

## **EFL students' language production characteristics in an asynchronous online learning**

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### **Abstract**

*This research aims to gain information and general description of students' language production in writing email in an asynchronous task based online language classroom. It covers how a certain amount of writing time pressure on within task planning stage could enhance students' language. This research applied a qualitative approach using case study research design. It was conducted in a vocational high school in Sumedang including the X grade students which were divided into two different groups A and B with different pressured online planning, namely 60 minutes and 45 minutes. The data obtained 36 emails. They were analyzed and observed using Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). It resulted that the 45 minutes group performed better on fluency and accuracy, while longer time limit benefited language complexity. That means the students in 45 minutes group paid more attention on meaning and form while the 60 minutes group gave students chance for restructuring as the result of taking risk.*

**Key words: online task based writing and language production**

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## INTRODUCTION

The pure online classroom is different from the real one because the online classroom has lack of social interaction. The teachers in an online classroom can hardly monitor their student activity, interaction, group discussion as well. The same as the aspect of a lesson the students focus on during the pre-task and within task planning phase in task cycle. The Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) itself has been drawing researchers interest for about three decades (Lai and Li, 2011; Lai, Zhao, Wang 2015). The TBLT approach emphasizes on communication skill and focuses on meaning and communication not on form (Willis, 1996). "In other words, the emphasize is on understanding conveying meaning in order to complete the task successfully. While learners are doing task, they are using language in meaningful way" (Willis, 1996). The principle and practices in TBLT according to Nunan (2004:1) are the following:

"a need-based approach to content selection; an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language; the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation; the provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning itself; an enhancement of learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning; the linking of classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom."

Furthermore, Willis (1996) that all task should have outcome which can be built on the later stage of the task cycle. The language production relates to theories of language comprehension in cognitive psychology. According to Skehan (1998) in Ellis (2005), in extent to which language users emphasis fluency, accuracy, or complexity are vary, with some task affecting and influencing them toward fluency, others on accuracy and some others on complexity. These different aspects of production caused by different system of language. Fluency is drawn by learners' memory based system assessing and deploying ready-made chunk of language and as the problem rises, they use communication strategies to get by. Accuracy and complexity are drawn on their rule based-system and

require syntactic processing, but differ from one another in “restructuring” as the result of taking risk or learner attempt to control existing resources to avoid errors Ellis (2005). In addition, the fluency properties (the number of syllables produced per minutes and the number of prune syllables per minutes according to Ellis (2005) is the evidence of what kind of planning – pressured or unpressured – learners engage in online. In other words, the fluency as the result of performing task shows what strategy they applied during the planning stage. Since the fluency properties produce as the result of learner performing task. Learner in the unpressured online planning condition spoke significantly more slower than those in pressured planning condition. The unpressured online planner perform as required.

Therefore, the research in this field including all aspect of teaching and learning. One of the most interesting is planning. A number of studies observe how various kind of planning influences language production including time allocated for it. Mehnert (1998) in Ellis (2005) studied different groups of planning time, 0 minutes, 1 minutes, 5 minutes and 10 minute found that the length of planning time indeed improve fluency but the other study found no effect on longer time. (Wendel, 1997) in Ellis (2005). Foster and Skehan (1996) investigated guided planning of different kind of texts the suggested that the type of planning interact with the type of task to get more fluency. Yuan and Ellis (2003) compared the effect of pre-task and online planning on learner performance of narrative task. In pre-task they given time 10 minutes but to perform they are under time pressured. The results shows that opportunity for unpressured online planning assisted accuracy and complexity but not fluency.

Plenty of the study mention above have been done in lab session or extracurricular activities related to face- to face classroom (Lai, Zhao, and Wang, 2011; Ellis 2005). There are still a few researches of fully online classroom. The researcher likely has begun to investigate non-lab based online learning like Hampel and Hauck (2004) and Lai, Zhao and Wang (2011). Lai, Zhao and Wang (2011) has study the online beginner Chinese

students of and teachers' reactions to the TBLT syllabus tried out in their classroom and not only about overall perception and experience but also student end production. The students are volunteer who has prior foreign language learning. They found that majority of their students lacked the appropriate strategies and skills needed for the effective TBLT. The implementation of TBLT online met challenges in the construction of TBLT syllabus and problems in implementing full cycle.

