

TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG MOSLEM LEARNERS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM AN EXPANDING CIRCLE COUNTRY

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: February 2023 Revised: March 2023 Published: April 2023	<i>A large number of research projects show an increasing interest in exploring English language teaching for young learners. Until recently, however, there has been little discussion about young Moslem learners who learn English in an expanding circle country. The purpose of this study was to provide a rich description related to the distinctive features of English teaching for young Moslem learners and to describe some plausible English teaching steps for learners. Following a case study design, this article explores informal English teaching involving seventeen young Moslem learners that took place at a mosque located in Lampung province, Indonesia. The researcher played the role of a key instrument who observed and made sense of the teaching process. The findings of the study show that among the noticeable features are dress code and venue, topics, the use of Islamic phrases, and translanguaging. As for the teaching steps, six steps are proposed including opening, performing prayer, storytelling, highlighting high-frequency words, memorizing relevant saying, and closing. This study suggests that the tradition and the linguistic repertoire of the young Moslem learners in the expanding circle country ought to be considered as potential resources to English learning.</i>
Keywords Expanding circle, Islamic education, Moslem learner, TEYL	
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INTRODUCTION

Early start to English language learning has been widely believed advantageous for children who are exposed to English at earlier ages are likely to have better linguistic and cultural competency (Raman et al., 2011). Such beliefs might be true in the broadest sense as an earlier start often implies greater achievement. Nevertheless, English itself follows such categories as a first language, second language, additional language, international language, and foreign language. Differences in English language teaching contexts and circles are of paramount importance to be explored, particularly in the context of English as a foreign language.

Kachru (2005) introduced the three concentric circles of English, namely the inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle. The inner circle represents the countries where English serves as the first or native language like Australia, UK, and USA. The outer circle embraces countries where English is used as a second language such as Singapore, Malaysia, and India. The expanding circle presents the countries where English is placed as a foreign language such as Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Indonesia. While the intersection between expanding circle and teaching English to young learners (TEYL) has been intensively discussed, little attention has been paid to a particular research subject such as young Moslem learners who learn English in an expanding circle country like Indonesia.

Much research on TEYL in the expanding circle countries, and some in the inner and outer countries, has focused on selecting and determining appropriate teaching materials (Olpińska-Szkiełko, 2015; Zuhdi, 2020); stimulating and engaging activities, strategies, techniques, and classroom management (Hartina, 2019; Lesia et al., 2022; Mardasari, 2020; Pratiwi et al., 2021; Yunita et al., 2022); teachers' perspectives and challenges in TEYL (Anggraini, 2018; Kusmaryati, 2020); and teaching English for children with special educational needs (Padurean, 2014). Despite a wealth of articles on TEYL, there has been no thorough discussion made pertaining to teaching English to Moslem children in Indonesia. Moslem children should be a particular research subject in the sense that they follow Islamic educational tradition in the learning process and that they might have a rich linguistic repertoire long before they are exposed to English language. Indonesia is home to the largest Moslem population in the world which makes the investigation of TEYL should not stop at discussing instructional variables like materials, teaching methods, and teachers' perspectives. The discussion should also embrace Islamic teaching tradition and multilingual repertoire landscape.

It is worth noting that the ultimate goals of early childhood education in Islam are distinctive. The goals center upon the teaching of faith and ethics. The former is concerned with teaching *laa ilaaha illa Allah* utterance, lawful and unlawful, worship, loving Allah's messenger and his family, and reciting the Noble Qur'an. The latter pertains to alerting the children to such abuses as lying, theft, insults, and dissolution. Moslem educators are to inculcate such concepts of faith and ethics into the child's souls in any possible ways which are not against the Qur'anic instruction and Prophetic Guidance ('Ulwan, 2004). For Islamic education to happen, family, school, and society should be in an interdependent pattern of relationship (Nudin, 2020). Thus, TEYL for Moslem learners should be made in line, directly or indirectly, with the primary goals of introducing Islamic faith (*tauhid*) and Islamic ethics (*akhlakul karimah*). The achievement of the goals is to be done collaboratively by both formal, like schools, and informal institutions such as outside school education.

