



## **Can Humanizing Classroom Meet EFL Learners' Needs?**

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**Abstract:** Humanizing classroom is a learning model which emphasizes the students' involvement in the classroom and considers the students' characters, learning style, and background in every phase of teaching-learning activities. This descriptive study investigates the implementation of humanizing classroom practices by high school EFL teachers and looks for the kinds of humanism values being applied as well as their impacts on their pedagogical practices. The subjects of this study were six English teachers at MAN Salatiga. The data is gathered from classroom observation, interviews, and documents. The finding shows that humanizing classroom values is reflected in every aspect and phase of the EFL teaching-learning process, where teachers do not only apply the values during the teaching-learning activities but also in their lesson plan and evaluation. Secondly, positive impacts from the practice exist, proven by the positive feelings shown by the teachers (appreciated) and the students (more confident and comfortable) in their English classes. In addition, when teachers implement the humanizing classroom, students could freely share what they need and feel in the EFL classroom.

**Keywords:** EFL; humanizing classroom; learners' needs.

### **A. Introduction**

The fact that most English teachers in Indonesia still use the grammar-based approach to teaching English that creates a less interesting teaching and learning atmosphere that causes students to feel burdensome in learning English (Panggabean, 2015). Thus, the intensity of learning English from elementary school until senior high school does not affect the students' comprehension and ability to master English. In addition, teachers' creativity is restricted by the curriculum, handbook, and national examination that affect teachers' tendency to decide the language teaching methodology and activity. That is why EFL teachers are restricted to these administration things through a contractual agreement, the requirement to use a certain handout, evaluation form, and promotion based on test results (Maia, 2015). Language learning with these characteristics is rather overwhelmingly in linguistic, structural and cognitive terms. Thus, students in such situation become nothing more than intellectual entities involved in an assessable cognitive process. Moreover, the

rapid technological development which affects humans into heartless machines with no humanity should be anticipated (Manurung, 2018). Based on the problems above, the teacher should not only prepare a teaching-learning activity in the classroom but also know how to formulate a classroom, which is more productive, creative, interesting, and focus on students' moral and spiritual strengthening (Maia, 2015).

In addition, teachers should consider the students' needs and characters when they prepare the teaching-learning activity. Learners' need is an umbrella term, which refers to a wide variety of information about the learner, the teacher, the language being learned, or the context of language learning (Sadeghi et al., 2014). Learners' needs are areas beyond the learners' necessities only, but even those of the teachers and the language used are also two important variables within. Thus, exploring students' needs when teachers want to arrange the lesson plan is necessary (Muthmainnah et al., 2021).

Identifying students' needs prior to formulating lesson plans and carrying them out in class through a needs analysis (or needs assessment) is equally paramount to achieving a successful learning. These processes can be regulated by diagnosing students' needs for learning or teachers' needs for teaching (Lozada, 2020). The information collected from this needs analysis provides crucial data upon which educators can make decisions (Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017). Through the need analysis, teachers could see what students are able to do and need to do but also to know what they would be willing to do or could be persuaded to do within the confines of their particular educational environment' (Astika, 1999). That is why conducting a needs analysis is paramount, for it affects the individuals' educational life at the time of studying and even their future life (Karimi & Sanavi, 2014).

Knowing the students' needs and characters in need analysis activity aligns with what the humanistic approach emphasizes. Humanistic approach itself is a mode of instruction where the student's self-actualization is the ultimate objective (Soviyah, 2007). As we know, even though the campaign of putting the learners at the center of education keeps getting louder, educational practices at the institution level in most countries are majorly still drawn by teachers' directive sides, and the traditional approaches to teaching English are still dominant in the schools. Hence, there is an urgent need to humanize our teaching and to change traditional teaching with more learner-centered approaches (Lojova, 2016). Hamdan & Elandeef (2021) explained that the humanistic theory in education stresses that students are inherently good, their basic needs are vital to their behaviors, the student is the authority on how they learn, and that all of their needs should be met in order for them to learn well, e.g., a hungry student will not have as much attention to give to learning. Thus, by taking into account things beyond students' intellectual state, learning is expected to be more caring, motivating, and stimulating. The humanizing classroom is one of the efforts to implement a student-centered classroom. In this case, the teacher acts as the axis where all learning and teaching activities rotate.

