CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR ADULT LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHING ENGLISH USING AN ONLINE PLATFORM

Alvin Taufik
fik@bundamulia.ac.id
Universitas Bunda Mulia, Indonesia

Nurdiana
nurdiana.usman@gmail.com
Universitas Bunda Mulia, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The pandemic is not over yet; Therefore, teaching and learning English with an online platform is still preferable. Like any other medium of instruction, an online platform has its challenges and problems, particularly in teaching English to lower-level adult learners. Shumin (1997) has mentioned several factors influencing the development of adult learners' speaking abilities. They are age, sociocultural factors, emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, and motivation. In relation to online learning, Altakhaineh, Alhendi, Dweikat (2021) state that the problems faced by students and educators are similar. They are time management, teaching methods, lack of encouragement and motivation, and lack of knowledge regarding online teaching tools. This research, therefore, aims to investigate the specific challenges and problems of teaching English to lower-level students through Zoom in the Indonesian context. This research is unique because the class is participated by people from three areas in Indonesia. Since they come from different areas, the facilities and access that they have and can make use of will vary. The research will start with a pre-test. Then, the teaching/research will start from late October 2022 to early February 2023. The result of this research is to identify the specific challenges and problems of online teaching English to low-level adult learners and the method/s used/can be used to overcome them.

Keywords: Challenge, Problems, Online teaching and learning, low-level, adult learners

INTRODUCTION

Why do universities or schools still teach some or all its course online? This must be a question asked by a lot of people, especially since the global pandemic has been 'considered' less impactful by the world community. The reasons for this can be answered from the perspective of the universities/educators, and the learners themselves. To give some background, according to the survey conducted by Educause (2022) the preference of having online learning has increased by 400%. Data in 2020 (before March 11) was 5%, while the data at the conduction of this survey, which was October 2022, has increased to 20%. The reasoning behind this, as per survey, is mostly personal reasons such as disability accommodation, family responsibilities, and work schedules. Meanwhile, from the aspect of the universities, even with the critics and protests from parents and concerned citizens, many elite universities are still going to teach online next semester. Some of those universities are from the Russel Group universities, such as University College London, the London School of Economics, Imperial College, Cardiff, and Leeds. Some will offer blended learning, such as Warwick, Nottingham, Manchester, Glasgow, and Edinburgh (Evening Standard, 2021). Unfortunately, when researching the reasons, the authors could not find reasonings put forward by universities. However, educators have come out and said that online learning is more accessible and engaging (Frot, 2017). This is, obviously, in contrast to popular belief. However, the educators said that it is more accessible because the students can access every lesson, materials, quizzes, and others, making them 'autonomous' learners. It is also more engaging because there is a plethora of technology to be used and a different platform that can be used to ensure direct interaction with tutors/lecturers.

However, in our case, those aspects are not part of the reasoning why students and lecturers/educators prefer to use online platforms. To provide some kind of background, our program, ISCO English Teaching program is a program that includes lecturers of Universitas Bunda Mulia and ISCO tutors from all over Indonesia (with ages ranging from 20-50 years old, making them adult learners). Thus, it can be seen right away that the biggest reason for the preference of using the online platform is a geographical one, since Indonesia is an archipelago. In our case, face-to-face interaction is not an option but is the only way the program can be held. For that reason, we have to be ready for every problem and challenge that will exist.

This ISCO English Teaching program is a program to enhance the English skills of the tutor, especially, their speaking skills, with quite significant consideration of the grammatical aspects as well. Because of that, the authors need to know what is needed in improving speaking skills, what is considered 'good' speaking skills, and what aspects influence the development of adult learners' speaking abilities. In addition, since this program must be conducted online, the authors also need to address the common problem of online learning.

In terms of the factors influencing the speaking ability of adult learners, Shumin (1997) has mentioned several factors that can be summarized into the followings: age, sociocultural factors,

emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, and motivation. This information is very important in deciding the methods of teaching, assessment, and interactions. Further, in terms of speaking ability or skills, according to Goh and Burns (2012: 67) to develop speaking competence, learners must get the language systems knowledge, the discourse genre, as well as speech production and communication strategies cores. This means the speaker of the language must know how the language system works (more or less, the grammar), must know the context of their speech (genre and discourse) and must be able to strategize their way of speaking. This is translated by the lecturers into the content of their materials. More explanation on this will be discussed in the Discussion section of this article.

Concerning online learning, Altakhaineh, Alhendi, Dweikat (2021) state that the problems faced by students and educators are similar. They are time management, teaching methods, lack of encouragement and motivation, and lack of knowledge regarding online teaching tools.

