

# Teachers' perspectives on teaching EFL speaking virtually: A case study of COVID-19 pandemic survival

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## ABSTRACT

The goals of this study are to analyze and provide in-depth detail about how teachers felt and how they taught during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used a qualitative approach via the Atlas.ti application and used a semi-structured interview to collect data. Five teachers were recruited to answer the research questions to determine what they thought, how they felt, and what they did during the pandemic. To improve the consistency of theme analysis coding (validity or trustworthiness), the study was adjusted based on feedback from external independent reviewers. The results reveal that teaching speaking has a direct effect on four things: (1) the teaching method, (2) the teaching tools, (3) the goals or aims, and (4) how well the students do. As a result, pupils perform better academically, cognitively, and socio-emotionally. This study has flaws, such as the fact that it was conducted in a remote area with few facilities and only used a small sample of teachers with good digital literacy.

**Keywords:** Case study, Cognitive, Instruction, Speaking, Teachers' perspectives, Technology tools.

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### **Highlights of this paper**

- Teachers' beliefs are an essential element of the teaching process.
- Teachers' beliefs encourage two aspects: self-concept and self-efficacy.
- Teachers should be facilitators of communication tasks rather than dominant lecturers for students.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Teachers' beliefs are an essential element of the teaching process. This encourages two aspects: self-concept and self-efficacy, as per [Hativa and Goodyear \(2001\)](#), who stated that a teacher's self-efficacy is how they feel about how much their teaching has the potential to develop students' interest in learning. Self-concept, on the other hand, refers to how a person sees themselves based on how they interact with and interpret their surroundings. Significant others' judgments, reinforcements, and attributions of one's behavior impact one's self-concept. These self-perceptions influence one's behavior, which, in turn, influences self-perception. Thus, self-concept is a factor that leads to other effects ([Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976](#)). Also, they divided teachers' beliefs into different types, such as how students and teachers behave based on these constructs, teachers' beliefs about how effective they are and how important self-awareness is, teachers' attitudes toward discipline and student control, and teachers' ideas regarding their role in the classroom.

[Carpenter, Fennema, Peterson, Chiang, and Loef \(1989\)](#) argued that teachers' beliefs come from classroom pressures. This may be the clearest sign of a teacher's professional growth and seems to be a key factor in determining how well teachers interact in a given school. We will get a lot closer to understanding how effective teachers are as we study more about their different types, functions, and beliefs. Similarly, [Prosser, Trigwell, and Taylor \(1994\)](#) proposed two ways to teach that fit with what teachers think: teacher-centered learning and student-centered learning. As instructors, teachers believe that they are portrayed as experts in their subject area who transmit knowledge to students. Teachers who subscribed to this viewpoint appeared to be less willing to assist and support pupils, and they were among the most senior and experienced responders. Students are expected to work hard in a teacher-centered model. Teachers who agree with this point of view believe that if students cannot achieve satisfaction, they will probably not have the drive or skills to do well, whereas student-centered organizations appeared to be more inclined to encourage self-regulated student activities. They also link their instruction to the institute's overall aims, the professional skills required in the industry, and their students' past education. Teaching should focus on helping students become self-directed learners, improving their ability to think and understand, and allowing them to apply new knowledge to a range of tasks and contexts, such as solving problems. Above all, teaching must pay attention to learners' growing awareness of how they might help others. Changes in the way students view, experience, handle, and think about things are part of their development and help them grasp critical components of their environment ([Butarbutar, 2019](#)).

Teaching speaking entails making organized verbal utterances to convey meaning (utterances are merely people's opinions). Speaking also refers to a participatory process of generating meaning that includes producing, receiving, and digesting data. We don't think about the quality of our speech because it is such a normal human behavior that we don't think it's noteworthy. Likewise, [Baleghizadeh and Nasrollahi Shahri \(2014\)](#) stated that speaking is often overlooked and undervalued compared to other literacy skills. This could explain why there is so little study of teachers' thoughts on speaking competency. Speaking carries more weight than the different abilities in pupils' minds since it appears to be the yardstick by which proficiency is assessed, at least to the layperson.

