



ELT Echo : The Journal of English Language Teaching in Foreign Language Context

journal homepage: <https://syekhnurjati.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/eltecho>



CULTIVATING EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' SOCIAL PRESENCE IN ONLINE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PRACTICE THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

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article info

Article history
Received: 12 October 2021
Received in revised form:
27 December 2021
Accepted: 28 December 2021
Available online:
31 December 2021

Keywords:
Classroom management
Social presence
Project-based learning
Pre-service teachers

abstract

The current pandemic situation has forced EFL pre-service teachers to conduct their teaching practice virtually. By teaching virtually means that they must have the ability to manage classroom online. However, to the best of researchers' knowledge, these pre-service teachers did not get any preparation related to online classroom management. One of the must-have abilities for pre-service teachers to manage online classroom is social presence. Since during online teaching the social contact between teachers and students weaken, then the ability for the teachers to socially present before their students is urgent. Though several studies have proposed that students' social abilities could be supported through project-based learning, there is a limited study investigating project-based learning and social presence. Therefore, through this research, the researchers attempted to develop a course focusing on developing pre-service teachers' social presence while practicing online classroom management through four stages of project-based learning activities. Using a social presence questionnaire adapted from Swan et al. (2008) and Arbaugh (2008), after one semester, the results show that there was a significant difference between pre-service teachers' pre-test and post-test score of social presence. It is also found that female pre-service teachers have higher social presence level than male pre-service teachers. In addition, 87% of the pre-service teachers joining the study also acknowledged that the project-based learning activities they did during the course help them develop their social presence. At the end, several implications related to the research findings are proposed in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Classroom management is one of the required skills for the pre-service teachers, including EFL pre-service teachers. Mulyasa (2007) even claims that classroom management skill belongs to teachers' professional competence that all teachers must have. In relation to the success of teaching, Widiaworo (2018) argues that the way teachers manage the class is closely related to the success of teaching and learning process. In 2020, the focus of classroom management course in one of departments of the private universities in Indonesia was still on managing offline classroom. However, the fact that the pre-service teachers from that department would have experienced online teaching during the pandemic, the need for preparing them with online classroom management seems unavoidable. EFL student-teachers or also known as EFL pre-service teachers need knowledge, strategies, and practice of online classroom management. In addition to online classroom management skills, it is also urgent to develop students' social presence.

Social Presence

Several experts have proposed the definitions of social presence. The earliest one is from Gunawardena (1995), defining social presence as a level where people seem real during the mediated interaction among them. One simple example for this definition is that two or more people who are separated in different areas yet are still connected through videocall. The moment when those people could see the presence of each other, then, that is a social presence.

Specifically, in terms of online teaching, Aragon (2003) has defined social presence as an effort made by a teacher to be able to associate a social relationship with the learning environment. Furthermore, social presence can also be said as how to establish a learning interaction without having to meet in the same classroom and being able to adapt to new social situations (Garrison et al., 2010). In addition, social presence is also associated with interpersonal and emotional relationships between student and teacher communication so as to create a conducive learning environment (Cui et al., 2013). In relation to classroom management, Marzano et al., (2005) emphasize teacher-student relationship as an important aspect for the success of classroom management.

Social presence is a must-have ability for the teachers in this era of online and distant learning. Aragon (2003) mentions that while teaching online, the ability to establish interpersonal contact among classroom members diminishes since they are separated by location and since all the contact is only through electronic. Therefore, creating interpersonal contact between teachers and students in the classroom is urgent. Once the students could feel the presence of their teachers, then it will be easier for the teachers to manage a more conducive classroom atmosphere. The better the teacher manages the class, the more effective the learning process.

Classroom Management

A considerable amount of literature has grown up dynamically throughout the idea of classroom management. Kunter et al. (2007) has defined classroom management as one of the competencies to develop and build a stable interaction relationship between teachers and students. In this environment, good classroom management also occurs if the teacher is able to manage classroom interactions effectively. Garrett (2014) argued that classroom management is applying instructional time efficiently to assure students' learning processes, strengthen their knowledge, and increase students' social motivation. In addition, classroom management also reflects the teacher's coverage of all his or her actions and practices in dealing with student behaviour, learning expectations, supporting learning outcomes in accordance with the academic and emotional-social goals of student learning (Partin et al., 2009; Garwood & Vernon-Feagans, 2016).

