

Teacher's Obstacles in English Online Learning during Covid-19 Pandemic

Yoga Purnama

Fakultas Syariah, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Surakarta
Jl. Pandawa, Pucangan, Kartasura, Sukoharjo, Jawa Tengah,
Indonesia

purnamayoga@iain-surakarta.ac.id

* corresponding author

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Abstract

The study investigated some obstacles on the implementation of learning English through online learning on students of Islamic Family Law at Syariah Faculty, IAIN Surakarta during the academic year of 2020/2021. The type of this research is qualitative descriptive. The data in this study are learning problems that occur in English language online learning activities during Covid-19 pandemic. The data were collected through documentation techniques and observations. Data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion were used to analyze the data. The study found that there are three main obstacles which hinder English language teaching and learning process namely: (1) student's limited skills of English, (2) lack of teacher supervision and interactions during the learning process, and (3) students' inadequate learning facilities and internet networks for online learning. The right implementation of learning strategy, communication, patience, and consideration on students' condition become the key factors to overcome all the problems of online learning during pandemic era.

Keywords: Teacher's obstacles, English Online learning, Covid-19 pandemic

Introduction

Online learning gains its highest popularity in Indonesia since Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. The development of technology has enabled teachers to teach students remotely by the help of smartphone, computers and the internet. Before the pandemic, the implementation of online learning is rather low. The concept of online learning is mainly implemented through web-facilitated where online learning platforms are only used to enhance face-to-face instruction, or blended learning which is basically a mix between conventional teaching-learning process in the classroom and only a small portion of online meeting as a supplement (Plaisance, 2018). This is understandable since most of the learning process at that time can be conducted through interaction between teacher and students in the classroom. There is no particular reason to implement full online meeting at that point.



As the time goes, the popularity of online learning becomes apparent since Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 or corona virus disease first appears in Wuhan, China by the end of 2019 and it has forced the governments around the world to implement closure of offices, public spaces, schools, and universities to prevent further spread of the virus. Online learning has become the solution to the avoid corona virus by utilizing social distancing in learning process. The scale of the implementation of online learning nowadays, specifically for higher education and university level, are at the scale that never be seen before (Czerniewicz, 2020).

The concept of online learning itself is actually not something new in Indonesia even though it is only limited to certain institution. Online learning began to be developed for higher education in 1984 with the establishment of the Open University (UT). Until the late 1990s, UT was the only state university in Indonesia that implements an open and distance education system. In line with increasing the need for the online learning in Indonesia, the system was later expanded in use in face-to-face educational institutions. The online learning system implementation is developed through a "dual mode" system, namely a combination between face-to-face and distance education systems (Farisi, 2012). Recognition of juridical-formal online learning as the national education subsystem is emphasized in Law Number (No). 11 of 2003 concerning the national education system.

The sudden transition from face-to-face learning in the classroom to online learning is regarded as something new for most teachers and students in Indonesia. As something new in the world of online learning education, it requires the synergy of teachers, parents and students to anticipate some obstacles during online learning. If the obstacles that arise during learning are not solved, it can cause several problems to the students in their online learning. This is mainly due to the learning environment and the characteristics of the students themselves (Nakayama and Yamamoto, 2007). Online learning during the pandemic has changed the world of education, both positive and negative.

The advantage of online learning is based on the fact that it has high flexibility in eliminating various limitations. It is able to provide access to education for all people without constraints such as age, geographic location, time, and economic situation (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004; Belawati, 2010). The emergence of smartphones as a main communication device makes it easier to conduct online learning easily. The versatility of smartphones in accessing information and real time communication makes it possible for students to study anywhere and anytime without constraints. Both the teacher and the students can continue conducting their teaching and learning process through online meeting and keep the education rolling during the pandemic.

