

**FOREIGN TEACHERS’ INSIGHTS REGARDING TEACHING  
“CONVERSATION” IN BOARDING SCHOOL: CHALLENGES AND  
STRATEGIES**

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**A B S T R A C T**

Speaking becomes one of the English skills that should be developed. One of the schools that provided a special speaking class for the students is the Islamic Boarding Based Junior High School of Amanatul Ummah. Speaking class is labeled as a conversation subject in this school. In conversation class, the teachers are required to improve the students’ speaking skills. The teachers who handled a conversation subject were foreign teachers who used full English during teaching and learning. This paper investigates the foreign teachers’ perspectives of the teaching conversation subject. This research used qualitative method using descriptive approach. The participants of this research were two foreign conversation teachers of SMPBP and the participants were chosen using purposive sampling technique. The data were obtained through three instruments namely observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The data then were analyzed using four stages namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion. The result of this research showed that the foreign teachers faced several problems related to the students’ understanding, engagement, and teaching materials. The strategies used by the teachers were using digital tools, gestures, language simplifying, early materials preparation, and discussion with senior EFL teachers. This research contributes to the literature of English language teaching related to the teaching conversation subject.

**Introduction**

English becomes one of the compulsory subjects taught in Junior High School. The teaching of English regulation depends on the system of a school. In a private school, the period of teaching English may differ from the period in a state school. Teaching English in a boarding school which the students stay days and nights gets more attention (As’ad et al., 2020; Aziz et al., 2021; Firman Mansir, Abdul Karim, Tumin, 2020). The meeting numbers of the teaching English is more than in the state school which in the state school English is taught 2 meetings in a week but in a boarding school, in this case in Junior High School of Amanatul Ummah Boarding School, English is taught 4 meetings in a week.

Due to the more meetings of teaching English in the boarding school, the subject of English gets another term for a meeting in a week. There is a new term called “Conversation”. The appearance of conversation subject is as the focus on teaching speaking. Teaching speaking can be challenging because the teacher’s focus is to train the students to be able to produce meaningful oral output (Putra et al., 2022). The target of the conversation subject was to train the students to speak English better while the teaching of English subjects focused on writing and grammar. In short, in Junior High School of Amanatul Ummah Boarding School, teaching English provided three meetings in a week plus one meeting in a week for teaching conversation subjects.

The teachers of English and conversation are different. English subject was handled by Indonesian teachers while conversation subject was handled by foreign teachers. The foreign teachers were not native English speakers. They were Afghanistan teachers. The existence of foreign teachers was expected to be able to motivate and help the students to speak English (Kurniawati & Rizki, 2018; Zulkifli, 2013). However, foreign teachers should not be used as the basis in measuring the success of teaching speaking in the boarding school (Budiarta, 2020). This research is intended to reveal the challenges and strategies of foreign teachers in teaching conversation.

There were several previous research related to teaching speaking in the Indonesian context. The first previous research was entitled Teaching English at Junior High School in Indonesian Rural Area: The Implementation of Scientific Approach (Malaikosa & Taopan, 2020). The result showed that there were some problems in applying the teaching method in teaching English in the rural area. The problems were the time-consuming and a large number of students. However, this research did not explore the challenges and strategies in teaching English that focused on speaking skills.

The second previous research was entitled An Analysis of Teacher's Strategies in Teaching Speaking Skill to Visually Impairment Students at SMA Luar Biasa Banda Aceh in Academic Year 2019/2020 (Khadijah et al., 2020). The result showed that the strategies used by the teacher were using questions and answers. The problems the teacher encountered were coming from the components of the students. Students with different levels studied in the same class. The next problem was the discussion forum of the teachers. There was no community for the teachers to have a discussion. The last problem was the lack of facilities for teaching English. The research was focused on the problems related to teaching English in a special school at the level of senior high level. The research did not focus on teaching speaking at the junior high level that the teachers were foreign teachers.

The third previous research was entitled ELT in Indonesian Context: Issues and Challenges (Yusny, 2013). The result showed that English was given a small portion in teaching and learning. The teaching and learning focused on the written. English was taught but not spoken in a society that differed from other neighborhood countries. Realizing the issues, the paper recommended a better ELT advance in the future. The research did not explore the challenges and strategies of teaching speaking with foreign teachers in the Indonesian context.

Based on the previous research, the research about challenges and strategies in teaching speaking for junior-level that the teachers were foreign teachers needs to be conducted. Therefore, this research paper would like to explore the challenges and the strategies of the foreign teachers in teaching speaking or conversation subject at the level of junior high in Indonesia, especially in a boarding school system. This research is different from previous research since the setting is in boarding school and the participants were foreign teachers teaching conversation subject.

### **Research Method**

This research used a descriptive qualitative. It is considered since this research intended to describe a phenomenon scientifically. The phenomenon was described, summarized, and represented in a deep understanding (Nassaji, 2015; Seixas et al., 2018). The participants of this research were two foreign teachers who teach conversation subjects in Junior High School of Amanatul Ummah or SMPBP. The foreign teachers

were Afghanistan teachers. The data of this research was obtained through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation.

The observation stage was conducted by observing the teachers' activities in teaching the conversation subject and making a recording. The observation was the fundamental research approach in a meaningful way (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The teaching of conversation was done in an offline system. Regarding the semi-structured interviews, the participants and the researchers conducted offline interviews and record the result. Semi-structured interviews were considered to be used since it was more flexible and did not limit the data obtained (Alsaawi, 2016; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The next data was coming from the documentation. The documentations included the recording, pictures, and self-teaching reflection of the participants (Elo et al., 2014; Wach, 2018). Those data became the supportive data for the interviews and observation data for this research.

