course, students are expected to be able to analyze experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. In addition, students are able to identify the main ideas of complex texts on concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their area of specialization. Students are also able to distinguish ideas in clear and detailed texts on various subjects and points of view on topical issues providing advantages and disadvantages of various options. Able to do a good command of English for communication. This course focuses on equipping and training students with the necessary speaking skills for their future careers as ELT teachers who think critically about certain phenomena and present them through various types of speaking. Students explore some of the current issues related to intercultural values and environmental issues in a variety of topics and sources. Project-based learning through presentations, roundtable discussions, panel discussions, and e-portfolios enables students to analyze problems, develop them, and provide solutions.

#### 3. Academic Writing

This course aims to develop the writing skills of EFL students on the use of communicative language in an academic context. This course equips students in the field of academic writing, which includes writing papers in an academic context, writing scientific and popular articles, as well as abstracts and synopsis equipped with ideas from various related references. Throughout the course, time will be available for practice, evaluation, commentary, and language analysis. At the end of the semester, it is expected to be able to produce papers in an academic context, popular articles, scientific articles, abstracts, synopsis.

#### 4. Basic English Components

In this course, students are expected to be able to apply dynamic, innovative, and professional ELT practices by paying attention to inclusive and intercultural values. Able to distinguish English vocabulary and grammar rules in four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) with a minimum CEFR level of B2. Able to interpret and apply familiar colloquial expressions and very basic phrases aimed at satisfying the needs of concrete types. In addition, the student is expected to be able to demonstrate the ability to introduce himself and others as well as demonstrate the ability to ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he lives, people he knows and things he owns. English Literacy is a basic course in English writing and grammar for non-native English speakers. It emphasizes basic writing skills such as sentence types and proper use of simple grammatical structures, basic linking, and descriptive vocabulary. Students will read for pleasure and academic purposes. Basic reading strategies will be introduced with a strong emphasis on vocabulary development. The main verb forms (present simple, present continuous, simple past) are introduced, able to organize interactions in a simple and clear way. They are learning themes related to family, hobbies and leisure activities, holidays, shopping, education, and work.

#### 5. Basic English Grammar

Able to distinguish English vocabulary and grammatical rules in four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) with a minimum CEFR level of B2. Produce quality graduates with divinity in the One and Only God, with the determination to continue learning, broad-minded, maintaining discipline and work ethic, and able to compete at the international level to master good English grammar in communicating. Able to distinguish English vocabulary and grammatical rules in four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) with a minimum CEFR level of B2.

#### 6. Critical Listening

Implement dynamic, innovative, and professional ELT practices by paying attention to inclusive and intercultural values. Able to

distinguish English vocabulary and grammar rules in four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) with a minimum CEFR level of B2. Produce quality graduates with divinity in the one and only God, with the determination to continue learning, be broad-minded, maintain discipline and work ethic, and be able to compete at the international level. Has the capacity to empower the community through the development of problem-solving concepts by applying scientific methods. Able to analyze experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly provide reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. Able to identify the main ideas of complex texts on concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their area of specialization. Being able to distinguish ideas in clear and detailed texts on various subjects and points of view on topical issues provides the advantages and disadvantages of various options. Able to perform a good command of English for communication. Student's experience in exploring and presenting material is needed to equip them for their future careers as ELT teachers or educators who are able to select or develop teaching materials, think critically about phenomena, and improve listening skills. Students explore some of the current issues related to intercultural values and environmental issues in a variety of topics and sources. Through project-based learning, roundtable discussions, panel discussions, and e-portfolios, students can analyze problems, provide solutions, and submit them on an online platform.

Online Learning Strategies for Language Skills Courses - This part discusses the strategies applied by lecturers of language skills courses in managing online learning. All lecturers take advantage of the available learning facilities by implementing synchronous and asynchronous learning sessions. From interviews with lecturers, some information was obtained as follows:

1. In using synchronous sessions, the lecturers use the Zoom, Google Meet, and VLM facilities to hold teleconference model lectures.

2. In using asynchronous sessions, lecturers use the Google Classroom facility to carry out various activities, including sending reading assignments, projects, online discussions, sending asynchronous class schedules.

3. In an asynchronous session, the lecturer asks students to read the submitted material to be discussed in the synchronous session.

4. In a synchronous session, the lecturers allow students to turn off the camera as long as they are still listening. This policy is based on the consideration of saving quotas because turning on the camera often takes up a larger quota.

5. At the beginning of the pandemic around March – April 2020, lecturer A, for example, asked all students to always turn on the camera, but this could not last long due to student reasons regarding the quota issue.

6. All lecturers decide that students must turn on the camera when they are speaking in presentations, asking questions, giving opinions, or responding to statements and questions from fellow students or lecturers.

7. Lecturers are of the opinion that when all students turn on the camera when students or lecturers deliver their presentations, they will feel more appreciated and increase student's confidence in learning.

