



TEACHERS' STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ONLINE SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

Jusak Patty*, Faneshya Mariana Bilung

Universitas Pattimura, Indonesia

E-ISSN: 2621-9158

P-ISSN: 2356-0401

*Correspondence:

jusak.patty@gmail.com

Submitted: 8 June 2023

Approved: 30 November 2023

Published: 13 December 2023

Citation:

Patty, Jusak, & Bilung Faneshya M. (2023). Teachers' strategies and challenges in teaching online speaking activities. *Celtic: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics*, 10(2), 228-241. Doi: 10.22219/celtic.v10i2.25494

ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategies used by vocational education teachers to teach speaking skills online. Specifically, it focuses on English teachers Vocational High School in Ambon and their challenges in implementing these strategies. The study aims to provide practical insights for teaching speaking skills in online vocational high schools and recommend teacher professional development. The research design involves qualitative research methods, including interviews with two English teachers who teach third-grade Nursing students. The interviews were conducted to gather information on the teachers' strategies and challenges in teaching speaking skills online. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques. The findings indicate that the teachers used dialogue, describing pictures, and drilling as strategies for teaching speaking skills online. Teachers also faced technical and pedagogical challenges in implementing these strategies. Technical challenges included internet reliability, limited device access, and teachers' technological proficiency. Pedagogical challenges involved limited student-teacher interaction, reduced student engagement, and the asynchronous nature of online platforms. This study contributes valuable insights into teaching speaking skills in online vocational high schools. The findings can inform instructional practices and guide teacher professional development programs to enhance online speaking instruction.

Keywords: *Online Learning; Speaking Activities; Teachers' Challenges; Teachers' Strategies, Vocational School*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi yang digunakan oleh guru pendidikan vokasional untuk mengajar keterampilan berbicara secara daring. Terutama pada guru Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan di Ambon dan tantangan pengimplementasian strategi-strategi tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan wawasan praktis dalam mengajar keterampilan berbicara di sekolah menengah kejuruan secara daring dan merekomendasikan pengembangan profesional bagi guru. Desain penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif, termasuk wawancara dengan dua guru Bahasa Inggris yang mengajar siswa kelas tiga jurusan Keperawatan. Wawancara dilakukan untuk mengumpulkan informasi mengenai strategi-strategi dan tantangan yang dihadapi oleh para guru dalam mengajar keterampilan berbicara secara daring. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis kualitatif. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan para guru menggunakan strategi dialog, mendeskripsikan gambar, dan *drilling* dalam mengajar keterampilan berbicara secara daring. Para guru juga menghadapi tantangan teknis dan pedagogis dalam mengimplementasikan strategi-

strategi ini. Tantangan teknis meliputi keandalan jaringan internet, akses terbatas ke perangkat, dan kemampuan teknologi para guru. Tantangan pedagogis meliputi interaksi terbatas antara siswa dan guru, penurunan keterlibatan siswa, dan sifat asinkron platform daring. Temuan penelitian ini memberikan informasi praktis dan panduan pengembangan profesional bagi para guru untuk meningkatkan pengajaran keterampilan berbicara secara daring.

Kata Kunci: *Aktivitas Berbicara; Pembelajaran Daring; Sekolah Kejuruan; Strategi Guru; Tantangan Guru,*

INTRODUCTION

English plays an essential role as a global language in the era of globalization. In Indonesia, English has become a compulsory subject in formal education. Among the four essential skills needed to learn English—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is especially important because it includes the ability to communicate effectively. Zakaria et al. (2019) emphasized that speaking skills are crucial for conveying knowledge and information to individuals. Developing speaking skills enables students to think, read, write, and listen effectively as they train their cognitive abilities by organizing, conceptualizing, explaining, and simplifying their thoughts, emotions, and ideas verbally.

Nonetheless, teaching these skills to students is not an easy task. Students often face challenges during speaking activities, such as shyness, finding ideas, low participation, and the tendency to use their native language (Ur, 2012). These problems will affect students' speaking performance to deliver ideas or get involved in the instructional procedures. Tuan and Mai (2015) state that when working with students' problems, teachers must identify factors affecting students' speaking performance, including performance conditions, affective factors, listening ability, and feedback during speaking activities.

