
CHALLENGES IN ASSESSING SPEAKING PROFICIENCY IN ONLINE LEARNING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to describe the challenges faced by high school English teachers in teaching and evaluating during online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research. The researcher used observation, an open-ended questionnaire, and an interview to collect the data.

The result showed that the teachers face some challenges in teaching speaking and assessing speaking in online learning. First, limited or shorter duration of teaching causes less speaking practice in the process of teaching and learning. Second, limited access to the online platform, this condition happened since not all students have sufficient internet connections during online learning. Third, less learning motivation from the students. Fourth, limited speaking performance activities, such as dialogue, role play, and other performing activities, are difficult to do in online learning. Those problems forced teachers to be innovative in redesigning teaching activities and authentic assessments for students' speaking proficiency.

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini yaitu untuk mendeskripsikan tantangan-tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru Bahasa Inggris Sekolah Menengah dalam pengajaran dan penilaian selama pembelajaran daring pada saat pandemi Covid-19.

Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Untuk mengumpulkan data, peneliti menggunakan observasi, kuesioner, dan wawancara.

Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa guru-guru Bahasa Inggris tingkat Sekolah Menengah menghadapi tantangan yang sama dalam pengajaran dan penilaian selama pembelajaran daring, diantaranya: *pertama*, alokasi waktu pembelajaran yang pendek dan terbatas yang menyebabkan kurangnya praktek berbicara di dalam proses pembelajaran. *Kedua*, terbatasnya akses terhadap platform pembelajaran daring, kondisi ini terjadi karena tidak semua siswa memiliki koneksi internet yang memadai selama pembelajaran daring. *Ketiga*, terbatasnya kegiatan pembelajaran untuk praktek berbicara, misalnya: mempraktekkan dialog, bermain peran, dan aktifitas praktek lainnya sulit untuk dilakukan melalui pembelajaran daring. Tantangan-tantangan tersebut memaksa guru untuk menjadi inovatif dalam merancang kembali kegiatan pembelajaran, serta penilaian yang otentik untuk kemampuan berbicara Bahasa Inggris siswa.

INTRODUCTION

As the traditional teaching and learning process moves to online learning, it makes all lecturers and teachers reconsider the appropriate types of assessments to be used appropriately with the online learning environment, especially for speaking because lecturers and students are physically separated by distance (Rahman, 2022). In the classroom discussion, it is suggested to integrate the four major skills of language in the assessment of language learning. Speaking skill is considered as the most difficult language skill in Indonesia (Diana, 2021). The design of the assessment task design should accommodate listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In other research, long sentences and word stress made them confused and unable to pronounce words correctly because Correct utterances rely heavily on intonation and sentence stress (Wahyuningsih, 2020).

Teachers cannot assess students' performance in a particular skill by observing other skill performances since each skill has its category and type of assessment task. For example, listening proficiency cannot be assessed by observing reading performance. According to Brown, before teachers design a task for assessment, they should determine the objective of the task. For example, if teachers want to assess the micro skill of listening such as how much students can recognize phonological and morphological elements of language, they can use intensive listening tasks (Brown, 2004). In other words, the task design of the assessment is adjusted based on the objective of the assessment.

There are two major objectives of a speaking test: to measure specific aspects of speaking skill such as structure, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, and stress; and to measure the overall speaking proficiency (i.e. speaking tests for functional purposes). Brown states that in assessing speaking, teachers monitor the progress of students' performance in communicating the language. Brown suggests four commonly identified types of speaking performance that can be used to consider tasks and procedures of assessment (Brown, 2004); (a) *Imitative*: oral production of a phoneme, grammatical properties of language, etc); (b) *Intensive*: oral production of a short stretch of language, such as greeting, question, command, etc; (c) *Responsive*: interaction, short conversation, etc; (d) *Interactive*: a more complex interaction; (e) *Extensive/monologue*: speech, oral presentation, etc.

