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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teacher Competencies In Virtual Learning: A Brief of Students' Voice

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ABSTRACT

Background/purpose – When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, the Indonesian government reacted to the spread of the virus by issuing new policies across various sectors, including education. Through the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Indonesian government issued the "Belajar Dari Rumah" (BDR) or "Learning-from-home" policy. From the odd semester of the 2022/2023 academic year, learning activities have been conducted face-to-face, yet some teachers at universities in Jambi City still choose to deliver virtual learning activities. Considering that this option still exists for lecturers, it is considered useful to examine the competence of teachers to conduct virtual learning classes.

Materials/methods – This qualitative research involved 15 students from Jambi University, Indonesia, with data collected through in-depth interviews.

Results – Most of the students mentioned that teachers lacked competencies in three categories of virtual learning, namely; time management, learning methods, and delivery subjects. Participant students suggested improvements to teacher competencies in time management through more effective and efficient use of time, choosing from diverse virtual learning methods, both audio and visual, gaming, discussion, and feedback, and communicating with good grammar and clear pronunciation in their subject delivery.

Conclusion – The participant students stated that teachers should improve their competencies in the areas of time management, learning methods, and learning material delivery. Considering the current study's limitations, it would be prudent to also conduct studies at other universities and in different study programs so that it a more useful insight can be gained in order to improve teacher competencies in the area of virtual classroom teaching.

Keywords – Jambi, student's voice, teacher competencies, virtual learning, managing virtual learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government reacted to COVID-19 by issuing new policies across various sectors, including education. Through the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Indonesian government introduced new policies regarding the implementation of formal education from classroom learning activities to virtual spaces, called "Belajar Dari Rumah" (BDR), or "Learning from home." This virtual learning activity operates using established technology platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, WhatsApp, and YouTube. This learning activity was conducted from basic education through to higher education from March 2020 to 2021.

The policy of learning from home raises certain pros and cons for both educators and learners such as Internet network limitations, that not all students possess smartphones or laptop personal computers, and the limited technical capabilities of educators. It is ultimately the educators who are responsible for the realization of learning, even in emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For educators used to traditional, formal classroom-based education, virtual learning activities are still often considered a new way to implement teaching and learning. Thus, educators need to redesign teaching activities in order that learning goals can be reached.

Regarding virtual learning, some researchers have conducted studies with a different focus, such as examining the problems of teachers and students in their experiences with virtual learning (Baggaley, 2020; Mahlangu, 2018), students' satisfaction with distance learning (Harsasi & Sutawijaya, 2018; Keskin & Yurdugul, 2020; Moroz & Moroz, 2022), the competencies and skills necessary for online teaching (Albrahim, 2020), and virtual learning as a response to seismic events in the sector or society as a whole (Tull et al., 2017). Several researchers have conducted studies related to virtual learning from the students' perspective (de Leng et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2022; Muzid & Munir, 2005; Yodha et al., 2019), and the experience of students having participated in some form of virtual teaching and learning (Burnett, 2011; Hamutoglu et al., 2020; Smyth et al., 2012; Weller et al., 2005).

Entering the odd semester of the 2022/2023 academic year, learning activities were moved back to face-to-face; however, some teachers at universities in Jambi City still opted to conduct virtual learning activities for several meetings, whilst the remainder were conducted face-to-face. Considering that virtual learning activities are still an option for teachers, it is considered necessary to examine the competence of teachers to conduct online teaching from the perspective of the students' voice. Therefore, the current study aims to assess the view of students and to gather their suggestions on how to improve teachers' competencies to instruct by way of virtual learning.

Teacher competencies are essential to maximize student achievement and to reach learning objectives. As such, teachers need to be able to deliver learning material both in the traditional classroom and also in a virtual environment. The COVID-19 pandemic forced all teachers from primary to higher education to move their classroom-based learning to the virtual space. In many instances, this requirement meant quite a different experience for both teachers and students; hence, the current study explores teachers' competencies in virtual learning during and following the COVID-19 era through examination of students' voices.