Despite the advantages, the sudden transition from offline learning to online learning has brought many challenges to the teacher and students. Some teachers experience obstacles in the implementation of learning related to learning applications, internet networks, devices, learning management, assessment and supervision (Rigianti, 2020). In addition to causing obstacles for teachers, online learning during the pandemic also raises problems for students. One of the obstacles that arise is anxiety. These students' anxiety arises due to lack of understanding of the material, limited time to do assignments, internet access, the



emergence of technical problems and student's difficulties in understanding the teachers' explanation (Oktrawirawan, 2020).

Research on difficulties and obstacles in online learning has been conducted by several researchers. Lestyanawati & Widyanoro (2020) conducted a research entitled "*Strategies and Problems Faced by Indonesian Teachers in Conducting E-Learning System During Covid-19 Outbreak*". The findings showed that there were three teaching strategies applied by teachers: applying only online chat, using video conference, and combining both online chat and video conference in online teaching and learning process. Some problems also arose during e-learning: the teachers' disability in accessing technology, school facilities in supporting e-learning, difficulties in explaining the material, students' limitation in accessing the internet, students' economically disadvantaged family background, and parents' support system.

Buana, G. P. and Apriliyanti, D. L. (2021) on their research entitled "*Teacher's Encounter on Online Learning: Challenges and Support System*" mentioned several problems that the teacher have during online learning. The result of their study shows that there are three issues that become the teacher challenges in the learning process namely technology, course content, and students. The first issue was related to the Internet connectivity as the classical problem of online learning. The second problem was that the teachers had obstacles in making adjustments to design and to deliver the materials. Then, the last issue was the students' participation as well as technological access.

Nartiningrum & Nugroho (2020) conducted a research entitled "*Online Learning amidst Global Pandemic: EFL Students' Challenges, Suggestions, and Needed Materials*". The study elucidates 45 EFL students' challenges, suggestions and needed materials during online classes. The result of her study shows that EFL students' main challenges in attending online courses were the unsteady networks and the less direct interactions. The students mainly suggested the use of video conferencing applications such as zoom or Google meet, though some students chose assignments over those applications. The students also mentioned that they basically needed grammar related materials within the online classes.

Those previous researches have given information on the difficulties and obstacles that both students and teachers have in online learning. Even though the topic of the research is quite similar, this research is different from all the previous research. This research not only focuses on describing the obstacles and difficulties that the teacher has but also describes the solution taken by the teacher for each of the problem arises during English online learning for Islamic Family Law's students at Syariah Faculty, IAIN Surakarta.

The obstacles that arise during online learning at Syariah Faculty of IAIN Surakarta are important to be studied further in order to maximize the implementation of online English learning or distance learning in the future. This research was made to find out the obstacles that the teachers have during English online learning at the Syariah Faculty of IAIN Surakarta and its solutions.

Method



This research applied descriptive qualitative research. The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened. Therefore, observation and survey tools are often used to gather data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Therefore, all the things experienced by the research subject, such as behavior, actions, and perceptions are described in the form of words and language.

The subject of this research was 131 students of Syariah Faculty, IAIN Surakarta majoring in Islamic Family Law, which takes English Course in academic year of 2020/2021. The object of this research is the obstacles of online learning in the English language course. This study aims to elaborate the obstacles in online learning of English courses and find its solution. This learning activity for English courses has been carried out online from September 2020 to May 2021.

Data collection was carried out using observations and documentation techniques. Observations are made by paying attention to student behavior patterns when implementing or carrying out online learning activities. The documented data is the result of student assignment and student discussion forums. Documentation is done by downloading data or screenshots of the student discussion forum. Data analysis was carried out using an interactive model which consists of three stages, namely (1) reducing data, (2) presenting data, and (3) concluding and verifying data. Reducing data is an activity of selecting main things, summarizing, and focusing on important things, as well as looking for themes and patterns as well as removing those that are not important. The data are then processed based on the focus of this study. Based on the results of the processed data, an in-depth analysis is carried out.

