

The adaptability and resilience of Indonesian EFL teachers during emergency online education

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has radically transformed the teaching and learning process from in-class instruction to remote learning. This changing situation leads to barriers for EFL teachers in executing their teaching plans. Therefore, they should be able to deal with such challenges for instructional continuity. This study aimed to investigate the challenges that EFL teachers face, examine their adaptability to the conditions, and explore their strategies in implementing online education. Seven junior high school EFL teachers were purposefully recruited from public and private schools in a town in southwestern Central Java, Indonesia, to participate in this study. The data were elicited through interviews and analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis techniques. The study revealed that the challenges encountered by the EFL teachers were mainly internet connectivity issues, low classroom participation among students, poor motivation in task completion, unsupported devices, and limited infrastructure support. In response to these challenges, the EFL teachers modified their lesson plans, improved their competencies, and adapted the material. Furthermore, in dealing with the challenges, the teachers made special efforts: selecting a simple online learning platform, monitoring students' learning processes, contextualizing the material to daily life, providing intensive feedback, and collaborating with students' parents. Recommendations for classroom practices, policymakers, and future research directly related to the findings of the current study are provided.

Keywords: *Adaptability, EFL, Online Education, Resilience, Teachers.*

1. Introduction

Every crisis attacking a country will have impact on other aspects of life, and education is no exception. When a crisis occurs, as when natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, and cyclones strike, or when a conflict or disease breaks out, students' access to education is usually put at risk [1]. The COVID-19 outbreak in the world forced schools, colleges, and universities to put an end to operations temporarily. In Indonesia, in mid-March 2020, public events at schools and all other educational institutions began to be postponed [2, 3]. Since then, all work was carried out from home, and a new way of teaching and learning, known as distance education, was implemented. However, challenges, particularly in technology infrastructure, arose in its implementation [4]. Students from remote places were unable to continue their learning activities due to lack of preparedness of schools and human resources for online education. Besides, Indonesian pupils did not have appropriate e-learning competencies. They were unprepared with Learning Management System [5].

The radical change was that all Indonesian schools had to adopt distance learning and utilize technology as part of strategy to support the government program of social distancing. Every teacher had to modify their lesson plans so that the students could learn as expected, despite the fact that many

Indonesian schools lacked the required human resources, technology infrastructure, and resource availability. The COVID-19 warned us that the scenario planning in education has become critical need [6]. Distance learning has emerged as a new teaching pedagogy in response to all these issues [7]. Therefore, the teachers, including those working in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), had to apply and adapt e-learning classes in delivering lessons so that the teaching and learning process could continue.

2. Literature Review

In the literature, challenge refers to something new and difficult which requires great efforts and determination [8]. Regarding the then emergency situation and unpreparedness in implementing online instruction, the EFL teachers needed to face such a thing in order to succeed in their mission. Many studies on EFL teachers' challenges of online education have been conducted in Indonesia. Overall, they tended to exhibit similar results. Some research has arrived as a conclusion that online learning teaching and learning main obstacles included: internet connection problem and student-teacher interaction issue [9, 10]. Learning platform errors, internet quota, and students' psychological problems, especially boredom and lack of concentration also emerged apparently in this matter [9, 11].

Singh [12] conducted his survey of Indian teachers' challenge of online education. The study revealed that in the implementation of online learning during the pandemic, the teachers suffered from lack of ICT infrastructures and low ICT literacy. From the students' perspective, in the Philippines, the greatest felt challenges of online learning in times of pandemic were reported to have come from learning environment at home [13]. It was most likely to be associated with mental health issues attributable to restrictions and lockdown. Result of this study of students' voice provided us with insights into the challenges of online learning faced by their teachers. Through a mixed methods study, [14] reported that Chinese students responded to online learning in a different way. The students viewed online learning in times of pandemic more as a blessing in disguise. According to the study, the students found their way by learning more independently, collaborating, building relationships with peers. They were encouraged to reconsider ways for better learning. Again, this finding reflected the challenges of e-learning faced by the teachers as well.

