

**JELT****Journal of English Education, Teaching, and Literature**

| e-ISSN: 3026-4812 |

<https://jurnal.rahiscendekiaindonesia.co.id/index.php/jelt>

Teachers' Approaches to Creating Active Learning Environments in English Classrooms in MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara

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KEYWORDS

Active Learning, English Language Teaching, Teacher Strategies, Qualitative Study, Madrasah Context

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ABSTRACT

This study environments in English classrooms at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Labuhanbatu Utara. A qualitative research design was employed to examine teaching practices in their natural classroom contexts. The participants consisted of English teachers selected purposively based on their active involvement in classroom instruction. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to ensure depth and credibility. The data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation applied to enhance trustworthiness. The findings revealed that teachers implemented student-centered learning as a core approach by engaging students in group work, pair activities, and collaborative tasks. Interactive teaching strategies, including role plays, discussions, presentations, and language games, were found to significantly promote student participation and confidence in using English. Effective classroom management, such as flexible seating arrangements and clear instructional procedures, supported the smooth implementation of active learning activities. In addition, positive teacher-student relationships created a supportive learning atmosphere that encouraged students to participate without fear of making mistakes. Despite challenges related to students' varying proficiency levels, limited instructional time, and differences in motivation, teachers demonstrated adaptability in modifying tasks and providing additional support. Overall, the study concludes that the creation of active learning environments in EFL classrooms is influenced by pedagogical, managerial, and affective factors. The findings highlight the importance of teacher agency in fostering meaningful and engaging English learning experiences, particularly in madrasah contexts. aimed to explore English teachers' approaches to creating active learning

INTRODUCTION

Active learning has been widely recognized as a central component of effective teaching and learning, particularly in English language education. In contemporary educational contexts, students are no longer positioned merely as passive recipients of knowledge; rather, they are expected to actively engage in learning processes through interaction, collaboration, critical thinking, and meaningful communication. This shift is especially significant in English classrooms, where language acquisition is strongly influenced by opportunities to practice, negotiate meaning, and use the target language in authentic and interactive situations. Consequently, the creation of active learning environments has become a major concern for English teachers at various levels of education.

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, such as Indonesia, the challenge of fostering active learning is even more complex. English is not used as a daily means of communication outside the classroom, which often results in limited exposure and practice for students. As a result, English classrooms frequently become the primary, and sometimes the only, space where students can actively use the language. If teaching practices remain teacher-centered, dominated by lectures and textbook-based instruction, students tend to become passive, reluctant to participate, and less motivated to develop their language skills. Therefore, teachers' approaches to classroom management, instructional strategies, and learning activities play a crucial role in shaping active learning environments.

Teachers are key agents in determining how learning takes place in the classroom. Their beliefs, pedagogical knowledge, and instructional decisions significantly influence students' engagement and participation. In English classrooms, teachers' approaches to organizing learning activities, encouraging interaction, providing feedback, and creating a supportive atmosphere can determine whether students feel confident and motivated to participate actively. Approaches such as collaborative learning, communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and student-centered instruction have been widely promoted as effective ways to enhance active learning. However, the successful implementation of these approaches depends largely on teachers' understanding, creativity, and adaptability to their specific classroom contexts.

Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Labuhanbatu Utara, as an Islamic senior secondary school, operates within a unique educational environment that integrates general education with religious values. English teaching in madrasah settings often faces distinctive challenges, including limited instructional time, diverse student proficiency levels, and the need to harmonize modern pedagogical practices with institutional culture. Despite these challenges, madrasah institutions are expected to produce students who are not only academically competent but also active, independent, and responsible learners. Therefore, investigating how English teachers at MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara create active learning environments becomes both relevant and necessary.

Previous studies in English education have shown that active learning environments can improve students' language proficiency, motivation, and confidence. Students who are actively involved in classroom activities tend to develop better speaking skills, greater vocabulary retention, and stronger communicative

competence. Nevertheless, many studies focus more on the outcomes of active learning rather than on teachers' actual approaches and practices in real classroom settings. Moreover, limited research has specifically explored English teachers' approaches in madrasah contexts, particularly in regional areas such as Labuhanbatu Utara. This gap indicates the need for context-based research that examines how teachers conceptualize and implement active learning in their daily teaching practices.

