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CONTENTS

TEACHER'S REFLECTION ON THE DECREASING PARTICIPATION WITHIN ONLINE CLASSES

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Abstract

The use of online classes used during covid-19 pandemic as the replacement of offline classes has affected the way teachers and students view language learning. Online classes are expected to function similarly as offline classes. However, teachers and students may find unequal aspects between the two teaching practices which make them prefer offline classes to online classes. This paper reports the findings in the writer's study in which she observed the students' participation from time to time within a semester teaching. This study aimed at discovering the dynamics of the students' participation levels within online classroom. Recording the communication activities in the online classes, the writer found that the students' participation varied across the time. The participation level was high in the beginning of the semester but it decreased significantly after the mid-term test. Comparing the participation level before and after the mid test, the writer found that the participation decreased 44% after the mid test. The average number of students' responses was around 205 in a session before the mid test and the number decreased into around 115 per session. The significant decrease of the students' participation in the class called for a teaching reflection. The writer as the lecturer felt the need to evaluate and reflect on her own teaching practices to reveal the reasons behind the decrease of students' participation in her online classes. The reflection was presented to portray some issues emerging within the implementation of online classes.

Keywords: *online classes; students' participation; reflection; pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of Covid-19 pandemic has affected many educational practices in many countries, including Indonesia. The replacement of offline teaching into online teaching has become one of the most noticeable impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (Agustina, 2021). Online learning has been defined by Gonzales and Louis (2018) as the learning activities which are done with the use of electronic devices completed with internet connection and it is done from a distance. When conducting online teaching and learning activities the teacher and students are usually not staying in a similar place. In this way, internet connection plays a crucial role for enabling teachers and students to conduct and join the online class.

Online learning itself can be done through the use of a wide range of online teaching and learning platforms. Despite the lack of experience of teaching and learning online, students' and teachers' familiarity with social media applications seems to ease the implementation of online classes. Mishra, Gupta and Shree (2020) state that many people are familiar with the use of social media application like WhatsApp Facebook, Instagram as well as twitter and this helps them move smoothly into the use of online

platforms for learning like Zoom, Google meet etc. Further, Mishra, Gupta and Shree (2020) assert that the pandemic has created a shift from traditional to modern teaching and learning approach.

Though the use of online classes seems to be an advanced and sophisticated movement within the educational practices, Agustina (2021) added that online classes in Indonesian contexts are still problematics in the way that teachers and students still encounter various problems when participating in online classes. Students' lack of participation is one example of problems in the implementation of online classes (Agustina, Matra & Karimah, 2021; Rasmitadilla et al., 2020). Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) also found that in online classes, teachers experienced difficulties to engage inactive and unmotivated students in the discussion and as a result only a small number of students took part in the class discussion. Teachers even found that some students slept during the online classes. Teachers had no clue of students' participation as teachers sometimes could not see students' face and mood (Mishra, Gupta, & Shree, 2020). The findings of the previous studies above suggest that making students actively participate in the class is an important task for the teachers conducting online classes.

According to Abdullah, Bakar and Mahbob (2012), effective learning can take place when active participation and interactions exist in the learning processes. Referring to this idea, the lack of interaction in the class may indicate the lack of effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes. In the context of online classes, the writer believes that without students' active participation in the online class the effectiveness of the class is likely to be questionable.

Generally, students can participate in various ways in their class. They can share opinions and ideas, answer teachers' questions, do a kind of demonstration in the class, discuss the task, and work on the assignment (Turner & Patrick, 2004). Lee (2005) classified students' participation into verbal and non-verbal participations. Using this classification, we can divide participation involving speaking activities as the verbal ones and those which do not involve the act of speaking such as raising hands and nodding head as non-verbal participation.

Furthermore, discussing students' participation in the teaching and learning activities to some extent reminds us to the idea proposed by Turner and Patrick (2004) where they believed that participation reflects students' motivation in their learning. They also described that students owning high level of motivation tend to be successful learners. However they also believed that participation in class is not only affected by the students' motivation but also the teacher's ways of teaching. Different ways of teaching are also believed to result in different kinds of participation.

