

## THE ONLINE ENGLISH TEACHING DURING THE PANDEMIC TIME AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN PEKALONGAN

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**Abstract:** In 2020 many schools in Indonesia were required to do online teaching practices to prevent the spread of covid-19. Schools in Pekalongan City were the examples. Teachers and students suddenly had to adapt to online classes. As online classes were quite new for the teachers in Pekalongan, the writers were interested in revealing teachers' actual perceptions and implementation of online classes through a quantitative study. Employing an online questionnaire, this study involved 30 English teachers from 22 junior high schools. The study found out that most teachers perceived their online classes as quite effective. However one third of them reported online classes as less effective. All teachers also reported problems in their online classes. This suggests online teaching practiced by English teachers in Pekalongan varied in effectiveness. Each teacher also encountered problems in managing online classes and this suggests an urgent need to help teachers to minimize those problems.

**Keywords:** *online teaching, English, pandemic time*

The online teaching practices have taken place in many educational settings in Indonesia since 2020. Those practices were enhanced by Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia which has been happening for more than a year. Many cities had closed the schools to minimize the spread of covid-19 (Abidah et al., 2020). This inevitably brought huge impacts on the learning activities of Indonesian students. Mailizar et al (2020) reported that more than 45 million Indonesian students relied heavily on online teaching and learning in the pandemic time. In Pekalongan City, Central Java the implementation of online classes was also required by the local government especially to follow the recommendation from the Ministry of Education and Culture in the efforts of reducing the spread of Covid-19 in the community. In March 2020, the online teaching practices began and they are still being implemented up to the time when this article is written. This also made teachers and students had to adapt to the new teaching and learning practices as the usual offline classes were shifted to online ones.

Online learning is the learning done with the use of electronic devices which requires the internet network (Gonzalez & Louis, 2018). With the advancement of technology, online learning can be conducted much easier nowadays. However, the use of online learning can be said as a new phenomenon in Indonesia (Pustika, 2020). Due to the sudden occurrence of covid-19 pandemic, Indonesian teachers had to teach online without sufficient preparation (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Similarly students had to adapt quickly to the new learning situation. As a result, the online classes implemented in Indonesian contexts were found to be ineffective (Abidah et al., 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Rosyidi, 2020; Zamroni, 2020). For the institutions which have been familiar with online teaching, the policy to conduct online classes does not pose a problem, but it does in the institutions which have not developed online learning and teaching systems (Abidah et al, 2020). Agustina, Matra and Karimah (2020) reported some examples of the problems encountered in online classes at university level in Indonesia such as lecturers' poor performance, students' lack of independent study skills, technical issues, burdening assignment, students' low level of motivation, and unsupportive learning environment. Other examples of problems were found out by Rasmitadilla et al (2020), Rahiem (2020) and Aji (2020). Rasmitadilla et al. found out that unstable signal and high internet fees became the primary problems within the online teaching practices in Indonesia. Rahiem (2020) revealed different problems within online teaching namely a lot of assignment, noises at home, and also technical problems when using technology. Besides those problems, Aji (2020) revealed that teachers' poor skill in using the technology as another raising issue. With the wide range of problems with emerge within

the implementation of online teaching in Indonesia, Agustina (2021) argues that online teaching in Indonesia apparently becomes new approaches and new challenges for teachers.

Similar to the situation in many areas in Indonesia where conducting online classes was perceived as new educational practices, online classes were not commonly done by teachers in Pekalongan city. Teachers in different educational levels rarely conducted online classes before the pandemic took place. Only some at the universities did it before the pandemic and nearly none did it at high schools. Thus, in senior high school and junior high school levels, online classes were a new phenomenon in Pekalongan. Teachers and students had to cope with this new ways of teaching and learning. Students stayed at their own homes but their learning was done in their new online classes. At the same time, teachers had to learn to use various online learning media so that they could deliver the materials well. In the beginning of its implementation, online classes seemed to be very interesting as a new way of teaching and learning. However, with the problems reported by the previous studies and literature, the writers had the interest to study English teachers' actual perceptions and implementation of online classes in Pekalongan City. Research in the area of online teaching during the pandemic was rarely conducted (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020) and more research on English teaching was done in tertiary level (Chin-Hsi Lin & Warschauer, 2015) therefore it is important to conduct this current study to contribute to the literature on how English teachers in Elementary, High Schools and Universities in Indonesia coped with the new teaching practices during the pandemic time. The writers would like to compare the implementation of online teaching practices during the pandemic time at four educational levels and reveal the actual problems experienced by teachers in each educational level. By finding out the real problems faced in the real teaching contexts, the writers believe that better assistance and solutions can be offered to those teachers particularly to help them minimize or solve the obstacles encountered within their online classes.

