# Reflection on Distance Education: Lesson Learned from Pre-service Teacher Program During Covid-19

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**Abstract.** The Covid-19 pandemic provides the right momentum for implementing distance education worldwide, including in Indonesia. This reflection is an effort to explore prospective teachers' experiences teaching French as a foreign language in Senior High School 1 Bangsri, Jepara, Central Java, Indonesia, participating in the Education Practice Program in periods of crisis due to pandemic. Various adaptations and improvisations in finding ways to implement online teaching practices need to be interpreted critically for remedial measures for related institutions, namely universities and schools. The students are agents who can help schools accelerate the improvement of the quality of distance learning schools where they practice education. Various kinds of students' knowledge and experience of online learning practices, including proficiency in using multiple platforms, seem useless in facing the infrastructure obstacles such as inadequate internet, lack of internet data, and lack of student interest in learning. Finally, the overall infrastructure for distance learning success still needs to be improved, including improving students' skills searching for creative and adaptive breakthroughs in understanding. For universities, this is a challenge that must be sought solutions, namely training students to continue to think critically through a constructive and adaptive curriculum in preparing prospective teacher students who will become agents of change in teaching French as a foreign language in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** distance learning · online teaching · reflection · covid-19 · teaching practice

## 1 Introduction

Indonesian government's policy through Letter No. 4 of 2020 states that learning at every level must be carried out through distance learning (in Indonesia, *Pembelajaran Jarak Jauh* or PJJ). In line with the policy, the government also reallocates the budget to support distance learning through Ministry of Education Regulation No. 6 of 2021 on the reallocation of the use of School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds for assistance with internet connection costs of students and teachers as a support tool for distance learning [1]. However, various obstacles related to the implementation of distance learning are

still widely felt, especially related to infrastructures such as network constraints and lack of internet data, even though distance learning has entered almost two years.

The implementation of the distance learning policy is a challenge for all. Schools take advantage of all variations platforms ranging from online applications that have been often used, such as *WhatsApp,* to educational programs on television such as National Television Channels presented based on education level to support distance learning [2]. Even the applications such as *Zoom Cloud Meetings* or *Google Meet*, which before the pandemic were rarely used, inevitably utilized to optimize distance learning in a virtual face-to-face. Unfortunately, not all schools can continuously use such platforms. Schools located in urban areas usually do not experience obstacles, in contrast to schools in rural or suburban areas that choose to use *WhatsApp* because of the instant and fast messaging feature that makes it easier for teachers to send material to students [3].

In addition to the ease of use of applications to support distance learning, the problems also vary, such as unstable internet networks or even not being available, especially in the 3T area (Smallest, Remote, and Lagging) [4]. In addition, students' interest and focus in distance learning also need to be a concern. First graders of elementary and high school students are not yet familiar with online learning systems. They have difficulty considering distance learning the same as Face-to-Face learning [5]. Some obstacles also happened to teaching and learning French as a foreign language at Senior High School 1 Bangsri, Jepara, Central Java. At the beginning of distance learning in this school, distance learning uses *WhatsApp*, but this platform is less accommodating of various active learning activities. Education tends to be centered on teachers who provide material and assignment piling up, unstructured, and less understandable. Like the survey conducted by [6] in Ukraine, many students feel exhausted and stressed due to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The use of the *WhatsApp* application is also a form of teacher unpreparedness in implementing distance learning. Teacher readiness is essential for the success of a learning activity. Teachers must be ready with learning plans, materials, and learning media that support distance learning activities. Distance learning provides effective and varied learning methods for students, especially the Millenium generation [7]. Based on the research of [8] on students in Korea, many feel online learning makes it easier for them to access lessons anywhere and anytime. They can also repeat the lessons they want to learn and interact with teachers without going to school. But on the contrary, teachers feel burdened because most are the first time doing distance learning and choose the easiest way to implement distance learning [9].

