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TEACHING ESP ONLINE: A SELF-REFLECTIVE THINKING PRACTICE

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Abstract

This article aimed at sharing the experiences of teaching English for Specific Purpose (ESP) for mechanical engineering students online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aspects covered in this reflective thinking were the learning objectives, teaching strategies, student perceptions, and the learning problems and results from the author's classroom. By using a narrative inquiry, the data used in this study were the teaching-learning documents, student's video project, and journal records. As the result, this study found that students' social environment at home affected their learning styles and outcomes. The author also suggests that other ESP teachers conduct more research on reflective practices that can help developing learning strategies and technology implemented in their course.

Keywords: ESP, Teacher Self Reflection, Online Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Online learning, as a type of teaching and learning technology that allows the materials delivered to students using the internet or other computer networks (Wahono, 2008), has become the most discussed topic in articles and journals during this COVID-19 pandemic outbreak (Prihatmi, 2021). As digital technology develops rapidly to support online programs, new learning methods and platforms are emerged and need to be researched before and after the application. Teachers from all levels of education started to apply and analyze various methods and technologies in supporting their teaching and learning process to find the best practice for their course. Teachers are proven to be able to increase their ability to identify their strengths and weaknesses and improve themselves when they receive feedback (Gun, 2011). For teachers, being able to perceive themselves and their teaching practices is an indication of the amount of reflective thinking they do (Choy, 2012). A study by Choy, et al.(2017) found that reflective thinking leads to self-efficacy, self-evaluation, and teacher awareness and proposed that self-reflection is essential for the development of teacher confidence and capacity.

Related to the same purpose, I encouraged myself as an English teacher in a Mechanical Engineering Department in the National Institute of Technology (ITN) Malang, to do a reflective thinking practice on how I perceive my own full online teaching this one semester. The aspects discussed will include the learning purpose, teaching methods, student perceptions, and the learning results. First, I would like to introduce the general circumstances on my campus. I have been teaching English for Specific Purpose, be specific is English for Mechanical Engineering, since 2015. English is a compulsory subject that must be taken in the second semester with 2 credits. The majority of the participants are male, with 94 students were divided into three classes. The sum of the meetings is 16 meetings with 2 of them are a middle test and a final test. The materials of the course were aimed to meet the basic requirements of

engineering, starting from the understanding general definition of engineering to writing resumes. Since March 2020, the learning process in ITN Malang was also converted into online learning. Therefore, this Even Semester of 2020-2021, the English course in Mechanical Engineering has also employed full online learning. However, as a new system applied for the new students of the 2020 intake, there were some challenges and opportunities that arose that I would like to share.

METHOD

This paper used a narrative inquiry as a part of qualitative research. Hart (2002) stated that narrative inquiry is the study of humans' personal experiences and how they explore the life lessons or meanings from these experiences. This approach has been used in many disciplines to learn or identify more about the narrator's cultural and historical experience, identity, or lifestyle (Lieblich, 1998). Here, I explore my own experience in the aspects of learning objectives, teaching strategies, student perceptions, and the learning problems and results. The data used were the documents (student's worksheet, teacher's feedback, and student's grade), student's video project, and journal records.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Learning Objective

In general, the purpose of the English course as stated in the Mechanical Engineering Curriculum 2019 was that the students are expected to able to improve their skills in reading, writing, and speaking in technically oriented English and able to communicate their thoughts orally and in writing. The biggest challenge in achieving this objective is that the material provided includes some special terms for mechanical engineering that these new students are not familiar with.

Teaching Strategies

In language teaching, Wehrli (2003) proposed teaching strategies as brainstorming, case-based small-group discussion, demonstration, games, and independent study.
In the National Institute of Technology Malang, all of the courses should use the SPADA ITN Malang, the web-based learning management system (LMS) developed by ITN Malang Instructional Development Institutions. All the materials taught in the semester are divided into topics that can be studied independently by the students. The LMS system also recorded the students' attendance, as well as the grade received from the assignment submissions.
In supporting the LMS system, I initiated to form a WhatsApp group in the hope of filling the communication gap between student-teacher and student-student, making communication flow easier, and more importantly, I and my students can catch up on the latest news whenever or wherever we are at.

Lastly, I also provided the students with a workbook that I wrote and compiled to meet their needs in one semester. By doing so, I assumed that students can learn by themselves at home manually or prepare themselves with the new topic before the day of the meeting. In conclusion, the strategies I employed in my online ESP class were mostly demonstration (by using the LMS system and Google Meet), small group discussion (by WhatsApp group), and independent study (by using the workbook). However, all the strategies were interconnected. The overall strategies I used in my classes was shown in Figure 1.

