LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research
Journal homepage: https://talenta.usu.ac.id/lingpoet

Plotagon Training for English Teachers during the *Covid-19* Pandemic

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 5 January 2024
Revised 20 January 2024
Accepted 30 January 2024
Available online 31 January 2024

E-ISSN: 2745-8296
P-ISSN: -

How to cite:
Dallyono, R., Hidayati, F., & Kurniawan, E. (2024). Plotagon Training for English Teachers during the Covid-19 Pandemic. *LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research*, *5*(1), 42-53.

ABSTRACT

A great majority of English teachers agree that it is crucial for them use to use digital technology to help students improve their foreign language skills. Many studies, however, show that the number of teachers who use technology in their teaching and learning practices is still limited. The lecturing method, discussion method, and follow-up study method were used to undertake the training activities. This study presents an overview of the training participants' reactions to the use of *Plotagon* in English learning, as well as the extent to which the participants understand how to create English dialogues using *Plotagon*. The use of online training turned out to have a significant impact on the characteristics of participants who interacted during the training. This technical skill weakness, however, could be compensated for by responding quickly when asked by the material provider via video conference. They believed that online tools should only be used as a supplement to the training process. Despite this, the majority of participants agreed that *Plotagon* was very useful for improving the quality of English learning, so the participants were enthusiastic about participating in the training even with all these obstacles.

Keyword: *Community Service*, *Digital Technology*, *English Teaching*, *Online*, *Plotagon*

1. Introduction

Today's computer technology has a significant influence on almost all aspects of life. Therefore, equipping all elements in the implementation of teaching and education with digital literacy is a significant thing to do. This technological innovation adds to the implications and functions of digital technology in the context of learning and teaching (Scherer et al., 2018).

More specifically, Zou (2013), based on research conducted, states that digital technology helps students to improve listening and speaking skills and strengthen problem solving skills. The students are fully involved in the learning process and their contribution to the class is also consistently increasing.

The majority of English teachers agree that the use of digital technology can help students to improve their foreign language skills. However, many studies show that the number of teachers who involve the use of technology in teaching and learning practices is in fact very limited. Tondeur et al. (2008) reported that teachers who have a constructivist perspective more often integrate the use of technology in the classroom.

On the other hand, teachers who are unsure of the use of technology in the classroom show a lower tendency to involve the use of technology in the classroom. This indicates a relationship between teachers' beliefs and

practices for integrating technology in the classroom. Fives & Buehl (2012) state that there is an influence between teachers' beliefs in achieving the knowledge gained through professional programs and the way teachers use this knowledge in teaching practice. Based on previous research, the adoption of technology in teaching and learning practices has resulted in relatively the same conclusions (Deng et al., 2014; Ertmer et al., 2012; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010)

Furthermore, researchers interested in the professional development of teachers in the field of technology use have proven that practical development will not continue if teachers are not motivated to hold firm beliefs about the benefits of technology (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Kim et al., 2013). More specifically, Huang et al. (2017) report that the level of dependence on technology differs based on the age and experience of the teachers. This research shows more accurately that the use of technology by teachers is influenced by many things: age, educational background, and location.

One of the results of technological advances that can be used as a source or tool to facilitate language learning is Plotagon. This online tool is intuitive content creation software *(https://plotagon.com/*) that can be used in the teaching process because it has a text-based filmmaking interface as well as a storytelling tool through the creation of short films or feature films.

Plotagon has become an educational application that allows its users to create instant animated videos. Users can create their own characters, choose scenes, write dialogue, and add emotions, sound effects, and actions. The software offers free trial options for individual storytellers, licensed versions for students and educators, and another for designers and professional users.

According to Love (2013), *Plotagon* can produce animated films from dialogue text. The benefits in class are many. Users can use it to write short scripts that can become films and can be used in a variety of ways; creative writing, reporting back on situations (feedback), and providing a creative touch in presentations. More explicitly, Love (2013) also mentions that *Plotagon* is very significant pedagogically because it produces graphic outputs from text-based input that can be utilized in foreign language learning.

