

## **SOCIETY-BASED ENGLISH COMMUNITY (SOBAT): EFL LEARNERS' STRATEGY IN LEARNING AND PRACTICING ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE WALLS**

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### **Abstract**

As for most Indonesian learners of English, classroom is the only place to learn and to practice English either with classmates or teachers. However, they do not have plenty of opportunities to practice in English when they leave the classrooms. This has encouraged many of the learners seek strategies that allow them to learn and to use English outside the walls of the classrooms. This paper aims to introduce an approach which can be used as an English learning strategy for EFL learners that they can learn and practice English outside the classroom. This approach is hereinafter referred to as the Society-Based English Community (SOBAT). Therefore, the discussion of this paper focuses on three main points. First, it presents a theoretical discussion on the SOBAT concept. Second, it introduces procedures that can be used by EFL learners to establish SOBAT. Third, it outlines several proposed activities that can be carried out in this community. Forming this community is believed to be able to provide four main benefits: providing the EFL learners with plenty of opportunities not only to learn but also to practice English collectively, forming a habit of using English as intensive as possible for the sake of establishing a community of English whose members actively communicate in English and use English the first lingua franca, giving the members a chance to become interactive, creative, active and effective EFL learners, developing their assertiveness, critical thinking, leadership, initiative as well as inclusiveness by taking a part in discussions and debates on important issues of this country.

Keywords: EFL learners; learning strategy; society based English; English community

### **INTRODUCTION**

Along with the dominance of science and technology in the lives of human beings, English also shows its existence as the most dominant language that dominates almost all aspects of life. Even, people generally agree with saying that none of languages could exceed the dominance of English in this world. The current statuses of English as the most rapidly growing language today, as the most widely spoken language in the world, as the most popular content language on the internet, as the most preferred language for

the scientific community, as the number-one language for business, and as the most preferred Language for publishing, have given us an obvious fact that English has really dominated almost all aspects of people's lives (Kaharuddin, 2019). It stands to reason that English is then considered as the king of all languages in the globe.

Reality has shown that English as the king of languages has affected so many people to learn and study it seriously. According to Knagg, J (2014) the number of English language learners throughout the world is more than 1.5 billion learners. They

generally learn English for five main purposes such as, to broaden knowledge, to expand career opportunities, to earn high income, to improve social relationships, and to raise living standards. In Indonesia, English has become the object of the government policy which not only advocates including English in the national education curriculum, but also teaching it as a compulsory subject specifically in secondary and tertiary level of Education. At the secondary education level, the government through the ministry of education and culture issued a policy No. 06/1967 which officially shaped the status of English in junior and senior high schools as a compulsory subject. While at the university level, the government issued government regulation No.19/2005 which stated the incorporation of religious education, civic education, Indonesian and English into the curriculum of undergraduate programs (Yassi, A. H. Kaharuddin, 2018).

Although English has officially been taught at the secondary and tertiary level for many years, complaints about the low learning outcomes still exist. Many studies show that the level of communicative competence in English demonstrated by many university graduates is still very low (Lowenberg, P. H. 1991, Alwasilah, C. 2007, Bahar, A. K. 2013, Renandya, W. A. 2013, Bahar, K. 2014, Andi, K., & Arafah, B. 2017). The studies not only reveal information on the low communication competence in English, but also show some important factors contributing to the outcomes. At least, five main factors are taken into account, namely; the quality of curriculum and teaching materials (how curricula and teaching materials are designed), teachers' competencies (level of knowledge, expertise and experiences), learning situations (number of students, room size, and learning facilities), learners'

attitudes (motivation, strategy, and learning styles and preferences).

In response to the factors, a number of considerable efforts have been made by language practitioners (e.g. language teachers and language researchers) to address the problems illustrated by these factors. For example, efforts go into designing and developing curriculum and ELT materials (Syatriana, E. 2013, Kaharuddin, Yassi, AH, Arafah, B. 2014, Nur, MR, & Madkur, A. 2014, Hamra, A. & Syatriana, E. 2015). However, due to the objective of writing this paper, I have chosen to discuss the factor of learners' attitudes, namely the learners' strategy in learning and practicing English, which in my opinion really needs careful considerations. This is interesting because a current phenomenon shows a unique tendency where many young EFL learners prefer to practice English outside the classroom than in the classroom (Sargsyan, M., & Kurghinyan, A. 2016, Sulistiyo, U. 2016, Kaharuddin, K. 2016). The phenomenon occurs because in Indonesia, English is taught and learnt as a foreign language. As for most Indonesian learners of English, classroom is the only place to learn and to practice English either with classmates or teachers (Kaharuddin, A., & Latif, I. 2017, Kaharuddin, A. 2018). Besides, they do not have plenty of opportunities to practice in English when they leave the classrooms. Therefore, many of the learners employ a strategy that allows them to learn and to use English outside the walls of the classrooms. The learners' strategy in this context is then defined as an action taken by the learners to bring about a desired proficiency in English. According to Ellis (1992), the learners' learning strategy is able to help them to cope with problems about communicating effectively in limited target language resources.

