



# A Relation Between Efl Students' Needs And Teachers' Teaching Strategies To Encourage Students' Involvement

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### Abstract

Online English teaching and learning during the pandemic is challenging for teachers and students. One of the problems encountered by teachers is maintaining students' involvement in class discussions. To maintain students' involvement, it is important to implement strategies that meet students' needs. This study aims at describing students' objective and subjective needs in learning English. This study was descriptive qualitative in nature. It was conducted at SD Daniel Creative School, Semarang. 184 students and 6 English teachers were involved in this study. This study used a questionnaire, classroom observation sheet, and interview as the instruments. The result revealed that for objective needs, many students still needed help in mastering some areas, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. For subjective needs, many students had low self-confidence and self-esteem in learning English. In addition, the students also mentioned their expectations of teachers' teaching strategies. The observation showed that the strategies implemented by the teachers were effective to fulfill students' needs and to encourage their involvement in class discussions. Unfortunately, the teachers did not implement all the strategies consistently to fulfill students' needs. As the result, students' involvement was still low. Thus, this study implies a suggestion for English teachers of the school and English teachers, in general, to consistently implement teaching strategies that meet students' needs to encourage students' involvement.

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## INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2019, the world was rocked by the news of the deadly Coronavirus Disease (COVID -19) outbreak. As an act to suppress the spread of the disease, the government of Indonesia decided to shut down many offices, malls, and stores, including educational institutions across the country. Thus, there was a sudden, rapid shift from conventional education to distance and virtual learning.

During conventional face-to-face learning, teaching and learning English has become a challenging process for both teachers and students, especially in the EFL context (Almekhlafi and Nagaratman, 2011). The challenge lies in the lack of exposure to authentic language use (Hosni, 2014). Thus, online learning adds even more challenges to English teachers especially those in elementary schools. First, teachers and students faced major challenges related to the lack of proper devices and internet connection (Aryanti, 2020). Second, during online learning, students' involvement in class discussions tends to be low.

One of the schools implementing distance virtual learning is SD Daniel Creative School. This school was established in 2009. This school implemented a conventional face-to-face learning process until the COVID-19 pandemic required it to make a shift to distance virtual learning. The school provided a proper internet connection and compatible devices for teachers to conduct the teaching and learning process. However, the teachers still encountered some problems. The first problem is related to the lack of proper internet connection and devices of some students. Some students were anxious since they had a poor internet connection and thus, sometimes they missed some parts of the discussion. Even though extra lessons were provided for them, apparently students were still anxious and worried. The second problem we encountered was the low involvement of students in class discussions. Interaction between teachers and students was limited by the screen. Thus, maintaining students' engagement in the class was a challenge teacher should encounter.

Teachers should apply various teaching strategies to help students learn English effectively and get involved in activities and discussions. Students, on the other hand, managed to use various ways to help them grab the knowledge from the activities and discussion effectively. Nonetheless, teaching strategies and methodologies alone are not sufficient to achieve the desired goal in English teaching and learning. Students' needs play an important role in the English teaching and learning process. Petraki (2010) claimed that students' different backgrounds and experiences resulted in different needs of each individual, and those needs should be taken into account because they affect their language mastery. Ramani and Pushpanathan (2015) stated that by analyzing students' needs, teachers can spot a gap between students' ability and their needs in learning English. Thus, there should be a collaboration between students' needs and teachers' teaching strategies since the midpoint of teaching and learning activities is not only on the teacher but also on the learners.

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the implementation of teaching strategies in the classroom. Many of them focused on comparing various teaching strategies implemented in English classes and investigating whether or not the strategies are effective to improve a certain skill. For example, Hoque (2017) conducted a study about the use of context-based strategies for teaching vocabulary. The study revealed that some teaching techniques were not effective and thus influence learners in developing vocabulary. There are only a few studies investigating students' needs in relation to teachers' strategies to encourage students' involvement in teaching English.

Based on the issues stated in the background of the study, we attempted to figure out the relation between students' needs and teachers' teaching strategies and how the relation encourages students' involvement in English classes. This study aims to answer the following objectives:

1. To explain students' objective and subjective needs in learning English

2. To explain strategies implemented by the English teachers of the school to teach English.
3. To explain the relation between students' needs and teachers' teaching strategies in English teaching and learning.
4. To explain how the relation between students' needs and teachers' teaching strategies encourages students' involvement in English classes.