Aside from the importance of speaking in English as a foreign language (EFL), the current study is being conducted in a rural area of Indonesia where there has been little research on teacher cognition, which makes it

particularly interesting. Furthermore, such research contributes to the journal's international appeal by providing insight into the Iranian setting and allowing for comparison with similar findings in other contexts.

However, during the COVID-19 outbreak, the University of Musamus Merauke, Province of Papua, Indonesia, closed the face-to-face learning process on March 17, 2020. All learning processes and faculty administrations were completed and locked for three months and, as a result, the second-semester learning process started virtually but was not effective due to limited access to utilities; both teachers and students could not reach their objectives, even though they felt under pressure due to a bad situation. Some teachers attempted strategy-based assignments aimed at reducing students' worries regarding lack of progress in their college careers; however, this strategy did not work well. Furthermore, the EFL speaking course could not be implemented as expected.

Crucially, in support of the best practice theories provided by Fang (1996) and Zheng (2009), a great deal of emphasis is being placed on the quality of learning and teaching EFL in particular. To overcome this shortcoming, this study investigates, analyzes, explores, and elaborates on teachers' beliefs and strategies during the COVID-19 outbreak. To make the analysis more insightful, the research questions are as follows: "How did teachers' beliefs regarding teaching EFL change during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?" and "What strategies did teachers use during the COVID-19 pandemic to teach EFL speaking?"

## **2. METHOD**

### *2.1. Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis*

Five teachers (four female and one male) were recruited to answer the research questions to determine what they thought, felt, and did during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were aged between 30 and 50 years old, and their teaching experience averaged more than five years.

Each person participated in an unstructured interview at a different location and time. In line with Elo et al. (2014), the importance of ethical behavior was communicated to the participants before interviews. Due to the nature of the questions and to protect the participants from embarrassment, low self-esteem, and other adverse effects, such as getting a bad name in their community or losing their jobs, a formal contract between parties was signed before the study began. Gill and Dalgarno (2017) stated that semi-structured interviews use a flexible framework of open-ended questions that define the area to be studied and from which the interviewer or interviewee can learn more about a concept. Using the same scenario, the interviewee can be asked several questions at the beginning, such as "How do you view your strategies?" and "What do you believe teaching and speaking remotely is like?" Furthermore, Beutel and Spooner-Lane (2009) emphasized that the investigation took 60 minutes. Alhojailan (2012); Braun and Clarke (2006) and Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2011) all support a type of study called "theme analysis," which is a type of qualitative analysis. This study was based on the same research topic and the data analyses were performed using the Atlas.ti application, which is qualitative data analysis and research software.

### *2.2. Validity and Reliability of Themes*

The two most important aspects of a thematic analysis are validity and reliability. The researcher will be able to compare the two sets of feedback as a result of this. The main goal of this approach is to improve the consistency of theme analysis coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), and the researcher can see any results that don't match up with what was added or removed by the external independent reviewers (Miles et al., 2014). The data analysis results are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Teachers' beliefs regarding EFL speaking thematically.

### 3. RESULTS

The responses to the question "How did teachers' beliefs in teaching EFL change during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?" were broken down into themes, namely opportunities and challenges, in the study notes. Teachers and students worldwide are gaining access to technological tools that help them learn or teach a second or foreign language faster. This is because the internet is so common that more people are becoming aware of the benefits of technology in classrooms. Technology integration in the classroom has become a critical component of effective instruction, and this has prompted several researchers to investigate the various aspects of such integration (Ding, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Lu, & Glazewski, 2019; Mollaei & Riasati, 2013). These two themes are broken down into four sub-themes: (1) teaching strategies, (2) teaching tools, (3) intentions or objectives, and (4) student achievement. Each is elaborated as follows.

