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Students' Avoidance of English Use in English MKU During and Post-Pandemic

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Abstract

Background: English as a general subject, known as Mata Kuliah Umum (MKU) in Indonesian tertiary education, primarily aims to develop students' second language (L2) proficiency. These courses are therefore designed to encourage the use English during classroom interactions. However, many students choose to remain silent or resort to using Indonesian instead.
Objective: This study examines students' unwillingness to communicate/participate in English during classroom instruction, both during and post pandemic.
Methods: It employs the third generation of the Activity Theory as the analytical framework, with the units of analysis being activities across the micro, meso, and macro levels. Using a case study approach, data were collected from multiple perspectives–students, teachers, and policymakers– through interviews. Course syllabi were analyzed as part of the dataset.
Findings: The findings suggest that the policy makers' decisions influenced the communication behaviour in both online and offline classes. This study highlights the importance of fostering L2 use habits through policymaking strategies such as aligning instructional practices with intended learning outcomes, establishing explicit language-use rules, and providing supportive tools and learning environments.

Conclusion: Additionally, it emphasizes the need for teachers to deepen their understanding of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA), particularly in balancing the development of both fluency and accuracy.

Keywords: Unwillingness to communicate/participate in English; English as a general subject; Activity Theory; Communicative Language Teaching Approach

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Introduction

In Indonesian tertiary education, English courses are often offered as a general subject, referred to as *Mata Kuliah Umum* (MKU). These courses aim to improve students' English language communication skills. Social approaches to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory posit that students' English proficiency develops through actual use of the language (Ellis, 1999; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Hampel, 2015; Lamy & Hampel, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2007). Grounded in this perspective, the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA) has been widely adopted across Indonesia (Musthafa, 2001). This approach encourages students to actively participate and communicate in English as the target language and develop their English proficiency.

However, despite the adoption of CLT, studies consistently report that Indonesian students are often reluctant to use English in classroom settings (Sari & Arianto, 2019). This reluctance has been observed not only in traditional face-to-face settings but also during online instruction throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Putri, 2023). Previous research in pre-pandemic face-to-face classrooms such as Fadilah (2018a, 2018b) and Kurniawan et al. (2018) highlights that students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English is shaped by a complex interplay of individual, contextual, and socio-cultural factors. These include personal traits (e.g., personality, confidence, prior experience), classroom context (e.g., teaching methods, technological tools), and broader cultural norms and expectations. During the pandemic, the shift to online learning introduced new layers of complexity, with technological mediation further influencing students' WTC and actual L2 use (Ardiansyah et al., 2020; Caromawati, 2024; Putri, 2023).

One such form of technological mediation is video computer-mediated communication (VCMC) or videoconferencing, which became a dominant mode of instruction during the pandemic. The literature suggests that VCMC environments, with their multimodal affordances, can enhance interaction and participation (Chanier & Lamy, 2017; Chun, 1994; Hampel, 2014; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1998). However, a pilot study by Caromawati (2024) in this university indicated that the use of videoconferencing alone was not sufficient to foster students' L2 use, , indicating a need for further pedagogical innovation.

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University ABC, a tertiary institution in West Java, aligns with the national trend of implementing CLT in its English MKU curriculum. The program combines large lecture-based grammar instruction with smaller, practice-oriented sessions in a language laboratory. Despite this design, students—both high- and low-proficiency—frequently displayed reluctance to use English. In group discussions, especially those led by teachers, students often remained silent or reverted to Indonesian, undermining the communicative goals of the program. In response, English instructors initiated an internal review and began integrating digital tools to support English use. Their efforts, however, were disrupted by the pandemic, which required a sudden shift to fully online instruction via synchronous (VCMC) and asynchronous platforms.

While prior research has explored students' L2 use and WTC in either face-to-face or online contexts, there is limited comparative research examining how these factors differ between videoconferencing-based instruction during the pandemic and face-to-face learning in the post-pandemic period. Such a comparison is essential for understanding how different learning environments shape students' communicative behaviours and for informing future instructional design.

Moreover, much of the existing literature focuses primarily on students' experiences and classroom-level practices. There remains a lack of insight into how institutional policies and systemic factors influence L2 use. To address this gap, this study adopts Spinuzzi (2013) concept of top sight, which calls for examining educational practices from multiple hierarchical levels—students, teachers, and policymakers. This broader view allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how structural, pedagogical, and contextual elements converge to influence language learning outcomes.

