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**Learning from the Pandemic:  
Using Authentic Materials for Writing Cause-Effect Essay  
in Indonesian Context**

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**ABSTRACT**

The coronavirus outbreak has affected all aspects of human life, including education. This article aims to describe (1) authentic materials that can be used for teaching cause-effect essay, (2) the stages of using authentic materials for learning, and (3) students' opinions in using authentic materials related to COVID Pandemic 19. This research uses a qualitative approach, which focuses on case studies. The subjects of this study were the lecturer of essay writing course and 32 fourth semester students who joined the course in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, University of PGRI Wiranegara, Pasuruan in the academic year 2019-2020. The research instruments used were mainly documentation, and personal chats interview with the subjects of the study. The data collection was conducted in May 2020. The results showed that (1) authentic materials used for teaching cause-effect essays are news in the mass media and short stories downloaded online in which both talk about COVID 19; (2) The stages of using authentic material for teaching cause-effect essay follows the process approach, namely 1) pre-writing (preparing background knowledge), 2) brainstorming and drafting, and 3) writing (revising, and publishing). The results also showed that students had no difficulty when using authentic materials related to the COVID 19 pandemic even though the material was written in a foreign language.

**Key Words:** authentic materials, essay, cause-effect, pandemic.

**Introduction**

Indonesia and other countries around the world are currently in a difficult time because of the Corona 19 virus pandemic. News related to the COVID 19 pandemic, including death, termination of employment, crime, and poverty, is presented almost every day on television and on newspapers both printed and online. However, from the dark side of the COVID 19 pandemic, many creative works have sprung up. They discuss, tell, describe, inform about this pandemic in the form of many literary genres, both fiction and non-fiction ( a poem, stories, songs, short films, mini fiction). As a result, materials related to COVID 19 become rich and varied.

One of the sectors that are strongly affected by this pandemic is the world of education. When learning and teaching must be from home, teachers feel uneasy because of the limited interactions and the limited teaching resources that can be delivered online. COVID 19 pandemic makes the use of textbooks became less flexible. Not many students manage to borrow books from the library to be read and studied at home. If only they managed to take the textbooks home, some topics might not be

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relevant to the up to date issue, such as the CIVD 19 outbreak. Nowadays, the use of conventional materials is slowly left out as more and more resources are taken from the internet in the form of e-textbooks (Embong, Noor, Hashim, Ali, & Shaari, 2012). It is time for the teachers/lecturers to think of the alternative instructional materials which are relevant to the current issue and convenient for both parties. One solution to this problem is the teachers made instructional materials through careful selection from online sources. Gunawan, Soewito, & Candra (2017) state that learning resources are taken from the internet are more affordable, more convenient, and more preferable., therefore, instead of being dependant on printed-textbooks, teachers/lecturers need to think creatively and innovatively in searching and delivering instructional materials appropriate with the instructional objectives, while a the same time making the students' awareness of the dangerous effect of the COVID 19 and how to solve the problems that follow.

For most teachers/lecturers, using a textbook as the source of information is typical. The use of textbooks in learning is efficient in some cases because this type of materials have undergone standardization in content and systematic presentation, and are generally following the established syllabi stated by the government (Richards, 2001). However, textbooks have limitations. Among these is the inauthenticity of the language and content (Richards, 2001). He states that the language and content written in the textbook are simplified to facilitate learning. Another disadvantage of using textbooks, according to Richards (2001), is that they make teachers less creative in creating learning materials suitable for their students. However, this does not mean that textbooks are not allowed from being used.

Talking about the downside of the textbook gives a clear message that for language learning, the instructional materials need to be as authentic as possible, and as close as possible with the target language used in the actual communication (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2019). Authentic material is a material whose creation is not for classroom purposes. Studies show that there are many authentic learning materials available for teachers/lecturers to teach writing. They can be printed materials, such as a collection of short stories (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2018), serial images (Styati, 2016), and web-based materials such as YouTube videos (Styati, 2016), websites (Sundana, 2018), like a blog, IMDb, and booksie.

