

## Establishing a Link between Online Written Activities and Pre-recorded Video Oral Exams Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

As the COVID-19 pandemic appeared around the world, most of the students and professors alike were not fully accustomed to online classes. In this paper, 31 students volunteered to give their insights about what benefits and difficulties they encountered in the online classes in terms of instructions/teaching, content, activities, materials, grammar, vocabulary, and other learning factors in completing writing tasks in the Debate 02 and the Practical English 02 courses and how their academic performances were reconciled through online written activities with pre-recorded video oral exams. Using a Likert-based survey method with quantitative and qualitative results, the conclusions were drawn. There is a link established between online written activities and pre-recorded video oral exams encountered in the asynchronous online model. Students' online oral exams via pre-recorded videos make a progress in their overall marks, especially in grammar and vocabulary that improved to high proficiency (3 points and 4 points, respectively) from their online writing task results (i.e. 2 points, the overall marks in sentence structure, word choice and tone, and grammar and mechanics) along with other positive learning outcomes despite the drawbacks. In solving the overall issues, a combination of both pre-recorded video lectures and PDF or PPT materials amid the Covid-19 pandemic is highly recommended as their benefits are still achievable and difficulties can still be diminished strategically. This paper offers insights to guide teachers and students in successful writing tasks to oral exams that can be completely possible in asynchronous online classes.

**Keywords:** communicative competence model, a link between writing and speaking, virtual and traditional classrooms

### INTRODUCTION

Thousands of people such as students, teachers, children, customers, politicians, doctors, nurses, and other service workers have lived in fear amid the COVID-19

pandemic. Liu et al (2020) enumerated that the symptoms of COVID-19 among patients are fever, malaise, dry cough, and dyspnea which are labeled as viral pneumonia. They reported that “people all over the world have been affected by Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which is the fifth pandemic after the 1918 flu pandemic. As of now, we can trace the first report and subsequent outbreak from a cluster of novel human pneumonia cases in Wuhan City, China, since late December 2019” (p. 328) (also see dos Santos, 2020; Yesudhas, 2020). In South Korea, Dighe et al, (2020) reported that “the first confirmed case was reported on January 20, 2020, detected at Incheon International Airport. Before February 14th, the majority of the 28 reported cases were imported or were household contacts of imported cases” (p. 2). Furthermore, they noted that on February 29th, the peak of incidences was reached shortly. After that day, Daegu and Cheongdo were declared “special management regions” and citizens were asked to remain at home for at least 2 weeks. Since then, universities have been required to conduct online classes to prevent the COVID-19 spread.

Most of the students and professors alike were not fully accustomed to online classes. The online teaching-learning materials for each course were pre-recorded video lectures and PDF reading selections with the weekly answer sheets which were uploaded through the university CANVASS, a university online platform, so that undergraduate students could study and answer the activities. In particular, the courses that were considered in this research are the Debate 2 and Practical English 2 courses during the 2020 second semester; however, oral exam videos of students were randomly selected from both the first and second semesters of 2020. Furthermore, students were aware that only PPT or PDF files that contain short reading selections, listening activities, other guided written activities, and special activity instructions were only provided in the first semester; while in the second semester, apart from those mentioned material components, pre-recorded video lectures where the professors further explain the content and context of the reading selections and activities were added.

Those two online courses are generally challenging as students need to meet their group members for the weekly activity and some of them are not acquainted beforehand. As a consequence, each student was required to practically work alone in completing in-depth research, reading, listening, and writing tasks for the course. Practical use of the language entails that students' capacity to: “1) remembering the lessons and applying them when needed in a practical situation, 2) using the materials for review to develop my knowledge and skills, and 3) relating to the topics or themes used in the materials are well accommodated by the learners for real meaningful interaction” (Ramos, 2020, p. 87).

Generally, these students spend time and effort studying at cafes, libraries, or at home after attending lecture-discussion in the class each day to improve their proficiency in the four macro skills. Motivation for such effort is derived in part from personal ego to communicate with foreigners or travel alone with convenience, but mainly so they can obtain good grades on the basis of job-seeking endeavors (see Ramos, 2013b; Ramos,

2014c; Ramos, 2016). In a certain university in Korea, Ramos (2014a) concluded that students' struggles on various aspects of lecture-discussion in English and frequency of learning attitude towards lecture-discussion had not been taken seriously. At some point in learning, "nonnative listeners recognize only part of what they hear and have to make guesses which link these fragmented pieces of text" (Field, 2012, p.244).

In this paper, the researchers are investigating students' difficulties with the pre-recorded lecture videos conducted by professors in the 2020 semesters. Areas that are investigated include subjects, teaching delivery, materials, and activities. Specifically, the research questions are as follows:

- 1) What benefits and difficulties did the students encounter in their online classes in terms of instructions/teaching, content, activities, materials, grammar, vocabulary, and other learning factors in carrying out writing tasks in the Debate 02 and the Practical English 02 courses?;
- 2) How were their academic performances reconciled through online written activities with pre-recorded video oral exams?; and,
- 3) How can these difficulties be addressed?