The academic literature on classroom management has revealed the importance of classroom management itself. The important benefits of why classroom management is important are as an ideal class benchmark, measuring the level of success of a class (classroom objective), creating a positive and controlled learning environment between teachers and students, as well as providing intellectual development in students' academic performance (Kimber et al. 2005; Kunter et al., 2007). In addition, effective classroom management can also increase students' appreciation and emotion and thus create an effective and conducive class atmosphere (Garwood & Vernon-Feagans, 2016). Therefore, it can be concluded that classroom management is a teacher's skill in integrating his/her performance

into an optimal learning process and being able to create an appropriate learning atmosphere by involving students in it. Classroom management with the right and effective proportions is important as a measure of success for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

In this present study, the pre-service teachers worked in groups and created online classroom management planning prior to their online classroom management practice. This project-based learning intends to strengthen their social skills.

Project-based Learning

Project-based learning can be either conducted individually or in groups. However, it is preferable to be conducted in groups since it is believed to enhance students' social skills such as communication, negotiation, and collaboration (Bell, 2010; Dag & Durdu, 2017). During the process of doing their project, the students work in groups with their friends collaboratively, share ideas to other members, and must also listen well to other friends' voices. These activities are the ones lead them to nurture their social skills. Therefore, in relation to the aim of developing pre-service teachers' social presence, the researchers employ project-based learning as the approach for this classroom management course.

The stages of project-based learning conducted by the researchers in this present study were adapted from the one from Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2005). The initial model from Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2005) consists of five stages: (1) *driving questions*, (2) *situated inquiry*, (3) *collaboration*, (4) *learning technologies*, and (5) *creation of artifacts*. However, the present study combined Step 4 and Step 5.

This present study was implemented for one whole semester in Language Classroom Management course. The so-called 'language classroom management' is due to the students from this department are trained to be English teachers, therefore they are expected to have ability or skill to manage language (read: English) class later. As mentioned earlier, the focus of the classroom management course from the previous year was still on how to manage offline classroom, yet, these students, who were obliged to conduct teaching practice, must teach online during this pandemic. Therefore, the need to teach them online classroom management strategies is inevitable. This current research thus attempted to answer these research questions:

- 1) Is there any significant difference in terms of students' social presence before and after the language classroom management course?
- 2) Do female pre-service teachers have higher social presence than male pre-service teachers?
- 3) Does project-based learning help the students in developing their social presence strategies during managing online classroom?

METHOD

A mixed-methods approach was used in this study. The quantitative data were derived from close-ended questions while the qualitative data were derived from the open-ended questions. This study was based on a 14-week online course of the Language Classroom Management course for the fourth semester students. There were two classes (in total 200 minutes) per week. As mentioned earlier, the participants of this current research are the students of English Language Education Department (ELED) at one of universities in

Indonesia. These students are projected to be English teachers in the future. The implementation of project-based learning was conducted in Language Classroom Management course in which these students are trained to own the ability or skill to manage online English classroom. The research was conducted for one semester from March to July 2021 with 66 students joining the course from the beginning to the end.

During the implementation stage, the researchers employed the project-based learning as the method for teaching. The researchers adapted the model proposed by Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2005). The detail stages of this adapted version of project-based learning format is explained in the following figure.

