Students’ Preference of Speaking Activities in Online ESP Classes

Sartika Otodu¹, Khoiriyah²

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia; otodusartika@gmail.com
² Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia; khoiriyah230693@umm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the students’ preferences for online classroom activities in English for Specific Purpose (ESP) speaking skills and the benefits that the students get from their preferred activities. Eighty-five students of the Psychology Department ranging from 17 to 22 years old, were proportionally selected to involve filling in the questionnaire and 10 students were interviewed. The findings show that there were several online learning activities both in synchronous or asynchronous mode, including conducting a discussion by using video conference (zoom, google meet, etc.), conducting online task or quizzes, making a self-introduction video, conducting asynchronous discussion through learning platforms (canvas/LMS, google classroom, Edmodo, etc.), watching a Youtube video, making video project about a topic, and making a video about digital storytelling. Yet, the most favourable of the students’ preferences of online classroom activities in ESP speaking skills is discussion activities by using video conferences such as Zoom and Google Meet (Mean=3.3). Those activities were beneficial for students to improve students’ vocabulary, creativity, and speaking skills as well. In conclusion most preferable learning activity for speaking skills, is followed by quizzes, watching Youtube, and other online learning activities. The students perceived that online speaking activities could improve their speaking skills. In addition, the study’s implication will be further discussed.

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Corresponding Author:
Khoiriyah
Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang; khoiriyah230693@umm.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

English is a global language and is used by people all over the world to communicate. Nowadays, English is a language that is widely used in various fields. English can be used as a native speaker, as a second language, and as a foreign language. In Indonesia, English is a foreign language, so English is
taught in certain fields, especially in formal education. At the university level, English is taught through the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses (Luana Sasabone, Yuriatson Jubhari, Sukmawati, & Sujarwo, 2021; Pranoto & Suprayogi, 2020; Sari, 2018). According to Paltridge & Starfield (2013), ESP is intended to be taught to those who use English as a second or foreign language. The purpose is to be able to use the English language according to their particular field. To achieve positive outcomes and effective learning, the structure, features and also related factors of an ESP course are very important.

“There are three general factors; selection of materials, exercises with text including activities to learn and practice skills, creation of a learning environment—motivation” (Saliu & Hajrullai, 2016).

Due to the current condition, the pandemic has undeniably resulted in a dramatic movement away from face-to-face and blended teaching modes and toward totally online instruction for all students and teachers (Khoiriyah; Khoiriyah, Kairoty, & Aljasysyarin, 2022). Educators and students can connect in both synchronous and asynchronous modes on many online platforms. For example, in this online environment, students and teachers are outfitted with a webcam and a microphone to communicate, allowing real-time interactions equal to those found in a traditional classroom setting (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021). Online learning is carried out by utilizing technology. The learning is carried out with various activities involving teachers and students. This is also supported by Syafiq et al. (2021) “Online learning is a teaching and learning process that utilizes an internet connection and learning platforms”. The online learning environment consists of synchronous and asynchronous. A synchronous environment is the presence of teachers and students. Meanwhile, an asynchronous environment is not time-bound. This means that students can learn according to their own time (Perveen, 2016).

Furthermore, classroom activities have an important role in encouraging students to learn and supporting the teaching and learning process. Samperio Sanchez (2017) stated, "Activity is any procedure intended to stimulate learning to rehearse a skill that might or not include a teaching strategy, material, and a goal, and which is developed in a certain amount of time". Meanwhile, an online classroom activity is a process in which students and lecturers connect by utilizing technology, electronic tools and internet networks. Additionally, activities in the classroom have an important role in increasing students’ ability to learn English. Thus, students also have various preferences for activities in the learning process. Each student has a unique character and interprets activities differently. There are many possible causes of each student’s preferences related to the activities carried out in the classroom (Samperio Sanchez, 2017). Thus, Sullivan (2016), argued the word ‘preferences’ refers to “the stable likes and dislikes that individuals possess. These likes and dislikes may be either present or future-oriented”.

Several activities are used in online classroom activities in English for Specific Purpose (ESP) speaking skills, such as presentation video-project. Take an example, García-Pinar (2019) reported that The use of TED talks has significantly improved students’ learning experiences and is favourably associated with their motivation. Previous studies also reported that making a video project makes students feel confident speaking (Mohammed Alhaj & H. Albahiri, 2020; Radosavlevikj & Hajrullai, 2019) and enhances ESP teaching programs as well (Syafiq et al., 2021). Kusumawati (2020) confirmed that students were required to finish the project based on the knowledge, guidance, and practice that had been done in the previous activity. They should perform a presentation recorded and should be uploaded to LMS. The finding of the presentation project in online learning indicates that students were successfully experiencing the learning process as similar to face-to-face learning.