The anticipated outcome of this paper is to guide teachers and students in carrying out class goals and objectives in their future curriculum development under the asynchronous online model.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Face-to-Face Class Versus Online Class**

As Yan and Song (2013) noted, the key differences between virtual and traditional classrooms involve the following: 1) Environment. Virtual students are not limited to living close to campus. Most of them cannot attend online classrooms during the covid-19 era. In addition, online students are not attached to fixed classrooms or time schedules. Online students may be alone, but often do not have privacy due to family members in the same household. 2) Online. Online classrooms can have students from different backgrounds, whereas traditional classroom students might be grouped by age, address, or ability level. 3) Scheduling. Virtual classrooms may be synchronous or asynchronous; however, offline courses have set meeting times. Online students may have to manage their own schedules and study times rather than depending on a routine schedule in offline courses. And, 4) Interaction. In a traditional classroom, the interactions can be from a teacher to a student or a student to a student. The teacher can interact face-to-face giving guidance and instant feedback, while online class is also possible on newer multimedia platforms that use video, but it is more difficult for teachers to communicate with all students, especially in large virtual classrooms.

As Mayoob (2020) summarized, the large categories of problem areas found in his study were technical, academic, and communication. Firstly, technical problems can be seen at

any level of national economic development, but some issues came up frequently in developing countries. Lack of necessary devices and equipment such as microphones and headphones was noted in some of the literature (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Haifa, 2020; Rahman, 2020). In addition, in many parts of the world, reliable Internet and Wifi connections may be hard to find (Akhter, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020). As result, this can lead to disconnected or unstable video, making it hard to keep on tasks on time or meet groups virtually. Some Wifi and Internet networks may be stable, but could be slower or have less bandwidth in developing countries (Hakim, 2020; Sreehari, 2020). Finally, reliable electricity could pose challenges in more remote areas or less developed countries (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020; Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020).

In addition to the problems with hardware and connectivity, there were problems mentioned with computer literacy and technical support. Some of the recent literature found student unfamiliarity with the platforms used such as Blackboard or Learning Management Systems (LMS) (Mahyoob, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020; Akhter, 2020). Other studies found that some teachers might be less literate in computers than the students (Efriana, 2021) and thus, could be overwhelmed by professional development meetings and reading how-to guides (Hakim, 2020).

In addition to technical issues, Mayoob (2020) mentioned academic issues in their study. Academic issues could be defined as problems with motivation and attitudes that students encounter in an offline context related to learning the content. Some students might start with negative beliefs that they are not prepared or have the skills for online learning (Akhter, 2020). In some studies, the learners felt unmotivated by the amount of time required to type and read compared to regular classes (Akhter, 2020; Rahman, 2020).

Problems with motivation and attitudes could be complicated by technical issues and by the different styles of communication found in online learning. Since there is less direct interaction, feedback could be delivered more slowly, and individual feedback might become impossible or inefficient. Less quantity of feedback, less specific feedback, and sometimes late feedback led to confusion and misunderstanding for students (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020; Rahman, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020).

### **Communicative Competence**

The Communicative Competence Model has three basic parts: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Communicative competence refers to grammatical and pragmatic competence by emphasizing the collaborative nature of communication through interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning (Savignon 1991). Canale and Swain (1980) promote sociolinguistic competence to further enhance interpretation and expression as expressing and interpreting utterances within the sociocultural context is essential to communicative competence. Additionally, strategic competence recognizes verbal and non-verbal strategies to negotiate meaning during a communicative breakdown (Canale & Swain 1980).

Nunan (1991) focuses on five features of communicative competence —“learning to communicate, the inclusion of authentic texts in the learning environment, the provision of opportunities to concentrate on language and learning processes, the enhancement of learner's own experience of language learning, and the linking of classroom learning experience to activities outside the classroom” (p. 280). He argues that to develop communicative competence, the instructor needs to have a real context as a practical technique. He adds that, in a natural context, a speaker faces an unpredictable situation where the drilled language is not enough. In Ramos’ (2014c) study, students believed that “following instructions would help them succeed in the communicative activities. Instructions would help them perform a pre-communicative activity so that they could manage their language investment and emotions during communicative activity” (p. 11). As a consequence, students should be provided with real-time scaffolding techniques to spontaneously use the language in an authentic context.

The question of whether communicative competence can be observed in asynchronous online classes was answered in a study by Junn (2021). In a communications and presentations class that was completely online, students recorded their team meetings (using webcam technologies) for the instructor to observe occurrences of expression, interpretation, and negotiation. Although the task was simple, it did show that interpretation and negotiation of meaning occurred. Another study by Mujiono (2019) found that students who prepared asynchronously via self-directed e-learning for a verbal test measuring their sociolinguistic competence scored better than students taught in the classroom only.

