

Research Article

Teaching English for Elementary Students During and Post-pandemic: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract.

As technology becomes increasingly common to be used in teaching and learning realm, and as the shift of learning modes before-during-and-post-pandemic is getting surprisingly transformed, the integration of technology in education offers more flexible learning opportunities. Digital media creation is one of the opportunities offered to be implemented in classes (either face-to-face or face-to-screen) and has been developed from time to time even before the pandemic hit not only Indonesia but also the globe. Especially for young learners, the teaching and learning activities should be made new, fun, and interactive. Hence, digital media presents to fulfill young learners' needs as well as attract their attention. However, not all EYL teachers were ready to immediately build an easy-accessed digital classroom. Some still had questions about the importance, regarding the fast-changing situation. This study aims to explore the integration of digital media in English class from EYL teachers' viewpoints. The instrument used in this survey research was a questionnaire distributed randomly to 19 English teachers of elementary schools in Malang. Findings revealed that the respondents admitted that there were benefits or prospects of digital media—one of which was enhancing the classroom technology. Nonetheless, the challenges were still dominating and—to some extent, need to be investigated further. Teachers preferred to blend synchronous and asynchronous teaching (47.4%) besides they thought that it could facilitate students' needs (89.5), this method was also considered as attractive for young learners (10.5%). Somehow, most teachers still put face-to-face method in their favor (84.2%) to be implemented in future.

Keywords: teachers' perspectives, EYL teachers, English for young learners, digital media creation

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a way that technology in information and communication is built up rapidly, it offers easiness and simplicity—not to mention the challenges, in every situation. This, eventually, has overcome the problems raised during the COVID-19 outbreak, while the previous use of digital platforms was merely an option. Along with it, the collaboration between teachers and students during online learning is the key. Previous study focusing on students' perception in online teaching and learning [1] reported that the

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use of online platforms conjoins with teacher's experience and knowledge in online environment. That is to say that teachers encumbered by the needs to quickly adapt to this new situation. Although considerable research has been carried out on the technical affordances of online learning [2]–[4], there is a few seeing this from teacher's point [5], [6]. Hence, the present study explores English teacher's perspective on teaching and learning online by integrating digital media creation; including the process of teaching, kinds of digital media platform, the challenges, and further usage of e-learning in primary school.

The affordance of technology and the presence of pandemic enables the shift in educational world, such as the sudden change of teaching and learning from traditional classroom to digital platforms (e.g., WhatsApp group, Zoom/Google Meet, video, Google Classroom/other LMS, quizwhizzer, thatquiz, wordwall, and quizziz) that recently helpful to minimize face-to-face meetings during pandemic; the changes are clear since the previous use of digital media was assisting the conventional learning in classroom [1], [7]. It also brings benefit for teachers and students to gain sources in learning, not only from hard-covered books but also from e-books, journals, and other internet sources [5]. However, it is not an easy move, both for the teachers and students, to instantly jump into online classes during the pandemic and gradually change it back into face-to-face mode after pandemic. Despite favorable outcomes which are well-explored, student's [8] and teacher's [9], [10] knowledge and experience in adapting the technology is reported as essential variables. Thus, it is believed that the challenges and disadvantages in entirely online classes could be more prominent considering the students and teachers were not ready to experience online environment [1]. It is mutual to several previous studies stated that majority of the teachers affirmed that they experienced online environment for the first time during this pandemic [1, p. 2], yet they showed positive attitudes in exploring the online environment [10, p. 12].

Along with the afore-mentioned study findings, integrating digital media in teaching English has caught our attention, particularly its implementation in elementary school. It is with reference to several points teacher needs to ponder, including the selection of teaching activities, materials, media, method, and time span [11], together with considering the nature of young learners [12]. Teaching English for young learners has its own uniqueness since the learners are in the phase of developing their thinking skill by meaningful language practice [13]. Besides, designing the teaching techniques is important, whether the class would be in synchronous, asynchronous, or the combination of both modes. Later on, in post-pandemic phase, how the teaching technique would be is also considerable. Obviously, it is an arduous task for the teacher to select appropriate

activities for the students. In higher level of education, students are more independent in comprehending learning instruction. Relatively different, elementary school teacher involves much more than executing lesson plans. Therefore, their viewpoints in integrating technology in teaching and learning process during and post-pandemic become our focus of this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Digital Media Platforms in Elementary Schools

The integration of digital media in education has been developed and implemented in the long run [14]–[16], becomes a way-out during pandemic [17], [18], and will be possibly continued after the pandemic with respect to the teacher readiness [9, p. 1]. This practice is more familiar in higher education level, such as higher schools and universities [1], but rarely be found in elementary level before the pandemic as the students are still dependent to the teachers and parents [14]. The pandemic forced elementary school teachers to be able to provide teaching and learning activities that can bridge the implementation of school from home. Based on previous research, challenges in implementing online learning carried out not only by the students, but also by the teachers and parents [17]. From the teacher's sides, they still had problems in selecting and using appropriate learning tools, internet networks and devices, learning management, assessment, and supervision for the elementary students. In other words, the lack of knowledge about the use of application technology during the online learning was the main problem for the teachers.