Previous research has proven that Plotagon has the potential to be used in learning English. Guzman Gamez & Moreno Cuellar (2019) showed that the use of Plotagon can increase students' motivation to write through an interactive and attractive interface to create digital stories. Students can create their own digital stories (with a partner) and result in improved English vocabulary and writing skills.

Afidah et al. (2021) created a learning media design that focuses on English speaking skills. The results of the analysis show that the media in the form of videos produced from Plotagon is suitable for use as learning media because it has an interactive aspect. Coban et al. (2021) believe that the use of *Plotagon* in learning to speak can reduce anxiety levels and motivate students to be actively involved in speaking activities by providing avatars and preparation time, contextualizing speaking, making students content creators, and enabling individual correction.

Previous studies have generally focused on the application of *Plotagon* to specific topics of learning English and its benefits for students in improving certain language skills. Meanwhile, research on the use of *Plotagon* and teachers' perspectives on *Plotagon* is still minimal. In fact, from the explanation above, *Plotagon* clearly has pedagogical implications for teachers. Therefore, teachers should have sufficient competence and understanding regarding the operationalization and use of *Plotagon* in the process of learning and teaching English.

On that basis, this community service activity was designed. This activity is expected to produce an overview of the response of the training participants to the use of *Plotagon* in learning English and the extent to which the participants understand how to make English dialogues using *Plotagon*.

This community service activity by holding a *Plotagon* training program for English teachers (junior high school and high school) in West Java is also expected to produce the following outputs: (1) providing concrete knowledge and insight regarding the use of digital technology in the context of learning and teaching; (2) provide comprehensive knowledge and insight regarding the use of *Plotagon* in the process of learning and teaching English; (3) encourage English teachers to actively and creatively design learning processes that involve information technology; and (4) encourage English teachers to be actively involved in the implementation of activities or training related to the use of technology in the learning process.

2. Method

This type of analysis relied on qualitative and quantitative methods supported by content analysis to achieve the objectives of this activity (Kracauer, 1952; Krippendorff, 2004, p. 143). It aimed to reveal the trainees' reactions to the *Plotagon* training's implementation and the extent to which the participants understood how to

create an English dialogue using Plotagon. This is a case study focused on qualitative research methods (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

The subject, the time, and the procedure

Plotagon's training activities were aimed at English teachers at junior high schools (SMP) and senior high schools (SMA) in West Java. As a result, the training provider sent a training invitation letter to all junior high and high school teachers in West Java. A total of 168 English teachers (118 from junior high and 50 from high school) registered for the *Plotagon* training, which was held over two days on October 9 and 10, 2021.

Table 1. Registered *Plotagon* Trainees

No.	Origin	Junior High School	Senior High School
1.	Majalengka	10	8
2.	Subang	30	14
3.	Indramayu	25	6
4.	Bandung	23	9
5.	Cirebon	30	13
		118	50

The majority of the subjects/respondents were female teachers, the average age of the subjects was 36-45 years, the majority lived in rural areas, and the majority had bachelor's degrees. In addition, there were 72 male subjects (42.8%), 83 people living in urban areas (49.4%). Due to gathering restrictions amid the Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face training was not possible. The Zoom meeting application was used as a model for online training. All registered participants were given a meeting ID and passcode, allowing them to fully participate in all training sessions.

The lecture method was used in online training to provide trainees with a general understanding of *Plotagon*. At this point, the trainees could understand *Plotagon* commencing with its definition, interface appearance, and general functions.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the subjects

Variables	Categories	Number	Percentages
Gender	Male	96	57.2%
	Female	72	42.8%
Residence	Rural	85	50.6%
	Urban	83	49.4%
Education	Bachelor’s	153	91.1%
	Master’s	15	8.9%
Age	25-35	58	34.5%
	36-45	67	39.8%
	≥ 46	43	25.7%

Second, following a general explanation of *Plotagon* to the trainees, the group discussion method was used. Prior to group discussions, training participants were given a simulation of how to use *Plotagon*. The training participants had the opportunity to ask questions, express their opinions, and engage in dialogue during the simulation session.

In general, all participants responded positively to the various materials presented via lecture and simulation methods. This can be seen in the training participants' willingness to ask questions and discuss various phenomena and technical obstacles encountered during the training process.