Findings and Discussion

Online English learning at IAIN Surakarta is carried out through the E-learning page which can be accessed through the IAIN Surakarta E-learning website (<https://elearning.iain-surakarta.ac.id/login/index.php>) using the internet network. IAIN Surakarta establishes the E-learning page as the main Learning Management System media which is not only used specifically for English courses but is used in all courses at IAIN Surakarta. Apart from utilizing the E-learning page, learning English online also utilizes other supporting media.

Lecturers use several websites as a source of English material, YouTube if the media are in the form of video, Google Drive for downloading learning materials, and WhatsApp as the main platform for interactions with students. WhatsApp is considered easier to be used as an online learning medium because this application has become a daily communication App for the students.

1. Implementation of Online English Learning

Online English learning activities are carried out through the IAIN Surakarta E-learning platform. The learning start with the lecturer opening in the class which contains greetings to students and giving an introduction to the lecture on that day using voice recording feature on WhatsApp or using teleconference App like Google meet / Zoom. The lecture was then continued by checking the students' attendance on IAIN Surakarta E-learning platform. Lecture material is delivered



by uploading a learning resource link on the E-learning page. The link contains learning materials from other media such as websites, YouTube or Google Drive which can be accessed using laptop or Smartphone.

During online learning, students are asked to open all material that has been prepared by the lecturer on the E-learning page of IAIN Surakarta. Lecturers then explain the material through voice recording on WhatsApp or online conference applications such as Google meet / Zoom depending on the situations. Student's participation is maintained during the meeting through discussions and interactive question and answer related to learning materials. Different learning strategies were also carried out by the teacher to motivate students to learn. The use of different learning resources and learning strategies aims to make classroom teaching and learning to become more lively. Online English learning ends with the lecturer giving feedback to the students. Feedback is given in the form of a voice recording containing the conclusions of learning activities, assignments and providing information related to learning plans for the next meeting.

2. Obstacles of Online English Learning

The transition of learning from face-to-face in the classroom to online learning raises many obstacles because this happened suddenly due to government policies that forced universities to provide lectures online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Learning English online is considered as something new for students. Moreover, it happened on 1st semester students who have just entered university and are starting their first course in university. During the sudden change, not all lecturers and students are ready to face changes in the learning system. It creates some obstacles which hinders teaching and learning process. Those obstacles include students' limited skills of English, lack of teacher supervision and interactions during the learning process, and inadequate learning facilities and internet networks for online learning.

a. Student's limited skills of English

One of the main problems that occur in the English online learning is the students' lack of English proficiency. It is apparent during the lesson as the students tend to be quiet and not actively participated in a discussion or question and answer session because their lack of English skill. During the lesson, all materials are presented in English, whether it is in the form of lecturer's voice recording, PowerPoint materials, handbook, or assignment. Students tend to take a long time to understand and keep asking for explanation even though the lecturer already explained the materials.

Actually, this problem also happened when doing face to face meeting in the classroom but the degree of severity is really apparent when doing an online meeting. In online meeting, students are separated and cannot communicate directly with the teacher or their friends related to the materials given. The discussion is also not effective because each student has different level of English proficiency. The discussion mostly dominated with the students that have good level of English proficiency. The rest of the students that don't have a good level of English proficiency tend to be passive. It is hard to determine whether they follow the discussion passively or simply lost their focus and doing something



else that is not related to the lesson because they cannot understand the material. The process of understanding the material and doing the task given by the lecturer cannot be done in a short time thus make the learning process become ineffective.

In teaching English in Syariah Family Law of IAIN Surakarta, the lecturer focused on 4 main skills of English namely reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The aim of the study is to strengthen the foundation of their English knowledge and make the students gets enough level of proficiency to utilize English in order to help their study in IAIN Surakarta. The lesson is specifically designed to develop students' English proficiency in each skill. During the lesson, the problem that arises in the activity to develop each skill is different but it has the similar cause which is the lack of students' English proficiency.

