



Teacher's strategies for stimulating EFL students' active learning in an Indonesian senior high school

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ABSTRACT

Organizing effective active learning poses a significant challenge for teachers. The responsibility not only lies in guiding learning activities but also in fostering students' active engagement in the learning process. This study aims to investigate the strategies employed by a female English teacher at a senior high school in Pekalongan, Indonesia to promote active participation among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students and the challenges she faces. Employing qualitative research with data collected from interviews and observations, various strategies were identified to enhance active learning among EFL students. The study revealed ten effective strategies implemented by the teacher at the school to stimulate active learning, namely encompassing visual-based instruction, problem-solving methods, computer-based instruction, cooperative learning, drama techniques, role-playing, games, peer teaching, Jigsaw learning, and panel discussions. Additionally, the research identified three key challenges faced by the teacher in fostering active learning among EFL students, namely time constraints, preparation limitations, and varying levels of student enthusiasm. In general, this study provides valuable insights that can assist English teachers in selecting suitable active learning strategies tailored to the unique needs of their students and classrooms.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: September 28, 2023
Revised: October 19, 2023
Accepted: November 12, 2023

Keywords:

Active learning; EFL students; Senior high school; Teacher's strategies

To cite this article: Solikhah, N., & Sofi, M. J. (2023). Teacher's strategies for stimulating EFL students' active learning in an Indonesian senior high school. *Erudita: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 3(2), 144-155 <https://doi.org/10.28918/erudita.v3i2.2147>

To link to this article: <https://e-journal.uingusdur.ac.id/erudita/article/view/erudita324>



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Introduction

Active learning holds significant importance in the realm of foreign language acquisition, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Active learning methodologies play a crucial role in enhancing language proficiency and acquisition, offering a dynamic and engaging platform for language practice and comprehension (Li et al., 2021). The shift from traditional, passive teaching methods to active approaches transforms students into active participants in their learning journey, fostering improved

language skills, critical thinking, and cultural understanding. This shift aligns with contemporary educational theories, such as constructivism, which emphasize the learner's active role in constructing knowledge (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Moreover, active learning in EFL not only accelerates language acquisition but also cultivates communicative competence essential for real-world language use (Canale & Swain, 1980).

However, implementing meaningful active learning poses challenges for teachers, demanding a nuanced understanding of various factors such as students' diverse characteristics, educational objectives, class sizes, and their preparedness for engaging in active learning tasks. Teachers accustomed to teacher-centered learning systems, where instructors exert greater control, might face challenges transitioning to student-centered approaches that emphasize active student participation. In such scenarios, students may resist the notion of active engagement, preferring traditional teacher-led explanations. Overcoming these challenges is crucial to ensuring that active learning remains a valuable and meaningful educational experience. Recognizing the evolving role of teachers in active-learning classrooms, as highlighted by Drew and Mackie (2011), emphasizes the need for educators to confront and adapt to these changes.

According to William and Burden's (2003) perspective, teachers' strategies, constituting the decision-making process regarding language teaching, serve as a critical gauge for the success or failure of language acquisition. This underscores the responsibility of teachers to employ effective teaching strategies, fostering active participation in English-language teaching and learning endeavors. The significance of technique lies in its profound impact on the overall efficacy of the teaching-learning cycle. Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the language acquisition process through thoughtful and efficient strategies, influencing the outcomes of language learning experiences.

Active learning traces its roots to constructivism, a learning theory positing that students effectively grasp subjects by engaging with the content and assuming the role of primary creators of information and knowledge (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). This pedagogical approach, encompassing activities like flipped classrooms, case studies, debates, games, 1-minute papers, think-pair-share exercises, and discussions on real-world issues, enhances students' critical thinking skills. In the context of chemistry education, active learning fosters a sense of curiosity and self-efficacy among students, making challenging material more engaging and accessible.

In the academic landscape, students are expected to master proficient language skills, and these skills play a pivotal role in shaping their overall academic success. Bonwell and Eison (1991) underscore the significance of involving learners in activities and promoting reflection on their actions. The transformation into active learners necessitates proactive engagement during classroom sessions, wherein students actively seek information, participate in discussions, and reflect on their learning experiences. This approach not only enhances language proficiency but also instills a sense of ownership and responsibility for the learning process, aligning with contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize learner-centered and participatory approaches.

