

English Teachers' Teaching Strategies to Promote Students' Writing Skills in Online Learning Circumstances

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to look into how EFL teachers use teaching strategies and how they use those strategies to help students improve their writing skills during online learning. A qualitatively guided phenomenological approach is used to study three teachers and students from senior high school. The research includes interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. The researcher then analyzed the data using techniques such as data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions or verification. The findings show that teachers used a variety of teaching strategies in teaching writing, such as demonstrating, motivating, providing feedback, and evaluating students' tasks. Moreover, the teachers used Google Meet to give students direct instruction about teaching materials, and they used collaborative teaching by assigning students tasks to complete individually or in groups or discussions. The final strategy that teachers employ is self-directed teaching, in which teachers assign students one specific material to study independently using an online source. Using those strategies, students were helped to improve their writing skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the basic language skills to be considered is writing. Haerazi, Irawan, Hadiyatno, & Hidayatulloh (2020) stated that writing is defined as one of the most productive skills, also known as the most difficult skill among other skills. It has complex stages, such as organizing ideas or information, avoiding ambiguity, making grammatical use, and choosing an appropriate vocabulary. Harmer (2007) stated that writing is a part of literacy because people are called literate if they can read and write in certain situations and for certain purposes. Therefore, writing cannot be mastered in a short period and need to be trained continuously. Teaching writing aims to give systematically information about how a learner can produce written expressions or information. How to make learning to write interesting and enjoyable for the student becomes the main concern of the teachers. Yunus, Nordin, Salehi, Embi, & Salehi (2013) mentioned the significance of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching ESL writing skills. Nowadays, a phenomenon that is often

found is that many teachers still apply traditional strategies in teaching writing. For example, students are tasked with writing a composition or an essay. After the students' essays are submitted, the teacher checks the students' work and gives it back the next day. Students only keep the correction results from their teacher and rarely see them again. For many years, teaching writing has focused on the written product rather than the writing process. As a result, students do not have opportunities to revisit their work.

Appropriate strategies are currently highly demanded to assist students in enhancing their writing skills, especially in online learning circumstances. Learning from the previous issue in 2020 when in Indonesia, schools, colleges, and universities started to suspend public activities, such as worship, working, celebrations, and studying, starting in March 2020 due to the pandemic (Mailizar et al., 2020), and people do their work and other activities from home, a new model of teaching and learning activities was administered, namely distance education. Since the closure of schools, the government has implemented distance learning as a temporary solution to the education problem. In addition, the government was also trying to facilitate distance education, including providing learning content that makes it easier for teachers to provide materials, providing guidance to families in learning from home activities, and overcoming internet connectivity challenges, especially in remote areas (UNESCO, 2020). The most responsive to deploying this distance learning, governments worldwide began introducing online learning programs to replace the conventional learning system that integrates through the internet. English language learning should be one of the learning activities to be concerned about, turning the learning process in the classroom into online learning. According to Lederman (2020), COVID-19 has inclined both students as well as teachers to embrace the digital experience of academics, even though there are many constraints in the implementation of online teaching and learning (i.e., internet connection, lack of access to learning tools) (Agung & OP, 2020). Thus, it is important to ensure that the students and teachers have full access to the internet or learning tools.

The situation of online learning is sometimes still continuing even after the pandemic. As a result, teachers must be ready to prepare several things needed in conducting online learning. They are facilities and infrastructures, including supporting platforms, tools, and human resources. Therefore, it is no doubt that the internet has become a solution to running distance teaching-learning. As Isisag (2012), in his research, reveals the use of ICT in learning provides a solution for distance learning and creates many positive effects in learning and teaching a foreign language. Some previous studies show the advantages of online learning compared to conventional learning. Online language courses offered various multimedia tools that most students were interested in (Nasser, 2021). Therefore, such preparation will help teachers and students reduce the probability of errors during the teaching process.

However, the researcher finds contradictions in using online applications in teaching writing. Some say that using the application is an effective way to gain the students' attention and gain their writing ability. From a single word to a lengthy essay, Azmi (2017) and Agca & Ozdemir (2013) demonstrated how the usage of digital technology can impact students' writing in various ways, including developing ideas, authoring, revising, and editing. On the other hand, some researchers state that the effectiveness of online applications in teaching and learning language is still questionable. Meanwhile, Abidin et al. (2020) say that several obstacles were found in implementing project-based online learning. Those obstacles include limited internet quota and teaching staff or students unfamiliar with it. Understanding the benefits and challenges of teaching writing using online modes, the researchers are interested in looking into how these online modes are used as teaching aids by English teachers in teaching writing.

The research site found that three English teachers attempted to use different strategies to teach writing to their students in online learning situations. These teachers utilized online media to guide students in organizing their work until evaluating the result of their writing. In line with this teaching practice, Vermunt & Verloop (1999) believed that teachers are guides and facilitators in learning who have to ensure the teaching and learning process going on. It means that the teacher is responsible for

finding an alternate strategy to teach in online learning conditions, so the students can continue their studies and achieve the goals set. Strategies can make learning easier, faster, joyful, focused, effective, and transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990). Therefore, in this study, the researcher will investigate what teaching strategies English teachers use to promote students' writing skills in an online teaching circumstance. By conducting this study, the researchers expected to give practical benefits to English teachers when teaching writing during online learning circumstances.