In terms of teaching strategy, teachers can begin by investigating how a good student acquires his expertise, namely through the use of a variety of cues. However, if they do so to make an educated assumption about meaning, they can stop inhibiting the use of communication methods in the classroom. Teachers' cues, on the other hand, can encourage students to communicate easily but not comprehend a meaning. . In so doing, our study explores two strategies: teacher-centered and student-centered. Teacher-centered accommodates presenting, evaluating, and

feedback. Likewise, student-centered learning allows for involvement, elaboration, critical thinking, project-based learning, problem-based learning, task-based learning, and collaborative learning. We can see in [Figure 1](#) the kinds of teaching tools that teachers believed offered positive opportunities during the pandemic, such as Zoom meetings, Google Meet, Google Classroom, WhatsApp groups, YouTube, and social media. All media are intended to improve students' speaking performance in terms of transmission, acquisition, creation, transmission, reproduction of information, synthesis, elaboration, analysis, and evaluation. Consequently, learners achieved improved performance in the academic, cognitive, and socio-emotional sub-themes (see [Figure 1](#)).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Our case study involved interviews with five EFL teachers about how they survived the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on how they taught EFL during that time. It studies and discusses some key concepts, tactics, and practices that educators interested in promoting virtual tools in EFL teaching and learning should be aware of. Our research found that participants were virtually employed by a wide range of professional publications. Reading, writing, and listening are examples of other skills (e.g., [Nguyen, Tran, Nguyen, Nguyen, and Nguyen \(2022\)](#); [Minichiello, Lawanto, Goodridge, Iqbal, and Asghar \(2022\)](#) and [Kusuma \(2022\)](#)). Speaking is taught using a teacher-centered strategy and has the potential to present, evaluate, and provide students with feedback. Student-centered learning involves problem-based learning to encourage critical thinking and speaking competence. This points to the potential advantages of including speaking in classroom activities while learning spoken or interactional communication. In other words, speaking can assist students in expressing ideas, gaining background knowledge, seeking clarification, developing motivation, reproducing information, and solving problems ([Butarbutar, Leba, & Sauhenda, 2022](#)).

Although teaching during the pandemic was not running effectively, participants were encouraged to learn virtually through a variety of methods, including WhatsApp, email, Google Classroom, Zoom, and Google Meet ([Butarbutar, 2019](#); [Shodiyevna, 2022](#) and [Maryati, 2022](#)). Other teaching tools, such as debates, presentations, and creating and uploading digital stories through social media and YouTube channels, could also help students improve their speaking skills ([Atmojo, 2022](#); [Leba, Butarbutar, & Werang, 2021](#)).

Similarly, our research claims that technological tools and teaching strategies are virtually classified as opportunities to develop competence in speaking a new language. With limited technology and poor internet connections, teaching speaking virtually was a great opportunity to promote many other technology applications to motivate students to improve their speaking performance and to endorse their practice more interactively. [Tsui, Chan, Harfitt, and Leung \(2020\)](#) investigated how the crisis teaching process during the pandemic "forced" teachers to be more creative and familiarize themselves with technological tools. In addition, the teachers chose synchronous, asynchronous, blended, or hybrid learning. This freedom of choice depends on the readiness of teachers to use them and the completion of the facilities to be used.

We claim that most teaching and speaking intentions or objectives, such as acquisition ([Derwing, Munro, & Thomson, 2022](#)) or reproduction of information. [Mukhtoralievna and Madaminkhonqizi \(2022\)](#) synthesizing ([Soleymanpour, Johnson, Soleymanpour, & Berry, 2022](#)) elaborating ([Dong, Gui, Zhang, & Zhong, 2022](#)) creating ([Esmaili & Mohammadi Rakati, 2022](#)) exploring ([Limeranto & Bram, 2022](#)). In addition to being insightful, transactional communication helps in recognizing and expanding our understanding of the implicit or indirect significance of what is said. Our findings showed that the Google Meet and Zoom applications could accommodate this objective. Transactional conversations, such as information-gathering interviews, role-play, and discussions, are held to exchange information. These interactions can result in purchasing something from a store or enrolling in

school (Butarbutar et al., 2022). In another vein, Saed, Haider, Al-Salman, and Hussein (2021) recognized that creating a video project was extremely effective in improving students' speaking ability during the COVID-19 pandemic in particular. While they created video content in pairs collaboratively, they also reproduced much better information and, at the same time, their self-evaluation improved (Butarbutar, 2021).