This study aims to explore teachers' approaches to creating active learning environments in English classrooms at MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara. Attention is directed toward how teachers plan lessons, manage classroom interactions, select teaching strategies, and engage students in active participation. By examining teachers' perspectives and classroom practices, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the strategies used to foster active learning in an EFL madrasah context. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective English teaching practices and to provide practical insights for teachers, school administrators, and future researchers interested in enhancing active learning in similar educational settings.

METHOD

This study was conducted using a qualitative research design, as the phenomenon of teachers' approaches to creating active learning environments was explored in depth and in its natural classroom setting. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perspectives, teaching practices, and classroom interactions that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurement.

The research was carried out at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Labuhanbatu Utara. The participants of the study consisted of English teachers who were actively teaching at the institution. The selection of participants was done purposively, based on their direct involvement in English classroom instruction and their experience in implementing learning activities. This sampling technique enabled the collection of rich and relevant data related to the research focus.

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure data credibility and depth. Classroom observations were conducted to examine how active learning was implemented during English lessons, including teacher–student interaction, student participation, and classroom management practices. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the English teachers to explore their understanding, beliefs, and approaches toward active learning, as well as the challenges they encountered in creating an active learning environment. In addition, documentation was used to support the data, including lesson plans, teaching materials, and school documents related to English instruction.

The data analysis was performed using an interactive model of analysis, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The collected data were first organized and categorized based on emerging themes related to teaching approaches, classroom strategies, and student engagement. The data were then interpreted to identify patterns and relationships among the findings. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was applied by comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation.

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the research process. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school authorities, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were preserved to ensure that the data were used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal that English teachers at MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara employ various approaches to create active learning environments in their classrooms. These approaches are reflected in instructional strategies, classroom interaction patterns, and the overall learning atmosphere established during English lessons.

First, it was found that student-centered learning was consistently applied in classroom instruction. Teachers were observed encouraging students to take an active role in the learning process through group discussions, pair work, and collaborative tasks. Rather than dominating classroom talk, teachers positioned themselves as facilitators who guided learning activities and provided support when needed. This approach allowed students to express ideas, ask questions, and practice English more frequently, thereby increasing their level of participation.

Second, the use of interactive teaching strategies was identified as a key factor in promoting active learning. Teachers frequently implemented activities such as role plays, question-and-answer sessions, presentations, and language games to stimulate student engagement. These strategies were designed to create a dynamic learning environment in which students were motivated to participate and interact using English. As a result, students appeared more confident in using the language, particularly in speaking activities.

Third, effective classroom management was found to support the creation of active learning environments. Teachers were observed organizing seating arrangements to facilitate interaction, such as forming small groups or circles. Clear instructions and classroom rules were provided at the beginning of lessons to ensure that activities ran smoothly. This structured management helped minimize disruptions and allowed students to focus on learning tasks actively.

Fourth, the integration of supportive teacher-student relationships contributed significantly to student engagement. Teachers demonstrated positive attitudes by providing encouragement, constructive feedback, and appreciation for student effort. A non-threatening classroom atmosphere was created, enabling students to participate without fear of making mistakes. This supportive environment was found to increase students' willingness to engage actively in learning activities.

Finally, several challenges in implementing active learning were identified. Differences in students' English proficiency levels, limited instructional time, and varying levels of student motivation were reported as obstacles by the teachers. Despite these challenges, teachers attempted to adapt their approaches by modifying tasks, simplifying instructions, and providing additional guidance to ensure that all students could participate actively.

Overall, the results indicate that teachers at MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara employ diverse and adaptive approaches to foster active learning in English classrooms, supported by interactive strategies, effective classroom management, and positive teacher-student relationships.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that active learning environments in English classrooms at MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara were created through student-centered instructional practices, interactive teaching strategies, effective classroom management, and supportive teacher-student relationships. These results reinforce the view that teachers play a central role in shaping learning environments that encourage students' active participation, particularly in EFL contexts where classroom interaction becomes the main source of language exposure.