Nonetheless, teachers and students need to consider classroom dynamics that either foster or hinder active learning among learners. This research aims to investigate the strategies employed by a female English teacher to encourage active participation among

EFL students and the challenges encountered in cultivating enthusiasm for the English class at a senior high school in Pekalongan, Indonesia. This is prompted by the observation that students in the English class at the said school during the 2023-2024 academic year exhibit limited active engagement. The researchers seek to identify strategies and challenges faced by the English teacher that align with students' needs, classroom dynamics, and available school resources to inspire active learning motivation among students. More specifically, this study wants to investigate the following questions:

1. How does the teacher stimulate active learning among EFL students in senior high school?
2. What are the challenges faced by the teacher in stimulating active learning among EFL students?

Method

This descriptive-qualitative study examines the strategies employed by an English teacher to stimulate active learning among EFL students in a senior high school setting. The research took place at an Islamic senior secondary school in Pekalongan City, in Central Java, Indonesia, involving one female teacher, identified as AS, and three students from different classes, pseudonymously named SJ, RI, and MM. The selection criteria for students included factors such as residence, class, family-income background, and gender. The primary objective of the study is to address issues of passivity among students despite teachers implementing seemingly effective strategies in the school. The investigation focuses on naturally occurring phenomena in the context of EFL, considering that English is not the participants' first language. The chosen research location and participants aim to provide valuable insights into the stimulation of active learning.

To evaluate how teacher strategies are addressed to students' active learning in the classroom, this study adopts a case study approach. The researchers utilized non-participant observation, where participants were observed without direct interaction, to collect firsthand information integrated into the teaching and learning process. This method was employed to gather factual and objective data during the field research. Additionally, structured interviews were conducted with the teacher to further explore how teacher strategies influence students' learning outcomes. The qualitative interviews, featuring open-ended questions, sought to address the research question and clarify how teacher strategies contribute to active student learning.

The collected information from interviews and observations underwent a thorough review to ensure consistency with the analysis results. Triangulation, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), involved considering five categories: data source, method, researcher, theory, and data type. The researchers implemented triangulation by collecting data from various classes, times, genders, economic classes, cultures, teacher, and students. The second step involved cross-checking findings from classroom observations and interviews. Data analysis followed Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) approach, chosen for its alignment with capturing the meaning of teacher teaching strategies. This approach includes searching, arranging, coding, synthesizing data, and identifying patterns.

Findings and discussion

Understanding active learning and its types

The term "active learning" is a recurrent theme in higher education literature, though its origins and precise definition remain somewhat ambiguous. John Dewey, in his influential work "Democracy and Education" (1924), vaguely characterized learning as a personal and engaged activity, emphasizing its active nature. A more explicit definition is provided by Bonwell and Eison (1991), who describe active learning as educational activities that engage students in practical tasks and prompt them to reflect on their actions. This concept underscores the importance of students being actively involved in the learning process, aligning with Dewey's earlier notion of learning as a personal and engaged endeavor.

Active learning serves the vital function of engaging learners within the classroom, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This approach involves strategies geared towards learner activity, as defined by Freeman et al. (2014). Instead of passive listening, active learning encourages student participation through various class activities and discussions. One way to initiate active learning, for instance, is by integrating intercultural perspectives into EFL learning, as it helps teachers create a dynamic environment that not only enhances language proficiency but also prepares students for effective communication in a globalized world (Sofi, 2022). Eddie et al. (2015) highlight the intricate nature of active learning, encompassing both teaching and student learning processes. Drew and Mackie (2011) further emphasize the dual nature of "active learning," representing both a learning theory and a repertoire of teaching strategies.

Active learning methods shift the focus from passive information absorption to active student engagement with topics. Various activities exemplify active learning, including brainstorming, discussions, teaching, journaling, group work, focused listening, asking questions, note-taking, commenting, and role-playing. Notably, traditional lectures do not qualify as active learning methods, as emphasized by Freeman (2014). The essence lies in encouraging dynamic participation and interaction rather than relying solely on the conventional lecture-based approach.

