



# Explaining Skills of Pre-service Teachers in Online Teaching: Evidence from a Classroom Practice

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**Abstract.** This article addresses how pre-service teachers who had been introduced to basic teaching skills implemented their explaining skills in online teaching. To achieve this aim, a qualitative approach, in particular, a case study research design was applied. The research participants were four student teachers who were taking a micro-teaching course in the English Language Department, at one of the state universities in Bali, Indonesia. They were selected by using purposive random sampling. Data were collected by conducting observation and in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed by adapting the syntax of a presentation lesson proposed by [1]. The obtained data were analyzed qualitatively. The results show that pre-service teachers performed three out of four stages of presenting the lesson: clarifying the aims of the lesson and getting the students to learn, presenting the new information, and checking the students' understanding. Among the four stages of the presentation, all students did not present advance organizers, whereas this stage is important to scaffold their students about the learning materials.

**Keywords:** Explaining skills · Pre-service teacher · Online teaching practice · Teaching skills

## 1 Introduction

Explaining skills is one of the basic teaching skills that need to be mastered by teachers. According to [2], explaining subject matters to students is a central competence of the teacher. Further, [3] argue that explaining skills is considered the core activity in a teacher's teaching practice. The teachers' role as effective explainers gains importance in the implementation of a text-based approach. In this teaching approach, the teachers are the resources who provide solid scaffolding for the learning material. By providing effective and comprehensible explanations for the students, the teachers can help students achieve their learning goals [4].

Considering the importance of explaining skills for teachers, teacher education programs should ensure that the teachers' candidates can provide effective instructional explanations. Unfortunately, empirical evidence showed that prospective teachers had not performed explaining skills effectively [5, 6]. This phenomenon is then reinforced by the argument stated by [7] and [8] that explaining skills are not automatically possessed

by prospective teacher students. These skills need to be trained, moreover, explaining skills not only require mastery of teaching materials but also mastery of delivering material in the form of good presentation techniques, use of media, and effective body language.

Many studies have been conducted to document explaining skills of the teachers [9–12]. However, little research has explored how student-teachers implement their explaining skills in online teaching. This study hence attempted to investigate student-teachers explaining skills in their online learning. This study is important to inform teacher education programs on how to provide the support that the student-teachers need to achieve their teaching skills, particularly explaining skills.

This paper aims to contribute to our understanding of this issue by describing student-teachers explaining skills. The study focused on prospective senior high school teachers in Indonesia (teacher candidates in university-based teacher education programs), in the domain of English. To observe prospective teachers' explaining skills, we used the syntax of a presentation lesson proposed by [1]. We applied video analyses to examine teacher candidates' explaining skills. With this paper, we aim to answer the following research question: How were student-teachers implement their explaining skills in online teaching?

## **2 Method**

### **2.1 Research Design**

To achieve the research objectives, we used a qualitative research approach because it allowed us to observe, hear, and analyse data naturally in a real context. As stated by [13], qualitative research seeks to understand and interpret the behaviour, experiences, and interactions of people that occur naturally in the context of the research being studied. In the context of this research, the phenomenon studied is the explanation skills of the student teachers in online learning. Through a qualitative approach, this study describes how the student-teachers implemented their skills of explaining in their online teaching practices.

From several types of qualitative research, case study research was used in this study. According to [13], case study research can explore a problem by using a case as a specific illustration. As stated by [14], a case can refer to an activity that is occurred in a certain context. Referring to this definition, we took the issue of implementing explaining skills carried out by the student teachers as the examined case. Through this case study research, we provide a meaningful and contextual understanding of student teachers explaining skills in online teaching.

### **2.2 Setting and the Research Participants**

The study was conducted at a microteaching course in a teacher education program of one of the state universities in Bali, Indonesia. The course is a 2-credit course aiming to guide the student teachers to master basic teaching skills, including explaining skills. Due to pandemic covid-19, the teaching and learning processes were conducted through online learning so did the teaching simulation practices.

In the course of microteaching, the program administrator grouped the student teachers into some classes, which consisted of eight to ten student teachers. This relatively small number of the student teachers provided an opportunity for the facilitator and observers to examine and review the teaching skills of the student teachers in more detail. During the teaching practice simulations, the student teachers were asked to take the role as a teacher; prepare the lesson plan, learning material and learning media; and teach their peers through Zoom or Google Meet. The length of their teaching simulation was between 20–30 min. Their teaching performances were also video recorded and observed by two observers. Before performing, the student teachers were guided with a teaching performance checklist. This checklist was used for doing self-assessment and peer-assessment.