From the research findings, we hope that this research provides adequate and meaningful information for English teachers in the school and other schools to implement appropriate teaching strategies to fulfill students' needs and to encourage their involvement in class discussions.

## METHODS

This study is assumed to describe thoroughly students' objective and subjective needs in online English classes, teacher's strategies and their purposes in using the strategies when they were teaching online, and to evaluate whether the strategies the teachers use in teaching English are appropriate and meet the students' objective and subjective needs.

This study was conducted at SD Daniel Creative School, located in Semarang, Central Java. The participants of this study were 184 students and 6 English teachers of grade 4-6. A purposive sampling technique was used in choosing the participants. The school was chosen simply because the researcher was a teacher in the school, thus the result of the research could be directly implemented in the school and it gave a huge contribution to EFL teaching and learning process in the school. Grade 4-6 were chosen instead of grades 1-3 because they have developed their reading and speaking skill, thus they could fill in the questionnaires themselves, stated their opinion, and answered questions by themselves when they were being interviewed.

Thus, the data obtained from the questionnaire and interview was valid since there was no interference from parents or guardians.

This study is descriptive qualitative in nature. The instruments of the study were a reflective questionnaire, classroom observation sheet, and interview. To gather data from the participants. First, the researcher asked for the participants' willingness to complete a form of reflective questionnaires (statements) arranged by the researchers based on students' subjective and objective needs in learning English by Brindley (1984) in Nunan (1999). The statements that were put on the reflective form were related to students' factual information in learning English, such as students' perceived language proficiency, language difficulties, and their perceived demand of language in real communication situations as their objective needs. The statements were also related to students' expectations, students' self-confidence, and self-esteem as their subjective needs. The researcher initially piloted the instrument before distributing the instrument to the participants. After that, the researcher analyzed the data to see the strength, weaknesses, and completeness of information to answer the research question. Finally, the researcher distributed the instrument to the participants of the research. To analyze the data from the participants, the researchers started by analyzing and drawing the percentage of students' responses to the statements through a calculation using Likert Scale. After that, the researcher triangulated the data gained from the instrument to figure out students' needs in learning English. The needs were diagnosed and categorized into types of needs analysis namely subjective needs and objective needs, as elaborated by Brindley (1984) in Nunan (1999). The data, then, was discussed descriptively.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result of the questionnaire, observation, and interview showed that some teachers implemented strategies that met the needs of the students. On the other hand, some

other teachers did not implement strategies that met the needs of the students.

### **Students' Objective and Subjective Needs**

The study revealed that students of SD Daniel Creative School had some objective and subjective needs in learning English. The objective needs were related to students' factual information in learning English, namely students' perceived language proficiency, language difficulties, and the demand for language in real communication. The study revealed that the students needed help in mastering some areas. 5% of them had problems mastering the listening skill, 2% of them needed help with reading comprehension, 11% of them needed help in improving their speaking skill, 79% of them needed help with vocabulary, and 85% of them needed help in understanding grammar. Meanwhile, the subjective needs were related to students' self-confidence, self-esteem, and expectation in learning English. For subjective needs, the study revealed that a quite significant number of students had low self-efficacy. Many of them felt discouraged and had low self-confidence in learning English. This finding was similar to the finding of a previous study conducted by Banu et al., (2018) which showed that most students had low self-efficacy in learning to write in English. Thus, it can be said that low self-efficacy is a challenge many students face in learning English, whatever skill it is. In addition, most students preferred to have group work because it would help them enjoy the lesson and feel less burdened in the classes. This result corresponds to the theory proposed by Harmer (2001) who stated that young learners naturally learn something from what they interact with. They are by nature attention

seekers who seek individual attention and approval from their surroundings. That is why in this study, the students enjoy working together with their friends. The students also enjoyed the classes when their teachers delivered their explanations clearly, provided enough feedback, and gave motivation to them during the lessons.

### **Teachers' Teaching Strategies**

The study revealed that the teachers implemented some strategies in their teaching and learning process such as using authentic materials, eliciting background knowledge, applying context-based teaching, giving feedback and comprehension checks, establishing habits and routines, giving a clear explanation, implementing cooperative learning, providing higher-order thinking skill, providing an interesting and non-threatening learning environment, motivating Students, and integrating all language skills. However, the teachers did not implement all of the strategies in their classes. They only implemented some strategies in their classes.