The primary question driving our research has been: "How competent are teachers in virtual learning?" In response, answers to the following two research questions were sought:

1. How do students view teacher competencies in terms of virtual learning?

2. What suggestions do students have for teachers' competencies in terms of virtual learning?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Students' view of teacher competencies

According to the Cambridge dictionary (2022), "view" is defined as a way of thinking. It means that a view is an individual's way of expressing something based on their own personal experiences and thoughts about an object, situation, or phenomenon. The view becomes the ideal that individuals seek in the future through different experiences in the same object/area. Hope, as a thought process, is the aim to achieve goals, which is followed by motivation and ways of achieving that aim (Synder et al., 2002). Hope is related to emotion, but is a dynamic motivational system that is supported by awareness through achievement. Expectations reflect individual perceptions in their clear conceptualization of goals (Lindley & Joseph, 2004), and expectations therefore consist of targets that are expected by individuals (Burns, 2010). Thus, hope has meaning as a form of thought used in achieving goals in certain ways. Vroom (1964) defined hope as the motivation in doing things according to expected desires.

Students as participants in learning activities have certain expectations from the learning process that they follow in order to achieve their goals. These expectations can include understanding all the materials presented by their lecturers, obtaining good learning results, and other expectations that can motivate them in following the whole teaching and learning process. Motivation is an important factor for students in following the learning process (Filgona et al., 2020; Jannah & Sontani, 2018), and teachers can be a significant motivation factor (Filgona et al., 2020; Jannah & Sontani, 2018) as they can directly inspire and influence students during learning activities (Jenkins, 2001; Singh & Singh, 2021; Wentzel, 2020). Therefore, students' expectations of the learning process in terms of it being managed by lecturers both virtually and through face-to-face instruction, can motivate them to remain enthusiastic about their learning activity participation, or the reverse.

Teacher competencies

Teaching can often include several activities such as talking, asking questions, writing on a board, conditioning learners to be ready and responsive to learn, as well as many others (Moore, 2010). Teaching, as one component part of the work of a teacher, relates to both knowledge and the art of guiding and directing learning activities in order to develop students. Teachers can achieve this through motivating students, stimulating their desire to learn, giving appropriate stimulus, proposing possible solutions, and helping students to set and work towards achieving their goals. Therefore, teachers lead students in the practice of technological skills to achieve desirable learning outcomes (Umunadi & Dulube, 2015).

The policy of learning from home still bears certain similarities to the characteristics of teaching and learning in a traditional classroom. The characteristics can be summarized as the purpose of both instructional objectives and the objectives of developing the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes of learners, the existence of procedures or activities, systematically involving active learners, discipline, the use of timetables, and the evaluation of students' learning (Suardi, 2005). Therefore, teachers must maintain several teaching-based competencies irrespective of the domain or environment in which they are required to teach.

The success of learning objectives depends largely on the competence of the teacher and their commitment to managing and organizing the required learning activities. Teacher

competence refers to their ability to carry out teaching activities to a predefined standard. As such, teachers must also have certain competencies in order to conduct virtual classes. According to Barlow (1985), the competence of an educator is the ability that they possess to carry out their specified duties as an educator. The primary competency of a teacher is the achievement of set learning objectives. Based on Indonesian Government Regulation No.19, 2005, educators must meet competencies in four areas, namely pedagogic, social, professional, and personality (The Republic of Indonesia, 2005). Teacher competencies are therefore a set of abilities that teachers are expected to have in order to manage their teaching skills in the delivery of learning activities.

Sudjana (2002) stated that teacher competencies consist of pedagogical, personal, and social elements. Furthermore, Albrahim (2020) mentioned several competencies and skills that teachers need to possess in order to teach via distance learning, which are; a) pedagogic skills, b) content skills, c) design skills, d) technology skills, e) management and institutional skills, and f) social skills. Furthermore, Tauber (2017) stated that teaching is a profession that includes recognizing a body of knowledge in order to make decisions and to explain to students how what they are doing builds upon their existing body of knowledge. Moreover, Tauber (2017) highlighted that classroom management is another aspect of pedagogy which is also an area in which teachers should have competent ability.

Virtual Learning

Virtual learning became a significant trend in teaching and learning activities both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and is an essential component in meeting the requirements of digitalized societies. The development of technology and changes in social life integrated with the Internet is one of the factors that influences the way in which teachers organize learning activities. Teachers have had to adapt to new roles through leveraging technology in order to conduct teaching by way of virtual learning (Beaudoin, 2003). Virtual learning is a form of acceptance of the current era's technological development and innovation in learning activities (Keller, 2005).