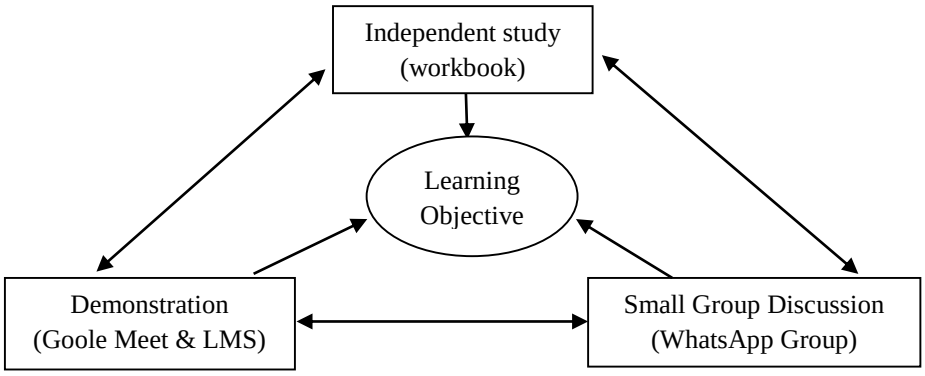

Figure 1. Learning Strategies Used

Student Perceptions

As online learning has been applied in two semesters, I have conducted two kinds of research in studying student's perceptions of online learning in my course. First, the perception in using SPADA ITN Malang. The result showed that SPADA ITN Malang got a positive appraisal and a high satisfaction level of perception. As the main platform I used in delivering materials and receiving student's submissions, SPADA ITN Malang showed high performance in the teaching-learning process, therefore there was no crucial issue to be fixed this semester. Second, I researched utilizing the WhatsApp group as my main media for communication with the students. It ended up also receiving high perception regarding ease-of-use, usefulness, and student-teacher communication (Prihatmi, 2021).

Learning Problems and Results

With the high rate of perceptions I got from the earlier surveys, I presumed that the learning process this semester will face no crucial obstacles. However, as the LMS system used was newly found and the internet network was limited in some areas, some problems arose during the learning process which affected the student's grades. The first problem was the home circumstances. As the students were at their homes, there was a high possibility for them to be affected by their home situation. Some students need to help their parents even though is it the time for the lecture. Some students do part-time jobs at home in the morning so they are unable to join the class properly. One student also stated that her family runs into a problem so she was stressed out and unable to submit an assignment. The second problem that arose was the internet network. My students came from various cities and rural. Many of the complaints about the quality of the internet network they had at home as most of them relied on cellular providers. Consequently, they got many problems in accessing the LMS, joining the Meet, or submitting the assignment. The third problem and the main problem I faced in my class was the student's motivation. As almost all mechanical engineering students are males, without a direct strict push and support from the family, they had low motivation in participating in the lecture and paid less attention to the teacher's explanation. Moreover, most of the students were even not interested to answer questions in English voluntarily without the teacher had to ask them. One of the parents' complaints was that she even had to wake his son up when it was his turn to present his topic on Meet. This lack of motivation led to a lack of understanding of the material given in the learning process and a lack of practicing their English orally. The learning results were described in the histogram in Figure 2.

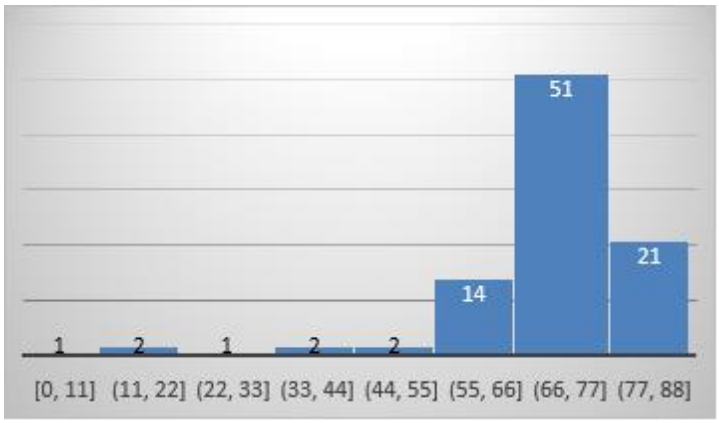

Figure 2. Students Final Score Distribution

The histogram in Figure 2 showed that the majority of the students (51 students out of 94) got 66 and 77 as their final scores. The Mean was 69.85 which is a B in grade. The smallest score was 0 and 20, and the highest was 82 and 80 (A in grade) which was acquired by 6 students. As the minimum required score to pass the course was 56 (C in grade), 9 students failed the course of a total of 94 students. In sum, the general success rate of this course was 90%.
For the speaking skill, the assessment was done using the criteria of performance developed by Brown (2007). The majority of the class score range was in "poor" and "satisfactorily" points, with only 5 students got "Very Good" remarks. However, in an online speaking test, I cannot validate my assessment to be 100% accurate, as there were many ways for them to cheat reading the text instead of doing speaking by practice.

CONCLUSION

In general, with a passing rate of 90% from 94 students, this semester's ESP Mechanical Engineering course is considered quite successful. 85 students passed the course while 9 students were not active since the beginning of the semester. However, the graduation rate is not the only measure of the success of the teaching and learning process. The average class score achieved is quite low despite getting a B. Active participation in courses and discussions on Google Meet is also low due to low learning motivation. I am fully aware that students' social environment at home affects their learning styles and outcomes. I have provided students with three media for learning. They got the right idea about the task because we were able to have intense discussions in our WhatsApp group, but lack of understanding of the material and lack of active speaking practice. This is the part that I missed reflecting on and do early treatment. Therefore, I suggest fellow ESP teachers to conduct more research on reflective practices to understand what is known and needed to bridge the gap between learning situations (Sezer, 2008) that can improve the quality of teaching.

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