

“The teacher did not explain the lesson, just giving us a task”: Self-reflections of pre-service English teachers in an online learning mode



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ABSTRACT

In the post-pandemic era, online learning has been the focus of many educational institutions nowadays, including English as a foreign language classes. However, with the current rapid changes in online learning, little attention has been paid to uncovering the self-reflection of pre-service English teachers in learning English online. This brief report seeks to construe how three Indonesian pre-service English teachers negotiate the meaning of their past learning experiences in English as a foreign language classes during the online learning mode. We employed a narrative inquiry in this study in order to capture the participants' experiences. Data were garnered through WhatsApp-based semi-structured interviews and were analyzed narratively. Findings suggest that the participants negotiated their multifaceted learning experiences and complexities during the online learning process. In addition, from the participants' narratives, teaching and learning enactment done by the teachers was ill-performed. The pedagogical implications of this study are discussed at the end of this paper.



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1. Introduction

Online learning in English as a foreign language has been mushrooming nowadays. It is evident from a number of empirical studies examining the effect of this learning on students' English skill development and teachers' professional development [1]–[4]. Efforts to enact this online learning in English language teaching may be directed by the current technological advancement and the fact that foreign language education is akin to technology. Previous studies have shown that technology and foreign language education are interrelated and provide easy learning and teaching modes [5]. In the past, online learning has been a pathway enacted by policymakers to bridge the complexities of learning and teaching in the pandemic era. One of the government policies to overcome the spread of COVID-19 was through implementation of online learning in Indonesian universities. The consequences of this policy are that teacher educators need to employ digital learning approaches in their classes [6]. However, although existing literature has shown that online learning is the ultimate goal of today's learning era, scant attention, in this research, looks at how teacher candidates reflect and negotiate their online learning experiences. As a consequence, they may encounter complexities and tensions when later enact classroom activities online in the class which are untold, and thus teachers are not well informed about these conditions. One of the most prominent approach to exploring such an issue is through self-reflection under the framework of a narrative inquiry design.

To the best of our scholarly knowledge, there is very limited research on the self-reflection of online learning enacted by pre-service English teachers (PET) in Indonesia. This study thus attempts to unveil how online learning experiences contribute to shaping their negotiated and situated perspectives within a teacher education program. Originated from Dewey's (1977) definition of reflective practice, which is an effort to think intensively about one's actions, scholars have witnessed

how self-reflection affects one's performances in myriad sectors such as physical education [7], medical education [8], engineering leadership [9], and English language education [10]. Previously, [11] considered reflective practice as a process of self-reflection involving self-observation, self-understanding, and self-revelation as parts of professional practice. In this study, thereby, we employ the term "self-reflection" since it is more situated and contextual [12].

Self-reflection has been deemed crucial in construing values depicted in one's personality, such as the understanding of personal and professional critical consciousness [13]. In pre-service education programs, several studies have attempted to explore student-teachers' self-reflections on teaching practice via vlogs [14], blogs such as electronic journaling [15], and a school-mediated teaching program [16]. Thus, it is evident from these studies that scholars have focused on self-reflections depicted in teaching practices as policy and curriculum align pre-service teachers' teaching skills development. Although the previous studies significantly contribute to improved and sustained teaching practices, there is a paucity of considering pre-service English teachers' reflections on online learning experiences as a decisive factor in their future teaching assumptions, beliefs, and principles. Their learning experiences prior to undertaking a pre-service teacher education program in higher education generally yield interesting trajectories [17] that lead them to perceptual learning and teaching. Learning from the experiences also plays a key role in a successful teaching career, however, we acknowledge that this notion is not addressed in many teacher education research, particularly in the Indonesian context. Instead, scholars focused partly on pre-service English teachers' teaching practicum, professional learning, and reasons for pursuing a teaching career [18]. Given these inconclusive findings, we attempt to uncover the extent to which three Indonesian pre-service English teachers' negotiated and situated perspectives of online learning experiences are reflected.