To address that situation, the present article is an attempt to depict how English is delivered to Moslem young learners who learn the language informally at a mosque in Metro, Lampung, Indonesia. This study is guided by two research questions, namely: (1) what are the remarkable features of teaching English for young Moslem learners?; and (2) what are the plausible teaching steps of teaching English for young Moslem learners? The answers to both questions should shed light on the salient characteristics of teaching English to young learners at Islamic educational context, and on the culturally appropriate teaching steps for English language teaching held in a mosque.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study applied a qualitative methodology particularly that of a case study as proposed by Creswell (2014). In this case study, the researcher sought to develop an in-depth description and analysis of an activity called English language teaching conducted to young Moslem learners in informal education. The activity took place in a mosque named As-Sakinah located in Metro City, Lampung, Indonesia in June 2022. The researcher conducted a qualitative observation by taking field notes on the young Moslem children's activities and behavior at the research site. This study did not include an interview with the participants.

Research Participants

This case study involved seventeen Moslem children who learned English in As-Sakinah mosque, Lampung. The children were all students of elementary school who learned English occasionally and informally in the mosque after *maghrib* prayer until *isya* prayer. The researcher was the head of the mosque who tried to provide free societal educational support

for the children. He had long taught Islamic teaching, particularly about Qur'an recitation, in the mosque. It was in 2018 the researcher started combining Islamic teaching with English teaching. The children attended the informal English class voluntarily without formal admission and requirements.

Instruments

The researcher was the key instrument in this case study. The researcher collected the data by observing the participants' behavior, taking notes, and reflecting on the data. The researcher was the one who gathered the information needed as the research data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted by preparing raw data of the field notes and images, organizing and preparing data for analysis, reading all the data thoroughly, interrelating description, and interpreting the meaning of description in accordance with the research questions (Creswell, 2014). To validate the data, the researcher used a rich, thick description in conveying the finding. The researcher provided a detailed description of the distinctive features and the teaching steps of English teaching for young Moslem learners.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The findings of the research are made in line with the research questions. The data was organized to reveal distinctive features of teaching English to young Moslem learners, and to depict plausible teaching steps of teaching English for young Moslem learners.

The distinctive features of teaching English to young Moslem learners

While teaching English to young learners around the world might share common characteristics, an Islamic teaching context possesses some notable features. Among the distinctive features are dress code and venue, topics, the use of Islamic phrases, and translanguaging. The following description deals with each of the features.

The first noticeable feature deals with dress code and venue. One of the most salient features of teaching English to young Moslem learners is the dress that teacher and students are wearing. The teacher did not set regulations pertaining to the dress code. That both teacher and students wear Islamic clothing that commonly applies in Indonesia such as *mukena* (prayer *hijab*), *sarongs*, and caps due to venue, tradition, and time. Children came to the mosque mainly to perform *maghrib* and *isya* prayers in suitable and acceptable clothing. The English learning activity occurred between the two prayers. Figure 1. Shows the dress code and mosque background where the teaching took place.



Figure 1. Dress code and venue of English teaching for young Moslem learners

The second distinctive feature was the topics. One of the intended goals of teaching English to young Moslem learners was to introduce basic relevant vocabulary and simple grammar. For this, the topics covered vocabulary related to the classroom, colors, animals, months of the year, numbers, mosque, house, vegetables, fruits, days of the week, Islamic words, body parts, parks, and family. As another goal of teaching English to young Moslem learners was to inculcate Islamic teaching, the topics were combined with the teaching of Islamic values like the importance of learning, the need to pray, and the need to stay away from alcohol. Thus the topics were the intersection between linguistic needs and spiritual needs.

The third particular feature was the use of Islamic phrases. By Islamic phrases in this context refer to some very common Arabic phrases or sentences such as *Bismillah* (in the name of Allah), *Masya Allah* (to a certain extent is equivalent to *my God*), *Alhamdulillah* (all praise is due to Allah). *Bismillah* always occurred in the beginning part of the instructional process, *Masya Allah* was often used to praise the student's achievement, and *Alhamdulillah* was to end the classroom activities. Those phrases have been commonly used even outside the English learning activity.

The fourth remarkable feature found in this study was the translanguaging phenomenon. The use of the Indonesian national language, local regional language, and Islamic phrases or Arabic phrases together was another noticeable feature of teaching English to young Moslem learners in the Indonesian context. The teacher and young Moslem learners in this study were mostly bilingual. The qualitative observation shows that the use of different languages, which were accessible to the students, together was helpful.