In line with this condition, teachers are pivotal in guiding students to overcome these hurdles, and effective teaching strategies are essential. Teaching strategy refers to the systematic approach employed to present and expand upon educational content, and in the context of language teaching, it encompasses a deliberate collection of instructional techniques aimed at fostering learners' proficiency in the target language (Zaim et al., 2019). Hayati et al. (2021) explain that teaching strategies facilitate students' learning by making the teaching and learning process effective, enjoyable, and engaging, leading to achieving learner goals. Teachers' strategies are crucial in teaching speaking because they directly impact students' ability to develop and improve their speaking skills. Effective teaching strategies allow students to practice speaking, engage in meaningful communication, and develop confidence in expressing themselves orally. Teachers can create a supportive and stimulating learning environment that encourages active participation and engagement by implementing appropriate strategies.

In language teaching, Scrivener (2011) proposes a diverse range of activities that can be used as teaching strategies and effectively engage students in developing their speaking abilities. These activities include picture difference tasks, where students compare and discuss pictures to practice descriptive speaking; group planning tasks, which involve collaborative discussions and decision-making to enhance fluency and negotiation skills; ranking tasks, where students rank items or ideas and justify their choices through spoken arguments; pyramid discussions, where students build upon each other's ideas to develop a coherent discussion; board games that require spoken interaction and strategic thinking; puzzles and problems that promote problem-solving and verbal communication; role play, enabling students to assume different roles and engage in simulated conversations; real play, where students engage in authentic communication situations, such as making reservations or ordering food; and simulation activities that replicate real-life scenarios for practical language use.

In recent years, the education field has witnessed a significant shift towards online learning, a trend accelerated by the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hodges et al., 2020; Redjeki and Hapsari, 2022)). This shift has prompted educators to adjust their teaching methodologies to engage students in virtual classrooms effectively. Online learning platforms offer opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous interactions, creating new possibilities for language instruction. However, teaching speaking skills online poses unique challenges for teachers, including understanding the subject matter, limited technological skills, maintaining control over the learning process, and addressing decreasing student enthusiasm despite having adequate facilities (Efriana, 2021).

Similarly, Rosalina et al. (2020) point out difficulties in online learning, such as teachers' competency in using technology, implementing effective strategies, providing support and facilitation, and fostering creativity. Addressing these challenges requires considering instructional strategies that encourage student participation and active engagement, especially without face-to-face interaction (Chapelle and Jamieson, 2008). Creating an online environment that fosters authentic and meaningful interactions becomes crucial when learners need opportunities to practice speaking in real-life contexts, particularly in vocational education.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), focusing on teaching English within specific academic, professional, or workplace environments, plays a crucial role in vocational high schools (Agustina, 2014). Unlike English for general purposes (EGP), ESP tailors the language curriculum to the specific vocational area, ensuring students acquire language skills directly relevant to their chosen profession. Proficiency in speaking is essential for vocational students as it allows them to express themselves clearly, interact with colleagues and customers, and effectively convey information (Novitasari et al., 2022).

Despite numerous studies exploring strategies for teaching speaking activities, especially in the context of EGP in traditional face-to-face classrooms (Mulyanti et al., 2021; Sari & Zainil, 2020; Sudrajat & Apriliani, 2022; Tamala &

Wulandari, 2021), research addressing teachers' strategies within the online learning environment and the context of ESP is limited. Particularly in Indonesia, there is a scarcity of reports on teachers' strategies for teaching speaking in online learning contexts (Hasibuan et al., 2022). This study aims to fill this gap by addressing specific strategies teachers at Vocational High School in Ambon employ in teaching online speaking activities and exploring the primary challenges they face in implementing these strategies. By delving into teachers' experiences, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge, offering practical strategies for teaching speaking skills in the online vocational high school context. The findings will inform instructional practices and provide recommendations for teacher professional development programs, ultimately enhancing the delivery of online speaking instruction in vocational high schools.

