

REVEALING THE CHALLENGES AND PRACTICAL WAYS IN TEACHING WRITING ONLINE

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ABSTRACT

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The present study aims at examining the challenges confronted by the lecturers and the practical ways in teaching writing online. A qualitative research method was applied to get a deep understanding of the objective of this study. The data were collected through interviews and documentation. In obtaining the data, three English lecturers of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang were interviewed by using a semi-structured interview. In addition, the supporting documents related to teaching writing online, such as teaching journals, teaching documents, and students' portfolios were also gathered to enrich the data of the present study. The findings revealed that the challenges faced by the lecturers in teaching writing online include the students' problems in internet connections and the difficulty in maintaining the students' writing process. It was difficult for the lecturers to ensure the originality of students' works; thus, the lecturers were unable to assess the actual student's ability in writing. However, the lecturers did some practical ways to overcome the challenges in teaching writing online. Firstly, the lecturers applied synchronous and asynchronous meetings in the process of teaching and learning by utilizing some Learning Management Systems as online learning media. Secondly, the lecturers used Turnitin to check the originality of students' works. Finally, the lecturers applied peer feedback to improve students writing skills.

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing skill is widely regarded as one of the most important parts of linguistic ability for academic success. Writing skill, nonetheless, thought to be the most challenging skill for

EFL students to learn. Related to this, teaching writing is being crucial. This idea is in line with Burns and Siegel (2018) stating that people should have linguistic and textual knowledge to be capable of writing. Hence, Biber, et.al. (1999); McCarthy and Carter (1994) in their studies had declared that writing is not a matter of writing down the speech into the text. Writing is a complicated cognitive activity in which the writer must display simultaneous control of multiple variables. At the sentence level, these include content control, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to organize and combine data into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and works.

In teaching writing, there are some principles that the lecturers use for evaluating the course or the task. One of the essential principles is providing feedback to the students' writing that enhances their language development. To respond to students' writing, Harmer (2004) suggests lecturers evaluate, assist, guide, or even edit students' work. Furthermore, doing selective correction, applying marking scales, correcting symbols, and giving comments could also be performed by lecturers. Other experts also have their ways of reacting to students' writings. Lecturers could modify the methods advised by the experts adjusted to the student's proficiency. Furthermore, according to Dixon (1986), peer feedback could be used to evaluate students' writing before it is done by the teacher. In this case, the students can read their friends' works and give suggestions for the improvement of their writing, then the students could score them after doing revision. Moreover, Pica (1986) declared that the students could have the training to provide some comments which are beneficial to their composition of writing, and they could make it in a form of questions or a checklist.

Nevertheless, pandemic suddenly comes up with its all complexion which requires lecturers to adapt to online teaching. In teaching writing, previously, lecturers usually prepare the lesson for teaching students face to face so they could interact directly with the students and check whether students understand or not while practicing in the class. Not only checking but also knowing the originality of students' works becomes a crucial matter for lecturers. Because when writing class is performed offline, lecturers could do all of their jobs without any gaps between them and their students, but it is different from an online writing class. There are some students who misunderstand the instruction so their writings are inappropriate or they are not based on the instruction. Moreover, another problem is originality. When students write essays at home, lecturers may have difficulty checking whether their writings are really made by them or not.

Problems faced by the lecturers during writing class online has actually been investigated by some researchers. As Hidayati (2018) conducted a study on revealing challenges had by Indonesian lecturers in teaching writing to EFL students. From that study, it has resulted that there are internal and external factors that cause lecturers to face problems in teaching writing. The internal factors found are for example linguistic competence, motivation, and reading habits of learners while the external factors are such as the condition of class and teacher's help. By knowing both internal and external factors, Hidayati expected that it could contribute to EFL study, especially in teaching writing to EFL learners. Then, another research done by Ngoc (2021) in investigating challenges in teaching writing in EFL classrooms, found that students had difficulties of writing such as lacking vocabulary, inappropriate grammar, and writing skills. Then to overcome those problems, Ngoc used two approaches namely a product approach and a process approach. Not only that, but he also compared those approaches to show their strength and weaknesses and some suggestions aimed to give the lecturers the best method of teaching writing.

