

# CHALLENGES IN ONLINE LEARNING ASSESSMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## ABSTRACT

Assessment is a fundamental aspect of student learning instruction. Many challenges and problems exist in assessing students due to the online learning environment during Covid-19 pandemic. This study was investigated the Speaking II online course at English Education Department in UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. This study uses the case study research method. The research was held in two phases, and the first phase is reviewing the Speaking II online course syllabus to discover the types of assessment being used to assess student learning. Two kinds of assessments emerged: (1) role play and (2) presentation. The second phase is interviewing with the lecturer of the online course to get information about challenges and problems that arose due to physical distance between the lecturer and students. The challenges are (1) the impact of physical distance between lecturer and students, (2) Adaptations resulting from the use of technology for learning (3) Workload and time management. The study concludes with suggestions and recommendations synthesizing the results with those found in the literature.

**Keywords:** Assessment, Evaluation, Online Learning, Covid-19

## INTRODUCTION

The deadly and infectious disease Corona Virus, also known as the Covid-19 outbreak, has deeply spread to many countries in the world. As a result, it disrupted conventional or face-to-face teaching, and the learning process became online learning to stop the chain of the infection of Covid-19. To deal with the Covid-19 pandemic forced many schools, universities, and institutions to remain closed temporarily. Worldwide areas were affected, resulting in fear of losing this whole ongoing semester or even more in the coming future.

Academic units are now struggling to find options of the solution to deal with this challenging situation. As a result, online learning is an alternative way to overcome this challenge. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Culture has banned universities and other institutions in Indonesia from doing face-to-face lectures and ordered them to do online learning (Circular Letter by Ministry of Education and Culture No. 1 of 2020).

Indonesian government has forbidden people from the crowd, maintained social distancing, worn masks, and always washed hands to avoid being infected by this dangerous virus. With nearly all schools and universities, students are now taking online courses. This social distancing will have adverse effects on the teaching and learning process. Hence, it is uncertain to get back to regular teaching and to learn anytime soon (Handrianto et al., 2021).

Online learning can be termed a tool that can make the teaching and learning process more student-centered, innovative, and flexible. Online learning is also defined as learning experiences in synchronous and asynchronous environments using different devices with internet access. So, students can learn independently and interact with a lecturer or other students anywhere and anytime. The synchronous environments are structured because students attend live lectures, real-time interactions between students and lecturers, and there is possible instant feedback, whereas asynchronous learning environments are not adequately structured (Ramadani & Syuraini, 2018). The learning materials of the asynchronous environment are available at different learning systems, and instant feedback is not possible under such an environment. Moreover, synchronous learning can provide many opportunities for social interaction while asynchronous does not (Dhawan, 2020).

Fortunately, online learning is already supported in this industrial revolution 4.0 era due to technological development. Rapid technological developments have made distance education easy (McBrien et al., 2009). In its implementation, online learning requires the support of mobile devices such as smartphones, laptops, computers, tablets, and iPhones, which can be used to access anytime and anywhere (Gikas & Grant, 2013). Also, online learning can be held through virtual classes such as Google Meet and Zoom or social media such as Whatsapp and Telegram.

Some arguments are associated with online learning, such as accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning, and policy. People said that online learning is easily accessible and can reach rural and remote areas. It is also relatively cheaper than traditional learning in terms of the lower cost of transportation, accommodation, and the overall cost of institution-based learning. Next, flexibility is the most exciting aspect of online learning because students can schedule their time to complete online courses. This type of learning environment can increase students' learning potential because they can learn anytime and anywhere (Dhawan, 2020; Syuraini et al., 2018).

As the traditional teaching and learning process moves to online learning, it makes all lecturers and teachers reconsider the appropriate types of assessments to be used appropriately with the online learning environment, especially for speaking because lecturers and students are physically separated by distance. Indeed, assessment is often considered an essential instructional step (Bachman, 1990). The way learners are taught and activities carried out in the classroom is significantly influenced by the assessment.

One of the significant responsibilities of working with the EFL students is to communicate effectively through oral language (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Therefore, for students of the English Education Department, speaking is the most required life skill of the four productive skills that must be mastered and assessed due to awareness of communicating in English as their preparation to become future teachers. So, speaking skills need to be practiced, developed, and assessed independently because online learning provokes intense student-centered learning in line with the learning objectives set in the course syllabus and appropriate with the learners' needs in the age of online learning. It

surely aims to test students' success in a way relevant to the skills required once they finish the study program.

