

Zukrina Kholis, Rudi Haryana Hidayat

Challenges of Classroom Management in Teaching English to Young Learners in Difficult Circumstances: An Islamic Boarding School Setting

Zukrina Kholis¹, Rudi Haryana Hidayat²

¹Institut Agama Islam Nurul Hakim, Indonesia, ²University of Mataram, Indonesia
zukrinakholis@gmail.com, rudiharyanahidayat@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

English language education in Islamic boarding schools presents unique challenges and opportunities due to their distinctive cultural and institutional characteristics. This qualitative case study investigates classroom management challenges and opportunities in teaching English at an Islamic boarding school. Through observation and interviews with three English teachers in an Islamic Boarding School in Lombok, the study identified several significant challenges including, insufficient facilities, student fatigue from numerous activities, time constraints, shortage of qualified tutors, and the non-compulsory status of English in the curriculum. However, the study also revealed notable opportunities within this educational context, particularly in terms of institutional autonomy. This autonomy manifests in greater freedom regarding rule-making, financial allocation, and pedagogical approaches. These findings provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of English language teaching within Islamic boarding school environments and suggest potential pathways for institutional improvement.

Keywords: Classroom Management, TEYL, Classroom Challenges

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, the teaching of English to young learners (also known as TEYL) has expanded to become a genuinely global phenomenon. Governments around the world are giving it higher priority, and it may be one of the biggest changes in global educational policy at the moment (Johnstone 2009). Lowering the age at which English is introduced into school systems is an observable fact that has to be taken seriously by all those involved in TEFL, according to Cameron's 2003 observation, since it has important implication for English language educators at the secondary level and beyond.

Even though our understanding of TEYL is progressively continuing to expand, there remains a great deal to be done, including describing the difficulties and realities many places that young English learner educators around the world must try to deal with, especially where English has not been a formal subject in primary school. Then, the attempts on identifying emerging agendas for encouraging the development of this crucial aspect of language learning are needed.

Zukrina Kholis, Rudi Haryana Hidayat

Therefore, research on TEYL in many different aspects of teaching young learners now has been a trend for number of researchers. Nikolov (2009) stated that, TEYL has its own set of research priorities and is now acknowledged as a significant area of research within applied linguistics and language education. It is also shown by the fact that numerous surveys of early foreign language learning research conducted over the course of the previous 15 years at various. Thus, this trend will provide more relevant source to dig more into this matter.

Defining what is meant by a young learner of English as a foreign language is a crucial first step in any discussion of TEYL. According to Pinter, 2006, the phrase "young learner" is widely used to refer to children studying English from the age of 3 up until the age of 13 or 14, since nowadays, a huge number of young learners are now engaged in learning English. So, learners of English in primary or elementary school age until the first year of secondary school in Indonesia, can be categorized as young learners. Emerging the English teaching in such young age, teachers across many elementary schools face several common problems, including helping students speak, keeping them interested, adjusting lessons for different learners, managing big classes, maintaining discipline, and teaching writing and grammar (Copland et al., 2014).

Regarding the setting, Islamic boarding school, as one form of private Islamic school, put the mastery of language, especially English and Arabic language as a compulsory subject to include in the process of teaching and learning. English, in this case, is taught as early as the young learners are applied in the elementary school level. However, when we talk about quality, there comes the challenges – challenges in educational cultures, teachers' quality, teaching quality, classroom and learning facility, different background of teachers and parents, supportive language environment, large class, mixed-ability learners, etc. As Hulu (2024) identified, some of the more pressing issues are the lack of adequate facilities, limited technological knowledge among educators, constraints in classroom time, and a notable deficiency in student motivation toward learning English.