The distinctive features of teaching English to young Moslem learners are greatly influenced by the Islamic tradition in Indonesia, the venue where the ELT takes place, the time of the teaching between two prayers, and the multilingual landscape. That the features are likely context-based, further investigation with different teaching contexts might find another different remarkable feature.

The plausible teaching steps of teaching English for young Moslem learners

Six teaching steps might best fit an English class for young Moslem learners taking place in a mosque, namely opening, performing prayer, storytelling, highlighting high-frequency words, memorizing relevant saying, and closing. The steps were the results of the previous teaching activities. Below is the description of each step.

Step 1: Opening

The class was opened by an Islamic greeting and the recitation of *bismillahirrohmaanirrohiim* which means 'In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful.' A Moslem teacher knows that such recitation is of paramount importance due to the Prophetic Guidance stating that every important matter that does not begin with mentioning the name of Allah, is incomplete. Mentioning the name of Allah is what makes the learning process an act of worshipping Allah. Thus, the English teacher began every session of the classes by greeting and recitation, as well as by reminding the young Moslem learners of the values of such greeting and recitation.

Step 2: Performing Prayer

After opening the class, the teacher invited the young Moslem learners to recite a prayer. Islamic teaching tradition recognized various versions of prayer to perform before the learning activity. One of the prayers used in this step was derived from the Qur'anic verse [QS 2:32]: "*Subhānaka lā 'ilma lanā illā mā 'allamtanā. Innaka antal 'alīmul hakīmu*" which means "Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. You are truly the All-Knowing, All-Wise.". The young Moslem learners who became the participants

of this research were mostly familiar with this prayer. They were also taught the same prayer in formal schools.

Step 3: Storytelling

In this step, the teacher performed oral storytelling. Once the teacher told the story of a famous Moslem learner named Syihabuddin. The story was mostly delivered in simple and short Indonesian sentences. When it comes to certain words, the teacher gave emphasis by mentioning the Indonesian word and their English translation. The use of the story was aimed at attracting students' attention, introducing high-frequency words in an interesting and meaningful way, and inculcating Islamic values through a well-known story in the Islamic world.

The story began with the fact that Syihabuddin was not a *smart* student. He found it difficult to understand the *lessons* even though he had *learned* for a quite long time. He came to his *teacher* and told him that he intended to quit the school. His teacher *suggested* to stay and try harder. The teacher *believed* that every student could learn well and that no student was *stupid*. Syihabuddin decided to stay and learn harder. Nevertheless, he still found himself unable to *understand* the lessons. He came to his teacher again. This time, the teacher permitted him to go home. On his *way* home, Syihabuddin took shelter in a *cave* due to the heavy *rain*. Inside the cave, he saw a big and thick *stone*. There was a large hole in the middle of the stone. He then realized that if a stone can have a hole if it is constantly dripped with water, a *human* brain should be able to absorb lessons when it continues to learn. Syihabuddin then returned to his school. He once again asked for his teacher's blessing to start studying again. In short, Syihabuddin mastered a lot of religious *knowledge*. He even *wrote* many *books* on religion. In the Moslem world, he is better known by the name Ibn Hajar which means 'son of stone'. From the stone inside the cave, he learned that *perseverance* is an important factor in mastering knowledge.

The young Moslem learners were always excited by stories. They paid attention closely to interesting stories. The stories remained compelling for they are delivered in simple and easy Indonesian language. Nevertheless, the stories should be made meaningful to the English language teaching by making them as a springboard to introducing English vocabulary and relevant simple English expressions.

Step 4: Highlighting high-frequency words

This study believes that a story is a powerful instrument to introduce words in a context. The story is the context itself that might help students to retain the given words. To strengthen the retention, the teacher highlighted what he believed to be high-frequency words. This step of highlighting high-frequency words was conducted in two ways namely pronunciation focus and meaning focus. The former was through imitating the teacher's model, and the latter was through recalling the meaning of the given words in the story (*smart, lessons, learn, teacher, suggest, believe, stupid, understand, cave, stone, rain, human, write, book, perseverance*). All the verbs were introduced in their basic form. Certain words were elaborated into simple sentences such as, 'I am smart' and 'I love books'.

