

# When Teaching Must Go On: ESP Teachers' Strategies and Challenges during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Submitted: 24/11/2020

Revised: 29/12/2020

Accepted: 17/01/2021

E-ISSN : 2579-4574

P-ISSN : 2549-7359

**Abstract.** Online classes have been rampant since the global spread of COVID-19. ESP teaching in higher education institutions is no exception, following the national government's call to employ an online mode of teaching. Although technology has been long used to facilitate the teaching-learning process, the practice of online teaching is not without problems. Thus, this study was aimed at investigating ESP teachers' strategies to make effective lessons delivery, optimize students class participation, and what challenges were emergent during their online teaching. The participants of this study were six ESP teachers in five private and one state universities who teach in various non-English departments. Data were gathered through interviews via WhatsApp. The findings showed that the strategies employed by ESP teachers were among others: ensuring instruction clarity, employing various learning platforms, virtual grouping, using authentic materials, etc. To optimize students' online class participation was done by scoring students' active participation, not giving non-doable tasks, using more asynchronous than synchronous method, etc. The challenges are having inconsistent internet connection, teaching while taking care for children, difficulty in monitoring students' progress, etc. The findings imply the need of serious attention from higher education institutions in conducting ESP online teaching during this pandemic as it requires not only technical preparedness, but also most importantly the human aspect involved in it.

**Keywords:** strategies, challenges, online teaching, ESP, pandemic

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## INTRODUCTION

The global spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) has tremendously impacted all elements of life, and as [Williamson, Eynon, & Potter \(2020\)](#) are concerned, it made the future becomes vague. Regarding English teaching, it has been forced to be conducted online with the mediation of myriads of learning platforms. Although technology has been widely employed to facilitate higher education teaching, the condition varies regarding teacher, student, and institution preparedness to respond to this emergency. In an Indonesian context, the Directorate General of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture has issued Letter No. 262/E.E2/KM/2020 that appeals to all higher education institutions to conduct teaching from home in response to the pandemic, including the practice of ESP, especially English for occupational purposes. Since face-to-face interaction in ESP classes of the non-English department has been dominant and favored, the switch to going online has brought about more grievance rather than a delight to a lot of teachers and students. ESP teachers of various departments (i.e. Nursing, Engineering, Pharmacy, Administration, and Accounting) struggle to design various online learning activities to maintain students' engagement, while at the same time, they also must provide immediate feedback to students. Strategies that are commonly applied to conventional face-to-face classes, therefore have to be left out or adjusted to a virtual environment often with little consideration about the condition of the learners and teachers. As [Compton \(2009\)](#) argues, both face-to-face interaction and online instructions can have similar problems, yet each method needs different treatment due to its different nature.

ESP teachers should ensure that their online classes run effectively, for example, by making sure that their lessons are well delivered, and students are actively participating during the class. As such, adequate knowledge of how to engage students in communicative competence and in facilitating meaningful online interaction is crucial ([Compton, 2009](#)). Similarly, [Murphy, Shelley, & Baumann \(2010\)](#) emphasized that distance teaching takes more expertise in some areas; one of them is interpersonal skills. In other words, switching the teaching from traditional interaction to virtual instruction is not merely the case of using available learning platforms. It is a way more than that. As [Compton \(2009\)](#) furthermore emphasized, teaching online language courses takes the skills in pedagogy, evaluation, as well as particular role and responsibilities. As the nature of online teaching is different from sit-in language class, it indeed poses specific challenges to teachers, moreover with teachers' various degrees of preparedness in conducting online classes and students' nonuniform learning environment.