Purpose of the study and research questions

This study aims to investigate Indonesian university students' communication behaviours (discussed in the next Section) during videoconferencing-based instruction in the pandemic era and compare it with their language use in face-to-face classrooms in the post-pandemic era. Two research questions were addressed: (1) How do Indonesian university students' communication behaviours differ between videoconferencing-based instruction during the pandemic and face-to-

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face instruction in the post-pandemic era? (2) How do factors at the micro (student), meso (teacher), and macro (policy) levels interact, from the Activity Theory perspective, to shape students' communication behaviours in MKU courses across online and offline learning environments?

By incorporating perspectives from students, teachers, and policymakers, the study also seeks to examine how multi-level systemic factors shape the students' communication behaviours in MKU courses. The findings are expected to inform more responsive and effective pedagogical and institutional strategies for promoting English communication in Indonesian higher education.

Literature Review

This section discusses the concept of students' students' willingness/unwillingness to communicate in English and English use (L2 use) as a communication behaviour meant in this study. It also overviews previous studies investigating students' L2 use and participations in English as a general subject or English MKU. Additionally, it introduces the Activity Theory as a theoretical framework implemented in this study.

Students' English use as their communication behaviours

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, Kubanyiova and Yue (2019) found that L2 use is for communicating, i.e. making meaning with each other, and/or participating in the class activities, i.e. completing the teacher's tasks. As a communication behaviour, L2 use will not occur without students' willingness to use it. MacIntyre et al. (1998) calls this prerequisite construct as Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Regardless, WTC does not guarantee L2 use. When students' L2 WTC is realized into L2 use, Dörnyei (2000) and MacIntyre (2007) use the connotation: Crossing the Rubicon. It refers to the students' decision to realize their WTC into talk. While Ducker (2020, 2022) used L2 WTC – Talk realization to express this daring communication action, this study will refer it to L2 use both for communication and participation (e.g. answering grammatical-related questions and making sentences based on the grammatical focus being learnt). It is also important to highlight that as this study investigated

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the conflicts inhibiting the willingness to use the L2, the opposite construct, i.e. unwillingness to communicate/participate, will emerge throughout this paper. This communication behaviour will also labelled as students' avoidance to use English. These terms are used interchangeably.

Activity Theory to provide a top sight on the effectiveness of an innovation

Activity Theory (AT) is "a theory of object-driven activity" concerning how people's collective activity is driven into a certain objective. It is originated from Russian psychology in the 1920s, drawing from Marx's and Engels' historical and dialectical materialism. As a theory, AT is "a powerful and clarifying descriptive tool rather than a strongly predictive theory" (Nardi, 1996, p.7). It is used to investigate effective uses of new technology (innovation) such as instructional technology for teachers (Russell & Schneiderheinze, 2005; Yamagata-Lynch & Yamagata-Lynch, 2010), iPad (Al-Huneini et al., 2020), and Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication software (Kern, 1995) in the early days of SCMC (Kern, 1995). AT is also used to identify challenges (contradictions) in online education environments concerning joint activities and how new tools support or hinder these activities (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). In AT, an activity system consists of elements: Subject, Tools, Rules, Community, Division of Labour, Object(ive), and Outcome. These elements are interconnected and interplaying in a complex and dynamic way.

Object is the goal where the activity is directed for the expected Outcome. Subject refers to the individual(s) under investigation. Tools refer to any physical or psychological means used to achieve the Object. An example of physical Tool is computer technology, and psychological Tool is linguistic resources (e.g. L1 or L2). Community is the participants who perform their actions collectively with the Subject towards the same Object. Rules refer to regulations of how the Subject performs his/her/their actions in the AS. Division of labour is the distribution of power and roles between the community members involved in the AS. The structure of this human activity system and the relationship between the elements are captured in a model shown in **Figure 1**. More detailed description of each element is provided in the Method section.