In this context of the study, before collecting data, we informed the student teachers that we would conduct research on their explaining skills. We asked their permission whether they could join our research or not. We also informed them that their teaching simulation videos were used as our data. Fortunately, all students agreed to participate in our study. Among 10 students, we then purposively selected four student teachers (ST1, ST2, ST3, and ST4) as the research participants. The criteria for selecting them were: 1) they focused on becoming prospective senior high school teachers; 2) they taught argumentative text; 3) their length of video simulation was 20 min; 4) they provided us with sufficient data; and 5) they were willing to participate in our study.

## **2.3 Data Collection Method**

Data were collected through observation and interview. Each of which is described below.

### **2.3.1 Observation**

Observations were conducted by observing the student teachers' teaching practice in their virtual class. Our purpose in joining the online class was to enable us to see, hear, and experience how student teachers implemented their explaining skills. This is in line with [15]'s argument that in a case study research, observation activities do not only aim to be close to the participants but also to feel and experience directly the things being studied. In addition, [16] also state that this observation technique can provide an opportunity for researchers to see, hear, and record what is happening in the context of the research being studied.

During this observation activity, we acted as passive observers. We recorded things that happened during the teaching practice on the observation protocol instrument. The things we observed were how the student teachers performed explaining skills: a) gaining attention, explaining goals, and establishing set; b) presenting advance organizer; c) presenting learning material (clarity, logical ordering, meaningfulness); and d) monitoring and checking for understanding. In addition to these aspects, we also recorded the language, facial expressions, and gestures used by the student teachers during teaching/interacting in virtual classes.

In addition to observing the research participants, we also asked them to send us a link to the recording of their teaching practice. This was done to complement our

limitations in recording things that happened when direct observation was carried out. From these video recordings, we could watch their teaching performance repeatedly to examine elements of explaining skills in more detail.

### **2.3.2 Interview**

The interview technique was conducted to explore the explaining skills performed by the student teachers. According to [14], in a case study research design, interview is an important technique used as it can help us to dig deeper information about the phenomenon under study. In the context of this study, interviews were conducted by telephone for 15 to 20 min. Interviews were conducted shortly after the observation was carried out. In this interview session, we also confirmed the things we found in the observation technique. Interviews were conducted by using casual conversation to provide relaxed atmosphere. In addition to the four informal interviews, we also discussed the student-teachers' explaining skills in the Zoom meeting. With the permission of the research participants, we recorded the telephone interviews and Zoom meetings.

### **2.4 Data Analysis**

The collected data were analysed by following the reflective thematic analysis proposed by [17]. The stages were a) familiarizing with data. At this stage, we watched the video simulations and read transcripts of interviews many times; b) transcribing data. At this stage, we transcribed data manually to make us more familiar with the data; c) compiling the initial code. At this stage, we labelled or coded the data. At this stage, we printed transcripts of interviews and students teachers' sequences of explanation and then coded them by highlighting them using a highlighter (color pen). We defined the code both descriptively and interpretively. The coding of the video data was done by taking a screenshot of the section containing the research data and providing information in the form of a data description; d) Searching for a theme. At this stage, we review the code that had been identified, and we ensured that the codes had the same meaning; e) Reviewing the theme. At this stage, we reread the themes that had been identified. We checked that the themes were in line with the research objectives; f), defining and naming the theme. At this stage, we began to name each of the themes found; g) Writing a report. At this stage, we presented the findings through a written report.

## **3 Results and Discussion**

Below are the descriptions of the element of the student teachers' explaining skills.

### **3.1 Clarifying the Aims of the Lesson and Getting Students' Attention to Learn**

The first stages of a lesson presentation performed by the student teachers were clarifying the learning objectives and sparking the students' interest to learn. Before beginning the lesson, all student teachers (ST1, ST2, ST3, and ST4) greeted the students warmly and checked the students' presence. They asked about the students' feelings and conditions.

They were enthusiastic to teach the students. They smiled and motivated the students to learn. One of them explicitly aroused students' readiness to learn by asking "*Are you ready to learn now?*" In addition to these, all student teachers led the prayer before beginning the lesson.