This form of learning activity involves a variety of technological applications that support learning activities via the Internet. Virtual learning is one component of the wider distance education medium, and means the application of the learning process via a variety of media technology such as video conferencing, online chat, synchronous conferencing, web conferencing, blogs, emails, and social networks (Simonson et al., 2015; Wicks, 2010). One of the theories of distance learning previously mentioned was that it should support student motivation, promote learning pleasure, create feelings, facilitate access to learning content, and cater for both real-world and simulated communication to, from, and between learners (Simonson et al., 2015).

Virtual learning is supported by various systems and tools (Shih & Hung, 2007) that are generally divided into two types; 1) traditional tools (e.g., videotape, television, cable TV, teleconferencing, and textbooks), and 2) computer-assisted and network tools (e.g., CD-ROM title, web browser, chatroom, Windows, media players, broadband video conferencing, etc.). Distance learning requires teachers to consider the needs of end users (i.e., students) in pointing out the best or most appropriate technology to be used (Shih & Hung, 2007). Harsasi and Sutawijaya (2018) highlighted that virtual learning tends to be utilized in the learning processes of today. Although virtual learning was a required medium during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is, however, still used as an alternative by some lecturers in the delivery of their learning materials to students.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach that focused on exploring teacher competencies in virtual learning from students' voices, since this approach is considered useful in collecting data based on a problem under study within its natural setting (Creswell, 2014). The participants of the current study were all higher education students in Jambi city, Indonesia. In total, 15 students from Jambi University were interviewed between October 29 and November 5, 2022. Participants were selected according to purposive sampling as the intention was to explore teacher competencies in virtual learning based on students' voices.

Participants were each assigned a code based on the abbreviation of their first name, their gender, and the semester of their studies at that time. For example, a female participant with a name of Suryawahyuni Latief studying in semester seven of her course would have been assigned the code "S27," whereas if the participant's gender was male, the code would have been "S17."

The study's participants were interviewed via telephone according to a structured format that used predefined open-ended questions (see Appendix) aimed at eliciting details about teacher competence in virtual learning from the students' perspective.

4. RESULTS

Students' view of teacher Competencies in virtual learning

When the students asked about their expectations from their teachers' competence in conducting virtual learning, the students each gave varied and mostly differing statements. From the 15 study participants, their responses were classified into three groups:

1. Time management competence of teachers during virtual learning.
2. Teachers' competence in choosing learning methods during virtual learning.
3. Teachers' competence in subject delivery during virtual learning.

The following describes the interview results according to each group statement according to the participant students' expectations regarding teacher competence in virtual learning activities.

Competence in time management

The competence of teachers in managing time in online learning according to students at Jambi University related to the schedule of learning activities. According to the students, most teachers changed their schedule according to their availability. The following are two excerpts from the students' statements:

> When studying virtually, teachers often change the schedule of learning activities, making it difficult for me to set my schedule for some of the courses In this semester, I hope that when the teacher chooses virtual learning activities, they carry them out according to the advertised schedule. [A21]

> Teachers change the existing schedules to conduct virtual learning; some even change learning activities to be at night or in the early morning. I hope that teachers will start to follow the established schedule, and consider the condition of their students. [M21, and similar from R11]

The aforementioned students (A21, M21, and R11) each stated that the teachers' competence in managing virtual learning time had not been maximized, and that most

teachers did not follow the established schedule of predetermined learning times. Most of the teachers changed the schedule of learning activities to suit their own availability. In addition, regarding the competence of teachers in managing time in virtual learning activities during the learning process, student K17 stated that:

> With virtual learning, the teachers spend more time using their devices, so the material cannot be completed during the available time. I hope that the teachers can better prepare themselves and their devices early before the set learning time begins. [K17]

A balanced view regarding teacher competence in the delivery of virtual learning was conveyed by student L27, as follows:

> Some lecturers still need to change lecture hours, or they forget and then change the lecture hours. As a result, some activity times have to be changed and readjusted, which made me less focused and not optimal in my studies. On the other hand, some lecturers are very good at managing timing, and are always on time; with Zoom meetings opened 30 minutes before classes start, and each class opening starts with brainstorming, then material explanation, discussion, and then closing, so that very little free time is wasted. [L27]

