

THE CONSTRAINTS FACED BY EFL LECTURERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ONLINE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The increasing demand for online learning learning has led to its widespread adoption across Indonesia, influencing all levels of education. This sudden shift has pushed educators to quickly adapt to digital technologies, primarily relying on internet-based platforms and email communication. The rapid transition to online learning has created opportunities for pedagogical innovation but also introduced significant challenges, particularly in English language education. This study investigates the obstacles encountered by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers in implementing online learning. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected from eight EFL lecturers teaching at both governmental and private universities in Aceh, Indonesia. The data were obtained through online questionnaires, providing insights into the various constraints experienced by these lecturers. The primary challenges reported include a lack of meaningful interaction between lecturers and students, suboptimal learning and evaluation processes, and difficulties in teaching skills-based material online. Other issues highlighted were students' limited understanding of the content, inconsistent internet connection, student disengagement from assignments, lecturer fatigue, and inadequate access to learning resources and support tools. This research provides a comprehensive overview of the barriers faced by EFL lecturers in transitioning to online teaching, offering valuable insights for improving the design and delivery of online education in similar contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing demand for online learning has significantly influenced education systems worldwide, including in Indonesia, extending to all levels of education. The Ministry of Education and Culture and local governments have promoted this approach to support learning in an increasingly digital world. Although some Indonesians may still be unfamiliar with online learning, the concept has been implemented through

smartphones and social media applications. This rapid transition has resulted in educators, students, and administrators being thrust into new learning ecosystems, requiring not only technical skills but also a reimagining of pedagogical strategies (Dhawan, 2020). While the educational sector globally faced similar challenges, in developing nations like Indonesia, this transition was particularly stark due to the uneven distribution of technological resources and varying levels of digital literacy among educators (Sari, 2021).

The term e-learning was introduced in 1999. White (2018) says that the principles of e-learning have been practiced in many ways, such as through correspondence, teaching machines, and computer-based training initiation in the 1960s. Not everyone can digest it well when applied to something new, especially in teaching and learning. The growing reliance on digital tools has encouraged many professionals in education to delve deeper, especially in mastering digital technology, which so far may only be limited to the Internet and email, and even then, it may only be used for specific purposes. E-learning tools, such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), video conferencing platforms like Zoom, and collaborative tools like Google Classroom, have become essential components of educational practice. However, despite these advancements, teachers face significant challenges in fully integrating these technologies into their day-to-day instruction, particularly when teaching complex subjects like language (Al-Marroof et al., 2021).

Various problems and obstacles often arise in the implementation process. The teachers at school and the lecturers at the higher education have faced numerous challenges. English language learning involves not only cognitive knowledge but also the acquisition of skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing, all of which are difficult to facilitate fully through online platforms (Zhao & Wu, 2020). Pedagogically, it has been shown that synchronous interactions, crucial for language acquisition, are harder to achieve online, limiting student engagement (Ali, 2020).

The ongoing challenge of transferring the learning system from face-to-face to online modalities highlights the necessity of this research. This study aims to identify the key challenges faced by English lecturers in Indonesia, specifically in Aceh, in planning, implementing, and evaluating online learning programs. In the context of Indonesia, where face-to-face lectures have traditionally dominated the educational system, adapting to online platforms without adequate preparation has compounded existing educational inequalities (Purwanto et al., 2020). While some universities have established LMS portals,

these are often used only for basic administrative tasks, such as grading or sharing academic information, rather than comprehensive instructional purposes.

