



LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT IN ONLINE LEARNING: CHALLENGES AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR ESP CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

This study is intended to find out the strategies used to assess the students and some challenges faced by lecturers in ESP classes at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The researchers were interested in finding the types of assessment and how lecturers conduct assessment during pandemic era. An exploratory sequential mixed methods design was used in this study to answer the research questions. Both quantitative and qualitative design were used to deepen the data. The subjects in this research were English lecturers who taught ESP classes in several majors at UIN Maliki Malang. The results from data collection revealed that the assessment which employed by lecturers was fit with the characteristics of students. The differences of assessment were caused by the students' dissimilar characteristics and their background. Finally, this study addressed suggestions for English lecturers, stakeholder and future researchers regarding the assessment to run in online class. Assessment must be created and developed well for the students before they join the lesson and the lecturer has to use several strategies to handle in case if one of the assessment tools does not work.

Keywords: *ESP class, language assessment, online learning.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The widespread of Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) has changed many aspects, one of them is education aspect. To stop the virus transmission, Indonesian government took the policy to apply online education system in all educational levels, so that students can learn from home and lecturers can also work from home. This new system force lecturers to have online assessment during teaching and learning process.

Concerning about the assessment in online class learning, the same problems also occur in ESP Classrooms at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Many ESP lecturers claim that assessing their students' real language improvement is really arduous. Some of them complain that cheating among students is one of the reasons. Some others mention that the limitation of time to have one by one interaction in online class also becomes the factor why lecturers cannot comprehend their students' language skills as better as in offline learning.

Online learning is considered as the innovation which provides a lot of benefits. Nguyen (2015) believes that online learning is a form of significant changes in all aspects of lives, including in education aspect that breaks the border of physical classroom as the only place of learning process. Ngampornchai and Adams (2016) mentions that online learning and Information Communication Technology becomes a crucial attempt to develop their self-responsibility in education field and control their own learning pace. Means, Bakia, and Murphy (2014) in Ngampornchai and Adams (2016) also support that virtual classes may establish unique interaction between students and lecturers in term of providing feedback on student performances. Moreover, Dhawan (2020) confirms that in Covid-19 pandemic situation, online class reveals as the perfect education solution in this crisis time. Virtual classes also offer the flexibility for learners to schedule their timeline. For educators, online learning may enhance their pedagogical skills to involve technology in creating interesting virtual face-to-face teaching process that is able to train students learn independently.

However, online learning which has been running intensively since the pandemic widespread in all over the world also reveals many challenges, both for students and lecturers. In terms of students' aspect, online class learning may cause the declining of students' learning motivation. Makarim, Indonesian Minister of Education, (2020) states that students may experience difficulties in study concentration during online learning from home. They can also feel extremely bored which potentially creates mental disorder. Another online learning challenge is miscommunication between students and lecturers that also often occurs during online teaching and learning. Students may encounter misinterpretation toward lecturers' instructions and explanations. Moreover, the internet connection also becomes another challenge for students living in rural or remotes areas. In addition, students often complained about the increasing of internet costs they need in daily learning process.

In terms of teachers' aspect, virtual learning class leads lecturers get difficulties to manage distance learning. It is stated by Dussault (2018) that online learning demands lecturers to execute tiring mountainous tasks, such as preparing materials, creating interesting activities, checking students' works, and providing detail feedback for each student during online class. Based on writers' opinions, online class learning also reduces the attachment between lecturers and students, so that lecturers get difficulties to do the personal approach if students experience difficulties in their learning process. Varga (2017) mentions in her research that the positive relationship between lecturers and students is one of the most important factors which can influence students' achievement. Then, the main problem faced by lecturers is lecturer' challenges to assess their real

students' skill improvement. One of the factors is because online learning also encourages the high risk of cheating among students. Watson and Sottile (2010) claims that internet and related technology assistance in academic field has teased students today to conduct more academically dishonest than students in previous generations. The easiness of accessing sources and answers via the internet, as well as the easiness of interacting with other students by online, has caused students nowadays as a "copy paste" generation.