In the theory of educational goals, assessment should focus on achieving authentic learning outcomes (Cumming & Maxwell, 1999). As this new education model becomes more complex, it is essential to study the teaching design again and select a variety of speaking assessments of online courses and avoid monotonous as if it is in the offline classroom. The quality enhancement of online teaching and learning is crucial at this time. Identifying possible challenges and problems faced by the lecturers and students will enable them to plan strategies that can be empirically tested because the best part of a university promoting their program is the good results at the end (Hafnidar et al., 2021).

During this rough time, the concern is how academic instructors can assess students in such a massive manner because good assessment will maintain the quality of education. While several technologies are available for online evaluation, they might sometimes introduce challenges or drawbacks during implementation, such as audio and visual issues. In addition, sometimes online contents are all theoretical and do not let students practice and learn effectively, which can affect their assessment results. Also, the cause that can affect they assess that students were not sufficiently prepared for balancing their works in the family and social lives with their study live in the online learning environment. The other factor also contributes to the problems of speaking assessment is that lecturers lack knowledge on how to assess their students due to the poor training conducted in Indonesia and this unpredictable situation (Rahmawati & Ertin, 2014).

Finally, the general challenges in online assessment to educational institutions are finding new technology, using it, and reimagining its education systems. Online courses should be made dynamic, engaging, interactive, and assessment, especially for speaking skills. This circumstance makes us realize that planning is an urgent need for academics to protect the students, faculty, community, and nation to address this issue, the researcher would want to report on a study of such sorts of speech evaluation during online learning and highlight the obstacles experienced by the lecturer and potential solutions for the foreseeable future.

## **METHOD**

This study uses the case study research method because the research explored the information deeply by collecting the data from documents and interviews. Creswell (2010) defines a case study as a study that explores processes, activities, and events. When it comes to an evaluation in online learning, this research is descriptive, and it seeks to identify the sorts of issues that arise during crises and pandemics like the Covid-19 virus. According to Gay (1987), descriptive research includes collecting data concerning the current issue of the subject of the study in order to answer the questions. The challenges associated with online learning were also identified and possible solutions based on previous studies.

The object of this research was the syllabus of an online course, namely Speaking II in English Education Department of UIN Antasari Banjarmasin academic year 2020/2021. The research subject was an English lecturer who teaches a Speaking course in the third semester in UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. The data of the research were syllabus and responses to the questions which are obtained from the interview. The researcher selected this area of study because it can be easily reached. Furthermore, this study was carried out in two phases,

from reviewing the course syllabus to discovering the types of assessment being. Used to contribute to the overall grade students received in that course and then interviewed the lecturer virtually via Whatsapp chat about the assessment and feedback challenges she faced.

In phase one, a message was sent to the lecturer who had taught for at least five months, asking for her permission to review the course syllabus to determine the types of assessments that were being used to assess student learning. In phase two, another message was sent to ask her permission to do an interview virtually. The following questions guided the interview: (1) What assessment practices have you used online that have been particularly effective? and (2) What challenges do you face in creating and deploying assessments for your online course?

This research has three main objectives, namely: (1) to describe the types of online assessment used in speaking class at the third semester in UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, (2) to describe the challenges of online assessment faced by the lecturer in speaking class at the third semester in UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, and (3) to give possible solutions for speaking online course in the coming future.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Finding**

The vast majority of the world has been quarantined due to the potentially lethal outbreak of the global pandemic Covid-19. Its impact on schools, universities, and other institutions may be studied as a result. This pandemic made institutions change from offline mode to online mode of pedagogy. It will be reluctant to change and accept modern technology. For this reason, it will show us the good and bad sides of online teaching and learning, especially in assessment aspects.

According to Brown (2003), assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a much broader domain. Assessments might take the form of feedback, comments, questions, confirmations, corrections, quizzes, and tests, among others. Assessment is the evaluation part of learning activities, and it is used to see whether the teaching and learning process can run as expected and reach the desired objectives. The lecturers may quantify and evaluate the extent to which the intended study's objective is attained or implemented. It also measures the progress or development of their program. The synonyms of assessments are scoring, measurement, testing, or evaluation (Salamah & Zuhriyah, 2016).