To date, there are still weak studies that reveal how teachers of ESP, especially those teaching English for occupational purposes in higher education institutions make their lessons well delivered and how to maximize students' active participation during COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in Indonesian higher education context. Neither have there been convincing studies that uncover the teaching challenges faced by ESP teachers during COVID-19 outbreak. A study conducted by [Atmojo & Nugroho \(2020\)](#), for example, has qualitatively described English teaching activities and challenges during the pandemic. Nevertheless, it was conducted in a

secondary education setting and emphasized on various online learning platforms used rather than exploring teachers' ways to make their teaching effective. Another study was undertaken by [Wargadinata, Maimunah, Dewi, & Rofiq \(2020\)](#), which highlighted students' responses on online learning in the early COVID-19 pandemic. Although it was conducted in Indonesian higher education setting, it only scrutinized the online teaching process in a private university. Moreover, its focus was on investigating online teaching from students' perspectives rather than the teachers' point of view. Investigating ESP teachers' experience concerning their strategies in delivering lessons online and how to maintain students' active participation during COVID-19 pandemic is pivotal as it could be best practices that can be applied by other ESP teachers. Moreover, exploring the challenges that ESP teachers face during their teaching from home is substantial so that they can be anticipated when it happens in the future. As [Dhawan \(2020\)](#) pointed out, in the time of crisis like during this COVID-19 pandemic, delivering knowledge turns out to be a challenging thing to do.

Thus, this study seeks to describe ESP teachers' experiences in teaching from home during COVID-19 pandemic, particularly their strategies on optimizing lessons delivery and students' active participation. Also, it addresses their encountered challenges when conducting their online classes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Major principles in online language classes

The practice of online English language teaching has been heavily dependent on the educational technology that it employs. Technology has enabled distance learning to take place, yet it should not be taken for granted. [Lai, Zhao, & Li \(2008\)](#) in [Compton \(2009\)](#) suggested that giving clear instructions is one of the principles in designing distance language learning. In assigning works, instructions on what and how students submit the tasks should be simple and straightforward ([Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020](#)). It means that no matter how good a digital learning platform is, it will be less useful if an instruction to carry out the given tasks is not clearly and adequately given.

In the times when teaching is forced to switch to online mode, communication between teacher and students becomes a critical aspect ([Dhawan, 2020](#)). Courses lacking personal contact and interaction will hinder the ability of students to stay involved and motivated ([Smoyer, O'Brien, & Rodriguez-Keyes, 2020](#)). Similarly, [Zhang, Wang, & Li \(2020\)](#) contended that teachers are agents of communication that support a continuous connection in an online learning environment. Hence, the success of communication heavily relies on how teachers select digital platforms and type of learning activities that can best facilitate communication between them and their students. Teacher-student communication is essential, yet distance teaching cannot accommodate it as optimal as that through face-to-face interaction ([Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020](#)).

[Mori \(1999\)](#) urged that assigning achievable learning tasks is imperative so that students are encouraged to complete them. It means the tasks must be doable within students' learning situation and capability. The goals of learning, especially in

ESP courses, should also be realistic which means that the planned goals should be achievable (Bhatia, Anthony, & Noguchi, 2011; Komarnytska, Balendr, & Bloschchynskiy, 2018). Concerning teaching that is switched to online instruction, achieving the learning goals becomes more challenging as a direct interaction between teacher and students is very limited. In order not to create a cognitive burden for students, it is essential to keep in mind that learning activities should not be too many (Huang, Spector, & Yang, 2019).

Before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, not all teachers were familiar with various online learning platforms. The widespread COVID-19 pandemic has changed it. As they are forced to switch their teaching to be online, they must explore abundant online learning platforms and select which ones best suit their teaching situation and their students' learning environment. A wide range of applications and learning management systems are used during distance learning (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Institutions introduce and provide online learning platforms, and the decision to use which learning platform is based on familiarity (Zhu & Liu, 2020). Besides, students' degree of literacy in using technology for online learning is also significant to consider as it can determine the success of online learning (Wargadinata et al., 2020).