Beyond Asia, in sub-Saharan Africa, Nthenya, et al. [15] illustrated the challenges of online education in secondary schools in COVID-19 situation as course dropouts everywhere. Either students or teachers had problems with the new method. They encountered access to ICT and internet access serious issues.

To date, there are not many studies on teachers' resilience, adaptability, and strategies in coping with challenges of online learning in Indonesia. A literature review by Fathayatih and Yamtinah [16] highlighted the importance of resilience in teachers faced with online education. During the pandemic teachers experienced psychological impact due to dramatic shift to new mode of learning (online learning). In broader sense, educational institutions' survival depends greatly on resilience, adaptability, and sustainability [17].

A survey involving teachers in Malaysia, Fiji, and India by Raghunathan, et al. [18] adopted three categories of teacher resilience: 1) internal resilience, i.e. efforts to upskill and reskill oneself; 2) interpersonal resilience, i.e. communication with students; 3) external resilience, i.e. trust and support from others. As to internal resilience, of 102 respondents, mindset change was expressed as the utmost important skill (97%), followed by learning how to teach online (96%), open mindedness (85%), and pedagogical skills (82%). Concerning interpersonal resilience, seventy-five percent of the respondents used interactive media-based communication method to engage with students. Regarding external resilience, the highest support was said to gain from family (86%), from students (68%), friends/colleagues (66%), and the management or institutions (61%).

Different from those teachers in advanced countries societies, in developing countries, the teachers typically remain resistant to digital devices and digital teaching before, during, and after the pandemic [19]. A correlational survey study by Răducu and Stănculescu [20] in Europe shows how equipping

teachers with technology alone is insufficient. Psychological factors, such as emotional intelligence and self-efficacy, are no less important. In line with this finding, [21] reveal that despite less support and resources and greater challenges, South African teachers are more resilient in facing challenges of online learning than the US teachers. This study provides us with insights into the role of socio-ecological factors in this matter.

The literature implies that the current research has something new in comparison to the previous studies, especially those studies conducted in Indonesian context. Instead of focusing on the challenges facing the teachers, it explored the “survival tactics” in unexpected situations and “special” efforts they had in attempts to cope with the challenges. According to Abbad in Utami [22] e-learning refers to the use of information and communication technologies to enable the access to online learning or teaching resources. Due to the pandemic, without adequate prior experience, all of a sudden, the teachers had to put it into practice. Consequently, the teachers needed to adapt and advance efforts in order to carry out teaching and learning process.

Considering the aforementioned condition, the current study was conducted in an attempt to seek to answer the following questions:

- 1) What challenges did the EFL teachers face in online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2) How did the EFL teachers adapt themselves in response to the challenges?
- 3) What strategies did the EFL teachers apply in online instruction during the pandemic?

Such study is quite strategic with respect to the role the teachers serve as front-liners in education. To answer those research questions, a set of methodologies were prepared and are presented in the next section.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

In this study, we employed qualitative approach. A qualitative study aims to describe and analyze a phenomenon, event, social activity, attitude, and perception of an individual or a certain group [23]. More specifically, the current study refers to descriptive phenomenology [24]. We focused on investigating the challenges the EFL teachers faced in carrying out online teaching in times of pandemic, examining their adaptability to the sudden and unexpected situation, and exploring their best possible efforts in working with the new mode of instruction (online). Overall, the study took the following stages: 1) identifying preconceived beliefs and opinions concerning the phenomenon under study – bracketing; 2) seeking a common understanding by immersing in the study and phenomenon being studied – intuiting; 3) analyzing the data while emergence for attaining pure and thorough description of the phenomenon was underway – analyzing; 4) providing critical descriptions – describing.

3.2. Participants

Due to nature of the present research, which is qualitative, and data collection technique, we involved a limited number of research participants. Seven teachers were purposely recruited from both public and private schools from different parts of the town of Cilacap, Central Java Province, Indonesia, where the study was conducted. Other selection criteria included education, work experience, and professional training. They hold a Bachelor’s degree certificate, had minimum five years of English teaching experience, and attained the national teacher certification. Table 1 provides more detailed information on our research participants (anonymous).

Table 1.
Demographic profile of participants.