Senior High School 1 Bangsri is one of the high schools located in Jerukwangi Village, Bangsri Subdistrict, Jepara Regency, Central Java Province, which has been carrying out distance learning for one and a half years. Based on the interviews with the French language teacher there, the implementation of distance learning for the past year was only done through *WhatsApp* groups by sending materials in the form of *pdf* files, *words,* or audio and *quipper* websites for mid and final semester exams. The teacher realized that students tend to be passive and rarely respond during lesson hours. In addition, many students do not do the daily tasks given, and some of them only do it as long as they can get daily grades.

From the problems that have been identified at the beginning of observation and interviews with students and teachers, pre-service teachers try to make more mature planning by trying to make or utilize learning media that are more interactive and attention-grabbing in teaching practices in school. Learning media and active distance learning are expected to help students understand teaching materials well and help French teachers implement distance learning more effectively.

The pre-service teacher conducted a learning practice at Senior High School 1 Bangsri, Jerukwangi Village, Bangsri Subdistrict, Jepara Regency, Central Java Province. The research was conducted with the practice of teaching French on Wednesday, September 1, 2021, through the *Zoom Cloud Meetings* platform. The subjects in the study were students of classes X IPS 1 and X IPS 2—data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation is done by following the process of learning to teach online together with the teacher and practicing teaching directly in the classroom. The pre-service teacher conducted an interview with a French teacher before practicing teaching distance learning. The pre-service teacher also conducts documentation of the learning syllabus, the distance learning lesson plan, and the daily report of student learning outcomes. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's data analysis theory. There are three stages in data analysis, namely reduction, presentation of data, and conclusions. After reducing important data, the author presents the data in descriptive text form to make it easier to make conclusions which is the last step in data analysis techniques.

## 2   Discussion

After collecting data and teaching practice, it was found that students were easier to understand distance learning material provided thorough explanations on the *Zoom Cloud Meetings* platform than learning through *WhatsApp* groups only. Students tend to participate in class and answer exercises given during class actively. The discussion will be described into three parts, namely the stage of preparation, implementation, and evaluation.

### *Preparation Stage*

The preparation stage is the stage before carrying out teaching practice. This stage consists of observing distance learning activities in the classroom before the implementation of the practice, consulting with the French teacher about difficulties during distance learning, and making materials and learning media for teaching, including compiling lesson plans. This stage is important because the success of learning is determined by how well the teacher designs the learning [10] as stated by [11] that the readiness of teachers and the curriculum to be used are critical to be able to maintain students' learning interests.

Before doing distance learning practice, the pre-service teacher consults first with the French teacher. The pre-service teacher consults on the use of *the Zoom Cloud Meetings* platform as a medium for teaching as well as materials to be taught to students. The selection of *Zoom Cloud Meetings* as a medium to deliver material because this application facilitates direct interaction between teachers and students and can be implemented in real-time. The results of the study from [12] also showed that many students prefer

the *Zoom Cloud Meetings* application because they can interact directly with teachers and friends, especially language learning that requires speaking aspects in their learning. One of the students in Wuhan, China, also stated that it was difficult to be able to practice the ability to speak a foreign language during online learning [13]. Especially in French learning, speaking practice is also important to make sure that the pronunciation is correct.

In the previous class, distance learning only occurred in *WhatsApp* groups. Students are lack practice in pronouncing French verbs. They are rarely practice speaking but only when the teacher gives assignments about speaking. This assignment was still not enough because the teacher did not provide any feedback or direct correction to the students who had wrong pronunciation. The assignment was just to record their voices and then send them to the *WhatsApp* groups. Distance learning through *Zoom Cloud Meeting* can be implemented as behaviorism practice in learning language based on the theory of stimulus-response-reinforcement [14].

After consulting, the pre-service teacher began preparing the material as well as the media. The pre-service teacher used reference material from a French teaching book called *Cosmopolite 1*. This source was chosen because the material presented corresponds to what will be taught to students. Besides, the book is arranged by a French educator so that the material can be more accurate rather than the other book written by non-French. Materials are selected according to the needs of students in order to understand them better. The material is then collected and condensed into one. Next, the pre-service teacher compiles the teaching material in the *Microsoft PowerPoint* application. The material displayed is in the form of important points that need to be considered by students.

