

# Book Chapter

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## Technology-mediated Language Tasks as a Performance-based Assessment of EFL Learners' Speaking Ability in a Distance Learning Context

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**Abstract:** The present study aimed to probe 33 EFL teachers' perceptions of applying technology-mediated English-speaking performance tasks in a distance learning context. A mixed-method research design was applied using two instruments, i.e., an online open-ended questionnaire and Focused Group Discussion (FGD). The questionnaire was an open-ended questionnaire administered online to determine EFL teachers' views and experience in implementing technologies in speaking performance tasks. FGD was conducted to unravel some alternative solutions to the challenges in applying technology-mediated language tasks with English speaking performance in distance learning contexts. The results showed various technology-mediated language tasks, the assessment aspects in English speaking performance, the challenges, and their possible solutions in applying the technology-mediated language tasks on EFL learners' speaking practices were explicated and elaborated in this study. This paper has shed light on some practical experiences and pedagogical implications for providing English-speaking performance tasks with technology integration for distance learning instruction.

**Keywords:** Technology-mediated language tasks, performance-based assessment, EFL learners' speaking ability, distance learning

### INTRODUCTION

The pedagogical practice has experienced significant changes in the teaching process due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. This issue has also influenced English teaching, where language teachers must innovate to create

practical and interactive online learning tasks so that students can continue to develop their language skills (Yi & Jang, 2020). This innovation can be done by utilizing technologies such as internet sources, live online meetings, and learning management systems so that students can get many learning resources.

Regarding EFL learning, particularly, technologies and language tasks can be effectively integrated to enhance EFL learners' communication and interaction with their peers and their teacher using technological platforms such as social media, learning management systems, and video conferencing (Chong & Reinders, 2020). In the distance learning context, those technologies have become prevalent in Higher education to provide the valuable learning sources, testing and evaluation systems, and communication tools that are systematically recorded as the learning archives (Hampel, 2014).

However, EFL teachers rarely realize about cumbersome and burdensome technology-mediated language tasks. Their students only get assignments without having review and feedback given by EFL teachers. Besides, they also have difficulty in managing the time to do many assignments or tasks for other various learning subjects. Responding to those problems, to this end, the study to probe EFL teachers' perceptions on applying technology-mediated tasks of English-speaking performance in distance learning context including various technology-mediated language tasks, the assessment aspects in English speaking performance, the challenges and their possible solutions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Technology-Mediated Language Task

Technology-mediated language task is defined as carried out in the form of assignments to practice language skills assisted by technologies based on the principles of a task-based language teaching approach (TBLT). This TBLT can be applied to create student-centered learning in improving their English communication (Wu et al., 2016) and increase their motivation to enhance language learning (Aliasin et al., 2019). The integration of TBLT and technology in language learning tasks is very potential in language instruction (Lai & Li, 2011; Ziegler, 2016).

### B. Performance-based Assessment of Speaking Ability in Distance Learning Context

Performance-based assessment is considered the strategies to empower students to understand applying knowledge and skills <sup>4</sup> performing meaningful, authentic, and engaging tasks (Griffith & Lim, 2012) clear measurement rubrics and the use of technology have all been shown to increase student motivation and performance. This paper examines ways in which performance-based assessments (PBAs). Speaking performance tasks conducted in a distance learning context can be carried out by asking students to perform speaking activities related to the contextual and authentic topics.

## METHOD

### A. Participants

By utilizing a purposive sampling technique <sup>12</sup> the study was participated by 33 EFL teachers from 6 universities in Indonesia. Their ages ranged from 25 to 45 years old. All of them had experiences applying technologies to create English speaking tasks either in blended learning contexts or distance learning contexts.

### B. Research Design and Instruments

A mixed-method study was applied in this research. The instruments <sup>9</sup> in the present study were a questionnaire and Focused Group Discussion (FGD). The questionnaire was an open-ended questionnaire. It was administered online via google form in which the participants had three weeks to complete the questionnaire. Two experts also validated this questionnaire <sup>2</sup> comprising four questions adapted from Al Khateeb & Alshahrani, (2019) communicative and intercultural competence. This research aims to identify the correlational effect of gender and region on the recognition of the concept of tele collaboration in the sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia. It also focuses on determining and assessing aspects of the criteria of tele collaborative tasks currently employed language-learning settings. One hundred and fifty-five teachers of English as <sup>14</sup> foreign language (EFL) before it was employed in the present study. The detailed questions of the questionnaire are as follows.

What kind of technology-mediated language tasks have you made?

What are your assessment experiences on technology-mediated language tasks of English-speaking performance in a distance learning context?

What aspects should be assessed on technology-mediated language tasks

of English-speaking performance in a distance learning context?