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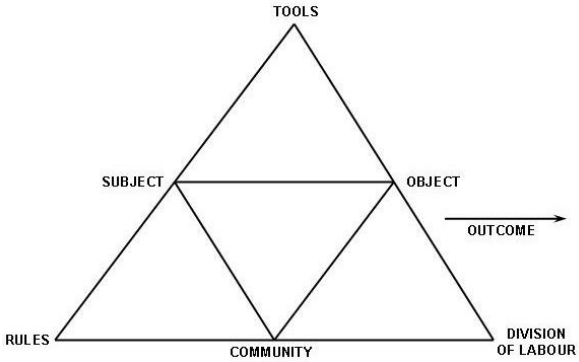

Figure 1 The Complex Activity System Model (Engeström, 1987)

AT has four generations annotating different investigation focuses as well units of analysis. This study applies the third generation of AT Engeström (1999), known as Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), focusing on investigating the complexity of interacting activity systems between different parties. A constellation of independent yet interconnected activity systems is the units of analysis. Contradictions between the activity systems are considered the source for change and development, thus expansive transformation can be possible (Engeström, 2000). For further reading of AT generations, readers can refer to Blin et al. (2024).

Factors impeding students' L2 use in online and offline learning from the Activity Theory Perspectives

This section synthesizes previous research on English MKU instruction in both online and offline classroom settings, differentiating findings across the micro, meso, and macro levels. In this study, these levels annotate power relations. Macro refers to the policy makers, meso refers to the teachers, and micro refers to the students.

Offline English MKU instruction

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In face-to-face English MKU instruction, the subject of the activity system is the student, expected to develop communicative competence. However, several studies highlight that many students come to the classroom with low English proficiency, high language anxiety, and a fear of making mistakes, leading them to remain silent or revert to Indonesian even during speaking activities (Wijaya & Rizkina, 2016; Yulianto et al., 2024). These psychological barriers are compounded by students' unfamiliarity with task types and low motivation for learning English, suggesting significant contradictions at the micro level.

The object of English MKU courses—promoting communicative competence through student-centered instruction—is often not realized in practice. Studies have found a persistent misalignment between instructional goals and classroom practices. For example, research by Prihananto (2021) and Marcellino (2008) reveals that lessons often focus on complex grammatical structures, long reading passages, and technical vocabulary, leaving little space for interactive communication. This contradiction reflects a gap between the stated pedagogical objectives and the implemented curriculum.

One source of this gap lies in the tools employed during instruction, including textbooks, classroom tasks, and other pedagogical materials. Wibowo (2017) found that English MKU textbooks used for Early Childhood Education students were not aligned with students' academic backgrounds, which led to disengagement and reduced participation. Similarly, Johari et al. (2025) found that students were more likely to use English when they perceived tasks as meaningful and relevant, suggesting that task design plays a critical role in promoting L2 use.

The rules governing English MKU courses—curriculum guidelines, assessment systems, and grading criteria—also limit students' L2 use. Teachers often feel constrained by policies that emphasize accuracy over fluency (Renandya & Widodo, 2016; Yulianto et al., 2024), leading them to prioritize written grammar exercises and standardized assessments. This often results in teacher-centered instruction that is not conducive to language production, especially speaking. These rigid rules reflect macro-level contradictions that cascade down to affect classroom interactions.

The community, including teachers and peers, also influences students' L2 behavior. In many face-to-face settings, students report a lack of peer support and limited collaborative interaction, particularly in large classes. Even when grouped, students often remain silent due to

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interpersonal discomfort and a perceived lack of communicative norms (Yulianto et al., 2024). Teachers, meanwhile, often dominate classroom discourse and revert to L1 (Rante, 2022), reducing the L2 communicative affordances of the learning environment.

Finally, contradictions in the division of labor also hinder students' English use. While students are expected to participate in English, they are often positioned as passive recipients of knowledge, especially in lecture-based sessions. Teachers tend to take on the central role in managing classroom talk, while students are rarely given opportunities to initiate or sustain interaction. This mismatch between role expectations and actual practice contributes to reduced student agency (Yashima et al., 2018).

Cross-cultural insights further reinforce the importance of structured interaction. Kaw (2025), studying English MKU in Hungary, found that students were more willing to communicate in structured, classroom-based discussions than in informal settings. This suggests that instructional structure and peer expectations play a pivotal role in fostering L2 willingness to communicate (WTC). However, research on how these dynamics have changed in the post-pandemic new normal is limited. One exception is a study by Mayers et al. (2023), which found that students' willingness to use English for oral presentations declined after the pandemic, possibly due to the shift back to offline modes with different interactional affordances.