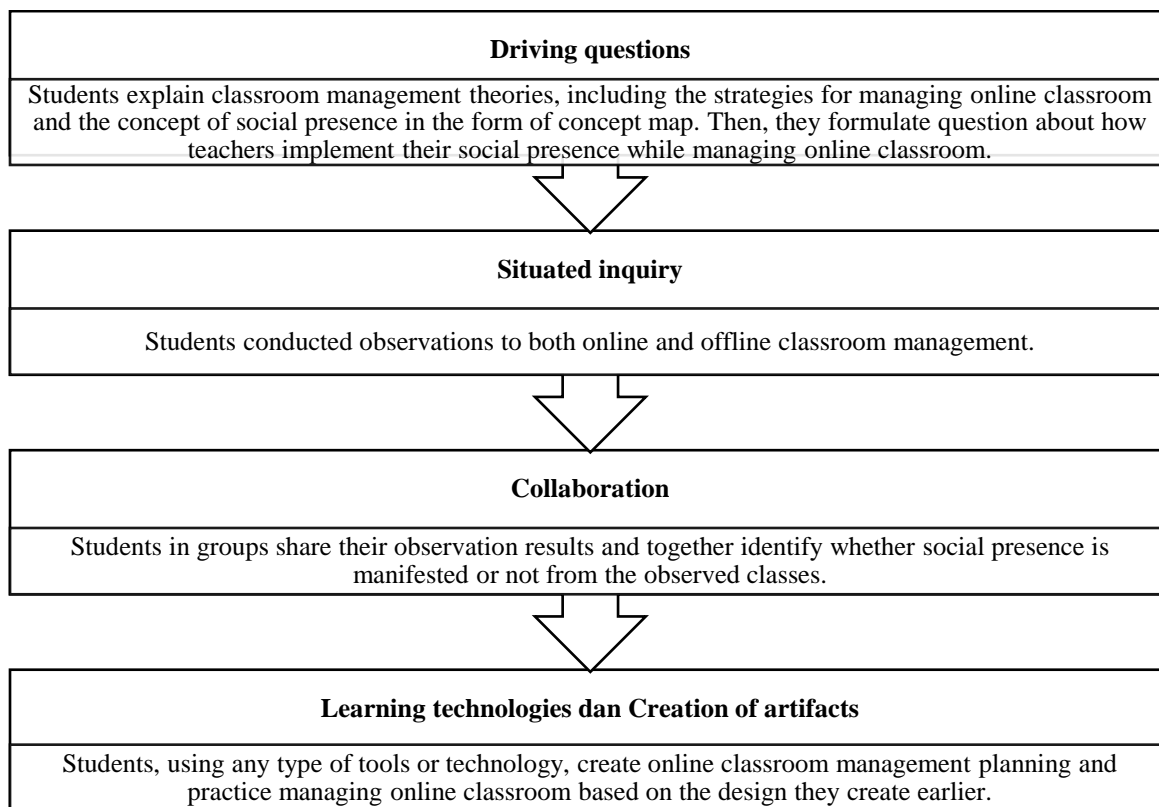


Figure 1. Adapted version of project-based learning stages of Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2005)

Then, the data to answer the first research question were collected by using close-ended questionnaire adapted from Swan et al. (2008) and Arbaugh (2008) who developed questionnaire to measure students' social presence. The questionnaire was given as a pre-test in the first meeting of the course, and then was handed again to the same participants as a post-test in the last meeting of the course after four months. Then, to answer the second research question, one open-ended question asking whether project-based learning could help them in developing their social presence strategies while managing online classroom was given to the respondents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This present study attempted to answer three research questions. This section will explain the results and explanation for the questions and also the discussions for the findings.

Research question 1: Is there any significant difference in terms of students' social presence before and after the language classroom management course?

From the research question, the researchers derived the following hypotheses:

H_a: there is a significant difference between pre-test score and post-test score for the pre-service teachers' social presence in the Language Classroom Management course; and

H₀: there is no significant difference between pre-test score and post-test score for the pre-service teachers' social presence in the Language Classroom Management course.

The researchers employed paired samples *t*-test to measure the mean score differences of the results of students' pre and post-test. The data from both pre and post-test were then analysed using SPSS. The results are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

From Table 1 and 2, we can see that the number of subjects at the time of the pre-test and post-test were both 66. A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of students' social presence. These pre-service teachers were found having lower social presence scores before the class ($M=41.97$, $SD=4.224$) than after the end of the class ($M=44.52$, $SD=4.685$). This improvement, 2.55, was statistically significant ($t(65)=4.33$, $p<.05$).

Table 1. Mean score differences result

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	41.97	66	4.224	.520
	Posttest	44.52	66	4.685	.577

Table 2. Paired samples test result

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Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-2.545	4.776	.588	-3.719	-1,.71	-4.330	65	.000

Table 2 shows that *p* value of the pre-test and post-test scores of the pre-service teachers are smaller than .05 ($.000 < .05$). In relation to hypotheses, H₀ is acceptable if the *p*-value is greater than .05 (sig (2-tailed) $> .05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that H₀ is rejected while H_a is accepted. In other words, it is obvious that there is a significant difference between pre-test score and post-test score for the pre-service teachers' social presence in the Language Classroom Management course.

Research question 2: Do female pre-service teachers have higher social presence than male pre-service teachers?

There are two hypotheses proposed from this research question:
 H_a : there is a significant difference between female pre-service teachers' and male pre-service teachers' social presence scores; and
 H_0 : there is no significant difference between female pre-service teachers' and male pre-service teachers' social presence scores.