### **A Connection between Writing and Speaking**

Among the four macro-skills, writing and speaking are the two productive skills that share a common role in giving information. According to Graham et al. (2013), “[w]riting is a mandatory gadget for learning and communicating. We utilize writing as an inductor to collect, maintain and extend information” (p. 5). It is believed that inputs of write-ups can be an extremely domineering element in endorsing speaking (Nation and Newton, 2009). For MacArthur et al., (2008), verbal working memory of oral skills at the level of progression can directly impact the fine-tuning of writing tasks. Therefore, an outstanding link between writing and speaking skills are proven to be justifiable theoretically (Brown, 2001; Luoma, 2004; Nation & Newton, 2009; Zhu, 2007); and, Namaziandost et al’s (2018) study manifested that a shred of practical evidence shows that “writing can be fruitful for the progression of both writing and speaking proficiency” (pp. 1695-1696). Teachers have the responsibility to train themselves in incorporating more English into their daily teacher talk so that students can learn more from them. However, in Korea, “the data collected from in-service teachers in this study implies that there is a strong need for a focus on developing effective classroom English, and this is something that should be considered from the very beginning of language teacher education” (Whitehead, Ramos & Coates, 2019, p. 188).

Another issue on writing to speaking is whether the writing teacher needs to explicitly teach grammar for correctness, style, and organization. Ramos (2015) commented that

“[t]he importance of grammar cannot be overlooked as when grammar is erroneous, content can be distorted ...” ( p. 93). The proper usage of grammar also goes with vocabulary building which should not be ignored in the writing process. Newton (1995) in his study of written input on communication found out that those present in students’ writing tasks are all the vocabulary orchestrated by students in negotiating meanings or content in general. Therefore, the findings of the study conducted by Namaziandost et al. (2018) “can urge the EFL teachers to train predestinated grammatical structures via writing practice, to hinder the fossilization of fallacious structures which may occur through speaking practice” ( p. 1696).

In Korea, Kim and Kim (2007) found out several issues on students’ writing activities and suggested that the balanced instructional and curricular approach of the process and genre-based approach to teaching writing should be prioritized as these have provided four principles (guidelines), namely: a) balancing form and function, b) scaffolding language learning, c) extending the writing curriculum, and d) providing meaningful response and formative assessment. It was believed that these four principles describe how university English writing teachers applied them to class effectively.

Webb (1994) concludes that “our responsibility is to empower the novice writers to understand what language can do so they can make effective choices given their audience and purpose” (p. 141). According to Seow (2012), “process writing in the classroom is highly structured as it necessitates the orderly teaching of process skills, and thus it may not, at least initially, give way to a free variation of writing stages...” (p. 316). It is also pointed out that “when we teach writing, we need to address at least three pedagogical foci: content, organization, and style” (Webb, 1994, p. 137).

## **METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

This research is a mixed-method, qualitative and quantitative. A qualitative method provides open-ended questions which the participants may provide further explanations in the questionnaire. According to Dörnyei (2011), “[t]he open responses can offer graphic examples, illustrative quotes, and can also lead us to identify issues not previously anticipated” (p. 107). On the other hand, quantitative data provides the figures of students’ written activities and pre-recorded video oral exams during the 2020 online classes.

### ***Research Participants***

The 31 students who voluntarily participated in this study are those who answered the qualitative questionnaire in the 2020 second semester, among which were 8 students from the Debate 02 course and 23 students from the Practical English 02 class. Their written activities in the 2020 second semester were evaluated, while their oral exams were randomly selected from the 2020 first semester (having only PDF or PPT materials) and second semester (having both pre-recorded lecture videos and PDF or

PPT materials), 21 oral midterms and 10 oral finals, respectively. Among them, 28 students are from the Department of English Language and Literature, 2 students from the Department of Global Business, and 1 student from the Department of Hotel Management.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

To validate whether or not the student participants have mastered the skills in their asynchronous online classes, the last unit of Practical English 02, particularly the subunit 16B (i.e. activity 1B with 4 questions, see appendix A), and the semester's halfway unit of Debate 02, specifically unit 16 (i.e. extending the topic section with 6 pro or con statements, see appendix B), were then considered for writing task evaluation. Each student was asked to answer the questions on his/her own. As for oral exams, students were asked to write answers to the questions chosen; after which, answers were presented by video camera and later pre-recorded video oral exam files were sent to the professors by email.

Moreover, the qualitative questionnaire asks students' benefits and difficulties in terms of instructions/teaching, content, activities, materials, vocabulary, and communication or interaction and further asked views about their experiences in online classes compared to a face-to-face class. The questionnaire using google forms provided open-ended questions where further explanations or other reasons are laid out by students (see appendix E). To ensure confidentiality, 31 participants were labeled from A to AE; however, not all students gave detailed explanations. Their opinions were not edited in order to evaluate the authenticity of their communicative skills.

### ***Data Analysis***

Frequency count to determine the number of responses in the writing tasks and pre-recorded video oral exams was calculated by the percentage formula in Excel (The Smart Method, 2018). The rubric for evaluating writing tasks was adapted from The American University of Rome (see appendix C), which has seven areas, namely: focus, main idea, organization, content, sentence structure, word choice and tone, and grammar and mechanics. Each area follows the 4 points Likert scale, i.e. excellent (4), good (3), fair (2), and poor (1). In addition, the rubric for evaluating pre-recorded video oral exams was adapted from RCampus, which is dedicated to the commitment to education and for its constant innovation (see appendix D), with six areas, namely: grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension, background knowledge, and fluency. Each area also follows the 4 points Likert scale, i.e. excellent (4), good (3), fair (2), and poor (1). Finally, the quantitative results were displayed in tables, and analysis and interpretation were provided by examining the qualitative results from the students' comments or opinions.

