

Indonesian EFL Novice Teachers' Strategies in Conquering Online Learning Challenges

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: COVID-19; novice teacher; online learning; teaching strategies	The researchers purposely conducted this qualitative study to determine the teaching strategies used by Indonesian EFL novice teachers in dealing with the online learning challenges they have adapted to during COVID-19 and how their strategy fulfilled the need for online learning. Using interviews and document analysis, the researchers presented strategies of five novice EFL teachers practised in Indonesia to adjust to the online learning challenges their teaching they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data analysis is done by transcribing, analyzing, coding, describing, and concluding from teachers' guided written reflections and semi-structured interviews. The results were also analyzed under the conceptual model of five types of interactions by Wang et al. The findings revealed that the teachers employed several strategies to minimize technical problems, create efficient learning resources, and adapt to an ERT-based learning environment. Despite these beneficial strategies, they cannot fulfil the successful criteria of online learning. Therefore, there is a need for improvement. This study is limited to a small number of participants, which may need to adequately expose all of the strategies employed by other novice teachers during online classes. Additionally, this study did not further investigate learning achievement, which needs to be investigated for future research.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Online learning has still become a significant concern in the last two years. The online learning journey was initially started in 1960 and potentially developed until now (Sarkar, 2020). Initially, online learning was conducted in colleges and universities where the students and institutions were thought to be more prepared (Dick et al., 2020). However, as a result of COVID-19, online learning is now being implemented at all education levels since it has proven beneficial to students and teachers who cannot attend school due to disease risk (Sarkar, 2020). In Indonesia, this action is carried out per the Ministry of Education and Culture decisions that shift all face-to-face school-related activities into online learning (Pemimpin Perg et al., 2019).

Online learning has been applied as a suitable means of supporting education because it brings many benefits. It is considered a potent tool to promote learner-centered (Singh & Thurman, 2019), innovative (Butler Kaler, 2012), flexible learning, and cheaper learning modes due to the transportation fees and accommodations (Dhawan, 2020). Despite the benefits of online learning, it remains a pro and con for some parties, particularly teachers and students, with various limitations. Furthermore, the pandemic situation differs significantly from the previous online learning situation (Huber & Helm, 2020).

Lots of researchers found that implementing online learning raises several challenges (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Febrianto et al., 2020; Lie et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). For instance, in Chile, Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison (2020) emphasized that the lack of direct interaction and the sudden change to online learning strongly challenge the learning process. These problems are also similarly found in other research. In addition, some research study in Indonesia implied the challenges of online learning come from various factors, including teachers, students, technological and pedagogical knowledge, technicals, and tools (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Febrianto et al., 2020; Lie et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020).

The teaching and learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic was far beyond prior for both students' and teachers' routines, where they were struggling with transitioning from face-to-face to online learning (Sasongko et al., 2022; Sumardi & Nugrahani, 2021). In Indonesia, most teachers deal with the challenges of creating strategies for teaching online (Sasongko et al., 2022). Not only the non-Millennial teachers, whom experts believed not to be technologically aware, but novice teachers were also strained to adjust their teaching strategies to online learning strategies. It is because novice teachers are still in the early teaching period with no prior experience (Farrell, 2012; Raymond-West & Rangel, 2020).

In the implementation of learning, interaction is one of the critical aspects that indicate that the "learning process" occurred. Therefore, it is required for teachers to ensure that there is interaction in their teaching-learning process. Experts proposed several types of interaction that need to exist in implementing learning in general: interaction with content, interaction with instructor, and interaction with peers (Moore, 1989). Interaction with content occurs when the students have a connection with the learning material, such as; understanding and mastering the material. Interaction with instructor occurs when students connect with the teacher, such as in asking or answering questions, and/or communicating. While interaction with peers is when students work with their friends as in group discussions or teamwork. As for online learning, Hillman and colleagues (1994) presented an additional type: interaction with interfaces (learning media/platform), which are the leading media of online learning (distance learning-learner-interface). As a novelty, Wang, Pang, Zhou, Ma, and Wang (2021) also formulated one crucial aspect for building successful online learning: interaction with the self. This action is essential when teachers and students reflect on the course of the learning process to shape activities and decisions that are useful in the future. Based on those criteria, interaction is a definition of highly effective technology-mediated learning where the actor and or object impact each other

mutually (Wang et al., 2021). These five types of interactions are considered a standard of successful online learning (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, the findings in this study will be analyzed using the five types of interactions.