Furthermore, teachers' challenges in helping students to achieve a high academic performance have been investigated by a few scholars, and this study's findings are backed by those of Lee, Yoon, and Yoon (2022). They emphasized strategic and sociolinguistic competence, language use (accuracy and grammar), and discourse competence, which were tasks to be achieved virtually during the pandemic. To the best of our knowledge, the government's regulation of lockdown and closing schools provided a large opportunity for teachers and students to synergize in the teaching and learning processes. With this change, students increased their self-regulated learning, self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-instruction, peer monitoring, self-reinforcement, and self-esteem. On the other hand, face-to-face crisis teaching processes provided the opportunity for students to achieve their socio-emotional (Nur & Butarbutar, 2022) and cognitive (Pratiwi, Huda, & Kurniawan, 2021) goals.

The findings of our study refute those of Nikolopoulou (2022), who stated that online instruction in primary schools was adversely affected by the pandemic. Data from during the pandemic showed that most teachers used a mix of instructional strategies, with the most popular learning activities being language, psychomotor activities, video displays, mathematics, and cross-disciplinary activities. Initially negative, the teachers' moods gradually shifted to become more optimistic. According to teachers, technology problems, a lack of resources and parental support, and a lack of training in online techniques were the main drawbacks of online education. Positive teacher experiences emphasized introducing children to technology and keeping them engaged in the classroom while highlighting the value of parental involvement.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, the teachers' beliefs sought to inform information-gathering interviews, role-plays, and arguments, which are examples of transactional dialogue. It is a result-oriented encounter, such as purchasing something in a store or enrolling in a school. These are heavily influenced by teacher beliefs. The data also support the idea that strong teacher beliefs about teaching, learning, and technology might be major roadblocks to effective technology integration in the classroom. Our study has verified the impact of teachers' ideas regarding practice, and they appear to agree that they play a vital role in determining one's professional identity.

The educational ideas that teachers hold are critical in determining how they give personal meaning to their job and how they orient their teaching practices. According to this viewpoint, teachers' personal views can shape, distort, and screen their thinking and thus influence their instructional efforts, as confirmed by Er and Kim (2017) and Baron-Ramirez et al. (2021). Teachers' educational views have a significant impact on how they perceive and use technology in classrooms (Butarbutar, 2021). When contemplating the influence of foreign language (FL) teachers, particularly those who teach in post-secondary institutions, on the next generation of FL teachers and policymakers, who will ultimately define the future of language education, it is critical to have a deep understanding of their values. Teachers' beliefs can help those in charge of FL programs and technology coordinators support FL teachers' effective classroom technology integration, as well as FL teachers who wish to reflect on their practice with technology by assisting them in developing an awareness of how their unique belief system may affect their technology use in the classroom.

Finally, being knowledgeable about teachers' beliefs during the COVID-19 pandemic has become an additional cognitive competence for both teachers and students. It assists them in effectively using technology in the classroom and asking instructors about their views can help researchers understand their choices from their perspective. The intention or objective of teaching EFL speaking during a pandemic depends on teachers' beliefs.

However, this study has limitations, such as the fact that the research was conducted in a rural area with limited infrastructure and a lack of teacher competence in digital literacy. This implies that future studies should explore students' and parents' beliefs regarding writing, reading, and listening abilities. Our study suggests that EFL teachers require adaptive or survival pedagogy and cognitive, socio-emotional, and technological knowledge to survive in controlled and uncontrolled situations. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, communicative language education has formed the backbone of English language teaching. Teachers should be facilitators of communication-based tasks rather than dominant lecturers for students.

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