

## **EXPLORING ENGLISH TEACHERS' DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING WRITING THROUGH A LEARNING PLATFORM: A CASE STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research reports on a qualitative case study that explores the difficulties face by English teachers who teach writing through a learning platform at junior high school in Banjarmasin. Data were collected online using semi-structured interviews with two English teachers as the participants. The qualitative analysis results found three main subthemes, namely, technical obstacles, students conditioning and participation of students. The findings suggest that not all the challenges faced can be overcome by the teacher, the teachers only apply limited strategies to overcome them include asked the students to collect assignments to school if any offline meeting and conducted daily evaluation.

**Keywords:** Difficulties faced, English teacher, teaching writing, a learning platform.

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### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Writing is considered as the most elaborate skill to be taught to students. It is very important in communication especially in this information age. According to White (1986:10), writing is the process of expressing ideas, information, knowledge, or experience through writing and comprehending the writing in order to acquire knowledge or some information to share and learn. Writing is one of the ways to translate our thought for other people. Besides that, Tarigan (1994: 3) stated writing is the activity of producing or drawing graphic symbols that represent a language that people understand, so that other people can read the graphic symbols presented.

In the globalization era, especially since there is the COVID-19 pandemic, technology is used in many aspects of life such as social, political, including education. It is because the global spread of COVID-19 pandemic causes class suspensions resulting in the needs of online learning (Moorhouse, 2020). Even, from March 24th 2020 the Minister of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia has ordered all education units to run School From Home (SFH) use a learning platform due to the increasing spread of COVID-19 and to maintaining the health of students, teachers, and all educational staffs (Mendikbud, 2020).

A learning platform is a web-based learning ecosystem for the dissemination of educational and training information, communication, and knowledge. Its goal is to popularize and expand access to the World Wide Web, as well as to provide

greater access to Internet-accessible devices such as smartphones, laptops, tablets, and computers (Alraimi, Zo, & Ciganek, 2015; Chauhan, 2014). According to Krish (2008), a platform learning is defined as a set of learning activities in a subject delivered via a network that allows for access and knowledge exchange. This terminology has emerged specifically to describe a method of teaching and learning that makes use of internet technology. The online learning environment is useful not only for students to access knowledge and materials, but also for course participants to associate and collaborate.

A learning platform also used by teachers in delivering English subject material. Lauder (2008) stated that as a foreign language, English has gained a special status among other foreign languages existing in Indonesia because of many true causes. Secondary school students are required to take this subject because it is compulsory and determines as essential among other subjects which is Writing English has not been an exception inside. The use of a learning platform, of course, presents many challenges for stakeholders, including English writing teachers. As stated by Hadad, Oliveira (2017) and Cardoso (2016), there are still significant difficulties concerning digital inclusion. Presenting a learning platform as a learning media poses challenges in the implementation of an online learning system, particularly in terms of the use of facilities and the availability of infrastructure, both of which have been limited thus far. Furthermore, learning to teach an online course takes time;

preparing for online teaching requires a significant amount of time, effort, and workload (Kaleta, Skibba, Joosten, 2007). Without investigate the difficulties face by teacher and adequate technical support also assistance in schools, teachers cannot overcome the difficulties that prevent them from utilizing a learning platform.

To sum up, this case study explored the difficulties faced by English teachers in teaching writing trough a learning platform in SMPN 28 Banjarmasin during the COVID-19 pandemic including how the way they overcome those difficulties.

## **B. METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This research applied qualitative research. According to Creswell (2014) qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In qualitative research, the researcher must look at what people think and feel rather than just what they do. Donal (2010) stated that qualitative researchers attempt to comprehend a phenomenon by looking at the big picture rather than breaking it down into variables.

The type of this research was a case study research method, which is appropriate when the main

research question in a case study is how and why and focuses only on a current phenomenon (Yin, 2014). According to Ary et al (2010), a case study is a type of ethnographic research study that focuses on a single unit, such as a single person, group, organization, or program. The goal is to develop a thorough description and understanding of the entity (the "case"). The research is about exploring English teachers' difficulties in teaching writing through a learning platform. The data in this research can be gathered through online interview.

