

EMPOWERMENT IN MADRASAH: WHAT ENGLISH TEACHERS HAVE TO SAY

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Abstract

Empowerment is often defined by impact, competence, and meaningfulness (Frymier, Shulman, & Houser, 1996). In order to empower students, English teachers have to be empowered themselves. However, research indicates teachers of English in madrasahs is still underperformance. Thus, this paper is attempted to explain the aspects and factors relating to empowerment issues in the contexts of the madrasahs in Indonesia. Despite of small number of madrasah that have high qualified performances in instructional practices, public madrasahs still sound unsatisfying comparing to the secular schools. The issue of teachers and learners' voices are still lack of attention in both school and instructional decision making. As the results, participation and engagement in English learning are still remaining less appreciation in term of meaningful learning both for teachers and students.

Keywords: *empowerment, madrasah, decision-making, voice, meaningful learning, learning involvement*

Introduction

Madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools which are mostly known for their doctrines, are getting for modernized. In the context of Indonesian educational system, madrasah is an integral part of nasional educational system which has no exception from the general education under the supervision of ministry of education and culture affair (Ali, Kos, Liezt, Nugroho, & Emilia, 2011; Al-jawi, 2012).

Today, there is rapid development of madrasahs in the country. There are about 60.000s madrasahs in this country (Kemenag RI, n.d.). However, issues of qualities are still dominated. Consequently, modern madrasahs should improve their competitiveness due to the instructional practices, e.g. English instruction, to face the global orientation, global demand.

Ali, Kos, Liezt, Nugroho, Furqon and Emilia (2011) published their research on the quality of the madrasahs in Indonesia. The results of the study suggest the main findings: qualified teacher schools has good learning achievement, e.g. S1 teachers are likely more capable than the bachelors. Most the schools live in Java, whereas in the east and in the west of Indonesia, the quality is still low. Students hope to have meaningful learning so that they can make it to prepare for their future. They also displayed the data of World Bank in 2005 shows that the quality of the learning achievement of madrasahs are still low comparing to state schools in Indonesia (Newhouse & Beegle, 2005 as cited in Ali et al., 2011).

Learning meaningfulness is lately mostly discussed within the Indonesian curriculum renewal (Larson, 2014). Authentic materials are highly suggested

to empower language class. This, of course, implies harder works from the English teachers as the available authentic materials should be adapted. Teachers have to make some revisions to conform the language learners. However, though this way, both English teachers and students will find something more in their English learning.

At the same time, in the context of English learning, the issue of empowerment is now trending not only in the context of madrasahs but also in the context of public schools. Empowerment is likely as key issues in learning success in the latest era reflected in the themes of English Language Teaching conferences (see for example www.iclet.unswagati.ac.id ; <http://eswe2017.wixsite.com/conference>).

Different from the western educational paradigm which adopts empowerment from long years ago (see for example Zimmerman, 1995; Duhon-Haynes, 1996), the implementation of empowerment in the context of Indonesian schooling system is still rare. Some research indicate empowerment, but the dimensional measurement is partially in the area of cognition (see for example Widihartanti, 2014; Handoko, 2014; Marwan, 2015).

In the context of competitiveness, both learning outputs and outcomes of the madrasahs in Indonesian are demanded to improve (Kemendiknas, 2013). As has been already discussed previously, the learning quality of the madrasahs are challenged in all areas: teachers, and students. Regarding to the English learning quality, the English teachers and the students have to improve their rate of participation so that their learning participation and involvement.

In the 21st learning paradigm, English skill has to be incorporated in other soft-

skill such as STEM, critical thinking, collaboration and networking. Therefore, students are best to learn in groups so that they are gradually learning how to appreciate other students' work. Through this, they are involved in task/project decision making. Everyone will participate in the discussion. Through this way, learning engagement will develop. In long term, students will find their English learning meaningful for their lives-having the impact.