With the increased popularity of distance learning, synchronous and asynchronous methods also gain more attention from teachers and researchers. Daniel (2020) suggested asynchronous teaching to be applied rather than synchronous teaching because it gives more benefits to both teacher and students. For teachers, they will have adequate time for preparing materials and activities, while for students, they can have more time to juggle between study and home (Daniel, 2020). It also offers more flexibility (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). Likewise, Zhang, Beach, & Sheng (2016) claimed that an asynchronous method is more suitable to be employed when assigning tasks like roleplay. Students can have ample time to prepare the task and opportunity to learn less strictly.

Online learning mode cannot be separated from the provision of feedback. Huang, Yang, & Chang (2020) asserted that online learning demands timely feedback since learners need to have a sense of accomplishment. George (2020) reported that feedback is valuable for students as it contributes to their learning experience. In distance learning, feedback can be given either right away or later on. Individual feedback can be immediately given during live virtual learning (Kuručova, Medová, & Tírpakova, 2018).

### **Review of previous studies**

Moorhouse (2020) conducted a study to investigate the challenges faced by a teacher during the pandemic. The findings addressed some difficulties when running the class online both synchronously and asynchronously such as students' minimum participation during the class, their preference to be passive participants, and teachers' limited knowledge on using the video-conferencing application. It turned out to be not comfortable when teaching online is dominated with a long silence and students' short response (Moorhouse, 2020). Although Moorhouse's study has illustrated some challenges found in teaching online during COVID-19 pandemic, the findings are very case-specific as it involved only a single research

participant. It would have been more convincing had more teachers were involved in the study, so that different perspectives could be gained.

Unlike Moorhouse's focus of study, Wong (2020) explored whether or not online learning during the pandemic could fulfil students' basic needs in learning. The four basic learning needs – arousal, autonomy, relatedness, and competence – were explored, and the result showed that autonomy and competence were met. Although this study involved a relatively large number of students and data were comprehensively obtained through interviews and questionnaire, Wong failed to take into account the challenges that teachers encountered in order to fulfil students' basic needs in learning during online classes. As a result, it seems as if the not-met-learning needs are the sole responsibility of the teachers.

A survey aimed at revealing teachers' perception of a large-scale online teaching during Covid-19 pandemic was carried out by Yang (2020), involving teachers of various education levels in 23 provinces in China. Attempting to investigate teachers' willingness, attitude, and knowledge during online teaching, Yang discovered that most teachers are willing to conduct online teaching. Nevertheless, many of them also state that online teaching is difficult to carry out. Furthermore, Yang (2020) recognized obstacles during distance learning such as students' lack of skills in self-study, the unreliable internet connection and learning platforms, difficulty in monitoring students' learning progress, and the lack of interaction with the students. Yang's study has brought up comprehensive and convincing results, yet it lacks a systematic review of relevant literature. Moreover, the paper does not provide adequate information about the method of the study.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Participants

The participants of this study were six teachers teaching ESP in six different higher education institutions in Yogyakarta Province of Indonesia. Some participants teach several departments in their institutions. The complete information about them is shown in the table below:

**Table 1.** Demographic information of the research participants

Participant	Higher education institution	Department(s) taught	Background of study	Years of teaching
Participant 1	Private	Nursing, Pharmacy	Master's program of English Language Education	More than five years
Participant 2	Private	Mechanical Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Informatics Engineering	Master's program of English Language Education	Three to five years

Participant 3	Private	Office Administration, Hospital Administration, Medicine and Pharmacy Administration	Master's program of English Language Education	Three to five years
Participant 4	Private	Mechanical Engineering	Master's program of English Language Education	More than five years
Participant 5	Private	Accounting	Master's program of English Language Education	Three to five years
Participant 6	State	Geological Engineering	Master's program of English Language Education	Three to five years

As displayed in the table above, only one participant is from a state university. It is because the limited number of state universities in the province which is not as many as private universities, and the lack of willingness of state teachers to participate in the current study.

### Research instrument

This study is qualitative, so the research instrument was the researcher herself as a human instrument who collected qualitative data through interviews.