2. Method

This study deployed a narrative research design through semi-structured interviews to capture participants' reflections [19]. Three Indonesian pre-service English teachers were recruited by employing a purposive sampling technique. The access to recruiting these participants was from the first author's relationship with the participants (names are pseudonyms): Herlin, Intan, and Irfan are the first author's students in an English language study program. Although this relationship may align with researchers' subjectivity in gathering and analyzing the data, a close relationship allows for open shared stories among the researchers and participants [20]. Thus, this model of the researcher-participant relationship also allows for more detailed information shared by the participants. We collected the data using the WhatsApp (WA) mobile application by generating questions from the interview guidelines. The interview started with a general question such as: "How is your online English learning experience?" The conversation then continued with a more specific question inquiring about their strategies for resolving online learning difficulties, "How do you deal with online learning difficulties? Since the nature of this study was the narrative lens, the data gathered were then analyzed thematically. We investigated the emerging themes within the documented data from the three participants. Afterward, we then conducted member-checking to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Negotiating self-motivation in the online learning

The first theme that emerges from the narrative analysis is the negotiation between self-motivation the online learning activities. The vignette voiced by Herlin, one of our interviewees, portrays that her motivation, once it is well established, is confronted with the fact that her online class did not run well. Worse, this condition is added to the teacher's low competence in using digital media. She tried to negotiate the power in learning English with such unfruitful conditions. However, it results in her decreasing learning motivation and unsatisfied learning outcomes. It is depicted in her voice:

....Actually, I have enough passion in learning English....However, it turns out to be unmotivated in the online learning model. The teacher did not explain the lesson, just giving a task. Worse, the internet connection was unstable and the presentation activities did not run well. That's why I was not very engaged at the time (Interview 1).

Herlin's account informs that learners in disadvantaged circumstances are frequently unmotivated in their learning [21]. They navigate to experience better learning nuances, although the teachers do not often explain the materials during online learning. In this case, Herlin is encountering learning fluctuation [22]. It is also known as learning participation, which changes due to varied forms of social interactions in the online learning platform. One of these forms is influenced by social negotiation with teachers and technology. In fact, unstable internet connections and teachers' inadequacy in teaching online are the major reasons why learning is sometimes uninteresting [23]. These investments are then altered since different conditions penetrate her learning. In another conversation, Intan, the second interviewee, underwent similar learning conditions as Herlin. He did not like the online learning since her home is far from internet resources, and that, the teachers did not teach at all. Yet, they gave tasks at every meeting in the class. This is seen from her account:

I don't like online learning. It is very hard for me to learn since my home is in a village and there is an internet connection. Besides, my teachers just sent WA and gave tasks to me and my friends. I think that is not learning, but a task!
(Interview 2).

Intan's learning experiences look uninteresting. She did not enjoy it because the teachers did not explain the materials and worse, her home internet connection is unstable. Both Intan's and Herlin's online learning experiences are not well-performed by the teachers, aside from the internet connection. In EFL settings, English language learning which is done online often does not run well due to teachers' low competencies in teaching online classes [24]. When asked about their preference for online learning and offline learning models, Irfan, our third interviewee, believes that offline learning is much better since students can emotionally engage with teachers in class. Meanwhile, Irfan contended that online learning is not very motivating since there are no social interactions among students and teachers. This is seen in his narrative:

.....In my mind, offline learning is good because students are emotionally engaged with teachers during the teaching and learning process. But, there is no social interaction in the online learning activities. It is therefore very hard to see whether students like me understand the teachers' explanation (Interview 3).

Irfan's narrative captures that offline learning enactment is indeed more meaningful for knowledge-based construction [25] and creates social interaction [26]. Theoretically, the meaning-making process is likely to take place since social interaction exists in the classroom. Therefore, students' self-motivation is heightened in the offline learning activities.

3.2. Tension in the online learning

The second emerging theme unveiled in this study is multi-tenets held by the three participants. As pre-service teachers currently learning to teach, they bring with them their perspectives after reflecting on the journey of their online learning. Hence, multiple ideas are captured from their narrative accounts:

Herlin: I am not happy this semester since I paid for nothing. I mean, I pay a lot of money for tuition fees but I just get nothing due to online learning (Interview 4).

Irfan: My classes are all beyond my expectations. I actually have an idea to present but due to the limited time in the online class, I cannot present it.
(Interview 5).

Intan: At first I thought it was easy to learn in the online learning platform. In fact, I feel more difficulties each semester. Badly, I cannot speak English well.....and mess up, so I feel unconfident (Interview 6).

These narratives explain to us that the participants encountered tensions during the online learning activities. Herlin shared that he got nothing during the learning process whereas she had to pay the full tuition fee in one semester of study. Irfan failed to present his ideas since the teachers limited the learning activity. Meanwhile, Intan felt that her speaking was not well performed during the online

class, leading to her low confidence. These tensions exemplify that EFL online classes are running with a lot of complexities [27].

4. Conclusion

This study captures the values of self-reflection in online English learning. The results documented that the participants of this study negotiated their multifaceted learning experiences in the forms of complexities and tensions during the online learning process. The findings also revealed that teachers' teaching enactment was ill-performed during online learning. This study suggests that pedagogical interventions in the form of systematic teacher training, facility-supported policy, and students' learning capacity building are encouraged to be implemented.

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