Previous research shows that the use of authentic material for learning can improve writing skills. (Sundana, 2018) conducted a study to find out whether authentic material was effective in improving writing ability. Through an experimental design, the results of his research show that groups who learned with authentic material were able to write descriptive texts better than those who did not. The next study is Arifa (2011), who uses authentic material to improve the high school students' writing ability to write procedure texts by using an experimental design. The results of her study show that the experimental group that used authentic material was able to write procedure texts better than the group that did not use authentic material. Another study was conducted by Setyowati & Sukmawan (2018) who investigated the use of authentic material for teaching essay writing class through content analysis design. In their research, the students analyzed short stories and made their analysis in the form of an essay. The results show that the students felt that making essays to analyze short stories was able to make them write better and understand the stories better.

However, previous research did not provide sufficient information on how authentic material utilized when the condition of the teaching and learning process does not allow for face-to-face interaction. Therefore, this article aims to describe (1) the authentic materials used for teaching cause-

effect essay, (2) the instructional stages for teaching a cause-effect essay, and (3) the students' opinions in using authentic materials that are related to the COVID 19 pandemic.

## Method

This study uses a qualitative approach focusing on a case study design. The researchers chose this design because in the English language study program at the University of PGRI Wiranegara, in the past two years, the writing classes have used authentic material. Referring to this, the chosen research design is considered appropriate. There are two subjects of this study, namely the writing lecturer and the 4th-semester student who joined an essay writing course in the academic year 2019-2020. Two parallel essay writing classes participated in the study. They were the 2018 batch A and B. The total number of the students who participated in the study was 37. However, only 32 students who actively joined the online class. The instruments used were the documentation of instructional material, the screenshots of the teaching and learning process conducted through telegram application, and students' chats from Whatsup and telegram groups. The data collection was carried out in May 2020. The data obtained are in the form of words, phrases, and sentences. Because the data are in the form of qualitative data, they will be analyzed qualitatively. A simple codification was carried out to assist the researchers in analyzing data.

## Finding

### The Authentic Materials for Teaching a Cause-Effect Essay

The authentic materials used for teaching writing are online mass media news and online short stories. Both of these materials were for learning to write a cause-effect essay. Class A used authentic material sourced from online mass media, and class B used a short story with COVID 19 theme. Class A used an authentic material entitled "*COVID-19 pandemic forces Indonesian mothers to do it all*" taken from the Jakarta Post on April 21, 2020, Tuesday and online on the Jakarta Post website at 08:46 WIB. The number of words in the article is 1,184 words and written in English. This article was retrieved from <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/04/21/covid-19-pandemic-forces-indonesian-mothers-to-do-it-all.html>. This article reports the struggles of mothers who must live and work at home during the Pandemic and the implementation of the large-scale social restriction.

Class B uses authentic material derived from a short story, titled "Life AC" written by Manuel Aiquipa. This short story contains 1,468 words and can be read at <https://denverite.com/2020/04/09/life-ac-our-second-place-coronavirus-flash-fiction-winner-feels-otherworldly/>. This short story is a flash fiction genre. It was launched from the Denverite website. The Denverite held a flash fiction contest during the corona 19 virus pandemic on March 18, 2020, and the gathering date was March 27, 2020. The short story contested must reflect how COVID 19 affects the social life of the community of Denver in America. The contest required a short story to be written in the range of 500 - 1,500 words. The short story entitled "Life AC" by Manuel Aiquipa managed to become the second winner of the Flash Fiction Writing Competition related to COVID 19.

### Instructional Stages

In general, the stages of using authentic material for the two classes were similar. The difference lay in the form of the learning material, one used fiction, and the other used factual news. The teaching and learning process was carried out online, through Whatsup Group (WAG) and telegram.