### Data collection & analysis

Data of this study were collected through interviews based on some questions regarding teachers' efforts to maximize online lessons delivery, their efforts to make students actively participated during distance learning, and the challenges the teachers came across. As the collection of data were done during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not able to be conducted. Instead, the interviews were done asynchronously through WhatsApp. Questions were sent to the participants through WhatsApp messaging; then, their responses were recorded using WhatsApp voice note. The decision to employ asynchronous WhatsApp interviews was based on the participants' preference as it offered flexibility in answering the questions and sending them at their most convenient time. After data were collected, they were transcribed and read several times in order to identify the themes. The identified themes were then coded, and the sub-themes were categorized accordingly. After that, the data were interpreted. To ensure the accuracy of the obtained data, contacting the participants were done after the interviews.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study describe three main issues related to teaching ESP in various departments during COVID-19 outbreak: teachers' strategies to optimize online lessons delivery and students' online class participation, as well as addressing the challenges the participants encountered during their distance teaching.

### Teachers' strategies to optimize lessons delivery online

#### 1. *Giving a crystal-clear direction & ensuring that information is well-understood*

Participant 1 admitted the importance of giving clear direction and detailed information to students on how they should follow the online class, claim attendance, submit assignments, and make sure that their submitted assignments were received and so on. It was in order to avoid confusion among students.

"I must give as detailed information as possible about what students must do during the online class. Otherwise, they will be confused." (P1)

This finding is consistent with that of [Levy, Wang, & Chen \(2009\)](#), which showed that teachers realized the importance of clear instructions in giving tasks by ensuring students' understanding. [Murphy et al. \(2010\)](#) also emphasized that clear guidelines are necessary for students when dealing with online submission of tasks. Especially in ESP, where technical terms are dominant ([Poedjiastutie, 2017](#)), clarity in lesson delivery is crucial.

Lack of clarity in giving online instructions on how to do tasks will result in students' misinterpretation, so the submitted tasks will not meet the expectation. This is importance to ensure that clear direction and instruction are at top priority during online teaching, since communication barriers during online interaction are more potential to occur compared to face-to-face interaction. The importance of communication during online instruction was also the concern of [Wong \(2020\)](#).

Teacher's awareness of the importance of giving crystal-clear direction during the practice of distance learning indicates that even with the mediation of advanced learning platforms, miscommunication and misunderstanding are still potential to occur between teacher and students. Moreover, in the context of learning English as a foreign language, the possibility for information and direction to be misunderstood becomes higher, especially when students have low capability in the target language.

#### 2. *Using various learning platforms*

To deliver lessons, five participants claimed that they use various online learning media such as through PowerPoint Presentation, Google Classroom, Google Form, Google Drive, Google Meet, WhatsApp, Zoom, Edmodo, and Padlet. For example, participant 1 stated as follows:

"I combine the use of Zoom, WhatsApp group, and video call." (P6)

Employing various learning platforms to support distance learning was also reported in a study by [Atmojo & Nugroho \(2020\)](#). Using not only a single learning platform to support ESP materials and tasks concurs is beneficial ([Laborda & Litzler, 2017](#)). The decision to make use of more than one learning platform could mean that no single digital learning medium is perfect. Not all types of learning media fit with the environment of institutions, teachers, and students. Moreover, not all

learning tools can facilitate all kinds of activities designed by teachers. When teachers try out one learning medium, but it does not work optimally, they are challenged to select and explore the others that can better facilitate their teaching. Indeed, selecting a suitable learning platform is not an easy task.

### 3. *Grouping students during live virtual classes*

Participant 6 uttered that since her classes consist of 40 students or more, she divided them into groups to make the lesson delivery more effective and to give more opportunity to interact with her students. She did this during live virtual classes.

