

## PORTRAYING SITUATED ENGLISH LEARNING AT A MADRASAH: WHEN LEARNING ITSELF IS INSUFFICIENT TO BUILD STUDENTS' SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT

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**Abstract.** This research reports of a phenomena of language learning dealing with English class experiences. The aims of the investigation are to drawn from two general research problems: 1) what kinds of specific tasks are given, and 2) what socio-affective learning strategies are used. Madrasah English teachers contribute to this study whereas semi structure questionnaire, direct observation, and interview was the other technique of data gathering. The research results significantly contribute to the changing paradigm in understanding how English instruction and tasks are delivered.

**Keywords:** *English instruction, task, madrasah*

### Introduction

Madrasah as another setting of schooling system in Indonesia is now criticize for its instructional practices. Low learning achievement (World Bank, 2010) is one of the evidences. The results of the TIMSS and PISSA indicate that the critical pedagogy is also one interesting point. Therefor, this study discover the phenomenon which exists in learning and instructional environment in Madrasah, West java. This study focus on learning tasks and strategies which run in English instructions in Madrasah, West java.

In Indonesia, the shortage of professional teachers is crucial to conduct the effective learning activity (Aziz, 2008). In general, language teachers are trained to construct and set their pedagogical competences in terms of language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge (Richards, 2014). Language teachers are possibly seen from their pedagogical and knowledge competence. These two main domains are as the representation of their personal/group shared values.

The main teaching principles include teaching strategies (Richards & Rodgers, 1999; Richards, 2014). The language teaching competence and performance cover the domains of: language proficiency, content language, content knowledge, teaching skills, contextual knowledge, language teacher identity, and leaner-focused teaching.

In instructional environment, it is important shape language learning environment which dropping teaching and learning in to the area of learning to speak. Ironically, students are rarely given space to practice their English listening in the classroom (Musthafa, 2001), take for example, in term of teaching Speaking in Indonesia, it is still challenged in terms of learning tasks, activities, materials, and practices (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). Arkin (2010) conducted his research on the area of teaching speaking, and the findings show that the skill-based language teaching is effective improving EFL lecturers in the university and thus, creativity, speaking competence, and confidence are the keys to success in English environment.

In the global context of competition of pedagogy, e.g. in England and Turkey had compared the novice teachers in the two countries. The results suggest that the two countries served their novice teachers as professional teachers in order to compete in an increasingly dynamic globalized economy (Busher, Lawson, Wilkins, & Acun, 2011). The study also revealed the reform of teaching from transferring knowledge, where the students are receptive, to the process of empowerment, that is the process of learning among the individuals int the classroom (Busher et al., 2011: 390). The significant finding related to empowerment was the difference of ways in expressing ideas among the students. Turkish students tend to be shy and doubtful in giving ideas or argument whereas the English students tend to be spontaneous despite of being true or false their ideas (p. 395).

The fast competition in the global world demands a high quality education. Thus the improving teachers' quality is a must (Sanaky, 2005). Teacher empowerment is a part of the education reform. It is impossible to make a change in our education without involving teachers as the implementators (Sarason, 1992 as cited in (Kleckner & Loadman, 1998). School reform asked the teachers to be actively active decision-makers to (1) improve their quality, and hence student learning, (2) implement the new practices, (3) provide motivation and recognition, (4) create more democratic school environment, and (5) increase the sense of professionalism, indeed (Baecher, 2012:317).

The new learning of the 21st century seeks to engage learners in more powerful conceptualizing and meta-cognizing processes, engaging the learners as co-constructor of concepts-as the definer, theory maker, critic and analyst, an autonomous and able to make independent decisions (Cope & Kalantziz, 2007 as cited in Oder, 2014). In engaging students

to learn in the classroom, Cremin, Thomas, & Vincett (2005) often evaluated and suggested three model of classroom management: room management, zoning, and reflective team-works (Cremin, Thomas, & Vincett, 2005).

In developing teachers' professionalism, it is important to provide them time for collaboration and opportunities to share decision making so that innovation is created (Baecher, 2012). In advanced, most of Indonesian teachers not still depend on the textbook and the syllabus by the central government (Aziz, 2008). Schools need sustainable approaches that build internal capacity for improvement. Capacity is an ability within schools to learn continuously in order to respond creatively to rapidly changing and unpredictable socio-political environments and local variables while holding fast to shared principles and values (Durrant & Holden, 2006). Thus, restructuring is a must. The teachers' professionalism among madrasahs which are generally unsatisfying in this context is one of the indicators of disempowerment. Therefore, one of the foundations of the school restructuring movement is teaching for empowerment (Stone, 1995).