The implementation of student-centered learning observed in this study aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through active engagement and social interaction. When students were positioned as active participants through group work and collaborative tasks, opportunities for meaningful language use were increased. This finding supports previous studies in English education that highlight the effectiveness of shifting from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered approaches in promoting active learning and communicative competence. In the context of MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara, such an approach appeared to help students overcome hesitation and become more involved in English classroom activities.

The use of interactive teaching strategies, such as role plays, discussions, and presentations, was found to significantly enhance student engagement. These activities encouraged students to practice English in authentic and communicative ways, which is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching and task-based learning. Through these strategies, students were not only exposed to language input but were also required to produce language actively. This supports the argument that interactive activities can foster students' confidence, motivation, and speaking ability, particularly in EFL classrooms where real-life language use is limited.

Classroom management practices also emerged as an important factor in supporting active learning. The organization of seating arrangements and the establishment of clear classroom rules contributed to a structured yet flexible learning environment. This finding is in line with research suggesting that effective classroom management is a prerequisite for successful active learning implementation. When classrooms are well managed, students are more likely to stay focused on tasks and participate actively without disruption. In madrasah contexts, where classroom discipline is often emphasized, such management practices can be strategically used to support interactive and student-centered learning.

Furthermore, the presence of positive teacher-student relationships was shown to enhance students' willingness to participate. Teachers' encouragement, constructive feedback, and tolerant attitudes toward errors helped create a psychologically safe learning environment. This finding supports socio-affective theories in language learning, which emphasize the importance of reducing anxiety and building learners' confidence. When students felt respected and supported, they were more likely to take risks in using English, even when their language proficiency was still developing.

Despite these positive practices, several challenges were identified, including differences in students' proficiency levels, limited instructional time, and varying

motivation. These challenges reflect common issues reported in previous studies on active learning in EFL contexts. However, the adaptive strategies employed by teachers—such as simplifying tasks and providing additional guidance—demonstrate professional awareness and pedagogical flexibility. This suggests that while structural constraints remain, teachers' reflective practices can mitigate their impact on active learning implementation.

Overall, the discussion highlights that the creation of active learning environments in English classrooms at MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara was influenced by a combination of pedagogical, managerial, and affective factors. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on active learning in EFL and madrasah contexts, emphasizing the importance of teacher agency in fostering meaningful and engaging English learning experiences.

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CONCLUSION

This study investigated English teachers' approaches to creating active learning environments at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Labuhanbatu Utara using a qualitative research design. The findings indicate that active learning in English classrooms was fostered through the implementation of student-centered instruction, interactive teaching strategies, effective classroom management, and supportive teacher-student relationships. These elements collectively contributed to increased student participation, engagement, and confidence in using English during classroom activities.

The results demonstrate that teachers played a pivotal role in shifting classroom practices from teacher-dominated instruction to more facilitative roles that encouraged learner autonomy and collaboration. Through activities such as group discussions, role plays, presentations, and language games, students were provided with meaningful opportunities to actively use English in communicative contexts. Effective classroom management, including flexible seating arrangements and clear instructional guidelines, further supported the smooth implementation of active learning activities.

In addition, the establishment of positive and supportive teacher-student relationships emerged as a key factor in promoting a safe and motivating learning atmosphere. Teachers' encouragement, constructive feedback, and tolerance toward students' errors reduced anxiety and increased learners' willingness to participate actively. Although challenges such as varying levels of English proficiency, limited instructional time, and differences in student motivation were identified, teachers demonstrated adaptability by modifying tasks and providing additional support to ensure inclusive participation.

Overall, this study concludes that the successful creation of active learning environments in EFL classrooms at MAN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara depends on the integration of pedagogical strategies, classroom management skills, and socio-affective support. The findings suggest that continuous professional development for teachers and institutional support are essential to strengthen the implementation of active learning. Future research may expand this study by involving students' perspectives, employing mixed-method approaches, or examining active learning practices across different educational contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of effective English language teaching.

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