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English Teacher's Challanges in Teaching English as Foreign Language at MTS Nurul Qolbi

Erniyanti Nur Fatahhela Dewi[1*], Mentari Pratami[2]
[1]Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika (UBSI), Jakarta, Indonesia
*E-mail: Erniyanti.enh@bsi.ac.id
[2]Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika (UBSI), Jakarta, Indonesia
E-mail: Mentari.mpm@bsi.ac.id

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Abstract

Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) becomes a crucial issue. Meanwhile, it is not an easy task, especially when it was done in places where English has very limited purposes. This research seeks to investigate the challenges of English teachers as well as the solutions taken by English teachers in private Islamic junior high school. The data is gathered through documentation, interview, and classroom observation. This study captures the perspective of an English teacher in facing the challenges of teaching English in the classroom through interviews. Various challenges arose, results showed that the challenges facing in teaching English are varied in which they related to the students and the facilities. The challenges coming from students' side including lack of vocabulary mastery, low concentration, lack of discipline, students' boredom, speaking problem, confidence issue, facilities issues, and time constraint. It can be concluded that this study has highlighted a wide range of issues faced in teaching English as a Foreign Language in *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* Nurul Qolbi.

Keywords: *English, Teaching English as Foreign Language, English teachers' challenges*

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching a language is not an easy enough task. It has many requirements. A teacher who teaches a language, does not only transfer and provide the knowledge, but also he/she should help students to enhance their language skills, such as reading, writing, listening and speaking (Imran, et al., 2022). In addition, teacher should promote students to have desire, spirit and motivation towards learning English (Sujarwo, et al., 2019). Furthermore, teachers have to prepare their lesson plan well. In accordance, Derakhshan (2015) eachers have to design what

students learn, how students get understand, how and why the learning influences them, and how lesson could be beneficial for them in the future. That is to say, language teaching should accomodate teachers who notice language skills and personal abilities.

Currently, English has dominated the context of foreign language learning (Sujarwo, et al.,2022) and teaching in Indonesia. Pennycook (2017) stated that English is considered by most people as an international language. Mastering English can guarantee the availability of opportunities for work, travel, higher education, and even a better life. Therefore, teaching English as a foreign language is a challenging task in developing countries in general and in our country in particular (Rezeki et al., 2021). In Indonesia, an incredibly diverse and multicultural country, English is regarded as one of the most popular foreign languages. Its policy implication is that the language becomes one of the compulsory modules to be taught in secondary schools and tertiary education.

Moreover, Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) becomes a crucial issue. Since it is a difficult demanding task. In accordance, Khan (2011) argued that TEFL was a demanding task because English is taught in a place where it provides limited exposure. Furthermore, many difficulties and challanges would be found in this issue. Therefore, English has been included in the curriculum of Indonesian schools and universities and considerable attention has been paid to this language in our society for the following reasons (Widodo, 2016). First of all, access to and use of the latest technological and scientific resources mainly written in English calls for an efficient amount of English language proficiency. Secondly, coping with the demands of the era of information explosion and the efficient use of the Internet makes learning English as a necessity. Thirdly, mastery of English facilitates cultural exchange among nations including the proposal of the dialog among civilizations.

In spite of all these, TEFL in Indonesian schools has not been able to satisfy the specified goals. In accordance, Yoestara (2017) asserted that teaching and learning English in Indonesian schools has not been able to comply any specific objectives. Thus, due to the shortcomings of the formal English as Foreign Language (EFL) program at schools to fulfill the practical needs of the learners on the one hand, and the need for learning English to satisfy these communicative needs while an increasing number of EFL institutes have been developed throughout the country. Yulia (2013) argued that the teaching of English language currently is very marketable to students at all levels of education. In response to this, the government has been trying to develop the English language curriculum in order to cater for the needs of Indonesian society. Teachers, for example, have been trained through pre-service and in-service programs to achieve once, rdad quality teaching as well as developing learning materials in the form of textbooks or online access. In brief, much effort has been devoted to improve English language teachers' capacity and students' knowledge (Sasabone, et al., 2022).

In the junior high schools, English is one of the essential subjects because in this level, it is firstly taught and influenced whether students will go to the next level of education or not. In addition, English is one of the compulsory subjects tested in the national examination. In Indonesia, there are some types of junior high school. Some

of them are state junior high schools and private junior high schools which tend to accommodate a certain religion. One of them is Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri or state MTs and Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah, both of them concern Muslim religion. The current study attempts to address the challenges that faced by English teacher in MTs Nurul Qolbi, which one of Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Citayam.

