INTERACTION: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Vol. 12, No.3; September 2025
P-ISSN: 2406-9558; E-ISSN: 2406-9566

Lecturers' Strategies for Overcoming the Digital Divide in Online Learning of English Language Teaching (ELT)

Nur Halima Tahir
hilmamms@gmail.com

Andi Sadapotto
sadapotto.andi@yahoo.com

Syahrir L
syahrir.lau00@gmail.com

Buhari
buharifakkah9@gmail.com

Sam Hermansyah
sam.hermansyah82@gmail.com

Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang

ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategies used by lecturers to address the digital divide in online English language learning in the English Language Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Sidenreng Rappang. A qualitative approach was employed, and data were collected through structured interviews with lecturers and students. The findings show that lecturers apply several strategies, including designing inclusive learning activities, promoting student collaboration, offering technical support, and facilitating the development of digital skills. The implementation of these strategies is supported by the availability of digital platforms and institutional facilities. However, limitations in internet access, varying levels of student digital literacy, and challenges in maintaining focus during online learning continue to pose obstacles. Overall, the study highlights the importance of lecturer readiness, institutional support, and student initiative in reducing the digital divide and improving the quality of online English language learning.
Keywords: Learning Strategies; Online Learning; ELT

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) in the 21st century has transformed higher education, enabling flexible, accessible, and interactive learning beyond the traditional classroom setting. Online platforms, digital resources, and virtual communication tools now play a central role in teaching and learning. In Indonesia, this shift accelerated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when universities were required to adopt online learning to

ensure continuity of education. What initially began as an emergency response has now evolved into a long-term approach, where online learning is not only relevant but has become a permanent and necessary component of academic practice. However, alongside these positive developments, the expansion of online learning has also revealed persistent inequalities among students, commonly known as the digital divide.

The digital divide does not only concern access to devices and stable internet networks. It also involves differences in digital literacy, familiarity with online platforms, and the ability to use technology effectively for academic tasks. Students from remote or low-income backgrounds often face limited internet access, share devices with family members, or lack the necessary skills to navigate digital learning environments. These challenges can result in slow progress, disrupted participation, and reduced confidence in online learning. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), where communication, interaction, and active engagement are essential, such disparities become even more critical. Students who struggle with digital tools may find it difficult to join discussions, collaborate with peers, or complete assignments that require online submission or multimedia formats. Consequently, the digital divide can hinder not only academic achievement but also equality and inclusivity in education.

Lecturers play a key role in addressing these challenges. Their ability to design adaptive, accessible, and student-centered learning strategies greatly influences the success of online learning. In the online ELT classroom, lecturers are responsible not only for delivering material but also for guiding students to develop both language skills and digital competencies. This role requires creativity in selecting appropriate platforms, flexibility in teaching approaches, and sensitivity to students' diverse backgrounds and learning conditions. Effective lecturers recognize that not all students come into online learning with the same level of readiness and therefore make efforts to provide alternative learning paths, simplified access to materials, and opportunities for independent or collaborative learning.

In regional universities such as Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang, the digital divide is particularly evident due to the varied geographical and socioeconomic backgrounds of students. Some students have home internet access and personal devices, while others depend on mobile data, shared devices, or public access points. These differences influence the level of engagement students can sustain in online English learning activities. As a result, lecturers are expected to implement strategies that promote fairness, participation, and continued learning under diverse conditions. Given these challenges, this study focuses on identifying the strategies lecturers use to minimize the digital divide in online ELT and examining the factors that support or hinder these strategies. The findings are expected to provide insights that can help improve teaching practices, strengthen institutional support, and promote more equitable learning experiences for students in higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The digital divide is understood as inequality in access to technology, digital infrastructure, and the ability to use digital tools effectively for learning. Digital Opportunity Theory emphasizes that meaningful digital access requires not only devices and connectivity but also digital literacy and institutional support. Lecturers act as mediators by providing guidance, training, and flexible learning arrangements to help students overcome digital limitations. In ELT, addressing the digital divide is crucial because learning relies heavily on communication, interaction, and continuous engagement. Strategies that lecturers can apply include inclusive learning design, technical support, digital skill-building, and fostering peer collaboration. Blended learning models, combining online and face-to-face instruction, can also help reduce technological barriers while maintaining flexibility.