Another online learning activity for speaking skills is digital storytelling. Digital Storytelling (DS) is a pedagogical tool that can help increase students’ creativity and “learning by doing”. Digital Storytelling is the creation of digital short films. Students recreate stories according to their field of study, thus, the results indicated that the students’ speaking skills had improved (Gimeno Sanz, 2015). Digital storytelling brings changes in the online learning process. As pointed out by Alcalde Penalver et al. (2021), based on their findings, the students realized that Digital Storytelling was a way to develop their language skills. The activity is considered a different learning method. Thus, students feel compelled to learn more in a more creative and fun way. Students’ perceptions on developing new
literacies they considered that they acquired different skills (technological, interpersonal and communicative) that could be useful for their future professional careers.

In the same vein, YouTube videos have slightly improved students’ speaking skills, although it is not very significant and is only designed to teach speech. YouTube is a web page that supports the teaching and learning process. In addition, YouTube is used as an alternative to improve students’ speaking skills as it is considered authentic material (Bekteshi, 2019; Kusumawati, 2020a; Yu, 2018). For example, students get new vocabulary and learn about the correct pronunciation so that students know which pronunciation is correct (Syafiq et al., 2021). Additionally, another activity is doing online quizzes and online tasks. According to Hoesny et al. (2020), the students mostly agreed that online activities and discussions motivate them to study the subject being presented. Thus, quizzes and online tasks can be used through Edmodo and encourage students to learn. Another online platform is Google, which supports online learning, especially for group tasks (Khoiriyah, 2021). Other published research also proposes several other online activities such as discussion (Mandasari & Wulandari, 2021), presenting videos about useful tips, making stories in English, discussing the material presented and also providing comments on other groups’ presentations. This can be a consideration in providing learning where English is used in accordance with real life. Thus, students are motivated to improve their English abilities (Hoesny et al., 2020).

Another thing that needs to be considered in designing ESP courses is the activities that are used in the classroom. In fact, activities in the classroom will greatly affect the level of student interest in learning English. Sanchez (2017) argued that “Activities play an important role in the process of learning in the classroom”. In early 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face learning turned into online learning (Kusumawati, 2020b). Initially, the class was carried out face to face learning (offline) into online learning. Therefore, activities that are usually carried out offline have to be changed into online learning. Thus, activities in ESP learning are carried out online. Online learning is considered a novel ESP training teaching strategy that fosters independent English learning skills by integrating interactive exercises into a virtual classroom environment to increase students’ learning engagement and information interchange (Mulyadi, Arifiani, Wijayantingsih, & Budiausti, 2020). It is now regarded as an ESP instruction transition that assists learners in being active and autonomous in mastering English skills.

Furthermore, one of the teaching and learning activities in online ESP classes is teaching speaking skill. Syafiq et al. (2021) state that online teaching can be an option for teaching English, especially speaking skills. Speaking skill is an important aspect that needs to be taught. Speaking skill is needed in accordance with the ESP curriculum (Venkateswara & John, 2021). Speaking skill is one of the main skills to improve students’ abilities in their future careers because speaking is related to the real world (Syafiq et al., 2021). Speaking skills have the most important role in learning a foreign language or a second language (Srinivas, 2019). The ability to speak is very necessary in learning a language, especially in the context of ESP. At the university level, it is important to teach speaking skills which are then by the student’s field of study (Lapele, 2019).

With regards to learning speaking online, there have been discussed in the literature. Take an example, Fitriani, Bandung, & Kadri (2020) explored the students’ perspective of online learning in speaking class during the pandemic. The result showed that students mostly negatively perceived their online learning activities as they claimed that the online learning did not contribute to improve their speaking skills. Face-to-face class was more preferrable. In the same vein, Syahrin & Salih (2020) tried to investigate Omani ESL students with regards to their online learning experience. Their study found a lack of the students’ productive skills (such as speaking) as students got limited opportunities to practice their speaking skills in the designed online platform. Similarly, Canadian university students reported that they also projected more activities that encourage peer collaboration in the classroom (Huang, 2021). From the aforementioned research, it is noted that speaking learning activities in online mode is still crucial to be investigated. Hence, this research aimed to explore the student’s preferences regarding speaking learning activities in online learning. Two research questions
are formulated as follows: (1) What are the students’ preferences of online classroom activities in the ESP speaking skill?; and (2) What are the benefits of students’ preferences regarding online classroom activities in ESP speaking skills?

