Strategies and Challenges in Synchronous and Asynchronous English Learning Activities

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Technology has a fundamental role in the teaching and learning process, particularly in Covid-19 pandemic situation. This situation forces all the components of education such as teachers, students, and educational practitioners to conduct their role by using technology in English Learning Activities (ELA). Online learning activities can be conducted synchronously and asynchronously. This study is concerned with exploring students' strategies and challenges in online English language activities. Observation and semi-structured interview protocol are applied to collect the data. There were 20 students who participated as research subjects of this study. To analyze the data, the researcher applied six analysis steps. It consists of organizing and preparing the raw data, reading through all data, coding the data, interrelating themes/description, and interpreting the meaning of themes/description. The researcher also discussed the literature at the end of the study. It also involves Discourse Analysis approach collaboratively to present the data in extract form. The results of study indicated that students attended learning activities synchronously and asynchronously. Synchronous learning strategies consisted of face to face interaction in zoom, google meet, discussion in room chat, attendance in Google Form or in academic information system. Asynchronous learning strategies covered Google Classroom, Email, and Schoology. The students found challenges in terms of trouble signals, limited internet data, insufficient knowledge on educational technology, and inflexible instructional materials. Thus, it can be stated that online learning activities give promises and challenges to the students.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 affects educational process in all countries including, Indonesia. Learning activities are changed from offline to online activities. In this situation, technology has a fundamental role in teaching and learning activities. this situation forces all the components of education such as teachers, students, and educational practitioners to conduct their teaching role by using technology in english learning activities (ELA). therefore, ELA can be conducted synchronously and asynchronously. most lecturers incorporate their learning synchronously and asynchronously as the best solution to facilitate instructional materials and ela to the students.

Synchronous and asynchronous are used by the lecturer to deliver and communicate learning materials and activities to students; it is also called as a distance method in online learning. A recent study indicates there are some ways can be applied to keep the learning activities from continuing in a pandemic situation. As Branon and Essex (2001) state that online educators apply synchronous and asynchronous communication tool in their online courses. Rehman and Fatima (2021) in the pandemic of covid-19 facilitated synchronous and asynchronous learning by conducting flipped classroom. different from Guo (2020) who compared synchronous and asynchronous in online teaching found that for future online offering learning should require mandatory synchronous participation of students.

Keeping the students actively participating in an online classroom in a pandemic is very challenging to lecturers. Teaching materials and learning activities must be running, with advanced technology the lecturers have an alternative strategy to engage interaction in online courses. however, in online learning some problems are found such as signal trouble. it is a big problem for the students who live in rural areas. in synchronous learning with virtual classrooms, it is expected that all the students turn the camera on, so verbal and nonverbal communication can be captured. however, it cannot run well as an effect of signal trouble. besides, the dotted voice of students interfered with the successful learning activities, even leaving the students out of the room if they tried to respond to the instruction. additionally, there is no wi-fi available around the students and limited internet data are other problems faced by the students. students' full attendance with an active camera in zoom or google meet is difficult to reach for the students who live away from the city. on the other hand, in asynchronous learning the lecturer provided learning materials and activities in some online platforms like learning management system (LMS), google classroom, edmodo, and others. Usually the lecturer gives a day to study the material and submit the assignment given, so the students can find the best time to learn it independently. Unfortunately, it is found that some students cannot understand the instructional materials well, even video learning is provided. they still need assistance from the lecturer directly. they are not disciplined on the time given, moreover after checking the students' task there are similar answers found. it is indicated that copy paste activity cannot be controlled.

The implementation of those learning tools revealed students' perspectives based on their learning activities. Lin and Gao (2020) that the students perceived challenges in both format of synchronous and asynchronous learning, they being distracted by classmates in synchronous and feeling isolated in asynchronous online learning. In line with Gazan (2020) indicated that the students like the flexibility aspect of both synchronous and asynchronous learning by repeatedly stating adjectives like easy and comfortable. Therefore, the situation above led this study to find out strategies that applied by students incorporate synchronous and asynchronous learning in pandemic situations to keep them active in online classrooms. Challenges faced by the students in online class are also examined in this study.

2.   METHODS

In conducting this study, the researchers applied descriptive qualitative study to collect and analyze the data of students at a private university in Makassar. The participants consisted of 22

students of six semester of English education department. They were 12 male and 10 female, those who were around 19 to 21 years old. The students chosen were active students during online class. To gather the data, the researchers who were as participant observe attended an online classroom for ten meetings. The researchers took note of students' activities in Google Meet classroom, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp group. After observing finished, the researchers provided semi-structured interview protocol to find out students' strategies and challenges in synchronous and asynchronous learning. The observations were conducted for ten meetings about 90 minutes. They responded to the interview question by recording their voice that is provided in WhatsApp. The interview was semi-structured interview. To analyze the data, the researcher applied six steps from Creswell (2014:247).