Teacher	District of origin	Teaching experience (Years)	Year of teacher certification training completion
T1	Majenang	19	2010
T2	Sidareja	9	2019
T3	Gandrungmangu	22	2013
T4	Jeruklegi	12	2016
T5	Cilacap Kota	12	2019
T6	Maos	16	2014
T7	Kroya	17	2016

3.3. Data Collection

We used retrospective interviews technique. The format of the interviews was semi-structured. The instrument utilized for the interviews was interview guide. It covered the main prepared prompts such as difficulties the EFL teachers encountered, adaptations they made, and special efforts they employed in implementing online teaching. The interviews were conducted online in the Indonesian language via the Google Meet. The seven participants were individually interviewed, where each interview lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. All participants were interviewed at least twice as part of trustworthiness (time triangulation) in the study. The interviews were recorded. As ethical consideration, the participants were informed beforehand about the study's goals and that their participation was voluntary. Through written informed consent, they were assured that their identities and responses would be kept confidential [25].

3.4. Data Analysis

From the interview recordings, verbatim transcription was made for data analysis and interpretation. However, excerpts of the data were displayed in this paper instead for efficiency. The data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. A thematic data analysis is a qualitative technique of data analysis which is characterized by the identification of patterns in meaning to create themes [26].

4. Results

To answer the research questions, results from the study are presented in the following three subheadings, namely: 1) challenges of online instruction faced by the EFL teachers; 2) the EFL teachers' adaptation to challenges arising in online instruction; and 3) strategies employed by the EFL teachers in online teaching.

4.1. Challenges of Online Instruction Faced by the EFL Teachers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the EFL teachers faced some challenges in conducting their teaching learning process. Results of interviews showed that the EFL teachers encountered the following problems: weak/unstable internet connectivity, students' low participation, students' poor motivation in tasks completion, unsupported device, and limited infrastructure support. Details are given in Table 2.

Table 2.
Challenges of remote learning encountered by the EFL teachers

Challenges faced	Excerpts from participants' response	
Bad internet connectivity	T1	... but the problem is internet connection...
	T2	At least one or two students have connection problem.
	T3	... when they receive a lesson from their locations, it's always the internet signal which is to the level of limited access.
	T4	One influencing factor is the limited (internet) quota ...
	T6	... the student's reason that the cell phone was damaged, the network was bad, the quota was limited...
	T7	When at home, the signal at our spot is quite weak. ... there are some who have trouble receiving the internet connection
	Students' low classroom participation	T1
T2		But soon the participation declined. Maybe it is because they have been at home all the time so they got bored. Well, the difficulty is to deal with the students who find it hard to submit their assignments.
T3		... there were only a few students. It is indeed very difficult for students to participate in online classes.
T4		Obviously, there should be many students present, unfortunately, it's almost never been 100%.
T5		... there are classes that are slow, probably attributable to their family background, the facilities do not support.
T6		My biggest challenge is how to get students to come to my class. It's how to manage the students to understand that nowadays we have to go online.
T7		If I use the Google Meet, the fact turns out that only a few students join the meet. Out of 32 students, roughly only 10 join.
Students' poor motivation in tasks completion	T1	The only problem is collecting assignments.
	T3	There were still some students who didn't collect the assignments until the last minute.
	T4	...there were some students who submitted the assignments up to the time of evaluation report delivery to parents.
	T6	The difficulty is how to get the students to submit the assignments.
	T7	Delay in submitting the assignments.
Unsupported device	T2	... the reason is that they do not have cell phone, they share one with parent.
	T3	When delivering videos, it's usually a problem with their quota or their cell phone memory.
	T5	When using the Zoom, the problem is on my own device.
	T6	Yes, because they don't have cell phone. They come from poor families
	T7	The reason why some don't join the class is that their cell phones don't support.
Limited infrastructure support	T2	There is no free Wi-Fi for the students; however, they have obtained the internet quota subsidy granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture
	T3	Some classrooms are out of reach, additional facilities like the hot spot transmitter are required.
	T4	Yes. Here, the Wi-Fi signal is unstable even though there are a few spots like the teachers' room, the library.
	T5	But the passwords are often changed, so that they are not misused by the students after school.