Students can infer what is essential in a course based on how their learning is assessed. Fulcher (2003) says that the assessment result commonly determines the success of a learning program. In online learning, there are many challenges in assessing oral skills where there is no face-to-face interaction. Lecturers are challenged to convey their intentions accurately, design assessments, and provide the appropriate feedback to help their students achieve the targeted learning objectives.

Teaching online has forced lecturers to be more creative in designing assessments for the new environment. Experimenting in this way sets the stage to experiment and innovate within face-to-face classes. For example, after using small-group discussion online, the lecturer also began to implement it in her face-to-face classroom. Related to this is the experimentation with new technologies that online teaching necessity. Teaching online

requires lecturers to experiment more with new technologies and teaching methods (Kearns, 2012). In general, lecturers may offer course assessments in various media, including video, audio, virtual meetings, and text. The implementation of those types of assessments is quite challenging for English lecturers due to online learning. This terrible time of fate has taught us that everything is unpredictable and needs to face any challenges.

Assessment serves three primary purposes: first, to inform lecturers and students of progress and to determine the next steps in learning; second, to certify individual students in order to provide a publicly identified standard that student has achieved at the end of a particular stage of education; and third, to provide information to serve the public accountability of universities and lecturers for their success and failures (Lindsay & Desforges, 1997). Further, there are eight assessment kinds: formal and informal, formative and summative, norm-referenced and criterion-referenced test, and traditional and alternative assessment (Salamah & Zuhriyah, 2016).

### ***Phase One***

Based on the data analyses gained from the syllabus review, the findings of the types of online assessment used in speaking class at the third semester of English Education Department in UIN Antasari Banjarmasin academic year 2020/2021 are as follows:

#### **Roleplay**

This type of assessment was conducted by applying roleplay dialogue in formative assessment for every meeting. Students were asked to create a role play video of a conversation with their friends for the annual meeting. For the middle test, the lecturer used Zoom Meeting to assess students directly by making roleplay conversations with their partners. After the middle test was held, the students were asked to create a video and roleplay for the annual meeting conversation again, but this time was individual. Those videos were also considered as their attendance in this course. This task requires students to construct responses, create products, or demonstrate the application of obtained knowledge. In practice, the lecturer used simple techniques to stimulant the students to speak. It can be used to know the students' understanding, their ability to apply, and their ability to inform certain subjects. This kind of assessment may be effective when the students are taught to communicate step-by-step procedures.

#### **Presentation**

This is the class's final meeting and the final assessment this semester, which includes student presentations by raising a topic about global issues through video individually. An individual oral presentation was used as a summative evaluation tool. Using this technique, teachers may get students to explain something, critique it, be proud of it, or applaud it. The lecturer makes her students find out their opinions, prides, and criticizes the current issues (Rita & Handrianto, 2021). It also had a high level of authenticity because the performance in the summative assessment required students to show attitude, knowledge, and skills, and they had to use their general background knowledge to understand the content of the presentation.

Although the topic is free, the lecturer also considered the quality of their presentation content. The lecturer assessed the students' knowledge by assessing their deep understanding and explanation of the content of their presentation. The professor evaluated

the students' abilities by expressing topics like pronunciation, fluency, and articulation. The example in assessing students' attitude was seen from their confidence and body language in presenting the content of the video presentation. The presentation video has also required some abilities which the student had learned in this online course. Students may use their creativity, such as Microsoft PowerPoint, to support the video presentation.

The presentation delivery format had to be adapted for the online environment. The performance was used in order to assess the students' cognitive and psychomotor (Arafani et al., 2021). The performance focused on process as well as products because the lecturer assessed the students' competence from the beginning until the end of the teaching-learning process (Syuraini, 2020). Unfortunately, after the students had done their video presentation, the lecturer did not give feedback directly to her students about their strengths and weaknesses, although she could do it.

The research findings were firstly, and the teacher used two types of assessments: formative and summative assessments. Specifically, in this course, there are role play and oral presentation tests. The most frequently used type of assessment was role play. This type of assessment was much more open-ended and often gave students some choice of a specific topic they wanted. It does not need much money to run the role play and presentation assessment video. Moreover, combining speaking skills with oral performance will facilitate students to practice the skill that they need in the future.

Two kinds of these assessments are included in the types of authentic assessment: authentic assessment, self-assessment and peer assessment, performance assessment, portfolio assessment, observation, students' project, and interview (Hidayati, 2016; Sesti & Syuraini, 2018). However, they were generally communicative as it supposed to be. As with online learning, students were frequently assigned into small groups or partners. So, role play contributed to the overall course grade. Students were asked to submit the role play video assignment to the Whatsapp Group every week.