“I divided my students into groups consisting of four to five, and then I allocated approximately 15 minutes for each group.” (P6)

Furthermore, Participant 6 added that having a smaller number of students enabled her to check students’ understanding of the materials she delivered and allowed them to ask questions. This finding broadly supports an earlier study undertaken by [Smoyer et al. \(2020\)](#) which illustrated the importance of opportunity for students to ask questions during online learning.

The initiative of Participant 6 to allocate time for a smaller group of students should be highly appreciated. Although it indeed demanded more of her energy and needed more internet cost, she was happy that she could ensure students’ understanding of her delivered lessons. It might indicate the responsibility of making sure well-delivered and well-understood lessons. It also showed that teaching might take sacrifice.

### 4. *Using authentic materials*

Participant 6 expressed her strategy to elicit students’ active participation online by selecting authentic materials. This finding supports a study carried out by [Psonder et al. \(2016\)](#). They found that authentic materials or those that are close to students’ field could contribute to increasing students’ motivation in learning so that they show enthusiasm when completing the tasks. Similarly, a study undertaken by [Jendrych \(2013\)](#) described that most ESP students enjoy having practical tasks. This finding emphasizes that ESP materials should be relevant to the students’ field of study.

“I think there should be something real that can attract students’ participation in the online class. For example, when talking about dream jobs, my mechanical engineering students want to work in a mining company like Freeport. Then we discuss the facilities offered there, the salary, and so on.” (P6)

As uttered by Participant 6, she described authentic materials as the relevance of the topic to students’ future career. When the topic is something that is appealing to students’ field of study or future work, it is highly likely that students will be engaged during the lesson delivery, so that effective teaching-learning process can take place. In other words, the conveyed materials should be useful and meaningful. What can be learned from this practice is that during online teaching, teachers should be more selective in picking materials that can offer meaningfulness to students. Concurrent with this, [Xia \(2020\)](#) found that various digital media can serve as authentic materials for ESP.



The strategies employed by ESP teachers to optimize lessons delivery during their online teaching mainly concern on minimizing students' lack of understanding about the materials that are likely to occur due to the absence of face-to-face interaction. Those various strategies might not all be employed in face-to-face classrooms, such as the use of various synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms and grouping students virtually.

### **Teachers' strategies to optimize students' class participation**

#### *1. Choosing a learning platform that can be easily used to communicate with the students.*

Selecting online learning media must consider not only how they can best accommodate the tasks prepared by teachers, but also most importantly, how those media enable accessible communication between teacher and students. When two-way communication is well facilitated, students' participation during online class can be optimum

"I choose media that enable me to communicate easily with my students. I do not try new media if they only make me difficult to reach my students." (P2)

As admitted by Participant 2, the choice of a particular online learning platform to some extent determines students' active participation during the online class. She furthermore explained that due to students' various geographical and economic conditions, not all learning platforms are suitable for their students' learning contexts. Therefore, to make them participate in her class, she employed some media that can be easily used and accessed by her students.

The current finding reinforces the viewpoint of [Huang et al. \(2020\)](#) which maintained that teachers should choose friendly learning tools so that they can enable students to easily search and process information, collaborate with their classmates, and show understanding. Selecting appropriate technological learning platform is also in line with what has been urged by [Zhu & Liu \(2020\)](#).

#### *2. Not burdening students with non-doable tasks*

The participants of the study are aware that tasks should not be burdensome for students. However, they have different reasons.

"Because ESP is not a major course in Chemical Engineering Department, I don't give tasks that can create a burden for my students." (P4)

"Other lecturers have given too many burdening tasks, so I do not want to add students' burden by giving a difficult assignment." (P2)

As seen in the first excerpt above, Participant 4 realized that due to the status of ESP which is not a major course in her department, she avoided giving burdening tasks. It is common for ESP in all non-English departments of Indonesian higher education institutions to be given fewer credits (usually one to two credits), compared to other courses that are in line with the fields of the department. Consequently, the level of task tends to be made less demanding.