Despite the challenges faced by the lecturers in teaching writing online, a study conducted by Ariesta (2021) resulted several strategies which were employed by lecturers in teaching writing online throughout the Covid-19 epidemic era. In teaching writing online, the lecturers utilized video as a learning method and a small group discussion technique. Moreover, the lecturers used photos as a learning strategy and an imagined strategy. The findings revealed that the strategies made it easier for lecturers to teach writing online. The lecturers were able to determine the students' comprehension of the contents, and the students were able to complete the teacher's task.

In light of the foregoing, the present study investigated the challenges in teaching writing online and figured out the practical ways to conduct online writing classes. Thus, this study is expected to give insights and solutions as contributions to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), specifically in teaching writing.

METHOD

The present study used a qualitative research method to get a deep understanding of teaching writing online, especially the challenges confronted by the lecturers and the practical ways carried out by the lecturers to gain effective online learning. More specifically, a case study was employed as the research design of the present study. In the case study, the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals, and collects detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009, 2012 in Creswell, 2014).

The data of this study were collected through interviews and documentation. To obtain the data, three lecturers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang were interviewed by using a semi-structured interview in which they were selected purposively as their experience in teaching writing online. In addition, the supporting documents related to teaching writing online, such as teaching journals, teaching documents, and students' portfolios were also collected to enrich the data of the present study. Furthermore, the data obtained from the interviews and documentation were analyzed by interpreting and discussing them with the related literature and previous studies to get the results of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion of the present study encompass the entire picture of the results based on the data gathered from interviews and documentation including the challenges and the practical ways in teaching writing online. In conducting online writing classes, the lecturers employed both synchronous and asynchronous learning as their significance in providing learning materials. Synchronous learning refers to when the lecturers and students in a class interact with the course content of each other at the same time by means of tools in the form of live lecture, live chat room, phone conference, video conference, etc. The lecturers conducted synchronous learning by using Zoom Meeting or Google Meet which was important to engage students in the process of teaching and learning, especially in understanding the materials about writing. In synchronous meetings, the students were able to listen to the direct explanations from the lecturers, actively participate in the class discussion, and get direct feedback from the lecturers. However, the problems of limited internet connection become a challenge in online classes. Some students in rural areas had limited internet access which made them difficult to join the class in a video conference.

Thus, the lecturers also conducted asynchronous learning by means of Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Google Classroom, Quizizz, Nearpod, Liveworksheet, and University E-learning. The use of various learning media in online teaching can give a positive impact on the students throughout the learning process. Hikmatiar et al. (2020) proved that employing Google Classroom as a learning medium has a good impact on learning outcomes, student interests, and motivation, as well as encouraging innovative attitudes toward students. In asynchronous learning, the lecturers assigned students to a unit sequence, in which they must complete the writing tasks as per their schedules. The assigned reading materials or uploaded media, online quizzes, discussion boards, and other resources were used in each unit. Besides, the lecturers also provided the materials in the form of videos to make students easier in understanding the materials. This is in line with the study conducted by Ariesta (2021) that the use of video to teach writing is an excellent way to teach writing skills in an online learning class. The teacher was able to assist students in comprehending the subject and examples by employing this method. Asynchronous learning allows learners to learn regardless of their location or time. Therefore, the combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning benefits

this flexible approach, as lecturers and students can interact with each other as well as with content and activities anytime and anywhere.

In teaching writing, the lecturers taught the writing process such as planning, drafting, editing, revising, and final draft. As stated by Richard and Renandya (2004) that the writing process includes multiple steps including planning, drafting, editing, and the final product. The writers must plan what they are going to write, put thoughts into phrases or paragraphs, go through the written text as much as needed, and create a final product as the final step of writing. Practically, in the first stage, the lecturers asked the students to brainstorm the idea as much as possible about the topic given. Then, the students started to write the first draft, edited and revised their drafts and got the final draft of their writing.