Third, because of this training activity, the trainees were able to design an animated film from the dialogue text that could be used in learning English using the follow-up study method. The training provider used this method to allow all training participants to review or design the results of animated films created with *Plotagon* as described in this training. It aimed to be one of the theories' practices that had been studied. This method of follow-up research was also important so that participants could apply it in their teaching activities in their respective classes.

Data collection

The data were collected online. Following the training, the questionnaire was sent as a link to the *WhatsApp* group via *Google Forms*. The participants, who were research subjects, had been informed about the purpose of the questionnaire and had given their consent at the start of the training. The subjects agreed to participate in the collection of this questionnaire by checking the consent box. E-mail addresses were not collected in order to maintain confidentiality. The average time it took to complete all the questionnaires was 15 minutes.

Research instrument

Non-standard questionnaires were used to collect data. The questionnaire contained question items that alluded to all of the research questions. The following questions were included in the first question:

a) The frequency of technical problems during online training (4 items related to the platform connection used, such as voice clarity, visual reception delay, and signal loss during online training) using a likert scale (5 = very often, 1 = does not occur),
b) The frequency of using *plotagon* during training (likert scale 5 = very often, 1 = does not occur),
c) Conformity with the schedule (yes/no),
d) Balance of teaching styles (more theoretical, not theoretical, balance between theory and practical tasks),
e) Assign tasks to trainees in comparison to face-to-face training (they have more free time, the same amount of free time, or less free time),
f) Obstacles encountered during the online training process implementation (open questions).

The following were the question items for the second question:

a) Opinions on the use of online methods for training (Likert scale 5, 1 = very small effect, 5 = very large influence),
b) Preference for interacting with teachers during training (microphone, chat),
c) Assimilation of information and online training compared to face-to-face training,
d) Perceived difficulties regarding presentation of work results online (harder, same difficulty, easier),
e) Information processing (more difficult, same difficulty, easier),
f) Perceived difficulties regarding online training compared to face-to-face training (online, face-to-face, a combination of face-to-face and online/hybrid).

Previous use of the E-learning platform (yes/no), frequency of using *Plotagon* in training (Likert scale 5 =, 1 = not used, 5 = very often), perceptions of *Plotagon's* usefulness in the learning process (Likert scale 5, 1 = not useful, 5 = very useful), preference for future use of various platforms were the question items used for the third question.

A series of sociodemographic characteristics were included in the questionnaire's last section. These data were used to conduct a descriptive analysis. The appendix contains questionnaires and question items.

Data analysis

A statistical approach was used to analyze the data. The responses to open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively by categorizing them into categories that describe the general requirements for implementing online training successfully (technical conditions, technical capabilities of trainers and trainees, teaching in an online environment based on the rules of teaching in a face-to-face environment, style of teaching, interaction between trainers and trainees). Several indicator indices were employed to measure information from these indicators for variables whose measurement was difficult. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data (percentage, mean, and standard deviation). With the help of Independent Samples t-Test and Chi square, comparisons were done based on the level of education (Bachelor's/Master's). The Spearman correlation coefficient was applied to determine the relationship between trainees' impressions of utilizing *Plotagon* in learning English and satisfaction with the online instruction offered.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

This service activity was carried out online with the participation of 168 English teachers from West Java (118 junior high school teachers and 50 senior high school teachers). Today's English teachers must deal with technological advancements in the classroom. The *Plotagon* is one of these technological advancements.

This service and research project was designed to demonstrate *Plotagon's* potential as a tool for learning English. *Plotagon* is a user-friendly content creation program that can be used in the classroom because it features a text-based filmmaking interface as well as a storytelling tool for short and feature films.

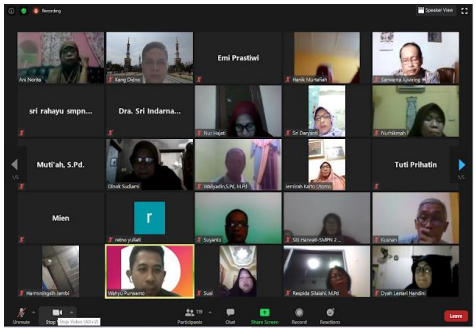

Figure 1. Plotagon trainees

This 168-person training exercise was designed to develop real knowledge and understanding into the use of digital technologies in the context of learning and teaching English. This was accomplished by including broad information on digital literacy at the start of the training materials.