On the other hand, the decision of Participant 2 to not give difficult tasks demonstrates emphatic feeling towards students' condition during online learning that is identical with the bombardment of tasks from various subjects other than English. This fact might also indicate that teachers tend to perceive that the tasks given during distance learning should be relatively easy so that all students are

willing to participate during the class. This finding confirms [Ruan, Duan, & Du \(2015\)](#), who asserted that tasks with an acceptable degree of difficulty led to a shift in self-efficacy, which could increase students' motivation for language learning.

### 3. Giving score for active students

Giving rewards to adult learners is, in fact, still common to be done as it can increase their participation and motivation in learning. This finding corroborates earlier study undertaken by [Nasser, Mansouri, Mohammad, & Al-Abed \(2012\)](#), which reveals that giving rewards to adult learners gives a positive impact on their learning motivation. Participant 5 maintained as follows:

“To make students participate optimally in a group discussion, I give a score to those who respond to my questions and reply to their friends.”

As learning English as a foreign language poses some considerable challenges to Indonesian adult-students, especially those whose competence is still relatively low, rewards are given to raise their motivation in learning. Although Participant 5 did not utter whether or not her giving score is useful to elicit students' class participation, her decision to do so signals that extrinsic motivation is still substantial for adult learners learning English as a foreign language.

### 4. Designing tasks that promote collaboration

Despite the condition that the teaching and learning process has been switched to online mode, Participant 5 said that she tried to allow for collaboration among students by assigning group works.

“For example, when the task required them to do a presentation, I assigned it in groups, so that they could collaborate with their group mates and discuss before they presented individually.” (P5)

Concurrent with this, [Jones & Young \(2006\)](#) cited in [Compton \(2009\)](#) averred that stimulating collaboration among students during online teaching can serve as a way to promote virtual socialization as well as students' interest in learning. Also, in [Zou, Wang, & Xing \(2016\)](#) and [Laborda & Litzler \(2017\)](#), it is found that collaborative tasks can be reinforced through the use of internet learning platforms. This finding supports a study undertaken by [Hampel \(2009\)](#), who pinpointed the role of teachers in an online class by facilitating group works. Likewise, [Miyazoe & Anderson \(2012\)](#) revealed the opportunity for collaboration through wikis in an online writing class by dividing students into smaller groups.

In this context of the study, it is worth noting that the initiative to group students might imply that the teacher (Participant 6) concerned a lot about the lessons and the students. Participant 6 did promote not only connection but also equity, as each student gets an equal chance in learning. Meanwhile, a collaboration that was promoted by Participant 5 through group works signaled that despite the distance that limits direct interaction, this twenty-first-century skill is necessary to be instilled.

### 5. Using more asynchronous rather than synchronous teaching methods

Due to students' geographical and economic condition that varies, Participant 5 claimed that she limits the use of synchronous teaching method. Not only is this method less economical, but it is also often not free from the bad internet connection. Unstable internet connection during real-time class might

discourage students from participating actively. Given this reality, teachers and their institutions need to consider students' situation. The excerpts below emphasize teachers' preference to employ asynchronous method.

"Non-real time interaction allows for more opportunities for active class participation rather than live virtual class. Moreover, asynchronous teaching is economically more friendly for students." (P5)

"Then, I asked them if they wanted to have a live class, and they said it is enough to have the lesson with a voice-recorded PowerPoint presentation because some have a problematic internet connection." (P5)

"I usually make materials using PowerPoint then giving them quiz using Google form." (P4)

This finding is in agreement with [Daniel \(2020\)](#), which suggested that teachers take benefit of an asynchronous mode of teaching as it offers more flexibility for both teachers and students. As shown by Participant 5, her awareness about students' geographical and economic conditions contributes to students' willingness to be actively participated and engaged in her online class.

### **Challenges during online class**

#### *1. Teaching while taking care of kids*

Teaching from home through online learning platforms poses a distinctive challenge for parent-teachers. As a parent carries a domestic role, her responsibility in teaching interferes with her household routines such as taking care of children. Participant 2 admitted how she plays a double role while conducting her class online:

"My classes run online, but at the same time, I must take care of my two kids. That is very challenging."