## **RESULTS**

Table 1 presents the results of students' written activities in the asynchronous online classes with the seven areas for evaluation.

**Table 1.** Results of Students' Written Activities in the Asynchronous Online Classes

students	focus	main idea	organization	content	style 1: sentence structure	style 2: word choice and tone	grammar and mechanics	total	average
A (PE02)	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	23	3
B (D02)	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	25	4
C (PE02)	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	24	3
D (PE02)	4	4	3	3	3	3	2	22	3
E (PE02)	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	25	4
F (PE02)	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	17	2
G (D02)	4	2	2	2	2	2	3	17	2
H (PE02)	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	14	2
I (D02)	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	19	3
J (D02)	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	24	3
K (PE02)	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	27	4
L (PE02)	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	14	2
M (PE02)	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	23	3
N (PE02)	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	17	2
O (PE02)	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	25	4
P (D02)	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	15	2
Q (D02)	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	15	2
R (PE02)	4	3	2	3	2	3	3	20	3
S (D02)	4	3	2	3	2	3	3	20	3
T (PE02)	4	3	3	2	2	2	2	18	3
U (PE02)	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	16	2
V (D02)	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	15	2
W (PE02)	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	25	4
X (PE02)	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	19	3
Y (PE02)	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	22	3
Z (PE02)	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	28	4
AA (PE02)	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	17	2
AB (PE02)	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	15	2
AC (PE02)	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	10	1
AD (PE02)	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	16	2
AE (PE02)	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	16	2
grand total	112	96	85	81	76	77	76	603	86
grand average	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	19	3

Note. 4 (excellent); 3 (good); 2 (fair); 1 (poor) / PE02 (Practical English 02); D02 (Debate 02)

As shown in Table 1, 4 points (the highest mark) were given to 6 students while 11 students got 3 points; 13 students, 2 points; and 1 student, 1 point which is the lowest



mark. In short, of 31 students, 17 had excellent and good proficiencies while the remaining 14 got fair and poor proficiencies.

If those 17 students who belong to high proficiency still encountered difficulties at some point based on their comments, then those 14 students who fall under low proficiency definitely experienced worse difficulties in those areas. For example, student E mentioned that “[i]t doesn't feel like that I'm learning which means I know I take a class but feels like no connection with professor and students. I think one of the important things about learning English is connection and speaking. So lack of them makes class a little bit boring.” (sic) Further, student O emphasized that “[w]hen learning online, there are many difficulties compared to learning directly in the classroom. There are new parts that I do not understand the meaning I have checked in the dictionary, but they have many meanings that I do not know which meaning to use appropriately. At such times I need the help of a professor or a friend so that I can better understand the meaning of the article. I also can't practice speaking much. therefore, my speaking and pronunciation are very poor.” (sic) Another difficulty is on-the-spot clarification. Student K indicated her frustration: “[i]t was difficult asking question freely” (sic) and this is supported with similar statements of students A, H, M, and X. Finally, student T said that “[t]here are many activities that require grouping, but because of online learning, so it's a little bit difficult.” (sic)

In terms of the specific areas, focus has a total of 112 with the total average of 4; main idea, 96 with 3 as the total average; organization, 85 with 3; content, 81 with 3; style 1 (sentence structure), 76 with 2; style 2 (word choice and tone), 77 with 2; and grammar and mechanics, 76 with 2. In a nutshell, the grand total of all areas is 603 with 86 as its total average, while the grand total average is 19 with 3 being the final grand average. In other words, students performed well generally in those areas in their written activities in the 2020 second semester, although students' overall marks in sentence structure, word choice and tone, and grammar and mechanics were fair (2 points for each area, low proficiency).

This result is manifested by the students who expressed their learning insights. For example, student W confirmed: “I personally find no difficulty in the online classes”(sic) and students P, Q, Z, AB, and AE had the same points as student W. Since the classes were asynchronous, these students were well aided in their written activities anyhow. For instance, student E stated: “[p]re-recorded video can know exactly what professor talks about and can follow the lesson when I can't catch the lessons. But PPT or PDF materials could make student get bored but also could be no introduction and just solve the questions without knowing the subject. I think that's the difference. I feel more comfortable with pre-recorded video cause I want to follow what professor says.” (sic) and this has a similar point of view with students A, B, H, R, V, and Z.

Meanwhile, a few students argued that having a PDF or PPT material alone or pre-recorded video lectures can be useful depending on the purpose. Student N stated that “I think pre-recorded video is needed when the students need to learn some theory. Whereas, PPT or PDF materials are proper when the professor have students do



U (PE02)	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	4
V (D02)	3	4	4	4	4	4	23	4
W (PE02)	3	3	4	4	4	3	21	4
X (PE02)	3	4	4	4	4	4	23	4
Y (PE02)	3	4	4	4	4	4	23	4
Z (PE02)	3	4	4	4	4	4	23	4
AA (PE02)	3	4	4	4	4	4	23	4
AB (PE02)	3	3	3	4	4	3	20	3
AC (PE02)	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	4
AD (PE02)	3	3	3	4	4	3	20	3
AE (PE02)	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	4
grand total	99	113	114	122	121	112	681	114
grand average	3	4	4	4	4	4	22	4