METHODOLOGY

This research, therefore, aims to investigate the specific challenges and problems of teaching English to lower-level students through Zoom in the Indonesian context. This research is unique because the class is participated by people from three areas in Indonesia. Since they come from different areas, the facilities and access that they have and can make use of will vary. The research will start with a pre-test. Then, the teaching/research will start from late October 2022 to early February 2023. At the end of the program, there will be a post-test to see whether there has been an improvement because of the program, especially in terms of their speaking competence. This will be conducted by paying attention to the speaking competence elements as proposed by Goh and Burns.

As for the problems and challenges themselves, these will be acquired through interviews and diaries. The diaries are in the form of writing of what has happened on the day of the teaching, the feedback given, and the improvement/non-improvement as a result of the program.

DISCLAIMER

As mentioned in the methodology, this is ongoing research that will reach its conclusion at the latest, early February 2023. Therefore, any conclusion and suggestions provided in this article are not final. In addition, all challenges and problems found in this article are specific to this context, in which online teaching is a must for adult learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

One of the problems identified, as a result of the interview and diary keeping, is in the form of time management. Lecturers and students offer critics on the limited time available for the teaching sessions. As a result of this, the teaching and learning processes are not that varied. The second problem is related to the lack of knowledge of the tutor to operate the platform, namely the Gmeet

platform. Both of these initial problems are in line with the problems stated by Altakhaineh, Alhendi, Dweikat (2021). One problem that is not identified in the literature is related to the logistics of the program, namely the data quota and internet connection. This is an expected problem because the tutors originate from different areas in Indonesia, even the remote ones. The other problem which has been identified through the interview is the interaction between the tutors and the lecturers teaching them. This is basically because there are too many students in the class/platform. Finally, the final problem that the authors have identified, so far, is the knowledge gap between the learners.

To overcome the solution of time management, there are two solutions the authors can offer. One, the coordinator of the program can increase the time limit to a two-hour program with more emphasis on practice. The other solution is to add extra sessions for the program. This way, the lecturer or the authors can have more time to discuss or practice the materials or lessons. However, for future researchers, there is also the need to review the number of people on the platform, since there is a possibility is interrelated with the number of participants.

To overcome the problems or challenges of lack of knowledge, the authors propose to have a preliminary session to discuss the operation of the program. Hopefully, by doing this, the time to conduct the teaching and learning process can be made more effective and efficient.

Jumping to the problems or challenges of interaction, we conclude that this is related to the number of participants and the variety of teaching methods employed by the lecturers. For that reason, the authors propose to employ a different, more layered, and interactive methodology that is different from what is being employed at the moment. As for the number of participants, it has been discussed previously in the paragraph discussing time management.

Finally, in relation to the problem of a knowledge gap, the authors believe that this is related to the pre-test. Although it has been conducted, maybe, in the future, the pre-test can consider the aspects of adult learners' speaking ability as mentioned in the introduction, namely age, sociocultural factors, emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, and motivation.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the problems and challenges of online English teaching for adult learners cover time management which resulted in limited time to expose the learners to language input, tutors' ability to incorporate ICT (Information and Communication Technology), and logistic problems which deal with quota and internet connection. In addition, the interaction between the tutors and the lecturers is another obstacle that should be taken into account when using an online platform. It becomes 'unnatural' and 'less freedom' when the tutors and the lecturers were having online sessions, especially if the tutors are beginners. As this is an ongoing study, for the time being, two solutions can be offered. First of all, the program coordinator should focus on language and

skills practice in a two-hour session. Secondly, there should be additional meetings for the program. Furthermore, the lecturers and the tutors should maximize the two hours program with more interactive two-way sessions.

REFERENCES

Altakhaineh, Abdel Rahman Mitib, Hiba Alhendi, and Fawzi Fayez Ishtaiwa Dweikat. "Challenges Facing Teachers and Students in English Oral Skills Online Classes." 2021. The International Journal of Technologies in Learning 28 (2): 21-37. doi:10.18848/2327-0144/CGP/v28i02/21-37.

Educause. "2022 Students and Technology Report: Rebalancing the Student Experience." 2022. Educause, https://library.educause.edu/resources/2022/10/2022-students-and-technology-report-rebalancing-the-student-experience.

Frot, Mathilde. "Six Reasons to Consider Online Learning." Topuniversities, November 15, 2017, https://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/choosing-university/six-reasons-consider-online-learning.

Goh, C. M. M., & Burns, A. (2012). Teaching speaking: A holistic approach. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Shumin, Kang. (1997). "Factors to Consider: Developing Adult EFL Students' Speaking Abilities." 1997. ERIC (EJ593320).

Sinclair, Leah. "Universities Refuse to End Online Lessons Amid Calls for 'Return to Normality'." Evening Standard, 10 August 2021, https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/universities-russell-group-online-lessons-return-normality-b949700.html. Accessed 30 December 2022.