## **Theoretical review**

### **Learning and learners' learning style**

Language learners use their self-development competence to adjust their learning strategies, and so do the English teachers (Griffiths, 2008). It is interesting to investigate this area in order to know in what learning. This is important not only for the researcher but also for the language teachers and the learners in understanding and improving learning outcomes because being aware of learning strategies make the results of learner better. It maximizes efforts in learning activities, and so do the results (Griffiths, 2008; Kang, 2009). And it therefore, is interesting to investigate the varieties among them.

In exploring learners' learning tasks and strategies, learners' experiences during instructions are the main sources. The experiences that are based on classroom and daily interaction within learning context tell new understanding about learners' learning strategies. It is hoped by analyzing and understanding the phenomena, the language lecturers are able to adjust and to improve ways of teaching and learning in the class, especially by knowing the socio-affective strategies.

In order to learn learning style and strategies within the English learners, especially for good English learners, there were many studies done. The findings suggest that there are many things that can be learned from language learners. Oxford (1996) has investigated phenomena above. She invented SILL questionnaires. Her findings suggest that in learning language, learners apply their own strategies and they also act within their own style.

Having interaction within six English language learners in a class in Hongkong, Sengupta (1998) also got interested in analyzing learning strategies and styles. In his study, he also paid attention to language learners and he goes to conclusion of the findings that good learner's perception on their teaching within daily activities gives good result in learning language. Here, the finding shows that if learners have positive point of view, they have good execution so that all they do refers to what they learn.

Moreover, advance study had conducted in area of English learning in term of communication. Noels and Kimberly (2001) explored what language teachers do to improve learning atmosphere for the language learners. The result of the study reveals that language teacher should be very careful in applying a method of delivery. To build interactive interaction in the classroom, they must give more chance to learners to practice. The researchers define "the more control from the teacher, the more students perceive, the less the students accept it as autonomous learners".

### **The need to have powerful learning design**

The interesting thing that every language teacher keeps in his mind is what Heimlich and Norland (2002) have already found. Heimlich and Norland (2002) suggest a process as a means for teachers to examine their beliefs and values about teaching, gain a better understanding of who they are as teachers, and develop a personal teaching style. This is, in my argument interesting for language teachers. English language teachers should be aware of the diverse of learners' learning styles and strategies.

Reeves (2006), thorough his research on EFL class explored professional development for working with ELLs and perception of language learning. Reeves (2006) found that there is still limited portion given to researchers dealing with teachers' attitude and perception on LLs. Furthermore, he also discovers that LLs are still not given a plenty of chance to practice and improving their competence in English language, even to express the ideas in the

classroom interaction. So, it can be deduced that there is actually a gap within theories and practice, the gap that is interesting to explore more. Even though, Tsai (2012) had conducted research in Taiwan to discover the learning style and strategies, being aware of learning style and strategies still remain important to investigate as the phenomena, especially for those mainly recognized as language learners.

### **Methods**

In this qualitative research, all data was gathered from various techniques: English teachers' narratives, observation, questionnaires and interviews. Semi-structured questionnaires and interviews was conducted to gather all respondents learning experiences in EFL learning. The observation which was recorded and direct observation was conducted in daily instruction activities.

### **Participants**

This research was conducted in a madrasah located in Cirebon Regency which is running under the supervision of the department of Religion Affairs of Islam (Kemenag). As there are three types of madrasahs namely Madrasah Diniyah (MD), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), and Madrasah Aliyah (MA), this research site was the MA. This was purposively selected since there is a good rapport among the researchers, institution, and the madrasah. The participants of the research was the English language teachers who teach English for several years. The English teachers here should have a plenty of time experiencing in English classroom interaction.

In line with the research questions, the research was done within the instruction daily life situation. Classroom activities as well as daily interaction within communities was the main focus, especially all which are related to instructional projects and activities. It is a hope that the information is served and provided mainly during the class interaction, and is therefore the existence of tasks and activity projects important to explore and to facilitate students in their learning and as feedback, how learners make strategies in learning English.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Lack of learning task design to invite student learning engagement**

All results of the observation suggest that the instructional practices in madrasah began by giving motivation. It seems that teachers were not aware of the building motivation. This phenomena were seen from the description below.

“mentuntut ilmu akan mendapatkan pahala dari Allah, sehingga kalian harus belajar dengan ikhlas dan rajin,” Siti Aisyah said. She is an English teacher there. But this was unable to motivate students. They were mostly silent as the voice of the teacher was so weak. (Siti Aisyah, English teacher at MI Syalafatul Huda)

Giving motivation: why is it not building and creating motivation? Motivation is different from empowerment. Empowered students are still powerful in the absence of motivation. But motivation is important element of empowerment. The *root* of empowerment is power meaning ability. Being empowered means having power to do; in other words there is capability or ability to do thing correctly (Spaulding, 1995). After giving motivation, the classes were set in lecturing whereas learning experiences were rarely inspired them. The following gives the proof.