### *Pre-Writing Stages*

The purpose of the pre-writing stage is to prepare the background knowledge. The material presented was the cause-effect essay of the COVID Pandemic 19 in Indonesia. The students discussed 1) the origin of COVID 19, 2) the country with the highest number of deaths in the world and in Southeast Asia, 3) and how COVID 19 affects human life in general. After the discussion, students read a model essay that talks about the COVID 19 Pandemic in Indonesia entitled "*The Impact of Corona Virus in Indonesia*". After reading, the students discussed the essay's structure. The discussion revolves around the essay structure (thesis statement, the introductory paragraph, the topic sentences), the essay development (the examples and details in the body of the essay, the evidence, and facts in the essay), how to quote, and write references, and how to make conclusions. The discussions also included the contents of the essay, especially those relating to how COVID 19 influenced the students' life, and in what aspects people are affected by this pandemic.

In the pre-writing stage, the vocabulary, phrases, and conjunctions commonly used to write cause-effect essays are presented, such as *because, because of, due to, since, for, as, therefore, as a result, thus*. The lecturer then asked the students to look for examples of words and phrases used in the model essay and had them explained why the words were appropriate. The students were also asked to analyze the clauses (sub-clause and main-clause) used in the model text. After identifying, students made sentences independently using words, phrases, conjunctions that express causality.

### *Brainstorming and Drafting*

The lecturer presented authentic materials to the students. The material was online mass media taken from the Jakarta Post on 21 April 2020 with the title "*COVID-19 pandemic forces Indonesian mothers to do it all*" for class A, and the short story "*Life AC*" by Manuel Aiquipa given to class B.

The students read this authentic material silently for 5 minutes. Because the materials were authentic, the vocabulary, grammar, and style of language sometimes became obstacles for comprehension. Therefore, the students read quickly to get the main idea and overall picture of the text (skimming). To skim effectively, the students were told to ignore difficult vocabulary. After skimming, the students read more carefully to get specific information (scanning) to answer the comprehension questions.

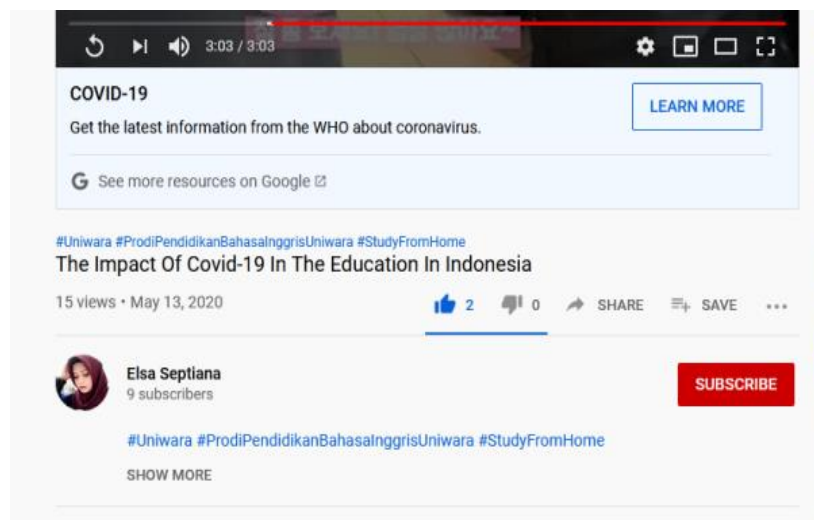
The comprehension questions revolved around the content of the text. The questions for reading the "Life AC" short story was comprehension questions about what, why, how. 1) whether the character still opened his shop during the COVID 19 pandemic, 2) why the story was written in diaries, 3) how the COVID 19 pandemic affected the lives of the characters, 4) why their neighbors looked sad, 5) what happened on a particular date in the diary, 6) how the story ends, and 7) whether the pandemic only harms human life. The comprehension questions for the Jakarta Post article were 1) about the role of mothers during the COVID pandemic 19, 2) why women's job was more vulnerable for layoffs, 3) women's tasks at home and work during the COVID 19 pandemic outbreak. After doing the reading comprehension section, the students were told to outline the cause-effect essay that discussed the impact of COVID 19 and what they felt about it. The students submitted the drafts through WAG or telegram.