From the interview, it is revealed that the student teachers used the above activities to get the students prepared for the lesson. They all admitted that arousing students' motivation to learn is important as it can affect their learning, as explained by ST 1 below.

*"I think, greeting the students nicely is important. I can know the students' feeling and I really wish that they enjoyed the learning process"* (ST1, interview).

Similarly, ST4 also said that:

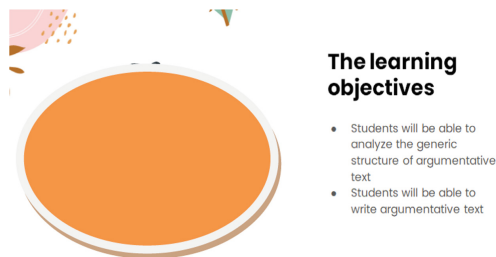
*"By greeting and checking the students' attendance, I know the students in person. This also can decrease their tension in learning as they are engaged in the class"* (ST4, interview).

The efforts made by the student teachers were used to reduce students' anxiety in learning. As argued by [18], anxiety plays a crucial role in distracting the students' to learn. When the students are anxious, they tend to become silent students who are unwilling to communicate. To avoid this case, teachers should create a joyful classroom environment by building positive images such as showing cheerful expressions, providing warm greetings, and establishing a close relationship with the students [19]. When the students have positive emotions, they are emotionally involved in the learning material, they become more interested in learning, and finally, they get better learning achievement.

Besides building a positive learning environment, the student teachers also introduced the topic that the students would learn by saying "*Today, we will learn about argumentative text*". They then continued sharing the screen to show the students the learning objectives. One example of the learning objectives shown by the student teachers is presented in Fig. 1.

As revealed in the interview session, the student teachers purposively informed the students about the learning objectives that the students would achieve on that day. This activity was performed to make the students aware of the topic and provide them with a guide about their lesson as illustrated by the following excerpts.

*"I informed the students about the learning objectives, so they know what they will learn today"* (ST2, ST4, interview).



**Fig. 1.** An example of learning objectives.

*“I shared the learning objectives to the students to make encourage them to control their learning” (ST3, ST1, interview).*

Setting learning objectives is significant both for students and teachers as it can give the direction to where the learning process would go. The learning objective contains the scope of the lesson and explicitly states students’ observable and measurable behaviors showing what they can do at the end of the lesson [20]. Before beginning the lesson, this learning objective should be shared or communicated to students for various reasons to make the students attend the lesson, and gain the students’ attention as it describes the teachers’ expectation of their learning outcome [21]. In so doing, they would behave and follow the learning process as expected in the learning objective.

### 3.2 Presenting the Learning Materials

The second stage of lesson presentation performed by the student teachers was presenting the learning materials. All student teachers presented their learning materials deductively, in which they followed the text-based learning method of language teaching. Firstly, they explained the definition of argumentative text, social function, generic structure, and language. Secondly, they showed an example of argumentative text, as shown in Fig. 2.

Thirdly, they asked the students to identify the generic structure of an argumentative text (Fig. 3).

Fourthly, they asked the students to work in pairs to analyze the generic structure of another argumentative text.

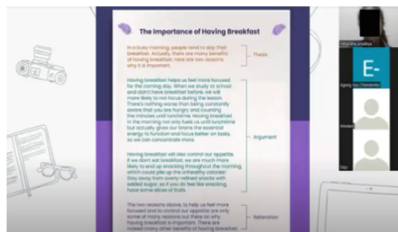


Fig. 2. An example of argumentative text.

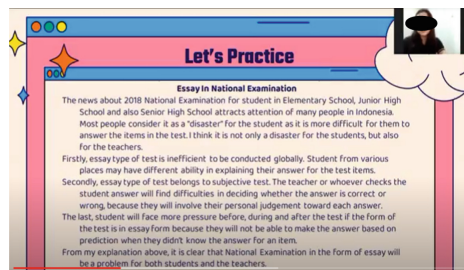


Fig. 3. Identifying the generic structure of an argumentative text.

The sequence of the activities performed by the student teachers adopted those of text-based teaching. According to [22], text-based teaching is an approach using a variety of texts to enable the students to function effectively in the target language. This approach consists of four stages: building knowledge of the field (BKOF), modelling of the text (MOT), joint construction of the text (JCOT), independent construction of the text (ICOT), and linking to related texts (LTRT) [23]. In the presentation skills, the student teachers applied modelling of the text (MOT) and joint construction of the text (JCOT).