One prevalent method is brainstorming, a collaborative approach that encourages students to spontaneously generate and share ideas. This technique fosters creativity and critical thinking by promoting open dialogue and the exploration of various perspectives (Paulus, 2000). Discussions also play a crucial role in active learning, providing students with opportunities to articulate and debate ideas. This interactive process enhances communication skills, promotes a deeper understanding of the subject matter, and encourages students to think critically (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005).

Teaching, as an active learning strategy, involves students in the instructional process, empowering them to explain concepts to peers. This not only reinforces their understanding but also cultivates a sense of responsibility for their learning (Mazur, 2013). Journaling serves as a reflective practice, enabling students to document their thoughts, insights, and questions, promoting metacognition and self-awareness (Negretti, 2012). Group work encourages collaborative problem-solving, communication, and teamwork, fostering a dynamic learning environment (Johnson et al., 2014). Focused listening, asking questions, and note-taking involve active participation during lectures, enhancing comprehension and retention of information.

Commenting and role-playing further stimulate student engagement by encouraging them to express opinions and immerse themselves in simulated scenarios, respectively (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Active learning, with its multifaceted techniques, enriches the educational experience by making learning an interactive and participatory endeavor.

Teacher's strategies for stimulating active learning among EFL students

The first strategy involves employing visual-based instruction. From participant interviews, Teacher AS was actively fostering active learning by incorporating audio-visual tools like YouTube videos, PowerPoint presentations, and flashcards. Departing from traditional methods, the teacher prioritizes engaging tools such as audio-visual lectures and flashcards for effective learning. Student SJ highlights the effectiveness of visual-based instruction in English classes, employing PPT presentations, YouTube videos, and graphics to capture student interest and improve information assimilation. Similarly, Student RI notes the frequent use of PPT, audiovisual media, and YouTube by the teacher, aiding better lesson comprehension. Student MM underscores the use of platforms like PPT and YouTube to simplify knowledge delivery, enhancing learning outcomes in an enjoyable manner. Observations support these insights, revealing the teacher's effective application of visual-based instruction, with students displaying enthusiasm and strong material absorption during learning sessions.

The interviews and observations above inform that the teacher utilized tools like flashcards, PowerPoint presentations (PPT), YouTube, audiovisual materials, and photos to facilitate active learning. As Merita Ismaili and Lumturie Bajrami (2016) suggest, visual aids serve as sources of new information and motivation for learning. The use of videos in class was perceived by students as engaging, relevant, helpful, and even motivating. To enhance learning outcomes and create a conducive learning environment, it is recommended that teachers and students explore innovative ways to integrate diverse video content into various classroom activities.

The second strategy involves employing problem-solving techniques. Teacher AS emphasized the efficacy of problem-solving techniques to enhance student learning. This approach involves active student participation in data collection and analysis, fostering a deeper understanding. Student SJ elaborates that the teacher employs problem-solving to promote active learning, assigning problems for students to solve individually or in discussion groups. RI underscores that students are required to gather facts and solve presented problems, facilitating comprehensive learning. Student MM echoes the use of problem-solving techniques by the teacher to engage students actively in resolving pre-prepared issues during the learning process. Observations affirm this, detailing how teachers introduce problems related to the material, guiding students in collaborative problem-solving sessions.

Problem-solving, following John Dewey's (1924) perspective, is a method well-suited for application in the classroom. This approach comprises four steps: identifying the problem, diagnosing potential causes of the problem, exploring alternative solutions, and evaluating alternatives and selecting the most suitable solution. This strategy enhances active learning by encouraging students to engage critically with real-world challenges, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

The third strategy involves employing computer-based instruction methods. Teacher AS utilized tools like Quizzes and Padlet, enhancing learning through visually appealing displays and engaging materials for improved assimilation. Student SJ notes the incorporation of computers to support learning activities, utilizing apps for independent problem-solving and subject understanding. Similarly, Student RI emphasizes the integration of active learning through computer-based instruction, enabling easy learning and independent research. MM highlights the accessibility of information through computer-based instruction, allowing the teacher to manage students' access to class-related content. Observations align with these insights, showcasing teachers directing students to effectively leverage computers for smooth learning processes, eliciting enthusiastic student engagement.

Through interviews and observations, the strategy above, as supported by Nasser Al-Mansour and Ra'ed Abdulgager Al-Shorman (2014), enhances active learning in the classroom. Computer-based instruction proves more effective in students' English learning, yielding better achievements compared to traditional methods alone. This method enables students to revisit information as needed, promoting repetition and reinforcing comprehension. Additionally, students have the flexibility to access learning materials at their convenience, providing autonomy in their learning process.

