"Bitmoji is Cool!": Exploring the Secondary English Teachers' Narratives Using Digital Avatar-based Pedagogical Agent

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ABSTRAK

Dalam pembelajaran daring, siswa berpotensi mengalami kebosanan, kurangnya motivasi, keengganan, dan kecemasan. Bitmoji Virtual Classroom (BVC) – kelas virtual bisa menjadi salah satu pilihan dalam melaksanakan pembelajaran yang interaktif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi pengalaman guru bahasa Inggris dalam merancang pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang menarik dan interaktif menggunakan Bitmoji Virtual Classroom (BVC) – kelas virtual yang dirancang sebagai agen pembelajaran berbasis avatar digital dalam pembelajaran daring – untuk meningkatkan minat siswa, keterlibatan, dan motivasi belajar. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan inkuiri naratif, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman empat guru bahasa Inggris sekolah menengah pertama yang berpartisipasi secara sukarela. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan dianalisis secara tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru menganggap proses perancangan ruang kelas virtual menyenangkan, dibantu oleh fitur menarik dari Bitmoji dan Google Slides. Mereka mendukung terciptanya pembelajaran yang efektif dan keterlibatan siswa yang lebih baik melalui bantuan media pembelajaran interaktif ini. Namun, mereka menghadapi tantangan, seperti perlunya panduan pembelajaran yang lebih jelas selama implementasi media interaktif yang digunakan. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan ruang kelas virtual berbasis avatar dapat berfungsi sebagai strategi yang inovatif untuk mengembangkan kreativitas dan meningkatkan motivasi siswa dalam lingkungan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris virtual.

ABSTRACT

In online learning, students are likely to experience boredom, lack of motivation, reluctance, and anxiety. Bitmoji Virtual Classroom (BVC) – a virtual classroom can be one option in implementing interactive learning. This study aims to investigate the experiences of English teachers in designing interesting and interactive English learning using Bitmoji Virtual Classroom (BVC) – a virtual classroom designed as a digital avatar-based learning agent in online learning – to increase students' interest, engagement, and motivation to learn. Using a narrative inquiry approach, this study explores the experiences of four junior high school English teachers who voluntarily participated. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings show that teachers find the process of designing virtual classrooms enjoyable, aided by the attractive features of Bitmoji and Google Slides. They support the creation of effective learning and better student engagement through the help of this interactive learning media. However, they face challenges, such as the need for clearer learning guidelines during the implementation of the interactive media used. This study suggests that the use of avatar-based virtual classrooms can serve as an innovative strategy to develop creativity and increase student motivation in a virtual English learning environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The uses of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and virtual classrooms have increased since the Covid-19 outbreak until the post-pandemic today. Since then, teachers have selectively employed suitable techniques for their teaching to fulfill their students' needs, in sustaining the teaching and learning process. Virtual classrooms were believed as the real classroom replacement as the pandemic situation forced teachers and students to shift the face-to-face classrooms to virtual ones. Teachers have explored and leveraged online and digital applications for their teaching. Teachers seek to employ technology-aided apps and platforms to assist their students during their learning in hybrid or full virtual classes (Santosa et al., 2022; Tafazoli & Picard, 2023). However, the use of online platforms might cause boredom in learning if teachers do not adjust and/or modify them as well as they can. Previous study argues that it is the way learning is delivered to have sound pedagogy and appropriateness that makes technology in a digital environment may work well (Mishra, 2019; Mishra et al., 2023). In line with this, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become one of the solutions during and after the pandemic. A sound pedagogy with appropriate technology integration is one important competence today in the

omnipresent digital learning era (Celik, 2023; Klimova et al., 2023; Klímová & Seraj, 2023; Santosa et al., 2024). Teachers and students can work synchronously and asynchronously in the teaching and learning process by using certain digital media or platforms (Stein & Graham, 2014; Tucker et al., 2017). Virtual classrooms, as one example of digital media, have also been utilized to support this situation.