At first, the raw data were organized and prepared for analysis. This involved transcribing interviews typing up field notes, sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information. Then, the data were read. The researchers provided a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning. The researcher wrote notes in margins of transcripts or observational field notes, or start recording general thoughts about the data at this stage. After that, it is start to code all of the data. The researcher organized the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word representing a category in the margins. It involved taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labelling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis. Description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting. Researchers generated codes for this description. Then, the researcher used the coding as well for generating a small number of themes. Advance how the description and themes was represented in the qualitative narrative. The researcher used a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis. The last is making an interpretation of the findings. The researchers related and compared the findings with information gleaned from the literature or theories, form interpretations that call for action agendas for reform and change. The researchers also discussed the literature at the end of the study. In interpretation, it also involved Discourse Analysis approach collaboratively to present the data in extract form.

3.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dealing with synchronous learning; the students of six semester combined synchronous and asynchronous online learning such as google meet, zoom, google classroom, email, and WhatsApp of those learning platform, the students gave similar responses on the strategies and challenges that they face during online learning.

1. Students' Strategies

Extract 01

"I used WA group, zoom, telegram, google meet, google classroom and sometimes using email to send an assignment. For example, using WA in intercultural communication and semantic courses. Using zoom in microteaching course, and intensive academic writing. Using google meet in the Research in ELT course and pragmatic. Using telegram in the English-Indonesian translation course. Using google classroom in Syntax courses. Actually in 1 course sometimes use 1-3 platforms The platforms used is suited with the exist condition. For example if the connection is good maybe it will use zoom/google meet, but if the conditions is unstable WA/google classroom will be conducted."

Extract 01 shows the strategies used by the students in online learning during Covid-19 pandemic. It combines synchronous and asynchronous learning. It depends on internet signal around the lecturer and students. The students entered the room as scheduled given by the lecturer. If most

of the students got trouble with the signal, the lecturer led them to the WA group of Google Classroom.

Extract 02

"Actually the most platform we use during Online right now is Google meet. In some courses such as; Research, Statistic, CALL, Intercultural Communication, Language material developments, and pragmatics. We use Google meet to give presentations, and also when the lecture explains their materials. But, some of the course, like AIK 6, use WA Group the most, even in doing presentations, we just send our recorders."

Extract 02 indicates almost all students use google meet as synchronous learning in online class. The students are informed that the lecturers explain the materials by presenting slide power points in a virtual meeting, so the students can listen carefully on the explanation. For certain courses, the students have a task to make a presentation too. WhatsApp's group is used for sending the assignment.

Extract 03

"To improve my own English I use several ways, for example reading something in English (sometimes I open social media and read English captions, then I'm looking for the new vocab to translate), I watch/listen to music by activating the English subtitles, this helps me to improve my vocabulary and pronunciation. Then I use the Halo app to help me find a speaking partner."

Extract 03 points out that students use social media, YouTube, and Halo applications as strategies during online learning. Even if there is offline learning with the lecturers, the students still keep going to improve their English by using the application above. Some students' activity includes enriching vocabulary and pronunciation by watching English movies.

Extract 04

"If one of course uses Google meet to start the class, I usually screenshoot all of the material that the lecturer share because sometimes my internet connection is bad which causes I couldn't hear explanation about the material. Then after that I'm looking for other material in YouTube or articles/journals that relate with material that the lecturer shared before."

Extract 05

"use a laptop or cellphone to turn on the subject or screenshot the lesson"

In extract 04 and 05, a strategy used by another student to screenshot the materials presented by the lecturers in a synchronous meeting. It is done as an anticipation strategy when getting trouble signals. Sometimes, the students could not hear the explanation from the lecturer. The students also find out related materials from YouTube or articles form journals for improving their understanding.

Extract 06

"When the lecturer gives an assignment or teaching material, my way to learn it is by paying attention to the PPT that is displayed and then taking a screenshot of the PPT template and then if I don't understand it, I will ask my classmates for more details via WhatsApp. I will record what my lecturer has said. When the lecturer in the subject pragmatics gave group assignments I and my groups used to video call to practice presentations. self-taught. I have an online friend who we both want to learn English with, so every day we communicate with each other over the phone 50% using English and the rest in other languages. watching movies and listening to music can also help."

Extract 06 shows the student using self-taught as strategy to practice her English skill. In synchronous learning, the student focuses on the PowerPoint slide and for unclear explanations, she tries to contact one of her friends via WhatsApp personally. During the explanation of the teacher, the student takes notes on the materials. The students also do video calls with the friends who are in the same group of presentation. To maximize her English skills, she enriches her knowledge by watching movies and listening to western music.