### *The Writing Stage and Publication*

At this stage, the students wrote essays responding to the reading materials that they have read before and given their ideas and thoughts about the effects of COVID 19 on people. The students submitted their draft personally to the lecturer. Next, the lecturer provided feedbacks. The feedbacks are related

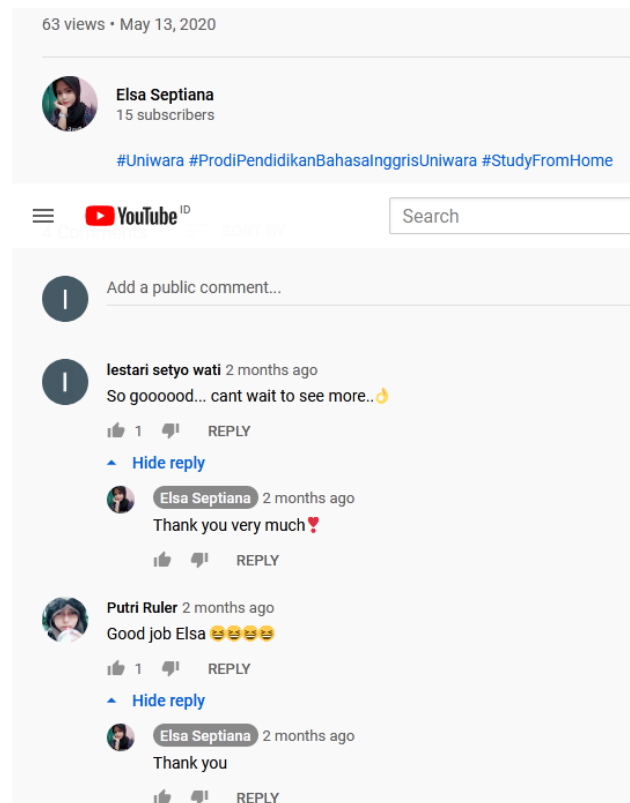
to the structure, the contents, the grammar, the choice of words, and the essay development. Some students revised their essays several times.

The lecturers also ask the students to check their grammar by using free applications, such as [grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com) or [u\\_dictionary](https://u-dictionary.com). The students were also asked to check the authenticity of their essay with the free online plagiarism application, such as [plagiarisma.net](https://plagiarisma.net), small SEO tool, and plagiarism checker X. The lecturers only accepted paper with 90% originality and above. If the originality was below 90%, then students must revise the sentences or paragraphs which were considered 'duplicate'. After the essay was submitted, the lecturer then asks the students to publish the essay on YouTube as the final stage of publication. The students wrote each paragraph from their essay in a PPT slide, then converted it into video and uploaded it on YouTube. All of the students were instructed to click the subscribe button, to like and give comments on other students' channel.



**Picture 1.** Example of the Student's Publication in You Tube

All students who took the essay writing class should publish their writing on their YouTube channel. Therefore, there are 32 cause-effect essay videos published on YouTube. All of them specifically discuss the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic in Indonesia.



**Picture 2.** The comments from viewe and students

The form of publication in the Youtube platform made the students presented the essay in their best effort. They had to select the background, learn to edit the video, and learn to upload the video. This shows that the students have to have multiple skills to fulfill the assignment.

### The Students' Opinion

In general, students gave a positive response regarding the use of authentic material with the COVID 19 pandemic theme. For them, this topic was not difficult to understand, nor was it difficult to write. Almost every day they read, watched and experienced the effects of a pandemic COVID 19 in daily life.

*In my opinion, there is no difficulty to understand the news material in the Jakarta Post (A.F / 2018 A)*  
*(Short story with the theme COVID 19) is not difficult, Ma'am, because we have often heard*  
*(COVID 19) on TV and online news in recent months (E.S / 2018 B)*

The students had no problem understanding the text, both the fiction and the factual text. This is all because this topic is widely discussed and talked in many mainstream media. Furthermore, there were no students who disputed the opinions of the class representatives and there were no problems found during the learning process.