The result of the research explained in a narrative manner. It is used by researcher to explain participants' experiences and phenomena experienced (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

### **Setting**

The place of the research is SMPN 28 Banjarmasin. It is located at Jl. Kelayan A Kelurahan Murung Raya Gang Laila, Banjarmasin Selatan.

The school is selected because a learning platform is used to support teaching writing. Moreover, there are a lot of difficulties faced by English teachers in teaching writing through a learning platform that need to explore using this research, and the researcher wanted to know how the teachers way to overcome those difficulties.

### **Partitcipannts**

Table 1. Participant demographic data

No.	Name (Initials)	Gender	Age	Working years as a teacher	Level of education	Taught subject
1.	FT	Male	43	17 years	Bachelor/S1	English
2.	AD	Male	55	28 years	Bachelor/S1	English

This qualitative study involves two English teachers (refer Table 1). These participants are recruited for the present study because the participants are English teacher who are teaching writing at SMPN 28 Banjarmasin and using a learning platform to teaching Writing. They are English teachers with same degree background knowledge but have different experiences. Because of that, the researcher choose all of them as the participants of this study to get concrete information as much as possible about English teachers' difficulties in teaching writing trough a learning platform.

### **Data and Data Source**

The source of data in this research was all information that researcher got from the participants. The information is obtained from interview answers as the data related to the topic which conducted online using Google Form. The data in this research are the answers of interview with English teachers at SMPN 28 Banjarmasin.

### **Procedure of Collecting Data**

To collect the data in this qualitative case study, researcher used interview as the technique. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Interviewing is an important method for understanding a person's perspective on how he or she constructs meaning, as well as a method for arriving at dense description. The use of interview technique in this research is to obtain the data related to the issue. Interviews are used to collect data from

participants in their own words about their opinions, beliefs, and feelings about various situations.

In this research, interviews were conducted online using Google Form with the participants using 14 semi-structured interview questions to understand in detail participants experience about the difficulties faced in teaching writing through a learning platform and the way they overcome it.

In the first stage, the researcher sent a WhatsApp to the participants to asking for participation in a research about exploring English teachers' difficulties in teaching writing through a learning platform. In the second stage, the researcher asked participants to answer all interview questions on the Google Form that had been distributed. The results of the interviews with the participants were received on August 9, 2021.

### **Analysis Data**

In analysing the interview data, the researcher followed some steps suggested by Cohen et al. (2007). The steps were:

1. Reading the interview answers result carefully and repeatedly, then coding, classifying and categorizing the responses to the interview questions.
2. Examining words, phrases, and sentences repetition.
3. Drawing conclusions and data verification where data was displayed and interpreted.

## **C. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

To address the two research questions, the researcher discuss the findings of the research for each of the questions in turn in the sections that follow:

#### **1. The Teachers' Difficulties Faced in Teaching Writing through A Learning Platform**

##### **a. Technical Obstacles**

Teachers faced some challenges related to the emergence of obstacles associated with technical issues. Not all students have smartphone/laptops, quota internet and Internet signals are poor. The challenges presented by these obstacles determine the learning activities that can take place. Problems can arise if these technical obstacles cannot be overcome and it means that student participation in learning is not optimal. As a result, some students cannot follow the lessons and experience delays in completing assignments given by the teacher. These technical obstacles often occur for students that

low-income parents. This condition is described by teacher below:

*Teaching (English writing) through WA (WhatsApp) is still not efficient or appropriate to use, because 1. Students do not know the e-learning platform so they must be taught first. 2. The problem is that the available internet connection is less reliable. The difficulties / obstacles faced not all students have cellphones, students run out of data packages / lazy to study so we have difficulty monitoring students making the delivery of material less than optimal. (Mr. FT, Google Form Interview, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021)*

*There are several difficulties in teaching English writing through the E-learning platform, for example giving assignments and exercises are constrained by the supporting media owned by students, only a small number of them can send assignments/practices. There are a small number (students) who can't take online learning, maybe there are many factors (technical obstacles) that they experience, students don't understand learning to use WA (WhatsApp). (Mr. AD, Google Form Interview, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021.*

In the implementation of a learning platform, the availability of data packages and Internet networks, and ownership of smartphones is an absolute must. Students must have these so that all instructional activities can be followed smoothly. Although some teachers end up doing offline learning or asking students to go to school because of these factors, the risk of spreading COVID-19 is significant, so students and teachers rarely do these.

