

Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Madrasah: A Literature Review

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Abstract

English is one of the compulsory subjects studied by students of Islamic junior high schools (madrasah tsanawiyah). Madrasah Tsanawiyah is equivalent to junior high school. Although students of Madrasah Tsanawiyah have been studying English since elementary school for several years, many students cannot achieve the desired communicative level. This happens because teaching English in a foreign context to Madrasah Tsanawiyah students is not an easy thing to do. However, it seems that English teachers struggle to teach their students effectively. Many challenging situations in EFL classes at Madrasah affect learning and teaching. English teachers have limited time to teach and students have very limited English learning goals. Some challenges faced by English teachers in Madrasah include curriculum, textbooks, qualified teachers, lack of support, and affective administration. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the challenges of teaching English in Madrasah Tsanawiyah including challenges in teaching English at school, types of challenges in teaching English, and previously related research.

Keywords: *Language teaching, language education, foreign language, language teachers*

INTRODUCTION

Madrasah tsanawiyah or islamic junior high school in Indonesia is one of basic education level in the formal education field. This level of education is taken when a student has been graduated from elementary school or madrasah ibtidaiyah. In this level the students will spend at least three years before getting graduation, It starts from grade seven until grade nine.

The teaching of English has become increasingly important as a foreign language in Indonesia. Lauder (2008 as cited in Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011) stated that English is a compulsory subject to be taught for three years at junior high schools and for three years in senior high schools . English also has been taught in elementary schools as an elective subject since the implementation of the 1994 Curriculum. It seems the development of English language teaching in Indonesia touches the recent English curriculum objective.

Teaching English in Junior high school has existed around the world in many countries where the learners are adolescents (Harmer, 2001). The complexity of teaching Junior high school students can be seen from the way to observe the need, goals, and responsibility. the students thought that good teachers are” someone who knows their names” (Harmer, 2001).

Furthermore, English is not something easy to teach to the students. What has caused the difficulties in English language teaching and learning especially in primary

and secondary school? According to Biyaem (1997 as cited in Wiriyachitra, 2004) the teachers face the following difficulties. For teachers, there are many obstacles such as: (1) Heavy teaching loads; (2) Insufficient English language skills and native speaker cultural knowledge; (3) Too many students in a class.

However, there are some difficulties commonly encounter to English teachers in teaching. As we see in previous points, the reseacher notices that there is positive side. The positive side is that, it can be the importance information that might be necessary for English teachers.

DISCUSSION

Challenges in Teaching English at School

In today's education debates, many experts call for school vouchers, smaller classes, more standardized testing, or rigorous teacher accrediting as the key to improving student performance. Remarkably, none of these approaches addresses what actually goes on in the classroom. (Larry, 2008). The first three most critical challenges of the English language teaching and learning classroom according to Lynch (2008 as cited in Gamit, 2012) as follows.

Lack of Learner Motivation, students may not have inspired and interested towards the learning of English language. They have even fear of failure in exams and even in classroom interaction and so cannot get involved easily in classroom interaction and learn the language comfortably. They need enough motivation from teachers and scope to learn English in classroom interaction.

Insufficient Time, Resources, and Materials, English is foreign language and hence cannot be learnt and taught as easily as mother tongue or first language. And when it is learnt or taught as second language, it requires long time and simultaneously adequate resources and materials to create English classroom climate which facilitate teaching-learning process.

Over-Crowded English Classes, the number of learners in a class room can range from one, for those who teach individual private learners, to 15 or twenty learners in a typical classroom up to "multitudes of 35 or forty or even fifty or more learners packed into a language leaning situation". The over-crowded classes create number of problems like; discomfort in the class, individual attention, evaluation, classroom management, maintaining learning effectiveness etc. The three and the most critical of them, as given above, are necessarily needed to be overcome to improve quality of English Language Teaching. Furthermore, Khan (2011) has argued that there are severals challenges of teaching and learning English as foreign language in Islamic environment, they are.

Background of English Teachers, teacher is the most important element in any educational programme. The teacher has a big responsibility to deliver the subject to the students. To achieve a better understanding of what language teacher education should be, it is important to take a closer look at the knowledge base of second or foreign language teachers of English, their pre-service education and in-service training.

Poor Ability, Mukattash (1983 as cited in Khan, 2011) noted that Arab students' challenges in learning English usually spring from the following reasons: a) school graduates have lack of information regarding the university or college they enrolled in;

b) there is deficiency in the English language curricula offered by some schools and universities; c) poor teaching methodology; and d) problems with proper language environments. These conditions make the students getting rare to participate in learning English.