Further, Geoffrey stated that in assessing the students' speaking performance, teachers should observe and decide the students' strengths and weaknesses so that it can be used as the consideration to prepare the following actions to enrich the students' achievement and improve the failure. Direct feedback is also beneficial for students to make them aware of their mistakes (Geoffrey, 2003). By observing the students' achievements and weaknesses and giving feedback, teachers could make a correctly judgment on the students' speaking proficiency. According to Malley and Pierce correct judgment leads the teachers to design authentic assessments (Malley, J. M., & Pierce, 1996).

In communicative language teaching era, assessment of one's ability in using language in real communication becomes the main concern. Also during the covid-19 pandemic, Various policies must be taken to optimize the course of education during the Covid-19 pandemic (Agustiana, Ahsin, & Setiadi, 2022). Assessment in online learning becomes challenging since not all students could access the online platform used by the teachers.

Besides, the design of assessment in face-to-face learning is certainly different from online learning. some speaking activities such as performing dialogue in pairs, doing group discussions, and giving feedback cannot run well in online learning. The limitation of speaking assessment activities is a big problem for teachers since they cannot identify properly how their students speak the target language. Psychological problems (shyness, anxiety, and nervousness) also made it difficult to speak English in online presentations (Yusuf, 2022).

In this case, teachers should be creative and flexible so that the gaps found in online learning can be substituted. Because teachers are suggested to create a good quality of learning and assessment in any condition. Therefore, teachers need to redesign new and authentic assessments, especially for assessing speaking proficiency in which the teachers could see and examine the student's performance directly.

Some previous studies focused on how authentic speaking assessment is applied in an offline classroom. For example, the use of group discussion, pairing work, and project presentation as the practice of authentic assessment in EFL-speaking classrooms (Inayah et al., 2019). Another research study revealed that role play and picture talks are the most appropriate to assess students' speaking skills at the junior high school level (Sahyoni, S., &

Zaim, 2017). Those previous research studies were conducted before 2020 when schools are still conducting face-to-face learning and there is no regulation to stay at home and physical distancing, so teachers could do various activities to assess the students.

The tasks should provide the learners with adequate time to show their speaking ability. The long format of the speaking test will be able to assess learners' consistencies in using language. In addition, it is possible to include more samples of behavior. In other words, the longer the speaking test is, the more reliable and valid information can be obtained.

Therefore, to fill the gaps from the previous research about the minim study of how to assess speaking proficiency in online learning, the researcher conducted the research in order to reveal information on how English teachers assess the students' speaking proficiency in online learning and to know what the challenges are to assess student's speaking skill without having regular activities in the classroom.

METHODS

This research used a qualitative approach, the type of this research is descriptive qualitative which aimed to describe the real condition of how the English teacher assesses the students' speaking proficiency in online learning and the challenges of speaking assessment they meet in online learning. The reason was to describe the situation or event as complete to provide new knowledge.

According to Walliman, qualitative research can be used to establish reality based on participants' points of view (Walliman, 2010). The participants' point of view could figure out the process of an event thoroughly. Furthermore, Creswell and Cheryl stated that the data of the qualitative research method is in form of words and sentences which were collected through interviews and open-ended questionnaires (John W. Creswell; Cheryl N. Poth, 2017).

The sample of the study was four English teachers in a *Madrasah Aliyah* (Islamic Senior High School) from several regions: Bojonegoro, Mojokerto, Jember, and Lubuk Linggau. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling by considering the different conditions of the regions and different platforms used by the teachers. According to Arikunto, it is a way of deciding sampling after having certain considerations (Arikunto S., 2006). The consideration of choosing the teachers in this research is because they were teaching English

through different online platforms and application during the Covid-19 pandemic and each region has different conditions and accessibility to the internet.

