

EXPLORING CHALLENGES IN TEACHING READING BY PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS AT A SECONDARY ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract: This article aims to explore the challenges pre-service teachers face in teaching reading skills at *Mts Alhayatul Islamiyah* and strategies to overcome them. This research uses a qualitative method with a narrative inquiry design, involving two female teacher candidates carrying out a teaching practicum in class IX. The findings of this research identify several main challenges, namely: low student academic interest, student learning barriers, anxiety in teaching, and the context of Islamic-based institutions. To overcome these challenges, pre-service teachers use interactive learning strategies that actively involve students through group discussions, educational games, and the use of technology. This research shows that the interactive learning approach effectively increases students' interest and reading skills, as well as overcoming various learning obstacles. It is hoped that these findings can serve as a guide for pre-service teachers and other educators in developing effective teaching strategies.

Keywords: Teaching reading, Pre-service teachers, Teaching strategies, Islamic-based institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic educational institutions, known as Islamic boarding schools, are renowned for their religious values and continuous education programs (Ruslan & Imam, 2022). According to Abdullah and Basthomi (2020), Islamic boarding schools are educational institutions that shape and develop moral values to become pioneers and inspirations for the nation's moral improvement. According to Danu (2018), Islamic boarding school-based school preparation starts with the Islamic boarding school and then the established school. This combination fosters a capable and morally grounded generation of youth Indonesians (Fachrudin, 2021). *Madrasah*

Tsanawiyah, a secondary level in Islamic boarding schools, integrates religious values with general knowledge under the Ministry of Religion. This balance appeals to parents seeking comprehensive education for their children (Anshari et al., 2023).

Pre-service teachers are students who engage in teaching practice, one of the courses that are qualifications for graduation; teaching practice is the ability to apply the theory students have learned during the learning process (Izzati, 2023). Pre-service teachers encounter some difficulties during teaching but overcome the problem using appropriate strategies (Irfayanti et al., 2020). Like the research findings by Abdullah & Basthomi (2020), pre-service English teachers at MAN 1 Makassar revealed that the most difficult challenge in class is that students often like to riot, chase, and even fight with their classmates. This is by the results of previous research by Fatihah (2022). Emphasizing these strategies not only supports their reading skills but also justifies the primary role of reading in terms of the potential practice activities it can provide to expand students' vocabulary and repertoire structure, as well as the opportunities it offers for continuous exposure to input (Junaidi et al., 2023).

Reading is one of the most important skills in learning English, considering that reading expands knowledge almost all information is provided through reading (Apriani, 2023). The metacognitive awareness of reading strategies inventory (MARSI), developed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002), assesses students' awareness and use of reading strategies. MARSI categorizes strategies into global reading strategies (GLOB), problem-solving strategies (PROB), and support reading strategies (SUP), helping teachers guide students to enhance their reading comprehension and academic performance. Reading instruction aims to help students become strategic readers, meaning they can use effective reading strategies to gain better comprehension (Mistar et al., 2016).

According to Laila et al. (2020), teaching strategies are crucial for supporting teaching and learning activities in schools. Emphasizing these strategies not only supports their reading skills but also justifies the primary role of reading in terms of the potential practice activities it can provide to expand students' vocabulary and repertoire structure, as well as the opportunities it offers for continuous exposure to input (Junaidi et al., 2023). This is also related to the theory of Willis, J. (2006), who integrates neuroscience principles with teaching strategies, including the use of technology. Willis demonstrates how technology can harness cognitive and emotional

processes in reading, increasing student motivation and engagement through digital tools.

Pre-service teachers face challenges in teaching English reading, which they must overcome by implementing effective strategies. Practical teaching experience is vital as it prepares them for future teaching roles. *Mts Alhayatul Islamiyah* in Malang, founded in 1984, presents unique challenges due to its mix of students from the Islamic boarding school and those from outside. *Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid* requires English to be used daily (Amiruddin & Jannah, 2019), while *MTs Alhayatul Islamiyah* only study English as a compulsory subject in school.

