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Teaching English as a Foreign Language at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah*: Facts and Challenges

Wakhid Nashruddin*IAIN Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, Indonesia**wahid1n@yahoo.co.id*

Abstract

The mastery of English as a tool of communication among nations and people around the globe is an undeniable fact. Islam world also needs to follow this by equipping its people with English as a communication tool. As Arabic is used for the communication inside Islam, English is needed to communicate Islam to other people around the earth both to Muslims or Non-Muslims. Teaching English has become an increasingly significant element in Islamic education. For this, the issue of teaching English at *madrasah* is an important concern for practitioners in the area of TEFL in Islamic institutions. This paper explores the writer's ten-year experience in teaching English at a *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* in Cirebon, West Java-Indonesia. The conditions that will be pictured are the culture, the students, the teaching and learning process, and the outcome of the current practices in *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*, mainly in the area of TEFL. Then, all these conditions will be contrasted to up to date research findings and theories so that the facts and the challenges can be clearly seen. This will also be seen from the perspective of current curriculum in Indonesia, namely curriculum 2013, which bears contradictions with the presence of it. In fact, the curriculum 2013 eliminates English as a subject learned at primary school level. What *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* will do in the next years can direct the expected outcome of the teaching of English at this level. Kinds of program that can be designed to empower the state of English mastery are an essential case to discuss. This all facts and challenges can provide insights so that people working in and with *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* understand and are ready to face the global communication era.

Keywords: TEFL, English, *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*, facts, challenges

A. Introduction

The communication among nations now has gone beyond what people thought in forty or fifty years ago. No borders among nations are an impression when people can be connected via internet. Global era cannot be stopped. People do business, networking, education, and other activities via internet. People are connected now.

In order to get connected with other people from different parts of the world, it is a requirement that people master tools which can be used by people they communicate with. This is important as to get connected means to be able communicate with other people. Messages should be able to be understood. In this way, understanding of message is crucial because how messages to be responded rely on the true understanding of the messages. Language mastery plays its role in this part.

English as an international language that is widely used all over the world takes its significant role more than it was used hundred years ago. It is now used in all aspects of human beings' life from all ages. English emerges as a foreign language that is extensively used as a language of communication in the global era.

British council estimates that 375 million people speak English as a first language, 375 million people speak it as a second language, and around 750 million people speak it as a foreign language. By 2000, it was estimated that more than one billion people have been learning English. And the number grows in the next following years. The spread of English as the language for communication among people in the world cannot be stopped (Britishcouncil, 2013).

Kachru (2006) has different data which are bigger than British Council has. Inner circle population, which speaks English as a first language, is about 408 million people. On the other hand, outer circle, in which the people speak English as a second language has estimated population about 416 million people while expanding circle where people in this circle use English as a foreign language reach its population about 306.9 million people. It can be seen that the number of native speakers of English is now outnumbered by the speakers of English as a second/foreign language which is about (outer + expanding circle) 722.9 million people. Even Crystal (1994) estimates about 900 million people in the world use English as a second and a foreign language. Again, the number of the user of English as a second/foreign language increases every year as the number of world's population grows.

People can get knowledge by mastering language that mostly used by different people from different countries in the world. Mastering English is a key success to the mastery of information, which in turn, helps people gain knowledge. English leads as the main language used in the world. Data from Lobachev (2008) describes that books, newspapers and magazines, scholarly journals, films and videos, and web pages mostly use English as the language

used. Furthermore, Lobachev (2008) shows that 200.698 titles or 21.84% of books published in the world use English language, 2499 titles or 62.55% of newspapers and magazines in the world are in English, 28.131 titles or 45.24% of scholarly journals in the world use English in the journals, 158.611 titles or 34.89% of films and videos are in English, and 1142.5 million web pages or 56.43% of languages used on the internet. English is used in many aspects of human life. This occurs in many areas, including religion.