More specifically, the training participants were provided a thorough understanding of how to apply *Plotagon* in the study and teaching of English. The training session included a description of the information in the form of general definitions for the *Plotagon's* technical operation. Participants were also asked to develop works based on the information they had received during the program.

All of the materials provided were able to motivate English teachers in West Java to actively and creatively design learning processes involving information technology. In fact, the participants were more enthusiastic after this training to always be actively involved in the implementation of activities or training related to the use of technology in the learning process.

Presenting the training materials.

The training activity begins with the distribution of opening material in the form of the importance of understanding information technology to integrate learning activities. In general, participants in training were exposed to digital literacy in the context of learning English. Following that, the material was more technically focused on the Plotagon. The following is the content.

Plotagon is a free application that can be downloaded. Before beginning the training, the trainees were instructed to download the application.

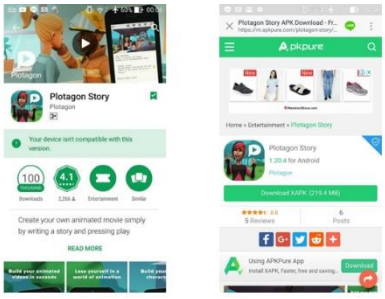

Figure 2. Plotagon in Playstore

The application will display a camera icon after it has been downloaded. Users can use this icon to create their own story and character design. Users can begin by pressing the create new plot button to begin creating a new storyline. The user can specify animations of people who can be included in the story in the characters field. At the top right, there is a shop icon that allows the users to purchase pre-existing Plotagon characters and scenes.

The material on how to create animations in the Plotagon application then begins to enter. To start a new

story, open the Plotagon app and click the camera icon, then create a new plot. Users will see a black screen with a blank space below it when they click the "Create New Plot" button. The image from the animation is displayed on the black screen, while the animation is set on the blank space.

Click the clip icon in the upper left corner to display a location; a blank space will appear.

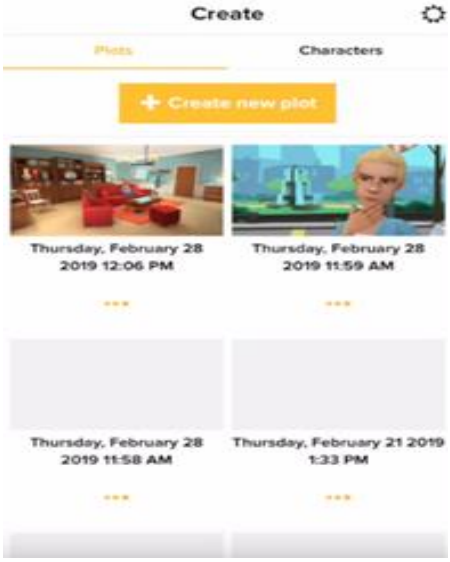

Figure 3. Flow Icon

When the location text is clicked, users can choose the location or background they want to use, and the data then choose the characters that can be placed based on their preferences.

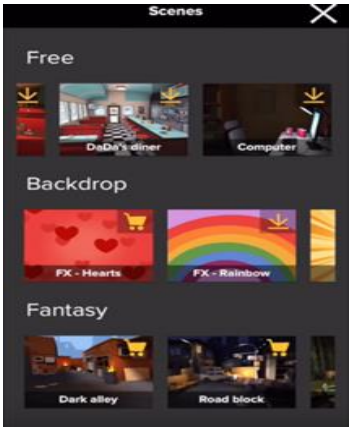

Figure 4. Selecting a location

To add a dialog, click the dialog icon at the top. Text will then appear in the empty space. There, the user can choose the character to use in the dialog and specify the character's expression in brackets. After all of the expressions and characters have been matched, the user can type a sentence that will be spoken by the selected character. By clicking on the mic icon next to the text, users can record their own voices to be included in the character's voice.