There are considerable number of digital platforms offering features that could help the elementary teachers. For instance, Learning Management System (in form of Edmodo, Moodle, Google Classroom, LMS Microsoft 365, or even self-developed LMS by the schools), social media (e.g., WhatsApp Group and Facebook Group), communication (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet, and Skype), interactive activities (e.g., liveworksheet, wordwall, educandy, quizziz, thatquiz, and quizwhizzer), and others. These digital media enable teachers to customize and create their own learning materials. Even though higher education level had used e-learning as an additional method before the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the teachers were not ready for a full-online experience [1]. This limited experience was also felt by the elementary teachers [14]. Most of the digital platforms are one-way learning direction or support student-centered learning, in line with the purpose as to develop learner's autonomy.

Meanwhile, in elementary school, the students are still depending to the teacher and students' parents [17]. Thus, the solution proposed for elementary school teachers was building good communication with students and students' parents by optimizing the features of digital media afore-mentioned.

2.2. Teaching English for Young Learner in Online Environment

The implementation of technology integration in elementary school obviously brought different treatment to the higher level of education. Coman et al. (2020, p. 6) reported that university students had a positive perception about online learning, considering it was helpful and useful during the pandemic situation. They also believed that the lecturers knew how to adapt to the online environment. This perspective is typically different from elementary school situation in which the students are depending to the teachers and parents in operating the digital media through laptop, computer, or smartphone [15], [17]. Besides, an elementary school teacher must be able to apply a variety of methods so that learning activities become interesting and fun based on the nature of elementary students [12], [13]. In teaching English, the variety of activities should be meaningful and linguistically comprehensible, so that the students would be attracted to practice the language actively and communicatively. Teacher should involve parents in providing material and using learning methods that are suitable for children's language development, such as using digital game-based learning innovations, LMS, or other previously mentioned applications. However, other obstacles faced were the fact that teachers, students, and students' parents were having limited experience on it. Furthermore, some applications were not available freely.

3. METHOD

The present study employed a survey design in which the questionnaire was used as research instruments, distributed via Google Forms to obtain the data from bigger respondents. After the questionnaire distributed, there were 19 English teacher of Elementary School in Malang responded and became the subject of the study. The questionnaire consisted of questions to explore teacher's perspective in integrating technology and teaching learning for elementary school. The reason for determining primary school teachers as research subjects is that elementary school teachers have difficulty in ensuring the continuity of the learning process for basic English subjects [19].

The obtained data were listed per section to make the researcher easier to analyze. Before data analysis, the listed data were narrated and ranged from the most to the least preference answers of the respondents. By this step, we can see the differences easier than when the data were still raw. The analytical method used in this research is descriptive statistical analysis. The measurement stage in this study is expected to determine the teachers' viewpoints on using technology in class during and post-pandemic, especially in English for young learners.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 illustrates the results of survey that has been distributed. It consists of 6 questions which intend to see the teachers' perspective on digital media they have ever used in the classroom activities.

TABLE 1: Frequency distribution of indicators related to EYL teachers' perceptions during and post-pandemic.

Variables	Category	Percentage
Previous experience	Previous use of e-learning platform	73.7%
Teaching method	Synchronous Asynchronous Combination	10.5% 42.1% 47.4%
Preference of digital media	Zoom/Google Meet WhatsApp Group Google Classroom Video	89.5% 84.2% 78.9% 73.7%
Usefulness of the digital platform	Delivering materials and information Distributing tasks Discussion Students' assessment media	75.7% 67.5% 36.5% 39.5%
Challenges faced during online learning	Technical problems (i.e., signals) Academic dishonesty Students' are lack of motivation Less effective	89.5% 78.9% 57.9% 52.6%
Future expectations	Preference on face-to-face Training on the use of digital media integrated in teaching and learning Module with interactive design and available online	84.2% 94.7% 89.5%

The first question aims to see how many teachers that previously had experience with e-learning platform. Table 1 depicts that as many as 73.7% has been familiar with the platform. It cannot be denied that technology has become a part of their teaching career. Teachers have been using the technology to enhance the students' performance since the dawn of time [20]. Without any doubt, technology has become so widespread and become the central role in education [21]. A number of studies have also revealed the

importance of technology integration in the teaching and learning process. One of which is a study by Gönen (2019) admitting that technology-supported classes could enhance the students' language skills, create enjoyable learning atmosphere, and trigger the students' active participation.