Despite the potential, boredom, less motivation, reluctance, and anxiety were evident during online learning. As highlighted by previous study students are highly potential to experience boredom along with anxiety and frustration in the online learning environment (Aristovnik et al., 2020). The learning context influences their psychological states. In the Indonesian context, online learning also presents higher anxiety to students in terms of English tests and fear of negative evaluation due to the inability to perform well (Bidari et al., 2021; Hanafie et al., 2022). Using interactive games, like Kahoot! (Hadijah et al., 2020; Zucker & Fisch, 2019), visually engaging graphics such as infographics (Dewantari et al., 2021), videos (Odo, 2021; Yiğit & Seferoğlu, 2021), and engaging avatar-based images, such as Bitmoji (Pate, 2022) are vital in reducing the students' negative psychology mentioned earlier. In this challenging situation, teachers need to make some adjustments and modifications in their learning materials and delivery to boost students' learning motivation. Teachers can adapt and modify some existing digital assets to ensure effective learning in the online context. They can build Bitmoji Virtual Classroom (BVC) as one of the alternatives to teaching virtually. The use of BVC as a pedagogical agent is vital as it can guide the students to the learning activities and tasks with a more personal approach as they interact with avatars representing their teachers and/ or friends (Cao et al., 2020; Wahyuni & Santosa, 2023). These aspects are considered important in assisting students in learning.

BVC is a virtual classroom derived from Bitmoji avatar and some elements of Google Slides that can be modified to support certain lessons for learning. Bitmojis offers users a unique way, a personalized way, to convey their messages. Previous study describe the short history of the Bitmoji stickers, Jacob 'Ba' Blackstock, a Canadian, a customizable comic strip application primarily used in education. There are several prominent studies on the use of Bitmojis as one engaging learning media based on real-life people as avatars in the online learning context (Lacoma & Beaton, 2020). In other study found that the use of avatar-based representations offers many opportunities for students to engage more in the teaching and learning process, especially reading (Graeske et al., 2022). The use of these avatar images also has been evidenced to help students when learning complex lessons, like Mathematics. Other alternative representative symbols, like emojis, are also preferred by students to initiate fun and motivation between their teachers and the students (Al Zou'bi & Shamma, 2021; Vest et al., 2020).

The utilization of Bitmoji has risen especially during online learning during the pandemic situation. As teachers need to be present, employing a visual representation is important. Previous study for instance, use these as avatars and it can help teachers' self-efficacy during learning while helping the students to maintain their learning engagement during the unprecedented time (Bosch & Ellis, 2021; Chung & Li, 2022). According to other study this pictorial communication tool facilitates online communication effectively (Kumar & Nanda, 2019; Puzier & Norton, 2020). Bitmoji is highly effective for campaign purposes as in the study in the context of librarians. They employed Bitmoji to connect students with subject librarians the Bitmoji tool is very helpful as they are highly versatile, able to be personalized, provides a digital likeness, and varied formats of both physical and digital. More importantly, Bitmoji can also be set up as a Learning Management System (LMS) or an online or virtual class to help to learn in the online environment. During the full online learning established a Bitmoji virtual art classroom to help teachers to manage their classrooms. In another similar study merged Google Classroom and Bitmoji as a response to remote learning and found that the Bitmoji Virtual Class assisted teachers in detailing the learning delivery while helping the students with learning opportunities. Other study created the "Black Lives Matter Reading Room" space where they provided wonderful stories to listen to, information about people in history, and other interesting information (Abas et al., 2022). These clickable links to this Bitmoji-based virtual learning site are evidenced to be effective to help students to learn.

BVC has been proven to be beneficial for teachers and students during the pandemic as it has become a way to engage students in learning during the pandemic, such a finding has potentially huge implications for school curriculum plans and emergency preparedness (Espino-Díaz et al., 2020; Thaheem et al., 2022). Another benefit of BVC is that the platform supports online teaching in whole ways. Previous study described that BVC engages students, navigates classroom materials easier, adds a layer of fun to the learning process, fosters a sense of community, and creates a sense of familiarity (Pate, 2022). These four advantages also might enhance teachers' teaching experience as well as enrich their references using online platforms. Moreover, teachers' creativity is also boosted, therefore, they can design and create a learning environment that can boost students' English learning motivation. Although several prominent studies have been conducted on the topic of Bitmoji and its potential for the students and the teaching and learning process, there is still a scarcity of empirical evidence on the teacher's perspective in employing Bitmoji in their instruction.

Delving into teachers' narratives is considered vital to understand the perspectives from the teachers' point of view when designing, implementing, managing, and assessing the teaching and learning process when utilizing a digital learning media like BVC. According to previous study it is strongly recommended to portray instructional activities as a part of understanding the comprehensive situation that informs the classroom levels

(Santosa & Wahyuni, 2022). Understanding teachers' narratives is also a part of continuous exploratory practice – a form of practitioner research in language education which is aimed at integrating research, pedagogy, and technology – to understand puzzles of the teachers and students and understanding of the puzzles (Hanks, 2015; Pinner, 2021). Therefore, the paper aims to delve into teachers' narratives in using BVC in the English teaching and learning process. The stories were gathered from voluntary English teachers of junior high school who employed BVC in delivering English materials and emerging themes of their narratives were discussed. The novelty of this study presents a unique contribution to the field of digital learning and pedagogy by examining the integration of Bitmoji, a digital avatar-based pedagogical agent, in English language instruction.