As identified in a previous study undertaken by [See, Wardle, & Collie \(2020\)](#), balancing teaching and taking care of children at the same time is very challenging and stressful. Moreover, [Williamson et al. \(2020\)](#) maintained that conducting online learning from home demands great attention and is cognitively overwhelming, especially for teachers who have an additional role as a parent. The word "challenging" as uttered by Participant 2 signals that playing a dual role at the same time is not an easy task. It might also imply that teaching from home cannot be ideally carried out, especially when teachers have children to take care of. Thus, the learning goals should be realistically adjusted to the condition of the teaching and learning environment. Otherwise, teaching from home becomes a stressful experience rather than an enjoyable one.

#### *2. Difficulty in overseeing students' learning progress*

Another obstacle faced by teachers during online teaching is their difficulty in monitoring students' class participation.

"During distance teaching, we cannot optimally do direct monitoring of students' learning progress. I could only give them a stimulus when answering questions or do a quiz. (P1)."

This fact supports the study undertaken by [Wong \(2020\)](#) who reveals that it is difficult for teachers to supervise students during online learning, and [Yang \(2020\)](#) who concludes that monitoring students' progress in learning is not an easy

task. The fact that overseeing students' learning progress is difficult to do could mean that the success of achieving the learning goals heavily relies on students' autonomous learning. At the times when face-to-face interaction is replaced with online instruction, learner autonomy is crucial to be developed so that students can monitor their learning outcomes by themselves. The utterance "I could only give them stimulus." implies that to the perception of Participant 1, it is not enough only to give them stimulus in learning. Participant 5 also confessed her inability to oversee students' participation during the online class directly.

"I cannot directly monitor their participation, so presentation is usually done individually (P5)."

Assigning the task to be individually done might hint a way to overcome the difficulty in supervising students' participation. The inability to monitor students' learning as hinted by the two participants might imply the shortcoming of the employed learning platforms as well as teachers' lack of power to control it.

### 3. *Instability of internet connection in students' remote places*

The typical issue of online learning in the developing country is the inconsistency of internet connection. The on and off internet connection hinders the teaching-learning interaction to a great extent. It can also trigger demotivation in teaching and learning. The current study reveals this as the most hindering factor, as addressed by almost all participants.

"Some students complain about poor internet connection in their area, so they are often late in submitting tasks. One student lives in Sorong where blackout often happens." (P4)

"Among the obstacles of online teaching, internet connection is the most annoying issue." (P6)

The instability of internet connection is greatly affected by the varied geographical characteristics of the Indonesian archipelago, which affect the provision of internet connection. This hindrance should be tackled seriously by the government for the sake of equal opportunity and access for distance education. Otherwise, online teaching will only work in big cities where infrastructure, electricity, and internet facilities are easily accessed. Similar to this fact are those found in [Yang \(2020\)](#) and [Zhu & Liu \(2020\)](#) who found that internet connection is still a crucial issue among students.

### 4. *Students' low discipline to attend online class on the schedule*

Participant 1 mentions that ESP students' level of discipline in attending the online class on time is low. It is stated as follows:

"ESP students lack discipline when submitting assignment and attending the class online." (P1)

This finding supports a previous study conducted by [Atmojo & Nugroho \(2020\)](#), who finds that punctuality becomes an issue among students when attending online classes on the schedule. It is due to students' false perception that students regard online learning as holidays in which they can have more time for relaxing at home rather than attending class as scheduled. Concurrent with this, [Wong \(2020\)](#) highlights the inability of online learning to generate students' motivation and maintain their attention. Self-discipline is also an issue that is

highlighted in [Zhang et al. \(2020\)](#) when conducting online classes. As found in [Zhang et al. \(2020\)](#), students regard self-discipline as a vital competency when attending online classes. This aspect concurs with [Daniel \(2020\)](#), who found that students' low motivation in learning will make studying from home not easy to do.