The challenges and strategies for teaching English reading experienced by pre-service teachers present intriguing phenomena for researchers. This study addresses two research gaps: participant differences and the focus on teaching challenges and strategies. Unlike previous research at Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School *Muaro Jambi*, which involved experienced teachers and class IX students, this research was conducted at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Alhayatul Islamiyah* with two pre-service English teachers from Unisma.

The second research gap is the focus on specific English language skills. While previous research discussed general English skills, this study zeroes in on the challenges and strategies for teaching reading. By focusing on reading, the research provides a detailed survey of the factors influencing reading challenges and effective strategies to overcome them, offering more specific insights than previous studies.

METHOD

The purpose of this research is to further understand the challenges faced by pre-service teachers in teaching reading and the strategies used to overcome these challenges. This study employs a qualitative description with a narrative inquiry design to collect data. According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research is a method for exploring and understanding the meanings shared by several individuals or groups, which are considered to originate from social or humanitarian problems. The participants in this study consist of two female pre-service English teachers who are currently engaged in teaching practice at *MTs Alhayatul Islamiyah*. In this research, the researcher uses interviews as a technique to collect data to identify the challenges in teaching reading and the strategies to address these challenges. According to Sugiyono (2015: 320), there are several types of interviews, one of which is the semi-

structured interview. This type of interview falls into the category of in-depth interviews, which are conducted more freely compared to structured interviews.

The interview process was conducted through the Zoom meeting application. The researcher prepared nine questions aimed at clarifying the challenges and teaching strategies experienced by pre-service teachers in teaching reading. To avoid bias in data processing, the researcher employed the member check technique, where interview transcripts were provided to participants to ensure data accuracy before proceeding to the next coding process. This data analysis technique follows a structured process: (1) conducting interviews, (2) transcribing, (3) thoroughly reading the transcript results, (4) selecting codes to determine similar data, (5) categorizing codes into the same groups, and (6) creating final themes. The analysis process began with a careful review of recorded data to fully understand the interview content, followed by multiple readings to transcribe the data accurately. Next, data points were grouped into codes to highlight important elements. These codes were then categorized into similar groups, and these categories were further combined into themes. The resulting themes were reviewed to ensure their alignment with the data and research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers analyzed data on the challenges and strategies in teaching reading faced by pre-service teachers, based on input from two participants and nine interview questions. From the interviews, five main themes emerged: four themes about the challenges faced by pre-service teachers, namely lack of students' academic interest, student barriers, anxiety in teaching, and the unique challenges posed by teaching in a pesantren-based school; and one theme about the strategy to overcome these challenges, which is interactive learning involving group discussions and the use of technology to make learning more engaging and enjoyable. The findings of this study highlight the need for more adaptive and creative approaches in teaching reading to address the various challenges faced by pre-service teachers in pesantren-based schools.

Challenges faced by pre-service teachers when teaching reading at Mts Alhayatul Islamiyah.

1. Students' low academic interests

The first finding indicates that both participants face challenges when teaching reading in the classroom, with low academic interest from students being one of the main difficulties. This is evidenced by students' lack of enthusiasm, passive behavior, and negative responses.

Ana described her challenge of teaching reading in class due to students' lack of enthusiasm for reading. In this regard, Ana stated that,

Their reaction when I teach is less than enthusiastic, and they have difficulty pronouncing words. I often spell out difficult words to help them read. Apart from that, many students feel lazy about learning English. Students who can read English also tend to be passive.

In this regard, Lina stated that students' responses vary and they tend to exhibit passive behavior. She said,

My students' reactions when learning to read English in class varied, with some students tending to be less active and giving negative responses.

In this regard, both participants faced challenges due to the lack of academic interest from students. Ana and Lina struggled with teaching English reading because of students' indifferent and negative attitudes. Ana noted widespread apathy among students, which made the teaching process more difficult. Meanwhile, Lina reported varied student responses, with some students exhibiting negative behaviors such as sleeping in class, reading novels, and leaving the classroom without returning. This finding aligns with Nababan & Amalia (2021), who identified that pre-service teachers face several challenges during their programs, including student motivation.