This paper deals with satisfying the desire by defining and formulating the concept of the learners' learning strategy beyond the classrooms which is here called a 'society-based English community' and abbreviated into SOBAT. Besides, this work not only offers procedures that the EFL learners can use to establish and to sustain English communities, but also suggests activities which will involve each learner in verbal communications and potential social activities. It is important to notice that all suggested activities in this English community are done with two main purposes namely: *The first*, to provide the EFL learners with plenty of opportunities to learn to practice English. *The second*, to form a habit of using English as intensive as possible which is able to establish a community of English whose members actively communicate in English and use English the first lingua franca among them.

### THE CONCEPT 'SOCIETY-BASED ENGLISH COMMUNITY' DEFINED

To understand the concept, it is first of all essential to know what society and community are. According to Saleh, S. M., & Baqutayan, S. M. (2012), society may be defined as a group of people who have reciprocal relationship in terms of interacting and helping one another to do their life-activities for the sake of fulfill their wishes and accomplishing their interests in association with their fellows. In other words, society may be understood as an organization established by a group of people doing their life activities together for achieving a particular purpose. Based on the definition, three important elements are identified i.e. individuals (all people without regard to the difference of their cultural background and physical appearance, social status, ethnic groups, as well as gender), life-activities (all routines the individuals go

through every day such as eating, working, communicating, travelling and so on) and purposes (reasons for doing something). On the other hand, Stebbins, R. A. (1987) defines Community is a social group with a common territorial base; those in the group share interests and have a sense of belonging to the group. In other words, community may be understood as a group of individuals who live in the same territory, share a particular interest in common, and display sense of belonging to the place where they live. Therefore, a community at least has four main components i.e. a group of individuals, the same territory, particular interest, and sense of belonging. The following figure illustrates the basic structures underlying the concept of 'Society-Based English Community'.

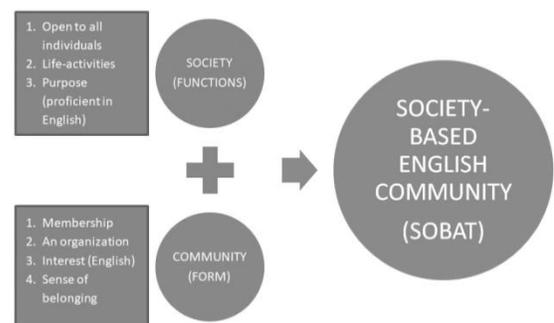


Figure 1. Underlying structure of Society-Based English Community

We finally grasp the concept 'Society-Base English Community (SOBAT)' as an organization established by EFL learners which is used as a place not only for learning and using English in a casual setting, but also for doing English-based life activities. In other words, this organization is aimed at providing the EFL learners a house of English language for learning, practicing it in real life context. The fact shows that almost all English learners spend their time on studying English in the classrooms. They often focus

on learning one skill and one item (for instance: grammar – simple present tense). After learning the rules of that grammar, the teacher gives them time to practice using the item. The learners have their papers in front of them and the studied rules are fresh in their mind. After all, a problem comes out in which they find it very difficult to remember how to use the rules in their communication skills next week, or next year. In SOBAT, such a problem can be overcome since the EFL learners get many chances to practice the rules that they have learnt through many different kinds of activities to acquire and to upgrade their language skills in a setting that is more like real life. In this regard, Au.K.H. (1998) is of the opinion that language acquisition will be more effective when learners have opportunities to use language for meaningful purposes and connect experience, knowledge, and culture through authentic language use.

Even if their English teacher also gives them opportunity to communicate both oral and written in the classroom, however their SOBAT's members will require them to speak and to write more than ever. Therefore, it stands to reason for saying that attaining more communication progress is the main goal of SOBAT. In addition, doing activities in SOBAT is a great way to make new lasting friendships. It is essential that the English learners need to have good English interlocutors because this will affect the development of self-confidence to interact socially. They will feel more comfortable speaking English around people they know, trust as well as have fun with. SOBAT will break through the limit of making friends to the people in their class only.