Humanizing the class is one of the models emphasizing students' characteristics, students' learning styles, and students' needs (Moriska, 2017). Teachers and students

work together to formulate a learning material and a method that fits with the students' needs and characteristics. Humanizing the classroom is expected to improve students' learning outcomes. The humanizing classroom is a strategy implemented using a humanistic approach where learners could learn from their surroundings and their real life and create a joyful learning environment (Moriska, 2017). Furthermore, the teacher tries to make students show their potential in a friction-free environment while each of the students is viewed as someone who demands guidance from an empathic and friendly teacher (Nwafor & Nwogu, 2014).

While we understand the roles of a teacher and students in the learning process are equally important, there is an emphasis that the teacher plays a major role in the implementation of humanizing the classroom because the act of humanizing is more likely a direct action from the teacher (as the doer or actor) to the students (as the ones receiving the impact of the action). In order to do this act of "humanizing", teachers should not only consider a lot of pedagogical aspects in relation to student factors of intellectuality, behavior, acceptance, and responses, but also the ability to establish effective two-way-interaction with the students and handle situations that may occur during the teaching practices (Shih, 2018). In order for the model to work well, the pillars of humanist education, including children-centered education, non-authoritarian teacher roles, focus on student engagement and activities, and democratic and cooperative education aspects need to be applied simultaneously (Suyatno & Wantini, 2018). An example of condition of how humanizing classroom is needed in EFL class is when the students are asked to speak a foreign language and only focus on the grammar which causes them to feel stressed and getting some errors in speaking. This situation needs humanizing situation where teachers could give them humanist correction and make them more comfortable (Ghanizadeh et al., 2020).

The above situation is expected to apply not only to general schools but also to all schools, including Islamic schools. On the other hand, Islamic schools have more subjects than general schools do. The great number of subjects to learn often causes students to be more stressful out. Thus, it needs a learning model which avoids students from learning boredom and stress. An Investigation of classroom humanization implementation in Islamic elementary schools shows that this learning model is a fun learning model that gives students the freedom to explore their learning interests and interact with other students (Moriska, 2017). In addition, the key to humanizing students' learning is formatting classroom activities that attract students' active engagement, which also puts the value of democracy and fun learning into priority (Suyatno & Wantini, 2018).

Those investigations show how humanizing the classroom resolves burdens among Islamic elementary students. However, could it also help break the boredom and other problems by English language learners face in Senior Islamic high school? How? These questions drive the researchers to investigate what humanizing classroom values and its implication reflected in EFL Classroom to help students to meet their learning needs.

## **B. Method**

Since this research revealed descriptively humanizing classroom model implementation in EFL classes, researchers employed a descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative research is defined as a form of social action that focuses on how people interpret their experiences to comprehend the reality that happens to individuals which employ interviews, diaries, journals, classroom observations and immersions; and open-ended questionnaires to obtain, analyze, and interpret the data of content analysis of visual and textual materials, and oral history (Mohajan, 2018). This research was conducted at Salatiga Islamic High School (MAN Salatiga) from August to December 2021.

The data were retrieved from classroom observation, interviews with English teachers, and some documents. There were six English teachers of MAN Salatiga whose classes were observed, and their commentary about classroom humanization was recorded via face-to-face interview. Classroom observation was conducted as the first stage of the study, where researchers prepared an observation checklist listing 10 statements of humanizing classroom behaviors to be done by teachers (see Data Presentation section). Then, all six English teachers from MAN Salatiga were interviewed regarding their observed and unobserved humanizing classroom practices to gather teachers' perceptions and experiences in implementing humanizing classroom model (see Data Presentation section). Also, photographs taken during the classroom observation and teachers' interviews were used as data support. Before interviewing the informants, the researchers informed that all participants' data will be concealed and written using Code (T1, T2, ... etc.,)

The data which were collected through observation and interview were analyzed using the scheme suggested by (Lacey & Luff, 2009), including transcribing, organizing the data, familiarizing, coding, and themes. The researchers conducted the data analysis through the following steps (1) Data Organization: the researchers take the data from the interview with English teachers and classroom observation; (2) Familiarizing: the researchers begin to analyze the interview answer and transcribing transcribe the observation recording; (3) Coding: the respondents' name is changed into their initial name to hide the real respondents and coding was also used to code the respondents' answer; (4) Theme: the researchers classify the answer based on the research objectives. Researchers applied data triangulation to validate the data where all information gathered from classroom observation, teachers' interviews, and documentation were compiled together to draw the result analysis, conclusion, and recommendation.