*Note.* 4 (excellent); 3 (good); 2 (fair); 1 (poor) / PE02 (Practical English 02); D02 Debate 02)

As shown in Table 2, 26 students were evaluated with 4 points (the highest mark) while 3 students got 3 points; 2 students, 2 points; and none for 1 point which is the lowest mark. In short, among 31 students, 29 reached excellent and good proficiency while the remaining 2 landed on fair and poor proficiencies. In terms of the specific areas, grammar has a total of 99 with the total average of 3; pronunciation, 113 with 4 being the total average; vocabulary, 114 with 4; comprehension, 122 with 4; background knowledge, 121 with 4; and fluency, 112 with 4. In a nutshell, the grand total of all areas is 681 with 114 as its total average, while the grand total average is 22 with 4 being the final grand average. It means that most students performed excellently in their oral exams in both 2020 first and second semesters, especially in students' overall marks in grammar (3 points) and vocabulary (4 points) that improved to high proficiency compared to their writing task results.

Pre-recorded video oral exams receive advantages and a drawback is not seen in the process. Student M stated, “[w]hile writing the answers and present them in front of the video cameras build our confidence due to which we can even do or perform particularly in our future job. I think there are no any disadvantages.” (sic) In support, student W said: “I think that presenting in front of the camera gives students more confidence, like we often stand in front of a mirror to practice.” (sic) Further, student AB mentioned that “[p]resent them in front of video camera, can know more about my speech skills” (sic) and this has similar points with students H, I, P, AE, and a few others.

However, some students showed the strengths and the drawbacks of this oral exam method. Student G insisted, “[n]ot beneficial. advantages is that we could take this exam in our house freely. Disadvantages are as i said before, we could not talk or speak our creative thinkings in front of professor.” (sic) This opinion is supported by student A, “[t]hey are benefits because exams should be fair to everyone, and disadvantages of them is it not a thorough.” (sic). Finally, student D made a statement, “I think writing my

answers was quite good for practicing and but I didn't see the script cause I wanted to practice without nerve and sentences that I thought it makes me feel more nervous and I wanted to create more idea. So advantages could practice what I thought but if I read it like a robot that's not good for making a video." (sic)

Moreover, 31 student participants expressed their insights about pre-recorded video oral exams against face-to-face exams in the qualitative questionnaire, among which are 15 students who agreed with the efficiency and effectiveness of oral exam fronting the video camera, 13 students who were in favor of face-to-face oral exam, and 3 students who believed on both methods being equally useful. Student N said, "[v]ideo presentations would be better since face-to-face exam is limited to show everything of student's thought." (sic) and this has the same points as students X, AB, and AE. Student P added, "[v]ideo presentation is good because I can comfortably talk about things that I couldn't say well because I was nervous during the exam.

On the other hand, the face-to-face exam also gains advantages. Student O critically commented: "[o]f course, direct testing will train students more skills. When testing directly, students will not know the test content in advance. Watching the exam while thinking of answers helps students practice their ability to improvise, it awakens students' brains to help train their thinking abilities. and having to answer questions directly like that also helps students practice calm, confidence when answering questions. A lot of people who have to answer questions are nervous and lose their temper. If they practice a lot, they will be more confident and comfortable." (sic) Student O's critical statement was well supported by students E, J, M V, and Z. Lastly, student B made a straightforward comment, "I prefer face-to-face because I like talking with my professor with eye-catching, and making video is really a burden for me." (sic)

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Benefits of Asynchronous Online Classes***

In the students' weekly written activities (see table 1), the benefits of asynchronous online classes are present due to potential factors. Those 17 students who belong to the high proficiency have become critical in distinguishing which material they can benefit from in carrying out their written tasks. Ramos (2020) mentioned that students believed that very relevant supporting details give sense to their points, with student AW's statement, "[a]t this point, studying the very basics of philosophy is crucial for logical reasoning" (sic) (p. 90). Pre-recorded video lectures offer students a trace to point out useful inputs that exude a sense of classroom atmosphere, compared to PPT or PDF materials alone that may mislead them to accommodate information in completing tasks without knowing the exact objectives of materials.

Furthermore, both pre-recorded video lectures and PPT or PDF materials offer effectiveness depending on the purpose. When passive learning such as learning a theory is the core, then PPT or PDF materials alone can be useful as they can be written in detail, but it is time-consuming when unfamiliar words or concept needs clarification

by using tools, like a dictionary. Whereas, pre-recorded videos can be pushed through when something creative or task-based activities are the objective of the class. In other words, activating student's schemas and emotions can be driven by active visual and hearing senses that heighten a learning appeal. Nunan (2012) emphasizes that "opportunities to reflect on the learning process and to develop new learning skills could help learners to identify and articulate differences between their school experiences and those encountered at a university" (p. 143)

Most importantly, a combination of both pre-recorded video lectures and PDF or PPT materials may fully activate the learning process and progress. Aside from new words, grammatical structures, concepts, etc. being orchestrated in the materials to produce information or skills, students would learn best when pre-recorded videos are given along with the PDF or PPT materials because professors would likely to use new words that are not present in the printed materials, to articulate concepts with a grammatical sensation that actively monitors past learning, to produce pronunciation and speech, in general, that can be heard and easily remembered. Ramos (2014b) stated, "[w]hen students have a desirable outcome from people with good accent and diction, they are likely to develop or heighten their performance skills in any communicative encounters" (p. 332).