When the learning process took place, the students were told to skim and scan text. After reading, the students discussed the comprehension question. If there were any difficulties in the materials, it would take longer for students to answer the comprehension questions. Yet, after five minutes, several students had posted answers to these comprehension questions. This shows that the authentic material was still within the tolerance limits of language abilities. Problems arose when the students

had to express their ideas in written form. The main problem was the use of language and choice of words.

*I wrote directly in English. But there are a lot of vocabulary that I don't know (N.F / 2018 B)*

*Yes, I wrote in the Indonesian first. Then I translated into English. I cannot write directly in English (in English) (N.S / 2018B)*

The COVID 19 authentic material turned out not to be a problem for the students because they are exposed to this news every day. From the opinion of the students above, it implies that the problems lay in the use of language to express ideas in written form. This is a common and natural problem because as a foreign language learner, the use of the target language to express ideas both written and oral, whatever the topic, is never easy for them.

## Discussion

Nowadays, the use of technology in learning can no longer be avoided, especially during the COVID 19 pandemic outbreak. Easy and inexpensive internet access becomes a wise choice to help to learn continues. To surf in cyberspace does not require a large desktop computer, because technology devices, such as smartphones and gadgets can do better jobs. In this research, the students use various applications to create essays and publish them, such as Grammarly.com and U\_dictionary applications to help check the grammar. They also use digital dictionaries, free online synonyms, and Google Translate to find out words or phrases they need to express their thoughts.

With the advancement of technology, teachers are spoiled with the vast amount of authentic materials on the internet. It takes a few efforts to select appropriate authentic materials for the students. The use of online mass media and short stories that talk about COVID 19 are considered relevant to the current issue. The use of news from magazines and newspapers taken from the internet provides a friendly atmosphere during the learning process (Sundana, 2018). Similarly, Alm (2008) states that teachers need to integrate technology in teaching and make use of authentic materials from the internet. He further states that authentic materials offer exposure to real use of the target language, as well as its cultural and linguistic context.

The learning stages in this study uses a process approach to teaching writing. This approach treats writing as a series of process, instead of as a completed product (Bayat, 2014). According to Graham & Sandmel (2011), the process approach is one of the most known approaches to teaching writing. Research has shown that the process approach is beneficial to improve the students' skills in writing an essay (Bayat, 2014; Miftah, 2015). The processes as reported in this study are pre-writing activity, brainstorming and drafting, writing, revising, and publishing. The process is going back and forth several times. Some students revise the drafts twice, while others only once. Because writing is not linear, the students need to go to this process to get the maximum result. The students' publication on the YouTube channel requires multiple skills. They have to learn how to edit the video, how to match the music with the theme of the essay, and how to upload the video. Therefore, the students need to improve their skills not only in writing an essay but also in technological ability. In this digital age, technology literacy is almost a must. As stated by Farmer (2014), the utilization of technology requires literacy skills, while at the same time, technology can help improve those literacy skills. This implies that incorporating technology in teaching and learning is highly recommended.

One of the policies of the Indonesian government during the COVID 19 pandemic took outbreak was learning from home, working from home and staying at home. These policies were implemented to break the chain of COVID 19. Therefore, the teaching and learning process underwent a revolution that no one was able to reject, namely learning anywhere, under any conditions, by utilizing available technology. Bonk (2012) states that in this century, learning does not only occur formally in the classroom environment and campuses, but it has penetrated an environment that is not even possible to imagine. According to him, learning can occur on a running train, on a flying plane, on a sailing ship, even in wars. Bonk (2012) defines informal learning as an activity initiated by oneself to study anywhere and anytime. This can be an activity to fulfill school assignments, to do house chores or office work. Bonk (2012) also introduces the term extreme learning, which means the use of technology to learn in an unusual way for the sake of learning. For example, learning can take place on a mountain, in a park, in a parking lot, in a mall, in a hospital, even on a battlefield. The term extreme learning according to Bonk (2012) can also include learning involving cyberspace, online communities/groups, webinars, webcams, conversations/chat, short messages from smartphones, virtual classes, online learning resources, open universities and free online courses provided by universities or other course institutions.