What are the challenges in applying the technology-mediated language tasks to EFL learners' speaking practices in a distance learning context?

Meanwhile, FGD was conducted to unravel some alternative solutions to the challenges in applying technology-mediated language tasks with English speaking performance in a distance learning context. In this FGD, 25 on-site participants and 8 remote participants via zoom meeting were involved. The process of FGD was recorded using Zoom video recording to document the FGD results well. Subsequently, the results were analyzed rigorously.

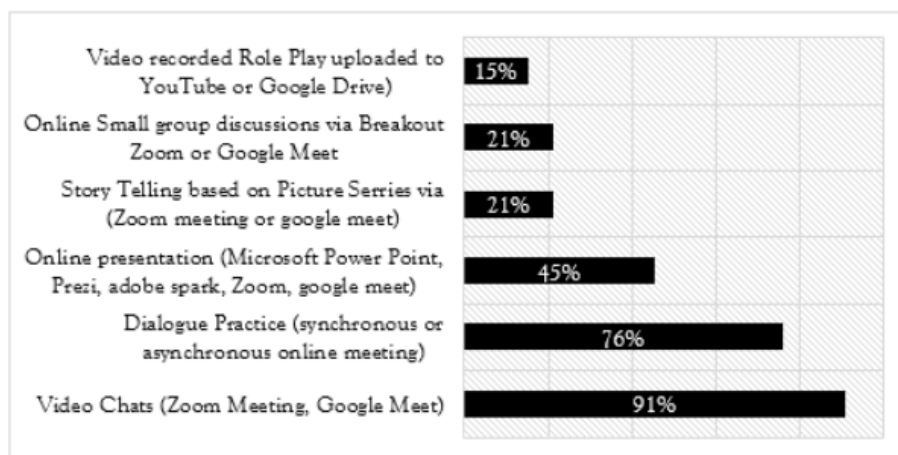
### C. Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire were evaluated descriptively with thematic analysis to categories the findings. The results, afterward, were tabulated and classified into specific themes that were presented in charts. Moreover, the data from FGD were analyzed qualitatively with descriptive interpretation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. The Various Technology-Mediated Language Tasks of English-Speaking Performance

Regarding the <sup>11</sup> results of the first open-ended question on the questionnaire, EFL teachers' views and experiences in giving English speaking tasks using technologies were illustrated in Figure 1.



### Figure 1. EFL Teachers' Experiences of Speaking Performance-based Assessment using Technologies in Distance Learning Context

The majority of EFL teachers (91%) asserted that the classroom interacting and conversation using video chats such as zoom meetings and google meets were used to assess their speaking ability. Besides, about three-quarters of them requested their learners to practice speaking in the forms of dialogue either in synchronous or in an asynchronous meeting.

The speaking performance tasks in the form of individual online presentations using Microsoft PowerPoint, Prezi, Adobe Spark, and synchronous presentations using Zoom or google meet were experienced by 45% of EFL teachers. This finding is corroborated with the previous study that the online presentation became a meaningful task for higher education students in the distanced learning context (Hill, 2003)

He suggested that this online activity should be instructed with students' autonomy in selecting select the related topics, setting, and time. Whereas less than a quarter (21%, 21%, and 15 % respectively) of EFL teachers reported that storytelling based on picture series via Zoom meeting or Google meet, online small group discussions via breakout Zoom or Google meet, video recorded role-play uploaded to YouTube or Google Drive were administered to apply as technology-mediated language tasks of English-speaking performance.

#### **B. The Assessment Aspects in English Speaking performance**

The second question of the questionnaire referred to the assessment aspects that should be assessed on technology-mediated language tasks of English-speaking performance in the distance learning context. The results of them can be seen in Figure 2.