Both assessments made students show their attitudes, knowledge, and skills and use the higher thinking skill to apply performance. They also had to perform in front of their friend by presenting the lesson's content which they had prepared clearly. Before they started the performance, they had to learn first what the lecturer had explained. Then, they can start the performance by making an outline and executing it. The lecturer's performance included an analysis of the process and the result of learning for the student per the features of genuine assessment. The students are asked to apply the mastery of demonstration speaking and critical thinking to a specific education topic (Setiawati & Syuraini, 2018). The lecturer evaluated the students' cognitive and psychomotor elements from the start of the meeting to the conclusion of the meeting in one semester.

In short, the lecturer started the semester by maintaining good communication with her students to avoid misunderstanding and motivate students to learn. She always tried to prepare the assessments organized and implemented the syllabus or lesson plans as scheduled. Generally, she preferred to conduct assessments that are considered the simplest and the most applicative for assessment and the scoring process. Mainly, to control the performance assessments, she managed to have the reasonable opportunity to demonstrate their ability. Nevertheless, the lecturer faced many difficulties in administering the online assessment system whatever she made during the teaching process. Consequently, the lecturer conducted just two kinds of assessments to overcome the problems.

Between those two types of assessment, role play appears most frequently. While the presentation is the least used only in the final assignment. Phase one of the research aims to: (1) identify the forms of assessment utilized by the lecturer in this online course and understand the contribution each type made by the lecturer; and (2) give a starting point for phase two of the research's discussion.

### ***Phase Two***

Challenges and concerns appeared in all two of the assessment categories mentioned above. Notably, it was found that every type of assessment had a little bit different problems in the process of its enactments. The lecturer realized that she was entirely responsible for implementing assessments effectively. Nevertheless, she still encountered many difficulties in administering them in online learning. Three broad challenges emerged from the discussion are:

### **The effect of the physical distance between the lecturer and the students is examined**

In an online course, students and lecturers do not meet like in regular classes as usual. For communication that exists in a face-to-face class, a setting does not occur in an online class. Because of this, the lecturer talked about the special attention she felt she owed her online students. She was concerned about being unable to accurately assess her students' progress and ability throughout the semester. When she had them on campus before this pandemic happened, she could walk around them and guide them step by step to a specific endpoint, but she could not tell where they were struggling when it was online. The lecturer also worried about ensuring that students in her online class were being assessed similarly in the face-to-face class.

For instance, a desire to make sure that students were taking objective exams under the same conditions were being asked to submit equivalent works and other indicators of achievement of objectives in both conditions. Further, an ungraded assignment and students who posted questions about the material were available in online learning because she expressed a desire to motivate students to participate actively by attaching a grade to the simple assignment and activeness. However, she had to do it because students in the face-to-face class were not allowed to be graded on their simple participation, and this is a strategy to maintain students' activeness in an online class.

### **Adaptations brought about by the usage of technology in the classroom**

The requirement for every communication to be mediated through technology directly results from the physical separation of students and lecturers. Communication between students and lecturers in the online class for this study was mainly accomplished by asynchronous technologies like creating and submitting videos and their discussion in Whatsapp Group. One problem resulting from the asynchronous systems of an online class is the impact of late posting. The worry of intermittent technology failure was also alluded to by the lecturer. For this reason, they may feel downtime and was likely to create anxiety for the students.

### **Workload and time management**

The problems of the study are the amount of time and effort involved in providing effective feedback to online students. She had to score the students one by one. So, the lecturer had to make sure that she scored every student based on their actual speaking competence. The lecturer reported being overwhelmed with the number of video assignments this required when it was done every week. The assessment method was quite complex and time-consuming, so that the lecturer was confused and shifted her focus from teaching to mainly assessing.

In approximately 120 minutes per week, she had to be able to deliver materials while at the same time conducting the assessment. If one student takes 5 minutes to perform a task individually, then the lecturer should allocate 150 minutes to give equal opportunities to the whole class of 30 students. It means that she spent 30 minutes longer than the allocated time in the syllabus. Moreover, it was also possible to have them work in a group, but the scoring process would be complicated. She had to focus carefully one by one to give an objective score for it.