In this article, however, the writers only report the findings of the study in Junior High Schools levels which involved the participation of 30 English teachers from 22 Junior High Schools. More specifically, in this particular area of study, the writers focused at 1) revealing how Junior High School English teachers in Pekalongan City perceived the effectiveness of their online classes, 2) finding out the online teaching method implemented by those teachers, 3) finding out the learning management system (LMS) used by the teachers in teaching online, 4) revealing the teachers' reasons for using a particular LMS for teaching online and 5) discovering the problems English teachers encountered in teaching online.

The writers hope that the findings reported in this article can provide useful information on how English teachers at high schools in Indonesia perceived and practiced the online teaching in the pandemic time, especially as the pandemic has forced the teachers and students to conduct online teaching and learning abruptly. In addition, this current study belongs to an area of study which has never been really explored previously and thus it may add to the body of knowledge of ELT in secondary level where technology advancement needs to be compromised in its utilization for English teaching in the pandemic time due to diverse affordances and constraints in each of classroom settings.

## **METHOD**

The study reported here was a quantitative study as the initial part of the bigger mixed method study focusing at finding out how the online teaching was perceived and implemented by teachers in Pekalongan City Indonesia. The whole study was completed for four months from November 2020 to March 2021. The mixed method study here belonged to the explanatory sequential mixed method which according to Creswell (2014) typically involves gathering data from a survey, analysing them, and conducting interview to explain the respondents' responses in the survey. Following Creswell's research stage, the first phase of this study was the quantitative study in the form of survey to capture the teachers' perceptions about their online classes and its implementation. Survey can measure attitudes, opinion, perceptions (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009) and thus it was appropriate to be used in this study. The second phase was a case study which was used to reveal the actual practices of online teaching done by the teachers in their own classes. Case study helps to explain how a phenomenon happens in real context (Yin, 2014) and thus the writers believed in its appropriateness for this study.

The survey itself was conducted by distributing an online questionnaire to teachers teaching at elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools and universities. The questionnaire was used to capture teachers' perceptions about online classes done during the pandemic time. Among the questions in the questionnaire were What model of online teaching did you use for teaching during the pandemic? What Learning Management System (LMS) did you use for teaching? Why did you choose that LMS? How effective are your online classes? and What are the main challenges you experience while teaching online?. The questions in the questionnaire can be categorized into closed and open ended questions where the choices of answers are available for the first category and unavailable for the second category (Pallant, 2013). Similarly, the questionnaire used in this study also employed those

types of questions where in some parts teachers were allowed to select from provided answers and for the other parts they could write their answers with their own words.

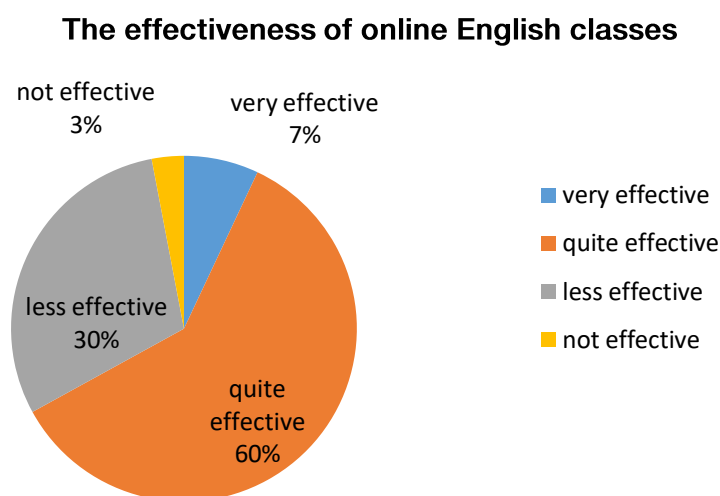
The final number of participants in the quantitative study was 179 teachers who taught various different subjects. However, in this article, the writers present the findings of the study based on the data collected from 30 Junior High School English teachers. These 30 teachers came from 22 junior high schools in Pekalongan City. They had completed the online questionnaire distributed through the Association of English Teachers forum of Pekalongan City in the first month of the study. The questionnaires were then analysed statistically and descriptively so that the research objectives could be achieved. The writers calculated the percentage of the teachers' answers and also presented them in the table and charts.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative study reveals many interesting findings describing not only teachers' perceptions about their own online teaching, but also the online teaching model, types of LMS chosen by the teachers, reasons for choosing the LMS as well as various obstacles the teachers encountered when they conducted their online English classes in the pandemic time. The overall findings will be described under 5 subsections namely *The effectiveness of online English classrooms*, *The models of online teaching*, *The LMS used by the teachers*, *The main reasons of selecting the LMS*, and *The problems faced by the teachers in teaching online*. Each of the finding will be discussed below.