### **The Relation Between Students' Needs and Teachers' Teaching Strategies**

All the implemented strategies were effective to fulfill students' needs. Unfortunately, not all teachers implemented these strategies consistently in their classes. One strategy, for example, was only implemented by some teachers (not all teachers) and those teachers implemented the strategy once or twice in their classes. As the result, students' needs were not optimally fulfilled in the classes. In the interview, the teachers stated that they did not implement the strategy consistently because first, they did not aware of students' needs and the strategies

they implemented in their classes, and second, they had limited time to implement those strategies in their classes.

### **How the Relation Between Students' Needs and Teachers' Teaching Strategies Encourages Students' Involvement**

#### Eliciting Background Knowledge

The finding showed that Teacher 1, Teacher 3, Teacher 4, and Teacher 5 implemented the strategy to teach reading comprehension by asking the students to share their experiences about the topics they were about to discuss. The observation showed that the students were excited about the discussion and raised their hands to share their experiences. From the finding, we could observe that most students were engaged and actively involved in the discussion. This finding also corresponds to the theory proposed by Linse & Nunan (2005) who stated that one of the effective ways to teach young learners is to build a schema that can be done by relating the topic of the lesson with students' background knowledge.

#### Applying Context-Based Teaching

The finding showed that some teachers put the lessons and discussions in a real-life context. The observation showed that when those teachers implemented this strategy, many students were involved in the discussion by sharing their own experiences. If we refer to the finding in this study about students' objective needs, a lot of students had difficulties in mastering some aspects, such as listening skills, reading skills, speaking skills, writing skills, vocabulary, and grammar. Those difficulties became a challenge that hindered their communication skill. Thus, teaching language in context would help them develop their communication skill and thus they could be more involved in the class discussion confidently using their communication skill. One of the principles of language learning is to learn a language in context to practice the language in a communicative context (Rieken et al.,1993). That can be said if all the teachers teach listening skills, reading skills, speaking skills, writing

skills, vocabulary, and grammar in a real communicative context, the students would be more involved in the discussion using their communication skills.

#### Giving Feedback and Comprehension Check

The finding showed that some teachers gave feedback to the students while some other teachers did not give feedback or input to students' answers in the classes. The observation showed that teachers' feedback did not give a significant influence on students' engagement in the classes. In the observation, many students were still engaged in the discussion even though the teachers did not give feedback to them. This finding revealed that teachers' feedback for young learners in this school did not have a significant influence on students' engagement in English classes.

#### Establishing Habits and Routines

The finding showed that all teachers implemented habits and routines in their classes by greeting the students, turning on their cameras, and preparing their books. The observation showed that the students were engaged in the classes. They greeted the teachers back and turned on their cameras. Some of them stated that they were ready for the lessons, and some other students were showing their books to the cameras as a sign that they were ready for the lesson. This finding was in accordance with the theory of Burden (2003) who stated that habits and routines were effective for controlling students' behavior since the students knew what to expect and what is expected from them. If students knew what to expect and what to do, they would be more confident and thus, they could be more involved in classroom discussions. It was also in accordance with Colvin & Lazar, (1995) who stated that habits and routines give students more opportunities to learn. The feeling of having more opportunities to learn would make them more engaged in classroom discussions.

#### Giving Clear Explanation

The finding showed that some teachers gave a clear explanation to the students by adjusting their speed and intonation in speaking. They also adjusted their word choice and

simplified the language whenever needed. The observation revealed that the students were engaged in the discussion. When the teachers simplified the language, for example, the students understood what the teachers meant and thus they were involved in the discussion by answering the teachers' questions or by stating their opinion. This finding was correlated to a study conducted by Stroet et al., (2013) who revealed that teachers' understandable, explicit, and detailed instructions were positively associated with students' involvement. As teachers of young learners, English teachers at the school should always be mindful of the way they explain the materials. They need to make sure all materials are delivered in small chunks with some pauses considering students' nature to have a limitation of concentration span (Henson and Janke, 1984). If the teachers did not understand this nature, students' involvement would be low, as found out by Tong (2020) that one of the factors causing students to have low participation in class is the lack of concentration.