Learning can be interpreted as a process that organizes the occurrence of a learning process. In it, there are various aspects of guidance or direction for students who are engaged the learning process. With online learning, the ability of educators to effectively guide and engage students becomes more dependent on the technological tools available and the digital fluency of both students and teachers (Moorhouse, 2020). The quality of interaction, which is pivotal in language learning, is often diluted in online formats, raising concerns about the long-term impact on students' language skills (Bali & Liu, 2018). Teachers use this as a benchmark for learning so that a learning strategy can be appropriately systemized and run effectively. According to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, learning is an interaction process between educators, students, and learning resources in a learning environment. The interaction of these three aspects makes the learning process systematized through the stages of design, implementation, and evaluation. As a complex activity, Pane and Darwis (2017) emphasize that interaction in learning will take place dynamically so that development and life experiences will be found in it to achieve the planned learning targets. It can be concluded that face-to-face learning alone produces a reasonably complex situation. Therefore, the challenges of online learning will undoubtedly find other complex sides.

E-learning, often called online learning, has a broad and diverse set of definitions. These definitions commonly emphasize the existence of technology-mediated learning. Several experts have expressed their views regarding the definition of e-learning. The term e-learning comes from 2 words in English: electronic and learning (Mutia & Leonard, 2013). Furthermore, the term "e-learning" has evolved over time, with some definitions focusing on asynchronous learning tools, while others highlight the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning in adaptive learning systems that personalize the educational experience (Ouyang & Jiao, 2021). This shift from traditional methods to more innovative, technology-driven systems necessitates a rethinking of teacher training and development programs.

Specifically, e-learning refers to using the internet and technology to provide various solutions to increase knowledge and skills (Oludare Jethro et al., 2012). This understanding shows that e-learning aims to enhance knowledge and skills by utilizing technology and the Internet. Solutions and materials to improve these abilities and skills are provided and delivered using technology and the Internet, such as videos, websites,

and audio. Horton (2011) also has the same thought that e-learning is a set of learning delivered through electronic media, such as the Internet, intranet, and extranet. Both definitions show the vital role of technology in the learning process. Learning can be said to implement e-learning if there is technology in it (Sukman & Mhunkongdee, 2021; Singh & Yunus, (2021).

In recent years, interactive learning systems have become more prevalent, allowing students to engage with materials in new ways. Bezhovski and Poorani (2016) define e-learning as an interactive system where feedback and resources are provided in real-time, making it possible for students to engage with both peers and instructors virtually. This shift to digital formats, such as e-books and interactive assignments, has reshaped how students access and retain knowledge. However, with these developments come new demands on educators, particularly regarding their readiness to adopt and integrate these technologies into their teaching practices (Smith, 2019) in (Kattoua et al., 2016). Hence, investigating the challenges in online EFL teaching is essential in ensuring that online learning truly meets the diverse needs of students, particularly in Aceh, Indonesia.

Based on the description above, this research focuses on identifying constraints faced by English lecturers in Aceh when using online learning. It aims to analyse the fundamental challenges these lecturers experience in planning, implementing, and evaluating online learning programs.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is a descriptive quantitative research method. Descriptive research is aimed at describing an event and its characteristics and is more directed to the 'what' question rather than how or why something has happened (Nassaji, 2015). Descriptive studies typically observe and document trends or situations without manipulating variables, making it suitable for understanding the real-world conditions faced by the participants (Creswell, 2014). In this study, descriptive quantitative research was deemed appropriate to explore the challenges encountered by EFL lecturers when transitioning to online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. This approach allows for an accurate depiction of lecturers' experiences, helping to highlight specific barriers to effective teaching using online platforms.

Furthermore, Kothari (2004) describes descriptive quantitative research as a tool for documenting and explaining natural phenomena as they occur, making it particularly effective for capturing data on constraints in online teaching during unprecedented

situations like the pandemic. This research method not only assists in identifying common issues but also quantifies the extent to which these issues are experienced, thereby providing a clearer picture of the overall problem. This study aims at investigating the constraints of online learning implementation experienced by EFL lecturers.

This study involved 14 EFL lecturers teaching at public and private universities in Aceh, consisting of 10 females and 4 males with varying teaching experiences. This diversity of teaching backgrounds helps to ensure that the data gathered represents a broad spectrum of perspectives and challenges related to online teaching. Respondents were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate. The selection of respondents based on their availability to participate in this study. This voluntary participation ensures a level of commitment and genuine insight into the challenges faced during online learning. They responded to an invitation to participate in the study.