## **Result and Discussion**

The findings of this research related to the challenges and strategies of the foreign teachers in teaching conversation subjects in the Junior High School of Amanatul Ummah Boarding School. The foreign teachers encountered several challenges related to the students' understanding, engagement, teaching materials. Regarding the challenges, the foreign teachers applied some strategies as a solution.

### ***Challenge and strategy 1***

The first challenge the foreign teachers encountered was the students' understanding. Since the teaching of conversation subjects was intended to train the students' speaking skills, the foreign teachers used full English in teaching. The problem was not all the students were able to understand what the teachers were explaining and instructing. The student's understanding related to the teaching materials become a challenge in teaching.

*“I use English when I am teaching but when some students do not understand, I make my speaking simpler. When the students still do not understand, then I use Bahasa Indonesia. I also use sound system and laptop in teaching”.*

When the students do not understand what the teachers say, the foreign teachers use Bahasa Indonesia that becomes the students' first language. The problems related to the students' understanding were solved by using Bahasa Indonesia only when the students could not understand English but when the students could understand what the foreign teachers say in English, then the foreign teachers did not need to translate it in Bahasa Indonesia. The foreign teachers also tried to use digital tools to support the teaching to make the students easier to understand the materials. In addition, the foreign teachers also used more simple language or simple English expressions.

### ***Challenge and strategy 2***

The second challenge was related to the students' engagement in actively participating during the teaching and learning conversation subject. The students felt sleepy since they woke up very early in the morning. It was a boarding school that the students do not only study for school. They have other activities that required them to wake up very early in the morning. It was two-thirty in the morning. That condition made

the students sleepy during school time and was not engaged actively in the learning (Taras & Potts-Datema, 2005). The sleeping behavior in the class can be trouble since it affects the students' performance and achievement (Chiang et al., 2014; Okano et al., 2019; Toyong, 2020).

*“When the students sleep in my class, I ask them to wake up and say come one wake up. Do not sleep. This is not a hotel or dormitory. They replied sir, we wake up at two-thirty. For this case, I bring games to make them active but the class then becomes very noisy. For me, that's okay as long as they are not sleeping”.*

The strategies the foreign teachers applied were by using a persuasive approach. The teachers said to the students not to sleep because it was not a hotel or a dormitory. That was not enough. Then the teachers used games for teaching conversation. When the foreign teachers used games as the solution, the class became very noisy but that was not a problem as long as the students learned actively and engaged in the teaching and learning.

The challenges related to the students' engagement was due to the characteristic of some students that broke the rules. Some students were considered to be a trouble makers in the class. Disruptive behavior could affect negatively teaching and learning. The foreign teachers had to deal with the problems and the teachers tried their best to handle the behavior

*“Some students are very naughty. They don't want to follow what I want them to do. They sleep during my class and go outside without my permission. Knowing this case, I try my best to control them but when I cannot do that, I consult their homeroom teachers”.*

Taking a look at the challenge, the foreign teachers tried their best in creating a good atmosphere for teaching conversation. Regarding the students that sleep during the class and the students that go outside the class without any permission, the teachers tried to consult with the student's homeroom teacher to find the best solution for those problems.

### **Challenge and strategy 3**

The third challenge was related to the teaching materials. The foreign teachers encountered challenges related to the preparation of the teaching materials about what to teach and how to teach it. The strategies the foreign teachers used were by planning the steps before teaching by writing the steps of teaching. The teaching materials were taken from several sources offline and online. The sources were considered to be useful for teaching. They were the existing books, internets, and discussions with other teachers.

*”Related to teaching materials, I took it from the existing books, internet, and discussion with English teachers. I make a plan before teaching about what materials I should teach and what the students should do after I explain. I write the steps on my cell phone”*

Creating a plan before teaching and using books, internets, and discussion with other teachers became the strategies done by the foreign teachers in solving the problems

related to the teaching materials in teaching conversation subjects. The foreign teachers prepared the books, took materials from the internet, and discuss with other teachers to decide the teaching materials.

### **Conclusion**

Teaching English in a private school is different from a state school especially teaching English in a boarding school. In Junior High School of Amanatul Ummah Boarding School, there was a subject as the modification of English subject. The name of the subject was conversation. The subject was English subject but the focus was to train the students' speaking skills.

The teaching of conversation in the boarding school was handled by foreign teachers. The foreign teachers were Afghanistan teachers. However, the foreign teachers had to deal with some challenges in teaching conversation. The challenges were related to the students' understanding, engagement, and the teaching materials.

Dealing with the challenges, the foreign teachers applied some strategies. Related to the student's understanding, the foreign teachers tried to use digital tools, simplify the English expressions, and use Bahasa Indonesia to make the students easier in understand what they are learning. The next strategy was addressed to the challenge related to the students' engagement. The foreign teachers used some games and consult with the homeroom teacher to create a better atmosphere of the teaching and learning while regarding the teaching materials, the foreign teachers made a plan before teaching and prepared the teaching materials from the existing books, internets, and discuss results with other teachers.

This research was limited to the challenges and strategies of the foreign teachers in teaching conversation at a junior high level in a boarding school. The further researcher was expected to conduct similar research that focused on the teaching of a specific material, different school levels, and different foreign participants.

### **Authors' Contributions**

Lestari Budianto as the first author contributed to writing and composing the research articles. He also contributed to conducting a semi-structured interview with one of the participants. Iwan Hadi and Siti Zulaiha as the second and the third authors contributed in providing, analyzing the data, and creating power points for the oral presentation at the conference.

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