The study conducted by Misdi, Hartini, & Mahaputri (2015) indicates how English teacher of Madrasahs persistent for improvement. This situation, at least, suggests the general condition of English language teaching in madrasah context in Indonesia. In short, in order to be competitive English teachers and learners, the elearning paradigm should be shifted.

To conclude, it is important to increase and develop learning participation and involvement. The engagement of English teachers and language learners, especially in madrasah, will lead to increasing learning quality and it is hoped, as the quality improved, learning meaningfulness will impact students' competence. Being dependent on the only existing instructional source such as minimal design in national curriculum may result poor initiatives for innovation (see Misdi, Hartini, & Mahaputri, 2015). Thus, by empowering both students and teachers, problems encountered in English class (see Musthafa, 2001; Yulia, 2013) can be overcome.

Empowerment: A definition

There are many definition and concept of empowerment. Empowerment is an interactive process that occurs between individuals and their environment. Empowerment is defined as a set of values, attitudes and behaviours (Avidov-Ungar, Friedman, & Olshtain, 2014). In

psychological definition, empowerment is meant to attain strength to perform the role with confidence (Ashcroft, 1987 as cited in Avido-Ungar, 2014:714). Thus, empowerment is a personal feeling of having confidence to performance the tasks.

Empowerment has been defined as a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems (Short, 1994). Empowered students are able to complete their tasks with confidence. They know what and how to do the tasks. They are motivated to do and to performance the projects. In the sense of teachers, empowered teachers are able to influence school and staff's decision making. In short, it is hard to empower students when the English teachers are powerless.

Methods for empowering both teachers and language learners

a) Ownership

Ownership gives teachers the sense that they have as much right as administrators to make changes. For language learners, ownership for them is "the their feeling that the classroom is theirs, too, not just the teacher's.

Through ownership of the classroom, children get to engage in activities that are interesting to them. They even get to participate in decisions about the classroom (Robinson, 1994, p. 154-155).

b) Choice

Teachers should be able to make choices about curriculum, instructional strategies, materials, even staff. Choices are also about the language learners. Choice for children may take many forms. They may choose what they want to study, how they will study it, which centres or projects they would like to experience and how long they will spend on learning experiences. The freedom to choose

motivates and engages teachers and students alike. Thus, Wasserman (1991) suggests that "the right of children to choose and the right of teachers to choose is a key to empowerment" (p. xii).

c) Autonomy

Teachers are hoped to restructure their expertise into a professional, independent, autonomous teaches as learning facilitators. They are able to create a democratic situation of learning process in the classroom to produce learning outcomes (Sanaky, 2005).

Seen as psychological perspective, learner autonomy is seen as broader attitudes and cognitive abilities that enable the learner to take responsibility for his/her own learning. Teachers need to be able to set their own goals and action plans, and children should be able to set their own goals and chart their own progress.

Even teachers are actively teaching, students are responsible on the successful learning. It means that students should be autonomous learners. An autonomous learner is able to make planning and organizing his own learning experiences, know domains of his interest for each subject, observe his own learning progress, find his own ways to learn and exercise, (be enthusiastic to language and language learning and have self-efficacy to use the language and ask for helps for some difficulties (Nurkamto, 2009).

d) Decision-making

Empowered teachers decide what to teach, how to teach, what materials to use and how to assess students. Empowered children also make decisions that affect the classroom, including what topics to pursue and how to implement the curricular choices. Empowered children make decisions that count; consequently, they display increased independence, thoughtfulness and originality. Children

learn how to make decisions by making decisions, not by following directions (Kohn, 1993 as cited in Stone, 1995).

Traditionally, teachers are left in school decision making, e.g. creating instructional policy (Stone, 1995). Albright (2002:150) suggests a real interesting direction of teacher's performing by combining learning and supervising as teacher's classroom practices by involving students' participation in decision making thought personal journal (Albright, 2000). Albright found and illustrated the particular way in which issues of power arose in the class by using electronic bulletin board postings, students' journal, and audiovisual tapes of classroom interactions.