2. METHODS

This research used a mixed method design. A mixed methods research design is carried out by collecting, analysing, and mixing qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study to understand a research problem (Creswell & Clark, 2018). In general, the use of mixed methods is intended when both quantitative and qualitative data can be combined to provide a better understanding of the research problem at hand. Quantitative data, such as scores on an instrument, make it easy to calculate specific numbers that can be analysed statistically. Meanwhile, qualitative data such as interviews can provide different views on the research topic (Creswell, 2011).

In this study, the populations were students from the Psychology Department in one of Indonesian private university in the academic year 2020/2021. The population was 527 students that have completed the ESP course. In this context, the ESP program provided by the university is called as FLSP (Foreign Language for Specific Purposes). Thus, the selected students can provide comprehensive information. In addition, the participants were selected using proportional quota sampling. As a result, a claim can be drawn from the sample to the population (Creswell, 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2018). Then, 85 students completed the questionnaire, and 10 students were interviewed via Zoom Cloud Meeting individually. The selection of those students was made by using a proportional quota sampling technique in which 15% (85 students out of 527 students) of the total population is sufficient to be selected as the participant (Sedgwick, 2012).

Two instruments were utilised in data collection: questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The questionnaire items consisting of two major topics (the students’ online activities and its benefits) were developed carefully in accordance with the existing selected theoretical frameworks (Alcalde peñalver et al., 2021; García-Pinar, 2019; Gimeno Sanz, 2015; Kusumawati, 2020a). This kind of survey research aims to get the information that expresses the characteristics of a large sample of individuals of interest relatively quickly (Ponto, 2015). Further, the interview technique was designed to allow participants to elaborate and reflect on their responses (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and allow researchers to probe and construct further questions based on participants’ responses (Adams, 2015). After the data was obtained, the survey data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were utilized to understand the broad trends in demographic characteristics as well as the more particular trends shown by survey results (Fink, 2017). To be more specific, the descriptive statistics utilized were measures of frequency and measures of central tendency. Meanwhile, interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used to gather findings reflecting specific themes to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section depicts the findings based on the research questions. The finding includes the students’ preferences of online classroom activities in ESP speaking skills and the benefits that the students get from those preferences. In general, there were several online classroom activities, namely conducting a discussion by using video conference (zoom, google meet, etc.), conducting online tasks (quizzes), making a self-introduction video, conducting a discussion through learning platforms (canvas/LMS, google classroom, Edmodo, etc.), watching a Youtube video, making video project about a topic, and making a video about digital storytelling. A detailed explanation of the findings is presented as follows.
3.1 The Students’ Preference for Online Classroom Activities in ESP Speaking Skill

There are seven items in the survey containing various online classroom activities in ESP/FLSP speaking skills. In this survey, several activities that are generally carried out in ESP online speaking skills classes are presented, especially during the pandemic. Table 1 presents the results of the data analysis, sorted from the highest to the lowest.

Table 1. Students’ preference for online classroom activities in ESP speaking skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Mean (x)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conduct a discussion by using video conference (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct online tasks (quizzes)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a self-introduction video</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct a discussion through learning platforms (Canvas/LMS, Google Classroom, Edmodo, etc.)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch a YouTube video</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a video project about a topic</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a video about digital storytelling</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest mean was found for the item conducting a discussion by using video conferences such as Zoom and Google Meet as activities for learning in online classes in ESP/FLSP speaking skills (x = 3.3). This means that most students agreed that discussions via Zoom and Google Meet are the most preferred ESP/FLSP speaking activities. Further, those platforms provided students with an opportunity to practice their speaking skills synchronously. During this pandemic, online learning can be easily implemented by utilizing digital technology that supports face-to-face meetings between lecturers and students.