Interaction is also possible with the *plotagon*. The hand icon must be clicked to add an interaction. Following that, the user can select which interactions the character will engage in. If there are two or more characters in the same location, they can interact.

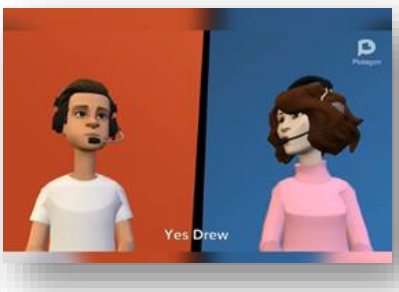

Figure 5. Creating interactions between characters

By clicking on the star-shaped icon, users can also add sound effects to their animations. Sound effects can enhance the nuances of the story created by the animation.

Finally, to play the created animation, the user can click the play button while determining whether the animation is as desired. When it is deemed adequate, users can publish it by clicking the button at the bottom right and adding the desired caption for the created animation.

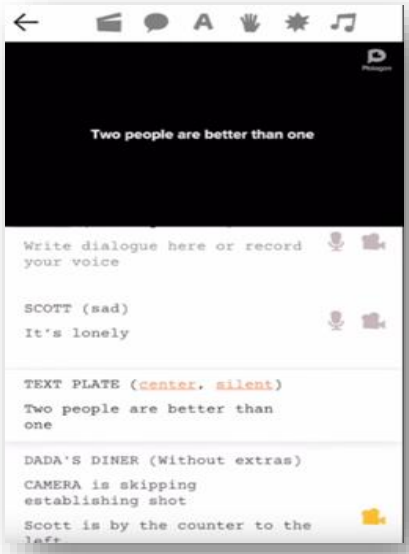

Figure 6. Adding sound effects

Perceptions of trainees on online *Plotagon* training

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, all aspects of education were forced to undergo drastic changes. One of them is to incorporate an adaptability strategy into the online learning feature.

This is the reason why 70.4 percent of respondents said they frequently encountered technical problems during training (difficulty connecting to the platform used, signal loss, delayed voice, and unclear voice). However, the use of online training tools in conjunction with another application, Plotagon, made it a little more difficult for some participants because they had to adjust their understanding with various digital tools (as many as 3.5 percent of the trainees mentioned this issue). Another issue with accessing materials during online training was the difference in internet signal strength from each participant's location. Another impediment to the implementation of online training was an unstable network (as many as 16.8 percent of the trainees mentioned this issue).

In general, the participants admitted that they lacked the high technical skills required to adapt to the use of online devices and additional applications in English learning. Furthermore, the implementation of online training had a significant impact on the characteristics of participants who interacted during the training. However, this technical skill weakness was compensated for by responding quickly when asked by the material provider via video conference.

These technical skills also included trainees' ability to display the results of their (group) work via screen sharing, use of the chat feature when they had questions, and various links for using Plotagon, among other things. The trainees took advantage of the features provided by the trainer (86.4 percent of the trainees stated this), which was related to the type of collaborative learning (30.6 percent of the trainees touched on this issue).

In response to open-ended questions, however, 17% of trainees admitted that they lacked the necessary skills to engage in and develop online-based learning and integrate it with technological advances. Furthermore, 24.5 percent of training participants stated that their inability to adapt to technological advances hampered their ability to understand the material and develop the subject matter or training. In this regard, 30.8 percent of training participants stated that the training activities were generally well-scheduled, beginning and ending according to a predetermined schedule. A balance of theory and practical work is essential in the context of online training. As a result, 71.4 percent of training participants reported that there was too much theory or

too many practical tasks, and 74.6 percent reported that the atmosphere of free time was less than face-to-face training. Of course, psychological factors and the slow adaptation and change from face-to-face to virtual habits were more likely to influence this.