4.2. The EFL Teachers' Adaptation to Challenges Arising in Online Instruction

Results of interviews revealed that in facing the challenges, the participants modified their lesson plan to online model. Five of the seven participating teachers employed the lesson plan designed and shared by the local English teachers' association. They also believed that they had to improve teachers' competence by joining online teacher training, seminar, and workshops. Besides, document study showed that in times of pandemic a policy has been launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia to allow the schools to choose options: whether to implement the ongoing national Curriculum 2013 (Discovery Learning), to implement the emergency curriculum, or just to independently simplify the curriculum. In efforts to adjust themselves to the condition, all the

participants modified their instructional material according to the emergency curriculum. Table 3 presents an interview excerpt listing the ways the EFL teachers adapted.

Table 3.
EFL teachers' adaptations to emerging challenges in remote learning.

Adaptations made	Excerpts from participants' response	
Modifying the lesson plan	T2	I'm following the lesson plan model designed and shared by the local EFL teachers' association, anyway.
	T3	I apply the lesson plan model designed and shared by the local EFL teachers' association. Teaching materials and instructional videos are attached to the lesson plan.
	T5	For the lesson plan, I follow the one from the local EFL teachers' association that I modify. There are materials that I have adapted to pandemic conditions.
	T6	Honestly, because the local EFL teachers' association has designed it and it has been adjusted also to this pandemic condition, then I use it.
	T7	The lesson plan is indeed the one designed and shared by the local EFL teachers' association, but I have further edited and adjusted it to our school condition.
Improving competency	T1	I'm in a government training on "Teacher as a Driving Force Program Batch 7" and I've got lots of improvement in my teaching performance.
	T2	I joined some webinars on "The Learning Teachers Series" to have more information dealing with learning and teaching during the pandemic.
	T3	The effort is to follow such online teacher training. Then, I also ask colleagues who have experience in online learning.
	T4	I just got a Learning Management System training, how to deal with online classroom. There are a lot of features that can be used and I also learned such things as jam board and mentimeter.
	T5	Yes, I still have to learn about IT. Actually, the government hold some training of this sort, that I just took part in.
	T6	I upgrade myself. I ask a lot. I ask my fellow colleague for helping me to learn how to do it.
	T7	Sometimes, I take part in a government training on "Freedom-to- Learn" Program which is online at a scheduled time.

4.3. Strategies Employed by the EFL Teachers in Online Teaching

Despite challenges of online learning, the participating teachers reported to have remained resilient and used strategies in implementing online instruction, instead. Those strategies were in the forms of selecting simple online platform, monitoring students' activity, contextualizing the instructional material, providing intensive feedback, and collaborating with parents and other teachers. Table 4 exhibits excerpts from the interviews, listing the EFL teachers' strategies for online teaching and learning in times of pandemic.

Table 4.
EFL teachers' strategies for online teaching in times of pandemic.