“...activities using Zoom application help me to be more confident in speaking English and improve my speaking skills because at the end of the meeting, the lecturer will provide feedback regarding my appearance”. - (Student 1)

Following conducting discussions by using video conferences (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.) was conducting an online task (x = 3.2). This activity is in the second highest mean, with the indications that students agree with conducting online tasks, which are quizzes as their second preferred activity. Quiz helps students understand and remember the material presented by the lecturer. This is also supported by the interview results below:

“Doing online quizzes via Kahoot applications train our speed to answer. So, we have to really understand the material and have to study the material before taking the quiz”. - (Student 2)

The lowest mean was found for the item-making digital video storytelling (x = 2.4). This means that students disagree with digital storytelling as an ESP/FLSP speaking skill activity. In other words, digital storytelling activities are not preferred by students. It seemed that students preferred having synchronous speaking activities instead of asynchronous activities such as making digital storytelling. The second lowest mean was found for the item making a video project about a topic (x = 2.8). This means that students disagree to make a video project about a topic as an activity that is preferred by students.
3.2 The Benefits of Online Classroom Activities in ESP Speaking Skill

There are twelve items in the survey consisting of several activities in the ESP/FLSP online class, along with the benefits felt by the students from these activities. This survey contains various activities that are generally carried out in online classes. In addition, several benefits are felt by students through these activities. Table 2 presents the results of the data analysis, sorted from the highest to the lowest.

**Table 2.** The benefits of online classroom activities in ESP speaking skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Mean (x̄)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video project improved my English speaking skill</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching YouTube videos increase my English vocabulary</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online tasks (quizzes) motivated me to study the material being presented</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion through video conference (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.) improved my English speaking skill</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video project increased my confidence in speaking English</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion through learning platforms (Canvas/LMS, Google Classroom, Edmodo, etc.) motivated me to study the material being presented</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion through learning platforms (Canvas/LMS, Google Classroom, Edmodo, etc.) motivated me to actively participate in online class</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video project improved my presentation skill</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion through video conference (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.) makes me feel confidence in speaking English</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital storytelling improved my English speaking skill</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion through video conference (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.) makes me active to give my opinion.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching YouTube videos improved my English speaking skill</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest mean was found for the item-making video projects can improve students’ English-speaking skills (x̄ = 3.3). This mean indicates that most of the students agree that making video projects can improve their English-speaking skills. This is also supported by the interview results below:

“…making videos is a very fun activity that can improve English speaking skills and memorization as well as add new English vocabulary”. - (Student 3)

The second highest mean was found for the items online task (quizzes) motivate students to study the material being presented and watching YouTube videos increase the students’ English vocabulary (x̄ = 3.2). This mean indicates that students agree that the activity of doing online quizzes is beneficial for students to learn the material presented by the lecturer and the activity of watching YouTube videos is beneficial for students in increasing their English vocabulary. This is also supported by the interview result below:

“… online quiz activities are more effectively used to help understand the material that has been taught because the time given to answer is very limited. So it encourages me to understand the material first before the quiz starts”. - (Student 4)

The lowest mean was found for the items digital storytelling improves students’ English-speaking skill, discussion through video conference (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.) make students’ active to give their
opinion and watching YouTube videos improve students’ English-speaking skill ($\bar{x} = 2.9$). These three items indicate that the students disagree that digital storytelling activities can provide benefits to improve their English skills and disagree that discussions through video conferencing make them active in giving opinions. In addition, students disagree that watching YouTube videos can improve their English skills.

Furthermore, students were asked about their preferred online class activities in ESP/FLSP speaking skills and what benefits they felt from these activities. There are three activities mentioned by students, including making video projects about a topic, face-to-face meetings using video conferencing (Zoom and Google Meet), and online quizzes (Kahoot and Quizizz applications). Based on the data that has been recorded from interviews, many benefits were felt by students related to their preferred activities.

The activity of making videos helps in improving pronunciation in English, adding new vocabulary, and improving memory skills. In making videos, students feel their confidence increases to speak English and also increase their creativity. Thus, the activity of making videos can improve students’ English speaking skills. In making videos, feedback from lecturers is very important as an evaluation for students to perform better.

“Making videos helps me to improve my English vocabulary as well as improve my fluency in speaking English and increase my creativity. This video assignment must be given feedback from the lecturer as an evaluation to be able to perform better”. - (Student 5)

Next, the benefits that students get from activities using Zoom application are that they can increase their confidence and help practice speaking English well. The student preference activity is a discussion or presentation on a topic where before a face-to-face meeting, the lecturer must inform students about a particular topic so that students can prepare and perform as well as possible. This is supported by the interview results below:

“It is better before the discussion activities through the Zoom application, the lecturer can provide topics to students so that students can make preparations”. - (Student 6)

The other respondent also had an opinion;

“Activities using the Zoom application are good to be applied in online speaking classes. By using Zoom, I can better understand the material presented by the lecturer. In addition, activities through Zoom can practice my English speaking skills because when there is a wrong pronunciation, the lecturer will help correct it”. - (Student 7)

The last, activity of doing online quizzes helps students understand the material that has been taught and improve their ability to remember the material.