Besides, the researchers chose ESP lecturers at ELC UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang as the research subject because they have significant roles to achieve the campus goal as the "World Class University". As it is known that UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim is intensively promoting many programs and building facilities that support its dream to become an international standard campus. One of those programs is providing English compulsory course for students in the 3rd and 4th semesters. All non-English department students are obliged to take the courses, named English I and English II. Thus, in running this program, the roles of ESP lecturers are crucial. Related to that, the researchers believe that conducting this research will help ESP lecturers in ELC UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang to overcome their assessment challenges in teaching online class by applying some effective assessments. If the online teaching and learning process in ESP classes during pandemic can run well, the campus goal will also be reached.

In the process of teaching and learning, teacher should consider five major principles of language assessment including practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback (Brown, 2004). Moreover, there are two types of language assessment including formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment aims to evaluate students' ability towards the process of their learning. After conducting the assessment, the teacher provides feedback and suggestion in order to improve the learner's language ability. On the other hand, summative assessment is conducted at the end of learning process, such as midterm test, final test, or a final project. Assessment plays an important role in teaching and learning process, and so in online learning. Online assessment, assuming the teacher's firm grasp of good online teaching techniques, should give students a chance to have better learning. Online media offer many platforms to create interactive, authentic assessment that engage learners within the sustainability of their course's learning journey rather than presenting the assignment(s) as barriers to moving forward in completing the course. As the sample of online learning assessment, Gaytan and McEwen (2007) found in their study by identifying the assessment method that considered to be particularly effective in online environment including projects, self-assessments, and peer-evaluations, peer review with feedback, portfolios, quizzes, and asynchronous discussion.

Thus, related to the study background above, the researchers are eager to find out the challenges in conducting an online class and to figure out the effective strategies to conduct online learning language assessment in ESP classroom.