Step 5: Memorizing relevant saying

Irwansyah (2015) notes that in the Islamic teaching tradition, sayings or proverbs are often used to inculcate values. For that reason, the fifth step was memorizing relevant sayings derived from various traditions. One of the sayings used in this research was: *Man jadda wa jada* and *Where there is a will there is a way* along with their Indonesian translation. Thus, in this step teacher had the students imitate the teacher's modeling, practice the saying in groups and individually, and memorize the saying.

Step 6: Closing

The last step was closing the English session by reciting *Alhamdulillah* which means 'all praise is due to Allah'. The teacher reminded the students that knowledge is a blessing from Allah and that every Moslem should say *Alhamdulillah* after learning a new thing.

The above six steps of teaching English to young Moslem learners worked well due to many previous classes that both the teacher and students had. It was previously touched that the English classes in this study occurred after serial numbers of Islamic teaching that the teacher and students had in the mosque. The steps like opening, oral storytelling, memorizing, and closing had been commonly practiced before the English classes were held. It is found that teaching English for young Moslem learners is made easier if the teacher is familiar with Islamic teaching and tradition.

Discussion

The first question of this study dealt with the exploration of distinctive features of teaching English to young Moslem learners. The findings revealed that dress code and venue, topics, the use of Islamic phrases, and translanguaging are among the noticeable characteristics. In the broadest sense, the findings support the findings of Hino (2021) who noted the possibility of a country in the expanding circle representing its own values through its English uses in global communication. Although this study does not specifically refer to the values of an expanding circle country, the use of Islamic phrases in this study supports the notion that English teaching in the expanding circle might be customized following its users' needs.

The findings of this study also confirm those of Khairunnisa & Lukmana (2020) that most Indonesian EFL teachers found the use of local language and Indonesian language helpful in facilitating students' learning process. Linguistic diversity should be acknowledged and seen as an asset to enhance the children's learning process. Ching & Lin (2019) argue that in a multilingual context, children's multilingual repertoire is better viewed as a potential resource rather than barrier to English language learning. Concerning the venue and topics, this study supports Johnstone (2019) statement that children should receive substantial societal exposure to their English development in that English learning should not take place only at schools. Children should also be taught more than just vocabulary and grammar but also about good character, effort, and diligence. It implies that informal society involvement is needed to foster the children's English mastery.

The second question of this study explored the plausible teaching steps of teaching English for young Moslem learners. The findings propose six steps of the teaching process namely: opening, performing prayer, storytelling, highlighting high-frequency words, memorizing relevant saying, and closing. Related to the use of storytelling as a teaching step, the findings present a similar point of view to that of Bland (2019) who maintained that oral storytelling is a valuable vehicle for teaching young learners long before they attend formal schools and learn to read and write. Oral storytelling might be one of the first teaching methods used to teach children.

Regarding the teaching step of memorizing relevant saying, this study support, and further extend Irawan & Haerazi's (2020) finding that memorizing is one of the classical methods used in Islamic boarding school. The memorizing method used in this study utilized Arabic language, English language, and Indonesian language. The memorization itself was made in line with the content of the oral storytelling, a teaching step before the memorization.

CONCLUSION

Much has been written about TEYL in expanding circle country but less about Moslem young learners who learn English as a foreign language in a mosque. The teaching of English for young Moslem learners in a mosque is distinctive. Teacher and students wear Islamic clothing when learning English in the mosque. The topics delivered by the teacher deals not only with English vocabulary but also with Islamic teaching. The use of Islamic phrases and translanguaging are unavoidable because the Indonesian language, English language, and Arabic language are to be seen as assets rather than obstacles to TEYL for Moslem learners in the expanding circle. Another noticeable feature of TEYL for Moslem learners deals with the teaching steps which accommodate the interconnectedness among Islamic tradition, oral storytelling, the utilization of Qur'anic verse and Prophetic Guidance, pronunciation drills and practice of high-frequency words, and memorizing relevant sayings which were made in line with the content of the oral storytelling. The teaching steps have placed English language teaching (ELT) as a potential tool in strengthening young Moslem learners' interest in their religion. This study suggests that further research should attempt to confirm whether young Moslem learners should learn through songs and other multimodal teaching aids in learning English. It would also be interesting to discover other plausible teaching steps that suit the needs of young Moslem learners in learning English at expanding circle country.

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