2. METHOD

Drawing on the approach of narrative inquiry, this study aimed to explore and make sense of the stories of four Indonesian English junior high school teachers' teaching experience in online classes. For this purpose, a guiding research question has been established. The question left room for participants to link their particular teaching experiences in the EFL context. The term narrative inquiry can be generally defined as a qualitative approach that brings storytelling and research together either by using stories as research data or by using storytelling as a tool for data analysis or presentation of findings (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Moreover narrative inquiry as the study of how humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), while outlined that a narrative approach focuses on the meanings and values that individuals attach to their experiences through the stories they tell and share (Moen, 2006). These ideas imply that narrative inquiry approaches attempt to understand how people think and experience events and what they value. Through this study, we tried to dig into the teachers' experiences in building and employing BVC in English online learning. The research was conducted in four junior high schools in Samarinda, East Borneo, Indonesia. They are all public schools with which two schools are located in the urban area while the other two schools are in the rural area of the region. The participants of this study are four English teachers, namely Kinan, Merlin, Rosa, and Erna (all pseudonyms) from four junior high schools in Samarinda, East Borneo, Indonesia. All of them are female teachers who teach English from seven to nine grades and love to incorporate technology in their teaching. These four participants were voluntarily selected based on the information gathered from the preliminary survey about the use of BVC in remote teaching given to some teachers in the English teachers' community in the region of East Borneo. These four teachers also showed high interest in the activities that involve designing and building BVC and its modification with certain lesson topics. All information from the participants is confidential.

To obtain the data, we employed an online in-depth interview for each participant. An online interview is a kind of interview that is committed online, not face-to-face (Suryana et al., 2020). In this study, we employed Zoom meetings to meet the participants virtually. The respondents were interviewed once after the BVC implementation. Each interview took approximately 20 to 30 minutes depending on the emerging situations taking place during the process. The purpose is to have consistent responses from the respondents regarding the tool implementation. They were asked in their native language, that is Indonesia to ensure they fully understand the questions. The questions were established with possible opportunities to dig deeper with more sub-questions, depending on the responses. The interview questions were about their experiences in building BVC as well as the stories in employing it. These questions are used as guidance during the data collection and can be presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Guide

No	Interview Guide
1	What do you know about Bitmoji Virtual Classroom?
2	How do you know about Bitmoji Virtual Classroom?
3	Why are you interested to try to create Bitmoji Virtual Classroom?
4	What do you like about Bitmoji Virtual Classroom?
5	How many times have you used Bitmoji Virtual Classroom in your remote teaching?
6	Did you create the Bitmoji Virtual Classroom by yourself?
7	How do you feel when you create your Bitmoji Virtual Classroom?
8	Do you have any references for creating your Bitmoji Virtual Classroom? Explain more about this.
9	How long did it take to create your Bitmoji Virtual Classroom?
10	What kind of obstacles did you find in creating your Bitmoji Virtual Classroom? Explain more about this.
11	What teaching materials or specific topics did you insert in your Bitmoji Virtual Classroom?
12	How was your students' reaction when you presented your teaching materials with Bitmoji Virtual Classroom?

No	Interview Guide
13	How do you think your Bitmoji Virtual Classroom can engage your lesson more than any other online teaching platform?
14	What kinds of problems did your students face when they access the learning materials on your Bitmoji Virtual Classroom?
15	Will you keep creating and using Bitmoji Virtual Classroom in your teaching for blended or hybrid learning? Why?