Online English MKU instruction

The shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic introduced new components and contradictions to the activity system. While the object of instruction remained the same—improving students' English competence—the tools used to achieve this goal changed significantly. Teachers adopted platforms such as videoconferencing, e-modules, and Learning Management Systems (LMS). These tools provided multimodal affordances for interaction (Chanier & Lamy, 2017; Hampel, 2014), but they were not always used effectively to support L2 communication.

For instance, Caromawati (2024) found that videoconferencing alone did not enhance students' English use, especially when teachers simply transferred traditional question-and-answer formats into the digital environment. Similarly, Banat and Febrianti (2023) showed that

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while students using e-modules improved test scores, it was unclear whether this translated into active English use during live class sessions. These findings point to contradictions between technological *tools* and pedagogical strategies as teachers' *tools*.

The *subject*, again the student, encountered new barriers in the online learning environment. Amran (2021) reported that students often experienced low motivation, limited peer interaction, and technical difficulties, all of which reduced their willingness to communicate. Some students lacked the confidence or familiarity with digital platforms to engage actively in synchronous sessions, while others struggled with unstable internet connections and limited access to devices. These micro-level contradictions were often amplified by institutional unpreparedness for digital pedagogy.

At the meso level, teachers faced difficulties designing and delivering engaging online lessons. Sesriyani (2020) found that active teacher engagement, such as asking questions and prompting discussions, improved two-way interaction. However, many teachers lacked training or time to design such activities and thus fell back on monologic lecture styles. The *division of labor* remained teacher-centered, with students passively observing rather than interacting.

The *rules* governing participation in online classrooms were often ambiguous. Students were not always told how their spoken participation would be evaluated, which led many to prioritize written tasks over speaking. In some cases, students viewed video participation as optional, especially in asynchronous formats. This lack of clarity in expectations further discouraged English use during synchronous online instruction (Caromawati, 2024).

The online *community*, which includes peers and instructors, also underwent changes. While digital tools offer opportunities for interaction, the lack of physical presence made it harder to build rapport and collaborative norms. Many students reported feeling isolated, and teachers struggled to create a sense of classroom community that encourages risk-taking in English. Without these socio-emotional supports, students often defaulted to silence or L1 use.

Method

This study was a case study, involving University ABC in West Java, Indonesia. It was chosen as the research site for several reasons. First, like many universities in Indonesia, it English MKU course offered general English (GE) as part of its curriculum. It meant that the topics were

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not specific. Second, it was required to implement online learning due to the pandemic and returned to face-to-face classroom post pandemic. Lastly, the university committed to conduct continuous (course) evaluation to provide qualified education. Thus, this research could offer benefits to them. This idea aligns with Lovey (2000), who argues that institutions are more likely to engage in research when they see its benefits.

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore students' avoidance of English use in English MKU courses, particularly in online (during pandemic) and offline classroom (post-pandemic) settings. Qualitative research is well-suited for this investigation as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the L2 use behaviours during the instruction within two different environments, and from different levels.

Data for this study were collected through multiple qualitative methods, including interviews with students, teachers, and policymakers, as well as document analysis of course syllabi. The policy makers participated in this study were heads of departments who possessed the information on how they designed the curriculum and their objectives of each course, particularly English MKU courses. This methodological triangulation enhances the credibility of the findings (Silverman, 2001). The inclusion of textual data, such as syllabi, allows for an analysis of institutional expectations, while interviews provide insights into individual and collective experiences regarding English language use in the classroom.

The Activity Theory framework serves as the analytical lens for this study, enabling a systematic examination of how various elements within each activity system—comprising policymakers, teachers, and students—interact to shape language use in the classroom. This framework provides a structured approach to analysing the dynamic relationships between key components, including tools, rules, communities, division of labour, objectives, and expected outcomes. Utilizing the 8-step model of Mwanza (2002) shown in **Table 1**, we sought answers to the guiding questions.

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Table 1 Using the 8-step model to identify the AT components in the WTC literature

	Identify the:	Question to Ask
Step 1	**Activity of interest**	**What sort of activity am I interested in?**
Step 2	**Object-ive**	**Why is the activity taking place?**
Step 3	**Subjects**	**Who is involved in carrying out this activity?**
Step 4	**Tools**	**By what means are the subjects performing this activity?**
Step 5	**Rules and Regulations**	**Are there any cultural norms, rules or regulations governing the performance of activity?**
Step 6	**Division of labour**	**Who is responsible for what, when carrying out the activity and how are the roles organised?**
Step 7	**Community**	**What is the environment in which this activity is carried out?**
Step 8	**Outcome**	**What is the desired Outcome from carrying out this activity?**

In this study, the activity of interest is the use of L2 both in the online classrooms during the pandemic and offline classrooms post pandemic. Tools referred to the mediating instruments that influence learning and communication, such as technology, teaching methods, and the use of first and second languages in instruction. Rules encompassed both explicit and implicit regulations governing language use in the learning environment. These include classroom agreements, institutional policies on language instruction, and broader educational guidelines upon the activities were performed for. Communities refer to the social groups within the activities, such as students, teacher networks, and institutional stakeholders. This social group are connected in the activity system that they performed.