8. There is a course material that a lecturer feels is no longer suitable for online learning needs; apart from being used for 10 years, the nature of the teaching material is no longer suitable for online learning.

As explained earlier, the purpose of this research is to describe online learning strategies for language skills courses in the English Language Education Study Program FCS UB during the covid-19 pandemic. From the results of lecturer interviews and some supporting data from documents and literature reviews, it can be noted several interesting things related to online learning for this language skills course.

Learning language skills has its own uniqueness, one of which is that several principles in it imply active participation and habituation of students. This course requires students to actively participate in learning in various forms and utilize various learning resources and media. Meanwhile, online learning also has its own uniqueness, namely the absence of physical face-to-face, which limits the interaction between lecturers and students. The absence of this physical interaction makes the learning model different;

namely, the lecturers anticipate it with learning models from synchronous and asynchronous sessions.

In his writing, Rifiyanti (2020:35) said that: Another finding is about learner's perceptions of the level of difficulty of language skills which they had to learn in English online learning. The learners perceived that the listening section was the most difficult skill to learn in an online English class. Thus, the learner's perceptions of these findings become an input for lecturers and institutions to pay more attention and to improve the quality of learning English online so that the results and outcomes are as desired. Finally, further studies are suggested to explore and improve learning and teaching, particularly in English online learning.

In other words, the students considered that the listening part was the most difficult skill to learn in an online English class. Thus, student's perceptions of these findings become input for lecturers and institutions to pay more attention to and improve the quality of online English learning so that the results and results are as desired. Finally, further research is suggested to explore and improve learning and teaching, especially in online learning English.

One of the learning strategies in this research is the strategy of managing the online learning process. In the strategy of managing learning, creating student discipline, in this case, so that students actively participate by turning on the camera in a synchronous session, is needed to create meaningful interactions. Marta L. Montiel-Chamorro (2018: p.86) adds that: "Self-regulation, discipline, and consistency are required to optimal performance. Students who follow the pacing guides and work as expected, completing all tasks and assignments, are more likely to develop the language skills they need to advance in their language learning process."

In creating discipline, consistency is needed for optimal performance. Students who follow the expected guidelines, completing all assignments are more likely to develop the language skills they need to advance in their language learning process.

Maican and Cocoradă (2021:18) added that online learning that utilizes internet network-based technology must be easily accessible by students. The use of technology media in synchronous and asynchronous sessions is prevented as much as possible so as not to cause boredom, stress, and depression for both parties. In courses that require a greater intensity of speaking, the use of breakout rooms is an alternative. One of the lecturers interviewed explained that in the courses he teaches, he uses breakout rooms, but sometimes he cannot intensively monitor these rooms.

"Technologies must be accessible and usable, as they can reduce the stress connected to learning in a general traumatizing context. The use of breakout rooms, available in video conferences, can support the need for social relationships and enhance the pleasant atmosphere of FL learning. The use of online lectures, discussion questions, and e-mail communication with teachers have been identified as online teaching strategies which engage students and reduce anxiety, while also increasing knowledge." (Maican and Cocoradă, 2021:18).

On a different occasion, Maican and Cocoradă (2021) added about the importance of a pleasant atmosphere for students in online learning. They also emphasized the need for challenging situations in foreign language learning. Several lecturers interviewed have stated that this challenging atmosphere can be done by utilizing the features available in online learning facilities by applying them.

"Considering the literature review and our results, we can define the sustainable online learning of FL as the active and enjoyable learning of foreign languages by means of blended systems which can be adaptively used in possibly challenging situations in the future to foster language proficiency. In line with sustainable learning, teachers should develop cross-cutting competencies, as student's ability to reflect on their own learning process, stimulate positive activating emotions and increase their wellbeing and resilience to distress in learning situations" (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021).

## Conclusion

The online learning strategy applied to the learning process for language skills courses has been running as the only alternative

during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the online learning process, language skills courses are unique because it needs for active participation of students in using the language for productive purposes, they are writing and speaking. In addition, speaking skills courses also aim to improve receptive skills, namely listening and reading. The researcher suggests for further research to focus on only one session, both asynchronous and synchronous sessions. The researcher also suggests further research to develop not only language skills courses but also pedagogy courses. For the study program, the researcher suggests that there is a common understanding to create discipline in managing student behavior in asynchronous learning.

### Recommendation

From the findings above, this research recommends several things related to improving the online learning system for language skill courses. To stakeholders, it is necessary to realize that COVID-19 has changed the learning model from conventional to online. For this reason, the decision-maker, in this case, the study program, needs to make a common perception about the rules of online learning. The rules include lecture procedures and classroom management. Lecturers need to be asked to be creative in managing learning, especially in utilizing internet technology-based learning media and social media.

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Received: 08 September 2021

Revised: 27 September 2021

Accepted: 26 October 2021