### The Effectiveness of Online English Classrooms

Online teaching and learning activities conducted in Junior High Schools in Pekalongan were found varied in their effectiveness. In this study, 60% of the English teachers acknowledged that their online English classrooms were quite effective. 30% reported that their English classes were less effective. Another 7% of the research participants mentioned that their online English classes were very effective while the other 3% admitted that the online classes were completely ineffective. To see the comparison, the following chart represents this finding.



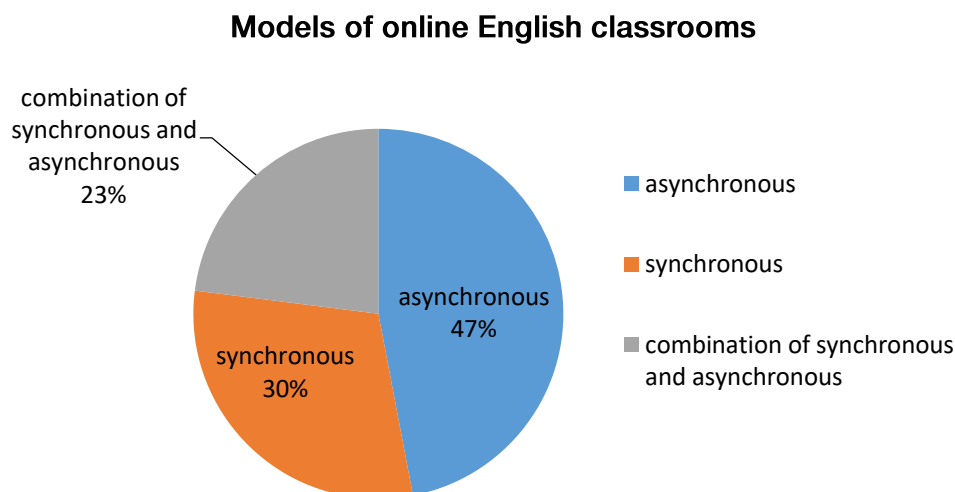
**Figure 1. The effectiveness of online English teaching in Junior High Schools at Pekalongan**

The chart above shows only a small percentage of teachers mentioning the online classes as very effective. This may reflect the successful teaching and learning activities as perceived by a small number of teachers in their English classes. For the majority of participants who said that their classes were quite effective, the effectiveness they acknowledged means that the minimum standard of the teaching and learning activities had been achieved. On the other hand, nearly one third of the participants felt that their classes were less effective and there was also a case where the online class was totally not effective. This finding calls for further attention as the students' learning may not take place when the classes were ineffective. The findings really described the diverse levels of effectiveness in managing online classes. Online English classes conducted in Junior High Schools at Pekalongan may need to be evaluated as not all English classes could run effectively even after two semester of online teaching practices. The evaluation may inform what actually went well and what went wrong so that the actual problems could be tackled.

### The Models of Online Teaching

The participants of the study were found to use various models of online teaching. Out of the three models: synchronous, asynchronous and the combination of synchronous and asynchronous models, the majority of English teachers participating in this study acknowledged their use of asynchronous online teaching model (47%). Another 30% of the participants implemented synchronous model and the other 23% of the participants mentioned that they used the combination of asynchronous and synchronous models. In other words, most of online classes held by the participants in this study did not involve any direct virtual meeting between the teachers and the students. Teachers taught students by sending the materials and tasks which students could access at any time from home. Some other teachers preferred synchronous model where they met face to face with the students in their online classes. The combination of synchronous and asynchronous model was the least frequently used by the participants of this study.

The following chart shows the comparison of the models of online teaching used by English teachers in Pekalongan.



**Figure 2: Models of online English teaching used in Junior High schools in Pekalongan**

The comparison of the models also implies that many teachers did not use direct and interactive online interaction with the students like those done zoom or Google meet. This was mostly due the less supportive facilities owned by the students as Junior High Schools Students usually borrowed their parents or older siblings' gadgets for their online study. Thus asynchronous model was more preferable for many English teachers in Pekalongan.