### **1. Formulating the Concept 'Sobat'**

To 'formulate' in this context means to start developing the concept methodically

and put it into a form of organization. For the purpose of formulating the concept, some procedures (methodology) are essential to follow. The procedures are established for showing the most practical ways in shaping SOBAT:

#### **Procedure 1:**

##### **Finding English learners who are crazy about English**

Crazy about English means to be very interested in learning and practicing English (Woodward, A. R., & Mair, V. H. 2008). Individuals who learn English and are crazy about English have the feeling of wanting to give their attention to learn and to practice English enthusiastically (Kaharuddin, N. 2014). In order to find such learners, it is firstly suggested to conduct an English learning program for individuals to stimulate their interest in learning English such as an English camp. In the context of Indonesia, an English camp is recognized as a creative activity conducted out door in which individuals stay in an area and in tents temporarily for learning English together using various methods and strategies. According to Ismail, N. S., & Tahir, I. M. (2011), the use of English camp in learning English as a foreign language is an effective way to develop not only the students' interest in learning English and but also the students' ability to practice English. One of the programs at the English camp is to introduce the community (SOBAT) to all participants and to compile a register containing the names of individuals who are really crazy about English.

#### **Procedure 2:**

##### **Starting the English community**

After running the English camp, it is suggested to follow the second procedure that is to get together and to talk about starting the English community. In this procedure, there are some important things to talk about, among other things:

- a. *Where can the community members meet?* The community members can meet outside of studying hours on their campus or university, in dormitories, at members' homes or even at the community own House of English (secretariat).
- b. *How often can the community members meet?* The community must have two regular meetings since the purpose of the community is to practice English, and this should be done regularly. One meeting is for the community executive committee and another is for all the community members.
- c. *How long can the meetings be?* The community members meet for at least two hours within one session and the meeting can start when at least 8 members are present.
- d. *What can the community members do at meetings?* The most important thing is to have fun at the meetings. Encouraging all the community members to use their English without worrying about making mistakes. Internalizing the idea that the community is unlike school or university's formal sessions. The community will give them a chance to practice their English in a relaxed, friendly and helpful environment.

#### **Procedure 3:**

##### **Establishing the team structure of the community**

When the community has been formed, the next procedure is to choose a group of individuals (team) and to identify their positions and functions in the community. The team is responsible to plan, to organize, and to coordinate all activities in the community. It is essential that the community has a loyal and solid team. This team consists of a chairperson or leader of the community called Mr. or Ms. President plus a deputy leader called Mr. or Ms. vice president, a secretary, a treasurer and a

correspondence person. Besides, it is important to limit the team's term of office. The term of office here refers to the length of time that the team will use to serve the community. For example, the term of office for the team is restricted to one year. After one year, all the community's members should vote for the next team to occupy these positions in the community. In this case, the term limit functions to give an opportunity to the other community's members to learn how to manage and to organize the community in a team structure.

#### **Procedure 4:**

##### **Recruiting the community's junior members**

A junior member of the community is a new individual who has officially joined and intend to actively participate in all activities carried out in the community. In this procedure, senior members persuade and select junior members. The senior members of the community initially may consist of at least 10 individuals who are persuaded to become senior member at the English camp. They specifically satisfy the following characteristics:

- They really want to improve their English. This is proven by their participation at the English camp
- They get ready to meet regularly under no circumstances
- They belong to the community because they want to, not because they must, and
- They are all keen to be active and helpful members.

Recruitment to junior members should be conducted immediately after the community is established. All prospective members may be from different background of culture, education, as well as social status. Senior members should set out some conditions when recruiting the junior members such as:

- Filling in registration forms,
- Paying registration fee Rp 25.000 and then they get a nice souvenir from the

community such as Key Ring, Sticker and so on,

- Attending an interview specifically given to junior members that will run for about two days. In the interview, prospective members are required to respond suitably to some questions addressed by interviewers (senior members) about their motivation, personality, performance, English capability, achievement and experience with organizations. After the interview, all the interviewers get together at the community secretariat to decide accepted members.