The results of Bonk, Kim, & Xu (2016) research on self-directed learning for self-directed online learning environments (SOLE), states that learners who learn from learning portals, video sharing, virtual learning, etc learn to satisfy their curiosity and achieve their own set of learning goals. Their results also revealed that these learners did extreme learning not to get certificates or diplomas, but rather aimed at personal and professional development, which was more focused on the benefits of themselves, for others and the surrounding community.

Based on Bonk's (2012) the extreme learning definition, the learning experiences that are taking place during the COVID 19 pandemic have met the criteria of extreme learning. The stages of learning in the essay writing course conducted in this study, were carried out using Whatsup Group (WAG) technology and telegram, and were carried out openly, flexibly, informally, and anywhere. Lecturers can teach this course under any conditions and at any time that has been mutually agreed upon. Similarly, the students can take this course anywhere and anytime, only by using their smartphones.

In this research, students publish their writings in the form of videos and uploaded them on their personal YouTube channel. In the past few years, the activities to make, edit, and upload videos to the internet might be something that cannot be done by everyone. However, with technological advancement, it is easy for everyone to do. People who are 'literate' with technology can make and record videos easily and share them with anyone and anywhere using only a smartphone (Brown, 2016). In this study, the students create videos for the publication of their work by using Kine Master, Likee, Film Maker Pro application which can be downloaded for free through the Play Store.

Using authentic learning material has to be done carefully. This is because three main elements must be considered by the teacher/lecturer to use authentic material in the classroom. The first problem is the problem of language difficulty levels, both in syntax and vocabulary called appropriateness (Day, 2004). The next problem is for what level problem (Richards, 2006). Authentic material will not be of much use, and may not be useful at all, to learn language skills if given to beginner level (Khaniya, 2010). The use of authentic material for the beginner level will only frustrate them and reduce motivation to learn (Guariento & Morley, 2001). Authentic material helps more acquisition and language skills for an advanced level (Beresova, 2015). Due to their 'authentic' nature, especially in



terms of syntax, vocabulary, and language style, teachers/lecturers need to pay attention to detail before presenting it to the students. All these aspects must be taken into account if teachers/lecturers should use authentic material to achieve the learning objectives. The use of randomly selected material will only give a 'discouragement' for both the students and the instructor.

## Conclusion

In all parts of the world, the COVID 19 pandemic harms human life. Yet, there is always a bright side from an issue, however dark it is. The results of this case study show that the negative side caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, can be addressed more wisely; that is making use of what is left from it. The vast amount of literary genres and mass media news (both digital and printed) have given a lot of choices for language teachers/lecturers to use them as instructional materials. Authentic material is utilizable for language learning, either first language learning or second/foreign language learning. When all aspects of life have limitations, It is better to make the best use of what is available to get the best results. One way to utilize authentic materials from COVID 19 theme is using it for writing a cause-effect essay. This topic is close and personal. Everybody experiences it and feels its direct impact on life. Even though the teaching and learning process is conducted in a blended learning setting or fully online learning setting because of the pandemic, the material's delivery should follow the writing as a process approach to be able to reach its maximum result. As the inclusion of technology in education is unavoidable, the students writing products can be published in any online platform, such as YouTube.

This research has some weaknesses. First, this study is conducted on small scale research with a qualitative design. Therefore, it cannot be used as a generalization. Secondly, this study does not explore the students' feelings when they use YouTube for publishing their writing products. This provides an opportunity for future researchers to investigate the students' perception when utilizing YouTube for publication. This research also does not explore the lecturer's and students' problems when using technology, specifically YouTube, for writing courses. Future researchers can direct their study to investigate the teacher's and students' problems and solutions when using YouTube for teaching. The COVID 19 pandemic outbreak surely does bring misery to all people. Yet, education persists.

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