### ***Difficulties of Asynchronous Online Classes***

As for difficulties in the students' weekly written activities (see table 1), the asynchronous online classes sprout the potential factors. In any teaching-learning undertakings, especially in task-based activities whether oral or written form, a close connection between a professor and students is very essential as the professor's direct or manual assistance in developing the language skills of students would reinforce motivation and meaningful language experience. To improve the teaching of writing tasks, a teacher should focus more on students' writing activities with a time frame in the following activities: "a) editing where teachers discuss the grammar and writing problems found in the compositions; b) writing short paragraphs or longer essays closely monitored by the teacher; c) watching a movie from which a reaction paper is constructed; and, d) identifying and arranging paragraphs according to its logical sequence" (Ramos, 2015, pp. 91-92).

However, this is not the case in asynchronous online classes as experienced by 14 students who belonged to low proficiency. For instance, understanding words can be fostered by a dictionary but not as much as a professor who is present physically in explaining words in the right context. Hackathorn et al. (2011) concluded that "allowing students to interact via discussions is an effective teaching technique, perhaps because as they repeatedly hear vocabulary words throughout the discussion, it lends itself to increased memory" (pp. 49-50). What is worse is that when an article or a short selection as a whole is difficult for students to understand or process, which may be a prerequisite to answering all activities, students may develop anxiety or frustration in completing academic tasks and this can create a domino effect in their pronunciation or speaking tasks in general.

Finally, another difficulty is on-the-spot clarification. Naturally, students ask questions right there and then but this is not available in asynchronous online classes, which hinders automaticity, confidence boost, and academic mindset. One example of academic mindset is having a pair work or group work activity in which students compare and contrast information, practice skills, and develop the value of collectivism and collaboration which can be applied in their future endeavors as social beings. Ramos (2020) emphasized that having friends or classmates is necessary to contributing critical thinking and reasoning in different logical and cognitive processes with their materials in a course.

### **A link between Online Written Activities and Pre-recorded Video Oral Exams**

A link between online written activities and pre-recorded video oral exams proves to be beneficial as shown in table 2, having 29 students reached excellent and good proficiency while only 2 students landed on fair and poor proficiency. Specifically, there is progress in students' overall marks in grammar and vocabulary that improved to high proficiency (3 points and 4 points, respectively) (see table 1) compared to their writing task results (i.e. 2 points, the overall marks in sentence structure, word choice and tone, and grammar and mechanics) (see table 2). In addition, as briefly indicated in the qualitative questionnaire, 15 students agreed that the efficiency and effectiveness of pre-recorded video oral exams are achievable.

Writing a prepared answer to the questions before facing the camera would build more confidence and self-efficacy in students' academic performance (i.e. talking about everything comfortably). According to Oxford (2012), "skilled L2 learners select strategies that work well together and that are tailored to the requirements of the language tasks; for high-performing L2 learners, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies often go together" (p. 126). Consequently, writing a prepared answer to the questions before facing the camera would gain a promising effect, even up to future job performance, because there is a connection between writing to practice and actual oral performance that takes place in the learning process.

Another point is rehearsing their answers in front of the mirror would offer a reflection of what is like in the actual oral exam performance that will provide them the avenue to evaluate their speech or speaking skills themselves. In short, self-evaluation is a factor in improving their oral skills from how they perform in the writing process. Oxford (2012) believes that "when allowed to learn in their favorite way, unpressured by learning environment or other factors, students often use strategies that directly reflect their preferred learning" (p. 127). However, a coin has two sides. Disadvantages in pre-recorded video oral exams can be seen in another spectrum. Creative thinking and thoroughness in digging students' skill levels cannot be measured accurately as they feel nervous in trying to exhibit spontaneity because they feel distracted with their prepared answer in front of the camera.

As a consequence, the face-to-face oral exam still gains its pride as the qualitative questionnaire briefly shows that 13 students were in favor of face-to-face oral exams and 3 students believed that both methods are equally useful. In that mode of an oral exam, direct testing on the spot spontaneously improvises their speaking ability, activates their brain functions, and justifies practice which is a vital factor in confidently carrying out the actual delivery of answers with eye contact with a professor – all that implies natural showcase of skills development. Ramos (2016) suggested that “[a]s for lower-level students, carefully-defined activities embedded with sociocultural elements should be developed and properly assessed before a semester starts. Sociocultural elements should include cultural and classroom orientation, communicative scaffolding, and compelling lesson design that involves interesting topics and activities for multi-dimensional purposes” (p. 15).

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has discussed the benefits and difficulties encountered in students’ written activities under the asynchronous online model. A little over half of the total student participants (high proficiency) performed well in their writing activities (see table 1). The online lectures or discussions had positive effects on writing tasks due to replicating the classroom experience through task-based activities, thus activating schema, positive emotions, skills development, motivational reinforcement, and meaningful language experience in the process.