While Hampel and Hauck (2004) did exploratory study in advanced-level synchronous online German course. The student were satisfied but the teacher reported the reluctance of speaking and suffered participation. Hampel (2006) studied intermediate-level asynchronous online German course and reported that the task quite successful. These finding shows that synchronous and asynchronous online course works well in intermediate and advance level but not in synchronous beginner level. However, none from all there researches has mention which kind of planning has been applied in their research.

The prior researches of both kinds of planning (pre-task planning and within task planning), which have unfortunately been done in lab-based environment draw positive impact in language performance and production. In the lab session, they have observed the influence of the first certain minutes on planning toward language production. Their positive findings purposed potentially relevant for pure online learning. However, the research on pressured within task planning in a pure online classroom seldom has been done yet. None of the previous researches has investigated the Elementary language production. Besides that, in an asynchronous online classroom it should be hard to timed students' planning, therefore it should investigated, what if the planning time integrated in writing time. The language production analyzed after all students submitted their emails.

## **METHOD**

The research was conducted in natural setting of a pure of asynchronous online classroom using qualitative approach with case

study design. Case study type 2 was chosen to embed a number of sub-cases with multiple analysis in a single holistic case study design (R. Bandyopadhyay, 2015). The research conducted from 15<sup>th</sup> June to 8<sup>th</sup> August 2020 took place on an online English classroom of Edmodo virtual school of a vocational high school in Sumedang, where the English lesson delivered once a week for 2 x 45 minutes but accessible for the whole week. Emails consisting of 50 to 120 words were collected from 36 students at the age of 14 – 18 who were grouped into two research groups. The division of the group were based on its timing within- task planning namely 45 minutes and 60 minutes.

### 1. The fluency

The fluency measured in two ways, syllables per minute and the number of repetitions. The first the total number of produced syllables counted using the online text analyzer tool <https://www.online-utility.org/text/analyzer.jsp> then divided by the total writing time, described in the formula below. The second, the number of repetitions, which showed disfluency counted the number of times a top phrase was repeated. Both ways are presented in the following formula:

$$\text{syllables per minutes} = \frac{\text{number of syllables}}{\text{total writing time}}$$

$$\text{number of repetition} = \frac{\text{number of times a word, phrase or complete utterance repeated}}{\text{total writing time}}$$

### 2. The accuracy

The accuracy counted percentage of error free clauses divided by total produced clauses, after the total number of (1) main clauses and (2) sub ordinate clauses was calculated. The Target-like use of a specific grammatical feature was calculated if a specific grammatical feature was selected for analysis e.g., simple present and obligatory occasions for the use of this feature were identified. Both were drawn in the following formula:

$$\text{percentage of error free clauses} = \frac{\text{number of error free clauses}}{\text{total number of produced clauses}} \times 100\%$$

$$\text{Target like use of specific grammatical feature (simple present)} = \frac{\text{the number of time the learner supplies the selected grammar feature}}{\text{total number of produced clauses}}$$

### 3. The Complexity

The complexity referred to syntax variety. It measured the lexical richness by counting the total number of different words used (type) and dividing it by the total number of words (token) used and counting the amount of subordination used by dividing calculated subordinate clauses by total clauses.

$$\text{lexical richness} = \frac{\text{the total number of different word used (types)}}{\text{the total number of words (token) used}}$$

$$\text{Amount of subordination clauses} = \frac{\text{Subordinate clauses}}{\text{Total clauses}}$$

To convey the findings more realistic and richer, the researcher described the detail setting i.g. offering many perspectives of themes and give the discussion of an element of shared experiences. Clarifying the bias, the researcher bring to the study is creating an open and honest self-reflection as a core of qualitative research narratively to resonate well with the reader. Comment by the researcher about how their interpretation of the finding is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history and socioeconomic origin will make a good qualitative research. The researcher presents contradictory evident or

information about the theme since the most evident build a case for the theme. Presenting the contradictory evident would make the finding more accurate or valid.

To make the result of the research reliable, the researcher used qualitative reliability procedures recommended by Gibbs (2007) in Creswell (2014): Make sure that the transcript does not contain any mistake during the transcription by checking it; Avoid a drift in the definition of codes, a shift in the meaning of codes during the process of coding by comparing data constantly with the codes by writing memos about the codes and their definition; Compare derived results by cross-checking codes which developed by different researchers.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

To reveal the findings of this research, it is also critical to clarify how the research was conducted. In this case, the research conducted under these teaching condition:

Firstly, pre-task planning done before the main task is perform and sort to rehearsal (involving task repetition) and strategic planning (preparing the learner to perform the task considering the encoding of the content and expressing it) (Ellis, 2004). The rehearsal was intended to associate students' thought with the discussing topic and situation of daily activity during Covid19 lockdown. The students' watched a video music "Hello from Inside - Parodi", and answered questions set by the teacher as guidance to catch targeted context. They were allowed to discuss with their friends or work alone through WhatsApp, Edmodo, or another application, they preferred. While the students were working on their task, they could always communicate with the teacher by any available media all the time.