In the study conducted by Mishra, Gupta and Shree (2020), it was found that students had little interest and attention when they joined online classes. It was also discovered that in order for the teachers to be able to teach online, they need some online teaching skills such as the skills to use the online learning platforms and the capability to handle issues during and after the online classes. In addition, they add that teachers also need to be patient, emphatic, and caring to students. Teachers also needed some excellent

skills for communication and presentation when they teach online classes. These findings signal the need of particular skills of teaching online so that teacher can increase students' interests and participation in the online classes.

Turner and Patrick's (2004) ideas about participation and its dynamics in the class activities have made the writer grew the interest to investigate the students' participation in one of her online classes. The writer was interested to find out the pattern of students' participation in her online classes. This is to inform the writer about the dynamics of the students' participation for one semester period of teaching especially when the teaching and learning activities were done online. This study was worth to carry out since knowing students' participation provides two great benefits. First, studying students' participation enables the teacher to look at students' progress in learning and second, observing students' participation can help the teachers to reveal the students' difficulties in learning so that teachers can provide appropriate support needed by the students (Turner & Patrick, 2004). With these benefits, the writer got stronger interest to do the study about the students' participation in the online class. In the current study, the writer focused to find out the dynamics of students' participation levels in her class of Philosophy of Language Education. Thus this article presents the result of the study on the levels of students' participation. A reflection on the research findings are also presented especially to help the writer see clearly on what actually happened in her class and to help her find the most appropriate approach to minimize similar problem to occur in her online classes.

METHODOLOGY

In this current study, the writer did a descriptive qualitative study where observation was done to capture the students' participation levels. The participation observed in this study covered the students' verbal responses when joining the learning activities through online classes. The data were collected by recording all students' responses in the classrooms in every single meeting in the Philosophy of Language Education class in the odd semester of the academic year of 2020/2021 in the English Language Education Department of Pekalongan University. There were 14 meetings in that online class and there were 34 active students joining the classes. The teaching and learning activities were done via WhatsApp Group, Zoom and Google Classroom. However the responses recorded were those found in WhatsApp Group as it was used more frequently than the other teaching and learning platforms.

All students' responses were recorded from meeting 1 to meeting 14. The numbers of responses were then compared from the first meeting to the last meeting. This was done especially to see the changing levels of students' participations.

The comparison was also made before and after the mid-term test. To do that, the average responses for the first seven meetings (meeting 1-7) and the last seven meetings (meeting 8-14) were calculated to discover the differences of the number of students' responses. The differences of the participation levels before and after the test indicated whether there was an increase or a decrease of students' participation in the beginning and end of the semester.

All of the students' responses were then presented in tables so that clearer

picture of the changing patterns of students' participation can be observed. However the writer did not do any interview to the students so that the results of the study only show the changing levels of students' participation within her online classes. The writer had not done any follow up study to find out the reasons for the students' unstable participation levels. This became one of the limitations in this current study.

Further, the writer did what so called a reflective teaching. Based on the study findings, the writer did some reflections on her teaching practices to see why the students' responses changed from time to time. The writer did evaluations on her own teaching activities and she tried to find some aspects where improvements were felt needed for her future online teaching practices.

DISCUSSION

Based on the observation which the writer did in her study, the number of students' responses varied across time in the online class of Philosophy of Language Education. From meeting 1 to meeting 14 the number of responses had never been similar for each of the meeting. The following table shows the number of responses found in each of the meeting.

Table 1. The number of students' responses

Meeting	students' responses
1	201
2	223
3	265
4	169
5	183
6	203
7	190
8	62
9	125
10	80
11	144
12	163
13	142
14	92

The table above suggests that there were some dynamics in level of students' classroom participation. It was high in the beginning, dropped in the middle of semester then went up at the end of the semester.

To compare the students' participation in the first seven meetings and the last seven meetings, the writer calculated the average number of the students' responses in those meetings. The result of this calculation is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. The comparison of average responses in the beginning and end of semester.

