Teacher’s Strategy in Solving EFL Students’ Problems in Learning English

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Abstract:
Learning new language as a Foreign Language is obviously not easy. The Foreign Language learners must find it hard to master. Therefore, there must be challenges that Foreign Language teachers face in classroom. The aim of this research is to investigate an English teacher in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to junior high school students at Ma’had Tahfidzul Qur’an, Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The matters to be investigated include barriers the teacher faced as well as her strategies to solve the problems. The researcher used qualitative method for this study and conducted interview for the English teacher to reveal the findings. The result of semi-structured interview showed that the biggest challenge faced by the English teacher is the condition where the students are less-motivated in learning English. Several strategies are used by the teacher such as encouraging the students through verbal motivation as well as providing joyful activities such as conducting different kind of games to build positive mood and interest of students in leaning a new language. The use of proper teaching strategies is demanded in order to have English learning become students’ habit. Therefore, implication of language teaching methodologies is also discussed in this research.

Keywords: EFL students’ problems, learning English, Teacher’s Strategy
1. Introduction

Indonesia is considered as a country where English is a foreign language or what so called by EFL (English as a Foreign Language). It is not considered as Second Language since most of Indonesian people use vernacular language as mother tongue and Bahasa Indonesia as second language, English is only used in some kind of circumstance for Indonesian. The definition of EFL itself is where English is rarely used at schools and surrounding community (Nordquist, 2017). Because of this context, teaching of EFL is a challenging matter for teachers even though the subject of English has been included in school curriculum since in basic level of education (Akbari, 2015). In addition, Akbari (2015) points out that English should be included in school curriculum by several reasons, i.e. (1) all of technology access is provided in English, so that it is a demand in the future that our students are insisted to master English, (2) the effectiveness usage of information era, especially internet, makes English is a necessity for every person to acquire, and (3) English facilitates people to do exchanges in many aspects around the world.

However, it is obvious that being a teacher seems never so easy, especially to teach EFL students. A set of challenging matters are ready to beat both teachers and students when English teaching and learning in classrooms takes place. Those barriers include mother tongue interference (Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013), cultural background and teachers’ experiences (Akujobi & Chukwu, 2012), students’ lack of motivation (Davis, 2016) and teachers’ lack of preparation (Erdem & Tutkun, 2016). In addition, poor performance of teachers including lack of mastery when using a set of technology that can support teaching and learning process are also potential to trigger unsuccessfulness of English language acquisition of students (Kwagwanji, 2016). Therefore, the role of teachers become very urgent to fix all of those matters by utilizing certain strategy to particular condition happened in a classroom.

Moreover, teachers also often deal with big classes their lack of capability in operating audio visual media or any simple teaching aid (Tabatabaei, 2013; Riyaz & Mullick, 2016). In this context, public schools including in Indonesia usually consist of thirty to forty students in one class. This fact, certainly become one big problem for teachers where they have to handle many students with different background. Because of this matter, it is hard for teachers to apply appropriate method and maximize the language acquisition transfer to students.

In addition, the reality that teachers must deal with 4.0 industrial revolution make them forced to follow todays education styles and needs. In this case, there are still many teachers who are illiterate to the use of modern technology. Realize it or not, our students might become more familiar with various technology better than teachers. This issue is real happened today and we have to be ready with it.

As a teacher, we have to pay attention to what strategy that we can use to teach EFL students, since every student needs different needs, as well as every class also needs different kind of strategies with others. The state of teachers’ strategies has been conducted by Milawati & Suryati (2019) who researched about teachers’ questioning strategies in teaching English in classrooms. In their study, redirecting is
the most frequent question types used by the teacher. In this case, redirecting means asking students in order to dig deep information and correct students’ incorrect statements. Not only questioning strategies, media used in teaching EFL students is also important. As what Amjah (2014) observed in her research that in order to develop students’ interest in learning English, it is suggested for teachers to use certain such as music and computer sciences.

By using only several strategies is not enough to work out with students’ problems in learning English. The fact that every student have their own different capabilities with others (Suryani, 2012) drives teachers to apply many plans because certain strategy may work to some students but not for others. Therefore, in transferring knowledge to students, it is highly recommended for teachers to use different types of strategies to handle this kind of matter.