The fourth strategy involves the implementation of cooperative learning methods. Teacher AS outlined a teaching approach where students gather information to solve presented problems, promoting problem-solving, and conclusion drawing. Student SJ describes the implementation of cooperative learning techniques, teaching students essential group skills like active listening and effective communication. According to RI, this cooperative learning fosters self-assessment, improving academic and social skills. MM adds that the teacher uses cooperative learning to develop problem-solving skills through conversation and listening. Observations align with these insights, illustrating teachers dividing students into pairs, providing materials for comprehension, and structuring roles as listeners and speakers in the cooperative learning process.

Aligned with Slavin (1996), as cited by McCafferty et al. (2006), cooperative learning plays a crucial role in assisting students facing challenges in grasping the material by providing peer support and controlled learning environments with ample feedback. In this approach, students actively engage and participate in the learning process, promoting a comprehensive understanding of the material. Cooperative learning fosters a collaborative environment where students contribute to each other's learning, creating a supportive atmosphere for effective active learning in the classroom.

The fifth strategy involves the incorporation of drama as a method to promote active learning in the classroom. Teacher AS discussed the use of the drama approach to foster active learning, enhancing speaking abilities and creating an engaging classroom environment. Student SJ notes that students learning through the drama method recognize the importance of active participation, leading to a commitment to serious study and content retention. According to RI, the drama method aids in grasping life ideals and encourages language skill practice through successful drama performances. MM adds that the drama method conditions activities in a supportive environment, facilitating vocabulary retention and fluency development. Observations align with these insights, illustrating the

teacher randomly selecting students for short conversations at the front of the class, enhancing concentration and engagement.

Yassa (1997), as cited by Serife Demircioglu (2010), argues that employing the drama method enables students to explore new possibilities within themselves. Through drama, students gain confidence not only in their abilities but also in their interactions with peers. This strategy enhances active learning by providing a creative and engaging platform for students to express themselves, fostering self-assurance and interpersonal skills in the classroom.

The sixth strategy involves incorporating role-playing and games as methods to foster active learning in the classroom. Teacher AS discussed the role-play teaching style, where students enact scenes based on assigned roles, incorporating actions, gestures, and facial expressions related to human social interactions. Student SJ highlights the enthusiasm generated when the teacher integrates games and role-playing into learning sessions, creating a less serious and tense atmosphere. According to RI, students' English language skills benefit from role-playing and games, fostering passion for practice, understanding, and information retention. MM adds that using these techniques creates a pleasant learning environment, enhancing engagement in various activities. Observations affirm these insights, detailing teachers appointing students to study prepared scenarios, explaining material scope, and facilitating scenario practice for an interactive learning experience.

The approach above aligns with Davidson (1984), emphasizing that role-playing and games can provide students with experiences in handling stressful, unfamiliar, complex, or controversial situations. By creating simulated real-life circumstances for a brief period, students have the opportunity to develop and practice essential problem-solving skills. This strategy not only engages students in interactive learning but also enhances their ability to navigate and address various challenges through experiential and enjoyable activities.

The seventh strategy involves employing peer teaching methods to facilitate active learning in the classroom. Teacher AS discussed implementing peer teaching to promote active learning, emphasizing its student-centered nature and the development of students' instructional skills. Student SJ notes that the peer teaching method immediately engages students, fostering cooperative problem-solving and a deeper understanding of learning content. According to RI, students collaborate in small groups, acting as tutors for their peers, sharing knowledge, and collectively addressing challenges, with minimal teacher intervention. MM adds that the teacher's role in peer teaching involves direction, support, and supervision, allowing students to discuss ideas and overcome difficulties collaboratively. Observations affirm these insights, detailing the teacher creating study groups and assigning capable students to teach their peers, encouraging collaborative problem-solving.

The approach above is in line with Goldschmid (1976). In peer teaching, students individually prepare for class by reading assignments and formulating questions related to the main points or issues. Subsequently, they are randomly paired during each class meeting, engaging in regular questioning and providing corrective feedback on assignments. The objective of peer teaching is for each student to delve into a different elective and then convey the core material to their peers, promoting collaborative learning and knowledge dissemination.