## **C. Result and Discussion**

### **1. Humanizing Classroom Values Implemented in EFL Classes at MAN Salatiga**

Due to the Covid-19 restriction policy, the researchers only went to one of the English classes at MAN Salatiga to observe. Table 1 is the observation checklist which was used to examine the class.

**Table 1.** Observation checklist of humanizing classroom practice at EFL class

No.	Indicators	Checklist
1.	Teacher greets them by saying <i>salam</i> and asking for their condition.	√
2.	Teacher appreciates students who deliver questions or do a task.	√
3.	Teacher reinforces students to ask questions, do tasks, and perform.	√
4.	Teacher avoids threatening students in the class.	√
5.	Teacher avoids sarcasm in the classroom.	√
6.	Teacher avoids activities which cause students to be embarrassed.	√
7.	Teacher is open-minded.	√
8.	Teacher always tells the truth to students.	√
9.	Teacher gives chance to students to show their competencies.	√
10.	Teacher knows well his students (name, character, background).	Not attended

Based on the result of observation, it is seen that all the indicators are checked, excluding the last point, which is about the teacher knowing his students well. Based on the observation which was conducted during the English subject in Social IV class, the teacher did not mention any students' names at all moreover recall their personalities or backgrounds. Yet, the teacher looked quite close and friendly with the students who were seen from how he often interacted verbally with the students and even let them come forward without any hesitation for class activity participation. If we look broadly, this absence of the teacher's address of the students' names is quite logical since the frequency of teacher-students meeting in class that semester is very low due to the social distancing policy, which allows students to come to school only a few times as an impact of Covid-19 pandemic resulting in making the teachers not able to identify their students as quickly as it was in normal times. In addition, teacher-students interaction may affect students' learning motivation and achievement, even though it can be maintained through online classes when the class is designed to create more interaction in the class (Sun et al., 2022). However, the internet and media limit teacher-students interaction in online classes. Furthermore, with the other 9 indicators being present during the classroom observation, it can be concluded that the practice of classroom humanization in the English class is at a very high rate.

It is clearly seen that EFL students at Islamic schools have a high desire to master language skills related to their surroundings such as expression, writing text, and vocabulary. They also expect that their EFL class tends to be cheerful and comfortable to learn needs a condition where they do not hesitate to demonstrate their ability and be respected. The values of humanizing classroom are also reflected in the teachers' interview results. Four of the six teachers responded to the questions about what their students need in EFL is that students want the materials related to their everyday life.

I want to see how the child comes first as the situation and the background because I teach several classes... So, basically, I start by looking at the condition of the child first. Can we include material that is in accordance with the curriculum with a little heavyweight? Can we or can we not? If not, we can simplify it. To start the learning, I usually start with the vocabulary by holding an icebreaker starting with simple things like those that can be found around us (T.3).

One of the teachers responded that the materials from the curriculum that are related to teenagers are interesting for them, and the others said that students love

materials which are taught from the easiest to the most difficult. *"Most of them want to master the language, exactly English, comfort, relax, fun. But they understand (English can be learnt easily)"* (T.6).

The learning atmosphere which they like is the class which involves the students in teaching-learning activity although the class is still conventional.

I usually use traditional didactic activities. So, for example, there is description material. First, I explained the concept and then I read it. Then I try to discuss a sample text. Normally we choose one of the texts that can be in Salatiga. So, in the description of this text, I explain more about famous or historical places. So, the hope is that students can make descriptive texts of the places around them. In that way, it turns out that students feel prioritized or humanized. Usually, when we teach it in general. When students create texts, they can use Google references. But at that point, I corrected right away. ...The students are happy. So, they not only take something that is famous in their area, but they try by writing it that they are trying to introduce a place in their area. Because after being corrected, we usually make presentations but not all students. It turns out that in this way, children feel involved and even use existing resources in their respective areas to make them feel interested and comfortable (T5).

Based on the teachers' description, every teacher has their own way of involving students in the class, such as teacher instructing students to create videos based on their creativity, teacher starting the class by using material or media that the teenagers generally like (K-pop, Korean drama, artist, football player, or viral person), teacher using the topics about things happening around them (legends in their village, folklores, their own experience, etc.), teacher practicing directly the material which is taught in their interaction to make students not realizing that they are learning, and so on.

