REINFORCING AND SUSTAINING ENGLISH SKILLS OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

Angella Novitaningrum[1], Diyah Mahmawati[2], Akhmad Nuris Hidayat[3], Nur Laili Yusuf[4], Wisnu[5]

[1234]STIT Miftahul Midad Lumajang, East Java, Indonesia
[5]Universitas Negeri Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia
Email: angellanovita.an@gmail.com1, diyah.mahmawati07@gmail.com2, akhmadnuris1993@gmail.com3, nurlailiyusuf12@gmail.com4, wisnu@unesa.ac.id5

Abstract:

This research aimed to reveal on how to reinforce and sustain higher education students' English skills in Miftahul Midad Islamic Boarding School Lumajang. It used descriptive qualitative method to analyze the teaching and learning strategy and students' expectation of English teaching and learning process. In order to collect the data, the researchers used observation and semi structure interview. Observation was carried out to investigate lecturer's and students' activities in the classroom, while interview was used to examine students' expectation related to learning style in English classroom. The findings showed that; first, the lecturer tend to use traditional instruction, that is teacher-centered-approach. In this case, the lecturer used several strategies that promote active learning and students' engagement in order to improve the effectiveness of the teacher-centered-approach such as using various instructional methods, using technology, asking questions, using small groups and giving students a choice, and second, all students expect that they would learn all English skills as well as grammar and pronunciation with their own learning styles. The students had several assumptions about the English classroom activities. For instance, applying group work to create relaxed and communicative classroom atmosphere, involving game-based-learning to make fun learning, practicing English directly outside the classroom, enganging interesting media in teaching and learning process, and learning English grammar with quick tricks. In addition, most of students believed that mastering English skills would be useful for their future

Keywords: *English Teaching and Learning Strategies, Students' Expection, Learning Style, Islamic Boarding School*

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, language has a significant role in communication. Communication and language can not be separated because language is considered as an instrument used by individual to express idea, opinion, or feeling in order to fullfil the basic need for social interaction. Every country in the world has their own language so it needs a global language that can be understood and make easier in communicating among countries, and English becomes an International language that is widely used in every aspect of life such as science, technology, art, culture and business. Crystal (2003) claimed that more than a billion people worldwide speak, learn, taught and use English as the first, second, foreign and International language in more than a hundred countries such as Russia, Germany, China, Indonesia, Thailand and other countries. In addition, English plays a very important role to unite all people around the world regardless their nationalities, cultural backgrounds, or races (Pandarangga, 2015). Due to the case, learning English is crucial to cope the intellectual

challenge.

Considering to its importance, Indonesia government has drawn up English as a Foreign Language (EFL) that taught from elementary up to higher education level. It also happens in some Islamic Boarding Schools where they try to make improvement of their education system. Nowadays, in organizing educational programs, many Islamic Boarding Schools not only require their students to learn religious knowledge but also encourage their students to learn and acquire general knowledge such as English. Its improvement help some Islamic Boarding Schools are able to compete with public schools in term of students' achievement both in academic and non-academic. It is supported by Umar (2022) that conducted a research entitled "English Language Teaching in Pesantren in Indonesia: Development and Challenges. He finds out that the Pesantren (Islamic Boarding School) carry out several adjustments to support the continuity of the Pesantren and the development of its education, such as a grading system, a clearer curriculum and a classical system by opening various educational institutions that adopt a modern education system. Many Pesantren have established public school with its curricula set by the government, and mastering foreign languages is a mandatory matter for students so that they not only understand every Islamic literature, but also have more competitiveness after graduating from Pesantren.

However, most students agree that English is a complex skill and difficult to be mastered even on students of higher education level. Dealing with that issue, the educators have to find out an appropriate solution. A lecturer and students of higher education have their own perspectives toward the running process of learning, environment and instruments. Students must have personal motivation which determines their perspective as well as learning behavior. In connection with the ideas above, what lecturer does in teaching and learning in the classroom can be largely governed by students' perceptions. The lecturer and students definitely expect the success of teaching and learning process. Lecturer, as a higher education stakeholder is required to involve creative learning and innovative teaching in the classroom to build on students' interest and motivation so that they will actively engange in learning activities. In addition, the lecture is expected to help students maintaining their comitment to learn English in order to acquire the English skills. It is in line with Latifah (2015) that stated teacher is not only presenting the materials, telling the students what to do and evaluating their progress but also motivating them to learn English.

Dealing with the ideas above, this research aimed to reveal on how to reinforce and sustaine students' English skills in Miftahul Midad Islamic Boarding School Lumajang. It focused on the teaching and learning strategy and students' expectation of learning styles used in English classroom

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used descriptive qualitative as a research method. According to Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) qualitative method is used for interpreting and presenting the data descriptively. In supporting the definition above, Taylor, Robert, & DeVault (2015) state that descriptive qulitative is a naturalistic approach that produces descriptive data of people's own written or spoken words and their observable behavior. Therefore, relating to the focus of this study, it intended to describe the teaching and learning strategy and students' expectation of teaching and learning process in English class. The participants who involved in this research are lecture and students of TBI in STIT Miftahul Midad Lumajang.