The eighth strategy involves implementing Jigsaw learning methods to foster active learning in the classroom. Teacher AS narrated the implementation of Jigsaw learning, where students work in small groups of 4-6 individuals, each responsible for specific knowledge. Student SJ notes the opportunity provided by the jigsaw technique for students to independently seek and expand their assigned knowledge, fostering active learning as they strive to teach their peers. According to RI, the jigsaw method necessitates students sharing acquired knowledge within their groups, promoting cooperation and strong interdependence. MM adds that the Jigsaw approach, superior to lectures, encourages student participation, allowing them to achieve goals and gain valuable experience. Observations support these insights, illustrating teachers dividing students into groups, assigning different materials for comprehension, and promoting knowledge sharing between groups.

Drawing from John Hattie (2008), the Jigsaw learning method creates opportunities for students to discover knowledge independently. Their task is to collaborate in groups to develop this knowledge. This method divides the class into mixed groups to address small problems, and subsequently, the groups organize the solutions collaboratively. Jigsaw learning promotes cooperative learning, where students contribute to and benefit from shared knowledge creation within a supportive group dynamic.

The ninth strategy involves incorporating panel discussions to promote active learning in the classroom. Teacher AS discussed the use of panel discussions where students engage in informal but directed opinion exchanges in front of their peers. Student SJ notes increased enthusiasm in the learning process through panel discussions, allowing open expression without fear of mistakes. RI highlights the pressure-free nature of this method, resembling private conversations between students and contributing to an enjoyable learning experience. MM emphasizes the pleasure students derive from studying with peers during panel discussions, despite the additional effort required. Observations support these insights, illustrating the teacher directing students to exchange opinions as a moderator, maintaining focused discussion activities.

The strategy above aligns with the findings of Harry A. Overstreet (1934). In the panel discussion method, a chosen group of students serves as a panel, while the rest of the class assumes the role of spectators. The panel engages in an informal discussion on selected questions, and afterward, students summarize the panel discussion, opening the floor to further discussion among their peers. Panel discussions encourage collaborative exploration of topics and facilitate comprehensive understanding among students.

The tenth strategy involves integrating information search methods to foster active learning in the classroom. Teacher AS discussed the approach of giving students the opportunity to access material beyond the classroom, enhancing subject knowledge through an information search process. Student SJ notes the teacher encouraging extensive learning about the covered subjects, granting students freedom to gather information from diverse sources. According to RI, students develop critical thinking skills by seeking reliable information with the teacher's permission. MM adds that students are taught to express their acquired knowledge using information search methods, with the teacher serving as a facilitator. Observations align with these insights, illustrating the teacher sharing questions for students to answer through information searches from textbooks and the internet, fostering expanded discussions.

The strategy above resonates with Dervin's (1983) perspective that information search serves as a means to bridge gaps, identifying distinctions between situations and outcomes. This process represents the utilization of information to accomplish a task, cultivating critical thinking skills among students. By engaging in information searches, students learn to think critically, enhancing their problem-solving abilities and encouraging independent exploration of topics within the learning environment.

Challenges faced by the teacher in stimulating active learning among EFL students

The primary challenge identified is the constraint of time, as revealed in interview data regarding obstacles to implementing active learning in the classroom. According to Janes and Hauer (1987), the utilization of active learning strategies tends to compress the available time for instruction. This challenge is exemplified in a concise yet impactful exchange between a student and a teacher, highlighting the pressures educators face in covering course material efficiently. The teacher's response, "If you want to interrupt me with a question, we will never be able to close the material," underscores the dilemma of time constraints in incorporating active learning methods. The gathered information from participant interviews reveals distinct perspectives:

Contemporary teachers differ significantly from those in the past. Their efforts are crucial for the expected progression of the learning process, demanding substantial time investments (Teacher: AS, Interview on September 25, 2023).

Implementing active learning requires the teacher to spend considerable time on preparation, including gathering teaching aids and materials. This often leads to extended class hours on subsequent days (Student: SJ, Interview on September 25, 2023).

Active learning methods demand significant instructional time, prompting the teacher to split sessions into two or three meetings to effectively cover the content (Student: RI, Interview on September 25, 2023).