METHOD

Research Design

The research design for this study is descriptive qualitative research, which aims to explore and understand the strategies teachers employ in teaching online speaking activities within the context of vocational education, as well as the challenges they face (Cresswell & Creswell, 2018). The research process involves formulating research questions, data collection in the participants' natural settings, inductive data analysis, and interpretations of the meaning of the data.

Research Participants

The research participants for this study were chosen purposively, with a specific focus on two English teachers who taught third-grade Nursing students at Vocational High School in Ambon. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the selected participants possessed the necessary qualifications and experience in teaching speaking activities within the online vocational high school context. This sampling technique was deemed appropriate because it allowed for the deliberate selection of individuals who could provide valuable insights and information about the research topic. By selecting teachers who were actively involved in teaching English and had experience with online learning, the study aimed to gather in-depth and relevant data regarding the strategies and challenges faced in teaching online speaking activities in the specific vocational education setting.

Data Collection Technique

The researchers employed interviews for this study as the primary data collection method. They developed a set of eight interview questions, divided into two major categories: teachers' speaking strategies and challenges faced in online learning. These questions were designed to gather the perspectives and experiences of the selected teachers regarding their teaching practices and the difficulties encountered in the online vocational high school context. The interviews were conducted with the participating teachers, allowing for direct

exploration of their insights, strategies, and experiences teaching online speaking activities. Through these interviews, the researchers aimed to capture rich, detailed information that would comprehensively understand the subject matter.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once the interviews were completed, the collected data were transcribed and translated into comprehensible sentences. Qualitative analysis was then conducted using the analytical method proposed by Miles et al. (2014). This analytical approach involves three main components: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During the data condensation phase, the researchers summarized and organized the interview data to identify key themes, patterns, and recurring ideas. This process involved identifying and extracting relevant information related to teachers' speaking strategies and challenges faced in online learning. Next, the researchers engaged in data display, which entailed arranging the condensed data meaningfully and coherently. This step facilitated exploring connections, relationships, and variations within the collected data. Finally, in the conclusion drawing/verification phase, the researchers made interpretations and conclusions based on the analyzed data. They critically examined the themes and patterns from the data and related them to the research questions and objectives. The researchers may have employed member checking or peer review processes to ensure the accuracy and validity of their interpretations.

FINDINGS

Teachers' Strategies for Teaching Speaking in Online Learning Class

Based on the research findings, it was discovered that the teachers at Vocational High School in Ambon utilized dialogue, describing pictures, and drilling as strategies for teaching speaking in online learning activities. The implementation of these strategies varied between the two teachers, T1 and T2. T1 primarily employed dialogue activities through WhatsApp, while T2 used a combination of Zoom and WhatsApp.

T1 elaborated on her teaching approach, highlighting how she incorporated dialogue activities within her class using WhatsApp. Following the presentation and thorough explanation of the learning material, T1 guided her students to formulate dialogues centered around specific themes or visuals. These dialogues were then recorded by the students and subsequently shared with her. Notably, T1 underscored the significance of these dialogue activities in facilitating effective speaking practice, as they enabled students to apply the provided learning material in practical conversations. This, in turn, fostered the expansion of their vocabulary. In T1's words, *"I used dialogue because I think that it can allow students to practice their speaking skills while practicing using the material given and increase their vocabulary."*

On the other hand, T2 blended Zoom and WhatsApp platforms to facilitate engaging dialogue activities. Within Zoom sessions, T2 adeptly orchestrated

dialogues, meticulously guiding students through each line, encouraging repetitions, clarifying unfamiliar vocabulary, and fostering collaborative practice. Moreover, T2 ingeniously crafted fill-in-the-blank dialogues, a resourceful tool that promoted completion and expanded practice opportunities. Capturing the essence of these endeavors, T2 underlined, "*The function of dialogue is to assist students in practicing their speaking skills while also practicing the material given and increasing their vocabulary.*" Both teachers agreed that dialogue activities were an effective conduit for honing speaking abilities and enriching vocabulary.