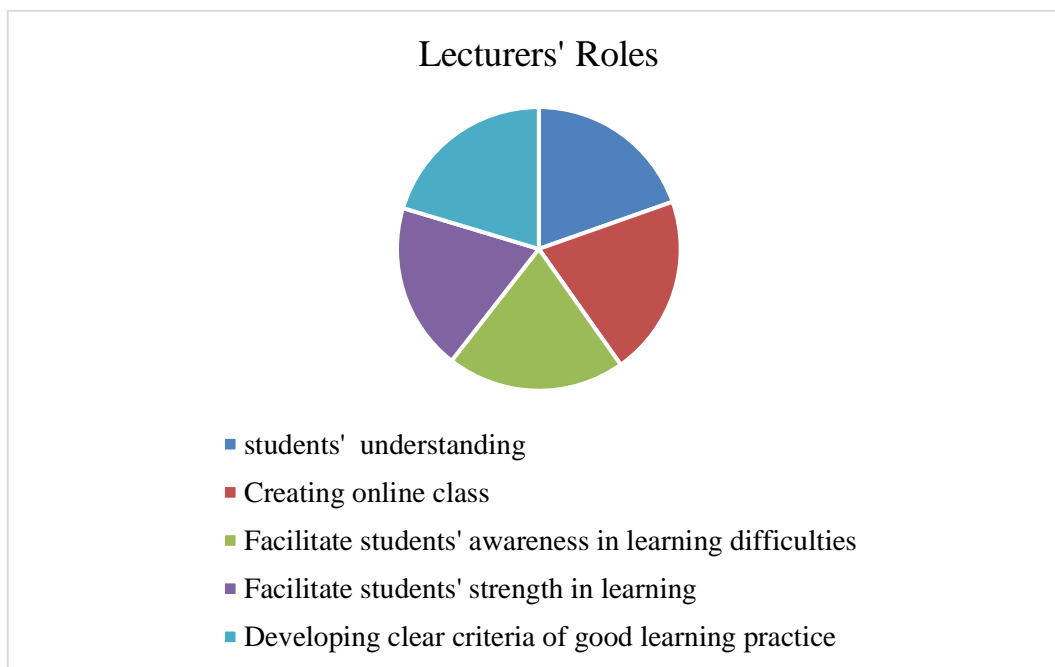
2. METHOD

The present study employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods design to find the deep understanding on language assessment in online learning, specifically, the challenges faced by the lecturers and the effective strategies carried out by the lecturers in conducting online assessment in ESP classrooms. Thirty-eight lecturers of ESP class of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang were selected as the sample of this study. In addition, two students of ESP class from different majors were also selected to enrich the data and triangulate the data from the lecturers. The data of this study were collected through interview, documents, and questionnaire. In the process of collecting data, exploratory sequential mixed methods design begins with qualitative phase, and followed by quantitative phase (Creswell, 2014). In qualitative phase, three participants of ESP lecturers and two students of ESP class including social and Science majors were interviewed by the researcher. The data were also enriched by collecting lecturers' documents related to the assessment they employed in online class. The next step, the data obtained from qualitative phase were analyzed by the researcher to find out how the lecturers run their online class and how they assess their students' performance in which the results of qualitative phase were used to develop a questionnaire. Concerning to the second phase of this study, the quantitative phase was carried out by administering the questionnaire to thirty-five ESP lecturers. By employing exploratory sequential mixed method design, the data obtained from a few individuals in qualitative phase can be generalized to a large sample in quantitative phase. However, to avoid the bias of data, triangulations was used to decrease the researchers' prejudices. The sources to do the triangulation are the documents and teaching journals from three lecturers, the interview guideline and the online survey as well.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

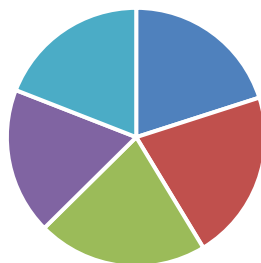
In this research, there were two types of data obtained from the field, the quantitative and qualitative data. The results of the questionnaires were spelled out into some main categories, such as online class environment and lecturers' guidance, students' self-assessment, tasks in online learning, and lecturers' innovation in assessment. Based on the questionnaire results, the researchers found that most lecturers agreed that creating helpful and supportive environment during online class was crucial. Lecturers needed to provide opportunities for students to show what they have learned at class (79%). Besides, creating an online class environment which could

facilitate students to complete as assigned task became one of the effective keys to conduct students' assessment (83%). Students were able to know what they have should do because lecturers allowed and assisted them to find their learning difficulties (82%) and learning strengths (77%) during online class and helped them to develop clear criteria of good learning practice (82.5%).