Religion is basically a norm or rules to provide better life. However, people, for many times, insist on the truest religion is their own religion and become intolerant with others. This is possibly because they do not understand each other's religion. Wrong information can make this happen. This also occurs to Islam. Many people, after the shocking 11th November tragedy at the USA, curious with Islam and perceive Islam as an intolerant religion, or even a religion that let its people do terrorism. As this view is not true, Muslims can fix this condition by telling people embracing different religions that Islam does not support terrorism.

English, as a second/foreign language, can be used to communicate ideas among people coming from different countries where they do not speak or write the same language. By using English, communication can be built up among varied topics. Here is the position where Muslims should take part. Understanding people and also gain lots of knowledge can be done if Muslims master English as an international language.

The learning process of English has received a great attention. It has been undergone from adult to children, even toddlers. Many people now realize the importance of English mastery as a main instrument to live in global society. To prepare next Muslim generations, a move should be done from now on. Teaching English as a foreign language at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* is a concern.

Rohmah & Milal (2008) introduce programs in ELTIS (English Language Training for Islamic Schools). This program is for training teachers of Islamic junior high school. The program was, in the beginning, supported by Australian government. It focuses on improving the teachers' teaching skill. This is a significant contribution to teaching English at Islamic junior high schools in East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, and Bone—Indonesia. As a friend of mine claims, in an informal talk, this program provides lots of benefits, from the benefits to be trained as a professional teacher to the provision of needed materials in the teaching and learning English at school.

In the area of teaching English as a foreign language at primary school level, Yulia (2009) paid attention to elementary school students' difficulties in producing language, in this context, English language. She observes the teaching and learning processes, focuses in speaking English. The result of her observation was the students' problems in producing language lies on the ways the teachers teach the language. The teaching ways were teaching forms (grammar) and vocabularies in teaching speaking. So, based on this study, the

teaching of English as a foreign language, in this study context, still focus on form and vocabulary, with ignoring, to some extent, the quality of training of producing language.

Identifying teachers' strategies in teaching English in primary schools, Marlita (2013) reports that the teaching English at primary school level has two different conditions; interactive and not interactive. From three schools observed, she spots that one teacher taught interactively, using games to cheer up the students' learning condition. In addition, although the teaching was interactive, but the teaching focused more on written language. The other two teachers taught not interactively, using "speech" method. They tend to rely on materials in course book which provides activities in working with vocabulary items. As a result the teaching makes the teaching and learning process become monotonous. This temporary finding suggest that the finding has similar finding with Yulia's, that the teaching English at primary school level still focuses on written language.

From these three studies, some lesson can be obtained. First, teachers of Islamic institutions should be trained well, as teachers are the main actors in changing students into better generation. Without having a certain standard of quality, teachers might be regarded as incompetent and lose their chances taking part in preparing a strong generation. Second, the teaching of English at primary level might be called "fail" because the teachers, in Yulia's & Marlita's context, do not teach in proper ways. The teachers teach using monotonous methods which do not even focus on the students' English language development. Thus, teachers should be prepared well.

Teachers' training is crucial, is a fact that I could not agree more. However, as one of my interests is in teaching English at Islamic institution, I would see the teaching and learning English at Islamic primary school, or widely known in Arabic: *madrasah ibtida'iyyah*. I would look at the teaching English at *madrasah ibtida'iyyah* from different view. Teachers' training is truly important but that is not the only thing to do. I would like to see the teaching English at *madrasah ibtida'iyyah* from a wider perspective, trying to look into the facts in the field and the challenges that will come. Two main questions to explore in this paper are 1) how is the condition of teaching of English at *madrasah ibtida'iyyah*? and 2) what challenges are expected to come in the next coming years?

B. The Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the teaching of English has appeared since the era of colonialism. Komaria (1998) traced the history of English teaching in Indonesia and she explains that it begun in the Dutch colonialism, but was omitted in the era of Japan colonialism. After the Indonesia independence was proclaimed, the teaching of English was reconstructed with the purpose of supporting students with "working knowledge of English". Thus, the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia has been taking place more than 60 years. What a journey!

Furthermore, as Komaria (1998) explains more, the teaching of English at the Dutch colonialism era was as an elite education. English was taught at Dutch schools. Then in 1946, after the independence of Indonesia, English was introduced in the curriculum of Indonesia schools. Then, it has been changing from time to time accommodating trends in foreign language teaching.