The issue of English teaching and learning always becomes a trending topic where as explained previously that English as a foreign language condition is definitely different with English as a second language. Therefore, in this research, the researchers would like to take a part on investigating what sort of problems happened during English teaching and learning process in a classroom at Ma’had Tahfidzul Qur’an, Samarinda, Indonesia.

Besides of that, the researchers also wanted to know what are the strategies used by teacher to overcome those challenging situation. For more information, the place where the researchers conducted this study is one of boarding schools in Samarinda, capital city of East Kalimantan, Indonesia, which applies two types of curriculums i.e. Diniyah curriculum which consist of Islamic learning activities such as Al Qur’an recitation and memorization and also common curriculum which is usually used by other public and private schools where it is a must for students to learn Math, Science, English, etc.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Common Problems Faced by Lower Level Students in Learning English

According to Akujobi & Chukwu (2012), there are many factors which influence students in learning English including the influence of mother tongue, media used, teachers’ experiences in teaching, different cultural background, big classes, as well as students’ attitude towards English learning. In line with Akujobi (2012), Dhillon & Wanjiru (2013) also believed that regional language gives direct effects to English language proficiency.

In addition, Dhillon & Wanjiru (2013) also added that a factor of most frequent language used by students also affects to their effort on mastering English. In this case, on the result of the study from Dhillon & Wanjiru (2013), the students use their regional language more frequently than using English. The matter of fact, not only students who rarely use English to communicate to each other, the teachers that they observed also showed the infrequent use of English in classroom. It means that teachers mix between the use of English and regional language as a medium in teaching and learning English subject in classrooms.
In accord with Dhillon & Wanjiru (2013), Nath (2016) found that in English learning class, teachers tend to use one hundred percent vernacular language as a medium to teach English. As a result, the students failed to acquired English as the target language because of an absence of English used in classroom even though in an English class. Unfortunately, learning by using English in the classroom is the only condition where the students have to practice the target language because the students simply do not practice to talk in English outside their classrooms.

Moreover, Davis (2016) believed that other than common problems that teachers may face, less motivated students also became one of biggest barriers for teachers to be solved. In accordance with Davis (2016), Ponmozhi & Thenmozhi (2017) also pointed out that EFL students especially those who do not live in urban area do not care about their communication skills in English. It indicates that the students are not motivated to learn English and it is a hard job for teachers to encourage the students regarding with the importance of mastering English for the students’ future.

Not only a matter comes from the students themselves, just like what Davis (2016) pointed out where students who are not encouraged may find learning English difficulties. Factors that come from teachers can also become important reasons on why students face their difficulties in mastering English. In this case, Erdem & Tutkun (2016) said that there are two main problems happened in English learning classrooms which are coming from the teachers i.e. the teacher gets angry when students make mistakes and the teacher in the case of teaching English classroom is considered to have lack of preparation. Considering the role of teachers are very important in handling students’ problems, the result of the research from Erdem & Tutkun (2016) becomes very troubling because teachers are an important element in school which have direct contact to students every day.

In addition to what has been observed by previous researchers, some of them found that teachers play important role to overcome students’ problems in acquiring English. Frankly said that it is not only the job of teachers but also depends on school organization. In this context, the school should set sort of rules how teachers and students can meet the demand of school including to what the school want and require related to students’ English acquisition outcomes. Not only determine the rules, but the school also should provide proper facilities which can support the teaching and learning process such as language laboratory, suitable curriculum and syllabus, internet connection, etc. In this case, when the school organization does on manage about this matter, it will contribute to the failure of students’ English acquisition (Teevno, 2011). As the research done by Ponmozhi & Thenmozhi (2017) where other than students’ lack of motivation, unsupported environment, school organization also becomes a generating point related to students’ English language proficiency outcomes.

In terms of facilities, we cannot leave aside the role of library as the heart of an institution is very vital. As a research from Tabatabaei (2013) proven that where a library at a school cannot provide proper learning sources it will become one of reasons of students’ failure in learning such as teachers will use textbook which is not suitable for students’ level. In short, this matter also needs to be highlighted by
school management as it is one of potential places for students to reinforce what they learn in classroom.