The main tool used in this research was a questionnaire, which consisted of 24 questions designed to identify the obstacles or constraints lecturers encountered during the online learning process. The questionnaire covered multiple dimensions, including technological challenges, teaching strategies, student engagement, and evaluation methods. It was distributed using Google Forms, ensuring ease of access for the respondents, given the widespread use of online platforms during the pandemic. The questionnaire design allowed for structured responses that could be easily analysed quantitatively while also offering respondents the opportunity to expand on certain questions if necessary. The data collection period spanned two weeks.

In analyzing the data, the questionnaires were then processed, analyzed, and presented as percentages. To calculate the percentage of responses, the researchers employed the statistical formula suggested by Sugiyono (2013), which is commonly used in quantitative research for the descriptive presentation of data.

FINDINGS

After distributing the questionnaire to the respondents, the finding was then carefully analyzed by the researchers to identify the constraints faced by English lecturers to the implementation of online learning. Descriptive research data analysis shows that lecturers faced problems in several measured aspects. Most problems faced by lecturers are generally related to the lack of interaction between lecturers and students, not optimal learning process, not optimal evaluation process, and materials related to skills are difficult to teach, the difficulty of making students understand the material being taught,

the instability of internet access, and students being unresponsive to the assignments given, and the lecturers get tired quickly. The distribution of online learning constraints can be seen in the following chart.

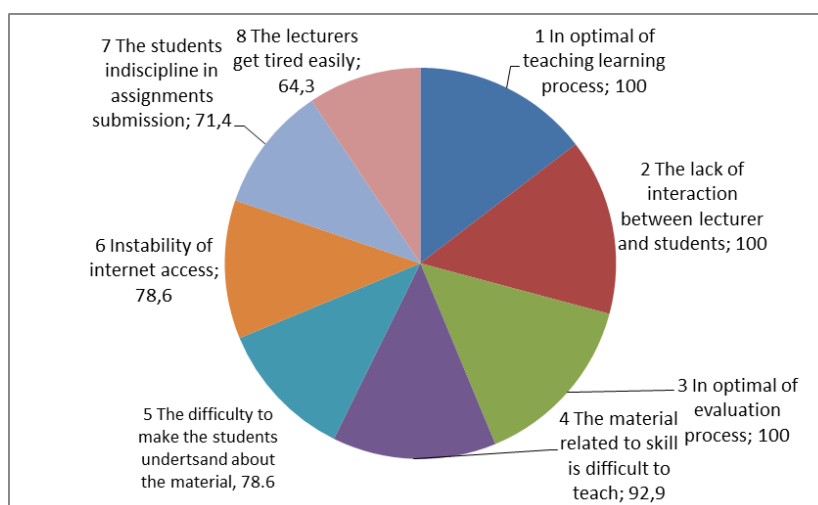


Figure 1. The percentage of online learning constraints experienced by the lecturers

DISCUSSION

This section elaborates on the research findings, focusing on the highest percentages of the online learning constraints encountered by EFL lecturers.

Interaction in online classes

A prominent issue reported by all respondents (100%) was the significant reduction in interaction between lecturers and students during online English learning sessions. This lack of meaningful engagement led to a one-way, lecture-dominated communication format, with minimal student participation. Many students were slow to respond and unresponsive to assignments (71.4%), and their discipline in submitting assignments on time was notably poor (64.3%). This This issue correlates with findings from Mulyani et al., (2021) that 68.8% of respondents agreed that their reason for enjoying the face-to-face or conventional ways of teaching and learning because of its effectiveness of material presentation and the lecturer's satisfactory explanation and, more importantly, the existence of excellent social interaction between students and lecturer. Banditvilai (2016) as cited in Cronje (2020) highlights that while e-learning can enhance learning, it should not replace the essential social connectivity between teachers and students. Social interaction is a crucial part of the learning process, fostering a sense of community and motivation that is often lacking in virtual classrooms. Furthermore, IT infrastructure plays a role in facilitating or hindering interactions. In addition, Krish (as cited in Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020) adds that online learning environment is not only useful for students to