#### **Procedure 4:**

##### **Holding an introductory meeting**

After the community has enough people sign up (e.g. more than 10 individuals), the community members will need to hold an introductory meeting. Introductory meeting, in this context, refers a meeting held for the first time after recruiting junior members to join the community which is aimed at providing basic information concerning the English community and its activities, giving an opportunity to all members to meet and begin to get to know each other, and inaugurating the junior members as permanent members of the community. At this first meeting, all members can learn each other's names and may talk about what kinds of activities they are interested in. One way to run the activities in the meeting is to put one senior member in charge of being a coordinator for all planned activities earlier. The coordinator can organize the meeting programs such as: self-introduction session, inviting a special guest to share experiences regarding learning English, playing English language games, etc. the most important thing is the introductory meeting can build an atmosphere of intimacy between community members after they know each other. In addition, it is also expected that all activities carried out can encourage all

participants to learn and practice using English.

#### **Procedure 5:**

##### **Creating the community's rules**

Rules may be understood as explicit regulations which clearly state the way all members should take part in the community's programs. The rules also govern all members on what they are allowed or are not allowed to do. According to Malu, K. F., & Smedley, B. (2016), the rules made in the community should come from the members and should address roles, responsibilities, and procedures that community members will follow. Therefore, at the Community, the members must discuss what types of rules that the community should have. The examples of rules can be as follows:

- The Community has an "English only" rule.
- All members must wear The community T-shirt every time they attend the community's programs
- The Community doesn't allow the members to take friends, to drink and to eat during the meeting.
- All the Community members should to donate some money in charity box every week.
- The members have to attend a certain number of meetings to remain as members.
- The Community members have to be ready for assisting the community activities.

The most important thing concerning the rules is that all the rules made must be directed at the ease of achieving the goals of the community.

## **2. Suggested Activities for the Community**

The progress of the community is largely determined by the variety of activities carried out by community

members. The activity referred to here is a series of programs planned to be carried out together to provide members with opportunities to develop their creativity, to foster brotherhood, and to improve their English skills. The planned activities should be chosen based on the wants, interests and needs of all members. Adjustment between types of activities with the interests and needs of members is done to foster the motivation of members that they enthusiastically participate in community activities. Because in principle, people will be interested in doing an activity that interests and has become their needs. In addition, the planned activities should represent the type of community. Considering that this type of community is a society-based English learning community, the planned activities should cover both of these namely the presence of English learning activities and society-oriented activities. Based on these two things, it is advisable that the community divides its activities into regular activities (known as Regular English Program) and highlights activities (known as Highlight English Program). The following discussion provides detailed information concerning both types of activities:

### **2.1. Regular English Programs (REP)**

Regular English programs (REP) may be defined as English learning activities held by the community's members orderly and habitually. Suggested regular English activities can be categorized into three parts, among other things:

#### **a. Saturday English Session (SES)**

This is the community's primary activity because in SES, all members get together and practice many kinds of different communicative activities to improve their English skills. SES runs from 9.00 am to 12.00 pm. Some interesting programs will be offered to all participants of the community. They

are Welcome Speech, New Comers' self-Introduction, warming up routines, Games, English Song show, Discussion, Announcement, Passing charity box and Closing Speech. To encourage all members participate actively and enthusiastically, SES may make a motto which is collectively yelled every time the members look bored when doing a particular activity. The sample of the motto is speak up, speak out, speak well.

#### **b. Internal Discussion Arena (IDA)**

IDA is specifically offered to the community's senior members and team. It is carried out at night once in a week from 8.00 to 22.00 pm at the community's secretariat. The senior members and team usually discuss about new-fresh topic that have been selected one week before. The topic selection is based on the appointed member's proposal and approved by all IDA members. The member in charge in IDA has to prepare an essay containing interesting problems or issues to discuss. The topic may come from magazines, newspapers, internet articles, somebody's personal problems as well as the hottest and newest issues in the country.

#### **c. Gathering Night Routine (GNR)**

Gathering Night is one of interesting activities of the community. GNR can be illustrated as an activity in which all the community members spend all night and do many kinds of promoting English activities. GNR normally runs from 8. 00 pm to 4.00 am. This program is held once in a month which includes Opening Speech, Introduction, Discussion, Games, Debating Contest and Closing Speech. There are also some optional activities such as Role Play (English Drama), Sing a Song and Speech Contest. To make GNR more

interesting, it is a good idea to invite the other English learning communities from English Language Centers, Schools, or universities.