Other than facilities and proper curriculum which match to the needs of students, particularly, there must be influence of how a school organizes its management towards teachers’ performances. In this case, teachers as one of important element at school will not perform well if school does not prepare them to be a good teacher (Teevno, 2011). Therefore, as teachers is the one last stand to transfer knowledge to students, it is very important for school to provide the teachers with proper training.

2.2 Strategies to Solve Students’ Problems in Learning English

Amjah (2014) says that problems in learning English is a matter of how to stimulate the students to learn. Specifically, in his research, students prefer to learn English with ICT such as the use of music and computer. Another researcher contribute to sort of strategies that can be solution for teachers to pay attention on when teaching English to EFL students covered to several important aspects (Erkan, 2012). First, English teachers can use various types of means to help them to teach English such as flashcards, maps, sound recording, and video. Second, teachers need to use proper textbook that is suitable with students’ level. Sort of authentic materials also can be used to support the English learning. Third, teachers can students in a group work as well as applying several types of language teaching methodologies such as audiolingual method, direct method, or silent way. Fourth, at lower level of education, teachers are suggested to do several activities such as applying repetition in order to have students’ correct pronunciation, providing interesting stories, as well as questioning. The last point that can be used by teachers is the procedures and various usage of evaluation e.g. multiple choice, true-false, projects, and written questions.

Moreover, several references regarding with what teachers and schools have to do with problems of English teaching and learning are proposed by Kamau (2013) i.e. vary teaching method that teachers apply, teachers should notice to students’ interest in learning, and the formal institution should provide adequate learning sources for students (Ponmozhi & Thenmozhi, 2017). In this context, Kamau (2013) believed that those elements are important in order to have decent outcomes.

Furthermore, the use of certain method such as audiolingual method can be one of solutions in solving students’ problems. The principle of this method is to make foreign language is learned as first language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The technique that teachers can use is by making English more like habits e.g. using simple English as a medium to teach English to EFL students, doing scaffolding (Mart, 2013) where teachers model the correct pronunciation of English vocabulary and then let the students try themselves where teachers still pay attention and correct students’ mispronunciation. There are many strategies that teachers can apply in teaching EF students including repetition, inflection, replacement, restatement, completion, transposition, expansion, contraction, transformation, integration, rejoinder, and restoration (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).
Many studies have proven that audiolingual method with above mentions strategies is significantly effective to help EFL students in learning. Particularly, a research from Suryani (2012) pointed out that students become more active in doing English language drills and ease them to memorize new vocabulary.

However, the successfulness of audiolingual method used in teaching English means nothing without barriers faced by English teachers. Suryani (2012) added that there are several challenges that the teacher face when teaching English by using audiolingual method i.e. the students are lack of motivation, limited time provided by school, as well as the different capabilities by each student. Finally, the teacher pertains some alternative strategies to solve the problems i.e. pay more attention to discipline matter, give students more advices on motivation, and have more efforts on making the English lesson more interesting.

3. Methodology

This research was done as a qualitative study. There are some typical examples in qualitative data, those are including observation notes, interview transcripts, literary texts, minutes of meetings, historical records, memos and recollections, documentary film (Walliman, 2011). The researchers would like to figure out natural phenomenon happened in teaching and process of English subject by interviewing an Indonesian English teacher in Ma’hadTahfidzul Qur’an Rahmatullah, Samarinda. Specifically, the place where the researchers conducted the research is not only a place where students memorizing Al Qur’an as the name of the school is Ma’hadTahfidzul Qur’an or in an Islamic Boarding School for Hafidz or those who would like memorize Al Qur’an. In this case, the students are also given sort of national subjects such as Bahasa, English, Math, and Science, etc.