Describing pictures was a strategy employed by T2. Through Zoom and WhatsApp, T2 thoughtfully shared pertinent images with his students, prompting them to articulate their thoughts and ideas regarding these visuals. This strategy aimed to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, bolstered by the notion that describing images promoted active engagement and fortified comprehension. In the words of T2, "*Describing pictures can provide students with an overview and clarify the learning material so that students can understand the material quickly and motivate them to speak and participate in the learning process.*" This strategy resonated with T2's conviction that it expedited learning and ignited a sense of motivation and active involvement in the educational journey.

Drilling was another strategy used by both teachers. T1 utilized WhatsApp for this purpose. She shared voice notes with her students, instructing them to listen and then repeat the provided notes. T1's insight on drilling was, "*Drilling serves to help students learn how to pronounce words or phrases correctly while increasing their vocabulary.*"

In contrast, T2 elaborated that drilling was integrated into Zoom and WhatsApp. During Zoom sessions, T2 prompted students to listen to his speech and repeat it afterward attentively. Conversely, T2 shared voice notes when teaching via WhatsApp or occasionally provided links to drilling videos on platforms like YouTube, encouraging students to emulate the pronunciation. T2's perspective on drilling was, "*Drilling is used because it can help students to learn how to pronounce words correctly and also help them memorize words or phrases pronounced.*"

The alignment between both teachers was evident, as they concurred that drilling was chosen to enhance English pronunciation accuracy and aid in vocabulary memorization. Both educators shared that this strategy aimed to foster practical speaking skills and vocabulary expansion among the students.

Challenges in Implementing Strategies in Online Learning Classes

When implementing strategies for online speaking activities, teachers encounter various challenges that can be grouped into two categories: technical and pedagogical. These challenges significantly impact the effectiveness of instruction and students' learning outcomes.

Technical Challenges:

One of the prominent technical challenges teachers confront is internet connectivity's reliability. Both educators emphasize the pivotal role a stable internet connection plays in ensuring the seamless conduct of online classes. T1 underscores this point by stating, *"Given that the entire teaching and learning process occurs online, any instability or poor quality in the internet connection disrupts the efficacy of the teaching-learning process itself."* Indeed, the efficacy of the online class heavily hinges on the accessibility and stability of the internet network.

Adding to these challenges is the issue of limited access to smartphones or devices. T1 and T2 have encountered situations where some students lack personal smartphones, necessitating them to borrow devices from family members to participate in online classes. T2 elaborates on this: *"Some of my students have restricted smartphone access, compelling them to either borrow their parents' smartphones or collaborate with their peers to attend classes."* This discrepancy in access perpetuates disparities among students and impedes their active involvement in speaking exercises.

Furthermore, teachers' technological proficiency limitations pose yet another obstacle. Not all educators possess equal familiarity with diverse online learning platforms. Some might gravitate toward a single platform, similar to T1, which predominantly relies on WhatsApp for teaching speaking, due to a lack of confidence or exposure to other technologies like Zoom. This variation in technological proficiency further underscores the multifaceted nature of teachers' technical challenges in the online teaching landscape.

Pedagogical Challenges

In terms of pedagogical challenges, both educators underscore the issue of insufficient interaction as a prevalent concern. They observe that student engagement and interaction with teachers during online classes fall short of desired standards. A recurring observation emerges upon conducting interviews: students often divide their attention between class and other activities, consequently impacting their participation levels and overall engagement.

Moreover, the asynchronous nature of online platforms and the potential disruptions posed by internet connectivity further hinder the prospect of real-time interaction. T1's perspective is noteworthy in this context, as she points out that using WhatsApp for learning inadvertently diminishes interaction. T1 elaborates, *"Interaction tends to be minimized because the learning process largely takes place through WhatsApp, enabling students to access materials without engaging in active interaction."*

Similarly, T2 highlights a related issue within Zoom meetings, wherein some students fail to maintain full attention and active involvement in the learning process. T2's insight reveals, *"There are instances during Zoom meetings where certain students, despite being present, divert their focus to other activities, thus detracting from their full participation."*

Consequently, the decline in interaction between students and teachers and among peers presents a significant departure from the more prevalent direct

interactions experienced in traditional face-to-face classes. These challenges, rooted in the struggle to sustain meaningful interactions, substantially contribute to the complexities inherent in online learning environments.