However, the drawback encountered by under half of them who belong to low proficiency (see table 1) is anxiety or frustration with the tasks that can have a chain effect in pronunciation or general speaking tasks, as direct instructor feedback is not available. Lack of real-time teacher feedback and clarification could also have negative effects on automaticity, confidence, collaboration, and the use of learning strategies. In classes where only digital reading materials are used, students could get confused or misunderstand how to complete tasks, which leads to frustration then passiveness.

Moreover, it has also discussed the benefits and difficulties encountered in the oral exams (via pre-recorded videos) under the asynchronous online model. Most students performed well in this aspect (see table 2). The opportunity to prepare answers before recording helped build confidence and efficacy in their academic performance, leading to an opportunity for self-reflection and self-evaluation. This in turn led to better oral exam performance.

However, in the qualitative results, about half of the total student participants who were in favor of face-to-face oral exam and a quarter of them who believed in both methods (face-to-face and pre-recorded video oral exam) being equally beneficial commented that pre-recorded video oral exams can hinder creative thinking due to less spontaneity caused by prepared answers. They also commented that these exams were not thorough in measuring skill levels due to inaccuracy. Comparatively, in the qualitative questionnaire, positive aspects were found in face-to-face oral exams. Direct oral tests

encourage meaningful practice and give students chances to improvise spontaneously and use eye contact, which implies a natural showcase of skills development.

Finally, it has discussed a link between online written activities and pre-recorded video oral exams in the asynchronous online model. Almost all students reached excellent and good proficiency in the quantitative data. It is found that online oral exams (via pre-recorded videos) make progress in students' overall marks, especially in grammar and vocabulary that improved to high proficiency (3 points and 4 points, respectively) from their online writing task results (i.e. 2 points, the overall marks in sentence structure, word choice and tone, and grammar and mechanics) (see tables 1 and 2). Therefore, a link between online written activities and pre-recorded video oral exams proves to be beneficial. In support, about half of the total student participants in the qualitative data also agreed with the efficiency and effectiveness of pre-recorded video oral exams.

In solving the overall issues, a combination of both pre-recorded video lectures and PDF or PPT materials amid the Covid-19 pandemic is highly recommended as their benefits are still achievable and difficulties can still be diminished. With both types of teaching-learning materials, the student's learning process and progress in carrying out writing tasks to oral exams can be completely activated in the asynchronous online classes.

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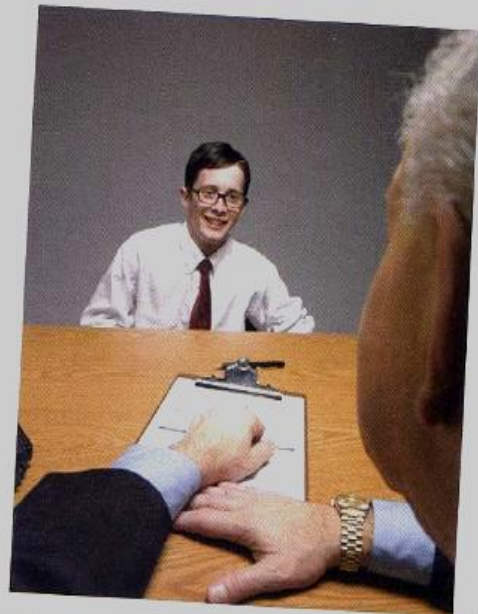
## APPENDICES

### Appendix A. Practical English 02 Material for the Writing Tasks

**B Pair work** Look at these interviewing tips. Then discuss the questions below.

Research the company beforehand.  
Prepare a list of questions to ask.  
Be prepared, but not rehearsed.  
Bring something to take notes on.  
Dress for success.  
Arrive early for the interview.  
Listen carefully and think before answering.  
Be confident, but not overly confident.  
Be positive about the negative.  
Don't talk about money too soon.  
Relax and just be yourself.

- Which tips do you think are the most important? Why?
- Are there any tips you disagree with? Why?
- What other tips can you suggest?
- Have you ever interviewed for a job? Describe the experience.





adopted from Let's Talk 3, Jones, 2008, p. 70

Appendix B. Debate 02 Material for the Writing Tasks

### Extending the Topic *Societal roles*

**A** Here are some of Dr. Lee's ideas. For each of them, state an opposite or different idea.

	Dr. Lee's ideas	Opposite or different ideas
	Societies are in trouble because women have jobs outside the home.	<i>Men have caused much of society's problems because most leaders are men.</i>
	Women are naturally suited to raising children.	
	Men are natural leaders.	
	A man's place is outside the home, working to support the family.	
	Today's children are lazy and confused because their mothers are working outside of the home.	
	Children need the help, love, and support that only mothers who are in the home can give.	

adopted from Impact Issues 3, Day et al, 2012, p. 72

Appendix C. Written Activity Rubrics (Paragraph level)