2. Students' Challenges

Extract 07

"...the main one is connection (networking) problems. Because using an online platform, of course, it must be supported by a good connection while there are some areas whose connection is still less stable (including my village). Then another challenge is, I find more difficult to understand the material taught by the lecturer, because I am the type of person who is easier to understand if it is explained directly and meet with the person who gives the explanation, it is very different when explained face to face than through online, so I have to work hard to understand the materials given."

Extract 07 indicates the challenges faced by the students in online learning during Covid-19 pandemic. The main challenge is internet connection. Online learning needs strong signals, especially for synchronous meetings. However, some areas around students are unstable connection for accessing internet so that the students are difficult to understand teaching materials taught by the lecturer.

Extract 08

"the network is very annoying, the voice doesn't sound clear, goes in and out of G-meet because the network doesn't support it, so I missed the lesson. conditions or situations at home that can interfere with our concentration, when we want to focus, but the noise of riots in the house is like a small child running, screaming, or whether there are guests, we have to make them tea, so I don't focus on what is conveyed by lecturer. For me, learning offline has more of an atmosphere."

In extract 08, another student adds that bad connections make her feel annoyed. It is because, lecturer's voices are dotted and some students are in and out of the room. As a result the student is left out of the course materials. Moreover, the home's situation also disturbs students' concentration, they cannot focus because noise. voices from the members of the family like children screaming and running in the home.

Extract 09

"Honestly, I don't not understand my subject at all while my teacher explains the material by platforms because it's different from normal situations in the classroom. I rarely understand that material because of some problems like a bad network or some noise in the room. That's why I learnt by YouTube which in I searched my material in then I did translate in bahasa if there is no subtitle in that video."

Extract 09 shows similar challenges faced by the student in an online classroom. In this case, the student has a problem understanding the subject because it is different from offline class. In offline class, the student and teacher can express their ideas freely, they can confirm difficult materials directly. Unpredictable bad connections and noisy homes make students hard to catch all the information given by the lecturer in synchronous class. Thus, the student finds out the similar material on YouTube and learns it by watching the video and translating into Indonesian.

Extract 10

"The challenge is, of course, the network, there is interference from outside, such as when parents ask for help at home, or there are friends who need help and call right away in the middle of learning, or sometimes the lecturers are distracted."

Extract 10 emphasizes that bad connections always disturb students' online learning activity. The student also cannot focus on the lesson because suddenly the parents call for help. Sometimes, when the course is running, the phone is ringing from friends. All these situations are unexpected to the student who is in an online classroom.

Extract 11

"the difficulty of understanding the emotions of lecturers or teaching staff so that the lesson becomes very bland. I like to procrastinate and feel lazy, all of which are challenges during this online lecturer. I was

unable to concentrate when meeting in learning rooms because the first factor was a very noisy environment, a lot of homework that I wanted to do such as washing, sweeping and so on. and I can't manage my time because there are many schedules that collide with lectures."

Extract 11 shows different responses in terms of challenges in online class. This student states that she cannot understand the emotion of the lecturer so she feels the lesson is flat. Moreover the bad things occurred is the students feel lazy and always postpone sending the assignment given by the lecturer. These situations are really challenging students' mood in online learning. Moreover the students cannot manage the time because many things have to be finished everyday such as washing, sweeping, and so on.

Extract 12

"students who live in ordinary villages suddenly don't have good network conditions, some run out of quota, don't concentrate too much, especially if the situation is very crowded at home, there is also a lot of noise. And it's even worse when the lecture is in progress, suddenly it rains heavily, that's where the network disappears or even the lights go out (off).

Extract 12 points out the students who live in villages have unstable connections. Sometimes, the signal is lost suddenly. As a result the students do not concentrate on the lesson. Moreover, the crowded home also influences students' activity at home. Noisy people in the home make the students unable to focus on the lecturer's explanation. The worst thing occurs when it is raining, the signal disappears and the light turns off automatically.

Extract 13

"Sometimes also when giving assignments, especially when online like this, there are usually students who catch or understand more quickly, some don't. sometimes dizzy, especially when many tasks have the same deadline as if they want to be divided, which one must be completed first. It's different from offline sometimes when there are ordinary tasks that are completed on campus and immediately collected. So a little burden feels less and has paid off because the task is complete."

Extract 13 indicates the students complain about the assignments. There are a lot of assignments that must be completed by the same deadline. From student's experiences it is really difference from offline class, where there is face to face meeting in the classroom, after the teacher explains the materials, they go directly to finish the task at the time. There are no assignments to complete at home anymore.

Extract 14

"There was problem when the lecturer explained that suddenly a motorcycle passed or a rooster crowed or the family was talking, especially when there were children playing. when the virtual class was in progress so the way to do it was self-study. search the internet for related subjects."

Extract 14 shows noisy voices from the vehicles which pass in around the online learning area make the students distracting to listen to the teaching materials from the lecturer in google meet or zoom. It is important to self-study by searching related lessons from the internet. It can be conducted asynchronously.