Meeting	Total Responses	Average
1 to 7	1434	205
8 to 14	808	115

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the average responses of the students was much higher in the beginning of the semester (the first seven weeks before the mid test). The mid test was given after week 7. There was a clear decrease of students' responses from week 8 to

week 14. This suggests that students were not as active as before. In percentage, the students' level of participation decreased 44% in the end of semester, from 205 into only 115 responses per session. This becomes an important call for the writer as the lecturer in the class being observed to do a reflection on what actually happened in the online classes.

Looking carefully at these findings of the current study, the writer came out with the following reflections.

First, it was very normal to have the changing patterns of students' participation as classes are always dynamic. The class atmosphere can vary from day to day depending on the students' motivation levels, the difficulty levels of the materials being taught, the teaching approach implemented by the teachers and many other factors. Moreover, in online classes the situation becomes more complex. Internet connection and the gadget can sometimes present barriers for both the students and the teachers. The writer was aware that the influence of various factors within an online class can affect students' participation. Thus each of the factors should be evaluated carefully.

Second, an increase or decrease in the students' responses in a teaching session can be categorized as normal when it happened in a small amount. However when the responses decreased sharply like what happened in this study, this suggests that something wrong was happening in the online class. The writer came out with three main areas which should have been fixed: test, tasks, as well as materials.

Looking at the finding where the students' participation level got lower after the mid-test, the writer believed that the main factor contributing to the decrease participation level was the test itself. The mid-test has given a particular burden for students and after the mid-test week, students returned to the online class and joined the learning activities. The writer thought that the students were actually not ready to do more learning. They got no break after the test and suddenly they had to learn the new materials in the Philosophy of Language Education class. The writer felt that students' lack of readiness to join the class physically and mentally became the main reason for the decrease of students' participation. It would be better if the writer gave students a session break after the mid-test so that they had time to prepare for the upcoming online class.

In terms of the tasks, the writer sometimes gave a scanned chapter of the book to the students. Along with that chapter, the writer provided a table as a learning guide for students. In that table, the writer wrote the main points to learn on the left column and the students should provide the descriptions of those main points on the right column. The students could get the description or the important information in the book chapter. Thus only after reading the book chapter students could complete the table. Without reading the book chapter, students would not be able to complete the table. Remembering what happened in the online classes, students spent so much time to complete the table. Some students often did not finish the task within the deadline or after the agreed extended time. Here was the example of the learning guide and task:

Table 3. Example of the task

No	Questions/Clues	Explanation/ Description
1.	What is lingua Franca?	
2.	When does English become lingua franca?	
3.	Who estimated the number of English speakers?	
4.	Which one is bigger in number? Native or non-native speakers?	
5.	What are some issues in discussing the English speakers?	

With this kind of task, students kept silent most of the time. They were busy doing the task and they did not respond verbally as frequently as when no task was given. Thus the writer believed that the kind of task affected the number of students' responses.

In addition, the writer also believed that the lack of mastery toward the materials presented by the writer was contributing to the decrease of the students' participation. Among the materials were the histories, the theories, the basic concepts, general ideas, beliefs, practices and the values within language education. The materials on the Philosophy of Language Education class were quite challenging for students as there were too many new information for them. When they did not have sufficient information about the topics being discussed, their contribution in the discussion was not much. As a result, their participation level decreased. The writer felt the need to give the materials much earlier to students so that they had sufficient time to read before joining the class session.