Furthermore, the kind of challenges faced by the English teachers in her teaching practice exists in Citayam, one of the developed areas in Indonesia, which likely has not enough English graduates, competent teachers, and English exposures, such as books and other language learning facilities. As such challenges are still encountered in several schools in a developed area, let alone in schools in a rural area. Mishra (2015) stated that "the rural areas lack good schools having proper ambiance and affordability which cater to the changing needs and expectations of the crass". For that reason, the researchers was interested in finding challenges in teaching English especially in a rural area that is Citayam village of West Java, Junior high school.

Regarding to this issue, several previous related studies which had been discussed about challanges in teaching as a foreign language. As it is mentioned by Yulia (2013) who explored teaching challanges in Indonesia, especially in motivating students and teachers' classroom language. In the other study, Behroozi and Amoozegar (2014) investigated obstacles that teachers encounter in teaching in secondary school. To investigate the study, Behroozi and Amoozegar designed and administered questioners to sample groups for eliciting data. Songbatumis (2017) also researched investigating the English teaching challenges as well as the solutions taken by the English teachers at MTsN Taliwang. The study captured the English teachers' point of view in facing English teaching challenges in the classroom and the solutions they implemented to solve them through interview.

Overall, those several studies seem to indicate that challanges in TEFL is still happening in schools. However, those studies did not spesifically discuss what challanges that teachers face in TEFL in *Madrasah Tsanawiyah*. Therefore, different from those studies, this current study would focus on exploring English teachers' challanges in TEFL. To regard this study, collecting data will be gathered through documentation, interview, and classroom observation.

METHOD

The research method was a descriptive qualitative study. The study was aimed to find out challanges that faced by English teacher in TEFL. In this regard, two English teacher invited to be a participant in the research. They have been English teachers for around 10 years, it can be said that they are quite experienced. This present study was conducted at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* Nurul Qolbi, located at Rajajaya-Citayam, Bojjonggede, Bogor, West java. In collecting data, researchers collected the relavant data through documentation, interview and classroom observation. After collecting data from those intruments, writer analyzed the data had been collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Qolbi: Culture and students' condition

From what English Teachers who taught there around ten years teaching English, the distinctive culture of it is the sense of kinship among people in it. Teachers know and are close each other. This can be seen by, for example, teachers in this madrasah eat from the same plate as shown for many times. Older and younger generations do not feel awkward when they have to share food from the same plate. This is happened since some teachers are still family or relatives from the head of YPI Nurul Qolbi, while some are from neighborhood Nurul Qolbi, and the rest are from outer circle of it (such as teachers sent by government). By knowing each other from the beginning, it seems to her that people in this *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* are emotionally close each other. This also makes new comers feel welcomed and in relatively short time become a new member of the family of this school. The condition makes *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* as a warm and peaceful place to work.

The conditions of the students of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah,* Researchers described here was only from informal observation in her teaching career in a *Madrasah Tsanawiyah*. The students of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* can be seen from the family's economical background, the parents' educational background, and the students' intelligence. These three backgrounds can be classified into three levels; high, middle, and low level. Each level brings certain impacts to the students learning.

Based on economical background, there are three kinds of students of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah*. The first is from high social class. The second is from middle class. The third is from low level class. These economic backgrounds influence the situation of the students. The high social class (economical background) is very minor, that possibly only one student in one class (e.g. the class of 2021/2022). The students from this social class are normally intelligent, as they are supported with equipment in learning. Their parents normally have middle or high educational background. Here, the students receive lots of attention for their learning process. These parents support their children's learning.

The middle economical background students are half in this *Madrasah Tsanawiyah*. They come from worker parents, such as labors at factories or employee at companies. The students come from this level normally have good intelligences; many of them have good achievement in their learning. They have enough support in learning and the parents at this level want their children have a better life compared to what they have. The parents at this level are normally have sufficient educational background. And the other half, come from the lower economical background level.

The lower economical background level students, where the economic condition of the family is low, are common in this school. The students from this level are equipped with insufficient supports for learning. The parents mostly have low educational background; perhaps just graduated from primary school or junior high school. The students from this level have low intelligence, for many reasons. A case that I spotted about some months ago was quite unique. I asked students to memorize ten English vocabularies and they had to report their memorization in the next coming week. Some students did not manage to report their memorization. A

student came up with a surprising answer to my question on why they did not memorize the vocabularies. He responded that he had to babysit his younger brother and sister and also helped his parent to sell local snacks. He was too busy with those businesses.