The limited weekly instruction time for English courses (2 or 3 hours) constrains the teacher in applying active learning methods, leaving her feeling that the gained time is insufficient (Student: MM, Interview on September 25, 2023).

Observations further emphasize that the teacher faces challenges in implementing active learning due to time constraints, requiring increased effort with a subsequent rise in the necessary time.

The second challenge identified is the extensive pre-class preparation required, as indicated by interview data regarding obstacles to implementing active learning in the classroom. This aligns with House (1974), who posits that resistance to change is generally linked to the time and energy required to acquire a new skill or role. The time investment necessary before a class can adopt active learning strategies is perceived to be greater than the time needed for updating or revising existing learning approaches. This challenge underscores the practical constraints associated with the preparatory aspects of integrating active learning methodologies. Information obtained from participant interviews yields the following insights:

When teachers opt for active learning strategies, they inevitably face the risk of creating barriers due to the time and effort required for implementation (Teacher: AS, Interview on September 25, 2023).

The teacher must prepare learning resources, equipment, and materials, as well as readying students for English learning. The preparation involves organizing all materials for active learning strategies in the classroom (Student: SJ, Interview on September 25, 2023).

The teacher completes all preparations before class, but occasionally students may not grasp the intended method. Consequently, the teacher finds herself preparing students for the proposed learning methods (Student: RI, Interview on September 25, 2023).

Challenges arise when presenting active learning strategies, demanding more extensive preparations and diverse implementation strategies (Student: MM, Interview on September 25, 2023).

Observations complement these findings, revealing that the teacher invests substantial time in class preparation. This preparation extends beyond materials required for learning activities, encompassing the need to ready students for the planned active learning methods.

The third challenge identified is students' lack of interest in learning English, as indicated by interview data. Interestingly, this obstacle is not perceived by the teacher as hindering the presentation of active learning in the classroom. To engage students in the learning process, the teacher aims to provide stimuli; however, the effectiveness of such efforts varies given the unique charm of each student. This perspective aligns with Dewey (1896), asserting that interest is an active force moving towards specific goals. According to Dewey, when individuals are psychologically alert, they are naturally drawn in a particular direction over others. Information extracted from participant interviews is outlined as follows:

To enhance students' enthusiasm for learning, teachers must adeptly navigate various situations, ensuring fair treatment for all students. Effective interaction with every student is crucial (Teacher: AS, Interview on September 25, 2023).

The teacher plays a significant role in fostering students' enthusiasm for learning. However, there are instances where teachers fail to create space or respond to students seeking to ask questions or share their opinions (Student: SJ, Interview on September 25, 2023).

Student enthusiasm thrives when the teacher engages with the entire class, yet the reality often involves the teacher interacting primarily with specific students (Student: RI, Interview on September 25, 2023).

Students are motivated to learn when the teacher demonstrates eagerness in teaching. Introducing icebreakers during dull moments further sparks enthusiasm (Student: MM, Interview on September 25, 2023).

Observations highlight a lack of student enthusiasm for learning English, emphasizing the need for the teacher to actively contribute to boosting students' enthusiasm. There is a perception among students that the teacher prioritizes interactions with high-achieving students over their counterparts.

Conclusion

This study focused on a female English teacher's strategies to promote active learning at a senior high school in Pekalongan. Two main objectives were explored: 1) how the teacher stimulates active learning, and 2) the challenges faced. The analysis revealed ten strategies: visual-based instruction, problem-solving, computer-based instruction, cooperative learning, drama, role play and games, peer teaching, Jigsaw learning, panel discussion, and information search. Noteworthy strategies include computer-based instruction, role play and games, and peer teaching. The analysis also identified three challenges: time

constraints, extensive pre-class preparation, and varied student enthusiasm levels, with some feeling neglected. The researchers recommend several considerations for future studies exploring teachers' strategies in fostering active learning among EFL students in Indonesian senior high schools. Firstly, include additional references from Scopus-indexed or international journals to enhance the study's literature. Secondly, increase participant numbers in subsequent research to broaden the understanding of the topic. Thirdly, explore the same subject using quantitative research to complement the qualitative findings.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the EFL teacher and the three students at *SMA Islam Kota Pekalongan* for their invaluable participation in this research through interviews and observations. Their cooperation and openness have been instrumental in enhancing the overall quality of this research.

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