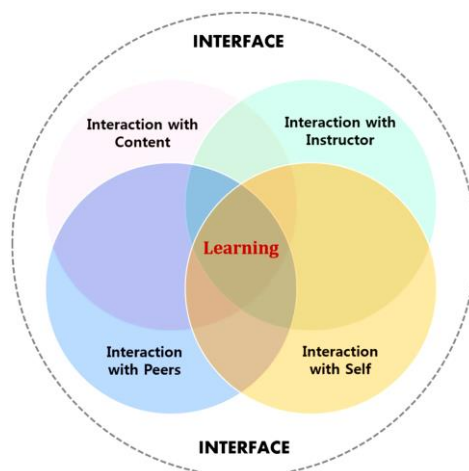


Figure 1. A Conceptualized Model of Five Types of Interactions for Online Learning

As profusely researched, teaching strategy impacts student academic achievement significantly (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016; Sutarto et al., 2020). At the same time, several studies focus on the challenges of online learning but are less interested in investigating the strategy to overcome the difficulties (Dick et al., 2020). Building on the challenges experienced during online learning in preliminary studies. The researchers have been enticed to discover how novice teachers adjust to online education in Indonesia, specifically those with limitations. Hence, this present study aims to dig deeper into the strategies of novice teachers in managing the difficulties of teaching online learning and find out whether the strategies fit the need for successful online learning. Therefore, the researchers use Wang et al.'s (2021) five types of interactions on successful online learning to answer that. This study seeks to show the results of implementing online learning, which interested parties can then utilize in determining and developing learning strategies. This study is expected to contribute to teachers making decisions regarding the problems they face. Besides, this study hopefully contributes to improving teachers' professional development and might be a consideration for forming an educational curriculum.

2. METHODS

2.1 Context and Design

Indonesia has many provinces whose topography and demographics differ from one another. These differences caused dissimilarities in each region's development and progress, impacting policies for implementing online learning. This study focuses on areas in Indonesia with several limitations in implementing online learning. This study was also carried out in the continuation period of online education, where several adjustments were made to address issues that developed during the first term. Thus, this study employed a qualitative case study to investigate the contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world framework (Yin, 2018). The researchers illustrated the issue in-depth and showed different perspectives from respondents.

2.2 Participants

This study involved five novice teachers who specialized in teaching EFL in Indonesia. They were around 25 to 30 of age with fewer than five years of teaching. Those respondents were recruited purposively based on the criteria: they voluntarily agreed to be the research sources; they experienced

adopting online learning during the pandemic; they faced difficulties in teaching English online. The respondents are coded respectively in the paper.

Table 1. Data of Respondents.

Name	Age (y.o)	Highest Educational Background	Teaching Experience	Setting
MA	27	Bachelor's Degree in English Education	Three Years	Central Java
EA	28	Bachelor's Degree in English Education	Three Years	West Borneo
AM	28	Bachelor's Degree in English Education	Two and a Half Years	West Borneo
NA	28	Bachelor's Degree in English Education	Two and a Half Years	West Borneo
AY	25	Bachelor's Degree in English Education	Two and Half Year	Central Java

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers provided a form of written guided reflection where the respondents reported their experiences about the strategies they used to overcome online learning challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. To strengthen the data collection, the researchers also used individual follow-up interviews. The context of the data taken was about the obstacles and the strategies of each participant during their online teaching-learning process. The data from the reflections and semi-structured interviews were then analyzed through the interactive analytical process of transcribing, coding, displaying, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis process consists of three steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/ verification.

