CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

It has been mandatory to hold online classes for college and university level as the result of COVID-19 outbreak. Teaching-learning process conducted in a computer-mediated communication system can be defined as a virtual classroom (Hiltz, 1995). Although a virtual class is not something new, it is increasingly more popular because of several reasons. First, the advancement of technology has opened wider access to virtual classrooms (Cheryan et al., 2011). Many types of digital technology such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and the internet allow people to communicate and join virtual classes. Second, the current worldwide pandemic has forced teachers and students to move fully to online mode (Dhawan, 2020).

For some English skill teachers, teaching in a virtual environment may pose challenges. The shift from face-to-face classes into virtual classes can be complex. Teachers should conduct examination and reflection of pedagogical practice to suit the needs of a virtual environment and to achieve their teaching goals. Although one teacher can teach well during face-to-face classes does not guarantee that the atmosphere in an online class will be the same as teaching in

an offline classroom. In a speaking class, teachers are required to create communicative and interactive activities by giving students a great deal of opportunities to practice the target language. While the teacher is the activity maker, actually the teacher's interventions are required to be the least in speaking class so the students gain more chances in expressing their thoughts and feelings on the topic (Achmad & Yusuf, 2014). In a face-to-face class, teachers can easily divide students in groups, assign activities, and supervise the activities. Teachers can observe directly how students interact and engage in group discussions. However, this cannot be done in virtual classrooms easily. Online teaching has the potential for professional development by transforming educational practices.

The modern way to teach speaking skills is in virtual classrooms. Teaching speaking online can be organized in many ways that will help students interact comfortably and improve their speaking skills. While teaching speaking virtually, teachers need some equipment and programs that will support the teaching-learning process. The use of the Blackboard Collaborate software program is one of the examples of technology that is used for teaching speaking in online classrooms (Hamouda, 2020). The teachers in online classrooms cannot have much intervention as in the traditional classrooms. Students will be more self-regulating in their own language learning.

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Teaching speaking in virtual classes requires the teacher to be aware of the challenges that may occur in the teaching-learning process, for example, the students' readiness to use a particular platform and some technical issues (Hartono, 2020). Teachers sometimes could ask the students to record their speaking assignment and submit in the predetermined time. However, this method will present the teachers' challenge when the submissions do not fulfill the submission requirements. The teachers will be faced with the options of whether the teacher should mark the submission that does not conform to the requirements or give the specific student additional time for a resubmission that meets the format requirements which can be unfair for other students who already submit the task (Gultom, 2020). Getting a live audience and capturing the audience's reaction in the recording are also some of the challenges of teaching public speaking online (Linardopoulos, 2010). Speaking forces the students to comprehend the situations including when, where, why, and in what ways to produce the language. The teachers will have a hard time boosting students' confidence and language use because the students themselves cannot do live speaking in front of the audience.

Various strategies can be used to cope with the virtual teaching challenges. Gultom (2019) stated that for the learning process to be more efficient and embrace learning requirements, strategies to teach speaking online

are essential and needed. Teachers may design and some digital contents for their class that are also suitable enough for the students.

The objective of this study is to investigate the challenges that teachers encounter in teaching speaking in virtual class in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic and their strategies to overcome those challenges. This topic will also lead to what strategies speaking teachers use to cope with those challenges where teachers and students cannot avoid using virtual class for teaching and learning process in the middle of the Corona pandemic.

Existing literature on the challenges of teaching speaking states that students' inhibition, unstable internet connection, external distractions, also limitations of non-verbal cues and E-learning platform are some of the most common problems in virtual speaking class (Hartono, 2020; Murniati, 2020). To engage students, teachers have to create activities to allow students to participate more actively such as the use of asynchronous online discussion forums (Bakar et al., 2013). In their study on online speaking class, Bakar et al. found an asynchronous online discussion forum such as the MEDiF can be effective to enhance the learner's speaking skill. The online forum limits the physical barriers and provides a virtual environment that can help the weak learners to increase the use of English, and also construct the use of higher-order thinking skills.

1.2. Field of the Study

The field of this study is Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL).

1.3. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on teachers' challenges and strategies when teaching speaking in virtual classrooms. This study will not discuss other English skills.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What are the challenges of teaching speaking in virtual classrooms?
2. How do teachers modify their teaching strategies in virtual speaking classrooms?

1.5. Objective of the Study

1. To find out the challenges of teaching speaking in virtual classrooms.
2. To identify the way teachers modify their teaching strategies in virtual speaking classrooms.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The researcher hopes this study will give some contributions to:

1. English Speaking Teachers

This research is expected to give a contribution to the teaching of speaking. It is suitable since this research can lead to research on how to overcome the challenges during teaching speaking in a virtual class.

2. English Teaching

This research is expected to give a contribution to develop the Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) knowledge.

3. Researchers

This study hopefully can be considered as a reference for those who want to do further research on teaching speaking skills in online classrooms. This study provides information that may help other researchers to understand the challenges of speaking teachers in online classrooms and how they modify their teaching strategies.

1.6. Definition of Terms

1.6.1. Virtual Classroom

A virtual classroom is defined as a synchronous online learning environment with the assistance of some online features such as online meetings, chat, forums, whiteboards, desktop sharing, and document sharing (Çakýrodlu, 2014). Virtual classrooms acquire decent technology for smooth execution.

1.6.2. Speaking

Speaking is a productive skill that consists of generating systematic verbal utterances to deliver information (Bailey, 2005). Speaking is one of the important English proficiency skills that need to be developed for the enhancement of communication among language learners (Achmad & Yusuf, 2014). For second or foreign language learners, it becomes a priority to master speaking skills in English (Hamouda, 2020).

1.6.3. Challenge

Challenge, as written in Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), is defined as something that requires a huge amount of mental and physical effort, and also test someone's ability to achieve a successful result. Challenges might disturb a process of something.

1.6.4. Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies point to the methods that can assist students to be able to learn the course contents they desire and construct achievable goals in the future (Sarode, 2014). Teachers apply some teaching strategies in order to smoothen the teaching learning process in their classes.