Competence in choosing learning methods

On teacher competence in choosing learning methods for virtual learning activities, some of the participant students stated that their teachers are not optimal in choosing learning methods in virtual learning. The students also stated that some teachers lack competence in utilizing the features of the virtual learning application selected. Therefore, some of the students highlighted that teachers should first master operating the virtual learning application in order that the learning method used can be appropriately adapted to the selected application, as stated by both F27 and S17, respectively:

> I saw that during virtual learning activities, some teachers could not take advantage of the features of the application and adapt its use to the learning method. [F27]

> Related to the learning method employed for virtual learning, in general the teachers only used the Q & A method spontaneously, although some choose the learning method with discussions held in breakout rooms. However, in my opinion, with the features of the virtual learning application, the teachers could design these activities using videos, and not just read out PowerPoint presentations to us, since that looks boring and overwhelming for me and my friends. [S17]

Competence in subject delivery

Teachers lack competency in subject delivery, according to the interviewed students. Subject delivery in virtual and face-to-face learning should differ. When delivering subjects in virtual learning, teachers should pay more attention to voice intonation as well as clarity of pronunciation and not mumble. The interviewed students stated that learning through virtual experience meant suffering regular disturbances in the sound quality, caused through various factors such as varying signal strength, teachers talking too fast, and a buzzing sound sometimes heard. Accordingly, statements by L27 and F21 included the following:

> I see that the competence of the lecturer in conveying the subject virtually is still lacking. The teacher conveys the subject in a voice that is not clear, delivered too fast, and sometimes their pronunciation is not sufficiently clear. Sometimes, the teacher's voice in explaining the material cannot be heard, perhaps due to a weak signal. [L27]

> In explaining the subject matter to us, the competence of teachers in face-to-face lessons is better than virtual learning. I guess that the teachers are sometimes distracted by the loss of network connection. [F21]

Finally, R27 provided views and expectations regarding the competence of lecturers in delivering material through virtual learning:

> Some lecturers are usually glued to PowerPoint slides displayed on Zoom, and do not use their own words; hence, their explanations are not that clear. [R27]

Suggestions to improve teachers' competencies in virtual learning

Regarding teacher competence in virtual learning, the participant students provided various suggestions in their interviews, which were grouped into the following three categories:

1. Suggestions about managing time
2. Suggestions about learning methods
3. Suggestions about subject delivery

Suggestions about time management

Suggestions related to teacher competence in terms of their time management skills included the following excerpts:

> In my opinion, teachers should maximize their time in teaching again, so that teaching and learning activities can be carried out according to their scheduled time. The time they have for learning must also be maximized, such as how long a presentation is, allowing for questions and answers, giving conclusions, etc. During question and answer sessions, some students many not have been able to answer fully, or a student was not satisfied with the presenter's response, but the time had ran out; for this it is necessary to think of a solution, so that it does not hang as an issue and both parties can accept. [L27]

> In my opinion, the time used for virtual learning should be reduced, since staring at a screen for a long time could affect eye health. Besides, virtual learning tends to be long, making students saturated, so it is better to use the time more effectively but to maintain a delivery that is comprehensive and does not interrupt late night learning activities since students tend to be sleepy during those lectures after our daytime learning activities. [M21]

The suggestions related to time management put forth by both L27 and M21 were for teachers to make more effective and efficient use of the lecture time, and to reduce the duration of virtual learning so that it is shorter than face-to-face learning.

Suggestions about learning methods

The interviewed students gave suggestions regarding the learning methods that their teachers employed in virtual learning classes. The following suggestion was made by R27:

> I suggest that teachers do not get hung up on using just PowerPoint slides; they should interact more with students so as not to make the class too quiet, so maybe use games. It should not be just about making us listen to the material, as this makes learning boring and people leave the virtual space. [R27]

M27 suggested that in virtual learning, teachers should not use visual methods such as PowerPoint slides but also employ active interaction methods and games. Meanwhile, A21 suggested using virtual learning activities that included audiovisual methods.