All the gathered interview data were then transcribed and coded and means of investigator triangulation were employed. This type of triangulation involves the participation of two or more researchers in the same study to provide multiple observations and conclusions (Carter et al., 2014; Denzin, 1978). In this study, two experts in qualitative research interpreted the interview results and confirmed the findings. In conducting this study, we employed six steps of qualitative study, namely identifying the topic or a phenomenon to investigate, selecting the research participants, collecting the story from the participants, retelling the story of the individuals, cooperating with the participants, and validating the precision of the study (Creswell, 2012). To gain the data (stories), we utilized an in-depth interview using an interview guide. We employed three steps; transcribing, coding, and creating the narratives of the participants (Suryana et al., 2021). In transcribing, we interviewed each participant and saved the data. In coding, each transcript was coded and analyzed using thematic analysis. In creating the narratives of the participants, the stories were retold in a sequence that reflected the themes. The major themes fall into three categories of motivation, perception, and challenge.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

From the data collection and analysis, emerging results regarding teachers' narratives on the use of the BVC platform. The stories shared by the participants regarding their experiences in building and teaching English online using the platform are reported. Generally, the teachers shared and reflected on what motivated them when teaching using the particular platform and techniques, how they perceived the use of BVC and the challenges they encountered in developing the virtual classroom as well as delivering English learning materials through it.

The first respondent is Kinan (pseudonym). She highlighted that "BVC is an excellent platform for better online learning." Kinan has been teaching English in one public junior high school in East Borneo since 2018. She loves to design any kind of digital stuff for her teaching. When she was introduced to BVC for the first time, she had great excitement to explore the platform. She learned a lot about this virtual classroom from the English teachers' community in Samarinda. For her teaching during the pandemic, she created a BVC comprising some related materials for her ninth graders. She claimed that BVC has been an excellent platform for online learning and makes it much better than before. Three main results are emerging from Kinan's narratives, namely motivation, perception, and challenges in utilizing Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. Kinan is the kind of teacher who loves to employ new things in her teaching. She loves trying this and that, particularly some new apps for her teaching. BVC is a new platform for her. She was highly motivated to employ BVC as she thought this virtual classroom is much more interesting than some other online platforms. She also wanted to get rid of the "Learning English is boring, not fun and enjoyable" mindset possessed by some of her students. She has attempted to create some other virtual classrooms for her students, but BVC was suitable for her teaching. This was proven by her eagerness in exploring the features of the virtual classroom. She could build one with a specific theme or topic by decorating the virtual class with some great elements in Google Slides. There, she added her customized personal Bitmoji avatar too as the representative of herself.

She also inserted some English learning materials like videos, PDF files, audiobooks, etc. For her, this work made her easier in presenting certain material to her students. Moreover, she felt satisfied seeing her students' responses to learning in this virtual classroom. Her students' learning motivation has increased as they had something new rather than working on some regular assignments or tasks. This kind of satisfaction has encouraged her to create a little bit more complicated BVC in the future. She recalled her students' reactions that motivated her,

> *"BVC has boosted my hobby of designing something digitally for my students. My students now loved BVC very much. They preferred to do some tasks through it rather than through WhatsApp Group only or directly answer questions in Google Forms. They found new happiness in learning English."* (Kinan)

Perceptively, Kinan stated that she was so pleased to have an opportunity to employ BVC in her teaching. She was eager to explore the platform as she loved trying something new. Designing, creating or building, and decorating the virtual class brought great joy to her. It was also completely obvious that she enjoyed hyperlinking things into her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. She also confessed that the process of creation has boosted her

imagination and creativity. It took 3 to 4 hours for her to prepare one slide of her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. It was rather tiring for her but she was delighted to do that. To reduce her tiredness, she tried to do the creating activity in chunks, in which she had some recess time between her activities. This worked well for her. Another positive thought she had was her students loved the BVC she presented. Initially, her students were curious and had no idea how to use the virtual classroom, but slowly, they enjoyed it. It was shown by their enthusiasm in engaging with the English learning materials. When they encountered some confusion and difficulties they consulted her, particularly in doing the tasks in the virtual class. Her hard work in creating BVC paid off. She stated,

> *"I spent many hours creating my BVC and to prevent my backache get worse, I worked carefully, and rested every time I felt exhausted. Then I continued it again. But when I saw my students' great enthusiasm for learning, the tiredness just faded away. It was a big satisfaction for me. I did it."* (Kinan)

Despite the assistance provided by the platform, Kinan affirmed that she faced some challenges in employing BVC in her teaching. First, she had to work hard in decorating the BVC she created. It took some time for her to put the suitable elements for her lesson. Moreover, she needed more time to produce the perfect and more engaging Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. She had to choose contextual materials that fit the lesson. When she taught Passive Voice to her ninth graders, she attempted to provide learning materials that are easy to understand and easy to employ in the Bitmoji Virtual Class she created. She did not want to give burdens to her students as the lesson was quite hard, therefore she tried to put short and clear instructions in her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. In line with this, her students were a bit overwhelmed in the first place. They questioned what they had to do in the BVC presented. To make everything clear, Kinan had to repeat the instructions. She recalled her students' reactions,