In reading, the problem that arises is mainly because of limited vocabulary level of the students. The students tend to take a long time to read and understand the material which is written in full English, whether it is an article, a power point slideshow, or handbook of English materials. This problem is quite troublesome since it makes the learning process take longer than needed. Lecturer often needs to explain the material which is actually already written there, in order to make the students understand. It is also apparent when the lecturer gives instruction through WhatsApp or in the instruction of the assignment. Many students are confused and often ask the lecturer to explain it on Indonesian language because they are not sure about the meaning.

In listening, the problem that arises is mainly on assessment. In order to do the listening session, lecturer needs to provide an audio file and an answer sheet to be downloaded by the students. The students then listen to the audio on their own, answer the question, and then submit the result to the lecturer. Teaching listening during the online learning is actually has its own advantages since the students have more time to do the task. They can simply play the audio many times in order to answer the question, since they downloaded the audio provided by the lecturer in their smartphone or laptop. The quality of the audio is also good since the student usually provide themselves with the headset that can make their listening activity become easier. The problem is, the lecturer cannot determine whether they do the listening activity by themselves or just simply copy their friends work. The students can easily ask their friends for the answer and their lecturer will not find out about it. This problem is severe since it makes the assessment becomes not accurate in determining the level of students listening skills. At some point, this issue is apparent since some students have difficulties in understanding the lecturer explanation in full English through voice recording or during the meeting on Google meet or Zoom even though they usually get the high score in listening activities.

The problem about the student's English proficiency also occurred in speaking. It happened in an individual speech and speaking group discussion. In individual speech, usually teacher gives the students certain topic and they have to record their speaking on a voice recorder or video. This instruction, even though it can make the learning time become effective, creates a loophole that is hard to avoid. Most of the time, students tend to memorize the sentences that they want to speak. It creates a false speaking activity since the students is not actually speaking but just saying the sentence that they already memorized before. It makes the students with the low speaking skills appear to have a good proficiency



in speaking even though they actually not. In speaking group discussion, the level of students' speaking skills also creates a problem. Different level of speaking ability limits the students to engage in a communication to each other. Speaking group discussion among students is even more difficult to be implemented on online learning. The communication between students is hard to be maintained because not all students take this activity seriously. It is hard for the lecturer to observe the students' activities in online discussion simultaneously since the students are not on the same place or platform. Even if the teacher is able to do that, it will not be effective since it will require a lot of time. Role play conversations that are usually easy to do in face-to-face meeting also difficult to be implemented to the full extent. It is true that the students can still engage in a conversation using Application like WhatsApp video call, Google Meet, or Zoom but it will be limited since the students have difficulties in creating conversation that involves property, body languages and gestures.

In writing, the problem related to the students' English proficiency is appearing mainly because the students have utilized Google translate in order to finish their task. Using Google translate in writing is not a good thing since it will not develop the students' writing ability. This phenomenon is actually not only happened during online learning, but also in a face-to-face learning as well. The difference is, in a face-to-face learning teacher can limit the students' chance to use Google Translate by doing the activity in the classroom. The teacher then observes the students during writing activity to ensure the students only use manual dictionary to do the task. While observing the students, teacher can also give each of them feedback depends on their result of writing. In online learning, this kind of strategy is hard to be implemented since the teacher has a limitation to do that. Students tend to use Google Translate more since they have the feeling that the teacher will not find out about it.

b. Lack of teacher supervision and interactions during the learning process

The next obstacles experienced during online learning are related to the lack of supervision and interaction during online meeting. The number of students in each meeting is rather big, almost 40 students joining the meeting in a certain time. It makes the lecturer difficult to communicate to each of them during the lesson. The limited ability of the lecturer in monitoring all student activities during online learning resulted in the difficulty in controlling students' activities during the lesson, especially when the lecturer explains the material through voice recording, when the students are in the discussion group, and when the students completing the assignments during online learning. Lecturers also find it difficult to prevent students from collaborating with each other while doing individual assignments or quizzes because students can easily work together to answer questions without worries. The students group discussion that were made during the lesson also did not run optimally because many students were not active in discussion among themselves and most of them tend to finish their group assignments independently. The existing E-learning platform in IAIN Surakarta does not yet allow lecturers to monitor all students' participation during learning.