Given these challenges, the research aims to dig deeper into identifying the primary obstacles faced by English teachers in Islamic boarding schools while also exploring potential opportunities for enhancing Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) within these unique educational environments. By examining both the challenges and opportunities, this study aspires to present comprehensive insights that can inform strategies for improving English language education in Islamic boarding school settings.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine classroom management challenges and opportunities in English language teaching at an Islamic boarding school at a secondary level. Data collection was conducted through an observation and semi-structured interviews with three English teachers in Islamic Boarding School for secondary school who were purposively selected based on their active involvement in English instruction at the institution. The interviews focused on exploring classroom management challenges, teaching methodologies, and available opportunities within the boarding school context. Thematic analysis was utilized to process the data, which involved systematic coding and theme development. To ensure research trustworthiness, member checking and detailed documentation were implemented throughout the research process. While the study was limited by its small sample size and focus on a single institution, it provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of English language teaching within Islamic boarding school environments.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Classroom Management

In this section of discussion, we will first discuss more about the classroom management matter in the setting. How an English classroom management is properly done, and how it runs in the setting, in this case, the English classroom of elementary level in Islamic boarding school, will be elaborated to see how the classroom management is a crucial aspect in teaching, what even Marzano and Marzano (2003) in their research *The Key to Classroom Management* suggested that, the

Zukrina Kholis, Rudi Haryana Hidayat

one factor that has the biggest influence on students' academic performance is classroom management. Evertson & Weinstein (2013) also stated that, Classroom management has a positive relationship with higher student engagement, improved learning, preventing dropouts, and less behavioral issues.

Ellias and Schwab, (2006), Emmer and Saborine (2015) in Zein (2018) explained that in an educational system that seeks to promote learning as well as social and emotional growth, classroom management is defined as the capacity of teachers to establish and maintain order in a classroom. This includes all of the teacher's practices associated with creating modes of instruction (such as lecturing, group work), and handling learner behavior. To make it clearer, Zein (2018) also added that the instructional component of classroom management involves the efforts made by teachers to arrange students into groups and seat them, control routines, time activities, set up and sequence tasks, give instructions, offer feedback, and keep an eye on the students. On the other side, the learner behavior management dimension comprises activities like stopping, correcting, and rerouting undesirable student behavior as well as fostering learner self-regulation.

In a language classroom context, teachers carry what Ralph (1994) called as 'double-load' of teaching in a language classroom: they have the same obligations and difficulties as other teachers of non-language subjects, but they also have the requirement to carry out these duties as much as they can in the target language. This condition may get more challenging when the teachers are young or non-graduate of any tertiary education, come from non-English background of study, or a bachelor of children education with less competency in English education like what happens in Islamic boarding school being discussed.

Difficult Circumstances of TEYL

In this section, we will discuss about what is categorized as difficult circumstances or what is also called less-than-ideal conditions in teaching English to young learners in general, and how these circumstances are related to the teaching English to young learners in Islamic boarding school setting of elementary level. These challenges will be discussed and rooted to a more specific way to the teaching

practice in the context being discussed. Difficult circumstances that turn out to becoming challenges in the process of teaching and learning including the educational cultures, quality of instructors and the instruction, classroom and learning facility, different background of teachers, unsupportive language environment, large class, mixed-ability learners, etc.

Educational culture in Indonesia is slightly distinct from the many European countries where English is taught as a compulsory school subject, or other countries where English is a foreign language but still being a school subject in primary school. The curriculum for English education in Indonesia has experienced challenging changes. The first methodology used in the nation was the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The course's objective was for students to be able to comprehend English readings and translate them into Indonesian. The early years of GTM adoption were suitable, despite much criticism. However, Jazadi (2000) argued that GTM was appropriate for the Indonesian environment, where classrooms were frequently large and advanced second language (L2) proficiency was not needed of teachers.

Not to be left behind by international need of communication competencies, the English teaching in Indonesia moved away from GTM to the oral approach that emphasize the development of oral skills (listening and speaking). Students are expected to actively involved in the classroom activity to gain more time of practice in using the language. However, practicing a foreign language is not always easy in Indonesian context, especially when it comes to a role-play activity. Educational culture that is already bound in Indonesia, especially in Islamic boarding school culture of teaching practices is more to be teacher-centered and a 'jug and mug' practices which cause students to be less actively involved in any classroom activities. Thus, the quality of the instructors and the instruction of English to young learners must be revisited. As mentioned by T2,

T2: the quality really depends on the training and support given to instructors. We need professional development opportunities that focus on communicative teaching methods. Our

Zukrina Kholis, Rudi Haryana Hidayat

teachers often have strong grammar knowledge but lack practical strategies to create a more interactive learning environment.