In order to collect the data, the researchers used observation and interview. Observation was carried out to investigate lecturer's and students' activities in the classroom, while interview was used to examine students' expectation related to learning style in English classroom. Here, the researchers used semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is a meeting where the interviewer asks open-ended questions, instead of following a strict and formalized list of questions. As

defined by Magaldi & Berler (2020) that semi-structured interview is an exploratory interview that enables a researchers to go deep for a discovery. In addition, the researchers did open-ended interview in order to make students have more freedom in giving response.

Furthermore, the data gathered from observation and interview was analyzed through some stages as proposed by Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014), namely data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing / verifying. In the first stage, the researcher did data condensation by selecting, focusing, simplifying, transforming, and/or coding the data which was obtained from observation and interview. In the second stage, the researchers displayed the data in the from of tables, figures, or narratives to describe information used to answer two research questions proposed in this study. In the last stage, the researchers analyzed the data descriptively to interpret it based on related theories and relevant research findings. There are some important points that should be consider by the researchers in interpreting the data, that is, summarizing the findings, conveying personal reflections, making comparison to the related literatures, giving limitations of the study and offering suggestions for further research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The description of findings for each research question was presented with detailed narratives gaining from the result of classroom observation and interview. Then, it followed by argumentative statement that had been compared and constrasted with related theories and relevant research findings. This session was divided into two parts; first, describing the teaching and learning strategy, and second, describing students' expectation related to learning style in English classroom.

Concerning to the first research findings, the researchers focused on the teaching strategies used in classroom activities. In the observation, the researchers observed the way the lecturer teaches undergraduate students of TBI in STIT Miftahul Midad Lumajang. The lecturer tend to use traditional instruction, that is teacher-centered-approach. Teacher-centered-approach is an approach that encourages students to completely focus on their educator. This is due to its efficiency and the fact that it is the approach which most educators are familiar with. In this case, the lecturer used several strategies that promote active learning and students' engagement in order to improve the effectiveness of the teacher-centered-approach such as; (1) Using various instructional methods. Although the lecture is the most common method used in the teacher-centered-approach, the finding of this study showed that students learn more when lectures are supplemented with other activities such as discussions, small-group work, and hands-on activities. Moreover, using various instructional methods, a lecturer can provide students with different ways of understanding and absorbing the material; (2) Using technology. Technology can be used in teaching and learning process in order to make the classroom activities more interesting. For examples, PowerPoint can be used to provide visual aids for presentations. Online resources can provide additional information that accessible for students; (3) Asking questions. It is a great way to engage students actively participate in classroom discussion and get them thinking about the material. Questions are useful to check students' understanding and encourage their critical thinking; (4) Using small groups. It allow students to interact with each other and share their ideas. It is the best way for students to discuss the material; (5) Giving students a choice. Giving students a choice in what they learn and how they learn is able to increase their engagement and motivation in classroom participation. Concerning to the ideas above, it can be said that teacher-centered-approach can be an effective way to teach, but it is important to ensure that the students are actively involved in teaching and learning process. It is in line with Ahmed et al. (2022) that stated there was a positive impact of teacher-centered-approach for students during learning at the university level.

The second research finding described students' expectation of teaching and learning process in English class. It focused on students' learning style in ELT

classroom. The students had several assumptions about the English classroom activities. Several students prefered group work because they could interect with their friends, share ideas and disscuss the problem. In other words, they wanted the classroom atmosphere to be relaxed and communicative. Several students expected fun teaching and learning styles so that they are not easily get bored in learning English. Here, they suggested to the lecturer to involve game-based-learning in classroom acivities. Several students like to study English and practice directly by not only studying in the classroom but also practicing it outside the classroom such as go to tourism resorts and practice speaking with native speakers. Another students like to study by watching videos on YouTube, listening to English songs and watching the English movies. They hope that the lecturer can use the media more often in teaching and learning process. In addition, some of students suggested that they want to study English with quick tricks, especially in learning grammar so they can learn it simply.

In relation with students' expectation in English teaching and learning process as elaborated above, the lecturer should consider students' desire so that the teaching and learning process would run smoothly. The students' motivation in learning English would be boost if the learning style meets the students' expectation. It was in line with Bordia et al. (2006) that stated most students have early assumptions regarding educating strategies and students' desires have a vital role in learning and their inspiration. Then, the teacher has a big influence for students' improvement in the outcome where a teacher gives direction and helps them (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). As supported by Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain (2005) that instructors have an imperative role in students' accomplishment, and great lecturers can see the opportunities of their students' skills well. Moreover, meeting students' expectations generates a greater level of motivation, classroom participation, confidence in using the language, practice and teacher feedback and positive attitudes about the overall learning experience (Bordia et al., 2006).

CONCLUSION
Based on the results and discussion elaborated in the previous sections, it could be concluded that a lecturer play a big role in the higher educational system. Lecturer hold positions of power and influence due to their superior knowledge and prestige among their students. The majority of the students expect a classroom situation where they could appreciate language learning. In addition, students agree that they as a learner have to acquire English skills. They realize that it is very helpful to their future such as in looking for a job that English will be one of the mandatory requirements for job applicants. They also wanted the teacher to understand their situation because they have different abilities and skills in learning English

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