For the distance learning practice, the pre-service teacher only focuses on the ability of writing. The material and the exercises are designed to be writing-oriented. In French teaching, there is a conjugation lesson that needs to be explained to the students. Students are expected to practice writing the conjugations based on the subjects. The pre-service teacher arranged a sentence with certain issues, and then students will answer the right verbs conjugations.

In the presentation, there are also examples of simple exercises that students can answer directly when distance learning takes place. The exercise is to find out if the student has understood the material presented. In addition to displaying material presentations in *Zoom Cloud Meetings,* the material will also be sent in *WhatsApp* groups. A week before the teaching schedule, the pre-service teacher announced first to students through a *WhatsApp* group that further learning would be carried out through the *Zoom Cloud Meeting* platform to get ready with their supportive tools and internet networks.

From this preparation stage, the pre-service teacher learned that it was crucial to prepare the material to support the ability to write from learning French. Especially for verbs and conjugations material, the teacher needs to pay attention to arranging the suitable materials and exercises. The students do not just write what they've learned but understand what they were writing for. The teacher also needs to design evaluations that challenge students' understanding in learning conjugations. Questioning and discussing

the answer can be solutions to make sure that students not only write the answer but also understand them.

### Implementation Stage

The implementation stage is the practice stage of distance learning teaching through the *Zoom Cloud Meetings* platform. After preparing the learning instruments, teaching practice activities are carried out using instruments that have been created to find out how students react and liveliness in following distance learning with a different platform than previous learning as stated by [15] that the involvement of teacher actively in learning can affect perseverance and also the value of students. It can develop strong student learning habits.

The distance learning was carried out in accordance with the scheduled hours. Before start, the class, the pre-service teacher has created a link to join the class at *Zoom Cloud Meetings*. The link was shared in *WhatsApp* groups 10 min before class started so students could get ready to join. This was the first time distance learning was carried out by using *Zoom Cloud Meetings* for French subjects in a class of X IPS 1 and X IPS 2. Previously, distance learning was only implemented in *WhatsApp* groups only.

Before delivering the material about *verbes et conjugations*, the pre-service teacher performs a perception about the previous week's material. The pre-service teacher asks questions and appoints students who are in the classroom to answer questions. Apperception is done for approximately 10 min and then continued to the main material. Presentations are also displayed on the *Zoom Cloud Meetings* screen. The pre-service teacher delivers the material with lecture methods as well as discussion with students during the learning. Discussion is really important in language learning to make students express themselves and make the classroom more active. When students can express themselves, the teacher can know if the students understand the materials yet [16].

The pre-service teacher occasionally asks the students about similarities or differences in the verb conjugation discussed in delivering the material. The pre-service teacher also asked the student to turn on the microphone and mimic the pronunciation of the word being learned. After reciting the verb, the pre-service teacher appointed one of the students to re-recite. The pre-service teacher also directly corrected the pronunciation of students if something was not right. This is important to be done because students are not accustomed to speaking in *WhatsApp* groups. The students seemed afraid and being silent at first, but the pre-service teacher kept encouraging them to speak. On each verb, the pre-service teacher made one example of its use in a simple sentence. After all the material has been delivered, students are asked to answer questions in the form of simple sentences. Students respond by using appropriate conjugation verbs according to the subject.

The distance learning practicum ends on time as scheduled at 12.00 WIB. Before closing the class, the pre-service teacher conducted a brief review of the material that had been delivered and asked the student if there were still those who still did not understand. The pre-service teacher sent a link for the presence in *Google Form* that has been shared in the conversation column. After making sure there are no questions, the distance learning ends with greetings and prayers together.

Speaking in language learning, especially French, is really important. Students in Indonesia tend to pronounce the word in its form. Here the teacher's role in stimulating

students to become brave and speak as much as they can in class. Distance learning through passive class in *WhatsApp* groups may be the loss for speaking aspect. Because encouraging students to speak is one of the principles of language learning in speaking [17]. The teacher should make the learning situation support the ability to speak so that the students can practice their pronunciation, rhyme, or oral composition.