English is not (yet) a compulsory subject for elementary school in Indonesia, and this may cause to a minor preparation of English instructor for children's English education in primary or elementary school level. In the Islamic boarding school being discussed, English is taught as a subject, but with a minimum learning hours per week. Limited time and lack of students' motivation becomes notable challenges in Islamic school settings (Hulu, 2024). This situation is further complicated by the students' demanding daily schedule, which typically begins at dawn with morning prayers and continues through various religious and academic activities until late evening. The exhausting routine often leaves students with limited energy and focus for English classes, especially when scheduled in the afternoon periods. This was revealed by T1,

T1: These students wake up at 4 AM for morning prayers, then they have regular academic classes, religious studies, Quran memorization, and various other activities until 9 PM. By the time they come to English class, especially if it's in the afternoon, they're really tired. Many struggle to focus, and some even fall asleep in class.

Moreover, the minimal teaching hours make it difficult for teachers to cover all essential language skills comprehensively. Teachers frequently find themselves rushing through materials to meet curriculum requirements, sacrificing the depth of learning and practical application that language acquisition requires. This combination of structural challenges - from limited hours to student fatigue and competing academic priorities - creates a complex environment that significantly impacts the effectiveness of English language instruction in Islamic boarding school settings. As T3 stated,

T3: It's very challenging because English is not a simple subject - we need to cover speaking, listening, reading, and writing. With such limited time, I often have to rush through the materials. Sometimes I can't finish all the activities I planned.

Additionally, Non-English majored instructors then take a role as English instructors but with less of English teaching experience and background knowledge

Zukrina Kholis, Rudi Haryana Hidayat

in teaching English, especially to young learners. This may lead to difficulties in a proper English instruction, and to generalization of teaching. It supported by Sekar's et al. (2022) finding that most teachers lacked initial training in teaching English to young learners, leading to insecurities about program management, self-doubt about their qualifications, and hesitation in delivering course materials.

T1: It is quite likely not ideal of how it should be. Many of the English teachers are not English education majored.

T2: Well, to be honest, it's quite challenging. I graduated in Islamic Studies, but because of the school's needs, I was assigned to teach English. While I can speak English well enough, teaching it is a different story. For instance, when teaching pronunciation. Since I'm not an English majored, sometimes I worry about teaching incorrect pronunciation.

English teaching to young learners should be done distinctively from the teaching of other lesson, it needs certain methods and supportive and authentic language environment to help learners get more exposures to the target language. This fact may have minor attention from non-English majored teachers and stakeholders since English is not a compulsory subject to teach in elementary school. Nikitina (2011) emphasized that the importance of authenticity in the teaching of foreign languages is widely acknowledged. The communicative method, which is currently the most popular technique of teaching languages, requires that the use of "real life" language be encouraged in the classroom. Authentic learning environments must be developed in order for the real-world language to emerge. Thus, this need a competent and experienced English instructor to create an authentic and supportive language environment to make a better English instruction in early childhood English education, since young learners being taught have different level of exposure of English. The challenges become greater by the fact that English is not even the second language in Indonesia, and learners have already spoken with their mother tongues which is distinguished among hundreds of tribes in this country.

Those difficult or less-than-ideal circumstances will be challenging for English instructors in managing the English classroom in the process of teaching and

learning English to young learners in Islamic boarding school context. However, there are also opportunities for the development of the process of teaching and learning in this form of private school, since it is not fully attached to the government policies in curriculum development and school funding.