In this study, the student teachers purposively selected a text (argumentative text) to be learned by the students. In the MOT stage, the student teachers presented to their students the example of argumentative text. They then explained deductively the communicative purpose, generic structure, and linguistic features. In JCOT stage, the student teachers assigned the students to analyze the generic structure of the argumentative text and constructed an argumentative text in pairs. These activities are in line with the studies conducted by [24] and [25].

Besides presenting the learning materials in a deductive way, the research findings also show that all student teachers had presented the topic clearly and effectively. They taught in small chunks, in which they focused on emphasizing the generic structure of argumentative text. In explaining it, they used a simple yet interesting Powerpoint and delivered it by using simple sentences so that the students could understand what their teachers were saying. When they noticed that some students were confused about what they were saying, they repeated the explanation by stating simpler explanations and provided with examples. The verbal language produced by the student teachers was also clear so that it made the students understand the topic easily. As stated by [1], clarity is a crucial element in explaining skills. When the teachers' explanation is vague, the students are failed to understand the material. As a result, the learning objective, which has been predetermined, cannot be achieved well.

### 3.3 Checking for Understanding

Having presented the material, the teachers checked the students' understanding by asking some questions related to the topic. They posed some questions to be answered by the students, such as *“Who wants to answer?, Who can mention the thesis statement?, Who can mention the argument part?, Which one is the conclusion part, Does anyone want to give opinion? How about the other opinion? Do you have any ideas?, Any ideas, please? Do you have anything else to add? Do you have any other opinion?”* These language expressions were used to make the students active in learning and to increase student-teacher interaction. When the students were silent and got confused, the student teachers (ST1) gave the students a clue, for example, *“Well students, the thesis statement is usually located at the beginning of the paragraph”*. After giving the clue, a student raised her hand and answered the question correctly. After having the answers, the student-teachers then appraised the students' answers by saying *correct, very good, good answer, and excellent*. Two student teachers (ST1 and ST3) also used their gestures of thumb up and clapping hand to accompany their verbal appraisal. These classroom practices are in line with the one proposed by [1], in which one strategy that the teachers

can apply to check students' understanding is to ask students to make direct responses to statements or questions.

Before the student teachers end the lesson, they asked their students whether the students had understood the learning materials or not by using these expressions: "*Do you understand the material?*", "*Do you get the point?*", "*Is everything clear?*", and "*Do you have questions?*" When all students responded that they had already understood the material, the student teachers then invited some students to conclude and reflect on the lesson.

From these stages, it can be seen that all student teachers used three out of four stages of a lesson presentation proposed by [1]. Data analysis revealed that all student teachers did not present the advance organizer. Advance organizer is a tool used by the teachers to introduce and illustrate the relationship between what the students have learned and what they are going to learn. This is shown before the teachers present the actual presentation [1] so that the students can have the context or the orientation to the topic [26]. The use of advance organizer is important to be used by the teachers because it can bridge the students' old information and the new one. Moreover, [1] argue that the advance organizer is not merely used to introduce the lesson, but to scaffold for new information. By using the advance organizer, the teachers can introduce the topic and illustrate the relationship between what they have learned and what they are going to learn. In so doing, the students can have a clearer picture of the topic and can remember the concepts more easily.

## 4 Conclusion

The study concludes that the student teachers performed three out of four stages of presenting a lesson, clarifying the aims of the lesson and getting the students to learn, presenting the new information, and checking the students' understanding. These three elements of the lesson presentation had been carried out clearly and effectively. However, one element, that is, presenting advance organizer had not been implemented by the student teachers.

Concerning the importance of advance organizer for scaffolding the new information and helping students to have a big picture about the topic that they are going to learn, it is suggested for student teachers to include this element in their teaching, particularly in expository teaching where they explain the learning materials deductively. In addition to this, the study also recommends teacher education program provide more opportunities for student teachers to practice the syntax of explaining a lesson to enhance their explaining skills. Future studies can be directed to investigate reflective practices on explaining skills conducted by both the student teachers and the facilitator. This is conducted to optimize the learning progress of the student teachers in obtaining their learning objectives.

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**Authors' Contributions.** The present study aims to contribute to the research on teachers' competencies, particularly on pedagogical competencies. Both authors contributed equally in conducting the study and in writing the paper.

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