DISCUSSION

In online learning, teachers confront the challenges of cultivating practical speaking skills, particularly in the specialized context of ESP. ESP, dedicated to imparting language skills pertinent to specific fields or disciplines, presents unique challenges and opportunities.

The strategies identified in this research—dialogue activities, describing pictures, and drilling—can be seamlessly integrated into ESP to enhance students' language proficiency within their specific domains. However, when implementing these strategies in online learning at Vocational High School in Ambon, teachers encounter primary challenges that can significantly impact the effectiveness of instruction and students' learning outcomes. These challenges can be categorized into technical and pedagogical challenges.

Dialogue activities involve students creating and practicing dialogues based on given themes or pictures, which can be tailored to specific professional contexts in ESP. For example, students can engage in dialogues related to patient assessments, medical histories, or treatment plans. By incorporating industry-specific vocabulary and language structures, teachers can provide students with the necessary skills to communicate effectively in their professional settings (Ulfah, 2011). This approach allows students to apply the language they have learned to real-life communication situations in their specific fields. (Rawung, 2021) suggests that incorporating dialogue activities in the classroom provides students a secure setting to engage in real-life language scenarios before experiencing them in the real world.

Describing pictures is another strategy ESP can use to enhance speaking skills. According to Lavallo and Briesmaster (2017), pictures are visual media that convey textual information and can increase students' engagement and foster a positive attitude toward English. In ESP, pictures can be selected to reflect the contexts and content areas relevant to the student's professional domains. For instance, students can describe medical images in a Medical English course or discuss case studies using specialized terminology. This strategy enhances students' comprehension of the material and helps them develop the ability to communicate effectively in their specific field by describing and analyzing visual information (Wulandari, 2012). Teachers can facilitate language learning directly applicable to future careers by connecting the pictures to the students' professional contexts.

Drilling activities can also be adapted to ESP contexts to improve students' speaking skills. In ESP, drilling can reinforce discipline-specific vocabulary, pronunciation, and phrases commonly used in professional contexts. For example, in an Engineering English course, students can engage in drilling activities to practice technical terms and industry jargon. By repeating and imitating these terms, students can enhance pronunciation accuracy and develop fluency in their specialized field (Scrivener, 2011). However, it is crucial to supplement drilling activities with authentic speaking tasks to ensure students can apply the language in real-life communication situations. Role plays, simulations, and discussions related to their field can be integrated to provide students with meaningful interaction and practical language practice.

While these strategies can effectively develop speaking skills in ESP, it is essential to consider their limitations. Although useful for vocabulary expansion and practice, dialogue activities may not fully replicate the complexity and nuances of authentic professional communication. Therefore, teachers should incorporate authentic materials, such as case studies, articles, or videos from the students' specific fields, to provide more realistic language contexts and promote meaningful communication. This viewpoint is congruent with the assertion made by (Akbari & Razavi, 2015) regarding incorporating authentic materials as a cornerstone principle within the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach for EFL classes. This incorporation catalyzes students to develop practical communicative competence in the target language.

Similarly, describing pictures while aiding comprehension should be supplemented with opportunities for students to engage in interactive speaking tasks that reflect their professional domains. Pair or group discussions, presentations, or debates centered around discipline-specific topics can be incorporated to encourage active participation and applying language skills to real-world scenarios.

Turning to technical challenges teachers face, one major hurdle is the instability of the internet network. Online learning relies heavily on a stable internet connection to access learning materials, interact with instructors and other learners, and obtain support during the learning process (Ally, 2004). In interviews, teachers mentioned that the internet network is a significant challenge as the learning process depends on it. The effectiveness of instruction and students' learning outcomes can be hindered if the internet network is unstable or unreliable.