In this research, the teacher of English subject is interviewed regarding with her problems in teaching English in the classroom, and what techniques she usually used to encounter those problems. After collecting the data by interviewing the teacher, the data is analysed by following the steps of flow analysis data proposed by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) i.e. data reduction, data display, data conclusion and verification. In data reduction, what the researchers do is decreasing the information which has nothing to do with this research and take only the important part related to this research. After that the data is displayed and concluded as well as verified to check whether the data findings are valid. In order to verify the findings, the researchers used theory triangulation Creswell (2012) where the researchers used theory triangulation regarding with the issues observed and rely to those theories in order to validate the data found by the researchers.

4. Result

4.1 Problems Faced by Teacher in Teaching English

After conducting an interview to the English teacher, the researcher found some findings on this research. These research findings indicate that the teacher faces some problems in teaching English in classrooms. From the result of interview, the teacher said that the biggest barrier happened during teaching and learning process
in the classroom is seeing from students’ lack of motivation. Since motivation is very important for the student and also for creating the whole class situation, this motivation matter impacts to their learning interest and engagement in classroom, it impacts almost all aspects during teaching-learning process.

When the teacher gives explanation, the students seems do not pay attention to the lesson. Some of them are talking to their friends or playing with something around them such as pen, or even bothering other friends and make some others cannot get a lot of concentration etc. In addition, whenever the teacher is giving exercises, the students are lack of spirit in doing their exercise. It is indicated by the absence of feedback from the students to designate whether they understand or not. Not only from the students’ response, the teacher can also prove that the students are less interest toward the assignment given by the teacher is from the result from the assignment. Most of them have middle to low range of score, or in other words, it is under 80.

Furthermore, when the teacher sometimes tries to prompt the students with questions related to the materials, only one or two students respond to the questions, while the rest of students remain silent. The teacher is actually eager to make the students to say a word from her questions, and the students are insisted to answer the teacher’s questions. Unfortunately, it does not work very well to attain the students’ response.

4.2 Strategies Used by Teacher to Solve Teaching English Problems

The barriers as mentioned on the first point make the teacher realizes it requires her to apply different techniques other than prompting to build students’ motivation in learning English. In this case, the teacher never plans when to use certain techniques when teaching English in the classroom even when she is facing problems. The teacher uses certain technique where she thinks it is possible and good to be applied.

The first technique done by the teacher to solve the students’ motivation matter is by giving them sort of motivation in the classroom. For example, what advantages the students can get when mastering English, how will they attain a bright future with English, etc. Other than that, the teacher sometimes uses games when the students start to feel bored and lack of attention towards the materials. This technique is used by the teacher because it is the only way that the teacher can boost the students’ mood in learning English.

5. Discussion

It is true that motivation is one of barriers that English teachers may face. Davis (2016) points out that in learning English as a foreign language, EFL students might lost their motivation and getting bored in class. Ponmozh & Thenmozh (2017) also pointed out that EFL students especially those who do not live in urban area do not care about their communication skills in English. Therefore for Indonesian students, it is not surprised to see EFL learners who have lack motivation on English since many aspects of their life is not all about English and they feel comfortable about that. But speaking of their future and more broad scope, English is actually very important for them. Therefore, students should learn English more, they need to be
motivated and be well-motivated, thus teachers need to have more attempt on designing course curriculum in accordance with students’ needs and interest.

From research findings above, the teacher efforts to prompt the students in order to make the students say a word can be one of strategies to used in teaching a foreign language, but it is important to make a red line between giving answer and when the students respond to the lesson. Specifically, answer can be only given through words or sentences which are done verbally when the teacher is prompting. Meanwhile, response is possible to bounce to any given situation in the classroom, and response can be represented through words or action.

Regarding with using prompting or questioning strategy, it is beneficial enough in order to make the students involved in classroom activities. Moreover, the teacher realizes or not, by giving the students activity such as games, the teacher is already demanding for students’ response toward the lesson. This kind of activity provide the students opportunity to build positive attitude in learning. In many conditions, because environment does not support EFL students to get familiar with English, the classroom becomes the only one place that the students can learn English (Nath, 2016). Hence, teacher needs to make the students as comfortable as they can.