Table 3. Frequency distribution of indicators related to participant capacity in participating in online training

Variable	Category	%
Technical constraints	Technical constraints in the implementation of online training	70,4%
	Using various digital platforms	3,5%
	Lack of technological competence	16,8%
Technical ability of trainees	Diverse use of digital features during training	46,1%
	Limited technical competence of trainees	17%
Training system	Conformity and adherence to the schedule of activities	30,8%
Training Style	Adaptation of training styles on online platforms	24,5%
	Adaptation of training styles on online platforms	65,1%
	Style balance gives training	70,2%
	Balance of task completion allocation	8,8%
	Clarity of task completion requirements	4,4%
	Participants focus and attention	7,5%
Interaction	Trainers provide support	10,2%
	Interaction between the material giver and participants	5,7%

Table 4. Frequency distribution of indicators related to trainees' perceptions of Plotagon

Variable	Category	%
Previous knowledge/experience	Previously used a similar application?	67,2%
Level of technology use in English class	Frequent use of digital platforms	88,4%
Uses of Plotagon for English class	Plotagon is very useful	69,8%
	Plotagon can be used in collaborative learning	31,6%
Intention to use Plotagon	Preference for using digital platforms	29,5%

The majority of trainees felt that online training limited their availability of free time. This is entirely due to the training participants, whose attention was divided between training materials and efforts to keep the equipment in good working order. The division of this focus was felt to make the free time during training implementation feel ineffective.

According to another viewpoint, online training actually provided more free time. This argument was based on a training environment with little direct interaction. As a result, the trainees tended to evade the trainer's

attention and focus. This period was regarded as similar to free time.

This phenomenon was confirmed by responses to open-ended questions, which revealed that 8.8 percent of training participants believed that the issue of task balance and time allocation for completion occurred in this training. Some training participants (4.4 percent) also stated that the instructions and requirements for completing assignments were not clearly communicated, and that the training participants lacked motivation (10.2 percent). Plotagon's online training format was also perceived to have the least amount of interaction (5.7 percent), which contributed to trainees' lack of focus and concentration (7.5 percent).

Trainees' perceptions of their ability to learn and use *Plotagon*

Despite the fact that the majority of the trainees (67.2 percent) had actively used various types of digital platforms in the learning and teaching process, their views on the online teaching environment were divided. Some (37.4 percent) thought the online Plotagon training was very appropriate, while others (32.2 percent) thought it was inappropriate, and the rest couldn't decide (30.6). When it came to satisfaction with the online training process based on their respective learning experiences, the same thing happened: 39.1 percent felt very satisfied, 31.9 percent could not determine, and 29 percent felt satisfied.

However, many trainees perceived online training to be more difficult than face-to-face training ($x2(2) = 21.44$, $p = 0.00$). Participants who were more open to the use of online tools in training were more satisfied with the training process overall ($r3 = 0.566$, $df = 762$, p 0.001). These findings also show that master's degree holders were more open to using online devices in the training process ($t(760) = 2.73$, p 0.001) and were more satisfied with their training experience ($t(760) = 4.18$, p 0.001).

To be honest, 60.5 percent of training participants thought that information processing was more difficult when done online, and a third of the trainees said it was difficult to convey an idea in a discussion or answer questions given in an online training setting (32.9 percent). However, providing interactive training via Zoom Meetings was able to improve comprehension and information processing (73 percent). In this case, the majority of trainees (52.4 percent) preferred to interact through the chat room provided and rarely responded or asked questions through the microphone.

Table 5. Frequency distribution of indicators related to trainees' perceptions of their ability to learn and use Plotagon

Variable	Category	%
Interaction with the trainer	Direct answer	43,2%
	Answer via chat room	52,4%
	No answer	4,5%
Presentation of assignments online	More difficult	32,9%
	Easier	33,3%
	Just the same	33,7%
Easier information processing by...	Training via audio	19,9%
	Audio and video training	73%
	Training via chat room	7,1%
Information processing online	Easier	11,9%
	Harder	60,5%
	Just the same	27,6%
General assumptions regarding online training	Not satisfactory	29%
	Between satisfactory or unsatisfactory	31,9%
	Very satisfying + satisfying	39,1%
Online training suitable for Plotagon training	A little match	32%
	Suitable	30,6%
	Very suitable	37,4%
Online training preferences	Choose the training you are undergoing	10,6%
	Choosing face-to-face training	48,1%
	Opt for a combination of online and face-to-face training	41,3%