In addition, the writer acknowledged that she was a new lecturer for the students. The writer never met the students before. The Philosophy of Language Education class was taught to the 3rd semester students and at the same time this subject was a new subject in the new curriculum. No one ever taught this subject before. There were 35 students on the attendance list however only 34 students were active in the class. With these 34 new students in her class, the writer admitted that she did not have sufficient information about her students' proficiency level in English, characteristics and personality, learning styles, motivation levels, and interest in the subject being learnt. In addition, the writer had not been able to memorize the name and the face of the students when she taught them. This was due to the use of WhatsApp Group where students were not seen directly. Sometimes the students did not show their real photos in the profiles. In each of the meeting, the writer always offered the students some options on how the class would be conducted, namely through Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, or WhatsApp group. Interestingly students always mentioned that they preferred WhatsApp Group. They argued that the use of WhatsApp Group saved their internet data package. Besides the use of WhatsApp group was convenient for them. Though the writer agreed with the students' preference, the use of WhatsApp Group indirectly limited the ability of the writer to memorize the faces and the names of the students joining her class. Consequently, when her students' participation level got lower she could not approach the students as much as she could do when she knew the students well. This does not mean that the writer did not make any effort to invite students to take part in the class discussion. The writer only felt that she could do better when she knew her students and had sufficient information about them. Without knowing the students' characteristics, the writer experienced the difficulties in helping them with their personal learning problem such as the lack of self-confidence to speak up in the online class, which the writer saw as a possible problem for some of the students in her online classes.

Apart from that, with the use of online classes, the writer felt that the students' commitment to join every single session was hard to detect. Particularly with the use of WhatsApp group, the writer could not control whether the students were actually joining the class with full readiness to learn or not. The writer as the lecturer could not detect whether the students were at home or somewhere else. Even, the writer had no ideas whether the students had a single focus on the online class or they had other activities. The writer thought if the students did other activities other than learning, then their focus would be split. As an example, there were cases where more than one-third of students in the online classes were very passive. Those students only responded once or twice in each of the classroom session. The writer thought that the students had been focusing on other activity and therefore they could not fully contribute and participate in the online class.

Last but not least, the writer also tried to relate the situation in her class with the covid-19 pandemic. The health of the students was an important priority in the pandemic time. It was good that students could join the class from home. In the case where they were not in a good health, they were still able to attend the class. More specifically, with the use of WhatsApp group or google classroom they did not need to show their face directly. This gave them much ease in their learning activities. The writer had a point of view that the health of the students during the pandemic time might contribute to their participation in the class. When students felt unwell (either due to the covid-19 or other diseases) the writer believed that they would tend to listen rather than to contribute in the discussion.

Overall, in these reflections, the writer has tried to think of some possible reasons on why the students' participation in the class got lower. The writer found the need to give a break for students between the test and the following class session. The writer also felt the need to change the type of tasks and materials. It was also necessary for the writer to know the students better. She was aware that she needed to enhance students' participation even more. However all of the thoughts presented here were based on the writer's perspectives as the lecturer of the online classes. Some other explanation and more valid reasons behind the decreasing participation of the students could be achieved when students were also asked to present their points of view. This had not been done by the writer and this contributed to the limitation and the weaknesses of the study.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown how the participation of students in an online class changed from meeting to meeting within a semester teaching period. The responses of the students never got similar across the 14 meetings in the online classes. The comparison of the average responses in the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester also suggests the sharp decrease of the students' participation level. The writer has got sufficient data to portray the dynamics of the students' participation in her online classes. This finding to some extent also suggests the idea that there was a problem of students' participation within the implementation of the online classes during the pandemic time. This finding strengthens the findings of the previous studies conducted by Agustina, Matra and Karimah (2020), Rasmitadilla et al. (2020) and Atmojo and Nugroho (2020).

However, this study still has the weaknesses and limitations. This study had not covered the students' views towards the factors contributing to the decrease of students' participation in the philosophy of language education class in the English Language Education Department in the Teachers' Training and Education Faculty of Pekalongan University.

The limitation of the paper however has been compensated by the reflections presented by the writer as the lecturer of the class. The reflection suggests some clues on what actually happened in the class and some possible causes of the changing levels of students' participation. Future researchers of course have the chance to explore more on students' points of view about their participation so that more complete picture can be captured within the contexts of students' participation level and the reasoning. Future researchers can also carry out studies on the students' participation within online classes with the use of other popular teaching platforms like zoom, google meet and the like. Besides, how the language teachers encourage students to participate in the online classes can also be investigated so that the literature on the students' participation in the class, the motives, the dynamics as well as the teachers' efforts in increasing the students' participation can be enriched.

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