It is obvious that every teacher must face specific challenges in teaching English in the context of a foreign language. The subject of this research which is the teacher assume that one of challenges she is facing is when she gives exercises to the students, the students are less encouraged to do the task. Related to that matter, we are not suggested to be so stressful or worried so much about it because learning a new language with foreign language context needs process and seems not really easy for EFL students. As explained by McDougall, Murray, & Saker (2014), EFL students in learning new language is possible to result certain tremendous behaviour such as hostility, less focus, bored, less concentrated in fulfilling task, event unhappiness.

In order to reduce those manners, McDougall et al. (2014) also point out that the role from people around them such as parents can also help the students to have more comfort learning situation by try to learn English as well as their children at school so that the parents can ask their children to talk with them at home with English. In the case of this research, because the students live at dormitory, the role of head of dormitory is important especially in making English is a habit, not a new language which is learned only in classroom. The head of dormitory can use simple sentences or expressions with students outside of the classroom when it is boarding activities times.

Furthermore, it is very important for us as a teacher to bring our students where learning English is like when they are learning to speak their first language. Therefore, the future implication of this research tends to broad its findings to several suggested language teaching methodologies to be used. In order to make English just like a habit, teachers can use audiolingual method where there are three important aspects to be highlighted i.e. stimulus, response, and reinforcement (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).
Stimulus, in this case, needs to be done by teacher to encourage students to learn. The strategy used by the teacher in this research is in line with language teaching methodology theory proposed by (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) where the teacher keep motivating her students to learn English. Not only motivate the students verbally, in the future, it is suggested to any teacher who teaches EFL students to use other forms of stimulus such as the use of various media such as picture, music, and beautiful classroom decoration(Kasman, Kaseng, Hanafie, & Daeng, 2014). These alternative stimulus are suggested in suggestopedia language teaching method where its purpose is to make students in relax atmosphere when learning new languages (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). As (Ponmozhi & Thenmozhi, 2017) stated vary teaching method that teachers apply, teachers should notice to students’ interest in learning, and the formal institution should provide adequate learning sources for students. In line with Kamau (2013) that believed that those elements are important in order to have decent outcomes.

Moreover, giving stimulus is never enough to be done by teachers. The teachers need to be demanding on students’ response towards the lesson to indicate whether the students understand or not. In addition, this “response” matter is not only acquired from students but also from teachers. In this case, the teachers have to be more sensitive in recognizing when to use certain strategy to different condition of the students in classroom. After having bounce back response from students as well as teachers, students’ individual reinforcement is the last important aspect needs to be completed by students themselves. It is because the students cannot absorb one hundred percent toward the lesson in the classroom, but they can simply can make English more like learning first language outside of the classroom. They can join any kind of English conversation forum or usually called by English club as many schools and universities have. In short, in order to make language learning becomes a habit, the role of teachers to apply above suggested aspects can be organized to change students’ mood and interest in learning English.

Hence, teachers should choose appropriate method based on intended outcomes on language learning acquisition. Thus, the method like Grammar Translation Method or word list to remember by none of target language used in classroom just like what teachers of used, should be reduced at class (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In addition, teachers not only should pay attention to the process of language teaching and learning in the classroom, but the teachers also should take note on how they will conduct language assignment for their students. Therefore, the more appropriate language teaching method used by teachers, the more natural language those students will acquire.

6. Conclusion

From research findings above, it can be concluded that it is very natural for teachers to face certain challenge when teaching English to EFL students. Students’ lack of motivation is one of them. By the use of suitable language teaching method, teachers can bring students to right learning situation with more relax atmosphere. In addition, having the students stimulated in learning new languages is always be the important part to take by teachers at first time they teach students. Various
stimulation used by teachers are possible to increase students’ interest in learning as well as avoid boredom. From this research, the stimulations are encouraging the students about the importance of this new language through verbal motivation and also providing joyful activities such as conducting different kind of games to build positive mood and interest of students in leaning a new language. It is recommended for teachers to create a condition where learning new language is like acquiring first language by constructing language learning as a habit in every day activities. This method can be students’ effort to have language learning reinforcement in order to strengthen the students’ language acquisition more on context rather than memorization, since memorization methods is not too exciting and ineffective to teach lack of motivation students of Foreign Language—or in this case, English.

References