> Teachers should use a whiteboard highlighted by a camera so that we benefit from audiovisual techniques. [A21]

Suggestions about subject delivery

Concerning the competence of teachers in subject delivery, the suggestions given by the participant students include teachers not rushing when speaking, using language that is easy to understand, actively inviting students to join the dialogue, and providing feedback to students. The following excerpts represent some of the suggestions made by the students:

> Teachers should pay attention to their voice intonation and the pronunciation of words during virtual learning. [R27]

> It is better to speak calmly, no need to rush. [N21]

> Choose words that are easy to understand, and actively invite students to speak. [F21]

> Teachers should give us feedback, at least in general, so that we can compare it with the results of our work to see whether or not we are performing to our maximum. [L27]

5. DISCUSSION

The implementation of virtual learning activities has become a trend still opted for by some teachers since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. This may be a form of teacher response to technological developments and changes in today's society. It is also connected to our now commonplace use of the Internet through various media technologies such as video conferencing, online chat, synchronous conferencing, web conferencing, blogs, emails, and social networks (Simonson et al., 2015; Wicks, 2010).

Unfortunately, the selection of virtual learning activities is still not seen as directly proportional to the competence of teachers organizing virtual learning. The questions posed in the current study were aimed at seeing how students viewed their teachers' competencies in organizing virtual learning, and what suggestions they had to improve teacher competence in terms of virtual learning.

Based on the results of the current research, which was conducted with 15 students at Jambi University, Indonesia, the findings revealed that the competence of teachers in virtual learning activities is seen according to three categories; time management, learning methods, and subject delivery. The students' teachers were seen as unable to use their time effectively or efficiently, and tended to attach more importance to their own availability instead of their students. Additionally, it was highlighted that the teachers' selection of learning methods used in virtual learning activities were considered monotonous, with the presentation of boring learning materials that resulted in the non-achievement of the course learning objectives. Previous researchers have discussed the competence of teachers in virtual

learning so that virtual learning can be made fun, whilst also achieving the stated academic goals of the course (Albrahim, 2020; Sudjana, 2002; Tauber, 2017).

Based on the participant students' views regarding teacher competence in virtual teaching, it was noted that students' enthusiasm in participating in virtual learning can be negatively affected to the extent that learning goals are not met. Teachers play a critically important role in the learning process, as stated in prior research by Filgona et al. (2020), Jannah and Sontani (2018), Jenkins (2001), Singh and Singh (2021), and also Wentzel (2020). Teachers must be able to organize and deliver virtual learning in a way that can motivate students and meet their students' expectations regarding the learning process followed. The students who participated in the current study suggested that in virtual learning, teachers should make use of their time more effectively and efficiently, choose and employ more diverse virtual learning methods such as the use of both audio and visual means, as well as including game-based instruction, discussion, student feedback, and to communicate using a high level of grammar and with clear pronunciation during subject delivery in the virtual learning environment.

6. CONCLUSION

There are certain differences that exist in teacher competences when teaching face-to-face in the traditional classroom compared to teaching in an online virtual environment. These differences in teacher competencies can be categorized as competence in time management, choosing appropriate learning methods, and the delivery of subject materials. In the current study, it was revealed that teachers had not managed the virtual learning time effectively or efficiently, such as time wasted in attempting to manage the virtual learning devices used. In addition, the teachers only used traditional audiovisual methods such as PowerPoint slides and discussion in breakout rooms for students, but without providing any supporting feedback. Finally, in delivering the course material, the teachers had not always used the right words, grammar level, or were lacking in clear verbal pronunciation.

7. SUGGESTIONS

The current research was limited to a sample of students studying in their first and seventh semesters of an English language study program at a university in Jambi City, Indonesia. It is therefore recommended that future studies are replicated at other universities and institutions, as well as with students from different study programs, in order to provide more generalized output to improve the competence of teachers using virtual teaching environments. More specifically, such future studies could result in other themes and more specific suggestions made that could help contribute to improving the quality of virtual learning and in how teachers can better manage virtual learning.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contributions S.L.: Literature review, conceptualization; D.K.: Methodology, data analysis; M.M.: Review-editing and writing, original manuscript preparation. All of the authors have read and approved the published final version of the article.

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APPENDIX

Open-Ended Interview Questions

Note: Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via telephone interviews.

1. How do you feel when you take part in virtual learning?
2. Do you think there is a difference between teachers' abilities to conduct face-to-face and virtual learning? If so, please explain.
3. What do you think about the teacher's competence in time management during virtual learning? Please explain.
4. What is the teacher's level of competence in virtual learning?
5. Based on your experience in virtual learning, what do you expect of teachers' competence in virtual learning?
6. What suggestions do you have for teachers to improve their competencies in virtual learning?
7. Do you have any thoughts about teacher competency in virtual learning?

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