The second question investigates the teaching methods used by the teachers; whether it is synchronous, asynchronous, or combination of these two. Most respondents' answers were on combination with 47.4% and on asynchronous with 42.1%; whereas those who responded with synchronous were only 10.5%. Pandemic has forced the teachers to transform from traditional face-to-face interaction to technology-embedded classroom. Unfortunately, most of the teachers seems unready to transform; this might due to lack of what Moorhouse et al. (2021) addressed as classroom interaction competence (CIC) or the ability to be engaged with the students virtually. Different from face-to-face classes, online classes do need not only pedagogical competence, but also technological competence, online environment management competence, and online teacher interaction competence. As a consequent, it is not easy for the teachers to decide which mode that is appropriate for them [24], making them simply combine to have combination of synchronous and asynchronous, or just let the students to learn by instruction asynchronously.

The third question focuses on digital platforms that the teachers prefer to use. The survey found that Zoom or Gmeet and WhatsApp application were two frequently used platform, with 89.5% and 84.2% respectively; while google classroom and video stood at the third and fourth with 78.9% and 73.7%. It cannot be denied that these four became vital in the teaching and learning process, especially since the pandemic. Zoom or Gmeet has become the routine as it could "substitute" the traditional class into a virtual class. Teachers and students could simply interact by screen wherever they are; making this the most favorable platform used since the outbreak of Covid 19. Suadi (2021) has conducted a study to see the students' perspectives about the use of Zoom and Gmeet, and the result showed that it was effective and efficient in addition to be able to enhance the students' language performance. Besides, Zoom/gmeet, WhatsApp was also used. This is in line with a study by Susilawati and Supriyatno (2020) and Agustin Mawarni et al. (2020) who conclude that the students performed better after whatsapp was integrated in the teaching and learning process. The other two also resulted in better performance as supported by Okmawati et al. (2020) and Kessler et al. (2021)

The fourth question is to dig deeper on how useful digital platform to be applied in English class at elementary level. Based on Table 1, most of the teachers use digital media to deliver materials and information (75.7%) and distribute tasks (67.5%). These

functions correspond to Moonma (2021) saying that some online platforms can be used as a means to deliver instructions. In this study, WhatsApp Group and Google Classroom have features that allow the users to post information and attach materials in various forms of documents. Zoom/Google Meet and video differ in some ways. They do not only enable the teacher to share information and materials in visual forms, but also allow us to share documents in the chat box feature or comment section [31, p. 111]. Other than what have been previously mentioned, few respondents also mentioned that digital platforms were also be used as the media for discussion (36.5%) and as student's assessment (39.5%). The comment section in Google Classroom and WhatsApp Group let us share students' thoughts, comments, and experiences in written form and/or in audio form for Zoom/Google Meet. It is teacher's task to build an active and interactive class, make sure that all the students speak up to activate their speaking skill and critical thinking. The choice to make these platforms as assessment tool is good as long as the students could get the feedback. It is due to UNICEF (2020) mentioned that many parents and students did not receive feedback from teachers after classes. Immediate feedback help students to improve their skills and help teachers to measure students' competencies.

The fifth question deals with challenges faced during online learning. Most of the respondents reported that technical problems, such as signals, web maintenance—become the main constraint in implementing online classes (89.5%). It cannot be denied that we should deal with this problem since it is beyond our capabilities. Then, it is followed by academic dishonesty (78.9%) due to the asynchronous learning method, the delayed task submission also became suspicious things. Teachers were unable to ensure whether students have performed their best or not. Next, the students had lack of motivation (57.9%) and that the online platform considered as less effective (52.6%). Compared to traditional learning method, there is the presence and face-to-face difference, but a good teacher can improve and be creative while assessing students [16]. However, not all teachers were ready to implement online learning. Teachers used various tools in delivering courses online in order to make the course more attractive, but sometimes feedback from students was delayed, tasks were not concise, and teachers often failed to express clearly their expectations [1]. Thus, it makes the online learning less effective.

The last question tries to figure out future expectations by the teacher. Most of them preferred to have face-to-face class (84.2%), but also expecting on training programs on the use of digital media integrated in teaching and learning (94.7%). They are also looking forward for having module with interactive design and available online (89.5%). This

fact is interesting to be discussed. Teachers prefer that in the future (post-pandemic), the class would be running in face-to-face. Notwithstanding the preference, teachers accept the fact that teaching nowadays cannot be separated from technology. So that, they also expect on having training programs as their professional development. They also hope that someday they will be equipped by interactive module that accessible online to make their future online teaching and learning easier. Furthermore, teacher training program and module would stimulate teachers' performance and implicitly the quality of the educational processes [1, p. 16].

5. CONCLUSION

Technology integration is not the cutting-edge, so it is not an option anymore. Nevertheless, it has to be used to facilitate and enhance the practice in the classroom. Love it or hate it, technology is here to stay, and many educators have already seen the benefits, from higher engagement to improved retention rates. Therefore, it is expected that teachers can take the advantage of technology and by implementing digital media in a positive way so as to promote better learning for the students of the future.

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