> *"Everyone seemed a little bit confused the first time I presented Passive Voice through my Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. They asked me what they had to do with the links, the video, the PDF, and the other elements inserted in the virtual classroom. To overcome this, I slowly repeated the instructions as well as translated them into the Indonesian language. It worked well finally."* (Kinan)

Adding to the narratives yielded by Kinan, Merlin (pseudonym) stated that "The use of BVC is like combining two apps of Google Slides and Bitmoji Avatar." Merlin has been teaching English in one public junior high school in East Borneo since 2002. She has experienced many ups and downs in facing students in learning English. She has faced many kinds of students in her class and this has enriched her teaching experience. As someone who is studious, she was familiar with the Bitmoji app (avatar) on her smartphone and explored it by personalizing it. But then she figured out how the app would be so amazing and interesting combined with Google Slides. This triggered her curiosity as well. Luckily, from many professional development opportunities, like webinars and workshops, she obtained many new insights and practical ideas about Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. Since then, she started to create some virtual classes and put related materials for her teaching.

Merlin is also a very creative teacher who thinks so hard about how to give her best for her students. Before the Covid-19 outbreak, she joined many workshops, seminars, and training related to English Language Teaching. Being introduced to Bitmoji Virtual Classroom, she felt like getting a new toy to be explored. With this virtual classroom, she wanted to give something different to her students. She has been highly motivated to create more Bitmoji Virtual Classrooms by seeing the great features that are colorful, interesting, simple, and engaging. With one slide of Google Slides, she could create a wonderful virtual classroom comprising many other supporting learning materials, for example, links to Google Forms, Padlet, YouTube, and any other learning sources. To begin creating Bitmoji Virtual Classroom, she decided on the topic first. Then, she adopted some existing templates from the internet (Facebook pages and groups). There are so many teachers from around the globe who have created thematic templates and shared them on the pages and groups. Furthermore, she tried to build her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom, from the simplest one to the more complicated ones, and inserted certain topics or English learning materials in her lesson. She said,

> *"I am really lucky to find some Facebook pages and groups that consist of some generous teachers to share their amazing BVC templates. Many templates with certain are topics available there, like Harry Potter, Superheroes, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc. I adopted some of the templates and then tried to create my slides. It was fun and challenging. My students loved the slides I created too."* (Merlin)

Merlin thought that there were two things she felt about Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. First, she was extremely happy. She was pleased to create the slides by putting elements she liked for her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. She put chairs, tables, a whiteboard, flowers, etc. in her slide that had a classroom theme. In another virtual class she created, she put some e-books on the shelves, a big screen on the wall, and her Bitmoji avatar as the librarian. This was a slide of a virtual library. She also affirmed that BVC can be created based on the students'

needs, like the learning topics or things that are related to the student's world. Besides, BVC has forced her to design a more simple learning design, with simple instructions that students can easily understand. Another thought she shared was about the time management she had in creating the slides. Like the other participants, she experienced exhausting moments during the process of creation. She spent around 3 to 4 hours or 5 to 6 hours a day building one Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. Moreover, she had to sit still and fully concentrate to create the slide she needed. It was quite tiring. She used to prepare the materials first and then created the slide to save her time. However, she felt satisfied at the end of the creation time and made sure the slide and the links work well. She tested the platform before presenting it to her students. She recalled her experiences,

> "It took 3 to 4 hours for me to create a thematic Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. Even I could need more hours to create a more complicated one. I used to modify the basic template into a class with certain topics. It was quite exhausting but I enjoyed it. I loved creating Bitmoji Virtual Classrooms for my students." (Merlin)

In line with how she perceived BVC in the case of time, Merlin stated that she needed special and extra time to prepare for the virtual classroom. This time-consuming activity needed extra effort as the creator had to focus on the details. The more complicated the slide, the more time is needed. Another challenge faced by her was selecting the elements to be put in her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. In creating the slide with a classroom theme, she had to carefully pick the suitable stuff, like choosing the right chair for the teacher (Bitmoji avatar) or the bookshelf that fits into the classroom situation. She also had to make sure the sizes of the elements were proportional and the slide became more appealing. Once she did a mistake in dragging and resizing the elements, the shapes of the elements did not look good or proportional. This activity required attention and concentration. After finishing building the Bitmoji Virtual Classroom, she had to pay attention to the instructions given to her students. She wrote some clues in the virtual classroom to direct her students to do this and that, but still, some students felt confused about what they had to do regarding the learning materials. She presented Report Text and Descriptive text in her Bitmoji Virtual Classrooms. In the learning Report Text, her ninth graders had no significant troubles in dealing with the materials. While her seventh graders asked a lot of questions when she assigned some tasks in the BVC with Descriptive Text topics. To overcome this, she created a brief tutorial on how to use BVC for her students.