Another problem that arises regarding with the lack of supervision from lecturer are the students' difficulties in maintaining focus through the online lesson. Students tend to be relaxed when the lecturer cannot see them directly and it resulted in lack of concentration during the learning. Students can easily open and browse their social media like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc during online learning, opening another website, or watching some random videos on YouTube that are not related to the material during the online meeting. Online English learning is carried out by students in their homes and actually needs supervision from their parents as substitute for the role of the teacher. Sadly, the parents often have limitations due to their work or are simply ignorant of this because they think their child is an adult and can manage it by themselves because their child is already studying in university.

c. Inadequate learning facilities and internet networks for online learning.

In online English courses, some students experience severe problems due to a lack of adequate learning facilities. Problems that arise in learning English online include the unavailability of a stable internet network and the limited internet data packages that the students have which results in the students' inability to take part in video conferencing via the Google meet or Zoom application regularly.

During the pandemic, many students chose to return to their hometowns. In some remote areas in Indonesia, a stable internet network is still difficult to obtain. This causes some students to be unable to participate in online learning activities properly. This was very evident when the lecturer explained the material using the video conference app or uploaded video file on the IAIN Surakarta E-learning page. The majority of existing instructional videos have a fairly large file size. This made the students take a long time to download instructional videos due to slow networks. The learning process becomes ineffective because lecturer had to wait for students to download / stream the video in order to understand the material. This finding supports the studies conducted by some experts (e.g: Andersson, 2008; Lestiyawati & Widyantoro, 2020; Joshi et al., 2020) as internet connectivity become the key success in online learning.

Apart from network stability issues, students also have problems on buying internet data packages. Many students cannot afford to buy big internet data packages for online learning due to its expensive price. Weak internet networks and the availability of internet data packages greatly affect student participation in online learning. At IAIN Surakarta, which is under the Ministry of Religion, students only receive a small number of subsidies for internet data packages for studying, unlike students at State Universities under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Culture who receive big internet data package subsidies for online learning. Due to the limited internet data package, many students have difficulties following learning activities to their full potential. The simplest example is the inability of students to conduct conference calls through Google Meet or Zoom regularly because this will be very burdensome for students. This has an impact on the lack of direct interaction between lecturers and students during learning.



3. Efforts to Overcome Obstacles in Online English Learning

In order to solve the problem that arises on the online learning, teacher needs to find the main cause of the problem and act accordingly. Certain strategy needs to be prepared in order to avoid the problem during online learning. The role of the teacher is very important as it can determine the result of the teaching and learning process. Due to the sudden implementation, English online learning for the students of Islamic Family Law, Syariah Faculty in IAIN Surakarta has many challenges for both the teacher and the students.

Teacher needs to have good preparation before the lesson to make online learning becomes effective and efficient. The learning materials need to be prepared in a simple and concise way. The teacher needs to consider the limitation of students' internet packages by trying to minimize the file size of the materials given without losing the essential point of the content. For example, instead of giving the long explanation on the material through Google meet or Zoom, teacher can simply use PowerPoint accompanied by voice recording of teacher's explanation on the material. If the materials are in the form of video, the teacher needs to reduce the file size beforehand by using video compressor to the point that it can be easily downloaded by the students. The teacher can compress it to the minimum possible file size that can easily be seen on a laptop or Smartphone without sacrificing its quality.

Communication between teacher and students during online learning also needs to be optimized. Teacher needs to take advantage of Whatsapp group as the good medium of communication and supervision during the lesson. Whatsapp has the features of voice recorder which is perfect as a medium of instruction. The students can easily listen to the teacher explanation in their Smartphone. This method is also better than giving the explanation through the text or on a Google meet / Zoom because of three main reasons. First, it will take fewer data consumption compared to do the live conference call on Google Meet or Zoom. Second, the students are able to play and repeat the teacher's explanation on the recording many times to understand the content. Third, it is easier for the student to listen the teacher's explanation through voice recording rather than reading a text containing the similar content. In order to ensure that the students are focusing on the lesson, teacher can give the students a time limit for certain task. The teacher has to prepare timeline for each activity and share it to the students. During the lesson, teacher then instruct the students to do certain activity on a certain time limit, step by step while observing the condition and adjust the durations if necessary.