Since the English teachers acted as the main actors in learning in madrasahs, often were students neglected in instructional design, e.g. in task selection used in the class. The research participants also stated that they decided what to be taught themselves according to the curriculum as one of the English teacher voice.

No. Neither students or other parties were involved in the selection and the use of teaching materials (Misdi et al., 2015).

Again, this perception is consequently costly since learners were not involved in decision making relating to what they will to learn. In other words, students' voice was less appreciated to boost learning quality (Short, 1994; Zimmerman, 2005).

What English Teachers have to Say?

In designing instruction, English teachers have to say “yes” to the followings

1. In the selection of teaching approaches (methods, techniques, and strategies)

English teaches have to listen to what their students' needs. This implies learners' power is accommodated meaning that learners will have their voice involved. Student-centeredness is highly appreciated. Small group discussion and project-based learning play important roles in providing feelings of empowered. Through this approaches, learning ownership is hoped established.

2. In the material selection

Authentic learning materials are often desirable for empowering language learners meaning that daily activities and experiences are included in their classroom activities.

3. In designing learning tasks

Multiple tasks are set to provide students options for completion. Tasks, different from exercises, will provide students competence-relevant to their lives.

4. In the assessment design

Even not always, it is important for teachers to include students to evaluate learning. This may take many forms, e.g. including peer assessment in evaluation students' performances.

5. The instructional should appreciate the 21st skills in education.

Critical thinking, collaborative, the use of ICT-based learning, networking, STEM are among the elements of the paradigms. This methods will help students' readiness to face their future lives.

Before course take place, English teachers have to say “yes” to the followings

1. Learning contract

As stated as a contract, there must be some negotiation what have to do (Dos) and what have NOT to do (DON'Ts). This is important as students will find themselves more responsible to their own learning.

2. Learning syllabus should be given before the course starts.

Students will learn better when they know what and how the course will take place. This is important.

In the classroom, English teachers have to say “yes” to the followings

1. Provide students space to practice

Teachers have to create space for students to perform their English in multiple modes, e.g. reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Students have time to be involved in classroom discussion through small group discussion, peer review, role-play etc. In this case, the importance is avoiding teachers' domination in turn-taking. It is important to keep in mind teachers are learning facilitators. Thus, to be good facilitators, of course, teachers have to create and prepare the system/software named designs.

2. Appreciate students' efforts

Having and doing mistakes, e.g. spelling, grammar, pronunciation, etc. are parts of learning. This is the power of learning. Banning students on these experiences is fatal because they will feel disempowering, e.g. Having feelings of fear, demotivated.

Post Teaching

1. Engage in online discussion

It is important to apply online services as learning platforms. Edmodo, googleclass, moodle, for examples, are now available and easily accessed by both teachers and students. Teachers and students are possible to have alive discussion online through learning platform as the platforms mentioned are secured.

Online classroom as blended learning is empowering as students are possibly engaged in further discussion including post-teaching reflection (Misdi, 2016a; Misdi, 2016b). Online survey or polling toward students' learning satisfaction is

powerful tool to listen students' voice. This is important to develop the instructions.

2. Provide further (the following up) small task/project

It is important for teachers to follow up the today-lesson by providing small projects/tasks as tool for connecting the today-discussion and their world outside of the classroom atmosphere. There, students are involved in peer projects. Thus, students practice what they have learned in the classroom.

3. Invite students' feedback to teacher' performance and instruction

In his study, Misdi (2016) found that knowing what students' voice and inputs is very helpful to develop and increase the quality of instructional practices. Feedback is mostly forgotten to be one of teaching strategies to develop critical teaching and learning as one comment of the English teacher's rarely was feedback given (Misdi et al., 2015).

Assessing empowerment:

In 1990s, a proposal of learning empowerment appeared. It was Ann Brainbridge Frymier, Gary M. Shulman, and Marian Houser introduced a measurement scale of empowerment for the first time (see Frymier et al., 1996; Frymier & Houser, 1999). The measurement comprises three dimensions: learning impact, competence, and meaningfulness. The sample of the statements are provided as attachment.