2.4 Procedure

All the interview data (recording) was transcribed and classified into word-processing files. The researchers reorganized and coded the transcription based on the themes that appeared within the data. The findings were later analyzed under the framework of online learning interactions by Wang et al. (2021). To eliminate the possible misinterpretation and ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, the researchers did member checks. Member checks were conducted between the researcher and all the interviewees. None of the respondents disagreed with the report. At the end, the researchers construct the final conclusion.

Table 2. Conceptual Frameworks.

Variable	Indicators	Sub-Indicators
Strategies in bridging online learning challenges	Interaction with Content	understand the learning material master the learning material
	Interaction with Instructor	formed communication question and answer respond to material and questions
	Interaction with Peers	group discussion sharing information
	Interaction with Interface	know the media understand the media able to operate the media
	Interaction with Self	reflection analyze errors fix what is missing

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results, the researcher displayed the most found obstacles faced by the participants during their online teaching-learning process and their strategies for adapting to it. It is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Recap of the results

Obstacle	Strategy	Theme
Limited internet connection access to the platform. Little knowledge of operating the platforms.	Using WA Group	Strategy to minimize the technical problems
Lack of interest	Creating additional resources (youtube, games app)	Strategy to Create Efficient Learning Resources
Limited time to have fully synchronous learning	Have blended learning	
Less motivation	Targetting assignments during asynchronous Giving reward	Strategy to Adapt ERT-based Learning Environment

Table 4. The presence of interaction

Indicator	Sub-indicator	Using WA Group		Creating add. resources (youtube, games app)		Have blended learning		Targetting assignment during asynchr.		Giving reward	
		yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
Interaction with Content	understand the learning material	v	v	v		v	v	v	v	v	
	master the learning material	v	v	v		v	v	v	v	v	
Interaction with Instructor	formed communication	v	v		v	v	v		v	v	
	question and answer	v	v		v	v	v	v	v	v	
	respond to material and questions	v	v	v	v	v	v		v	v	
Interaction with Peers	group discussion	v	v	v		v	v	v	v		v
	sharing information	v	v	v		v	v	v	v		v
Interaction with Interface	know the media	v		v		v	v	v	v		v
	understand the media	v		v		v	v	v	v		v
	able to operate the media	v		v		v	v	v	v		v
Interaction with Self	reflection	v	v	v		v		v		v	
	analyze errors	v	v	v		v		v		v	
	fix what is missing	v	v	v		v		v		v	

*yes means there is interaction, no means there is no interaction, yes&no means there is less interaction

After analyzing the diary of reflections and the interview transcripts, the researchers found three main themes of strategies used by the participants. Those three main themes are the strategy to minimize technical problems, the strategy to create efficient learning resources, and the strategy to adapt to the ERT-based learning environment. A brief recap of the results is shown in table 3 and detailed below.

3.1 Strategy to minimize the technical problems

Most teachers stated the crucial problem of online learning was a technical problem such as limited knowledge of learning management systems (LMS) such as Gmeet, Zoom, and/or others, and internet access and connection instability. Teachers and students lack knowledge of virtual instruction and what LMS should be used (Febrianto et al., 2020; Sasongko et al., 2022; Sumardi & Nugrahani, 2021). This matter immensely affects the continuity of the online learning implementation as stated:

- (1) *"There are some problems that I had. First, the connection is the main problem since I teach in a village. Many students from the village have limited internet connection access to the platform. So, I have to find another solution for that. Second, students were often confused about the material that I gave to them because the time to explain was limited and also because they had little lore of operating the platforms."*-EA

Since online teaching was new to them and their students, the novice EFL teachers claimed they needed to use a compensatory strategy to help them perform the virtual instruction. Striving to use technology, they chose WAG, which was accessible to most students. This alternative was chosen to maximize learning time, so they could skip the tutorial to use the other platform.