2. Student barriers

Student barriers also represent a significant challenge for pre-service teachers when teaching reading. Additionally, pre-service teachers often face difficulties in understanding and addressing the specific obstacles that students encounter. They need to develop strong communication and empathy skills to build positive relationships and support students in overcoming their challenges.

Ana described the challenges she faced with student barriers. She emphasized how these obstacles significantly impacted her ability to teach reading effectively. She said,

The challenges I experience when teaching reading include students not focusing on learning to read, students sleeping in class, students often taking things for granted, and students often leaving the classroom without permission during learning.

Lina said that low ability is one of the main barriers in teaching reading. She also mentioned that general student barriers affect the effectiveness of the learning process. She said,

Their abilities are meager they don't even understand how to read numbers in English. This situation adds difficulty to the teaching and learning process and requires appropriate strategies.

Low ability is one of the main barriers to teaching reading. Student barriers, such as lack of comprehension often caused by limited vocabulary, also affect the effectiveness of the learning process. Students who struggle with understanding reading texts frequently feel frustrated and lose motivation, negatively impacting their academic performance. This is consistent with Hidayati (2018) findings, which identify poor vocabulary, weak grammar control, difficulty understanding long texts, and lack of educational media as primary factors contributing to students' difficulties with reading English. In this context, the challenges faced in teaching reading include students not focusing on learning, students sleeping in class, students often taking things for granted, and students frequently leaving the classroom without permission during lessons. These issues highlight broader barriers such as lack of comprehension and motivation, which significantly affect students' engagement with reading materials and their overall learning environment.

3. Anxiety in Teaching

Teacher anxiety in teaching also impacts the challenges in teaching reading. Ana and Lina experience different types of anxiety: Ana's anxiety affects her ability to interact productively with students and manage the classroom effectively, while Lina's anxiety arises from issues related to students' time discipline, which affects her ability to respond flexibly to students' individual learning needs.

Ana described that she experiences anxiety when teaching reading in the classroom. She also added that this anxiety makes it difficult for her to maintain focus and manage the class effectively, which impacts the student's learning process. She said,

One of the challenges that I feel when teaching reading in class is the challenge that comes from myself, such as I am always anxious when I go to class because I teach in a class where all the students are boys.

Lina said that her anxiety differs from Ana's; Lina feels anxious due to students' time discipline issues. She said,

When it's time for changes in lessons, students leave the classroom and find it difficult to be reprimanded to go to class immediately, so this takes quite a long time, sometimes students also make excuses for permission to go to the toilet but don't return until the lesson is finished. This is certainly a challenge and anxiety when I teach English.

In this regard, anxiety in teaching is also a significant challenge for pre-service teachers. The anxiety experienced in teaching, which includes classroom management and time discipline, as reported by the participants in this study, aligns with the findings of Hayunigtias and Humairoh (2021). They found that the anxiety experienced by pre-service teachers during their field experiences is partly due to classroom management. The pre-service teachers reported that they do not have as much authority as regular teachers, they feel anxious because they cannot control the class effectively, and they struggle with managing their time efficiently.

4. Islamic-based institutions

Islamic educational institutions influence the challenges faced by pre-service teachers when teaching reading in the classroom. The impact of Islamic values and cultural backgrounds can affect teaching approaches, the selection of reading materials, and classroom interactions. Additionally, these differences in values and culture can add complexity to adapting teaching methods to meet students' needs and expectations.

Ana said that a challenge of Islamic boarding schools is the difficulty in implementing technology-based learning methods. She said,

The factors that make me find it difficult to teach English reading apart from the lack of student motivation in learning to read English, there is another factor, namely that it is difficult to apply several methods of learning to read English with technology.

When I wanted to teach in class, I brought material that required using a projector, but the problem was that I had to teach in the hall to use the projector and had to get permission the day before use because the hall was also used as a classroom.