Opportunities in TEYL in Islamic Boarding School Setting

As a private school, Islamic boarding school is 'semi-attached' to the government policies in education aspects, and this will give more freedom in decision making of rules in the school, more flexibility in funding, and the process of teaching and learning. Those 'freedom' then will be good opportunities to the teaching, in this case teaching English to young learners take any inputs and open to any suggestions about how the teaching should run, and will have an easier funding to support the teaching and learning in form of classroom facilities, teacher education, curriculum and material developments, etc. that will lead to a better instruction.

T3: We create our own teaching materials, share resources among teachers, and try to make lessons as engaging as possible despite the limitations. Sometimes we organize English conversation clubs outside regular class hours for interested students. But honestly, without systemic changes and more support, it's hard to make significant improvements.

T1: We can also modify the curriculum to better suit our students' needs. For example, we've implemented an English morning program and additional conversation classes.

To make these opportunities run better, not only Islamic boarding schools could organize extracurricular activities such as English clubs, it could also initiate cultural exchange programs, and community service projects which can provide students with a platform to practice their language skills in authentic contexts, fostering a more immersive learning experience. By engaging students through workshops that highlight the importance of English proficiency and encouraging them to participate in language activities, schools can create a supportive environment that motivates students. Moreover, leveraging technology, such as online language learning tools and interactive applications, can help bridge the gaps

in teaching quality and student engagement, ultimately transforming English language learning into an enjoyable and collaborative journey for young learners in the boarding school setting.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, managing English to young learners' classroom in Indonesia, especially in Islamic boarding school setting has some challenges that need to be faced by teachers, e.g., the bound educational culture in the nation, non-English majored instructors that leads to less-than-ideal instructions, lack of specific classroom and learning facility for a language class, unsupportive language environment, large class, mixed-ability learners, etc. However, a private Islamic boarding school has some opportunities to enhance the classroom management which will help achieve better result in TEYL, they are, freedom in decision making of school policies, flexibility in funding, and flexibility in creating a better teaching and learning activities. The teaching, will then have good opportunities to take any inputs and be receptive to suggestions about how the teaching should proceed, and they will have easier access to funding to support the teaching and learning in the form of classroom facilities, teacher education, curriculum and material developments, etc. that will result in an improved teaching.

REFERENCES

- Cameron, L. (2003). Challenges for ELT from the expansion in teaching children. *ELT journal*, 57(2), 105-112.
- COPLAND, F., GARTON, S., & BURNS, A. (2014). Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners: Global Perspectives and Local Realities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48(4), 738–762. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43268015>
- Evertson, C. M., & Weinstein, C. S. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues*. Routledge.
- Jazadi, I. W. A. N. (2000). Constraints and resources for applying communicative approaches in Indonesia. *EA journal*, 18(1), 31-40.

Zukrina Kholis, Rudi Haryana Hidayat

- Johnstone, R. (2009). An early start: What are the key conditions for generalized success. *Young learner English language policy and implementation: International perspectives*, 31-41.
- Marzano, R. J., & Marzano, J. S. (2003). The key to classroom management. *Educational leadership*, 61(1), 6-13.
- Nikitina, L. (2011). Creating an authentic learning environment in the foreign language classroom. *International Journal of Instruction*, 4(1).
- Nikolov, M. (Ed.). (2009). *Early learning of modern foreign languages: Processes and outcomes* (Vol. 38). Multilingual Matters.
- Ralph, E. G. (1994). Middle and secondary L2 teachers meeting classroom management challenges via effective teaching research. *Foreign Language Annals*, 27(1), 89-103.
- Rich, S. (2014). Taking stock: Where are we now with TEYL?. In *International perspectives on teaching English to young learners* (pp. 1-19). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Hulu, N. A. (2024). Teachers' Difficulties in Teaching English to Young Learners in 5 Schools at Nias. *The Journal Of English Teaching For Young And Adult Learners*, 3(1), 21–27. <https://doi.org/10.21137/jeeyal.2024.3.1.4>
- Sekar Pramesty, N., Maghfiroh, A., & Atiek Mustikawati, D. (2022). Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners in Rural Area. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 14(4), 5283-5292. doi:<https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v14i4.1517>