The low discipline in attending online classes might lead to a few speculations. First, the materials delivered online do not interest students. They might be too difficult or too easy. Second, the technical issue could be the cause of students' reluctance to participate in the online class. They might find that the learning tools employed in the class are less accessible. It could be due to an unreliable internet connection or costly internet data.

#### 5. *Students' various level of literacy in the use of technology.*

The next challenge deals with the various degrees of technological literacy among ESP students. Many still have difficulties on how to use technology for their ESP learning purposes. It is found in the following statements uttered by some participants:

“Some students do not know how to upload videos.” (P1)

“Maybe they are not ready because they have never used technology for learning such as Google Classroom. I could understand this. It needs socialization.” (P3)

This finding has been indicated in previous studies ([Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020](#); [Dewi, 2014](#); [Dhawan, 2020](#)) which recognized students' low level of literacy in using technology for e-learning purposes.

ESP teaching and learning through the use of technology has been prevalent as indicated in some previous studies ([Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2020](#); [Nickerson, 2018](#); [Yang, 2016](#)). However, even though the ESP students in this study are digital native, it is surprising that they are not technologically savvy, especially with using technology for learning purpose. It illustrates that ICT (information and communication technology) has not been commonly used to support ESP students are intensively acquainted with a myriad of learning platforms.

#### 6. *Giving feedback to students' submitted assignments.*

As face-to-face interaction during ESP teaching is replaced with online instruction, giving assignments becomes more common. As a result, it is not only students who complain but also teachers, as they have to provide feedback to students' collected assignments. Participant 6 complained as follows:

“Reading, correcting, and giving feedback to students' submitted assignments are time-consuming.” (P6)

Difficulty relating to giving feedback during ESP online teaching, especially to each student affirms the previous study undertaken by [Atmojo & Nugroho \(2020\)](#). Feedback in ESP teaching is useful as it provides information about the practical skill and competence that ESP students still need to improve ([Hüttner, Smit, & Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2009](#)). The awareness of Participant 6 to provide feedback shows that the ESP teacher attempts to build interaction through two-way communication, rather than a top-down instruction. It could also indicate the teacher's responsibility to offer a meaningful learning experience for students, although it takes extra time. On the other side, the changed mode of teaching to

be online has indicated extra workload for teachers that can threaten their wellbeing. Thus, institutions should regulate the practice of ESP distance learning in such a way that can be effective, yet it does not trigger an increased burden for both ESP teachers and students.

## CONCLUSION

The increased popularity of online ESP teaching and learning during Covid-19 pandemic has forced changes regarding how to deliver the lessons and optimize student participation. It has also posed some new challenges for ESP teachers in higher education institutions. While in a traditional face-to-face teaching ESP teacher can have more time for preparing unfamiliar materials that are related to students' field of study, in online classes they have to deal with a lot of issues. Too many things to consider (as discussed earlier), might result in teachers' lack of time in preparing contents that are not their field. The importance of giving a crystal-clear instruction, for example, is reinforced as the lack of it can significantly threaten the success of teaching online and students' understanding about ESP materials. About optimizing student participation during online classes, teachers' claim for adopting various strategies imply that there are still many students who join online classes reluctantly, despite the demand of communicative skills for ESP competence. In other words, many have demonstrated a lack of inner drive to learn enthusiastically using online learning platforms. Thus, it leads to additional challenges that teachers must handle.

The higher education institutions especially of non-English departments should respond to the challenges that occur by regulating the practice of ESP distance education during this seemingly endless pandemic, in a way that it does not burden both students and teachers. The ESP learning outcomes might be adjusted to be more realistic and achievable due to the absence of face-to-face interaction. Indeed, switching learning to be conducted online is not a mere case of using an appropriate kind of technology. Most importantly, the human aspect should be seriously taken into account.

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