- (2) *"I use WAG as our media to communicate with the students. Most of the students are already known to operate this app. It is easier for the students and me. Moreover, WAG did not take too much quota and can still operate even when the signal is low."*-MA
- (3) *"It is hard to hold the class using Gmeet or Zoom. Many students did not know how to operate it. It takes time to teach them how and of course, it will cut the time for learning. Not efficient for us because the time for online learning is shorter than face-to-face learning."*-AM

Sumardi & Nugrahani (2021) stress that teachers are supposed to learn how to coordinate their pedagogical strategy by utilizing the available instructional platforms to apply in their virtual classroom to minimize the notable challenges of online learning, which was the technical failings. The preferences on the suitable platform help teachers and students interact and engage effectively. Ultimately, the strategy selected was to use an easy and appealing learning media, WAG. Nonetheless, it greatly aided novice teachers in bridging their online teaching process. In line with previous research (Febrianto et al., 2020; Sasongko et al., 2022; Sumardi & Nugrahani, 2021; Sutarto et al., 2020; Yang & Kuo, 2020) the use of compatible learning media will improve engagement and desire to learn by facilitating not only the delivery of content but also the achievement of learning goals. Teaching with modern tools that are cost-effective, easy to use, and useful are among other pertinent factors to consider when selecting media for teaching (Sasongko et al., 2022).

However, even though WAG can be used as a substitute learning platform for online learning, it cannot fully fulfill the need for interaction during online learning. As shown in Table 4., the use of WAG is considered to have less interaction for most types of interactions, except with interfaces. The advantage of WAG is only because of practical reasons. Therefore, teachers still need to find other platforms other than WAG which is applicable yet also meet the interaction indicators.

3.2 Strategy to Create Efficient Learning Resources

The difficulty in delivering the material forced teachers to create complementary strategies to ensure students learn something. Owing to this problem, teachers initiated creating their own learning videos by adjusting the learning goals and their students' needs.

- (4) *"I decided to make my own YouTube channel and upload some materials for my students so they can download or watch it many times. The problem with the connection, we usually asked them to go to the village that has a good internet connection at least two hours in the morning every day, so the students were able to follow online teaching and learning process"*-EA
- (5) *"I make a video for learning, and put some tasks and instructions in it to make sure my students watch the video. Sometimes, there is a student who skips watching the video. I want to ensure all my students can learn and be responsible with it, even when online. It also helped the student understand the material more because they can access the video anytime."*-MA

Novice teachers improved themselves by preparing the materials themselves. On top of that, this strategy helps teachers optimize their teaching materials and boost their professional development. Efficient learning resources also enable students' independence and responsibility, which may promote students' learning development (Sasongko et al., 2022). This strategy is aligned with Bozkurt & Sharma (2020), where online language teaching is a learning process that provides learners agency, responsibility, flexibility, and choice and involves more than merely uploading educational content.

According to the indicator of each type of interaction in Table 4., creating efficient learning resources is undoubtedly suitable for most of them. This strategy fulfils the need for interaction during the class; besides, it lacks interaction with the instructor directly. This strategy is perfect when combined with suitable action from the teacher that provides direct interaction with the instructor.

3.3 Strategy to Adapt ERT-based Learning Environment

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning environment shifted from face-to-face to a virtual-based environment. These situations force teachers to create a suitable learning environment that enables students to learn. However, going immediately to a completely virtual environment is more demanding than they might think.

- (6) *"It is difficult to control students while carrying out online learning. Students find it challenging to focus on what the teacher is saying. They are easily distracted even by small things like status or playing games and the internet while studying."*-NA
- (7) *"To have a fully online class is harder than people might think. Sometimes, what we mean to what the students understand is different. The different approach makes different result. A teacher needs to contemplate the right step to teach online because it's different from a face-to-face environment."*-LY

Hodges et al. (2020) elucidate that a virtual or online instructional system requires careful design and planning to suit the purpose in advance. It signifies that teachers may not be able to implement effective online teaching and learning without first preparing the right design for it (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Sumardi & Nugrahani, 2021). Therefore, teachers need to adopt emergency remote teaching (ERT) rather than going straight to the fully online instructional system. The ERT-based instructional practice was not originally planned and designed for online teaching but adapted online to provide access to education to students due to a particular crisis (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic).