EFL teachers' strategies	Excerpts from participants' response	
Selecting simple online platform	T1	The idea is more exciting, more interactive when using WhatsApp Group.
	T2	I utilize the Google Classroom and WhatsApp Group.
	T3	Yes, so far, at times my online teaching and learning process makes use of WhatsApp Group.
	T4	... I finally focus on using WhatsApp Group.
	T5	The Google Classroom is used for all subjects. So, hopefully the students don't get confused because assignments and other activities are organized in one platform.
	T6	In WhatsApp Group I just share instructions and link of the material.
	T7	The Google Meet is use for synchronous activities while for asynchronous activities I use WhatsApp Group.
Monitoring students' learning process.	T1	I chat them personally every three days (twice a week).
	T2	I have attendance link inserted on the Google Classroom to monitor the students' attendance.
	T3	... through the homeroom teacher who has a group number with their parents, anyway.
	T4	Attendance completed with photo is submitted.
	T5	I call their names. For instance, when there is a discussion, then I call them.
	T6	Usually, trough the attendance list which I post on the Google Classroom.
	T7	To students who are still inactive, I chat them personally.
Contextualizing the material	T1	... when studying descriptive texts, at least the students can describe someone and something and apply it on social media.
	T2	... material about expressions of greeting, thanking, apologizing, ... can be practiced directly for everyday life.
	T3	... when your friends win a competition, you congratulate them.
	T4	When they participate in the school study tour program, they have to write a text telling their trip experience.
	T5	... procedures text, related to materials that are at home or around us.
Providing intensive feedback	T1	I usually give feedback using chat, emoticons, and appropriate expressions such as, "Good." "Great."
	T3	I give feedback by mostly saying, "Oh, this is pretty good."
	T4	Direct feedback by saying, "Good." I usually give indirect feedback to students who are of average to above average level.
	T5	I gave reflection on the Google jam board, like asking what you did today, what you felt.
	T6	I give applause, thumbs up, very good, just like that, using emoticon.
	T7	Mostly the feedback is chats like "Good." "Excellent." That's what it says directly in WhatsApp Group.
Collaborating with parents	T2	Even, sometimes students' parent give suggestion to use more than one online platform for variation in learning process.
	T3	I asked the students' parents to monitor their children while learning at home but it did not run well. They said they were too busy.
	T4	There is a parent group/community whose admin is the homeroom teacher for communication with the parents.
	T5	Always, communication with parents dealing with online learning.
	T6	Since we have a parent group , then when we want to have a test or what, I inform it to the group.
	T7	There is a cooperation with parents. So, their kids are in accompany during online learning.

5. Discussion

With respect to the research questions posed earlier in the Introduction section of this paper, we explored the meaning and relevance of the results of the current study and explained how they fit with existing research and theory as follows.

Regarding research result 1, we believe that the internet connection plays an important role in online learning. Unfortunately, as can be seen from Table 2, some students had serious problem concerning internet connectivity. This finding corroborates that of the previous studies revealing that students still faced problem accessing the internet network due to their remote area, although they had internet quota/data at hand [27, 28]. This sort of problem hinders online learning activity from taking place and it becomes less effective, accordingly.

Since the students did not have to go to school during online learning, they started to feel lazy. In addition, much data quota was needed by the students when online platform was implemented. Direct, vivid, and intense interaction with both teacher and other students is gone with online learning. The students lost their interest and need in following the learning activity. This finding complements an earlier report by [29] informing that many students took online learning only as a formality and not as a real substitute for regular teaching and learning. Some teachers only shared the material to students without teaching it. In the absence of “teaching” (with all its valuable features and aspects), it is likely that “learning” does not take place as expected.

According to Efriana [30] some students were less enthusiastic to participate in online learning even though they are supported by adequate facilities, such as computers, androids, and availability of internet network. They were less concerned about the significance of EFL literacy and task submission. As a result, deadlines for assignments that should be submitted within a week were often extended. This is consistent with the condition experienced by the present research participants regarding time task submission.

Some devices to conduct online learning like computer and cell phone should be ideally available. Based on the interviews, some students did not have their own gadget, and even if they had one, the application did not support online activities. This finding confirms the result of a study by Efriana [30] reporting that some students did not have devices such as cell-phones or computers for online learning media. If any, they shared with parents. This situation does not allow for effective online learning practices.

Online learning needs supports of internet data quota, internet signal, Wi-Fi, and other additional devices. Even though the students and teachers were granted data quota from the ministry or government, often it was not enough to serve for stable network connection. Meanwhile, not all Wi-Fi networks in the participating teachers' working areas could reach every spot or corner of the schools. This condition would not benefit online learning, which is consistent with the findings of a study by Hermanto and Srimulyani [31] confirming that there was less effective online learning due to lack of facilities, infrastructure, and unpreparedness of technology literacy.

Related to result 2 of the present study, instructional material is anything employed by a teacher to deliver messages for creating an effective and efficient learning environment [32]. However, Table 3 above shows that the EFL teachers had to adjust the lesson plan in accordance with the students' need and school condition. In this case, the finding is supported by the documentation review, where five of the EFL teachers under study employed the lesson plan offered by the local English teachers' association with some modification to meet the necessities and condition.