The world of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) has been developing significantly from year to year. It grows as the theories of learning develop from time to time. Three approaches, "... the environmentalist, the innatist and the interactionist views of language learning serve as the background to language teaching theory (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006).

The environmentalist approach to language learning, according to Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006), is influenced by the structural school of linguistics and the behaviorist school of psychology. This approach sees that oral language is more important than written language. Language mastery starts from oral language and written language mastery comes after the mastery of oral language. Mostly, the lesson was about things in the surface structure of English language. In addition, stimulus-response activities, together with reinforcement, occur during the teaching and learning. Learning a foreign language is then seen as a program of language skill training.

The innatist approach, as the language learning theory and psycholinguistics continue to develop, sees that learners have 'nature' condition in which they may learn any language when they were children. Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) explains that, in this approach, "The learner was seen as possessing an innate ability to process language and as actively participating in the learning process, using various mental strategies in order to sort out the language system to be learnt." Learners have an ability to cope with the language they learn. In relation to this, the process of teaching and learning a foreign language should not ignore the learners' "talent" in learning a language. Furthermore, the language learnt is not only about the surface structure, but also its deep structure.

The interactionist approach sees that learning language is not about learning its surface and deep surface structures only. Meaning was not only inside of the structure of a sentence, but also things beyond it. Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) explains that

"The development of discourse analysis supposed a shift within the field of linguistics away from the study of isolated sentences and toward understanding how sentences were connected. This new orientation advocated the study of both structure and function in order to understand what language was."

Language was seen by its functions. By knowing the function of the language, students will have clear purposes why they have to use the language.

These language functions make the language learning exists. Without those functions, language learning will be “tasteless.” To manifest this, Halliday (1975) in Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) mentions seven communicative functions which occur at children’s communicative development. Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006)) clarify that

“(Halliday, 1975) postulated a total of seven communicative functions characterizing the child’s early communicative development, all of which were related to aspects of social life. These functions were: *instrumental*, which involves the use of language to get things; *regulatory*, which involves the use of language to regulate people’s behavior; *interactional*, which involves the use of language to interact with other people; *personal*, which involves the use of language to express one’s feelings; *heuristic*, which involves the use of language to explore the outside world; *imaginative*, which involves the use of language to create an environment, and *representational*, which involves the use of language to communicate information.”

Learning a language which based on these functions will ease the learning process as they take its steps along with the development of the functions of the language.

Learning English as a foreign language can be successful if it fulfills some conditions. According to Moon (2000), at least five conditions should exist to ensure the learning English will be successful. The five conditions are:

- 1) *Time*. Children will have plenty of time for learning English and it can be spread over several years.
- 2) *Exposure*. They are exposed to English all around them, both in and outside of school.
- 3) *A real need for English*. They have a need to use English in order to survive on a daily basis, e.g. to make friends, to study in school, to shop, to travel, etc
- 4) *Variety of input*. They are exposed to a wide variety of uses of English, e.g. spoken and written, English for thinking, for interacting, for getting things done, for imagining
- 5) *Meaningful input*. They will receive plenty of meaningful language input through experience of English not as a subject to be learned, but as a means of communication, where the focus is on the meaning not the form of the language.

These five conditions should exist in the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. As these conditions are integrated in the teaching and learning process, the learners’ possibility of getting successful will increase.

1. Teaching English for Young Learners

Learning English as a foreign language can be marked by the existence of errors in the language production. It also occurs normally when children learn a language. As Moon (2000) explains that errors provide evidence that the children do learn language and they find out how English language works. Furthermore, she directs the use of errors as a first step to understand to what extent the language learning has occurred. When students produce errors, the learning is taking place.

To make it easy in understanding the conditions of primary school students, it is better to identify how their characters are. Children learning at primary school can be grouped by their ages. Scott & Ytreberg (1991) divide children into two levels; the five to seven years olds and the eight to ten year olds. Furthermore Scott & Ytreberg names some characteristics of each level of students.