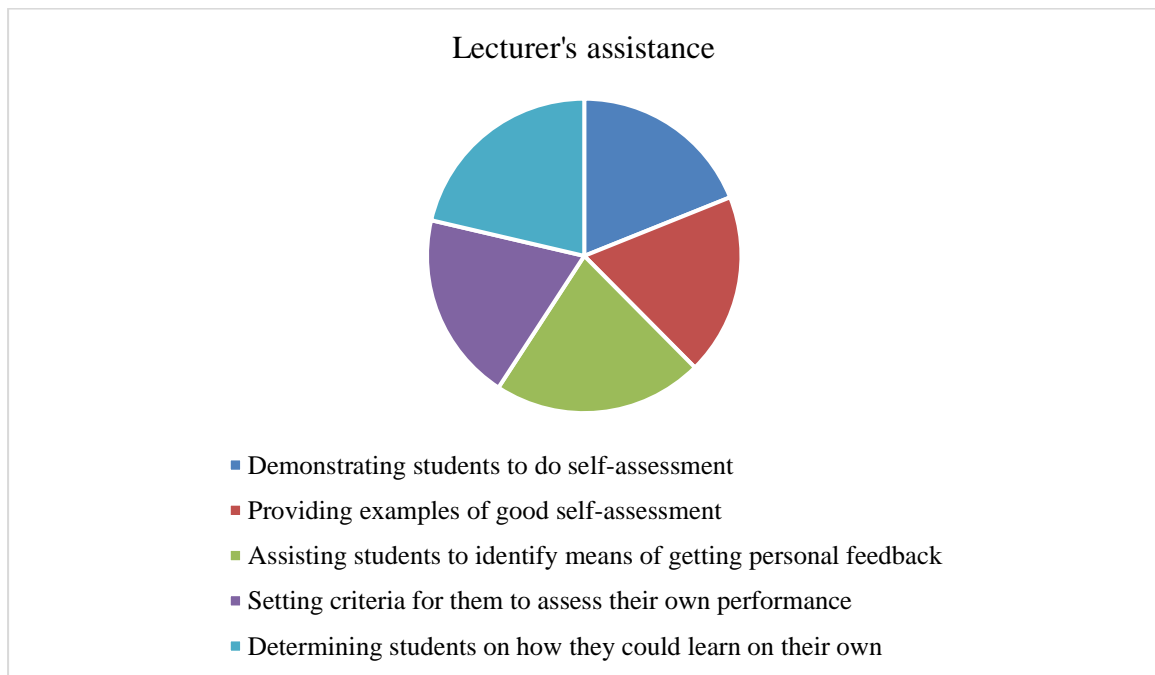
Lecturer's guidance in the teaching and learning process like guiding students to set their goals and monitor their own learning progress also became one of the most significant keys to have effective assessment (82.5%). Lecturers were strongly recommended to help students to improve their learning process and virtual class performance (87%) by providing online feedbacks (87%). Those feedbacks could be the best ways for lecturers to provide specific information to students about their strengths and weaknesses in online learning class (75%) and make suggestions to them about how they could develop better learning strategies (78%).

Lecturers' Guidance



- Setting students' goal and monitor them
- Helping students to improve learning process
- Providing online feedback
- Explaining the strength and weaknesses
- Giving suggestions for students' future goal

In assessment, lecturers also needed to demonstrate students how to do self-assessment (70%). Providing examples of good self-assessment practice that was able to make students examine their own learning process (69%) could also be another alternative. Moreover, assisting students to identify means of getting personal feedback (80%) and setting the criteria for them to assess their own performance at class (72%) could help students to determine how they could learn on their own at class (79%). Some kinds of tasks given by lecturers in virtual learning class also held an important point. Lecturers had better allow students to perform task-based activities more than paper and-pencil tests (78%). This kind of activities could encourage them to explore their language skills more through the authentic learning activities and avoid them from plagiarism or cheating each other.



The last aspect which could make the effective assessment was lecturers' innovation in assessing students' skills. Lecturers needed to learn alternative approaches to assess students' learning outcomes (76%). Lecturers who taught in different departments must have felt how diverse the students' English skills were. Thus, learning different teaching approaches was very significant to make lecturers able to apply the most appropriate ones at their classes. Lecturers could determine how students' learning can be improved by performing classroom observations (68%). The observations could be conducted from students' interactions in some online learning platforms used at class, such as Google-Classroom, WAG, Telegram, etc. By observing periodically, lecturers could identify better learning opportunities (81%), diagnose areas for improvement of instructional activities (75%), enhance the quality of online classroom instruction (79%), explore and finally create effective virtual teaching methods and strategies (80%). Moreover, lecturers needed to continuously collect learning data from students to improve instructional process (74%).