Division of labour refers to the roles and responsibilities distributed among different stakeholders, such as policymakers drafting curriculum guidelines, syllabus designers structuring course content, and teachers planning and delivering lessons. The way tasks and responsibilities are allocated affects the implementation of English language instruction and the extent to which it aligns with institutional goals. *Objectives* represent the intended goals of each activity. We understand that each participating groups in this study may have shared similar or different objectives, thus, we concluded their objectives based on our interpretation on the data. Finally, *expected outcomes* refer to the long-term expectations to achieve from the activities.

The scope of the elements determined above, based on the guiding questions of the 8-step model, used to provide a clear picture of each party' activity. Finally, the three activity systems

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were compared to investigate any contradictions in relation to the use of English during the online and offline class. The findings were used to identify systemic challenges and potential strategies to foster a more supportive learning environment for second language acquisition.

Findings and Discussions

This section presents the findings of the study in response to the two research questions: (1) How do Indonesian university students' communication behaviours differ between videoconferencing-based instruction during the pandemic and face-to-face instruction in the post-pandemic era? and (2) How do factors at the micro (student), meso (teacher), and macro (policy) levels interact, from the Activity Theory perspective, to shape students' communication behaviours in MKU courses across online and offline learning environments? The analysis draws on qualitative data collected from students, teachers, and policymakers, and offers an integrated view of how communication patterns are influenced by individual, instructional, and systemic factors.

Findings

Online learning in University ABC during the pandemic

Policy Making Activity (Macro level)

During the pandemic, policy makers—including the vice rector of academic and student affairs, curriculum designers, and heads of departments—developed a new curriculum with English MKU as one of compulsory courses. The primary goal was to enhance students' English communication skills. To achieve this, policy makers implemented Learning Management System (LMS) platforms for instruction and established institutional regulations aligned with the university's vision and mission.

The division of labour assigned curriculum design teams and department heads to develop study program curricula, while the coordinator of course lecturers created syllabi tailored for online learning. The English course syllabus targeted elementary and intermediate proficiency levels, focusing primarily on grammatical structures, although the communicative

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language teaching approach (CLTA) was encouraged. The CLTA implementation was written explicitly in the course syllabi documents. The expectation was that the grammatical-focused practice was delivered through the LMS, while the synchronous meeting was aimed for more communicative practice as the replacement of the traditional and language laboratory class meetings. The students' English communication skills were assessed through grammar-based tests.

Teaching Activity (Meso level)

In online classrooms, lecturers delivered the English MKU course—primarily focused on grammar—based on the approved syllabus. They viewed the primary aim of online teaching during this period as ensuring students' understanding of grammatical concepts. Nevertheless, because CLTA had been long practiced in traditional settings, many teachers remained committed to it and explored various tools such as the LMS, Zoom (Basic), Google Meet, and PowerPoint. They also experimented with pedagogical strategies like project-based learning and group discussions, frequently exchanging ideas and materials with peers.

Despite their commitment, teachers faced significant technical and pedagogical challenges. Technically, the limitations of basic online platforms hindered the facilitation of pair and group discussions, which are central to CLTA. Some teachers instructed students to create discussion groups via WhatsApp, Zoom, or Google Meet outside class sessions, but monitoring these spaces proved difficult, especially in ensuring equal participation and English use. Limited internet access was another barrier, leading students to turn off their cameras. While some still participated actively, teachers often found that students with cameras off were less engaged or even inattentive. Many did not respond when called upon, sometimes blaming internet issues.

Pedagogical challenges included assessment requirements and large class sizes. Teachers were required to evaluate grammar mastery, which shifted the focus away from communication. As a result, they relied heavily on L1 for explanations and used L2 mainly during controlled practice. A recurring sentiment was, "I was afraid they wouldn't understand the grammar lesson, so I used Indonesian instead." Teachers' use of L2 for communication was largely limited to greetings and small talk, which only a few students reciprocated. Large classes—some with over 50 students—further limited the practical implementation of CLTA.