Secondly, the strategic planning contained a task with pictures emphasizing content, focus on grammar form, and expressing their own ideas. The students ordered words (as example) in boxes toward correct table regarding daily activities during and before lockdown of two people, the man in the video and their own activity.

Thirdly, on the within-task planning, the students were given an email with some questions in it to ensure that the students write about their daily activity and focus on targeted form (simple present), the instruction and amount of time 45 minutes and 60 minutes. The researcher did not separate time to read, plan, and write a reply because the class is asynchronous online one. It also intended to give the student more independent task. Skehan and Foster (2005:197) states “with on-line planning, the situation slightly different. There is no time specifically allocated to preparation for task performance”. In other word, the online planning in this research was unguided and pressured.

There are special things in such online classroom that the stages in a task cycle might not be done at one period unlike in face-to-face classroom, but possibly at different times. Some students send their submissions after the teacher sent them reminders several times. In other words, a task cycle can be delivered in different lesson periods. Willis (1996) stated some independent learner preparations could give a task advantage. Pre-task phase is achievable at the end of previous lessons, so the learners can prepare at home. The students could do finalizing or rehearsing of the report after class, for homework, and be presented in the following class.

The analysis focused on students’ specific linguistic features (i.g. lexical richness and grammatical accuracy) on learner language production. The language production itself is not the main focus of this research but as the information processing model serves as foundation for investigating how the nature of the task learner asked to perform affect their production” (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2009). Each of language production reflects language performance which elements analyzed using online tools utility to ensure its accuracy. They were the number of syllables, the number of repetitions, the sum of words produced, and the type of words used. The sum of every free error clauses, total produced clauses, target like grammar used counted manually. Then the overall result of both groups A (60 minutes) and B (45 minutes) calculate and presented by its mean.



### 1. Students' Language Production

Addressing to answer the first research question “which linguistics features are presented mostly in the students’ writing?” the mean of students’ language production in two different pressured time compared and presented in the following table 4.1.

Table 4.1  
 DATA ANALYSIS  
 STUDENT PERFORMANCE MEASURE

STUDENT	COMPONENT									
	FLUENCY				COMPLEXITY		ACCURACY			
	syllables per minutes	syllables per minutes	number of repetition (A)	number of repetition (B)	lexical richness (A)	lexical richness (B)	error free clauses (A)	error free clauses (B)	target like grammar use (A)	target like grammar use (B)
S1	0.5	1.7	6	4	0.8	0.8	97	133	25	75
S2	1.6	1.7	42	2	0.7	0.8	89	100	50	100
S3	0.9	1.4	0	12	0.7	0.7	101	75	83	67
S4	1.2	1.3	10	4	0.8	0.8	108	0	43	0
S5	0.8	1.0	0	0	0.7	0.9	78	100	75	100
S6	1.1	0.7	6	0	0.9	0.9	100	100	43	0
S7	2.4	2.9	0	2	0.7	0.8	95	54	86	50
S8	1.5	0.7	6	0	0.8	0.9	88	63	89	100
S9	2.0	2.6	11	12	0.7	0.7	109	67	100	60
S10	1.5	1.4	2	2	0.6	0.8	75	50	50	50
S11	1.3	0.7	6	0	0.7	0.9	73	100	100	25
S12	0.5	1.0	0	0	0.7	0.8	88	22	17	75
S13	1.1	2.4	0	4	0.9	0.8	116	64	60	71
S14	2.6	0.7	11	0	0.7	0.8	84	100	73	100
S15	0.0	2.3	0	6	1.0	0.7	132	91	0	91
S16	1.4	1.6	4	0	0.8	0.8	103	33	38	100
S17	1.6	2.6	14	6	0.6	0.6	95	88	100	86
S18	3.1	0.8	6	0	0.7	0.9	76	33	100	67
Σ	25.2	27.7	124.0	54.0	13.5	14.4	1708	1273	1131	1216
$\bar{x}$	1.4	1.5	6.9	3	0.8	0.8	58.6	70.7	62.8	67.6

The mean shown in Table 1 indicated similar results that the students in group B who had 45 minutes writing time produced more syllable per minutes (1.5) than those in group A who had 60 minutes writing time (1.4). The percentage of free error clauses produced more by Group B (70.7%), while A produced 58.6%. Group B used 67.6% more target like grammar feature than Group A which was 62.8%. Lexical richness’ mean expressed that both groups created the same amount of 0.8. While the mean number of repetitions made mostly by students in Group A, they

repeated phrases 6.9 times. The students of group B produced only 3 repetitions.