In online learning, however, the lecturers could not maintain the students' process of writing. As another challenge in conducting online writing classes, the lecturers found it difficult to ensure the originality of students' works, for they have a more accessible website on the internet to help them accomplish the tasks. There is a lot of information available in the online source, even the students can get the task easier by taking any online articles. Since the lecturers could not check directly the students' writing process, they were difficult to measure the students' ability in writing. To overcome this problem, the lecturers checked the originality of students' works by using Turnitin. Turnitin enables the lecturers to check the similarity of the document/s with already published work. Moreover, the study conducted by Halgamuge (2017) also revealed that Turnitin's use as a plagiarism prevention tool increases the student learning outcomes with dramatically enhanced academic skills. After checking the similarity as well as other components of the writing, the lecturers gave feedback to the students' writing, asked them to revise their works, and get the final draft of their writing.

As the learning process, providing feedback is essential in teaching writing. It benefited the students in improving their writing ability. Hyland & Hyland (2006) stated that the purpose of feedback is to help students learn how to write better. In addition, Hyland & Hyland (2006) in his writing focused more on the types of writing such as teacher written and oral feedback, teacher conferencing feedback, peer feedback and self-evaluation, and computer-mediated feedback. Related to this, it is claimed that there is a little study which focuses on computer-mediated feedback. Thus, it is suggested to conduct research on giving writing feedback by using electronic system. Although there have been earlier researches on teacher writing feedback, there has been only a limited study that specifically examines teacher writing feedback in online learning. As a study conducted by Zainuddin (2004), it showed that the provision of feedback was able to improve students' writing. It is also in line with a significant study of adult ESL learners' learning preferences by Nunan (2000) which was found that error correction by the teacher was one of the most highly regarded and sought classroom activities.

Nevertheless, there was a problem in providing feedback on the students' writing. The lecturers found it difficult to give online feedback which took more time and was less effective, for the lecturers have limited time to check each of students' works. Peer evaluation for students, on the other hand, could be a solution to this problem. In practice, after the students have completed their work, the lecturers group the students in pairs to check each other's work. The review includes their grammatical error, the structure of the paragraphs, coherence, and cohesion. Then, depending on their friend's feedback, they revised their piece of writing. Thus, it can be easier for the lecturers to check the result of students' writing. In relation to the few studies on teaching writing feedback through online, the writers conduct this study in order to know how lecturers use the media and also online system in giving writing feedback to the students, specifically the usage of chat group of social media for example WhatsApp, Telegram, Google classroom and E learning as the online learning media.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study revealed that some problems become obstacles in teaching writing online. Those are such poor internet connections had by some students in the remote areas, and the difficulty of lecturers to know whether the students' writings were created by them or not. The

students who lived in rural areas tended to have limited access to get internet connection, which was possible for them not to join the live sessions smoothly. They complained to the lecturers because of being stuck, getting buffering, or leaving the online learning activity. Furthermore, the lecturers found that some of the students' writings were nearly identical. It was difficult for the lecturers to determine which work was original and which was not. By having online writing classes, the students easily knew others' works. They could communicate with their classmates to get what they wrote, even the students could access the websites that offer much information that can be used to do their assignment. Thus, the lecturers were getting harder to know the ability of students' writing because the lecturers were not able to see the process of students' writing when it was held online.

This study, however, not only portrayed the problems faced in online learning but also proposed some practical ways in teaching writing online. In addition to synchronous learning, the lecturers also took advantage of asynchronous learning by utilizing some online learning media such as Google Classroom, Liveworksheet, Quizizz, Nearpod, University E-learning, etc. to provide interesting materials that could engage students in the learning process. Moreover, the lecturers used Turnitin as the tool to know whether the students' works are originally written by them or not. Furthermore, providing feedback on the students' writing was also crucial to enhance the ability of students in writing. All in all, it is suggested to further researchers conduct the related study under this topic with different methods or subjects of the study. The outcome may provide diverse perspectives, yet it can enhance the study's insights. Besides, future researchers may widen other fields that are relevant to English education. The most significant one, the findings are able to make a greater contribution to English Language Teaching (ELT).

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