Level five to seven year olds (Scott & Ytreberg, 1991):

- They can talk about what they are doing
- They can tell about what they have done or heard
- They can plan activities
- They can argue for something and tell you why they think what they think
- They can use logical reasoning
- They can use their vivid imaginations
- They can use a wide range of intonation patters in their mother tongue, and
- They can understand direct human interaction.

Level eight to ten year olds (Scott & Ytreberg, 1991):

- Their basic concepts are formed. They have very decided views of the world
- They can tell the difference between fact and fiction
- They ask questions all the time
- They rely on the spoken word as well as the physical world to convey and understand meaning
- They are able to make some decisions about their own learning
- They have definite views about what they like and don't like doing
- They have developed sense of fairness about what happens in the classroom and begin to question the teacher's decisions, and
- They are able to work with others and learn from others.

By knowing and understanding the conditions of students at primary level, it is expected that teachers can view their students' language development. In addition, teachers can make this language as a foundation to their teaching.

Children, with their unique characteristics, are different with adults. The points above can provide insights for teachers or tutors of English language. By knowing the points of students' characteristics, teachers can design suitable activities for the students' learning. If the teachers can accommodate the students' characteristics in their teaching, the goal of language learning is surely will be possibly achieved.

2. *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah*

Madrasah ibtidaiyyah is Islamic primary school. There are two kinds of *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*; the state *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* and private *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*. All these two kinds of *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* is under the supervision of Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The state *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* works directly under the supervision of Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The private *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* is usually under a private educational foundation.

Madrasah ibtidaiyyah is a unique institution in which it has special characteristics. *Madrasah ibtidaiyyah* teaches its students Islamic subjects. While regular primary school provide students a subject called Islamic Education subject, *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* specify that subject into some subjects; *fiqh*, *aqidah akhlaq*, Arabic language, and others. These specifications are encouraged to provide students with deeper understanding in Islamic norms, values, and understanding.

The teachers of *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* mainly graduated from Islamic institutions. The Islamic educational background of the teachers helps them transferring their knowledge about Islam and helps students understanding and implementing Islam in their daily lives. *Madrasah ibtidaiyyah* is a place to shape Islamic future generation.

C. The Facts

There are some reasons why I choose this research site. First, it is one of the oldest *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* in Cirebon, which has operated more than 50 years. Secondly, in some aspects, this *madrasah* has many academic achievements, such as the winner of smart contest, speeches, and others. The third reason is that the awareness of the people at school about the importance of English as international language. Since 2008, English has been taught for students from grade 3 to grade 6. The facts I have found is from my experiences working at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah An Nur*, a private Islamic primary school in Cirebon (2002-2008, 2010-2013). It is under the Islamic Education and Dakwah Foundation of Jagasatru (YPDIJ), Cirebon. This *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* is under an Islamic foundation that was founded in the era of Indonesia independence.

In this school, I had worked with more than 20 teachers and have received lots of information about the process of teaching and learning in *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*. This section will describe the culture exist, the students'

condition, the teaching and learning process, and the outcome of the current practices in *madrasah ibtida'iyyah*.

1. The Culture of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah*

From what I have learned for 9 years teaching English, the distinctive culture of it is the sense of kinship among people in it. People know and are close each other. This can be seen by, for example, people 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 perhaps because some teachers are still family or relatives from the head of YPDIJ, while some are alumni of this school or Pondok Pesantren Jagasatru under YPDIJ, 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 me that people in this *madrasah* 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* as a warm and peaceful place to work.

2. The Students of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah*

The conditions of the students of *madrasah ibtida'iyyah* I describe here is only from informal observation in my teaching career in a *madrasah ibtida'iyyah*. The students of *madrasah ibtida'iyyah* 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 ibtida'iyyah*. The first is from high social class. The second is from middle class. The third is from low level class. These economical 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 2010/2011). 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 common in this school. 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.

The lower economical background level students, where the economical condition of the family is low, are also 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 five six years 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 ibtidaiyyah* where I taught. 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 I found were a high loyalty of the alumni to the school. For many events, alumni take their greatest role.