Small part of the students participated in the classroom. Students were addressed to answer the questions given in the class. girls dominated the question-answer session. Media were used in the class. The media was pictures but too small for students to read/follow the picture-discussion. This is ineffective, then...Boy students are making noisy talks-disturbing other students-like.

This is a notion if they have power, in fact. At least, they are different among others and have power over the other (Spaulding, 1995) even in the less effective ones. teacher explained all.

According to the teachers, pictures are the available media. This leads to the discussion of the lack of ability to access and use the ICT-based media such as infocus, laptop, and others. Most students look like bored, demotivated, and unfocussed (Interview).

The learning atmosphere is not interesting and joys for the students. They look not understand or perhaps they were not enthusiastically to respond.

English was never used in the interaction. This situation leads to the analysis that students are less given opportunities to act.. disempowering students so that motivation is less, indeed (Nichols & Zhang, 2011) even individual, group, and representative presentation were seen during instruction. (classroom observation at *MTs Negeri 1 Pilang- Kota Cirebon*)

Giving motivation: why is it not building and creating motivation? (Motivation is different from empowerment. Empowered students are still powerful in the absence of motivation. But motivation is important element of empowerment. low motivation to learn; no attention; Students were busy on their own business. This means the teacher was powerless since she was *unable* to control over their students (Stone, 1995). Thus, empowering students hardly came because empowering students needs empowered teacher (Stone, 1995).

The condition changed when the students were instructed to work in group. Even some, especially the boys, were making noisy all of this time, most of the students tried to share and discussed the topic in group. This was a good indicator that learning atmosphere almost happened. Learning is gaining the knowledge-some thing truth which individual gains. Something may different from one and another in terms the quantity and quality (Duhon-Haynes, 1996).

### **Lack of learning empowerment**

This was reasonable since the teacher seems powerless in the classroom. Ceballos, et al. (2021) have demonstrated how emotion and mindful learning in learning play important roles in empowering school students. The *root* of empowerment is power meaning ability. Being empowered means having power to do; in other words there is capability or ability to do thing correctly (Spaulding, 1995). Bahasa was the main language of instruction, and once English was pronounced by the English teacher, the pronunciation needs to be improved.

L1 was mainly used over the discussion. Group discussion or any kind of peer discussion strategy was rarely found during this class. Hence, hardly were students given opportunities for doing independent activities. This is so awful situation since small group or other kinds of share-peer work provide more power to learn (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). (Classroom observation at MI Syalafatul Huda Cirebon)

In general she was able to manage the class, e.g. providing them group discussion to give them multiple learning experiences. The different was from a madrasah **MI Miftahul Ulum, Weru Kab. Cirebon:**

Simple English medium of instruction. Students were actively engaging in learning--easy tasks. Students were keen to finish the job fast. It implies that they enjoyed learning even they were as other students who were still hard to understanding the texts

provided by the teacher. But, here teacher had used pictures to teach and discussed so that students seemed enjoyed learning.

The instructional strategy was attractive enough. In short, the teacher was at least using the art of teaching (Robinson, 2004). In terms of reading environment, lack of reading sources fashioned madrasahs. Most of the madrasah have no libraries instead of LKS (purchase-exercise book); a library is available but at the same time, LKS or purchased-student exercised book was the only book used in the instruction.

Teacher evaluated all assignment and tasks by giving scores. students were getting ready to receive material, instead of doing thing. In this case, teachers were hardly providing students learning projects. At glance, students were treated all the same as they had the same learning experience so that all must be graded. Marks are the only focussed of the teachers.

#### **Lack of socio-affective learning strategies**

Mostly, students were treated in lecturing atmosphere. However, this happening in a madrasah gave different points of views. English was sometime used for small interaction. # English was sometime used as medium of instruction. Lack of questioning strategies. During the observation, hardly was the students' questioning occurred naturally as self-learning strategies. (Classroom observation at MI Hidayatus Shibyan Talun-Kab. Cirebon)

The classroom interaction ran as usual; teacher explained, students did assignment given in the classroom. But there was reflection as the class was over. Even experts suggest that doing learning reflection is important (Suherdi, 2008). But, overall it was hardly to find the peer evaluation or using authentic of assessment as it was indicated in their lesson plan. The lesson plan seems never modified and reused annually.

#### **Conclusion and recommendation**

This research goes to the conclusion that the instructional practices among madrasahs are still as follows. The instructional tasks are still in form of lecturing & Teacher scoring is mainly used based on the small achievement test alike.

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