

EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This literature review explores the multifaceted challenges and strategic approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT) within Islamic boarding schools (Pesantren). The study is grounded in the necessity of mastering English as a global language while maintaining the spiritual identity of students in a unique educational context. Using a qualitative library research method and documentation analysis, data were synthesized from various national journals and books. Findings indicate that teachers face significant hurdles, including students' low motivation, limited vocabulary mastery, speaking anxiety, and the dominance of the Arabic language. To address these, successful strategies include implementing "Fun Learning" models, daily language discipline, and the integration of Islamic values through activities such as Muhadara, Mufrodlat, and Kultum in English. The study concludes that effective ELT in pesantren requires a synergy of institutional support, innovative pedagogy, and an immersive environment that aligns linguistic proficiency with students' religious and academic objectives.

Keyword: Challenges, English Language Teaching, Islamic Boarding School, Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

English has become a global language and plays a crucial role in communication, education, technology, and international relations. English, a subject taught in numerous Indonesian educational institutions, is crucial for enhancing the knowledge of Indonesian students (Zulkarnindra, 2021). In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject at various levels of education, including Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). Within the context of Islamic boarding schools, learning English can also help students understand the literature and sources of Islamic knowledge available in English (Ahmada, Mahmud, & Nisa, 2023).

Islamic Boarding Schools or Pesantren is not only one of the religious education institutions that become the womb of prospective Muslim scholars (Umar, 2022). Pesantren, one of Indonesia's leading educational Institutions, offers a unique blend of academic and spiritual education. While traditionally focused on religious instruction, pesantren have evolved to include secular subjects, making them an attractive option for parents

seeking a holistic education for their children. (Meria, Tri, & Bahtiyar, 2025)

The modern pesantren education system is currently undergoing a complex transformation influenced by digital progress. Consequently, these institutions must adopt contemporary pedagogical practices, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT), to ensure a harmony between traditional curricula and technological evolution. This study focuses on investigating the methods employed by English instructors to navigate the digital era within the constraints of limited gadget access common in Islamic boarding schools.

Understanding the challenges and strategies used by English teachers in this unique educational context is important to improve teaching quality and support students in mastering English without neglecting their religious identity.

However, teaching English in Islamic boarding schools presents unique challenges due to their distinctive curriculum, learning environment, students' linguistic background, and the integration

of religious values into daily activities. The learning method usually contains stages or technical steps and operations applied in the learning process. (Fitria, 2023).

Alongside the challenges, the study also outlines practical strategies that teachers can implement, including creating supportive learning environments, incorporating engaging and contextual learning materials, integrating Islamic values in instruction, providing differentiated tasks, and offering continuous feedback to help learners progress. The insights generated from this analysis are expected to support teachers and educational institutions in developing more effective and Islamic-based English teaching practices. (Fitria, 2023)

According to (Utomo, Kusakabe, Sultoni, & Setyowa, 2020) the difficulties in teaching English in EFL classrooms stem from the instructors, students, school, and parents. Less teaching materials, classroom management, ICT expertise, numerous teaching administration, a heavy workload, and memory loss pose difficulties for English instructors. From the perspective of the pupil, difficulties in learning English include a lack of vocabulary, issues with motivation, and juvenile delinquency.

In addition, the lack of school facilities to facilitate teaching and learning activities is a problem in the teaching and learning four processes. In addition, many parents in the village are poorly educated and lack long-term perspective, which negatively affects their children's education. This study offered three recommendations for teaching English effectively: (1) teachers should create a teaching contract at the beginning of each semester; (2) principals should send teachers to MGMP meetings and continuous professional development activities; and (3) schools should periodically motivate students and parents.

The education system in pesantren, or Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, is renowned for adapting and integrating traditional Islamic teachings with modern educational practices. Islamic education in pesantren traditionally emphasizes three core concepts: *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. *Tarbiyah* emphasizes character building

and morals, *ta'lim* focuses on providing knowledge, and *ta'dib* focuses on fostering behaviour and character.

Therefore, there is a movement towards innovation in teaching methods and learning media as a response to advances in science and technology. Based on Nikmatullah as educators, policymakers, and stakeholders, their role is crucial in shaping the future of Islamic education and ensuring its relevance in the digital era (Nikmatullah, Cecep, Wawan, Naf'an, & Anis, 2023.).

METHOD

This research uses library research. This type of qualitative research is generally carried out by not going into the field to search for data sources. Library research can also be interpreted as research that is carried out only based on written works, including the results of both published and unpublished research (Fitria, 2022b).

In this research, the researcher would like to describe strategies and challenges for English Language Teaching (ELT) in Islamic Education Institutions such as Pesantren or Islamic Boarding Schools. In this study, the researcher used the documentation method. Related to the data used by the researcher is data in the form of written works such as books and articles.

In collecting data, the researcher seeks from various sources, readings, studying, associating, and taking notes on materials needed to obtain relevant information with discussion. The researcher collects data from books and articles from national journals related to English learning and English Language Teaching (ELT) in Islamic Education Institutions such as Pesantren or Islamic Boarding Schools. However, research focusing on English teacher challenges and strategies in Islamic boarding schools, Therefore, this study seeks to explore the challenges faced by English teachers and the strategies they implement in teaching English.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research reviews strategies and challenges in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Islamic

Education Institutions such as Pesantren or Islamic Boarding Schools.