access knowledge and materials but also to associate and make collaboration among course participants. Also, lecturers and students are in separate locations, so their interaction was influenced by IT infrastructure (Junus et al., 2021). As Ramane (2021) also emphasizes the challenge teachers face in keeping students engaged during online classes, reinforcing the idea that without proper engagement, learning effectiveness declines. The prolonged and often delayed responses in online settings contribute to a less dynamic and interactive learning environment, which can lead to a deterioration in learning outcomes.

Inefficient learning process

The learning process involves preparation, active teaching, and a structured closing, all of which are essential for ensuring effective education delivery. If any of these elements are compromised, the learning process becomes less effective. A significant portion of respondents (64.3%) reported experiencing fatigue during online teaching, potentially due to multitasking between campus duties and home responsibilities. This fatigue, combined with the lack of physical presence, makes it difficult for lecturers to focus fully on the teaching process.

The challenge is particularly pronounced when teaching language skills. Many lecturers (78.6%) admitted to struggling with making students understand course material through online platforms. Teaching language skills requires interactive methods like conversation practice and real-time feedback, which are harder to implement virtually. This result is in line with Widiyono (2020) that online that online learning often results in less optimal material understanding due to the overwhelming number of assignments, which may substitute active teaching and reduce time for meaningful interaction and skill-building. This results in a learning process that is less effective. Additionally, many lecturers lack the expertise in using online learning platforms effectively (43%), which can further diminish the quality of education. The lack of proper training or familiarity with digital teaching tools leads to an incomplete and ineffective learning process.

Evaluation challenges in online classes

Given that the overall learning process was deemed not optimal by 100% of the respondents, it follows that the evaluation process was also considered ineffective (100%). English language learning, which involves developing a set of complex skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), is difficult to evaluate thoroughly in an online environment. Assessing these skills often requires interactive methods that are hard to

replicate online. Another factor was caused by internet access. Salam et al., (2023) noted that the limitations of infrastructures, such as unreliable internet connection and a scarcity of devices available in their schools, add to the challenge, affecting not only the evaluation process but also students' ability to complete and submit assignments on time. The lack of student discipline, noted by many respondents, exacerbates this issue. If students are not consistently engaged, the accuracy and effectiveness of evaluations may be compromised.

Instability of internet access

All respondents admitted that they had an internet quota and had no difficulty in buying a quota. However, the most prominent problem they experienced during online learning was the instability of connection. The varying quality of internet providers, especially in remote areas, contributed to interruptions in the learning process. This is consistent with Alqurashi's (2011) findings, that the most common obstacle to online learning is that some students do not have adequate access to the internet, and professors need excessive time to develop course materials. Moreover, the time needed for lecturers to develop digital course materials often exceeds their capacity, leading to a heavier workload. This, combined with technical issues, impacts the quality of teaching and learning. Stable and reliable internet access is essential for any form of online education, and without it, the entire process becomes disjointed and inefficient.

The lecturer's fatigue

The constraints also come from the lecturers themselves. Readiness of lecturers during the online learning process is one of the successful aspects. The questionnaire results show that the online learning process makes lecturers get fatigue (tired) easily (64.3%). Many factors cause fatigue, such as multi-tasking between campus assignments and homework, so they felt less focused during screen time. These constraints can be reduced by setting up a good time management. Another cause of lecturers' fatigue dealt with their physical condition during the online learning. A study conducted by Sekti et al., (2020) reveals that the lecturers often complained about their body's poor physical condition when carrying out lessons. This is because the body is sitting for a long time and staring at the monitor screen continuously. They felt tired eyes, feeling sore, causing frequent tears, increased cylinder size and minus; headache; neck, shoulders, back, hips are often stiff and sore; the feet are swollen and feel stiff, the knees when used to stand up after sitting for a long time become stiff and drag. In addition, Gultom et al., (2022) observed that online teaching has led to increased feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and sadness among educators. The lack of in-person interaction, combined with the pressures

of managing digital classrooms, has contributed to a sense of burnout and reduced empathy towards students.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