- (8) *"We, as teachers who teach in a remote area, cannot execute our classes in online classes only. Not all students have access to connect to the internet all the time. Sometimes, signal problems, erroring, blackouts, and other issues might happen. So we need to provide them with additional planning. During the class time, which was very limited, I provided the material, explained it to my students, and gave a chance for them to ask me anything they did not understand. At the end of class time, I give them a task to do and deadline it to the next meeting. More importantly, I let them contact me whenever they need me. It is the only way to ensure they get the education they need."*-MA
- (9) *"The policy of online classes have shorter time than the original classes. So, we have limited time to teach. It feels like nothing could be delivered well and less effectively. That is why I made learning videos to substitute the time to explain the material. It is way more effective because, during class time, the students are free to ask me what they hard to understand. We also can do a class discussion about what they have learned from the video. It is efficient and helpful because the student can learn through the video and rewatch it anytime, anywhere they want."*-EA
- (10) *"My class is done in both synchronous and asynchronous. By doing so, I gave the student a chance to prove themselves and increase their confidence. Giving the students rewards for what they got also motivates them more."*-NA

Providing a correct environment increases the students' interests and motivates them to keep learning even during difficult times. From the interview, most teachers adjust their teaching strategy to the ERT-based. According to Sumardi & Nugrahani (2021), the ERT-based instructions used a flipped-classroom approach, which involves class group discussions and engaging in online video lessons and assignments that must be completed outside of class time. Moving to ERT constitutes a beneficial strategy to encourage students to engage effectively and efficiently during class because it enables the flexibility of language instruction anywhere and anytime. In accordance with Bozkurt &

Sharma, (2020), Hodges et al., (2020), and Sumardi & Nugrahani, (2021), who claimed ERT is a correct temporary shift to deliver instructional practices where it provokes flexible teaching and learning without time and space restrictions during the crisis circumstances. ERT also can be practised fully in remote teaching or blended or hybrid.

Although adapting to an ERT-based learning environment is an ideal option, considering its flexibility and efficiency, this strategy needs much attention to ensure that all the interactions occur in every action taken. Deep thought is needed on it. Nevertheless, these strategies employed by novice EFL teachers shall be improvised due to their limitedness. For example, using WAG does not instantly cover the technical problems that still hinder teachers and students when the internet connection is unstable. Moreover, moving to ERT requires teachers to take more control of its implementation, which is a tiresome job for teachers (Sumardi & Nugrahani, 2021). Therefore, teachers need to upgrade their teaching strategies to serve better education.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the strategies of novice EFL teachers in dealing with online learning challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. Young and less experienced in teaching, five teachers were interviewed. They opted to change the previous face-to-face teaching strategies to online. The findings revealed that novice teachers possess several strategies to ensure that the learning processes continue optimally during the COVID-19 outbreak, such as minimizing the technical problem during online classes, creating efficient learning resources, and adapting to an ERT-based learning environment. Due to its availability and simplicity, WAG was chosen as the media to communicate and deliver the learning process. Teachers who create learning videos also use efficient learning resources to achieve the intended learning goals. Moreover, the teacher does not rely on other sources, which may have different learning objectives. This strategy is done so that students understand the material more efficiently and become more interested in and familiar with how the teacher teaches. Adjusting the learning environment to the ERT-based offers an appropriate option for the teacher to implement the learning instructions effectively and efficiently, enabling flexibility in time and space and also practices. Despite these strategies being helpful for the teachers and students, they still lack other issues. This strategy cannot fulfil all the online learning needs related to interaction during the process. To be considered successful online learning, the teacher must take action that meets each interaction's criteria, including content, instructor, peers, interface, and self. It implies that teachers must upgrade and prepare better teaching strategies for future education.

This study may have particular limitations and provide some suggestions for further research. The sample size of this study was limited to only five teachers in two different provinces, which is insufficient to generalize to all teachers in Indonesia. As a result, the findings may not adequately expose all of the strategies other novice teachers employ during online classes. Further stages, such as learning achievement, were not investigated further. Thus, future related studies should address these limitations. This study is hoped to contribute to teachers' professional development and might be a consideration to the associated parties for forming an educational curriculum.

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