Lack of Management, the management can be defined as the minimum resources available in one Institution. The teacher can not develop themselves in teaching because they have limited resources. The teacher will be easy to deliver the subject matter to the students if the Institution can provide a good management to the teachers. From those explanations above, the researcher finds that many aspects could be a challenging situation for the English teachers while teaching. The researcher notices that the previous points reflect on the fact of challenges that faced by English teachers in teaching, thus there is no coherence between English and other subjects, the rare of students participation and lack of libraries which helps students to enrich their minds of informations.

Types of Challenges in Teaching English

There are a variety of challenges in teaching English. Kizildag (2009) stated that there are three types of challenges in teaching English, they are.

Institutional challenges, the challenges from Institutional are caused by lack of support from the school or the Ministry of National Education. There are two kinds categories of Institutional challenges:

1. lack of support : the category means that the institution were unsuccessful in providing the basic infrastructure for teaching communicative English and unwilling to solve it.
2. lack of understanding the Nature of language teaching : this challenge appeared because the English teachers do not get any professional training from their schools. They do not know how a foreign language should be taught and English teachers are put heavy burdon through heavy workloads with crowded classrooms (Kizildag, 2009).

Instructional challenges, there are two main categories in instructional challenges.

1. A busy curriculum: in this category, Kizildag (2009) stated that it was full of unrealistic learning goals for readiness of learners and lack of flexibility in application.
2. Inappropriate textbooks : this category encompass the lack of supplementary materials and incompatibility with the realities of the English learning and teaching context. Crookes (1997 as cited in Kizildag, 2009) argued that second/foreign language teachers often perform their teaching tasks under the conditions of far less autonomy than other professions as regards curriculum, materials, and school structure.

Socio-Economic challenges, Kizildag (2009) described that the socio-economic challenges as the lack of support from the parents of the students. The English teachers were challenged by the parental understanding about English. This situation happened because of the lower socio-economic levels of the parents, the lower awareness of the importance of learning English. Unlike Kizildag's study (2009), Riash (2011) devided two majors of challenging factor in teaching English. The first is about the English teachers itself and the second is about larges class size.

Unqualified Teachers, unqualified teachers may suffer the following problems according to (ILO/ UNESCO: 2009 report) the general qualification of teachers in developing countries is inconvenient. The report also stated: "In developing countries, where supply considerations may necessitate short-term intensive emergency preparation program for teachers, a fully professional, extensive program should be available in order to produce corps of professionally prepared competent teachers to guide and direct the educational enterprise". Teacher shortages remain a major challenge in education systems worldwide. In developing countries, the increase in enrolment of students in recent years has not been met by an increase in qualified teachers. Generally, unqualified teachers suffer from the following:

1. They are inefficient in using realistic evaluation methods, such as files of achievement and the methods of observation, interviews and performance measures, to know the level of students.
2. They are inefficient in designing activities and other preventive and remedial actions for coping weak students strengthen and to accelerate learning.
3. They do not cooperate with the family in the assessment of pupils to improve their education and performance.
4. Their encouragement to students to express their opinions, feelings and point of views about what is offered to them and what is being studied is almost rare.
5. They use traditional methods, strategies and culture of memorization not culture of innovation and creativity to master their performance.

Larger School Size and Students Population, teaching English in a crowded classes are difficult to teachers to communicate with students inside the class and give them chance to participate . Teaching English environment in school to be effective, the needs to be conducive to learning, allowing the pupils space and time to interact within the learning and teaching process. creating and maintaining stimulating teaching environments can be achieved through effective classroom organization. Overcrowded classrooms have increased the possibilities for at-risk students, as well as others, to lose interest in school and do poorly on tests. Students do not get individual attention. Lot of them become frustrated and stressed and that makes them unable to concentrate or stay on task while in class.

From both of challenging factors, the researcher sees that both of theories have pointed out that challenges in teaching English come up because of some problems. Each theories have discussed the type of challenging factor clearly and related each other. The researcher surely agrees with those explanations that overcrowded classes are considered essential problem in teaching , thus a huge number of student inside the class make student's achievement very low , also it is reflected and appeared at teacher's performance, that means overcrowded classes problem must be solved to protect our student and teaching process from destruction. For the current study, based on the theories from Kizildag (2009) and Riash (2011), the researcher will devide two types of challenges factor faced by English teachers, they are academic and non academic factor.

Academic Factors, Academic challenges factor constitute problems are caused by lack of the students' attitude, students' motivation in learning English and lack of students' ability in learning English.