However, several inhibiting factors may limit the effectiveness of these strategies. These include weak internet connectivity, limited student digital literacy, lack of institutional facilities, and challenges in sustaining student motivation. Conversely, institutional commitment, access to user-friendly digital platforms, and a supportive learning culture serve as enabling factors. Previous studies show that success in overcoming the digital divide depends on the alignment of pedagogical innovation, technological access, and cooperation among lecturers, institutions, and students. Effective strategies not only improve academic outcomes but also encourage digital empowerment and equitable participation in the learning process.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design to explore how lecturers address the digital divide in online English Language Teaching (ELT). A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research aims to understand real experiences and teaching practices rather than measure variables numerically. As Creswell (2014) notes, qualitative research focuses on participants' perspectives and situates findings within their natural contexts. In this study, the goal is to describe how lecturers plan, implement, and evaluate strategies to overcome digital limitations among students. The participants include lecturers and students from the English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang who have direct experience with online learning. Purposive sampling was used to choose individuals who could provide relevant and in-depth information. Lecturers selected were those who had taught online and faced technological challenges among students, while the student participants were those who had experienced both the benefits and difficulties of online learning. This sampling approach ensures that the data are rich, meaningful, and aligned with the study's objectives.

Instrument and Procedures

The instruments used in this study were observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to see how lecturers managed online classes, used digital platforms, and provided support to students with limited technological access or skills. Semi-structured interviews were then carried out to gather more detailed information about participants' experiences and strategies. This interview format allowed participants to respond freely, while still keeping the discussion aligned with the research focus. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and was recorded with participants' permission. Documentation, such as teaching materials, communication records, and institutional reports, was also collected to support and confirm findings from observation and interviews. The data collection process began with obtaining permission from the institution and informed consent from participants. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, depending on participants' availability, and observations were made by attending or reviewing online class sessions. To ensure credibility, data triangulation was used by comparing findings from multiple instruments and sources.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved organizing and simplifying the raw data by coding and categorizing it to identify patterns related to lecturers' strategies and challenges. The next phase, data display, involved arranging the processed data in narrative and thematic form to make interpretation easier. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the broader meaning of the themes and confirmed the findings using the evidence collected. NVivo software was used to support the coding and thematic analysis process. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was strengthened through triangulation and member checking, transferability through detailed contextual descriptions, dependability through clear documentation of procedures, and confirmability through reflective notes and audit trails. Ethical considerations included obtaining participants' consent, ensuring confidentiality, and allowing participants to withdraw at any point without consequence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research are based on data collected from interviews with five lecturers and five students from the English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang. The purpose of these interviews was to explore the strategies lecturers implemented to overcome the digital divide and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing their application. The results reveal that lecturers applied various approaches combining pedagogical, technical, and social strategies to ensure equal learning opportunities during online English Language Teaching (ELT).

The first major finding concerns inclusive learning design. All lecturers emphasized the importance of designing materials that can be accessed easily by students with diverse digital capabilities. This included providing materials in multiple formats such as PowerPoint slides, PDF files, videos, and recorded explanations. Some lecturers also distributed offline assignments to accommodate students who faced poor internet connections. By simplifying the learning materials and offering flexible submission options, lecturers aimed to minimize students' frustration and ensure that learning outcomes were still achievable despite technological limitations.

The second finding highlights peer collaboration as an essential strategy. Lecturers encouraged students to work together in small groups, allowing those with better digital literacy to assist peers who struggled with technology. This collaborative environment not only helped students complete tasks effectively but also fostered a sense of inclusivity and mutual support. According to several lecturers, teamwork became a bridge to balance digital competence within the class and reduced the psychological burden among students with limited access. Another important strategy identified was technical support and digital guidance. Lecturers took an active role in mentoring students on how to use digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom, and Canva. Some lecturers also recommended online tutorials from YouTube to enhance students' self-learning in technology use. While formal training was limited, the lecturers' continuous encouragement and step-by-step guidance helped students build confidence in navigating digital tools for learning.

The findings also reveal that digital skill development was integrated into the learning process. Lecturers did not only focus on teaching English but also incorporated tasks that required students to utilize technology creatively such as designing digital posters, recording short videos, or presenting through online platforms. This approach allowed students to practice language skills while simultaneously improving their digital competence, aligning with the goal of preparing them as future teachers in a technology-oriented world.

In terms of communication strategies, lecturers maintained active contact with students through WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, and video conferencing. These channels were used for announcements, consultations, and quick feedback. Students acknowledged that responsive communication helped them stay motivated and overcome confusion during online learning. However, both lecturers and students agreed that maintaining consistent engagement was challenging due to uneven internet quality and time management issues.