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To encourage participation, teachers used strategies like awarding bonus points and calling on students from the attendance list. While these strategies had mixed success, teachers believed participation would have been even lower without them. Importantly, students were not required to respond in English, to reduce anxiety.

Learning Activity (Micro Level)

The students' primary goal in this course was to fulfil university requirements, improve their grammar skills, and achieve high final scores. They acknowledged enrolling in the course solely because it was mandatory. To participate in online classes, they relied on LMS platforms, Zoom Basic, Google Meet, and PowerPoint presentations. Classroom interactions were predominantly in L1, with English (L2) used mostly for grammar exercises and occasionally for communication.

Students' learning activities were shaped by multiple layers of regulations, including university policies, course requirements, teacher-established classroom rules, and parental expectations. Within this structured environment, they were responsible for completing assignments, engaging in discussions, and demonstrating participation in online learning. Their academic experience was also influenced by teachers, parents, and university policymakers, such as department heads.

Regarding L2 use, students made efforts to respond in English when teachers addressed them in English and explicitly asked them to do so. However, if a peer had already responded, they often remained silent, reasoning, "one of us had already represented everyone." They only felt obligated to speak when called by name. Some students who did not respond to the teachers even when they were called claimed that they had internet connectivity issues. In some cases, they later realized from friends that they had been called on, leading to feelings of guilt for not responding.

During group discussions outside the main online classroom—such as on WhatsApp, Zoom, or Google Meet—students focused solely on completing assigned tasks, such as answering grammatical questions, role play, or preparing presentations. They used English only for task-related purposes and never for casual communication, stating, "*we weren't asked to*."

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Offline learning in University ABC post pandemic

Policy Making Activity (Macro level)

Post pandemic, policymakers facilitated the return to offline learning while maintaining the core objectives of the English MKU course: developing students' English communication skills and character building, in line with the university's vision. Curriculum designers were tasked with reviewing the syllabus, but learning outcomes and assessment methods—focused on grammar use in simple sentences—remained unchanged. The only major change was the shift back to face-to-face meetings; language lab sessions were not reinstated, based on the belief that teachers could balance grammar (accuracy) and communication (fluency) in traditional classrooms.

The university's LMS remained the primary technological support tool. Course instructors designed lesson plans and submitted reports on syllabus implementation, while policymakers evaluated progress through feedback surveys and meetings.

Teaching Activity (Meso Level)

After the pandemic, English MKU teachers remained committed to the course's primary goal of developing students' English communication skills. To enhance their pedagogical approach, they integrated LMS platforms, educational tools like YouTube and EdPuzzle, and traditional paper-based worksheets for group and pair discussions. These resources helped create interactive lessons that encouraged students to apply their English skills in real-life contexts. The course coordinator ensured that all lecturers followed the established syllabus, while teachers were responsible for designing materials, conducting lessons, and assessing student learning. Both permanent and temporary teaching staff worked collaboratively to create an engaging and productive learning environment.

In offline classrooms, lecturers attempted to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLTA) by incorporating more English use alongside grammar exercises. However, monitoring student participation was challenging, particularly in larger classes (over 20 students), where maintaining engagement and L2 use was difficult. In smaller classes, teachers could assign

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communicative tasks and actively monitor students, ensuring they used English. In larger classes, however, students often reverted to L1 or became disengaged. Additionally, the seating arrangements with long tables limited students' movements and teachers' monitoring strategies. The teachers found it challenging to group the students and assign communicative activities. Even when they attempted to do so, they found it hard to monitor if the students were on-task and used L2. They believed that monitoring was easier to performed in the language laboratory classrooms.

Despite striving for communicative activities, teachers acknowledged that grammar remained the central focus of learning and assessment. To ensure students understood grammar concepts, they frequently relied on L1. While they believed they provided more practice opportunities and built stronger rapport with students in offline settings, they admitted that their communicative activities still lacked true communicative engagement.

Learning Activity (Micro Level)

The transition back to offline classrooms required students to adapt to a structured academic environment where active engagement in L2 learning was expected. Their primary objectives remained unchanged: completing coursework, mastering grammar as outlined in the syllabus, and achieving high scores. Their learning experience was shaped by multiple stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and university policymakers.