3. The Teaching and Learning Process at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah*

Madrasah ibtidaiyyah conducts its teaching and learning process similar to other formal primary school. What makes *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* different with other formal non-Islamic primary schools is that students of *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* 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 primary school.

In the area of teaching English as a foreign language at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*, 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.

4. The Outcome of the Current Practices *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah*

Many people still do not trust *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* as a place for their students studying (learning). Perhaps they do not know the advantages of studying at madrasah. *Madrasah ibtidaiyyah* is not seen as a good place for people to send their children to school.

From my temporary analysis, I 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 ibtidaiyyah* is actually competitive. They can compete outside *madrasah*. Students graduate from this *madrasah* enroll many state Junior high School. However, as the input of students of *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* 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.

5. The Impact of Curriculum 2013 to *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah*

In the latest curriculum in Indonesia, curriculum 2013, English subject is eliminated. The main reason is that children should be taught how to think critically from the beginning of their school time. Literacy should be built from the literacy of native language. Asworth & Wakefield (2005) highlight that:

“Early literacy, a term widely used in current educational literature, describes how young children gradually become aware of the uses of written language in their environment. This ever-increasing awareness of writing and reading is now considered an integral part of children’s early language development.”

Thus, the contact hours for Bahasa Indonesia subject are increased. Again, the purpose is to strengthen the foundation of literacy, that the native language (or the official language of the country).

However, madrasah cannot skip the trend today. English has been taught from very early ages, from primary school ages, kindergarten ages, or even toddlers. If madrasah do not provide the teaching of English at school, perhaps people will think again if they want to send their children to madrasah. People in general believe that the younger their children master English, the better their English mastery will be, which in turn, in long term, the more successful life they will have. Madrasah cannot ignore this issue. In fact, madrasah could accommodate this by preparing a certain way in teaching English that will work with what the experts (government) instruct.

There is still a chance for madrasah to conduct the teaching and learning English at school. What is so called extra subject or local content subject can be used for this purpose. Madrasah is still allowed to provide English subject with 2 hour contact hours in a week. So, the key point is how and what to do with this 2 hours a week. Will it be enough for introducing English to the students? If not, what can be done to enrich students learning?

D. The Challenges

1. How the teaching and learning process of English at Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah should be

The position of teaching English at madrasah should be not stressful, as the demand of the ability of mastering English should not be too big. An introduction of English is enough as this is the main purpose of teaching English to young learners. Preparing students to learn English at high school is the main goal as I think this is important for students' readiness in learning a foreign language.

Some alternatives of the teaching and learning English at madrasah can be addressed from reading some articles on teaching English for children. Two ideas suggested here view the teaching and learning of English in an additional element outside the formal curriculum. Perhaps by positioning English outside of the formal and conventional class can make the learning process more fun and enjoyable for children at school.

An interesting point has been made by Afia (2006), she proposes and has been working with introducing English to young learners via English clubs. In her perspective, English club is a place for students to have a warm introduction to the English language. The purpose of English club is to assist students building up "a positive attitude towards the English language" and to familiarize them with English language system (Afia, 2006). In this club, the activities are more fun and informal. Singing, playing games, doing cross word puzzles, and other enjoyable activities are things that students do in the club. This can be

considered as an alternative as Tunisia and Indonesia have similar positions towards English language, i.e. English as a foreign language.

Places for doing learning activities are also interesting issues to discuss as the classical classroom are set up in a rigid way. Asworth & Wakefield (2005), settle centers for English language learning for children learning centers (or activity centers or play areas). The centers are:

1. block center (to learn concepts, such as number, order, shape, size, space, and measurement),
2. art or creating center (to learn how to create, to experiment, and to respond to ideas and events),
3. dramatic play center (to play a role, to act a story),
4. sand or water table (to discover form and shape),
5. library (as reading stock provider),
6. writing center (for providing time to write),
7. science center (to learn scientific facts),
8. table toys (in which the toys function as realia),
9. music center (to provide music in learning English).