A variety of constraints have been reported by the respondents in this study related to the implementation of online learning in the teaching of English. Most constraints and problems faced by lecturers are generally related to the lack of interaction between lecturers and students, inefficient of learning process, not optimal of evaluation process, materials related to skills are difficult to teach, the difficulty of making students understand the material being taught, the instability of internet connection, and students being indifferent to the assignments given. Moreover, lecturers reported feeling fatigued due to the demands of online teaching, while the availability of references and learning support tools did not seem to pose significant challenges.

Despite these obstacles, lecturers demonstrated a high level of confidence in utilizing internet-based teaching platforms. They acknowledged that while online learning presented its own set of difficulties, especially concerning student engagement and interaction, they were capable of managing the technical requirements of web-based tools. However, it must be emphasized that the success of online learning is heavily dependent on stable internet connection. This highlights a critical infrastructural need that requires attention from both educators and policymakers to ensure a smoother and more effective online learning experience.

Furthermore, while the majority of respondents indicated that they had access to abundant online resources and references, there remains a need to continuously update and diversify these resources to suit the evolving needs of online education. Lecturers' capacity to manage both synchronous and asynchronous learning modes, as well as their ability to innovate in digital pedagogy, will be crucial moving forward. Hence, any long-term shift to online learning models should not only address the technical challenges but also provide ongoing professional development for educators.

In sum, this study reveals that while online learning can be a viable alternative to traditional in-person classes, there are clear areas that need improvement, including fostering interaction, streamlining the evaluation process, and addressing the psychological aspect on both students and lecturers. Solutions to these problems will require collaborative efforts between institutions, educators, and technology providers.

Suggestion

Based on the findings, it is recommended that lecturers, institutions, and policymakers address the challenges that have arisen from the implementation of online learning. First, more emphasis should be placed on improving digital communication channels to foster better interaction between lecturers and students. Workshops and training that focus on maximizing student engagement through online platforms could prove beneficial in bridging this interaction gap. Additionally, a similar study with a wider sample should be conducted to capture a more diverse range of challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers in different geographic and institutional contexts. By expanding the sample size and including participants from various regions and types of universities (e.g., public vs. private, rural vs. urban), future research could gain more comprehensive insights into the obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of online learning. Moreover, this research relied primarily on quantitative methods, using only a questionnaire to gather data. To build a more nuanced understanding of the issues, future studies should incorporate qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions with both lecturers and students. These approaches would provide a richer perspective on the emotional and cognitive aspects of online learning, which are often not captured in quantitative surveys. To ensure a sustainable and effective transition to online education, further research should also focus on the development of more innovative and interactive teaching tools that cater specifically to language learning. Since EFL teaching often requires a high level of interaction and practice, especially in skill-based areas like speaking and listening, future studies could investigate the effectiveness of new technologies, such as AI-based language tutoring platforms or immersive virtual classrooms, in addressing these challenges.

Finally, institutions should consider offering additional support to lecturers, not only in terms of technical training but also in areas related to mental health and well-being. As this study shows, many lecturers reported feeling fatigued and overwhelmed by the demands of online teaching. Institutions could provide better time management strategies, ergonomic advice, or even counselling services to help educators cope with these new challenges. A concerted effort to address both the technical and personal needs of lecturers will contribute to a more positive and productive online learning environment. By addressing these issues, the teaching and learning process can be optimized, leading to better outcomes for both lecturers and students in an increasingly digital educational landscape.

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