To collect the data, the researcher used three techniques, they are observation, an open-ended questionnaire, and an interview. The observation was conducted by joining an online class held by the English teachers. The open-ended questionnaire was used to get information about the identity of the teachers, their teaching experience, and teachers' competence in using technology for online teaching. Meanwhile, the interview is used to get insight into information about challenges met by the English teachers in assessing speaking proficiency in online learning and to support the data gained from the questionnaire.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on Indonesian National Curriculum, the teaching of English should cover knowledge and skill. There are several competencies covered in the student's handbook published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, which are Vocabulary building, Pronunciation practice, Reading, Grammar review, Listening, Writing, and Speaking. However, speaking practice is not provided in all chapters. For example, for twelfth graders, there are 7 knowledge competence and 7 skills that should be taught. But in the students' handbook, the speaking practices appear in 7 chapters among the 11 chapters. They are chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 5, chapter 6, chapter 7, chapter 8, and chapter 11. In chapter 1 (offering help/services), the speaking practice is in form of group work. The task in chapter 1 is writing dialog and role play it. In chapter 2 (why don't you visit Seattle?), the task is having a conversation in which the students give suggestions using the 'if clause'. In chapter 5 (who was involved?), the task is retelling news. In chapter 6 (Online School Registration), the speaking task is having a conversation that talks about news. In chapter 7 (It's Garbage in, Artworks out), the speaking task is a role-playing of becoming a news broadcast. In chapter 8 (How to Make) the task is repeating the teacher and group discussion about a certain topic. In chapter 11 (Let's make a better world for all), the speaking task is to work in pairs to sing a song and tell the content of the song.

Based on the explanation above, the students have opportunities to practice their speaking for about 59%. For *twelfth* graders, the

students have opportunities of 63%. For eleventh graders, the opportunity is 54%, and the opportunity for tenth graders is 60%. However, during the pandemic, the condition is different. The different conditions of the teaching and learning process lead to some problems.

First, the duration of learning is shorter than usual. In normal offline learning, the process of teaching and learning is conducted in 90 minutes for each meeting. Meanwhile, in online learning, the duration is only 25 minutes for each meeting. This shorter duration surely has an impact on the process of teaching and learning. The teachers stated that they have difficulties managing time to meet the learning goals. 25 minutes is too short and limited for having some learning activities. As a result, the teachers are mostly focused on cognitive competence, and put aside the speaking activities. It means that in online learning during the pandemic, speaking practices were rarely done and the students' speaking competence was hardly ever assessed by the teachers.

Second, the students have limited access to the online platform. For speaking activities, the students frequently used Google Meet, Zoom, or Video Conference Applications which allow the users to speak and have a conversation. These kinds of applications spend much internet quota. Some students liked to switch off their cameras so that they will not spend too much internet quota. On the other hand, the teacher needs to see their direct performance in speaking. Switching off the camera, the teacher cannot observe and assess the student's performance properly. Another option for assessing speaking in online learning is creating Vlog or Short Video on Youtube. Again, it needs much quota and excellent internet access. Some students who live in a village will have difficulties finishing this task because the internet connection in a small village is very limited. Therefore, the assessment of speaking becomes challenging when the internet connection is not supported.

Third, many students have less learning motivation. In online learning, the teachers have limitations in controlling the student's participation in the teaching and learning process. Some students joined the class regularly and punctually, but others did not. In an excellent class, almost all students joined the class based on the schedule. However, for a regular class, only half of the class and sometimes a quarter of the class joined the teaching and learning process. At home, no one supervises them. As a

result, the students will participate in the learning process as they wish.

Fourth, the students have limited activities in online learning. In face-to-face learning, several activities can be done to assess the student's speaking performance, such as pair-work, group work discussion, speech, role play, performing dialogue, etc. The condition will certainly be different in distance learning since not all students have a good internet connection. It is difficult to ask the students to do pair work or group work. So the task should be an individual task. When the students are given individual tasks, the students can be bored because the task is in form of a speech or monologue.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that online learning creates new challenges both in teaching and assessing speaking. In this case, teachers need to evaluate their way of teaching and technique of assessment so that the learning objective could be achieved despite those limitations.

CONCLUSION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, assessment in online learning becomes challenging since not all students could access the online platform used by the teachers. Besides, the design of assessment in face-to-face learning is certainly different from online learning. Based on data gained from the open-ended questionnaire and interview, it is revealed that there are some challenges in assessing speaking proficiency in online learning, they are: 1) The limited or shorter duration of learning, 2) Limited access to the online platform, 3) Less learning motivation from the students, 4) Limited activities for speaking practices in online learning. Those problems forced teachers to be innovative in redesigning authentic speaking proficiency assessments.

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