Since there are two groups, i.e. female and male English pre-service teachers, the researchers employed independent sample t -test as the analysis. The results are presented in Table 3 and Table 4. From the tables, it can be shown that the mean pre-test scores of social presence for females are higher ($M=42.73$, $SD=3.988$) than males ($M=39.76$, $SD=4.221$). The same result also goes to the post-test. The mean score for social presence level after the Language Classroom Management class for the female pre-service teachers are found higher ($M=45.43$, $SD=4.664$) than that of male pre-service teachers ($M=41.88$, $SD=3.740$). These differences in means (pre-test difference= 2.970, post-test difference=3.546) were statistically significant for both pre-test ($t(64)=2.607$, $p<.05$) and post-test ($t(64)=2.831$, $p<.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that H_0 is rejected while H_a is accepted, since the p -value is less than .05. These results, therefore, answer the research question that the social presence of female pre-service teachers are higher than that of male pre-service teachers.

Table 3. Mean group difference result

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Male	17	39.76	4.221	1.024
	Female	49	42.73	3.988	.570
Posttest	Male	17	41.88	3.740	.907
	Female	49	45.43	4.664	.666

Table 4. Independent sample t -test result

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pre-test	Equal variances assumed	.018	.893	-2.607	64	.011	-2.970	1.139	-5.246	-.694
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.535	26.597	.017	-2.970	1.172	-5.376	-.564
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	.997	.322	-2.831	64	.006	-3.546	1.253	-6.049	-1.043
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.151	34.569	.003	-3.546	1.125	-5.832	-1.261

Research question 3: Does project-based learning help the students in developing their social presence strategies during managing online classroom?

The third research question was gathered from the open-ended question asking whether project-based learning could help them in developing their social presence while managing online classroom. Since this is a yes/no question, the participants were supposed to respond their answers with 'yes' and 'no'. However, instead of 'no', they were in doubt and answered 'maybe'. Of 66 students, 87% of them agreed that during the course, for one

semester, the project-based learning could help them develop their social presence in managing online classroom. Surprisingly, no one answered no. The rest of the students, 13% of them were in doubt. They answered ‘maybe’. They were in between and were not sure whether their social presence was cultivated from the project-based learning activities. Figure 2 shows the results of this finding.

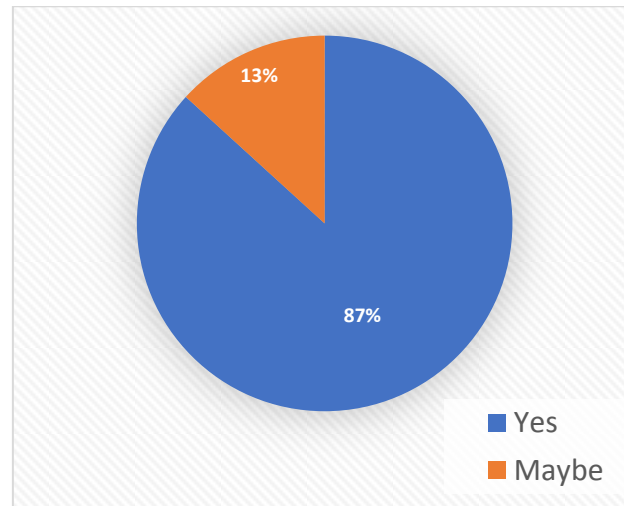


Figure 2. Pie diagram showing the percentage of participants answering that project-based learning help them developing their social presence

Since the second question is an open-ended and in the form of statements, the researchers attempt to analyse the data qualitatively by using NVivo and tried to figure out the word frequency among the participants’ responses. Then, the result confirmed the previous pie diagram. Among several words that frequently emerged, the words ‘yes’, ‘project’, ‘learning’, ‘teacher’, ‘class’, ‘practice’, and ‘know’ are among the seven most frequently mentioned words by the participants. Therefore, from the results, it can be concluded that the answer for the second research question is yes, project-based learning could help the students in developing their social presence strategies during managing online classroom.