Another technical challenge is students' limited access to smartphones. The availability of online gadgets, particularly smartphones, is crucial for students to participate in online education, whether synchronously or asynchronously (Segbenya et al., 2022). Students need smartphones to access online platforms, engage with learning content, and actively participate in the learning process. If students lack access to smartphones, they may face difficulties joining classes and following the instructional activities, thus impacting their learning outcomes.

Additionally, teachers may face challenges related to their limitations in operating technology. Not all teachers are proficient in using technology, which can hinder their ability to effectively engage in online learning activities (Efriana, 2021). Teachers' technical skills are essential for overcoming technical issues during online instruction. According to Ardiyansah (2021) to successfully carry out online learning, teachers must possess proficient technical abilities to address any technological challenges that may arise effectively. Some teachers mentioned in interviews that they struggle with operating specific online platforms like Zoom. In such cases, teachers may use alternative platforms like WhatsApp for teaching, which can impact the effectiveness of instruction and limit the range of interactive learning activities available.

On the pedagogical side, a significant challenge teachers face is the reduced level of interaction in online learning. Interaction is vital in practical learning, allowing students and teachers to communicate, practice using the target language, and enhance the learning experience (Huang et al., 2020). However, online learning presents challenges in maintaining interaction. The interview results from indicated that some students ignore the class and engage in other activities during online learning sessions, such as using social media or assisting with household chores. Moreover, the asynchronous nature of learning materials sent through platforms like WhatsApp may lack real-time interaction, as in offline classes or Zoom meetings. Similarly, Farah and Sholikhah (2021) reveal that most EFL students negatively perceive online learning as there was insufficient support from teachers and were bombarded with many tasks to complete. Teachers should employ creative approaches to encourage student participation and interaction to address these challenges by offering extra marks as motivators (Docan, as cited in Farrah & Jabari, 2020).

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that integrating dialogue activities, describing pictures, and drilling techniques into ESP contexts can effectively cultivate students' speaking skills within their specialized fields, offering opportunities for speaking practice experience, vocabulary expansion, comprehension enhancement, and refined pronunciation. This multi-pronged approach, encompassing active engagement through dialogue practice, fluency, and content mastery via picture description and reinforcement coupled with self-assessment through drilling techniques, significantly contributes to the enhancement of English language speaking abilities, corroborated by various studies (Maro, 2018; Pratiwi & Ayu, 2020; Tanveer et al., 2021). However, educators must acknowledge the limitations of these strategies and complement them with activities that foster genuine communication and authentic language utilization in ESP. By seamlessly integrating discipline-specific content and

authentic materials, teachers can prepare students for adept professional communication within their respective domains. Teachers need to consider the limitations of these strategies and supplement them with activities that promote meaningful communication and authentic language use in ESP. To bridge the ESP classroom with real-world academic and occupational scenarios, ESP practitioners should employ authentic materials, thereby establishing meaningful connections (Bui, 2022).

Teachers also face technical and pedagogical challenges when implementing online learning strategies for speaking. Technical challenges include internet network instability, limited student access to smartphones, and teachers' limitations in operating technology. These challenges can impact the effectiveness of instruction. Pedagogical challenges, such as reduced interaction, also arise in online learning and can affect students' learning outcomes. However, with innovative approaches and support, these challenges can be mitigated to enhance the effectiveness of online instruction and improve students' learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on the strategies employed by teachers for online speaking activities at Vocational High School in Ambon. The findings highlighted using dialogue, describing pictures, and drilling to enhance students' speaking skills, facilitated through platforms like WhatsApp and Zoom. Despite the effectiveness of these strategies, teachers encountered technical challenges such as unreliable internet and limited device access, along with pedagogical issues like reduced interaction and attentiveness. These challenges impact instruction and learning outcomes. Addressing them requires improvements in technical infrastructure, equal access to devices and the internet, enhanced teacher proficiency, and promoting student engagement. Training programs for teachers adapting to online environments and fostering a collaborative learning environment can help overcome these challenges in online speaking activities.

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