Attitude plays an important role in language learning process. A learner's attitude to the learning language will impact the learner outside the classroom. Burden (2004) showed that a positive attitude would motivate learners to achieve their learning goals. Furthermore, Stern (1983) stated that there are three components constituted attitude, the first is cognitive component, which means the belief to a certain aim, the second is affective component, which means likes and dislikes about an aim and the third is conation component, which means someone's intention and action about a certain aim. In English learning process, if a student is eager to learn a foreign language, this positive attitude is helpful for his study. On the contrary, if he regards English as a very difficult language and learning it as a waste of time, this negative attitude will inevitably restrain his English learning. The study done by Bahous, Bacha & Nabhani (2011) state that promoting positive student attitudes towards the learning language can motivate students to learn and become efficient in the target language.

The second challenges from academic factor is *motivation*. The motivation of EFL (English as Foreign Language) learners is still a problem in Indonesian schools context. Many students in Indonesia show low motivation in learning English. They come to class to fulfill their attendance list. Most of them are passive in teaching and learning process. Only few are brave to communicate in English. They are shy to speak English. They feel hesitate that they produce a lot of mistakes when they communicate in English. Motivation is one of the important affective factors in learning process, which helps to determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners. Brown (2002) stated Motivation is thought of as "an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to a particular action" (p. 152). Proper motivation can facilitate learners' learning process. In Krashen's opinion, the most ideal affect condition is that learners have high motivation and strong self-confidence, with which they can do better in second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). The English teachers will face some challenges while teaching if the students do not have any motivation in learning English. Lack of motivation in learning English were caused by poor ability in learning English and lack o support. Luo, Jian and Wang (2004) indicated that students' learning motivation had a strong influence on the study score and that intrinsic motivation and integrative motivation had positive relationship with learning outcome. Xu (2011) also stated in the study that language learning motivation was significantly correlated with the use of language learning strategies and teachers should assist students to achieve better results in English learning by understanding more about students' motivation and strategy use. Therefore, motivation is a key element affecting students' learning process and it is this internal drive that will encourage students to reach their aims.

The third challenges factor inteaching English because lack of *students' ability* in English. The biggest challenges that EFL teachers face on daily is communicating with their students. It is especially difficult for teachers of low-level classes because of their students are often able to say few or no words in English. This challenging situation happened because students in EFL classes often need more attention from teachers.

Non Academic Factors, the challenges from Non academic factor constitute caused by lack of prior organization, lack of infrastructure for teaching communicative English and lack of support by either the school management or the Ministry of National Education and economic challenges.

The first challenges of non academic factor in teaching English is the *larger classroom size and students population*. According to a study, public schools have an average of 40 students per teacher, whereas private schools have average of 15 students per teacher (Aqel, 2005). In crowded classes, students do not seem to receive enough attention (MEHE: 1999). Overcrowded classrooms have increased the possibilities for at-risk students, as well as others, to lose interest in school and do poorly on tests. Students do not get individual attention. Lot of them become frustrated and stressed and that makes them unable to concentrate or stay on task while in class. The researcher agrees with this point that large mount of students inside the classlly in governorate schools make real problem in teaching process because the large make students disable to concentrate in the class and it make violence among the students and this will be reflected at the teacher , thus he \ she will do his work in bad way. So, bad classroom affects both teacher and students.

The second challenges of non academic factor is *lack of facilities*. In this factor, there are several challenges categories. *Inappropriate Textbooks* were another dimension of non academic challenges, which encompass the lack of supplementary materials and incompatibility with the realities of the English learning and teaching context at Madrasah. *Socio-Economic Challenges*, USAID (United Stated Agency for International Development) stated that socio-economic challenges as lack of support from the families. In many parts of Indonesia, public or privat *madrasah* are the only schooling options for youth who can not afford to go to general schools. Islamic schools thus cater to some of Indonesia's poorest children. At the *madrasah ibtidayah* and *madrasah tsanawiyah* level, a little over 40 percent of parents had completed primary school education, 25 percent had completed junior secondary level education, and just under 20 percent had completed senior secondary level.

The teachers were challenged by the parental understanding of the importance of English classes. The parents do not support their kids in homework and this is reflected in unreturned homework assignment. When the students do not do their homework, the teachers have to spend extra unplanned time in class to reinforce their learning.