Regarding with the problems on the students lack of proficiency, teacher needs to implement different strategy for each skill. For the problem of reading ability, it can be solved by uploading the material on E-learning at least 2 days before the meeting. By doing this way, teacher can then instruct the students to read and understand the content beforehand. It will make the learning process become effective and efficient. Teacher need to prepare 2 kinds of teaching materials, one to be uploaded before the meeting and one to be uploaded during the meeting. In order to make sure that the students are doing the assignment correctly according to the instructions given, each material provided in E-learning



must be supplemented with clear and concise explanation or instruction from the teacher. In addition, teacher needs to teach the students on how to improve their reading ability. The teacher needs to raise the students' motivation to enhance their vocabulary level, for example by purposely giving interesting reading materials as the supplementary.

For the problem of listening, teacher needs to redesign the listening activity in such a way that can prevent the students from helping each other. In order to apply this technique, teacher has to make sure all of the students are ready to do the listening activity. Teacher uploads the listening file, ask the students to download it, and then set certain time limit to do the listening task. Regarding with the answer sheet of the listening activity, teacher can utilize Google Form which can help minimize the students' chance to cheat during listening. Google Form has a feature to shuffle the answer options for each question. By doing it this way, teacher can force each student to focus on their own listening task and not giving them chance to help each other. Another advantage of using Google Form as an answer sheet is that it can provide instant grading of the students' answer. It provides huge helps in reducing teacher's work thus make the assessment process become much easier.

For the problem related to speaking activity in online learning, the researcher is still trying to find the effective way to avoid memorizing text in students' speaking activity. In speaking activity, the act of memorizing is hard to avoid unless the teacher employs face-to-face conversation to each of the students by using Whatsapp video call. This method of assessment is truly accurate in determining the students' ability in speaking but it is not efficient. The drawback of this method is that the teacher has to call each of the students separately and needs to allocate a lot of time in order to finish assessing all the students. This kind of method can only be implemented once or twice in a semester since the teacher also needs to allocate the teaching time for the other English skills as well.

In writing, teacher also has difficulties in preventing the students from using Google translate. This phenomenon is hard to avoid, even if the teacher gives unique instruction like writing with certain topic, provide some sentences as the main idea, or limit the number of words. It will only prevent the student from copying the text directly from the internet, but not preventing them to use Google translates. The nature of online learning limits the teacher's ability to observe each student during the process of writing. The teacher also has difficulties in differentiate the students work, whether it is purely based on their writing skills or using Google translates to finish their task. Since the writing activity is mainly done by the students at their home, it is hard to prevent the students to not opening Google translate on their browser.

Despite all these efforts to tackle the problems, there are still many problems which are hard to avoid during online learning. Teachers need to maintain the communication with their students in order to minimize the problems experienced during the learning process and increase the effectiveness of online learning. Learning objectives will be achieved if all learning components can be carried out properly through an effective and efficient online learning process.



Conclusion

Online learning becomes something that is unavoidable in the middle of the pandemic. The implementation of online learning truly takes a lot of effort, whether on the teacher or the students. Lacks of English proficiency, lack of supervision, and inadequate learning facilities and internet network become the main obstacles that can hinder teaching and learning process. The problems that arise during learning needs to be solved accordingly in order to make teaching and learning process become more effective and efficient.

As the online learning revolved around the teacher, the role of the teacher is very important. Preparation before the lesson needs to be optimized in order to achieve learning objective. Teacher needs to think a way to avoid any problems that can potentially happened on the lesson. The way teacher responded to the problem will determine the achievement of the students. The right implementation of learning strategy, communication, patience, and consideration on students' condition will become the key factors to overcome all the obstacles during online learning in pandemic era.

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