Another demand on the lecturer's time has to enter comments or feedback to each student because if there is not a grade associated with an assignment, it would be eliminated. For the lecturer, this is very time-consuming and more complicated than annotating the face-to-face class.

## **Discussion**

Based on the findings and insight gained from the identification and interview, the following possible points to discuss have emerged in response to the challenges described above and proposed for online classes in the coming future: (1) Self-assessments and peer-assessment can deliver helpful, personalized feedback while not adversely affecting the lecturer's workload. One approach to these assessments is to have students present portions of a field assignment for critique peers provided with a rubric to guide their review. In addition, reducing lecturer workload and peer assessment provides multiple learning benefits for students (Yang & Tsai, 2010). The use of peer assessment strategies fosters community development and gives students a chance to learn through analyzing and critiquing the work of others (Handrianto, Uçar, Saputra, Nengsih, Kenedi, & Rahman, 2021). Peer assessment works well for speaking assignments. In fact, to maintain interpersonal relationships with lecturers and friends during the Covid-19 epidemic; (2) Use rubrics to guide students' activity in every assignment because every week, there is an assignment to create a video that is also considered their attendance. A rubric can be as simple as a checklist that specifies target performance criteria for an assignment. The grading sheet for this assessment is designed to give clear information on students' performance so that students receive a detailed score of skills assessed in the test. Developing the rubric ahead of time can help to clarify the thinking about the objectives of the assignment. It can help students understand the lecturer's expectations and fine-tune their performance accordingly. A typical set of criteria used in a rubric for online classes might include specifications for how frequently students are required to make and how students are expected to relate course content; (3) Providing students an example such as video related to speaking material that is taught can be very effective to oblige students to complete the required speaking and help them gauge their understanding of the material. Students can experiment to see what features are available. Moreover, to promote critical and divergent thinking about the course material that asks students to relate course concepts to personal experience or real-life concepts from their professional settings; (4) Make use of synchronous technologies, where appropriate. Speaking in the classroom



should involve the interaction between the lecturer and students or among the students. Many of the challenges lecturers face when teaching online result from the distant, asynchronous nature of most online learning cases. However, given that one of the primary reasons for the asynchronous format, all students in an online class are unlikely to join a virtual conference at the same time each week. Virtual conferencing can help close the gap that asynchronous communication introduces. Indirect assessment: The lecturer does not have to listen or watch students' recording, which is very time-consuming as grade is given on the spot.

Look for appropriate opportunities to address the entire class to reduce the time spent giving the same feedback to multiple students to understand their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, they know which language aspects have been mastered or need improvement. After an extensive assessment, post an announcement summarizing some of the submission trends and the recommendations for the next step. Additionally, maintain a Question & Answer discussion where students can post questions for everyone to see and motivate students to assist one another when appropriate. During discussion time, the students and lecturer face real-life communication, and the lecturers should set time limits and reminders for students to make them alert and attentive

## **CONCLUSION**

This study was conducted in two phases. In phase one, a syllabus from the Speaking II online course in the English Education Department of UIN Antasari Banjarmasin was reviewed with the goal of illuminating types of assessment used and gaining a sense of the level of contribution each type made to the overall course. In phase two, the lecturer of the online course was invited to participate in a one-on-one interview to discuss assessment challenges she faced in moving the online course and possible practices and the teaching feedback she developed to address those challenges.

Data gathered in phase one resulted in identifying two categories of assessments: (1) role play and (2) presentation. Data collected in phase two were analyzed in order to identify kinds of challenges. To summarize, the lecturer face assessment challenges of three types. The lecturer was challenged by constraints resulting from: (1) the impact of physical distance between lecturer and students, (2) adaptations resulting from the use of technology for learning, and (3) workload and time management.

Because this study was carried out with a small sample and lecturer within a single online course, it is not appropriate to generalize its findings to all online courses. Nevertheless, as an exploratory study, it provides some information on areas of concern that the lecturer has as she moves into online learning and some strategies she has found to help deal with challenges she encountered. Moreover, having phase one data as a starting point helped establish a context for the phase two discussion.

This research provides some possible recommendations in terms of directions for future work. The lecturer has several concerns about student assessment in the online environment. The lecturer is worried about monitoring her students' progress under the constraints of being geographically separated from her students and managing their time effectively using technology. Finally, it would also be worthwhile to examine the lecturer's

thinking and decision-making about assessment, including the process by which she evaluates their assessments' effectiveness

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