Based on these findings, it is clear that the training participants were still interested in implementing face-to-face training as the most effective method. They believed that online tools should only be used as auxiliary tools to aid in the training process. As a result, 48.1 percent of trainees preferred a specific face-to-face training method, 41.3 percent preferred a

combination of the two, and 10.6 percent preferred online training. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in two significant changes in the world of education: digitization and a shift in the online learning process. Interestingly, even in the absence of a pandemic, educational actors have been required to actively participate in integrating technology into the classes they teach. The use of *Plotagon* is an advancement in the context of this study.

This study is at least able to prove several things that support the findings of previous studies. Previous research has revealed that digital learning platforms in the form of animation bring benefits to students when used as a complement to traditional education processes (Suresh et al., 2018). In addition, most of the studies mentioned show that students generally have positive attitudes towards online learning and technology-based learning (Odit-Dookhan, 2018). although they sometimes experience technical problems and think that information processing is better when going through traditional learning (Alsaaty et al., 2016). Furthermore, other studies show that technology-based learning has many advantages, such as better results in information assimilation and flexibility (Stern, 2004), adapting material to student needs (Babu & Sridevi, 2018), being student-cantered (Al-Dosari, 2011), and removing space and time barriers, all of which motivate students to engage in conversation and exchange opinions (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014).

Many factors influence the quality of the online education process and how it integrates and integrates with technology, including teachers' level of training in using technology, their teaching style, interaction with students, strategies used to attract students' attention, encourage contact between students and their community, collaborative learning, rapid feedback, active learning, task time that 'encourages' students to allocate more time to come (Cheung & Cable, 2017). On that basis, this service program was carried out in order to provide a foundation for English teachers to integrate *Plotagon* as a learning support tool.

According to this study and service program, when training was conducted entirely online, some of the previously mentioned benefits and advantages became more prominent. The questionnaire respondents believed that online training was unfavourable to information assimilation and processing, making learning more difficult. Furthermore, the trainees perceived that presenting their work online was more difficult due to the numerous technical and non-technical factors to consider.

As a follow-up to the post-training follow-up study method, the trainees were asked to make animations using *Plotagon* for presentations. The animation was made in groups of 5-10 members. Formative evaluation was one of the benefits of this type of evaluation. In addition to receiving a learning experience, participants were given the opportunity to receive assignments based on learning outcomes without having to take a written test. In order to make learning feel more humane, aspects of the assessment focused not only on cognitive assessments but also on performance, cooperation, aesthetics, and the creative process. Observational data show that the ease with which the trainees completed the task enabled them to perform to the best of their abilities. The participants were ecstatic to be a part of their respective groups. Aside from that, they are given interesting assignments that are relevant to their world. The collaboration was crucial in advancing their overall understanding of the *Plotagon's* functions and applications.

5. Conclusion

The results of this service activity are that English teachers in junior and senior high schools in West Java were presented with comprehensive knowledge and insights regarding the use of *Plotagon* in the process of learning and teaching English; encouraged to actively and creatively design learning processes that involve information technology; and encouraged to be actively involved in the implementation of activities or training related to the use of technology in the learning process. All of these results were obtained from the provision of structured material and accompanied by the practice of making animations with the *Plotagon* application as a form of collaborative evaluation.

Furthermore, it has shown interesting results in terms of the description of the trainees' responses to the use of *Plotagon* in learning English and the extent to which the participants understand how to create English dialogues using *Plotagon*. In general, the participants admitted that they lacked the high technical skills required to adapt to the use of online devices and additional applications in English learning.

Furthermore, the implementation of online training has a significant impact on the characteristics of the participants interacting during the training. This technical skill weakness, however, can be compensated for by responding quickly when asked by the material provider via video conference. Based on these findings, it is clear that the training participants are still interested in implementing face-to-face training as the most effective method. They believe that online tools should only be used as a supplement to the training process. Despite this, the majority of participants agreed that *Plotagon* was very useful in improving the quality of English

learning, so participants were enthusiastic about participating in the training despite the numerous obstacles.

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