Students relied on LMS platforms, teacher-designed materials (such as YouTube and EdPuzzle), and paper-based worksheets for collaborative activities. These resources facilitated learning through discussions and group exercises. In accordance with university policies, classroom rules, and parental expectations, students were expected to complete assignments, participate in discussions, and contribute to group tasks.

While teachers encouraged the use of English in class discussions, students admitted they primarily used L2 for task completion, particularly grammar exercises, rather than for communication. They noted that teachers tolerated this behaviour, as they did not strictly enforce L2 use. Although additional points were awarded to those who spoke English during

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discussions, there were no penalties for not doing so, leading students to view L2 use as optional rather than essential.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the English courses in University ABC underwent a change only in the medium of instruction: one was delivered online, the other was in traditional classrooms. This occurred as the target outcome(s) of the policy makers remained unchanged. While English MKU was not a compulsory subject according to the ministry of research, technology, and higher education, it became one of the compulsory subjects. However, how the practice of the course would be implemented, they left it to the syllabus designers. The syllabi became a strong influence on the other parties' activity systems, making them interconnected. Thus, it can be concluded that the three parties in this study shared different levels of power relations with the policy makers held the strongest. These power relations inevitably affected the practice of English use in both online and offline English courses in some ways, illustrated in Figure 2.

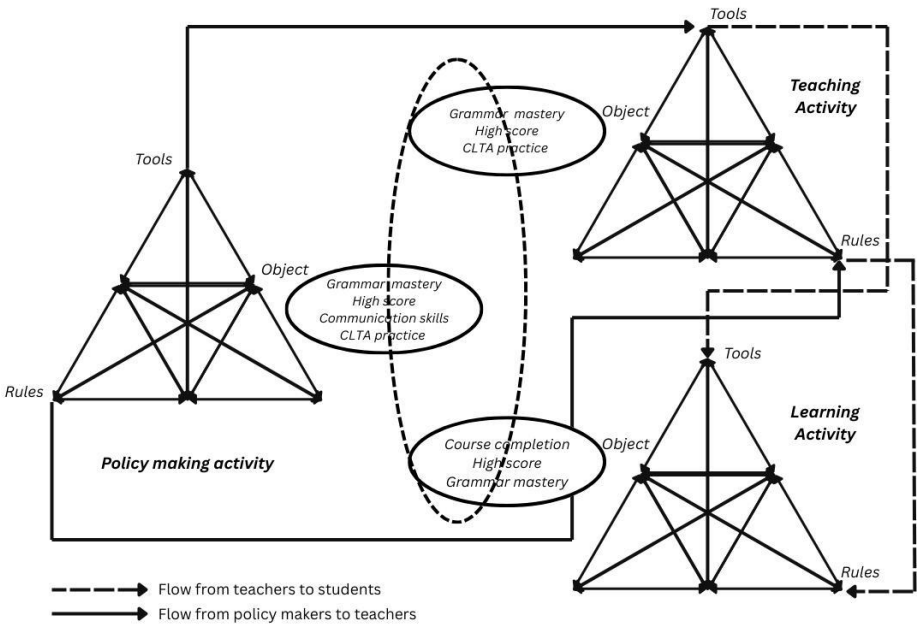

Figure 2 The power relations between the policy making, teaching, and learning activities

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First, the three activities shared partial objectives, i.e. grammar mastery and students' high scores upon their course completion. The fractions were found in the teachers' and policy makers' 'other' objectives, i.e. students' L2 use as their communicative language teaching (CLT) practice vs students' grammar understanding as the primary assessment of the course. As found by Marcellino (2008), Madya (2007), Renandya and Widodo (2016), and Prihananto (2021) teaching grammatical structures limit meaningful communication in the classrooms. In this case, the teachers' beliefs as well as the policy makers' claim written on the syllabi about how the English instruction was delivered were contradicted with the main objectives of the activities, also written on the syllabi, as well as the assessments. It could be found in how the teachers delivered lessons and the primary use of L1. Another contradiction between the objectives was the development of students' communication skills expected by the policy makers. The influence of curriculum, assessment, and scoring system on teachers' pedagogical practice supported Yulianto et al. (2024), while L1 use despite L2 use expectation in English MKU courses supported Rante (2022).