> "I struggled to manage my time in creating my Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. It was a really hard effort to produce some slides completed with suitable materials and clear instructions. My students got overwhelmed by the tasks in the virtual classroom but then the short tutorial I made for them was helpful." (Merlin)

Another interesting story came from Rosa (pseudonym). Rosa is an English teacher in a junior high school in East Borneo. During the pandemic, she liked to explore some apps to be used in her teaching. She figured out about BVC in a workshop and since that time she started to love the platform. She kept exploring, modifying, and then finally created one with a specific topic for her students. She felt satisfied when her students showed more engagement in learning English. She emphasized that "Students never got bored when learning English using Bitmoji Virtual Classroom."

Rosa was so excited since the first time she saw the design of Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. She installed the Bitmoji avatar app on her phone and played (customized and personalized the avatar) with it several times. She also learned more about how to use Google Slides and connect the slides with Bitmoji on her smartphone. After being successful in building one Bitmoji Virtual Classroom, she was more motivated to create another one. She was truly amazed by the elements she used in her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. She happily decorated and hyperlinked her virtual class with some learning materials, like an e-book, YouTube videos, etc. She felt that this virtual classroom has made her job much easier to be done. She was eager to do the designing and creating work. She expressed her excitement,

> "What I love the most about BVC is I can put the files of books (e-books), video, audio, and links in it. I selected carefully the English learning materials to be put in my Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. I also love to see the fancy elements and cute avatars in my Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. These parts made my teaching easier." (Rosa)

Rosa perceived the platform as "Happy." It is the main word Rosa could use to express her feeling regarding the use of BVC in her teaching. She was most inspired to design and create her BVC from regular meetings of the English Teachers' Community in Samarinda, East Borneo which she frequently attended. Since that time, she built her virtual class with certain topics that she presented to her students. She inserted some materials about Simple Present Tense and made some adjustments with the elements provided by Google Slides. This was enjoyable for her. She had the freedom to put anything in her BVC including customizing her Bitmoji avatar as she liked. On the contrary, she could not avoid the feeling of tiredness as she spent 3 to 4 hours creating

the slide. Nevertheless, she was satisfied with her work. Her students responded well although there was a bit of confusion at the first. She said,

> *"I need longer time to sit and look at my laptop screen as I had to pick this and that for my Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. I started to design my slide with the basic material of Simple Present Tense for my seventh graders. I was just like "wow" after seeing my Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. I could make it and make my students happy in learning English. BVC was the coolest virtual class I have ever known and created."* (Rosa)

Although Rosa admitted that the platform is helpful and engaged the students well, she affirmed that spending too much time in preparation was the first challenge she had during the process of BVC creation. It took more than 3 hours for her to produce one slide and its complementary elements (virtual classroom decoration, links, video, audio, etc.). It was even longer when she needed to create more complicated ones or more than one slide. She could not avoid the tiring condition. The other obstacle she faced was regarding the instructions she made in her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. Some of her students did not get a clear picture of what they needed to do with the contents. The questions like "What is this, ma'am?" and "What should we do with this?" were frequently asked by her students. They tended to be confused and curious at the same time. Luckily, they kept exploring it after getting clarifications from Rosa. Therefore, the activity of clicking in her BVC has turned into a more interesting and engaging activity. Even one student said that she recognized the virtual classroom as she once had ever seen BVC on the internet. She also stated that the virtual classroom designed by Rosa was similar to the one in some schools abroad. She recalled,

> *"In the beginning, my students felt a bit lost wandering virtually in my Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. But then after I clarified and simplified my instructions they started to understand and explore the virtual classroom happily."* (Rosa)

Finally, an interesting narrative came from Erna (pseudonym). Erna is one of the dedicated junior high school English teachers in another public school in the East Borneo region. She has been teaching English there since 1995. She loves learning something new that can enhance her teaching expertise. She has joined many teachers' professional developments, like seminars, workshops, and training. One day she was introduced to the Bitmoji app and Google Slides in a workshop in one of her professional development activities Since that day, she fell in love with the apps and felt challenged to create some for her lessons. She kept exploring the platform, learning from many sources, and finally created some Bitmoji Virtual Classrooms for her students. She has great excitement about presenting the virtual class to her students. During the narratives, she reflected that "Creating BVC has become a great new challenge for me."