Regarding the supporting factors, the research found that institutional infrastructure, such as campus Wi-Fi access and flexible academic policies, facilitated the implementation of online learning. The willingness of lecturers to adapt to technological changes and students' positive attitudes toward digital learning also served as key enablers. In contrast, the inhibiting factors included unstable internet connectivity, limited access to digital devices, and unequal levels

of digital literacy among students. Additionally, distractions during online sessions and the absence of face-to-face supervision contributed to reduced learning focus and discipline. The results indicate that lecturers' strategies effectively mitigated many aspects of the digital divide. By combining inclusive learning design, peer collaboration, technical guidance, and adaptive communication, lecturers were able to create a more equitable and interactive online learning environment. Nevertheless, consistent institutional support and improvements in digital infrastructure remain crucial for ensuring the sustainability of these practices in the long term.

The results of this study align with theoretical perspectives on digital inclusion and confirm previous findings that the digital divide is not limited to access issues but extends to differences in digital literacy and utilization. According to Van Deursen and Van Dijk (2019), the digital divide includes disparities in the skills and outcomes derived from technology use. The lecturers' strategies observed in this study reflect an awareness of this concept, as they not only provided access to materials but also trained students to use digital tools meaningfully. This indicates that the lecturers' role went beyond content delivery they functioned as facilitators who empowered students to engage with technology as part of the learning process.

The use of inclusive learning design supports Dhawan's (2020) assertion that flexibility and accessibility are key principles of online learning. By providing learning resources in various formats and allowing offline completion, lecturers demonstrated sensitivity to students' socio-economic and technological conditions. This practice reduced inequality and promoted fairness in educational participation. It also resonates with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocates for multiple means of representation and engagement to accommodate diverse learners.

Peer collaboration proved to be a particularly effective approach to address the skills gap among students. This finding supports Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction. By grouping students with different digital competencies, lecturers created a collaborative environment where peer mentoring naturally occurred. This not only enhanced students' digital abilities but also strengthened their interpersonal communication and teamwork skills competencies that are essential in modern education and professional contexts. The study also found that technical support and digital mentoring played a crucial role in reducing anxiety and increasing confidence among students. As highlighted by Zam Zam Hariro et al. (2024), digital empowerment requires not only access to technology but also the capability to use it effectively. The lecturers' efforts to guide students in using learning platforms, even informally, reflect a practical application of digital pedagogy. Although institutional training programs were limited, lecturers compensated by offering continuous informal assistance, demonstrating a proactive attitude toward digital transformation.

The integration of digital skills into ELT activities aligns with Grant's (2021) notion that strategy is a framework for decision-making leading to desired outcomes. In this case, lecturers strategically incorporated technology-related assignments to achieve both linguistic and technological learning objectives. This dual focus not only enhanced students' engagement but also prepared them to become digitally competent educators capable of adapting to future educational demands. Communication strategies adopted by lecturers also reinforce Zhao et al.'s (2022) findings that effective interaction is critical for online learning success. The use of multiple communication platforms helped maintain a sense of connection and immediacy between lecturers and students, even when physical presence was impossible. However, the challenge of sustaining engagement highlights the need for structured digital communication frameworks that balance accessibility and interaction.

The findings regarding supporting and inhibiting factors confirm that successful digital learning depends on both human and infrastructural elements. Institutional support, such as access to Wi-Fi and flexible academic guidelines, facilitated lecturers' adaptation to online teaching. Yet, limitations in internet stability, insufficient devices, and varying levels of digital literacy remained significant barriers. These findings echo Sihombing's (2023) argument that technological advancement in education must be accompanied by strong leadership, institutional readiness, and continuous professional development for lecturers. It reveals that lecturers' strategies at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang effectively addressed multiple dimensions of the digital divide through pedagogical creativity and empathy. Their initiatives exemplify the principles of inclusive education and digital opportunity theory. However, to ensure sustainability, these strategies must be supported by systemic efforts such as improved infrastructure, policy alignment, and ongoing digital literacy training for both educators and students. The findings underscore that overcoming the digital divide in ELT is not solely a technical challenge but a holistic educational mission that integrates pedagogy, technology, and human connection.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that lecturers in the English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang employed a combination of pedagogical, technical, and social strategies to overcome the digital divide in online English Language Teaching (ELT). These strategies include inclusive learning design, peer collaboration, technical support, digital skill development, and adaptive communication. Through these approaches, lecturers successfully minimized disparities among students with different technological backgrounds and created an environment that fostered equal participation. The use of flexible materials, multiple communication channels, and blended learning methods allowed students from various economic and geographic conditions to access education more effectively. This demonstrates that thoughtful instructional design

and empathy-driven teaching can significantly reduce the impact of digital inequality in higher education.