### The LMS Used by the Teachers

Being asked about the LMS used in teaching English, the participants reported various types of LMS they utilized in their online classes along with some other application and teaching media. The teachers acknowledged the use of Google Classroom (47%), WhatsApp Group (23%), School LMS (13%), Moodle (7%), Microsoft (3%), Youtube (3%) and Schoology (3%). The use of these various teaching platforms suggests that Junior High School English Teachers in Pekalongan City involved in this study were quite familiar with the use of technology. Besides, the most popular teaching platform used was Google classrooms as it was used by nearly half of the participants. WhatsApp Group was also used by nearly one-fourth of the participants. Some schools also created their own LMS and this showed a good progress of the schools to cope with the pandemic time. As many LMS could be accessed through hand phones, it was necessary for the teachers' and students' phones to have sufficient capacity for downloading the teaching and learning applications.

### The Main Reasons for Selecting the LMS

There were various reasons presented by participants in this study especially concerning to the use of particular LMS or application in their online classes. There were at least seven main reasons underlying the use of a particular LMS or teaching platform. Those reasons were presented in the following table.

**Table 1. Reasons for LMS Selection within online English Teaching in Pekalongan City**

No	Reasons of LMS Selection	Responses	%
1.	Familiarity and ease of using the LMS	14	46.7
2.	Complete features	5	16.7
3.	Easy to interact with the students	4	13.3
4.	The availability of apps in students' phones	3	10
5.	Easy to manage the class	2	6.7
6.	School recommendation	1	3.3
7.	Easy to record students' scores	1	3.3

Table 1 shows that the primary reason for the teachers in selecting the teaching platform or LMS was the familiarity and ease in using it. This suggests that in the pandemic time which demanded the quick move from the offline into online teaching, teachers preferred something that they felt familiar and easy to help them conduct their online classes. It is quite logical for the teachers to have this reason as when the new teaching mode they implemented was easy to do, it would not add their teaching burden. This made them feel more comfortable in their online classes. It is also quite interesting to find out that complete features of the LMS were not the main attraction for the LMS selection. This might mean that only some teachers considered the importance of the complete features offered by the LMS. In other words, most teachers could tolerate the limited numbers of features provided by the LMS. For some other teachers, their concerns were more on the ease to interact with the students, on whether the students had the LMS on their phones and on the ease to manage the class. School recommendation and the ease to record students' scores were not popular reasons in selecting the LMS. With these diverse personal reasons for LMS selection and teaching practices may vary due to different LMS or teaching platform employed by the teachers.

#### **The Problems Faced by the Teachers in Teaching Online**

The last findings covered the challenges the English teachers faced in teaching online. The data showed that the English teachers had a number of challenges when teaching English through online classes. Those problems can be seen in the Table 2.

**Table 2. The problems of teaching English via online classes in Junior High School in Pekalongan**

No	Problems of Teaching English in Online Classes	Responses	%
1.	The lack of students' interest and motivation in joining online classes	11	34.4
2.	Limited internet data	7	21.9
3.	The lack of interaction between teachers and students	4	12.5
4.	The lack of students' independent study skills	4	12.5
5.	Unsupportive home environment	2	6.3
6.	Students had no gadgets	2	6.3
7.	Boredom in teaching online	1	3.1
8.	Students were passive in the online classes	1	3.1

If we look at the English teachers' answers above, the main challenge they experienced was the students' low interest and motivation in participating in the online classes. For many students in Junior High Schools in Pekalongan City, online classes were something new. A sudden move from offline to online learning might have made the learners to feel less comfortable and thus their motivation



decreased in learning. The number of tasks given by the teachers contributed to the lack of interest in learning too. Previously in offline teaching and learning activities, teachers had more time to explain the materials to the students and students could ask directly whenever they had difficulty in understanding the materials. Moreover, students could interact with all of their classmates directly. They could learn and play together. However, with the use of online classes, all of those activities were limited. Apart from the many factors contributing to the lowered motivation and interest in joining online classes, this particular problem clearly needs solutions. Without any motivation to learn, the students' learning will not be effective and thus the learning objective would be harder to achieve.