Previous Related Research

Previous Studies related to challenges of teaching English at Madrasah/ Islamic school and Islamic environment. In 1997, (Sadtono *et al.*, 1997) conducted a diagnostic survey on the *SLTP* ELT in Indonesia. The survey aimed at providing input for the improvement of existing inservice *PKG* programs for secondary school English teachers. The survey was conducted during August and September 1996, in four provinces: Central Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, East Java, and South Sumatra. To represent the whole range of schools, sixteen *SLTPs* were taken as samples: a wellresourced, high-achieving state school in the four provincial capital cities, a state school in a capital of a regency, a state school in an isolated rural area, and a private school in a provincial capital. Each province received a one week visit. The data ranged from the students' English proficiency

collected through open-ended format tests of each of the four skills (Sadtono *et al.*, 1997) and information about the teaching and learning process was gathered from a one-off observation. Teachers' and students' views and concerns of the teaching/learning process, were revealed in semi-structured, smallgroup interviews. Classroom observations suggested that there was a lot of teaching but little learning, and that interactions between teachers and students were described as "one-way traffic" (Sadtono *et al.*, 1997). Although classroom observations revealed that students worked in pairs and small groups, the team was sceptical about how frequently students were assigned pair and small group work. and "whether or not teachers were really convinced of the value of this kind of interaction" (Sadtono *et al.*, 1997). The survey concluded that the students' language proficiency was very low. Testing the four areas of language skills, they found that 60% of the subjects scored below average and only about 15% obtained good scores. They also found that the students' productive skills were weaker than their receptive skills. From interviews with the teachers the team concluded that in general teachers thought that time allocation, class size, and curriculum were not a problem, but they were worried about the EBANAS (National Final Examination) because "their own, and school reputation, is at stake if many of their students do not achieve good scores" (Sadtono *et al.*, 1997). The survey also found that the teachers complained about students' low motivation.

Another findings from Cleary (1996) conducted a research with university students in Malaysia. The results showed that the students believed that English is "conduit for western culture and Arabic should be raised to equal status with English or should completely take the role of English in Malaysia. From the finding in this research, the author of this tried to shed light on teaching English in Islamic context. The author did the best way to change students' perception about english. It worked very well and success. This paper draws conclusions about the powerful impact of the socio-cultural setting of the language classroom on the most appropriate methodology to be used and on students' attitudes towards learning the language and consequently the outcomes. Similiar finding from Al-Mutawa (1986, 1994 as cited in Malallah, 2000) conducted a research project with Kuwaiti students which shows that they are not in favour of the English language and its learning. Most students did not regard English as beneficial for a better job and future business.

Another interesting research related to challenges in teaching English was done by Rahman & Alhaisoni (2013), tried to see and investigate the prospect and challenges in teaching English in Saudi Arabia. The data were collected via survey that was done by the researcher. They found some challenges of EFL teachers faced, they are: unqualified teachers, lack of emphasis on developing skills, lack of motivation from the students and lack of facilities.

Another research that has been done by Saikia (2013) which investigated the challenges of the English teachers in teaching English at secondary level. He investigated the challenges do the teachers and students face in the classroom in teaching and learning English and tried to see what needs to be done to resolve the existing challenges in teaching and learning process of English at Secondary level. The participant in this research are one thousand students both boys and girls, thirty teachers that randomly selected from secondary level and fifteen heads of the institutions. The researcher did the observation, interview and document analysis as the techniques of collecting the data. In brief, the researcher identified many challenges regarding teaching of English, they are:

teachers are lacking in o job training, most of the teacher use grammar translation method, lack of facilities, very few of the teachers use English in the classroom while teaching and Most of the schools have overcrowded class.

Similiar to Saikia (2013), Chen & Cheng (2009) tried to see deeply the challenges that foreign English teachers faced in Taiwanese elementary schools. The researcher recruited three foreign teachers for this research. The data were collected via different menthods including interview, questionnaire, classroom observation, fieldnotes, journal and document inspection. After analyzing the data, the researcher could find some challenges that are faced by foreign english teachers in teaching,they are: classroom management (the challenges in classroom management is misbehaved students, the teacher got some behavioral problems from the students while teaching, for example: many students were unhappy while learning english), the issue of the accent (most taiwanese people use american accent, because the participants are african, the students getting confused and hesitated when the teachers taught), the last challenges is large students number and class size.

CONCLUSION

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a madrasah involves integrating English into a curriculum that also includes religious studies, facing challenges like limited resources and time, and overcoming them with strategies like using technology and adapting teaching methods. Challenges include students' varying proficiency levels, low motivation, and teachers' own limited skills in technology and curriculum design. Successful strategies involve innovative pedagogical tools like podcasts, adapting teaching styles for younger learners, and finding ways to integrate Islamic culture and values into language learning. Challenges faced by teachers are **resource and time constraints**: Teachers often face limited time for English instruction and have inadequate learning facilities and materials, **student motivation and proficiency**: A major challenge is a lack of student motivation and the difficulty of teaching students with diverse proficiency levels in the same classroom. **Teacher capacity**: Teachers may have challenges with using technology in the classroom, designing suitable lesson plans, and a lack of adequate training. **Curriculum integration**: Combining the national curriculum with a religious (Islamic) one can be complex, requiring teachers to adapt their teaching methods.

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