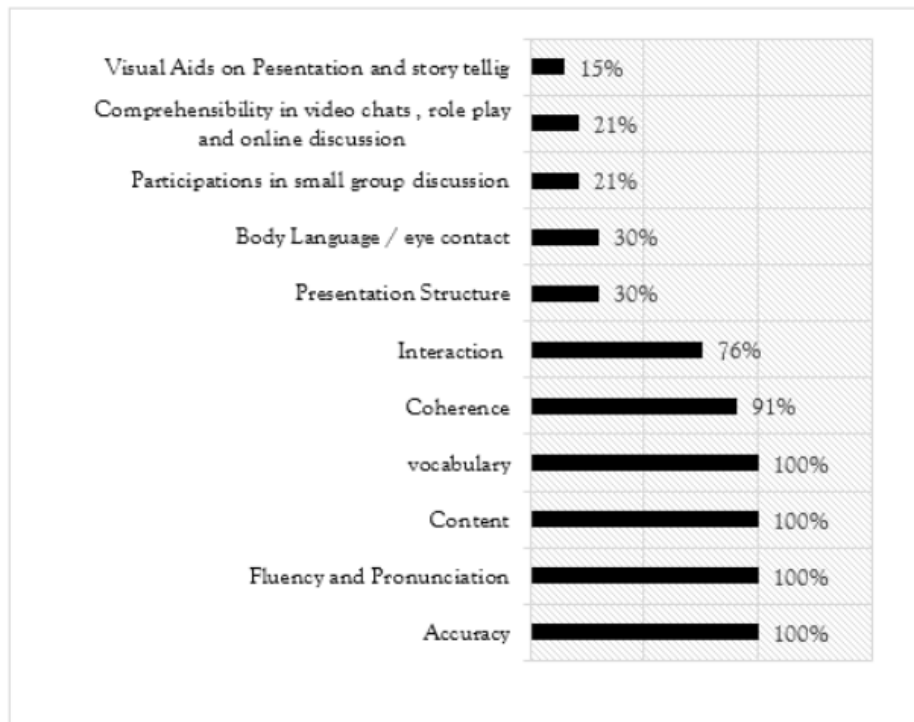


Figure 2. EFL Teachers' views on Assessment Aspects of Learners' Speaking Performance

Figure 2 shows all EFL teachers' respondents posited that four aspects, including accuracy, fluency and pronunciation, content, and vocabulary, should be the obligatory assessment aspects for students' diverse speaking performance tasks. Those aspects were considered the analytic scoring that was commonly used in assessing students speaking performance (Namaziandost, 2019). Moreover, most teachers asserted that coherence and interaction were also crucial in assessing students' speaking performance. This coherence is one aspect that helps language learners produce the unity of ideas and logical organization in developing the contents (Phuong, 2018). Moreover, the interaction aspect is necessary to administer in speaking performance, especially in small group discussions and conversations dealing with their ability to listen and respond (Rahmawati & Ertin, 2014).

Less than 50% of EFL teachers conveyed other speaking assessment aspects (in Figure 2). They are presentation structure and body/eye contact in individual presentation, participation in small group discussion, and comprehensibility in video chats, role play, online discussion, and visual aid on presentation and storytelling.

### C. The Challenges and Their Possible Solutions in Applying the Technology-Mediated Language Tasks on EFL Learners' Speaking Practices

Some of the challenges encountered by EFL teachers in implementing the technology-mediated language tasks on EFL learners' speaking practices in a distance learning context are elucidated in Figure 3.

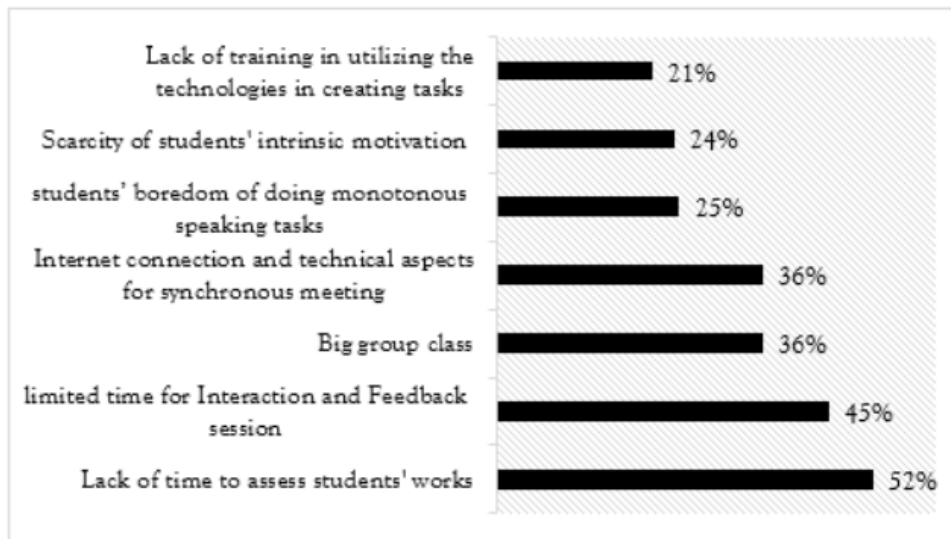


Figure 3. The challenges in applying the technology-mediated language tasks on EFL learners' speaking practices in a distance learning context

EFL teachers found some challenges in applying the technology-mediated language tasks to EFL learners' speaking practices in a distance learning context. They are divided into three categories, i.e., teacher, student, and technical issues.