“…quizzes are often done in online classes and these activities help me to better understand the material presented by the lecturers”. - (Student 8)

Discussion

All students have answered their preferences regarding activities in the ESP/FLSP online speaking skills class for synchronous and asynchronous learning modes. It was found that the preferred activity of students in online classes was to conduct discussions using video conferencing such as Zoom, Google Meet, etc. Video conferencing can be an alternative to online learning, especially for speaking classes (Widiastuti, Padmadewi, & Dewi, 2021) because the students can practice speaking synchronously. Zoom is an application used to conduct collaborative web-based video conferencing. In general, Zoom is used to support online meetings or webinars that provide various facilities, including audio, video, etc. (Kinasih, 2021). One of the students said that the Zoom application was effectively used as a
medium for conducting online classes, especially in the ESP/FLSP speaking class. It was also supported by Destianingsih and Satria (2020), Zoom is one of the effective tools that can be used as a virtual face-to-face meeting. Another response from students regarding activities through video conferences said that the lecturer gave the topic first and provided feedback regarding student performances. This is also supported by the study conducted by Destianingsih and Satria (2020). The role of the lecturer is to be able to provide explanations before conducting discussions or exercises via Zoom and provide feedback to students regarding the students’ performance.

In the findings of the next study, the activity that is preferred by students in terms of the benefits obtained is making videos because it can improve students’ English speaking skills. In line with the research of Encalada and Sarmiento (2019), it was found that making their own videos helped students in developing their speaking skills. In addition, the activity of making videos will increase students’ self-confidence. This is because, at the time of recording the video, there was no audience, which sometimes, for some people, decreased their confidence level (Bobkina & Romero, 2020). The activity of making videos as one of the assignment methods forces students to be able to find out for themselves about English vocabulary and pronunciation. One participant said that making videos was very fun, but students needed the lecturer’s feedback. This is also in line with Encalada and Sarmiento (2019) stating that there is a need for quick feedback from lecturers. So, students can find out what pronunciation errors they make. Correction assistance from the lecturer is highly expected by the students.

Based on the age range obtained, the participants are classified as Z Generation, which lives in the technological era. Students are considered to have been fluent in the use of technology. Therefore, students will be more adaptable to the process of making videos (Dukut, 2020). One participant stated that it was difficult to make videos at first, but because they always got the task of making videos, they finally got used to it. Students become more aware of using certain features to edit a video. Video recordings and presentations are an effective way of preparing students to be proficient in 21st-century communication. In addition, this is a preparation for students to face the new communication reality which is dominated by technology. Lecturers always help students develop their digital communication skills, such as talking in the absence of a real audience in front of them, and recording and editing videos (Bobkina & Romero, 2020). Additionally, in a study, it was found that after carrying out discussion activities using the Zoom application, students felt quite motivated to learn more (Kinasih, 2021). One study found that making videos made students feel more motivated, this is due to improvisation (Encalada & Sarmiento, 2019). In addition, the activity of making videos can increase students’ creativity. Therefore, discussion activities through the Zoom application and other online platforms and making videos can be solutions for online class learning in ESP/FLSP speaking skills.

4. CONCLUSION

This research basically has revealed two aims. First, this study aims to determine which activities students majoring in Psychology prefer in the online classroom ESP/FLSP speaking skills. Based on students’ responses, they mostly prefer discussion activities using video conferencing such as Zoom and Google Meet etc. This activity can be an alternative for lecturers and students to be able to connect in real time even though they are in different places. So, the online learning process can be situated like during face-to-face meetings. Second, this study aims to determine the activities that students prefer, referring to the benefits felt by students related to these activities. Based on the students’ answers, the activities that are preferred in terms of benefits are making video projects. This activity was beneficial in improving students’ English-speaking skills. Making videos provides many benefits for students, including increasing English vocabulary, increasing creativity, and helping students master video editing techniques. In addition, making videos helps students to be ready for new communication modes involving technology. Although the findings of this study cannot be generalized, the insights and suggestions presented might be valuable for ESP teachers and lecturers.
seeking to improve the teaching and learning process in an online environment. Hence, for future research, it is expected to identify what factors actually influence the students in choosing the activities that they preferred the most.

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