#### Implementing Cooperative Learning

Some teachers implemented a principle of cooperative language teaching in their classes. The principle they implemented was keeping students' talk and teachers' talk balanced. The observation showed that this strategy was effective to boost students' involvement in class discussions. Being given enough time to speak up about their ideas and opinion, they looked excited and engaged in the discussion. Student 2 was interviewed and he stated that the lesson was not boring when his teacher asked some questions and involved the students in the discussions. In addition, he was excited because he could tell his experience or state his opinion to his friends. Tran (2019) found that cooperative learning was proven effective in enhancing students' engagement in learning. Referring to this theory, all teachers should implement cooperative teaching and learn consistently in their classes. In addition, instead of just implementing one principle of cooperative learning, keeping teachers' talk and students' talk balanced, the teachers could implement more principles of cooperative learning, such as group

work in their teaching and learning process since group and pair work was proven effective in language teaching and learning (Tiwari, 2021).

#### Cultivating Higher-Order of Thinking Skill

The finding showed that only Teacher 4 implemented higher-order thinking skills in her classes. She encouraged her students to answer her questions and then asked more questions to elaborate on their critical thinking skills. The observation showed that many students were engaged in the discussions by raising their hands and stating their opinion. Dewey (1916), cited in Kuhn (1999) argued that students' critical thinking was correlated to their engagement in a problem. In addition, Setyarini et al., (2018) found in their study that implementing higher-order thinking skills in classroom activities was proven to increase students' engagement. In addition, they found out that teachers could stimulate students' higher-order thinking skills by using some open-ended questions such as 'why, why if, how, how about, and if you were'? That is to say, critical thinking skill was proven effective to improve students' engagement in learning both theoretically and practically. To implement critical thinking skills effectively, Kholisoh & Bharati (2017) suggested English teachers combine some questioning strategies, such as wait time, repetition, paraphrasing, and simplifying.

#### Providing an Interesting and Non-Threatening Learning Environment

The finding showed that some teachers provided interesting and non-threatening learning environments in some ways. They adjusted their teaching activity, chose materials that were interesting for the students, and told some jokes to make the classes less threatening. The observation showed that the students were engaged in the discussions. They stated their opinion or answered questions given by the teachers excitedly. Student 3 and Student 4 were interviewed and they stated that they loved the class taught by Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 because the teachers were funny. In addition, they were not afraid to ask questions in the classes taught by Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 because the classes were fun and were not scary. From the finding,

we could conclude that if classes are less threatening, students would relax and they could participate more actively in class discussions. This finding corresponds to the finding of Sarjan (2017) who observed teaching strategies in listening classes. He found out that students were more involved in listening classes when their lecturers created non-threatening atmosphere during the teaching and learning process. In addition, this study also corresponds to the study conducted by Mustapha et al., (2010) who found out that one of the important factors that affected students' participation was teachers' skill to create a positive learning environment. In conclusion, all teachers should always create a positive and non-threatening learning environment to boost students' involvement in class discussions.

#### Motivating Students

The finding showed that some teachers gave motivation to their students in the classes. They motivated their students to answer questions they gave in the classes. The observation showed that some students did not look confident to answer questions from the teachers. But, after being motivated by the teachers, they raised their hands and stated their answers, followed by some other students. Abdullah et al. (2012) found in their study that students with high self-efficacy were motivated and became more confident to be more active in class discussions. Referring to the finding, all teachers should always give enough encouragement to students who need to be motivated to make them more active and involved in class discussions because motivation is a key principle contributing to students' successful learning (Brown & Lee, 2015).

#### **CONCLUSION**

Some conclusions could be drawn after analyzing and discussing the result of this study. First, the study revealed that students of SD Daniel Creative School had some objective needs in relation to their perceived language proficiency, language difficulties, and the demand for language use in real communication.

This study also revealed the subjective needs of the students as follows: low self-efficacy and self-confidence in learning English, preference to work in groups, and expectation for teachers to explain materials clearly, provide enough feedback, and give motivation for them during the lessons.

The finding showed that teachers implemented some strategies in their teaching and learning process such as using authentic materials, eliciting background knowledge, applying context-based teaching, giving feedback and comprehension checks, establishing habits and routines, giving a clear explanation, implementing cooperative learning, providing higher-order thinking skill, providing an interesting and non-threatening learning environment, motivating Students, and integrating all language skills.

All the implemented strategies were effective to fulfill students' needs. Unfortunately, not all teachers implemented these strategies consistently in their classes because they did not aware of the students' needs and also because they had limited time. That is to say, students' needs were not optimally fulfilled by the teachers' teaching strategies.

When the needs of the students were fulfilled by the teachers' teaching strategies, the students became more engaged and involved in class discussions. The students enjoyed the lessons and became less burdened and as the result, they became more confident to answer teachers' questions or to tell their idea.

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