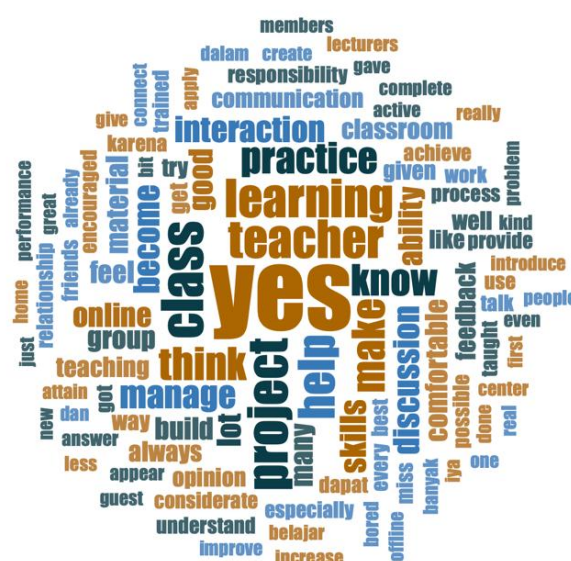


Figure 3. The most frequent words emerged from the participants’ responses

What interesting from these findings is that the empirical results showing that through project-based learning, the pre-service teachers could develop their social presence. Throughout the semester, students were firstly 'forced' to do all the assignments in groups. They were 'forced' to always be 'present' for their group members, since all the learning activities and projects were conducted in groups. Then, at the end, the findings unsurprisingly confirmed that these group works help them cultivate their social presence. During the group works, the students were having a lot of interaction with their peers in order to complete the group project. These results are in line with the notion from Oyarzun et al. (2018) who claims that a good interaction could significantly affects both teacher and students' level of social presence. In relation to conducting project-based learning for online learning, Heo (2010) has already claimed that computer-mediated communication (CMC), like what these pre-service teachers used for completing the project, is an effective tool in project-based learning since it extends their interaction beyond time and space limitations.

Another significant finding from this research is related to gender difference in terms of social presence level. From the result, it has been found that the social presence of female pre-service teachers are higher than that of male pre-service teachers. This confirms the previous research from Johnson (2011) claiming that females had higher perceptions of social presence than males. The implication for this result might include involving the male pre-service teachers more on activities that promote social presence. Another implication might also include mixing the females and males in the same groups for doing the project. The groups formed in this course mostly consist of the same gender for one group, with females gather in some groups, and the males gather in other groups. By mixing females and males in one group, it is expected that those male pre-service teachers will gain more awareness about social presence.

Furthermore, Picciano (2002) stated that social presence is more significant when the learning activities are not just about acquiring knowledge but also constructing new information with peers. The learning activities designed for the whole project-based scheme in this research mostly focus on assigning students to construct ideas with their peers. During the course, for example, in Driving Question, students in groups formulate questions about social presence and discussed the answers to their own questions through breakout room session in Zoom meeting. After having small group discussion, they must share the results to all the classmates and lecturer in Zoom main room. Next, in Situated Inquiry, these students, who are also pre-service teachers, must investigate the practice of social presence by observing how teachers in real life manage their online classroom. Then, in Collaboration, after doing the observation, they shared with friends from other groups whether social presence strategies emerged in the classes they observed. Finally, in the Learning Technologies and Creating Artifacts, those students who were clustered in groups of three, created online classroom management planning prior to the online classroom management simulation. During these activities, they learned to use online tools or technologies for managing online class, such as Zoom videoconferencing, Google Meet, Google Docs, WhatsApp, Google Forms, Jamboard, Kahoot!, Quizizz, Canva, and others. In the last stage of project-based learning, these pre-service teachers, working in groups, must play roles as English teachers with other friends as their students. It is then seen that the social presence strategies were manifested from this online classroom management simulation. This emergence of social presence strategies were then quantitatively and qualitatively proven as a result of both knowledge they have learned from the course, and the project-based learning activities from beginning to the end of the course.

CONCLUSION

Classroom management is one of the important skills for the pre-service teachers, including EFL pre-service teachers. However, the focus of classroom management course for pre-service teachers during the pandemic still mostly on the strategies to manage offline classroom. The fact that those pre-service teachers are obliged to teach online makes the need for training them how to manage online classroom unavoidable. In addition to online classroom management skills, it is also urgent to develop students' social presence while teaching online. The researchers then developed one-semester course focusing on training and preparing pre-service teachers to manage online classroom. During the learning process, project-based learning was implemented by the researchers. The pre-service teachers then joined the course for about four months and did four group assignments and projects assigned by the researchers. At the end of the course, it is found that project-based learning helped them develop their social presence. In addition, the social presence of female pre-service teachers is found higher than that of male pre-service teachers. From the results of this research, it is then suggested that project-based learning is used as the teaching approach for online learning, specifically for pre-service teachers, since it could enhance their social presence skills. Once they gain social presence, they could manage online classroom well and thus they could also create a conducive and effective learning for their students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is a part of a research grant funded by Directorate of Academic Development of Universitas Islam Indonesia.

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