The study also concludes that the success of these strategies depends on both individual and institutional factors. Lecturers' adaptability, creativity, and digital competence were essential in bridging gaps in access and skills. Meanwhile, institutional support such as internet access, training programs, and flexible academic policies played a crucial role in sustaining online learning implementation. However, several inhibiting factors remained, including unstable internet connections, lack of digital devices, and varying levels of digital literacy among students. These challenges highlight that bridging the digital divide is not a one-time solution but an ongoing process requiring collaboration between lecturers, students, and educational institutions. Continuous professional development and infrastructural improvement are therefore necessary to maintain equitable access to quality education in the digital era. This research underscores that overcoming the digital divide in ELT requires more than just technological advancement it demands a holistic transformation in teaching mindset and institutional commitment. Lecturers must continue to act as facilitators, motivators, and mentors who not only deliver content but also empower students to become independent digital learners. Educational institutions must, in turn, ensure that policies, infrastructure, and resources support inclusive and sustainable online learning. Ultimately, when pedagogy, technology, and human interaction are harmonized, online English education can become a powerful medium for promoting equality, engagement, and lifelong learning in the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education.

REFERENCES

Agarwal, S., & Pandey, N. (2020). Online teaching-learning in higher education during lockdown period of COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Research Open, 1*(1), 100012. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100012

Ali, W. (2020). Online and remote learning in higher education institutes: A necessity in light of COVID-19 pandemic. *Higher Education Studies, 10*(3), 16–25. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v10n3p16

Ally, M. (2019). *Foundations of educational theory for online learning.* Athabasca University Press.

Anderson, T., & Dron, J. (2017). Integrating learning management and social networking systems. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 18*(1), 7–25.

Basilaia, G., & Kvavadze, D. (2020). Transition to online education in schools during a SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Georgia. *Pedagogical Research, 5*(4), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.29333/pr/7937

Bawane, J., & Spector, J. M. (2009). Prioritization of online instructor competencies: A Delphi study. *American Journal of Distance Education, 23*(2), 62–75.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 49*(1), 5–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239520934018

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2008). *Blended learning in higher education: Framework, principles, and guidelines.* Jossey-Bass.

Grant, R. M. (2021). *Contemporary strategy analysis: Text and cases edition* (11th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Hariro, Z. Z., Sutarto, R., & Supriyanto, A. (2024). Empowering digital literacy for sustainable learning transformation in higher education. *Journal of Educational Technology Development and Exchange, 17*(1), 45–61.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* SAGE Publications.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Moore, M. G., Dickson-Deane, C., & Galyen, K. (2011). E-learning, online learning, and distance learning environments: Are they the same? *Internet and Higher Education, 14*(2), 129–135.

OECD. (2021). *Bridging the digital divide: Inclusive education and technology access.* OECD Publishing.

Sain, Y., & Hermansyah, S. (2025). Exploring the Language Attitudes of the Tolaki Community in Kendari: A Comprehensive Sociolinguistic Analysis. Journal of Languages and Language Teaching, 13(2), 983–993. https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v13i2.14415

Sam Hermansyah, Buhari, Ibrahim Manda, Andi Sadapotto, Muhammad Hanafi, Andi Asrifan, … Muliani. (2024). Reflection on Learning in Teacher Professional Education (PPG) Strategies to Enhance the Competence of Novice Teachers at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang. INTERACTION: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa, 11(2), 727–734. https://doi.org/10.36232/interactionjournal.v11i2.628

Sari, M., & Handayani, L. (2023). *Folklore in the digital classroom*

Sihombing, H. (2023). Digital leadership and readiness in Indonesian higher education institutions. *Journal of Educational Management and Innovation, 4*(2), 78–92.

Sugiyono. (2015). *Metode penelitian pendidikan: Pendekatan kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D.* Alfabeta.

Sugiyono. (2016). *Metode penelitian kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan kombinasi (Mixed Methods).* Alfabeta.

UNESCO. (2020). *Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action.* UNESCO Publishing.

Van Deursen, A. J. A. M., & Van Dijk, J. A. G. M. (2019). The first-level digital divide shifts from inequalities in physical access to inequalities in material access. *New Media & Society, 21*(2), 354–375. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818797082

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Harvard University Press.

Zhao, Y., Zheng, Q., & Lu, X. (2022). Building student engagement in online education: The role of communication and feedback. *Interactive Learning Environments, 30*(4), 567–584.

Zhong, R. (2020). The digital divide: Technology access gaps between urban and rural education sectors. *Journal of Digital Learning Research, 3*(2), 23–35.

Zulkifli, M., & Rachman, A. (2021). Challenges and strategies of EFL lecturers in online learning during the pandemic. *Indonesian Journal of English Education, 8*(1), 14–28.