Alike with Kinan, Merlin, and Rosa, Erna was also motivated to create BVC as it is explorable and has some unique features. Creating BVC and hyperlinking the virtual classroom with some English learning materials have become something interesting and challenging for her. She said that assigning her students to learn using BVC is like giving interesting and challenging puzzles to her students.

> *"My students treated my BVC like puzzles, for the first time. They were interested yet curious at the same time. Once they understood how to do with the virtual classroom, the confusion turned into excitement. It was a satisfying moment for me."* (Erna)

Erna affirmed that she was happy and tired at the same time. Alike with the other participants, she needed extra time to create her slides in Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. She sat for hours to accomplish one slide with one topic. Sometimes it took almost a half day for her to create a complete slide, including the supporting materials. She designed and built the slides comprising the material of Recount, Report, and Songs for her students. To get more ideas, she googled to get some more references for her virtual classroom. However, her happiness was still there when her students responded well to the learning activities that she designed in her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. She recalled her experiences,

> *"I loved working on my slides in BVC despite the amount of time I spent on it. I asked Google to give me more ideas and references. I was tired but then I was happy and satisfied seeing my students' excitement in learning through my Bitmoji Virtual Classroom."* (Erna)

Erna also experienced some obstacles in working on her Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. First, she tried hard to manage her time in producing her slides. She needed more time to search the materials, select the suitable elements, and hyperlink everything she needed for her virtual classroom. She put some materials about certain texts (Recount, Report, and Songs) in her slides, complete with the instructions. When the virtual class was ready, she shared the link to the BVC with her students. In the beginning, her students did not know what to do with the slides. They just read the instructions on the slides, both in the form of pictures and sentences. They kept trying and then asked Erna about the activities in the BVC. Erna then made the instructions clearer to help them engage

with the materials, like the attendance list, summary, worksheet, etc. Furthermore, everything was fine after she repeated the instructions. She stated,

> *"My students were just like to get a new toy when they first dealt with my Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. But then they were okay with that. In the end, they were able to recognize the instructions in my BVC. The key was that I had to make my instructions clearer, both in the virtual classroom and my own oral/written instructions."* (Erna)

All the respondents' narratives present interesting stories regarding the use of BVC in their teaching and learning journey. To sum up, Table 2 highlights all of the respondents' experiences.

Table 2. Participants' Narratives in Learning Using Bitmoji Virtual Classroom

Narratives	Kinan	Merlin	Rosa	Erna
Motivation	- Supporting and boosting her hobby of designing digital tools for teaching. - Getting a new preference in designing a virtual classroom.	- Willing to give something different to her students. - Having a positive atmosphere with the elements in Bitmoji Virtual Classroom.	- Loving to design digital tools for teaching. - Doing something extraordinary for her online teaching.	Feeling interested in something new, just like a puzzle.
Perceptions	- Creating BVC brought great joy. - Time-consuming.	- Creating BVC was fun. - Need extra time and effort to create Bitmoji Virtual Classroom.	- Creating BVC is a very new and interesting thing to do, getting new experiences. - Need more time to create a good Bitmoji Virtual Classroom.	- Creating a story digitally is fun and challenging. - Time-consuming.
Challenges	- Time management - The instructions	- Less of time - The instructions	- Time - The instructions	- Need extra time - The instructions

These narratives bring about interesting stories of these teachers in the instructional process utilizing the innovative learning tool, called Bitmoji Virtual Classroom. The results need to be delved deeper into for a comprehensive interpretation.

Discussion

The participants' motivation in using Bitmoji Virtual Classroom

The participants stated that since seeing the BVC for the first time they were mostly encouraged to explore it more. Moreover, they also intended to give something new and different to their students as learning English virtually using some other digital platforms seemed to be quite boring and not too challenging. The features that are eye-catching, interesting, unique, explorable, and linkable also caught their attention. This has led to their eagerness to create more BVC regarding the learning topics they provide for their students. From the four participants, motivation was internal and driven. This is in line with previous study said about intrinsic motivation which is to engage in an activity because it provides satisfaction, enjoyment, and even interest or challenge to the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The participants' natural curiosity and interest also energized their effort as the teaching environment provided optimal challenges and rich sources of stimulation (Buchner & Zumbach, 2018; Santosa et al., 2020). This motivational wellspring in enriching their teaching expertise is likely to flourish. In this study, the participants were highly motivated internally to build BVC.