2. METHODS

This research used qualitative research as an approach. Berg (2001) claimed that qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. This research is narrowly focused on phenomenology design. It is supported by Creswell (2007), who stated that phenomenological research describes the meaning of a topic or phenomenon in the lives of multiple people. Phenomenological methodologies allow participants to explain the phenomena while also allowing the researcher to understand better the social and psychological situations from the participants' perspective. The researcher applied phenomenology design to discover the phenomenon of writing teaching strategy based on the research questions of what and how a particular strategy was applied in the processes of online writing classes at a high school. The subject of this research is three English teachers and all students of English classes in one of the senior high schools in Indonesia.

The primary data is the type of data collected by the researcher for a specific purpose from the teacher and student interaction observation while learning English writing online. Next, the researcher interviewed the teachers regarding their strategies for teaching writing online amid the Covid-19 outbreak and how they implemented those strategies. Lastly, questionnaires were given to the students to gain their perspectives on the implementation of teaching writing.

The data sources for this research are presented from English writing teachers to get information about teaching strategies and students' perspectives on implementing the teaching strategies. The phenomenon or situation is the online teaching process. The places were at one of the High schools and at home through online media to gain data from teachers and students related to writing online classes. Artifacts may include audio and video recordings, photographs, games, artwork, or other items that provide insight related to the context or participants. Thus, the artifacts are the interview audio, video recordings, photographs, and documents required, such as the syllabus, lesson plan, and students' writing from the worksheet given.

This research used some techniques in collecting the research data, as follows questionnaire, interview, and document analysis. The researcher observed the students' and teachers' activities during the online teaching-learning process to know the teachers' teaching strategies. Since the writing class was held online, the researcher made notes, recorded the class-meeting video, and took screenshots during the observation based on the data required. The questionnaire sheet was used to measure the students' opinions or perspectives on teachers' strategies in teaching writing. The sheet was in *Google Forms*. In this case, the researcher used the Google application to give the questionnaire directly to the students' e-mail or WhatsApp accounts with the help of teachers. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Close-ended questionnaires were used to determine the percentage from each item measured that are later interpreted descriptively. Open-ended questions were used to identify students' perceptions regarding teachers' strategies for teaching writing in online circumstances. The questionnaire discusses three major aspects; students' participation, instructional design and delivery, and teachers' role and involvement. Fedynich & Bradley (2015) adapted and revised the questionnaire items. The researcher interviewed three English teachers in a formal interview. There was no structure or interview guide. Instead, the interviewer built rapport with respondents, got them to open up and express themselves with the open-ended questions, and expressed little control over the respondents' responses. In order to complete the data analysis required, the researcher collected the documents from the teacher, such as the syllabus, lesson plan, and students' writing from the worksheet given.

The collected data were then analyzed by using several steps according to the theory of Miles et al. (2014) based on its components as an interactive model as follows: data condensation (it refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming data), data display, and conclusion, drawing or verification.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Teaching Strategies Used by the EFL Teachers in Promoting Students' Writing Skills

| No | Teachers | Demonstrating | Motivating | Supporting | Evaluating |
|----|----------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1 | RS | √ | √ | - | √ |
| 2 | AT | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| 3 | LL | √ | - | √ | - |

According to the findings of the teaching strategy used by the EFL teachers, the teacher interview shows no sign of evaluating the teacher's proposed strategy. It might happen because of the work-from-home regulation in which they cannot give assessments and score directly to the students. The statement can be seen in the transcript below:

AT : The most challenging part of teaching writing in this online learning situation is giving directive feedback on their work right away. Besides the distance, time also becomes another issue that we face, limited time makes us difficult to reach all the goals of evaluation.

The statement above shows the difficulties that teachers face during assessing students' writing tasks. This situation is relevant to what Al-Bargi's (2022) suggestion mentioning that in order to improve students' L2 writing and provide an accurate and fair assessment of their L2 writing performance, remote online second language (L2) writing teaching and remote online L2 writing assessment, respectively, require a holistic structural approach. Besides that, unlike regular teaching/face-to-face, the students will have difficulty connecting to online classes, not only taking the time but also lacking internet data for having the online course from the beginning to the end. The teachers do not apply this strategy during online classes. Thus, it is no doubt that the teachers will do the scoring system from their homes (Okmawati, 2020). They prefer not to waste students' internet data because they know that most of their online learning problem is their internet data which causes the students' difficulty getting online.