Based on the mean score above a conclusion could be drawn that 45 minutes pressured time benefits students' performance on fluency and accuracy but not on complexity. The 45 minutes time limit led the students to prioritize meaning and grammatical form while doing the task phase. Group A and B shows equality on using opportunity for restructuring in complexity. Therefore, in conclusion they had the same willingness to take risks in experimenting linguistically. In accordance with Skehan (1998:270) in Ellis and Barkhuizen (2009) who argues, "...that these three areas afford effective indices for measuring performance on particular task" that meaning reflected in fluency, meanwhile form demonstrated either in accuracy or complexity. Accuracy happens if control prioritizes and complexity happens if the chance for restructuring arises because of learner willingness to take risks. "A reasonable assumption is that the length of planning time is positively correlated with the degree of fluency" (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2009). Among three areas, fluency and accuracy occurred mostly in group B in which the time limit was 45 minutes. Nevertheless, none of the group A and B showed superiority in complexity.

## **2. Fluency and Accuracy**

This section aims to answer the second research question, "Do the student pay more attention to accuracy than fluency?" To get the accuracy description, the number of produced syllables per minutes, the number of the repeated phase, the different word types, the number of the word produced, the number of free and error clauses, and the correct and error targeted grammar were counted. The result defined, the fluency aspect of the two groups, as presented below, shows between the time-pressure and less time-pressure groups. The dispute mean is only 0.1 of produced syllables per minutes. Yet, it is found that group B make more syllables (fluency). In other words, Group B was more fluent than group A. Group B produced fewer repetitions of phrase shows that Group A were

less fluent than B. So, the data indicates that the pressured time of 45 minutes has led the students to be more fluent than the less pressured group. They produced language in real time without hesitation and paid more attention on meaning. Many experts supported the theory that fluency appears when learners prioritized meaning over form in order to get a task done using processing strategies that enable learners to solve the problems quickly (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2009).

Table 4.2  
**Descriptive Data of Students' Writing Fluency**

Variable	Writing Fluency Syllables per Minute	Writing Disfluency Repetition
Group A (60 Minutes)	1,4	6,9
Group B (45 Minutes)	1,5	3

The table 4.3 below shows the difference of writing accuracy between group A and B. Group A created 56.8% error free clauses, while group B made 70.7% error free clauses. That means group B produced 12.1 % more free error clauses than the group A. 67.6 percentage of the students in Group B more succeeded to use target like grammar feature than A, who made 62.8% target like grammar use. That means the students in group B, who had only 45 minutes writing time paid more attention on form and produced more accuracy on simple present than those with 60 minutes were. In relation to the rule system of target language, the learner in Group B produced better target language. They could control over elements they already internalized and thus adapted a conservative stance toward target language use better (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2009). The result of this research correlated with the study conducted by Yuan and Ellis (2003) in Skehan and Foster (2005) that online planning is more relevant to increase accuracy than is strategic planning.

Table 4.3  
**Descriptive Data of Students' Writing Accuracy**

Variable	Error Free Clauses	Target Like Grammar Use
Group A (60 Minutes)	58.6%	62.8%
Group B (45 Minutes)	70.7%	67.6%

### 3. Complexity

This section addressed to answer the third research question “Do complexity appear in students of elementary level?” The table 3 below expressed the mean score of student produced lexical richness. Group A with 60 minutes writing time and group B with 45 minutes viewed the same numbers. That means they elaborated language the same rich lexis. The total of subordination clauses produced by group A was 13 divided by total produced clauses 156. The amount of subordination used by group A was 0.08. By group B wrote the total subordination 3, if it divided by total produced clauses 149, the amount of subordination used was 0.02. In conclusion, the students of group A who got 60 minutes writing time made more subordination clauses than those in group B.