Lina said that the main challenge in Islamic boarding schools is integrating local values with English language material. She said,

The challenge in the context of Islamic boarding school-based schools which is the main challenge in developing English reading lies in the integration of local values and culture with the English learning materials that I teach “At the school where I teach, learning English is not emphasized.

Islamic-based schools, with their limited resources, cultural influences, and low priority for English, face several challenges. Limited resources include inadequate supporting facilities, while cultural influences can affect teaching methods and students' reception of less relevant materials. The low priority for English results in insufficient support for language development, making learning less effective. This aligns with the findings of Aji and Setyarini (2020), which highlighted the lack of digital technology and infrastructure in pesantren as significant obstacles. Baharuddin et al. (2023) added that the monotonous classical learning patterns in pesantren often render new strategies ineffective, further complicating pre-service teachers' efforts to use innovative and engaging reading instruction methods.

Strategies of Pre-service Teachers in teaching English reading in Islamic boarding schools.

5. Interactive learning

Of the four challenges faced by pre-service teachers in teaching reading, one of them is the use of interactive learning strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the learning process. Here are the approaches applied by the two participants.

Ana says methods used include quizzes with laptops and reading the composition of used snack wrappers. This approach helps students stay more interested and focused on the lesson. Ana stated,

Some of the methods or strategies that I use are related to technology and active learning methods, such as quizzes using a laptop, looking for used plastic snacks, and reading out the composition of the snacks. In my opinion, by using this strategy students are more interested and focused on the learning process.

Lina says the approach includes using group discussions to enhance text comprehension and incorporating technology. This is similar to Ana's approach, which also uses interactive methods and technology to engage students. She said,

The strategy that I use to teach English reading includes the use of active learning methods, one of which is group discussions where students are invited to collaborate with their various understandings of the text being read. Apart from that, I also usually use technology.

To address the challenges faced by pre-service teachers at *MTs Alhayatul Islamiyah*, such as students' low academic interest, student barriers, teaching anxiety, and the limitations of an Islamic-based institution, pre-service teachers employ interactive strategies such as group discussions, technology, and active media. This approach supports the findings of Hariro et al. (2023) and Dzulfikri and Azami (2024), which emphasize the benefits of varied teaching techniques and media in enhancing reading skills and student engagement. It also aligns with Willis's (2006) theory on integrating technology with teaching to boost motivation and engagement. Additionally, to overcome these challenges in teaching reading, pre-service teachers are advised to use MARSİ to enhance metacognitive awareness and integrate interactive learning strategies. Adapting these strategies to Islamic values and using active media, such as reading guides and mind maps, can increase students' interest and comprehension.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research uncovered investigative findings regarding pre-service teachers' challenges when teaching English reading in secondary Islamic boarding schools. The study identified several important issues in its analysis, including students' low academic interests, challenges, teaching process fears, and the context of Islamic-based educational institutions. Pre-service teachers need to understand effective reading strategies to address these challenges.

These strategies include active media such as group discussions and role-plays, which can stimulate students' interest and enhance understanding. Engaging media, such as animated stories and interactive images, are also used to create stimulating and captivating learning experiences. Technology, such as educational software and learning applications, is integrated to provide broader access to interactive reading materials and exercises tailored to students' needs. By implementing these strategies, the primary goal is to improve students' learning outcomes and the overall effectiveness of education. This study provides insights into the challenges of Islamic-

based education and concrete solutions that can be implemented in everyday educational practice.

Understanding the factors that cause challenges and strategies for overcoming them is very important for pre-service teachers in preparing themselves to face various situations when teaching. By understanding the challenges that may arise, they can better prepare and hone the skills needed to face rapidly changing conditions. This helps them become more responsive and flexible in overcoming emerging challenges, enabling them to develop appropriate strategies and be ready to adapt to new situations. In doing so, they can improve the quality of student learning and create a more effective learning environment.

With this knowledge, pre-service teachers receive practical guidance. They are more comprehensively prepared to become quality educators responsive to student needs and the dynamics of the educational environment. Furthermore, it is hoped that future researchers can involve more participants and use a mixed approach. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of teaching strategies and their impact on student learning outcomes.

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