Compared with conventional learning, most of the teachers in the interview said there are changes in a teaching strategy adjusted to the situation (Nambiar, 2020; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020). In teaching offline, all of the teachers start by explaining and describing one topic and stating the examples. They will explain it using media such as pictures if connected with teaching writing (Basith & Syafi', 2020; Leonardo et al., 2022). It functioned as stimulation for the students, which will give them ideas of what to do about the topic. Then they will guide them by correcting the task if they have any mistakes or providing feedback or suggestions for their writing. Lastly, they might or might not do the scoring system in the classroom; it depends on how much time they use in teaching in school, especially in writing. One of the teachers said that "*learning writing takes more time than other skills*". That is why the teachers do not assess their tasks in the classroom. Usually, the students take it home as homework.

Those strategies in teaching especially writing, align with the teaching strategies in general. Fajrial (2017) stated six categories of teaching and learning strategies. The first strategy set induction might or might not be implemented in online classes. It depends on how much time the teachers use in teaching (Vannest et al., 2009). From the interviewees, there is no indication of implementing this strategy. Mostly those three teachers directly did to giving tasks to their students but providing a short explanation about the lesson given beforehand.

Table 2. The Implementation of Teachers' Strategies to Promote Students' Writing Skills

| No | Teachers | Direct Instruction | Collaborative teaching | Situated Teaching | Self-directed teaching |
|----|----------|---|------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 1 | RS | Google meet | Giving task | - | Giving tasks and learning by themselves |
| 2 | AT | a. Google meet b. Interactive video c. <i>Up-to-date</i> topics | Giving task | Solving student's problems | a. Searching material from other sources b. Self remedy |
| 3 | LL | Google meet | Giving task | - | Task and exercises |

The second strategy, establishing appropriate, is similar to the demonstrating strategy. This strategy means that the teachers explain specific topics and what they need to do, state examples, and try to relate the subject or the illustrations to their daily lives (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2017). The third strategy is the repetition plan. From the interviews, it can be found that the teachers implemented this strategy in online learning. For example, they gave them a topic to read and made a summary of it. This practice is considered repetition so that they can understand specific issues well. Another teacher also implemented this by asking them to rewrite things after giving feedback about one particular topic. She said that making the students rewrite will make them fluent in writing because writing is considered difficult compared to reading and speaking.

The fourth category, stimulus variation, is implemented by those three teachers teaching online. All of them use the approach of texting or giving a call to the students to motivate them to learn and read. Their ways of interacting are unique, considering that people are dealing with online learning circumstances and make the limitation of people movement (Darby & Lang, 2019). One of the teachers said that, "*writing text in the WA group indirectly shapes their personality*". Students who do not know ethics can accidentally learn it by keeping in touch with their teachers by text. So this is the benefit of the pandemic that tone of the teachers felt. Mr. RS's pattern in implementing this strategy is quite different. It does not matter if the student submitted the task late; he will keep accepting it. All he wants the students to do is keep studying and always learning no matter the situation.

The teachers also apply the fifth strategy through telecommunication devices. Mostly they use the WA group to connect with the students (Baguma et al., 2019). They want the students to ask if they do not understand. After the students do some reading, they can ask questions directly or indirectly to their teachers in the group, such as WA, google classroom, etc. The last strategy, namely summarizing, might be used in the offline class, but it is pretty challenging to do that in online learning. It is quite similar to explaining but in a straightforward way. The style of summarizing is shifted to the students. The teachers always ask the students to make their summaries after reading or finding other information about one particular topic.

In addition, for the implementation of teaching strategies to promote writing amid covid-19, those teachers often call the students one by one by using WhatsApp video calls to have a short conversation regarding one of the topics in the textbook. For the writing activities, teacher AT used authentic materials that mostly connected to the current situations, such as asking the students to write an essay about COVID-19 and its impact on their lives and students' feelings regarding studying from home. Most teachers lead the students to open Youtube to enrich their vocabulary, watch movies, or listen to English music and rewrite it to enrich their writing knowledge.

The kind of method for the application of teaching strategies by EFL teachers is considered one of the strategies by Harmer (2004), which is motivating and supporting. The motivation is seen through

her care by calling them, and the lesson's feedback represents the teacher's support to the students. A similar method is acquired based on the interviewees' questions' answers. Those teachers give extra attention to the students through online media (i.e., WhatsApp, Google Meetings, etc.), especially during the work-from-home regulation amid online learning circumstances.

CONCLUSION

This research concluded that the teachers used several kinds of teaching strategies in teaching writing in online learning circumstances. These strategies are demonstrating, in which the teachers give explanations about certain topics of writing, motivating the students by applying media in order to help them to develop ideas about their writing, giving feedback towards their tasks, supporting the students by giving any feedback towards their tasks, and evaluating students task by giving an assessment. Furthermore, the way the teachers implemented the teaching strategies was as follows; 1) giving the students direct instruction about teaching materials through Google Meet; 2) the teachers also implemented collaborative teaching by giving the students tasks to do personally or in a group or discussion; 3) The last strategy that the teachers use is self-directed teaching in which the teachers give the students one particular material that they need to study alone with the help of an online source. Future studies are suggested conduct to investigate strategies in the area of teaching other skills such as listening, speaking, and reading.

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