Consequently, the students in this study found that L2 use was not the main objective of their English courses. They focused on how they understood grammar rules and implemented them accurately in sentences that would determine their grades, which became their 'other' objectives. This finding might denote that the students in this study did not find L2 use useful for them. As found by Johari et al. (2025), students' willingness to use English was promoted upon their perception of task usefulness.

Second, unsupportive learning environments were found in both online and offline courses for communicative activities. It was true that the videoconferencing could support two-way interaction (Sesriyani, 2020), but it did not guarantee equal participation. The basic plans of the synchronous environment such as Zoom and Google Meet did not allow group or pair works, resulting on monitoring issues. These basic plans also allowed limited meeting durations. Other technical problems such as internet connection also hindered communication. These instructional challenges, as found by Amran (2021), impacted students' L2 use motivation. Class size was also a concern as the teachers found that the students could hide behind the off cameras

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and let their active peers took the floor. The teachers admitted that their unfamiliarity with online instruction was a challenge. While teachers became more creative and adaptive to deliver online instruction during the pandemic, teachers in this study were struggling with tools unfamiliarity. This contrasts what Suwartono et al. (2025) found. It was possibly because the data in this study was collected in the early period of the pandemic or because the teachers did not find it compulsory to explore technological tools to support student-centred interaction, participation, and communication.

On the other hand, in offline classrooms, not only class sizes but also the seating layouts and non-soundproof classrooms prevented L2 use because disturbing other classes became a concern. As found by Sari and Arianto (2019), collaborative learning enhanced L2 use. However, this kind of learning was hindered due to the classroom architecture. While Bayog et al. (2024) investigated seating positions, near or further from the teachers, this study found the rows seating arrangements hindered communicative activities that promoted L2 use. This supports Mayers et al. (2023) about the interactional affordances affecting the students' communication behaviours. Thus, the teachers found practicing CLT approach easier in the language laboratory.

Third, the course objectives and technical issues discussed above predictably influenced the selections of task types used in both online and offline courses. Teachers chose grammar exercise for the class 'tasks' (although we cannot consider them as tasks) than communicative activities for not only goal purposes, but also practicality. This unsurprising finding supports Wijaya and Rizkina (2016) and Caromawati (2024) who highlighted task types as one of the factors affecting students' willingness to use L2.

Four, the community involved in the teachers' and students' language learning activities (both in online and offline classrooms) affected the L2 use promotion. As evident in Kaw (2025), peer support could enhance the habitual use of English in academic setting. However, when peer teachers in this study sheared their experiences about their students' understanding and progress on their grammar rules and exercises, other teachers became more concerned about their own students'. Similarly, peers students who thought that understanding English grammar was more important that communicating or participating (especially in English) remained quiet in both online and offline classes. Their behaviours consequently affected the class dynamic which

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ultimately affected others' students' willingness to use L2. Thus, it can be inferred that the peer support for L2 use was not found in this study.

Five, there were no explicit rules about the promotion of using English for communication and participation in both online and offline courses. Although the syllabi stated that the English courses implemented CLTA as their instruction approach, but there was no explicit explanation on the consequences if the approach was not implemented by the teachers. Similarly, although the teachers provided 'additional' scores if the students actively participated and used English in the classes, but they did not highlight the consequences if they failed to do so. This discovery provided evidence that L2 use was not a priority, which ultimately demoted L2 use habit.

Conclusion and Implication

This study highlights that policymaker decisions inexorably influence English MKU instruction, both in online and offline settings. Course objectives, assessment criteria, scoring systems, infrastructure, and class size all affect students' willingness and opportunity to use English. Despite adopting Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA) in the syllabus, classroom practices often fall short of its principles, limiting students' communicative development. This gap calls for systematic evaluation of course design, learning objectives, and assessment methods to better align with the intended communicative outcomes. Cross-institutional collaboration among MKU coordinators and curriculum developers can support the refinement of syllabi and teaching strategies.

Teachers also need a stronger understanding of CLTA principles. Although some view CLTA as outdated, its emphasis on fluency, interaction, and meaningful language use remains highly relevant for basic English courses. Supporting teachers through targeted professional development and training can help them implement CLTA more effectively using available tools and resources.

One limitation of this study lies in its reliance on qualitative data, which, while rich in depth, may not capture the full extent of patterns across larger populations. Future research is encouraged to adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights with

quantitative measures to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing L2 use in Indonesian higher education.

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