### *Evaluation Stage*

An evaluation stage is a form of reflection on teaching practice activities that have been implemented. Evaluation is required to find out how distance learning teaching practices proceed through the *Zoom Cloud Meetings* platform, whether the results are in accordance with the planned learning objectives, and how students develop from previous learning [18].

After carrying outdistance learning, the pre-service teacher assesses the results of daily tasks given periodically within a predetermined time limit. The deadline given is five days until Sunday. Students in *WhatsApp* groups send the task by taking handwritten pictures of their work.

The pre-service teacher conducted a reflection and an evaluation of distance learning that has been implemented through *Zoom Cloud Meetings.* The pre-service teacher found that many students couldn't join the class at *Zoom Cloud Meetings* with or for no apparent reason. This was proved by the total students of the two classes are 70 students, but those who can attend are only 25 students, and those present until the end are only 18 students. In fact, they have read messages in *WhatsApp* groups, and many are not present for no reason. Those who do not attend with a reason ask permission because the network in their home is bad, so they can not join *Zoom Cloud Meetings,* the internet data can only be used for certain applications such as *WhatsApp,* and some who permission due to family affairs or indeed do not open *WhatsApp* groups at all.

Based on distance learning's experience, one year that has passed, teachers only use *WhatsApp* groups as a medium of delivering materials because many students are hindered by poor internet networks. However, students' understanding through *Zoom Cloud Meetings* class was better than simply delivering material through *WhatsApp* groups. This is proved by the results of daily assignments of students who were almost all correct. Some students who did not take the class at *Zoom Cloud Meetings* but did daily tasks were found to be wrong with one question. But for the students who were attended the class got a perfect score.

Apart from technical constraints such as internet networks, student participation is also still relatively low. The response of students in *WhatsApp* groups is relatively few, and only certain students respond to the messages of the teachers. The pre-service teacher sent a text message as well as an audio message, but still, only one to five students responded. This happened because the learning method used is usually only through *WhatsApp* groups with the teacher who send materials along with their training and tasks, then there is no response or questions from students. Students will respond when the teacher starts sending messages, like begging for a response from the student. After that, the class will be completely passive. Though the interest of students to follow the learning is very important to be able to support their values [19].

Another obstacle is the lack of interest of students in following distance learning. This can be caused by several factors, such as limited internet networks, inadequate

devices or mobile phones, many distractions such as online games, and an unconducive environment, as well as students' indifference to distance learning [20]. The role of parents in controlling children is also needed during the distance learning period. However, parents who are sometimes less capable in the use of technology or limited time because they have to work are also an obstacle in itself [21]. Teachers can still carry out asynchronous learning by sending video recordings of teaching and uploading them on *YouTube*. But there must still be control and supervision from the teacher to remind students. Teachers can sometimes utilize popular quiz platforms like *Kahoot!* and *Quizziz* for evaluation or just fun games so that the students are interested in distance learning.

## 3    Conclusion

French teacher has limited mastery of the distance learning platforms, so that learning relies on *WhatsApp* groups only with minimal interaction between teachers and students. Distance learning implemented through the *Zoom Cloud Meetings* platform using *Microsoft PowerPoint* presentation media can improve students' understanding and liveliness in the classroom compared to learning through *WhatsApp* groups. There were several obstacles in distance learning through *Zoom Cloud Meetings*, such as internet network barriers, lack of devices, and students' low interest in following distance learning. There is no specific assessment standard for online learning; for example, the DALDIS (Digital Assessment for Learning informed by Data to motivate and Incentivise students) assessment program in Ireland that is feedback so that students and teachers can give each other assessments of ongoing learning [22]. Homework related to distance education is still very much and must be completed collaboratively together, whether the government through fair policies, schools, universities, or other stakeholders.

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Tri Rahayuningsih (T.R) worked on the teaching practice and all of the data collections. T.R. wrote the original draft. Y.A. did the review and edited the manuscript.

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