These centers play their own rules in strengthening certain skills. The key point is how to make these centers as learning spots which focus on doing activities as ways of learning English. These centers can be varied as students' need, the teacher's analysis, and the space provided (Asworth & Wakefield, 2005).

In relation to how to run class in teaching English to young learners, teachers should pay attention to some important things. Shin (2006) provides "ten helpful ideas for teaching English to young learners." The ten ideas are:

- Supplement activities with visuals, realia, and movement.
- Involve students in making visuals and realia.
- Move from activity to activity.
- Teach in themes.
- Use stories and contexts familiar to students.
- Establish classroom routines in English.
- Use L1 as a resource when necessary.
- Bring in helpers from the community.
- Collaborate with other teachers in your school.
- Communicate with other TEYL professionals.

The first eight tips are for the practical things in teaching English in the classroom, while the last three do not directly used in the classroom but are needed for supporting the teaching in the classroom.

From the ten ideas, Shin (2006) proposes the last three ideas for encouraging the expanding of learning environment. She believes that with

community and collaboration, teachers and their students can enrich the teaching and learning. She then pictures that in “TEFL Community Triangle” (Shin, 2006). Further, she thinks that TEFL Community Triangle “refers to a community of English speaking and English-teaching members of both local and international communities that EFL teachers belong to that can help enrich their English-teaching practices—in this case, to enhance the teaching of EFL to young learners” (Shin, 2006). Figure 1 is Shin’s TEFL Community Triangle.

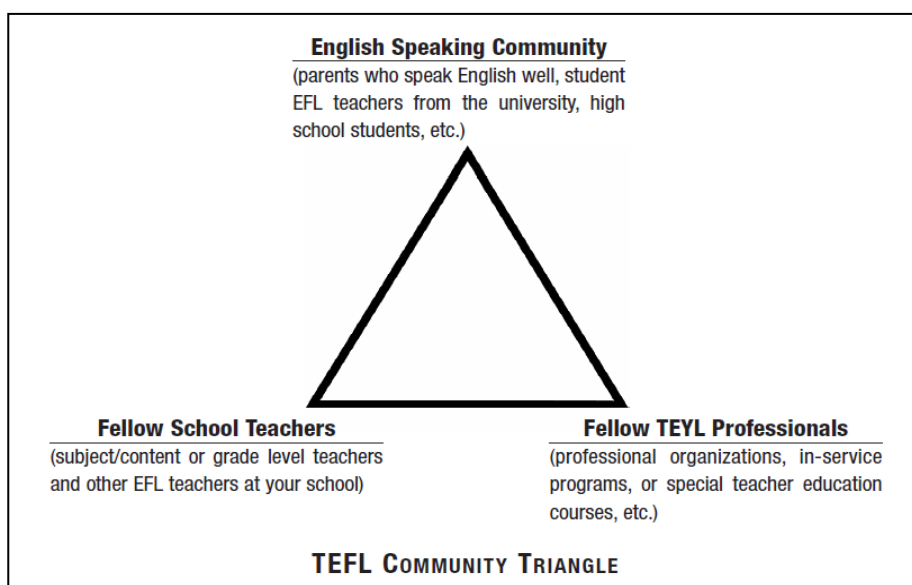


Figure 1 TEFL Community Triangle (Shin, 2006)

At this point, I can see that the future of teaching English at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*, referring to works cited above, should be in a different setting and format. Teaching English should not only in form of formal and regular classes, which in a small scale of research conducted by Yulia (2009) and Marlita (2013), was proven to be ineffective, to some extent. What most important is the contact hours for the students to get in touch with English. The quantity and the quality of English teaching should be set up. So, what comes up to my mind is to set up some conditions in the process of teaching and learning at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* level. Four actions forming an alternative path that I propose to carry out in teaching English at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* level are:

1. To set up English clubs at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* level, as has been suggested by (Afia, 2006).
2. To set some learning centers in the clubs for learning activities, as proposed by (Asworth & Wakefield, 2005).
3. To set the activities in the club according to eight ideas suggested by (Shin, 2006).