1. Challenges of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Islamic Boarding Schools

Teaching foreign languages such as English faces challenges and difficulties during the implementation. The following are several previous studies that examine methods for teaching English at Islamic boarding schools. There are several factors are derived from internal and external factors. Teachers should consider many things to engage the student at pesantren in learning. The term internal factors are pedagogy, motivation, and identity, while the external factors include curriculum, classroom management, and teachers' proficiency

The first challenges The next challenge is classroom management (Habibi, et al., 2018) Teachers play various roles in a typical classroom, but surely one of the most important is that of classroom manager. Effective teaching and learning cannot take place in a poorly managed classroom." In spite of the enduring concern of educational practitioners and researchers, research focusing explicitly on classroom management in pesantren is still limited. Our study intended to explore English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom management problems and the coping strategies of pesantren teachers. It was not easy to determine the dominant problems that pesantren teachers encountered related to classroom management in teaching English as a foreign language as a variety of problems seemed tinvolvedly interconnected. According to (Husna, Anshori, & Khoirunnisa, 2021)

one of the factors that come from students is when students do not have strong motivation to learn English, so it will be a challenge for a teacher to revive the motivation of these students. The students think that English is a difficult language because they have to master several skills, namely listening, reading, speaking, and writing. To master these skills they must also understand grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and others. (Hajriah, Amirullah , & Chairil , 2023)

In terms of student factors, increasing the learning motivation of students by holding competitions

about English every month, the facility and infrastructure by adding language laboratory facilities. While in the environmental factor, applying language discipline in the Islamic boarding school requires students to speak English in daily interactions. (Fitria, 2023)

The journey towards digital integration has its challenges. There is much concern over maintaining basic principles intrinsic to pesantren, particularly when close interactions decrease in digital environments (Kurniawan, Agus, & Ema, 2025) Educators emphasize character education to maintain traditional Islamic values amid technological developments (Nisa, Durotun, Aimah, & Fakhr, 2024)

2. Startegies of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Islamic Boarding Schools

(Lestari & Pratolo , 2019) explain that teacher education background, enthusiasm level or student motivation, teacher comprehension of the student's character, and norms applied at Islamic Boarding Schools determine English teachers' strategies. Even though English teachers in several Islamic Boarding Schools attempt to develop their teaching strategies innovatively, stagnant approaches are still used to meet students' requirements select the most effective strategy for teaching English.

The modern Islamic boarding school education system seeks to combine traditional systems with modern systems that are developing in society. One of the characteristics of modern Islamic boarding schools is that the language used by elements of modern Islamic boarding schools primarily uses English as an effort to answer the challenges of the times so that students become individual learners who are also able to guide society by using various languages effectively and efficiently (Fauziah & Maulana , 2022)

Various models of English teaching in pesantren, such as the "English-Trend" program and "Weekly English with Fun" show the diversity of methods employed, from informal speaking practice to structured language camps and symposiums. These models highlight the importance of practical language use in both academic and everyday settings, promoting proficiency through

immersive, interactive activities. (Meria , Tri , & Bahtiyar, 2025). Iksan., Husnaini, & Masruddin, (2022) explain that the weekly English Program with the Fun Learning Method benefits teachers and can help Pesantren students improve their English. Implementing Fun Learning can assist and inspire Pesantren students to learn English.

CONCLUSION

The teaching and learning of English in Islamic boarding schools represent a unique integration of global linguistic needs and traditional spiritual values. This study concludes that English Language Teaching (ELT) in this context faces significant multifaceted challenges, primarily stemming from internal factors such as students' low motivation, limited vocabulary mastery, and speaking anxiety, as well as external factors like the dominance of the Arabic language in the daily curriculum.

However, synthesized findings from various studies highlight that these obstacles are effectively mitigated through culturally responsive strategies. Teachers successfully bridge the gap by integrating Islamic values into the curriculum through activities such as *Muhadara* (public speaking), *Mufrodlat* (vocabulary memorization), and *Kultum* (religious lectures) conducted in English. Furthermore, the implementation of "Fun Learning" models and immersive environments—including "English Weeks," daily conversation discipline, and the utilization of language laboratories—proves essential in building student confidence and proficiency.

Ultimately, the success of ELT in the pesantren environment depends on the synergy between institutional support, innovative pedagogical methodologies, and a curriculum that aligns English proficiency with the students' religious identity and academic objectives

Future research and educational practice should focus on strengthening the integration of digital technology and specialized teacher training to overcome the unique challenges of the pesantren environment. It is recommended that school principals prioritize sending English teachers to MGMP meetings and continuous professional development activities to improve pedagogical

skills and classroom management. Educational institutions should also enhance their infrastructure by adding language laboratory facilities and creating a more supportive atmosphere for both speaking and writing.

Furthermore, researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies on the impact of "English-Trend" and "Fun Learning" programs to determine their long-term effectiveness in maintaining students' linguistic proficiency alongside their religious identity. Finally, schools must maintain a "triangle of consistency" by ensuring that teaching contracts and motivational sessions for both students and parents are conducted periodically to sustain high learning motivation

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