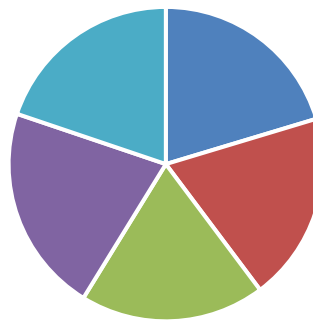
Lecturers' innovation



- Learning alternative approaches to assess students' outcome
- determining students' learning
- Identifying better learning opportunities
- Diagnosing areas for instructional activities improvement
- Exploring and creating virtual teaching method and strategies
- Collecting learning data to improve an instructional process

Collecting data from students was also helpful for lecturers to make the decision of how they measured extent of learning at the end of a lesson or subject (77%), determined the degree of accomplishment of a desired learning outcome at the end of a lesson (73.5%), assessed the quality of student learning in a class at the end of an instruction (77%), and made final decision about the level of learning that students achieved at the end of online class (72%). It was also crucial for lecturers to evaluate the level of competence of students at the end of an instructional program (81%). In the end, those all data was positively important as the materials to improve lecturers' online instruction for the next teaching term or school year (75%).

Lecturers' additional work



- Measuring the learning at the end of a lesson
- Determining the degree of accomplishment of a desired learning outcome
- Making final decision about students' performance at the end of lesson
- Evaluating the level of competence of students at the end of an instructional program
- Importing all positive data for the next teaching school year

Besides, using quantitative data, the research was completed by the qualitative data. Based on the qualitative data taken, topic about feedback was also covered. The teacher stated that giving feedback to students is the teacher's responsibility to boost students' performance. They had to what students have to do and not in speaking class and they were able to learn the other's mistake. This could make students learn from the class. The good feedback is written or oral explanation given from lecturers in order to enhance their students to achieve the objectives. The feedback is better when it is conveyed by applying unnamed form or keeping students' name confidential and just underlining which one of the mistakes that should be corrected.

The other aspect obtained from qualitative data was about challenging in creating and developing assessment. Lecturers are suggested to make various assessment styles depending on their students' needs. In the progress of making the assessment, many challenges were faced by lecturers. These are because of some factors such as students' lack of creativity or interest, misunderstanding between teacher and students, teacher's less control, no clear guidance from institution about what students' need to achieve and how they have to achieve it, over-used need analysis used year by year, students' readiness in joining class, students' lack of internet connection of quota. Those challenges can be much bigger when not faced fast by the facilitator or lecturers in the class. In the case of students' lack of creativity, the teacher had already given an example of how students have to do for the task. Unfortunately, in the end, they did their work carelessly and began to copy the example given. It was actually like cheating activities because they did not produce the real of their task. No original idea came from them.

In term of using the platforms, three participants or lecturers handle the class by applying synchronous and asynchronous learning. The most-commonly used platforms in the class are WhatsApp and Zoom. The reason why they used these kinds of platforms is that they are easy to use and accessible for students. Meanwhile, to distribute the task, lecturers could be helped by Google Classroom because of its practicality in managing the task. In addition to it, they are also helped by YouTube and Google Meet to give assessment to students. It depended on the need where the lecturer and students want. According to them, using Zoom is actually easier than using Google Meet. But, because of the limited time on Zoom, they sometimes preferred using Google Meet to lengthen the duration of the teaching.

Here, to make the data valid, interviewing students are also important to have their views regarding the assessment done by their lecturer. The interview results showed that students from A faculty and B faculty had the same opinions regarding some categories, such as the importance of lecturers' guidance, fun and supportive environment at class, and lecturers' innovation in

assessment. For the importance of lecturers' guidance, they agreed that lecturers needed to give opportunities for students to show what they have learned at class. It made them aware of their learning process monitored and be fully paid attention by the lecturers. A guidance from lecturers to set students' goals and monitor their own learning progress also became one of the most significant keys to have effective assessment. Moreover, lecturers were also strongly recommended to help students to enhance their learning process and virtual class performance by providing online feedbacks. Those feedbacks could be the best ways for students to get specific information about their strengths and weaknesses in online learning class. Then, students also needed suggestions about how they could find and develop better learning strategies.