These three kinds of students exist in *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* Nurul Qolbi. These student variations form a diverse community and make it a unique environment of school. All elements, if they can, elaborate and work hand in hand to support the school. What writer found were a high loyalty of the alumni to the school. For many events, alumni take their greatest role.

The Teaching and lerning process at *Madrassah Tsanawiyah Nurul Qolbi*

Madrasah Tsanawiyah conducts its teaching and learning process similar to other formal Junior high school. What makes *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* different with other formal non-Islamic junior high schools is that students of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* learn more about Islamic religions. This make the students are well equipped with Islamic moral values for their future lives. By learning more religious lessons, students are expected to be more religious than non-Islamic junior high school.

In the area of teaching English as a foreign language at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah,* the main goal is to familiarize students with English language. However, an additional goal was proposed by other sides, in my context, from the foundation and a senior teacher. The goal is to provide students with adequate knowledge and skills in using English language in their daily lives (e.g. in conversation). For example, students are able to explain how to perform shalat, how many pillars of Islam are, and what Islam is. Such knowledge, according to them, can show that students learn English language and have a rather different mastery of English language compared to students learning English in non-madrasah school. In this context, the two objectives can be accommodated in the teaching and learning English. Teachers can set up the learning conditions in form of familiarizing students with English language, in the beginning stage. At this stage, vocabulary building is essential for students' readiness in producing the language. At the next stage, the teaching and learning of English can be directed to functional texts at simple condition. Here, the students should be able to explain activities or performances of Islamic practices. By incorporating these two goals in the teaching and learning activities, the teaching and learning process will be fruitful and meaningful.

The current outcomes of practices *Madrasah Tsanawiyah*

Many people still do not trust *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* as a place for their students studying (learning). Perhaps they do not know the advantages of studying at madrasah. *madrasah Tsanawiyah* is not seen as a good place for people to send their children to school. From my temporary analysis, reserchers think that people now care more on education in general field. They feel happy when they children get 90 or 100 for their children mathematic marks. Here, people see that madrasah is for studying religious subjects and is not qualified for teaching general subjects, such as mathematics or science.

The outcome of *madrasah Tsanawiyah* is actually competitive. They can compete outside madrasah. Students graduate from this madrasah enroll many state Senior high School. However, as the input of students of *madrasah Tsanawiyah*

are normally from middle and lower economical background, the ratio between students of madrasah and students from non-madrasah produce such a wide gap. While students from non-madrasah can study at elite schools (as they are well supported by their parents), students from madrasah can only join mid or low schools (as they are do not have sufficient support from their parents). This gap is possibly can be reduced if people working in and with madrasah ibtidaiyyah provide more support on students' learning.

In the field of teaching English at madrasah, the outcome of the students is quite promising. Everything depends on the teachers. Teachers take a great role in motivating students in learning. However, as the learning do not only occur at school, parents should also supervise their children learning at home. This is what sometime teachers cannot ensure. For instance, when teachers asked the students to do some activities as homework, parents should also accompany and make sure that their children do the assignments.

English teachers' challanges in TEFL at MTS Nurul Qolbi

The challenges in teaching English faced by English teacher at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* Nurul Qolbi found are varied in which they are related to the students and the facilities. Students' side, the findings revealed that challenges in teaching English comes from students as well. These challenges are students' lack of vocabulary mastery, students' low concentration, lack of parents' support, lack of discipline, boredom, and speaking problem.

Students' lack of vocabulary mastery. Teachers explored that one of the challenges in teaching English in classroom is students' lack of vocabulary mastery. It hindered the students' understanding of the subject. In teacher' opinion, some students might have lack of vocabulary mastery which makes them not actively participate in class. In addition, senior teacher asserted that the main challenge in achieving teaching and learning goal was students' lack of vocabulary mastery. With regard to this issue, Hasan (2016) argued that one of the most challenging tasks that students encountered is mastering vocabulary. Maruyama as cited by Hoa (2016) also pointed out one of three reasons why students have lack of vocabulary mastery is because English is not used by students in their daily life which make them feel not need to learn the words.

Students' lack of parents' support. Teachers concluded that lack of students' motivation can be caused by the absence of their parents' support. The senior teacher also elaborated her experience in which she once caught a student who did not bring any books to school due to forgetfulness, while the other students intentionally left their books in the desk of the classroom. participants believed that such things would not have happened if students' parents supervised and controlled their children's learning at home.