##### **b. Student Conditioning**

Conditioning students to participate in online learning is difficult for teachers. Factors that create these barriers may be divided into internal and external factors. For example, difficulties arising from the

student's home environment (Teacher do not know what students are doing at home). One factor is a less conducive home learning environment in which the activities of family member students cause distractions that reduce the concentration necessary to understand the subject matter. This internal factor can cause students who are learning not to be focused on learning. Mr. AD remarked on this.

*To apply English writing materials using cellphones / WA (WhatsApp) is not always efficient and appropriate because we cannot fully recognize / know what students are doing at home even though they can follow online (online classroom). (Mr. AD, Google Form Interview, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021)*

Conditioning students by teachers' remains difficult during teaching online, and a teacher must carry out conditioning activities in the virtual classroom so that learning can run smoothly. This dramatically determines the enthusiasm and motivation of students to learn. For this reason, a teacher must be able to ensure that all students are ready to learn and look for creative ways to engage them.

**c. The Participation of Students**

Student participation in instructional activities is faced with problems of data packages and ownership of smartphones, as well as the enthusiasm of students to learn. Such as the conditioning of students, the teacher must also seek ways to maintain student enthusiasm. During teaching online through a learning platform, several teachers stated that it was not easy to maintain student enthusiasm for learning. Students began to feel bored and less eager to learn online through a learning platform so that teacher has difficulty in monitoring the students. Mr. FT explained this.

*The difficulties / obstacles faced not all students have smartphones, students run out of quota data / (Students) lazy*

*to study so we have difficulty monitoring students making the delivery of material less than optimal. (Mr. FT, Google Form Interview, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021)*

**2. The Teachers' Way to Overcome the difficulties in Teaching Writing through A Learning Platform**

From several difficulties faced by English teacher in teaching writing through a learning platform during COVID-19 pandemic, teachers apply limited strategies to overcome them as follows:

**a. Collect Assignments to School if any Offline Meeting**

Students do not have smartphones and internet problems are one of the reasons why English writing material cannot be delivered optimally. So that students can still receive learning materials from the teacher. When there is an offline meeting at school, the teacher will ask students to do an exercise in the book and collect it again when there is the next offline meeting. This is done while still adhering to health protocols to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

*If students have difficulty (understanding the English writing material given by the teacher) we allow them to ask questions with a personal WA (WhatsApp) and for students who don't have smartphones, we ask them to work on the exercise book and collect them when there are meetings / offline at school. (Mr. FT, Google Form Interview, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021)*

**b. Conduct Daily Evaluation**

To know the optimal delivery of English writing material, the teacher evaluates students' participation through the WhatsApp as a learning platform during online learning and through homework given to students. For students who are active in online classroom learning, teachers can assess it directly. In addition, the teacher also uses homework (PR) as a way to evaluate students. Homework was given a time limit to

collect. When the homework has been accepted immediately corrected and assessed.

*For assessment / evaluation to the students in learning English writing. For active students through online (learning), (students) can immediately rate at that time. (Mr. AD, Google Form Interview, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021)*

*We evaluate students using daily assessments directly when assignments are received immediately corrected. Assignments are given a time limit to collect. (Mr. FT, Google Form Interview, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021)*

Evaluation was normally done after the teacher gave a conclusion on that day. Homework was given to strengthen students' understanding of the English writing material. Furthermore, homework gives to students in order to evaluate students individually.

### **Discussion**

From interview conducted by researcher with Mr. FT and Mr. AD as resource and English teacher in SMPN 28 Banjarmasin mentioned that the process of teaching writing English becomes less efficient. This is because using a learning platform in teaching English writing is a new thing for teachers and students. It makes students need more time to understand how to use the platform in learning.

The implementation of teaching is not much different from face to face teaching process. This is because teaching process is carried out through the Whatsapp as a learning platform. The teachers only need a device such as a laptop, computer or smartphone with internet data and material preparation for teaching.