When they learn, they like to start first with relaxed communication. We communicate with teenagers. So I have to follow their development as the music they like or the hobbies they like. After that, I started to get into the learning material (T.4).

Also, students do not want the class threatening or scaring them. They want a class that makes them comfortable and fun, and humanizing them.

The second question is asking teachers whether they ever involve students in arranging the lesson plan or not. All teachers answer yes, although it is only sometimes. Two of the teachers offered the learning activities which will be taught the next day to their students. *"I offer the students about this material and then I give them several options, and they choose which option"* (T2). The other teacher involves students to arrange a video or other learning media which will be used in the next meeting. *"I once asked in class what kind of teaching would be best for me. They responded without teaching with much tension. We finally found a solution for making assignments in the form of movie making"* (T.4). One teacher explained that students are asked to prepare material which they like through search engines. One teacher asked her students what learning activity they wanted in the class. *"Yes, but not often. Because students tend to*



*choose what they like, of course, what amuses them*" (T.3). Teacher 3 urged that when teachers always ask her students what material to learn, they only want the accessible material, that is why teacher only sometimes asks them to decide the material to learn. The other teacher involves students in arranging learning activities in form of what topic they want in the role-play activity. *"I also did a role-play learning system like if someone wanted to be a teacher without me having to point him/her out"* (T.1).

The next questions ask about from whom teachers know their students' character and problems and how they handle the students' learning problems. According to their responses, it is found that most teachers observe their students when they learn although the pandemic situation forces the class to switch into online learning, which makes teachers are challenging to know deeper about students' character. Teachers also often discuss with the previous English teachers and homeroom teachers to know the students' character and learning problems. *"We usually discuss with a previous English teacher who taught him/her to know the effective treatment for him/her"* (T2). The English teachers have various ways to solve the students' problems. Three teachers tend to come to see the students personally to ask what their problems are and what they want. Teacher 3 chooses to let the class goes as usual without giving special treatment to the students who have a learning problem. He thought that every student had his plus and minus. He is probably not good at grammar but actively performing dialog in front of the class. One teacher tends to involve the home-room teacher, guidance and counseling teacher, and even a psychologist when she founds her student got a serious learning problem. *"We usually share information, such as about the student or seek information from the relevant coordinator teacher"* (T.1). One teacher chooses handwriting analysis to know the students' character and tendencies. It helps him to decide how he should interact and communicate with the students. Then, he involves one of the students to be a moderator in the class to improve their confidence.

Then, teachers are asked whether they involve students in arranging or planning learning evaluations. Generally, teachers have involved the students in evaluation. However, it is still very minimal such as choosing the media for learning assessment, and asking whether they are ready for the test or not. *"Sometimes I gave them a choice like: which one do you prefer? Online test or offline for all. And Sometimes I check their competence, ready or not? I opened question directly"* (T6). Teachers still arrange tests generally without differentiating students who have lower competence. When the students with lower competence do not pass the test, teachers give more reinforcement in the form of remedial. *"Regarding the tests, I never ask the opinion of the students only by the form, because we can consider offline and online. We often use online because there are 50% at home and 50% in class"* (T.5).

The findings show that teachers have struggled to make the class comfortable to learn by implementing some humanizing values, such as greeting them, appreciating them, avoiding some negative activities in the classroom, and knowing them well. The success of how teachers humanize the classroom is affected by three dimensions of the teacher's pedagogy, including cultural, social, and intellectual (Price & Osborne, 2000).

Although the observation result shows that the teacher does not mention students' names, the interview result shows that every teacher spots his or her students who need special treatment and approach from the teacher. It is clearly described by mentioning the case and name in their interview and the class. The following interview result shows how teacher recognizes which of their students who get difficulties in learning.

It turned out that there were 2 students during the class who never attended through the WhatsApp or Google Meet group. When they are face to face, there are people whose understanding needs a special touch. So, I use the system that I always use. During the apprenticeship, for example, other students work on assignments. I try to communicate directly with the student in class. So, when another student did the homework, I asked him where the difficulty was. It turned out that in this way, she wanted to express her obstacles in learning (T.5 Q.4).

The humanizing classroom values are also clearly seen in their ways of getting close to their students when they have a problem with learning material or other problems. Every teacher has a way to solve it. They are not angry with students who have special needs but rather they try to approach them by meeting them face to face, and discussing with other persons who take part in the teaching-learning process, including their parents and even psychologist.

