

Arief Noor Farida is a junior lecturer at Indonesia's *Universitas Negeri Semarang* (Semarang State University [UNNES]). Now teaching her fourth semester and an alumna of the English Education program at UNNES, Ms. Farida is an especially motivated and dedicated educator. She teaches 18 hours per week, specializing in grammar and writing-skills courses. The Intensive Course she teaches, focusing on reading, writing, speaking, and grammar skills, serves as a foundation for incoming English Department students.



Ms. Farida welcomes her students to class.

Ms. Farida begins each class by welcoming students with small talk in English before reviewing previous material. Each class ends with a review, comprehension-check questions, encouragement to complete the homework, and a friendly reminder to students that the course serves as a building block for the rest of their academic journey within the department.

Of her classroom, she is most proud of the atmosphere she has established with her students, who, she said, are “energetic, active, and not afraid to try new things.” She pointed out that “traditionally, Indonesian classrooms are very teacher-centered. Students usually feel a lot of pressure about making mistakes in class, both from the teacher and their peers.” Ms. Farida combats this cultural norm by reducing her lecturing time, trying different seating arrangements, and moving around the classroom. “When I was studying English in junior high school,” she recalled, “my teacher only read from the textbook, and the class was very boring. I do not want my students to feel this way about English. I especially like to assign role plays and let students become another character. This way they feel less pressure to be perfect.”

The current students, who are enrolled in either the English Education or the English Literature program, received their English education beginning in the first grade of elementary school, when they were about six years old, and in general achieved intermediate proficiency by the time they completed high school, at about age 18. A topic of intense debate, the national curriculum of Indonesia underwent major changes in 2013, and English language study is no longer a compulsory subject in elementary schools. English is now optional at the primary-school level, with compulsory lessons beginning in junior high school.

“I understand the motive behind the change is to alleviate the pressure on students to learn a foreign language,” Ms. Farida said. “However, without early exposure to English, how will students become interested? How will students build their language foundation?”

Ms. Farida believes that at the elementary-school age, students are more inquisitive and curious, and more capable of taking in new information. As a mother, she is keen to the changes she sees in her six-year-old son’s learning experience. “My son hears the

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Ms. Farida helps one of her students with an exercise.

English I use around the house and has already begun mixing English vocabulary with Bahasa Indonesia. He tells me ‘*Bunda, saya mau star fruit*’ (‘Momma, I want a star fruit’). He does this out of his own curiosity and natural thirst for learning. I hope he can continue to learn English like this without feeling too much pressure. My son is exposed to English because of my career as a teacher.”

Also in the most recent national curriculum is a focus on student-centered learning. Ms. Farida hopes that this will shift the emphasis from reading and mechanical study to more active classes in which students are able to comprehend and *use* English to complete a task.

“The new curriculum’s focus on student-centered learning is often quite different

The English Department provides lecturers with a curriculum to follow, but they are also given the freedom to improvise and use their own materials. In Indonesia, students are able to choose their own majors, and therefore the students of the well-known program at UNNES are highly motivated and eager to learn. Finding engaging and authentic materials can sometimes pose a challenge to Ms. Farida, who said the greatest resource for such materials is the Internet, although she makes use of local materials as well—for example, by assigning her translation class to translate local brochures into English.

As a young lecturer, Ms. Farida hopes to continue improving her teaching technique as well as her personal knowledge of English. She actively seeks professional development and

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from what the majority of students have experienced in language classes,” she said. “In my own lessons, I have incorporated more student presentations and teaching practices in order to give them hands-on experience. Up till now, these future English teachers have not had many role models for student-centered learning. Now, we must make up for this so our students are fully prepared to carry out the new curriculum.”

At UNNES, English Department lecturers use classrooms equipped with the same basic facilities: desks, chairs, blackboards and whiteboards, and LCD overhead projectors. Ms. Farida’s main resource in class is a textbook that provides students with a base knowledge of English so that they may continue in their respective programs. Both disciplines within the English Department—English Education and English Literature— instruct the majority of classes in English.

training opportunities and has participated in Shaping the Way We Teach webinars and MOOCs (massive open online courses) offered by the U.S. Department of State and the University of California–Berkeley. Her future goals include attending and presenting at local conferences and seminars as well as completing an exchange program overseas. Her advice to teenagers hoping to begin a career in English education is to first build a base knowledge of English grammar. She said, “It is one of the things students ask about most. For students to succeed, the teacher must be able to explain the grammar rules to them.” She also pointed out that along with achieving a high proficiency in English, prospective teachers must also hone their teaching methods and skills.

Following up on her undergraduate and postgraduate work, Ms. Farida develops her own teaching skills by experience and

reflection. During her UNNES studies, she taught privately from her second semester onward and therefore was able to immediately apply the theories she learned in the classroom. She learned from her challenges and successes. Ms. Farida thinks critically of her own lesson planning, reflecting on past classes and working to improve the next. She is also an active observer; as a student and still now as a lecturer she observes her more senior colleagues and takes note of techniques that work well and methods she hopes to try in her classroom.

In addition to online training, Ms. Farida is a fan of resources found on the Internet. “There are so many resources available on the Internet, and teachers from all over the world can access them for free,” she said. She is especially a fan of www.eslflow.com and www.busyteacher.org. Now that she is a full-time teacher, she has even fewer chances to observe others in practice. Sometimes Ms. Farida finds videos of teaching on YouTube to imitate in class. Her senior colleagues are

often too busy to observe her teaching and provide feedback, as the demand for English in Indonesia is quite high and UNNES has one of the best programs in the area.

Ms. Farida first became interested in the English language when she was in kindergarten. She borrowed a cassette tape of Mariah Carey songs from a cousin and fell in love with the language. Not only did she learn all the lyrics by heart, she had her mother translate them so she could understand the meaning. She did not return the cassette to her cousin for many months. And now she uses songs in her teaching. “Students are much more engaged during class when they see language in action, not just in a textbook,” she explained. “Sometimes I still use songs in translation, idiom, phonetics, and even grammar lessons.” She also uses songs to introduce a topic and get students “excited—even if the song itself is not the main focus of the lesson.” As an example, she said she plays the Backstreet Boys’ “As Long as You Love Me” to introduce adverb clauses.

Ms. Farida shows no signs of losing her passion for learning and teaching English. “I like English because it gives me a sense of accomplishment,” she said. “Compared to Bahasa Indonesia, the grammar rules are much more complicated and complex. When I fully understand one and how to use it, I feel like I have solved a puzzle. When I teach, I try to pass this passion on to my students.”

Most important, she said, “is my continued use of English with my son. I want him to be able to speak English well and have the same passion that I do. Indonesia is growing and developing rapidly, and I hope for him to be successful. I think English proficiency will be a key factor in that.”

This article was written by **Erica Balazs**, an international education professional currently serving as a returning English Language Fellow hosted by Semarang State University in Central Java, Indonesia.

Photos by Erica Balazs



Motorbikes parked on Semarang State University campus