In term of class management, students in both departments agreed if their lecturers establish helpful environment that could support the online teaching and learning process in virtual class. It was because creating an online class environment which could facilitate students to complete as assigned task became one of the effective keys to conduct students' assessment. Students were able to know what they have should do because lecturers allowed and assisted them to find their learning difficulties and learning strengths during online class and helped them to develop clear criteria of good learning practice.

Lecturers recognized well on how they assess their students' performance depending on what they need to achieve and how their learning be successful. They assess their students based on the principles given and they tried to apply to the online class. Even though, running an online class is not simple as its name but all lecturers who are the participants in this study do a lot of efforts to gain knowledge from other friends and search any information about how to run an online class smoothly and effectively. This new normal era forces the lecturers to handle the class as they conduct a real classroom but the challenges and interferences come hand in hand. The internet connection becomes the first challenge the lecturers and students have to face. The speed of internet connection or Wi-Fi is not always in their home. That is why they must spend their mobile data of their smartphone to join the virtual class. It is not about how the lecturers teach their students perfectly or flawlessly but rather than the essence of class life when it enters the learning process.

Assessment in a real or an online class is really important since it can be a guidance for both the lecturers and students in seeing how far they have already gone through and making sure that they are on the right track. The assessment in those two classes should be different. The means to assess the students' performance and the process to run it are not the same. Two types of assessment, namely formative and summative were used by all lecturers who became the

participants in this study. The lecturers in class have already done these types even though the forms were different because they run an online class. According to Brown (2004), formative and summative assessment are two kinds of assessment applied by teacher in the class.

In relation to that, covid-19 pandemic made the lecturers do maximum efforts to gain students' motivation, engagement and assess them in online learning. The principles of assessment should not change anything but improve the quality of it. In running online class, challenges and difficulties may come depending on the types of class. No single assessment is good to use in class but the most appropriate one is the one which can help students to achieve learning objective. Gaytan and McEwen (2007) point out by identifying the assessment method that considered to be particularly effective in online environment including projects, self-assessments, peer-evaluations, peer- review with feedback, portfolios, quizzes, and asynchronous discussion, achieving the learning objective can be easier.

Assessing students' English skills in online class learning is a complex thing to do. Lecturers must consider many things, so that the assessment can be reliable and suitable with students' real language capabilities. The first thing the lecturers should do is establishing good relationship with students during virtual teaching and learning process. Related to Varga (2017) in her research, the positive relationship between lecturers and students is one of the most important factors which can influence students' achievement. It may also become the way out of one of online class problems with regard to students' lack motivation. Students who have a good attachment and get proper guidance from their lecturers tend to be more motivated and engaged that can lead them to be more successful in academic career. It is reflected by the result of quantitative data which says that lecturer's guidance in the teaching and learning process like guiding students to set their goals and monitor their own learning progress also becomes one of the most significant keys to have effective assessment.

Lecturers in online learning should also open opportunities for students to show what they have learned at class. Giving those kinds of opportunities may be one of their ways to monitor students' learning process. Students are able to know what they should do because lecturers allow and assist them to find their learning weaknesses and strengths during online class and help them to develop criteria of good learning practice. It is related to Dhawan (2020) who confirms that in Covid-19 pandemic situation, online class reveals as the perfect education solution in this crisis time. It provides the accessibility, affordability, and flexibility for learners to schedule their timeline. It is believed as a way that can encourage their life-long learning as a new self-developing skill.

Assessing skills in class is depending on what the teacher need to score and how the students respond to it. Skills taught in the odd semester are speaking, listening and reading. In assessing speaking, common criteria assessed are fluency, grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, pronunciation, and task (Nunan, 1999). For checking the grammar in speaking class, the lecturers preferred ignoring because when lecturers are focusing on it too much then the students' motivation getting low. Students would feel that they made so many mistakes during the speaking class. This is not like what Nunan states about assessing speaking since Indonesia applied English as EFL.