Students' low concentration. Students' low concentration in classroom causes challenges in comprehending knowledge transferred by the teacher. Teaching objectives could not be achieved one hundred percent because some of students do not concentrate in classroom. As teacher described by that when she was explaining a certain topic, the teaching process was interrupted by students who were busy in talking and doing other things. Therefore, she needed to stop and give

the students advices. Khajloo (2013) said that students do not concentrate in learning English, otherwise, they will do their best and get good scores.

Students' lack of discipline. Discipline issue was linked to the classification of the students' class. As teachers felt that such issue is not encountered in class 7B, in which it is the class of diligent students that she was a class supervisor, yet it is faced the other classes (class 7A and 8A). Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) found that discipline problems were related to "the age and sex of students, differentiation, parental attitudes, inexperience, not sharing the learners' first language, and keeping the students motivated".

Students' boredom. Some of my students get bored in studying English when researchers teach a certain topic of the subject. It is because some of her students have already studied that in their primary schools and private courses. Khajloo (2013) indicated that these students have higher academic level than others and when they listen to repetitive low-level content for them, they find it unattractive and boring.

Speaking problem. Encouraging students to speak in English is quite difficult. Students choicer got the punishment than come forward to speak up using English. In addition, Pronunciation problem. Most of students commit errors in pronouncing words. This is also strengthened by Khan (2011) that specific problem connected to pronunciation, stress, and intonation become problem for students.

Next is *Confidence issue*. Students are timid in performing their speaking skill. When researchers ask my students to retell what they have written in their diary and speak in front of their classmates, they get timid. This was also can be said "students' speaking skill is not improved since most of students are timid. Copland, Garton, and Burns that many children are timid in front of their classmates, particularly in speaking a foreign language since it can be face-threatening. Other thing is that most of students are afraid of making mistakes, especially in pronouncing or spelling incorrect words. There is no improvement in students' speaking skill because they are mostly afraid of making mistakes. This finding goes hand in hand with the in which there are some students who have studied English outside the school which can make other students are afraid. Fatiloro said that the presence of a competitive student in the classroom make other students have awful attitude.

By contrast, *Facilities issue*. In facilities issue, it covers not only about the things concern with facilities provided and time devoted, but also the support facilitated by students' parents to learn English. Inadequate resources and facilities. The availability of K13-based books were barely provided, especially books for the seventh grade students. Additionally, researchers agreed that the available facilities in the school did not support English teaching and learning process. The devices such as LCD projector and sound system were very limited in which there was only one device that could be used by all teachers. Such inadequacy "constitutes a challenge to the teaching of English in which large numbers of students require a large number of resources". Ajibola also added that ensuring the availability of sufficient textbooks, computers, listening devices, hands-on tools, and other teaching instruments is a challenging assignment.

Next is *Time constraint*. The time provided was not enough to apply teaching ideas in the classroom as well as to improve their own professional development. Time provided to teach English was only two hours for each meeting, to be exact, 40 minutes in every meeting, whereas, researchers expect that the ideal time to teach English is 90 minutes for each meeting moreover the classroom was started at 1 p. m afternoon. Students had done activity in the morning. So that, could say the teaching and learning process less effective.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the analysis that have been conducted by researchers about challenges that faced by teacher in teaching English as Foreign language in *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* Nurul Qolbi could been concluded that this study has highlighted a wide range of issues faced in teaching English as a Foreign Language in *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* Nurul Qolbi. The teaching and learning English at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* should be prepared and implemented well. The mastery of English shows that whether or not people are literate. The mastery of English can help people master knowledge. English clubs can be alternative in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in *Madrasah Tsanawiyah.*

The findings showed that the challenges facing in teaching English are varied in which they related to the students and the facilities. The challenges coming from students' side including lack of vocabulary mastery, low concentration, lack of discipline, students' boredom, speaking problem, confidence issue, facilities issues, and time constraint.

Nevertheless, the readers should evaluate the results of this study. The findings of the present study cannot be generalized because the findings suggest localized challenges in teaching English, which is at *Madrsah Tsanawiyah*, Indonesia. Even in the school's context, each English teacher encounters different challenges. Therefore, for teachers, the findings can be whether applicable in teaching process or not based on the readers' real environment. Furthermore, future investigation into challenges in teaching English might usefully focus on students' attitude diversity in classrooms and training that participants have joined in.

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