The second problem faced by the English teacher was the limited internet data. The online teaching will only happen when both teachers and students can use the internet. The problem revealed in this study was interesting as it related closely to the funding. Talking about funding is pretty tricky. It remains unclear about who should be responsible for providing internet data for teachers and students when the internet data given by the Ministry of Education was insufficient. It would be better if schools could provide the internet for students since not many parents could afford the internet fees to facilitate their children online learning. However, to take such kind of policy, agreement should be sought first especially between the school committee and the whole school members. When the schools were unable to provide the internet data, teachers and students themselves should pay for the internet data which means that additional fees were required to conduct online teaching and learning.

The next two main problems were the lack of interaction between the teachers and students and the lack of students' independent study skills. The lack of interaction could result from the asynchronous online teaching model and also from students' being passive in the online classes. It was understandable that more interactions happen in offline classes as students and teachers were in similar room and they could directly discuss the learning materials. But in Google classroom, this kind of interaction was hard to achieve as students only gave comments and teachers would respond in comments too. In WhatsApp application, more interaction could be achieved if the students were active. Teachers could use voice notes and students could listen to them and responded subsequently. Ideally the teachers can also use zoom or Google meet to interact directly with the students. However in this study no one acknowledged the use of these teaching platforms.

Lastly, talking about the students' lack of independent study skills, it was not surprising that Junior High School students had not been trained and prepared for studying independently. The students were just graduating from elementary schools and they needed a lot of guidance and supervision from the teachers. They might never think that the pandemic would happen and that they would be required to learn online. This study has shown that after two semester of learning online, students remained struggling with independent study activities. As the pandemic is still occurring, and students are continuously required to learn in a more independent way, it would be better if teachers and schools can provide trainings for the students to acquire independent study skills.

Others problems like unsupportive home environment, the unavailability of gadgets, teachers' boredom in teaching and students' inactive participation show that the challenges met by the English teachers varied broadly. Further, those problems need to be solved to increase the effectiveness of the online English classes managed by the participants of this study. This becomes the homework for not only the schools, the teachers, the students, but also the students' parents. Everyone needs to contribute to minimize the problems above by using their most appropriate capacity and roles.

The overall findings of the study strengthen the previous research findings on the online teaching and learning practices in Indonesia. This current study found out the ineffectiveness of online classes in some schools and this was in line with the findings of the study conducted by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) and Abidah et al (2020). Besides, this current study revealed Google classroom as the most favourite teaching platform used by English teachers in Pekalongan City and this finding supports Mannong's (2020) argument that Google Classroom is among the best platforms to help teachers teaching in the pandemic time. The main problem within online classes found in this current study was also similar to the problem reported in Atmojo and Nugroho's study (2020) where students' participation and motivation was also low. Others problems encountered by the teachers in this current study add to the literature on barriers in teaching online like those reported by Abidah et al (2020), Moorhouse (2020) and Rasmitadilla et al (2020). With these findings, the writers agree with Agustina's (2021) standpoint that the online teaching and learning in Indonesia still presents a number of problems which are uneasy to resolve.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has revealed various findings related to the practices of managing online classes done by thirty English teachers in Pekalongan city. Online English classrooms were found to vary in effectiveness levels; from very effective, quite effective, less effective and not effective. This suggests that not all online classes were successful in their implementation.

Concerning the teaching models used by English teachers, there were three models, namely asynchronous, synchronous, and the combination of synchronous and asynchronous with the asynchronous model as the most preferable ones. For the most frequently used LMS was Google classrooms. WhatsApp Group became the second choice after Google classroom and it was used by many teachers. The main reasons for the teachers in using the LMS were the ease and familiarity in operating it. It makes sense as when teachers feel familiar and easy in using the LMS, they have no urgent need to learn something new and they will cope in much better way rather than when they have to adapt to the new LMS or application. Some other types of teaching platform were also used like Moodle, Microsoft, Schoology and this shows that Junior high school English teachers were quite updating with the technology advancement. Or in other words, they were familiar with technology.

Lastly, in terms of problems faced by the English teachers, there were diverse problems reported by the teachers. The four main problems were the students' low motivation and interest, the limited internet data, the lack of interaction between teachers and students and the lack of independent study skills. The writers believe that these four main problems and the other problems mentioned by the teachers need to be minimized and overcome so that the teaching and learning activities in online classes can run in a better and more effective way.

Like the other previous research, this study had found problems of teaching online and at the same time contributes to the literature about the online teaching during the pandemic time. The future research can be done in wider contexts by involving more participants so that the findings can offer more generalizability. Comparative studies can also be done in different settings so that more information on how the online distance learning or online classes are actually conducted by teachers in various educational settings in Indonesia can be revealed.

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