Extract 15

"limited competence for students and teachers or lecture in the use of learning applications. Limited resources for the use of educational technology such as the internet and quotas. Online learning patterns must be part of all learning even if only as a complement. The point is that students get used to learning online."

Extract 15 shows the students found challenges on operating learning applications. Their competences are limited to using learning applications because the application is new for them. However, they have no option, so they have to learn and used to that application during online learning.

Extract 16

"When conducting virtual meetings, the conditions at home are not conducive. Sometimes a lot of noise interferes with concentration so it is difficult to understand what the lecturer is explaining."

Extract 17

"When sending assignments, deadlines and time are very limited so it is slow to send assignments due to the network."

In extract 16 and 17, students gave negative responses on online learning, especially in a synchronous way. Virtual meetings from home are not conducive because there are a lot of noises that interfere with them to concentrate on the lesson. Asynchronous learning also gave another challenge, which is in sending assignments. The time given is short and sometimes the students get an unstable signal when it is ready to send, so it needs a good signal to upload or send the assignment.

The pandemic of Covid-19 leads the lecturers and students to conduct their teaching and learning activities from home. Synchronous and asynchronous learning are chosen as alternatives to keep the learning activity running. This situation elicits different responses from lecturers and students. The students have their own way to improve their English during this pandemic; however they also found challenges in the process synchronously and asynchronously. Investigating challenges found in online learning are in line with Abdulmajeed & McManus (2020), Simamora (2020), Adedoyin, & Soykan, E. (2020) study who found various perceptions during pandemic. As Simamora (2020) analyzed students' perspective on the challenges in online learning during Covid-19 found the students gave positive and negative responses such as economic aspect and anxiety. Yusuf and Ahmad (2020) stated that the major challenges are less focus and internet access are unsatisfactory. This study also indicates most of the students cannot focus on the lesson because some noise occurs around their home. Moreover, unstable access to the internet made them limited to join fully online classes.

Dealing with trouble with the internet in some areas of students' home made it difficult to send the assignment given on time. When they were ready to send it, suddenly the connection disappeared and it was shown on the screen disconnected. As Hermanto and Srimulyani (2021) mentioned that the teacher complains the students were not disciplined coming in virtual meetings and sending the assignment. Living in a rural area was also a big challenge to students who must enter synchronous learning, in and out the room were most problems faced by them. Rural students found unprecedented challenges to adapt in online learning (Dube, 2020). This problem is also faced by the teachers who live in rural areas, they cannot maximize their explanation in synchronous learning because of internet trouble. It also found that the challenges of English teaching and learning are affected by socio-cultural aspects (Poedjiastutie, Mayaputri& Arifani, 2021). One of them is students' parents' economic situation, where they lack the money to provide internet data for their children. Therefore, some of the students could not enter online learning because of insufficient internet data. The recent study by Putri (2021) indicates that because of internet access problems in rural areas, the teacher applied asynchronous learning for their students. The teacher instructed students to do self-improvement at home by using available learning media.

The challenges found by the students in Covid-19 pandemic pushed the students to self-improvement and self-taught as their learning strategy. It was applied by accessing others media that are related to the courses. It means the students still have motivation and effort to improve their English. As the data shows most of them searched videos from YouTube to be watched which are related to materials that have been taught by the lecturers. Some lecturers and students applied Blended-Learning as a way to conduct teaching and learning instruction (Lapitan, et.al., 2021). Watching English movies and western songs help the students to improve their English in terms of pronunciation and speaking. Köse & Mede (2016) considered that online tools are effective to enrich vocabulary and pronunciation by repeating the words. It indicates, even though there are many

challenges that hamper students' activity, they are still going to find an appropriate strategy to promote their skill, especially in English skills.

4. CONCLUSION

The Pandemic of Covid-19 highlighted different perspectives, particularly in the educational field. Online learning has becomes popular amongst the students and lecturers in the world. Synchronous and asynchronous learning are chosen to be applied to keep the teaching and learning instruction run in online class. Some learning platforms used to support lectures and students activity such as Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, email, and WhatsApp group. They combine the media based on the situation. Internet access is seen as a big challenge to them in which in some conditions like in rural areas they the internet access is in trouble and unstable. Teaching and learning activities cannot be maximized synchronously in that situation. Home conditions like noise from the members of family and vehicles which pass in and out are other challenges found. Therefore, the students used some learning strategy to understand the instructional materials by searching similar and related sources from the internet and videos on YouTube. In asynchronous learning, the students can manage the time to study. These results give implication that the chosen appropriate teaching strategy influence toward students' achievement and interactions as well as in asynchronous and synchronous learning. Therefore, the further researcher is expected to investigate best practices on online teaching and learning, and develop learning activities to promote students' achievement.

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