Conclusion

Different from the traditional approach, teaching English for empowerment is now demanded in the twenty-first century of education. In the twenty-first century learning paradigms, a typical task-based language teaching or task-based instruction is powerful to provide students meaningful learning experiences. Students are really

appreciated to choose and complete learning task and projects.

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Sample of questionnaires and interview relating to learner' empowerment

INTERVIEW POINTERS

In advanced, the themes related to the **Impact, meaningful and competence** are used to interview the participants (language learners before, during, and after the class).

(Y=Yes, No= No, Ns=Not sure)

IMPACT	Y N Ns
1. Do you have any power to make a different in how things are done in the class? How can you ensure you have the power?	□ □ □
2. Do you have any choice in the methods you can use to perform the work? How can you ensure you have any choice in this case?	□ □ □
3. Do you think your participation is important to the success of the class? How can you ensure your participation is important?	□ □ □
4. Do you have any freedom to choose among options in the class How can you ensure you have the freedom in this case?	□ □ □
5. Do you have ability to make an impact on the way things are run in the class? How can you ensure about this?	□ □ □
6. Do you think alternative approaches to learning are made to encourage in the class? How can you ensure about this?	□ □ □
7. Do you have any opportunities to contribute to the learning of others in the class? In what cases do you have these opportunities?	□ □ □
8. Do you have any opportunities to make important decisions in the class? How you ensure about these opportunities?	□ □ □
9. Do you have any abilities to make influence what happens in the class? In what influence is it?	□ □ □
10. Do you have any power to create a supportive learning environment in the class? How can you explain this power?	□ □ □
11. Do you think your contribution to the class makes difference? In what difference is your contribution?	□ □ □
12. Do you have any abilities to determine how tasks can be performed? How can you ensure your abilities in this case?	□ □ □
13. Do you make a difference in the learning that goes on in the class? In what situation do you make a difference?	□ □ □
14. Do you have any freedom to choose in the class? In what situation is the freedom you have?	□ □ □
15. Do you have any abilities to influence the teacher? In what situation do you influence the teacher?	□ □ □
16. Do you feel appreciated in the class? In what situation is appreciation given?	□ □ □

MEANINGFULNESS

- 1. Do you feel the tasks required of you in the class are personally meaningful?
How can you ensure it is personally meaningful?
- 2. Do you usually look forward to going to the class?
Why do you commit on this?
- 3. Do you find the class is exciting?
How can you find it exciting in this case?
- 4. Don't you feel the class is boring?
To what extent you don't feel it boring?
- 5. Do you find the class is interesting?
In what situation is it interesting?
- 6. Do find the tasks required of you in the class are valuable to you?
How is it valuable to you?
- 7. Do you think the information in the class is useful?
How is it useful?
- 8. Do think the course will help you achieve your future goals?
Why is it helpful for your future?
- 9. Do feel that the tasks required in the course are a waste of your time?
In what situation do you feel it?
- 10. Do you think the class is not important to you?
Why do say so?

COMPETENCE:

- 1. Do you feel confident that she/he can adequately perform your duties?
In what situation is it?
- 2. Do you feel intimidated by what is required of you in the class?
How can you ensure about this?
- 3. Do you posses the necessary skills to perform successfully in the class?
How do you ensure about this?
- 4. Do you feel unable to do the work in the class?
In what situation is it?
- 5. Do you believe that you are capable of achieving your goals in the class?
How can you ensure about your capability?
- 6. Do you have faith in your ability to do well in the class?
How can you ensure this?
- 7. Do you have the qualification to succeed in the class?
How can you tell about your qualification in this context?
- 8. Are you lack of confidence in your ability to perform the tasks in the class?
How can you say so?
- 9. Do you feel very competent in the class?
In what extent, do feel this?

(Source: Frymier, Shulman and Houser, 1996)