Overall, all the participating EFL teachers agreed that they had to raise their competence with respect to the implementation of online teaching and learning process. As a study by Asmara [33] suggested, the teachers have to constantly update their competence and better master the course they teach. Moreover, in online education, teaching learning process utilizes online platforms. They realized this and, consequently, often joined online teacher training conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture and institutions nationwide. They also collaborated with other teachers in learning new things related to online learning.

Dealing with result 3 of the study, we suppose that using online platform is a must as far as online learning is concerned. According to Tabel 4, the EFL teachers interviewed utilized simple online platforms to conduct their online learning. They tended to use WhatsApp Group as it is the most widely used by the students and does not cost much. It complements an earlier report by Asmara [33] revealing that the WhatsApp is considered the most preferred online platform, as it could share information combined with some file formats such as audio, video, image, and location data. Besides using the WhatsApp as the online learning platform, one of the teachers also employed the Google Classroom to organize students' online activities. The platform is considered the most beneficial. This finding corroborates [34] mentioning that the Google Classroom allows teachers to manage the virtual classroom activity effectively and efficiently.

Dilenbourg, as quoted in Juan, et al. [35] pointed out that monitoring students' activity can help to anticipate potential problems such as student zero/poor participation in either individual or collaborative learning activities, and even course drop-outs. Nevertheless, monitoring students' learning process within virtual classes remains a problem to the teachers interviewed.

Ideally, the material delivered to students should connect with the students' daily life. In this point, students will get the advantages from the material that had been learned. Anderson [36] suggested that teachers inform the students about the importance of the lesson and the benefit to the students. This strategy could help the students to contextualize learning and make it more meaningful and interesting. Of the seven interviewed teachers, five mentioned the example of their learning material which was related to the students' daily life.

Feedback is crucial for students, as it offers the chance to improve academic achievement, foster learning, and develop teacher-student relationship. It is a crucial intervention for online educators [37]. Good feedback practice will benefit both students and teachers in dealing with students' learning experience [38]. Two teachers said to have often sent selected emoticons as a way to give feedback on their online class. Another couple of teachers reported to like using positive expressions as feedback. It was intended to trigger other students who had not completed assignments. Meanwhile, a teacher often gave direct rather than indirect feedback to her students. Another teacher had reflection activities on google jam board to know the students' feedback of her online class. She gave questions such as what students have learned today and how they feel about today's activity.

Since online learning were done mostly at home, the EFL teachers found it difficult to control over their students' learning process. Despite problems with working with parents regarding their kids in the online learning context [39] the participating EFL teachers often requested parents to bridge the information gap between teachers and students and better care for their kids' study.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, identifying the challenges the EFL teachers faced while implementing online education during the COVID-19 pandemic and exploring the survival of emergency situation they experienced during the pandemic makes a worthwhile contribution to education in that other teachers can anticipate similar problems in the future with success. Results of the study have shown that the challenges faced by the EFL teachers are internet connection problem, students' poor class participation, students' low motivation in the task completion, unsupported devices, and limited infrastructure support. To cope with those challenges, they have adapted themselves by modifying the lesson plan, improving competency, and adapting the instructional material. Further, they have employed strategies to face the challenges above, i.e. selecting a simple online learning platform, monitoring students' learning process, fitting the instructional material to students' daily life, providing intensive feedback, and collaborating with students' parents.

This study offers the following recommendations. First, the results provide educators and policy-makers with insights into the EFL teachers' resilience and performance during the emergency period. It is interesting to compare results of this study with practices in other parts of the worlds' largest Archipelago Indonesia and beyond with similar learning context. Secondly, as this study was based

solely on interviews, it is suggested that the future studies include data from classroom observations to give a better picture of the condition.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Acknowledgement:

We, the authors, would like to acknowledge the invaluable efforts of the following people. To Dr. Furqanul Aziez (former Director of the Postgraduate Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto) for his continuous support. It is through his permit and gentle reminders that we conducted this study and were able to stay focused and successfully complete it. To Mr. Sadmoko Danardono (Head of Cilacap Office of Education and Culture) for his permit, directions, and friendly comments that we were encouraged to complete this study in time and disseminate the results in a local teachers' forum. We are also indebted to all school principals who sent their teachers for our interviews. Finally, we are grateful to all the participating EFL teachers for their time spent with us during the data collection.

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