How the participants perceive the use of Bitmoji Virtual Classroom

All participants agreed that BVC gave them new excitement in preparing their teaching. In deciding the topic of learning, designing, building, and decorating, until finishing and sharing the classroom link with their students, the participants experienced joyful, enjoyable, and fun activities. They saw and treated BVC as a new "toy" that was interesting to explore. Moreover, the activities of building the virtual classroom have triggered their 'adventurous' trait as teachers. They perceived the creation of this virtual classroom as a new great challenge. These statements are affirmed by previous study who stated that teachers find creating BVC engaging (Chung & Li, 2022; Pate, 2022). Teachers found the act of building BVC fun and motivating and even became a hobby for several teachers and this could lead to sustainability.

On the contrary, the participants felt the activity of building a BVC was a bit time-consuming. They had to spend many hours creating one complete slide. This drawback is supported by previous study explained that the process of creating a BVC could take a considerable amount of time and spending hours preparing a teaching tool does not justify the one time that students will use it (Graeske et al., 2022; Pate, 2022).

The obstacles that the participants faced in using Bitmoji Virtual Classroom

Although the participants affirmed that BVC is interesting, both for teachers and students, building a complete BVC takes time and requires effort. In building this virtual classroom, there were some obstacles faced by the participants, technically and practically. Time constraint was the first challenge they experienced. This is supported by study who stated that teachers mentioned how it became a low-stress activity for them if there was no time limit (Pate, 2022). All participants stated that they needed more time to focus on the virtual classroom as there were many elements to be put in the classroom. Starting from deciding the topic wanted to be delivered, choosing the classroom theme, decorating the classroom, and hyperlinking the learning materials (e-book, video, etc.). To do this, the participants had to manage their time very well. The second challenge the participants faced was the instructions given in the BVC they created. The participants affirmed that some students were at the first had confusion as they did not know what to do with the BVC. They felt overwhelmed to see the eye-catching elements in the virtual classroom but had no idea how to deal with it. Other study stated that BVC are appealing because of their cartoon look, but users can become overwhelmed with what to look at first (Pate, 2022). According to other study hyperlinks' visual designs and interactivity are the other important aspects to consider in the online learning environment (Yildirim, 2017).

Although there were some instructions embedded in the virtual classroom; signs, symbols, or small notices like "click me", "watch me", etc., the students still did not understand what they had to do. After repeating and chunking the instructions (both written and oral), everything became better. In line with this, other study claimed that a central challenge facing designers of multimedia instruction is the potential for cognitive overload – in which the learner's intended cognitive processing exceeds the learner's available cognitive capacity (Mayer & Moreno, 2003). In this case, the participants needed to pay attention to the instructions they put in their BVC as well as ensure the instructions were clear enough for students.

This study implies that to ensure active and meaningful learning, teachers must be able to understand the subject matter and be able to design and employ a sound pedagogical competence shown by their ability to deliver the learning instructional steps in clear and coherent step-by-step procedures. Technological competence is also a vital component to be acquired by teachers in dealing with the students in the 21st-century learning. Teachers need to continuously explore, develop and practice their professional capacities. BVC can be one alternative online platform for teachers in face-to-face, hybrid, or full online classrooms. Hindering factors, like technical support from the learning environment and the pedagogical abilities of the teachers are still the two major factors that need to be considered when employing innovation. Using technology in the current learning era is inevitable. The rapid growth of technology from a simple substitution to sophisticated robot-assisted creation needs to be addressed well by all school parties and policymakers.

4. CONCLUSION

Learning has majorly shifted, from face-to-face classrooms to virtual ones until the post-pandemic time. This condition leads teachers to do some adjustments and modifications in their teaching to maintain the sustainability of the learning process and avoid boredom, lack of motivation, and anxiety. BVC has become one of the potential learning media to address the situations. Based on the English teachers' narratives, they designed and built the BVC happily as they were fond of the appealing virtual class, including the elements in it and its linkable features to deliver some learning materials online. The participants also perceived that the process of building the virtual class was fun and challenging but they could not avoid some obstacles like time constraints and less comprehensible instructions. It is suggested that teachers should pay attention more to the pedagogical instructions given in the BVC they design to make them more understandable, well-scaffolded, and engaging the learning. Providing a brief or simple tutorial on how to deal with the materials in the virtual classroom is also crucial.

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