4. To make a working network with sides related to teaching English (Shin, 2006) at the club.

The big idea is to put the teaching and learning English in clubs. Setting up English clubs will be a demanding and challenging activities. Place, equipment, and tutors are things to prepare and be given a great attention in the beginning. Space can be easily provided as schools have rooms available. However, referring to #2, setting some learning centers, school needs to set its spaces, ensuring that all conditions can be accommodated.

In the clubs, learning centers seem to be the main instrument in the teaching and learning process. Each learning center will provide different learning experiences. Music center, for example, provide opportunities for children to familiarize themselves with English sounds and articulations using fun ways, such as singing songs and singing chants. In this center, students can practice producing sounds of English.

The eight ideas of Shin (2006) can be incorporated in the process of teaching and learning English. In table toy center, for example, toys can be used as realia which are utilized to practice language. Holding a toy car, students can pretend to drive a car and make a sentence like; "I go to school by car." Moreover, realia can also be created by the students. This can be done at art or creating center. Asworth & Wakefield (2005) picture that "equipment at this center will include materials such as modeling dough, cookie cutters, paints, brushes, paper, coloring pens and pencils, fabric scraps, glue, easels and tables." The involvement of students in doing activities can bring motivation and power to learning engagement. When the students engaged in learning, the success of learning should take place.

Networking is another key factor in the success of running a program. Networking can provide things that will be needed in the club. The instructors, for example, can be recruited via networking. Alumni of *madrasah ibtdaiyyah*, who study at English department or have good commands of English or perhaps those who have big interests in learning English, can be invited to join and to work with their "juniors." English department students near *madrasah* can also be invited to support this program by being volunteers to teach in the club. Other sides that can support this club should also be invited. See figure 1 to see sides involved in the TEFL community triangle (Shin, 2006).

To sum up, learning English at *madrasah ibtdaiyyah* level in form of English clubs is quite promising in form of its format. The teaching and learning can be in informal and relax situation. In clubs, sides related to this program should work hand in hand empowering it. Teachers cannot work alone in running the club. Working and cooperating with all sides can strengthen the club and result to the success of teaching and learning English at *madrasah ibtdaiyyah* level.

2. How the outcome of the practices of English teaching at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah* should be

It could not be agree more that the outcome of the practices of English teaching at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* should be a qualified one. Students should have a certain skill that can help them have a strong basic for furthering their English learning. Two main goals have been above mentioned; they are (1) to familiarize students with English language, and (2) to provide students with adequate knowledge and skills in using English language in their daily lives, mainly in telling about Islam.

Based on the two goals of teaching English at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* level above mentioned, the outcome of the practices of English teaching at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* should be, to some extent, practical. Students of *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* should be able to use their language to tell people about Islam in simple situations. What they every day do should be expressed properly using English language.

3. What We Can Do

In the end of this paper, I would like to reorient what I have discussed. For practical reason, I would provide lists of things that is required to do. There are three things to do to empower *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*—focusing in the area of teaching English as a foreign language—they are:

1. To set up clear objectives in teaching English at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* level,
2. To set up English clubs as alternative to conventional formal English teaching in classrooms, and
3. To strengthen networking to support English language teaching and learning.

When these are done seriously, the teaching of English at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* should be good. In the end, at long term, the students of *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* can see their bright future as they have mastered one of skills required in the globalization era.

E. Conclusion

The teaching and learning English at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* 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. The data from Lobachev (2008) shows 10.58% of literate population in the world speaks and/or writes English. The mastery of English can foster the critical literacy of the students at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*, which in turn, prepares high qualified graduates as future Muslim generations.

English clubs can be alternative in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* level. In clubs, the learning of English can

be in informal and enjoyable situations that can foster language learning. With supports with elements in the community, English language learning can take place meaningfully. In implementing the English clubs at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*, all aspects that have been mentioned and discussed should be considered.

For further research, as this paper sounds theoretical, the experiment of setting up English clubs can be explored. Other aspects related to the community readiness and opinions regarding the setup of English clubs can also be surveyed. Perhaps, things that I cannot see as parts of future development of the teaching English at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* can be filed by readers.

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