Basically, teaching is a process of delivering an explanation of thing. In teaching, especially teaching online through a learning platform is the right way in the current situation. It is because between teachers and students there is do not needs to meet face to face become a crowd. However, even this does not make all teaching activities, especially English writing, run well. Based on the results of interviews with teachers, researcher believe that there are some difficulties faced by teachers in teaching English writing through a learning platform.

Compared to the previous situation, teachers can delivered English writing material and monitor their students face to face in class. Now everything switches online. Where in the practice through WhatsApp as a learning platform used there are several difficulties faced by teachers in teaching such as, technical obstacles, students conditioning and participation of students.

The challenges of technical obstacles that teachers and students face in the form are as like, unstable internet connections, data packages and some students who do not have learning devices or smartphones. This result confirms a previous study that found out that, one of the challenges that teachers face is an unstable internet connection and a limited quota (Nugroho, 2021). Besides that, teacher got difficulties about students conditioning, the lack of student motivation and engagement in online learning activities was a challenge for EFL teachers (Nugroho, 2021). Moreover, participation of students also be a challenges for teachers. As state by Lai et al., (2015) that The lack of student motivation and engagement in online learning activities appeared to be a serious issue that needed to be addressed. It happens on a regular and continuous basis. The students tend to skip the teachers' instruction that has been written a little longer, resulting in a less than optimal study outcome.

In the practice of teaching writing through a platform learning not all the challenges faced can be overcome by the teacher. The teachers only can apply limited strategies to overcome those difficulties such as, asking the student to collect assignments to school if any offline meeting for student who doesn't have electronic device like smartphone and conducted daily evaluation of students' individual homework (PR). According to Cooper (1989) homework is an important tool to involve evaluation in the school process. It is provides teacher with opportunity to involve in their students learning actively, helps teacher monitor their students' progress in the subject (Muhlenbruck et al, 2000; Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2006). It also means that teachers can only monitor their students through evaluation of assignments or homework sent by students via a learning platform.

From the explanation above, the researcher concludes that, although online teaching is the best solution during the current COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is undeniable that English teachers encounter difficulties in teaching or delivering English writing material through the a learning platform. Difficulties in monitoring or interacting with students and problems with learning tools are

the most frequently encountered by English teachers. This makes the delivery of English writing material not always efficient.

#### **D. CLOSING**

##### **Conclusion**

The conclusions from the results of the research in this thesis as follow:

1. English teachers' difficulties in teaching writing through a platform learning

The difficulties faced by teachers during teaching through a learning platform, include three subthemes namely, technical obstacles, students conditioning and participation of students.

a. Technical support, not all students have electronic device such as smartphone/laptops and also quota internet problem. It makes students cannot follow the lessons and experience delays in completing assignments given by the teacher. This causes teachers got difficulty in conveying English writing material evenly to all students.

b. Students conditioning, conditioning students to participate in online learning is challenges for teachers. It becomes a challenge for teachers because monitoring student activities virtually is not easy. A teacher must conduct conditioning activities in the virtual classroom to ensure that learning proceeds smoothly. That is why a teacher must be able to ensure that all students are prepared to learn and to find innovative ways to engage them.

c. Participation of students, maintain students enthusiasm for learning was not an easy challenge by teachers. It is because students began to feel bored and less eager to learn online through a learning platform so that teacher has difficulty in monitoring the students.

2. The teachers' way to overcome those difficulties

In the practice of teaching writing through a platform learning not all the challenges faced can be overcome by the teacher, the teachers only apply limited strategies to overcome them as follows:

a. Collect assignments to school if any offline meeting, students who do not have smartphones and one of the reasons why English writing material cannot be delivered optimally is due to

internet issues. In order to students can continue to receive learning materials from the teacher. When there is an offline meeting at school, the teacher will ask students to complete an exercise in the book and return it when the next offline meeting occurs.

b. Conducted daily evaluation, students who do not have smartphones and have internet problems are one of the reasons why English writing material cannot be delivered optimally. It is one of the teacher's challenges in successfully delivering material to students. In order to students can continue to receive learning materials from the teacher. When there is an offline meeting at school, the teacher will ask students to learning at school. The teachers also asked the students to complete an exercise in the book and return it again when the next offline meeting occurs. This is done while adhering to health protocols in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

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