When we face that depressed child. Her depression was already very high. So, because it is related to psychology, I have to follow the science that psychologists teach. The point is that we give students motivation to keep learning and excited (T.4 Q.4).

This finding is also reflected in the research result which was conducted by [Moriska \(2017\)](#) which shows that the students have the freedom to learn and are more accepted by the teachers.

Teachers also involve students in arranging lesson plans and evaluations variously, although not every meeting and evaluation, they are involved. Every teacher has different ways of involving students in arranging lesson plans and evaluations. The teacher could include students in arranging lessons using a proactive-research strategy to omit the students' behavior problems, provide students with special needs and develop students' competencies ([Nagro et al., 2019](#)). The ways teachers use to involve students in arranging lesson plans are; offering which method/ media is used in the class, which material or topic students want to learn, and how they get the material autonomously. Teachers have not been involved fully in arranging the evaluation. Teachers only offer the media used and whether they are ready to have a test or not. It is caused by the teacher's worry about not completing all basic competence when they should involve students in arranging the test.

## **2. The Implication of Humanizing Classroom Values in EFL Classes at MAN Salatiga**

The last question concerns on the implication of humanizing the classroom for the teachers and students. All of the teachers admit that they get positive advantages



in the implementation of humanizing classrooms. One teacher said that when the students are involved in the class, most students feel that the material is easier to understand. "Students feel comfortable and are not afraid of English. Actually, learning English is not easy unless we know the keys, such as mastering pronunciation and vocabulary" (T.1 & T.6). It shows that students' engagement and motivation improve when teachers humanize the material based on the students' lives and experiences (Rahmanpanah & Mohseni, 2017). The teacher also feels more appreciated by students because of her loving and close interaction in the class.

Because they are happy with the subject, happy to learn it. Then after graduating, he still made quite an impression. For example, they often still communicate on social media as an alumnus. Because they are happy with English, such as happy with the way they learn and how to teach it, then some of them take the English Study Program in University (T.3).

In fact, teaching quality, learning goal orientation, and performance goal orientation are collaborative and interactive predictors of career choice (Mahfud et al., 2019). The other teacher said that by implementing humanizing classroom, she learns to implement the learning agreement in her classroom. Teachers feel that students are more confident in the class without anxiety and scare. "After the 'Merdeka Belajar' activity, I understand about the class agreement, For example, determining after this material if there should be an assignment and agreeing on when to set the deadline" (T.2). Involving students in the assessment will make them more appreciated, and they could elaborate the assessment through self or peer assessment (Falchikov, 2004).

It is found that humanizing classroom is important to be implemented in EFL classes since English is one of the subjects that most students are insecure with. By implementing these values, teachers take many advantages of students' and teachers' sides. According to the interview, it shows that teacher feels more appreciated and learns about learning agreement with her students and students look more confident and comfortable learning. Students tend to specialize in their teachers not only because of their teaching capability but also their interpersonal competence, which creates memorable experiences for the students until they graduate (Koehler et al., 2017). Although students need more warm atmosphere and appreciation from their teachers, they still respect their teachers when they instruct the materials (García-Moya et al., 2020). By humanizing the classroom, the teacher-student relationship is maintained relatively smoothly without neglecting their position as teachers and students. They are more confident in asking or demonstrating their project. Students with learning problems are helped with the teacher's assistance. This finding is proven by what Suyatno & Wantini (2018) found in their research that the class is more fun and democratic when the whole day school implements humanizing classroom values.

## D. Conclusion

Based on the research conducted at Salatiga Islamic High School (MAN Salatiga), it is found that humanizing classroom values are reflected in every aspect and phase of

the EFL teaching learning process. Teachers do not only apply the humanizing classroom values when the teaching-learning activities are conducted but also when they arrange lesson plans and evaluations even though the practices are limited to the syllabus fulfillment. The practice of humanizing classroom values has positively impacted the language classroom. It is seen in the positive feelings of the teachers and the students. Teachers feel more appreciated, and students feel more confident and comfortable learning English. Therefore, the researchers suggest that EFL teachers need to continue implementing the humanizing classroom values in every aspect of teaching learning and improve the practice of humanizing classrooms, especially for arranging lesson plans and evaluation.

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