## **2.2. Highlight English Programs (HEP)**

Highlight English Programs refer to interesting and exiting English events conducted by all community members which are specifically focused on society-based activities. These programs are supplementary, but the best part of this community. The following programs are some of the examples:

### **a. English in Social Work**

English in social work may be defined as an activity conducted to practice English while providing social services such as helping individuals, families, groups and communities. This activity is mainly aimed at helping them to resolve some of their problems e.g. financial problem. This can be one of the community's annual programs. For example, English for the orphan. It is an activity conducted by visiting orphan house for two main purposes i.e. to give donations and to introduce the orphanage English. The visit can be started by collecting some money from all members or by doing some efforts to collect money to be donated to the orphan house. During the visit to the orphan house, the community members can carry out some activities such as having 'Dhuhur Pray' together, having lunch together, sharing and introducing one to another, playing games like blowing balloons game, and introducing English to the orphanages. Some of the games are in English such as how to greet and introduce to a new friend, mentioned some English vocabulary. To make the orphanages interested in the games, the community members can provide prizes.

### **b. English Immersion Camp**

This is an English language camp program designed to accelerate the development of the society members' English skills (Bahar, K. 2013). This English Camp is held for three main goals namely:

- to welcome the new members and tighten the relationships among members of SOBAT
- to give all members an opportunity to participate in intensive, interactive and entertaining activities during the camp site for the sake of developing their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills as well as their grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.
- to give the members a chance to practice their English with one another provide an excellent way for them to demonstrate what they have learned so far.

It is a 'must activity' for the new members because this activity will illustrate the advantages that they will get in the society. This program may be held in two days. The first day of the camp can carry out the following programs:

- Opening ceremony
- Praying and 7 minutes lecture after prayer.
- Introducing SOBAT to the new members, it goes in midnight where there will be a Question and Answer session.
- Game work (the members gathered on group, they have to play Drama in English)
- Holy contemplation night ( the members gather in a certain wide area near the camp site for self-introspection)

On the second day, the real camp activities, the members are doing their activities according to the following

categories: Session 1 category (Team Work Post), Session 2 category (Creativity Post), Session 3 category (Brain Challenge and Talent).

c. Inter-Society Members English Debate (ISMED)

ISMED is an English debate competition for SOBAT members. It contributes greatly to the members' critical and argumentation skills. It also brings good advantages as a medium for student to develop their English capability. In line with this activity, it is expected that SOBAT members will be ready for participating in several Regional or National English debating contests.

d. SOBAT Newsletter Activity (SONA Media)

SONA Media is intended to increase the members' skills in writing English articles. Most of the articles are originally reported by appointed SOBAT's journalists and some articles are submitted by productive SOBAT members. It is basically expected that SONA Media will be able to get rid of SOBAT members' grammar problems. Hence, SONA journalists are in need of assistance from some outstanding Language Advisors on editing some submitted articles before being published.

e. Sunday Excursion Program (SEPAM)

SEPAM is also called 'HAPPY SUNDAY' because the program is carried out on Sunday by visiting some interesting sites. SEPAM will offer a pleasant activity to motivate the participants speak English. For example, the members visit a beach; they will be divided into 6 groups. Every group has one guide and three foreigners. We will choose the Best Guide and Foreigner. The guide had to explain the beach in detail and the foreigners have to ask some questions. They must speak

English and if they break the rule they will get punishment. In addition to practicing English, the members can also see beautiful scenery while admiring God's creation in the beach. The committee will vote for the best tour guide and foreigner. The winners will walk away with SEPAM prize. This program can be done once in two months. For the next two months, SEPAM can plan to go to different places. It will be fascinating program.

## CONCLUSION

Society-based English community which is here called SOBAT is especially formed for learners of English who intensively want to learn and practice English outside the classrooms. It is not classroom-based English education in which learners, teachers and teaching materials mutually interact. It is a society-based English education that enables learners of English developing their English skills by interacting with each other through both language-based and society-based activities carried out collectively in an organization called the community. To realize the approach of SOBAT as proposed in this work, two important things should be known and implemented, namely: *The first*, English learners must be able to understand and apply procedures to establish and to sustain English communities. *The second*, the EFL learners need to be familiar with and engage in suggested activities which will involve them in verbal communications and potential social activities. In addition, it is also essential to notice that all suggested activities for SOBAT are done to achieve two main purposes namely to provide the EFL learners with plenty of opportunities not only to learn but also to practice English, and to form a habit of using English as intensive as possible for the sake of

establishing a community of English whose members actively communicate in English and use English the first lingua franca among them. Taking this approach give SOBAT's members a chance to be interactive, creative, active and effective EFL learners. We suggest readers of this work to consider establishing Society-based English communities, which not only serves as a learning strategy that encourages them to learn and to practice English language outside the wall, but also very useful to develop their assertiveness, critical thinking, leadership, initiative as well as inclusiveness (Bahar, A.K. 2014), especially when they take a part in discussions and debates on important issues in their country.

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