Another skill that has to be assessed is listening. Providing the best way to score students' listening skill is a must. Ayuanita (2013) believes that it is important for students to get used to listen to different English accents. To familiarize students with variety of English accents, the lecturers had already provided additional materials of listening out of book. To bear in mind, lecturers also considered the students' level of English proficiency. The variety of English accents might find the students dizzy to listen, thus selecting proper and suitable material based on students' prior experience and level of proficiency can be the best method to do in listening class.

Reading is also needed to assess. Reading activities in Indonesia might get lower because there is no such obligation to read regularly and there was no support for children in their golden age to begin to read. In brief, extensive reading is not familiar among Indonesian children. Therefore, when students are getting older and joining the university, the capacity of their reading skill may not enough to help them and support their learning process. Rasinsky (2004) states that reading assessment should help students as the readers to comprehend the text automatically and accurately. The lecturers in this study had already provided the best way to get students' responses by giving Google Form or Quizzes to know the students' understanding and monitor them as well as to guide them when they needed a hand.

The last aspect which can make the effective assessment is lecturers' innovation in assessing students' skills. As it is said by Darby (2019) that for educators, online learning may enhance their pedagogical skills to involve technology in creating interesting virtual face-to-face teaching process that is able to train students learn independently. Those pedagogy skills are not only about creating appropriate online class materials, having successful discussion and activities with students, but also about assessing their real capabilities. Thus, lecturers need to learn alternative approaches to assess students' learning outcomes. Lecturers who teach in different departments must feel how diverse the students' English skills are. Thus, learning different teaching approaches is very significant to make lecturers able to apply the most appropriate ones at their classes.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings above, the data collected have already answered the research questions raising how the lecturers conduct online teaching practice, face the challenges in determining and developing the assessment, and employ the effective strategies in order to engage ESP students in the virtual classroom.

The lecturers have already employed some teaching practices and the assessment well such as, providing students with suitable platforms to run the class, giving time to give feedback for students, providing students with high-quality of material to use in online learning using formative and summative assessment and many more. Yet, all the things cannot be done successfully if there are no support and good facilities provided by all the participants such as students who must be the participants of class process, institution leaders who provide time and opportunity for lecturers to run online class and the lecturers themselves.

To create and develop the assessment, lecturers also faced some challenges and interferences. However, they have to provide better and different assessment tools for their students. This is a new normal era of pandemic that forces the lecturers to develop the skills in online teaching. Moreover, the teaching and learning process may run in online system next year if it is seen from the condition right now. Thus, lecturers are encouraged to upgrade their skill about technology and relate it to their teaching practice even though running online class is not the same as the real one. All aspects should be set well and appropriately before the class begins. The interference may often come is the internet connection. The problem can come from the lecturers and students as they do not know what they have to do with the signal problem. Then, controlling online class may become the challenging one as well since lecturers are not in the same situation and condition with their students when they teach. So, class management and planning should be created as what the students need and the lecturer wants because lecturers know about the students' characteristics and needs and they also know better about the learning objectives.

Some suggestions are delivered based on the findings. The English lecturers need to know the students' characteristics and their condition before employing the assessment tools to assess their students. Showing their interest in teaching the students makes the students enjoy in class even in online class and to tell them the benefits of mastering English. The English lecturers have to facilitate and guide the students in learning process and tell them how assessment are helpful for their effective learning. The English lecturers are encouraged to be flexible, open-minded, and easy-adapting in order to vary assessment tools to assist the students' achievement. The type of

assessment given to the students must be in line with the students' needs to help them to reach their goal in learning language. Moreover, the stakeholders like the institution and leaders have to make a proper and suitable assessment and do needs analysis as needed.

All in all, further researchers can also do the same research in this field but with different method or the setting of study. The result may give the different views but it can enrich the findings of the study. However, the findings will give more contributions to English Language Teaching (ELT). Additionally, the future researchers may broaden the field to the other field but it is still related to English teaching.

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