From the amount of subordination used, it is to conclude that the students had limited interlanguage system for they are at elementary level of language proficiency. The group A obviously had greater willingness to take risk by experimenting linguistically. In the term of lexical richness, both groups A and B indicated to own the same willingness to use more challenging and difficult words.

In accordance with this result Ellis and Barkhuizen (2009:184) stated “the complexity showed the extent to which learners produce elaborate language”. There are two sense of elaboration. “The first, learners vary in their willingness to use more challenging and difficult language. Language is upper limit of their interlanguage system, and thus not automated, can be consider more complex than language has been fully internalized”. The second, “complexity can refer to learner preparedness to use wide range of different structure. Complexity depends on learners’ willingness to take risks by experimenting linguistically Skehan (2001) in Ellis and Barkhuizen (2009:184). In accordance with the finding of this research, Ellis (2005:23) stated that “giving learner the opportunity to plan can increase the complexity of their production.” The effect can be enhance if the learners are given “a reasonable length of time for planning, say 10 minutes”

Table 4.3  
Descriptive Data of Students' Writing Complexity

Variable	Lexical Richness	Amount of Subordination
Group A (60 Minutes)	0.8 0.8	0.08 0.02
Group B (45 Minutes)		

#### 4. The Role of Time on Students Online Writing Strategy

This part tended to answer the last research question, “what role does time play in learner writing strategy? Based on the overall data the students in the group of 45 minutes writing pressured time performed better than those in the 60 minutes group. The on-line pressured 45 minutes writing time obviously benefited students’ on fluency and accuracy but not on complexity. The 60 minutes time limit gave the students positive effect to take risk by experimenting linguistically.

The finding correlated to Skehan and Foster (1997) theory that the pressure on online planning built up with a consequence effect on fluency. Mehnert (1998) in Ellis (2005) through his investigation of allocating different groups of learner 0 minute, 1 minute, 5 minutes and 10 minutes planning time found that fluency improved in relation to the length of planning time. Ellis (1997) in Ellis (2005:22) found that “planning provided opportunities for both strategic and on-line planning resulted in more accurate use of the regular past tense.

However, it contradicted with the following research: Ellis (1987) who compared learners’ performance both oral and written, stated that in the term online planning accuracy was greater when there was no time pressure. Ellis and Yuan (2003) found from their study of pre-task and on-line planning effect on narrative task in which the group of learners were given 10 minutes for preparing task in Pre-task phase and performed under pressured time. In the on-line planning, the learner were given no

chance for preparation but allowed to perform in their own time. And the control group which had no preparation time and should perform under pressured time. They found that unpressured on-line planning assisted accuracy and complexity but inhibited or reduce fluency.

Crookes (1998) in Ellis (2005) reported 10 minutes of planning time led learners to produce more complex sentences and wide range of lexis. In conclusion, 45 minutes pressured online writing time played role to increase students' fluency and accuracy, notably the students were at elementary level. Related to cognitive models of task based performance and learning, the time is appropriate to provide opportunity for the students to draw on their memory- based systems of language, accessing and deploying ready made-chunk of language, and using communicative strategy to cope when problem arise. The time also enable students to access their rule-based system and syntactic processing. The 60 minutes writing times provide the learner border chance for 'restructuring' as the result of the need of taking risk (Skehan, 1998 in Ellis 2005).

In this research, the researcher found some other facts that only 9 people from both groups A and B (45 minutes) who could achieve required writing length 50 – 120 words. There are only few students wrote correct email structure and some of the students fail to write because the system would lock the "activity" on Edmodo as the time up. The students' capability to recognize the structure of the email possibly related to the planning, which not concluded detailed planning. Some student fail to write required words could be caused by the limited working memory or the other factors such as signal matter, the kind of pre-task, the strategic planning even the students' motivation to make effort on learning and notably some other problems occurs on pure online classroom.

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study is to discover students' language production characteristics in a real asynchronous online task-based writing activity by comparing two different kinds pressured within-task planning on writing, 45 minutes and 60

minutes. In the 45 minutes group, the students performed better than those in the 60 minutes one.

Based on the research finding in the previous chapters, the researcher draws some conclusion as follow: Fluency and accuracy occur mostly in 45 minutes pressured online planning; Appropriate time limit can aids the student to pay attention on both fluency and accuracy; Complexity in the elementary level can appear, if the students have plenty of time to plan and write; A certain length of time provided for planning can enhance better students' language performance on writing.

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