	<b>A (4)</b>	<b>B (3)</b>	<b>C (2)</b>	<b>D/F (1/0)</b>
<b>Focus: Purpose</b>	Purpose is clear	Shows awareness of purpose	Shows limited awareness of purpose	No awareness
<b>Main idea</b>	Clearly presents a main idea and supports it throughout the paper.	There is a main idea supported throughout most of the paper.	Vague sense of a main idea, weakly supported throughout the paper.	No main idea
<b>Organization: Paragraphs</b>	All paragraphs have clear ideas, are supported with examples and have smooth transitions.	Most paragraphs have clear ideas, are supported with some examples and have transitions.	Some paragraphs have clear ideas, support from examples may be missing and transitions are weak.	Para. lack clear ideas
<b>Content</b>	Exceptionally well-presented and argued; ideas are detailed, well-developed, supported with specific evidence & facts, as well as examples and specific details.	Well-presented and argued; ideas are detailed, developed and supported with evidence and details, mostly specific.	Content is sound and solid; ideas are present but not particularly developed or supported; some evidence, but usually of a generalized nature.	Content is not sound
<b>Style 1: Sentence structure</b>	Sentences are clear and varied in pattern, from simple to complex, with excellent use of punctuation.	Sentences are clear but may lack variation; a few may be awkward and there may be a few punctuation errors.	Sentences are generally clear but may have awkward structure or unclear content; there may be patterns of	Sentences aren't clear

			<b>punctuation errors.</b>	
<b>Style 2: Word choice, Tone</b>	There is clear use of a personal and unique style of writing, suited to audience and purpose; the paper holds the reader's interest with ease.	There is an attempt at a personal style but style of writing may be awkward or unsuited to audience and purpose; the reader may lose interest in some sections of the paper.	There is little attempt at style; reads as flat and perhaps uninteresting in content, which is usually generalized and clichéd.	No attempt at style
<b>Grammar &amp; Mechanics</b>	Excellent grammar, spelling, syntax and punctuation.	A few errors in grammar, spelling, syntax and punctuation, but not many.	Shows a pattern of errors in spelling, grammar, syntax and/or punctuation. Could also be a sign of lack of proof-reading.	Continuous errors

adapted from The American University of Rome,  
<https://www.aur.edu/sites/default/files/University-Writing-Rubric-Approved-by-Curriculum-Committee-Feb-2010.pdf>

### Appendix D. Oral Presentation Exam Rubrics

Category 				
	Needs Improvement 1 pts	Satisfactory 2 pts	Good 3 pts	Excellent 4 pts
Grammar	Needs Improvement Student was difficult to understand and had a hard time communicating their ideas and responses because of grammar mistakes.	Satisfactory Student was able to express their ideas and responses adequately but often displayed inconsistencies with their sentence structure and tenses.	Good Student was able to express their ideas and responses fairly well but makes mistakes with their tenses, however is able to correct themselves.	Excellent Student was able to express their ideas and responses with ease in proper sentence structure and tenses.
Pronunciation	Needs Improvement Student was difficult to understand, quiet in speaking, unclear in pronunciation.	Satisfactory Student was slightly unclear with pronunciation at times, but generally is fair.	Good Pronunciation was good and did not interfere with communication	Excellent Pronunciation was very clear and easy to understand.
Vocabulary	Needs Improvement Student had inadequate vocabulary words to express his/her ideas properly, which hindered the students in responding.	Satisfactory Student was able to use broad vocabulary words but was lacking, making him/her repetitive and cannot expand on his/her ideas.	Good Student utilized the words learned in class, in an accurate manner for the situation given.	Excellent Rich, precise and impressive usage of vocabulary words learned in and beyond of class.
Comprehension	Needs Improvement Student had difficulty understanding the questions and topics that were being discussed.	Satisfactory Student fairly grasped some of the questions and topics that were being discussed.	Good Student was able to comprehend and respond to most of the questions and topics that were being discussed.	Excellent Student was able to comprehend and respond to all of the questions and the topics that were being discussed with ease.
Background Knowledge	Needs Improvement Student was lacking in background knowledge which hindered his/her responses to the questions regarding class materials.	Satisfactory Student showed decent background knowledge of class material, making his/her responses incomplete.	Good Student displayed well knowledge of class information and topics.	Excellent Student presented excellent background knowledge from class topics and was able to add more information in their response.
Fluency	Needs Improvement Speech is very slow, stumbling, nervous, and uncertain with response, except for short or memorized expressions. Difficult for a listener to understand	Satisfactory Speech is slow and often hesitant and irregular. Sentences may be left uncompleted, but the student is able to continue.	Good Speech is mostly smooth but with some hesitation and unevenness caused primarily by rephrasing and groping for words.	Excellent Speech is effortless and smooth with speed that comes close to that of a native speaker.

adopted from RCampus,

<https://www.rcampus.com/rubricshowc.cfm?code=Q4W568&sp=true>

## Appendix E. Qualitative Questionnaire for Asynchronous Online Class

- 1) Which department or college do you belong to?
- 2) What benefits or difficulties did the students encounter in their online classes in terms of instructions/teaching, content, activities, materials, vocabulary, and communication or interaction in carrying out writing tasks in the Debate 02 and the Practical English 02 courses?
- 3) Tell the difference between pre-recorded video lectures and PPT or PDF materials alone. What are the benefits of each? Which one do you think you feel more comfortable with?
- 4) In oral midterm and final exams, are writing your answers on the answer sheets and present them in front of the video camera more beneficial? What are their advantages and disadvantages?

### Authors' Biodata



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