First, regarding the teacher's challenges, about half of EFL teachers perceived that lack of time to assess students' works and limited time for Interaction and Feedback sessions were the challenges in applying technology-mediated language tasks of speaking performance. Solutions to these challenges, the synchronous meeting should be focused on conveying feedback sessions, and assessment of students' works. This is relevant to the findings in E5 "The teachers' feedback and evaluation are influential <sup>7</sup> motivate students in doing the tasks during the distance learning." (EFL T1). To wit, this finding is congruent with the previous study that to create student-centered learning in task-based learning, EFL lecturer should reduce their guidance during the process of the learners' task completion, but they should <sup>3</sup> focus on providing the feedback after they completed the tasks (Ji & Pham, 2020) interviews with 10 students as two focus groups and autiotaped



group discussions of the focus groups. The findings disclosed several mismatches between teaching and learning traditions in China and the principles of TBLT: (1.

Second, referring to **students**, approximately a quarter of EFL teachers conveyed there was a scarcity of students' intrinsic motivation and students' boredom of doing monotonous speaking tasks. These problems can be surmounted by crating various and creative tasks (Bao & Du, 2015). The students' intrinsic motivation is one factor that should be taken into account in successfully applying technology-mediated language tasks related to English speaking performance. It is pertinent to the statement in E7 (with E referring to Excerpt and EFL T referring to EFL teacher) "*The motivation of students should be concerned by the teachers in applying technology-mediated language tasks in order to enjoy practicing their speaking skill.*" (EFL T7). The variation of speaking performance tasks is like video recorded role-play, online small group discussion, synchronous individual presentation. Meanwhile, media such as YouTube or Instagram can be considered as the exciting media for EFL learners in publishing their tasks. The aforementioned statements were relevant to the FGD findings that can be seen in the following E1, E2, E3.

E2: "*To create interesting and practical activities of speaking practice, students can record their speaking performance using mobile video recording. The record, then, is uploaded to YouTube in which its link is shared to the learning management system (LMS).*" (EFL T4)

E3: "*To make students interested in finishing the tasks, learners should be provided by various speaking activities such as role-play, online small group discussion, and individual presentation.*" (EFL T10)

Furthermore, another problem related to students is the lack of training in utilizing the technologies in creating tasks. To reduce these cumbersome learning tasks in utilizing technologies, students' familiarity with the technologies for completing the tasks should be prioritized. This is corroborated by the results of FGD shown in E4.

E4: "*Learning media or technologies for completing the tasks should be familiar with students in order that they do not have burdensome learning tasks with the need to master a new technological usage.*" (EFL T6)

Moreover, giving clear instruction and the involvement of EFL students in planning the tasks is essential to be employed to eliminate the cumbersome learning tasks (see E4 and E5).

E4: "*To successfully employ technology-mediated language tasks, students should*

*be involved in planning tasks such as given specifically what media can be used.”*  
(EFL T 2)

E5: *“EFL teacher needs to give the clear instruction for doing role-play at their homes, so students can practically follow it.”* (EFL T5)

The previous empirical study supported the finding that task planning significantly influenced students' accuracy scores of their speaking performance (Khoram & Zhang, 2019).

Third, challenges of technical issues were related to the internet connection, technical problems, and big class. They were classical problems that hinder successful online learning activities especially related to speaking performance tasks. These problems should be coordinated with the faculty or university policymakers (Idris & Osman, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

The present study probed EFL teachers' perceptions of applying technology-mediated English-speaking performance tasks in a distance learning context. Three parts, including various technology-mediated language tasks, the assessment aspects in English speaking performance, the challenges, and their possible solutions in applying the technology-mediated language tasks on EFL learners' speaking practices in distance learning context were explicated in this study. First, regarding the various technology-mediated language tasks, the classroom conversation using video chats and dialogue practices can be used for assessing students' speaking performance tasks. Besides, individual online presentations, recorded role-play, online small group discussion can be the variety of speaking performance tasks. Second, the assessment aspects encompassing accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation, content, vocabulary, coherence, and interaction become the essential parts in assessing EFL students' multifarious speaking performance tasks. Third, other aspects such as presentation structure, gesture/eye contact, comprehensibility, and visual aid should be incorporated based on the particular speaking tasks.

Furthermore, three categories of challenges and their solutions conveyed by EFL teachers are elaborated in this paper. First, dealing with the teacher, lack of time to assess students' works, and limited time for interaction and feedback session. The possible solutions for those challenges are EFL teachers should try to convey feedback in a synchronous online meeting. Second, referring to

students, scarcity of students' intrinsic motivation and students' boredom of doing monotonous speaking tasks. To anticipate these problems, giving clear instruction and the involvement of EFL students in planning the tasks, familiarity with the technologies for completing the tasks, and various tasks should be the principles on applying the technology-mediated tasks in a distanced learning atmosphere. Third, technical issues such as internet connection, technical problems, and big class should be communicated with the university policymakers to find out a better solution to those problems.

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