



The implementation of English and Arabic practices at an Islamic bilingual boarding school

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to identify challenges teachers and students face in this process at an Islamic bilingual middle boarding school in Aceh, Indonesia. The participants included 27 boarding school students, one English teacher, and one Arabic teacher. The collected data underwent analysis using the interactive analysis model, which involves data reduction, display, and verification. The analysis focuses on specific activities within five categories: (1) *mufradat* (vocabulary), (2) controlling language use, (3) *muhadasah* (conversational activities), (4) competition, and (5) cooperation. The findings revealed that not all specified activities were consistently carried out, with each category featuring three implemented activities: daily vocabulary memorization, language festivals, and the application of punishments. The interviews brought forth challenges such as teachers' language proficiency limitations, students' low motivation, and a tendency to use the Indonesian language when unsupervised. These insights provide valuable guidance for similar boarding institutions that implement comparable language programs.

Keywords: Arabic, English, Islamic boarding school, language implementation, practice

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INTRODUCTION

The number of children sent to boarding schools has increased in the past 20 years in Indonesia, including in the province of Aceh, Indonesia. Despite the fact that access to traditional pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) has been widely available for many years (As-Sabiq et al., 2018), a substantial number of modern Islamic pesantren are currently being established. Modern pesantren differ from traditional ones as traditional pesantren solely concentrate on religious matters, employ conventional teaching methods, and are primarily situated in villages (Bawani, 1993, as cited in Das et al., 2016). Modern boarding schools, on the other hand, integrate Islamic teaching with general knowledge and life skills.

Annually, a multitude of boarding schools become accessible to attract students to enrol in their academic programs. The establishment of modern Islamic boarding schools has fulfilled the demand of the modern era (Das et al., 2016). Mastuhu (1999) emphasizes that the integration of cultural and international systems renders schools more dynamic and competitive.

Aceh has the fifth largest number of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia (Adnan et al., 2023). The majority of Acehnese individuals adhere to Islam, with a significant proportion actively practicing the faith by adhering to its obligatory tenets and refraining from engaging in errant actions as prescribed by Islamic values. Parents typically impart Islamic education to their children by enrolling them in boarding schools. Parents aspire for their children to receive training that encompasses Islamic knowledge and general knowledge, skills, and moral values (Muluk et

al., 2019). Before the commencement of the academic year, parents actively seek information regarding the educational programs offered by prospective schools. These programs are significant in parental decision-making and transcend considerations related to the facilities provided by the educational institution. Initial observations before conducting this research revealed that all boarding schools offer various interesting programs such as (1) Islamic teaching program (reciting Al Qur'an), *Tahsin* (improving recitation), *Tajwid* (grammar of Al Qur'an), and others, (2) physical activities; archery, swimming, equestrian, and karate, and (3) soft skill programs such as art, English, Arabic, and other languages courses.

Similar to the English language, Arabic is also a foreign language in Indonesia. The language is also used in the holy book of Muslims, Al Qur'an, as Allah Almighty said in Surah Yusuf verses 2:



“We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an, so you people may understand/use reason” (12:2)

However, not many Muslims in Indonesia have mastered the Arabic language. They can read the translation that comes along with the Al Qur'an itself. The translation is provided on the left or right side in many prints of the Al Qur'an. Thus, learning the language itself is likely not a priority for most Muslims. However, Mahbubah et al. (2019) underscores the imperative nature of mastering the linguistic aspects of Arabic, particularly those found in the Al Qur'an. They further add that the need to learn Arabic is a part of being a Muslim and is important to conducting religious activities.

In the Indonesian curriculum, Arabic is a compulsory subject in Islamic schools (Zurqoni et al, 2020). However, they also found that students at schools find it difficult to master Arabic even though they have been learning it for years. They mention that one of the failure indicators is that students are not able to understand the meaning of the sentences in the Al Qur'an.

Several studies on strategies, skills, or multilingualism used in pesantren have been a focus of scholars, especially in the Indonesian context (Fattah et al., 2022; Habiburrahim et al., 2022; Silviyanti & Wahdini, 2020; Tahir, 2017). Tahir (2017) identifies the approach and implementation of multilingualism used in a pesantren in Makassar, Indonesia. A sample of 6 English teachers and 9 Arabic teachers were taken in this study. The results showed that the teachers had used multiple approaches, such as immersion, transitional, dual language, and pull-out. He also found that four main teaching strategies were implemented, such as communicating among students and teachers, and students to students, daily routines, and language-group activities.

Moreover, Fattah et al. (2022) explain some steps in implementing foreign language learning in an Islamic boarding school context; this is as shown in Table 1. From Table 1, the steps outlined for implementing foreign language learning in an Islamic boarding school context are multifaceted and cover various aspects of language acquisition and application. In the first category, *'mufradot'* (vocabulary), a comprehensive approach involves activities such as assessing memory retention, proficiency evaluation through scrutiny of specific books, correction of verbal expressions, documentation of contemporary language terms, and regular alterations in language content. The emphasis on repetition, memory commitment, and journal recording suggests a structured and systematic language learning methodology.

The second category, *'controlling the use of languages'*, highlights the importance of effective management, disciplinary actions, and language surveillance to ensure students' adherence to language practices. Notably, it includes unique measures like the coordination with culinary and stationery facilities to address students who do not want to speak English and Arabic. The third category, *'competition'*, introduces extracurricular elements such as linguistic festivals, rewards, competitive events, and drama competitions to promote language proficiency and

participation. Lastly, the fourth category, ‘*muhadatsah*’, highlights the significance of conversational activities in enforcing language use and emphasizes a regular thematic approach to these interactions.

Table 1. Steps in implementing foreign language learning in an Islamic boarding school context

No	Terms	Meaning/activities
1	<i>Mufrodot</i> (Vocabulary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating the students’ retention capacity - Scrutinizing the <i>mufrodot</i> book for proficiency assessment - Rectifying students’ verbal expressions - Documenting contemporary language terms - Implementing alterations in language content on a bi-weekly basis - Mandating students to commit <i>mufrodot</i> to memory - Repetition of vocabulary on the subsequent day - Recording entries in a designated journal book.
2	Controlling the language use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizing and managing students’ schedules effectively - Implementing disciplinary actions in response to disruptive conduct by students - Disseminating language surveillance activities to a group of 15 individuals or more within a single day - Imposing rigorous penalties on students who refrain from engaging in language activities, specifically in <i>muhadatsah</i> (conversational activities) and <i>mufrodot</i> (vocabulary exercises) - Administering a punitive measure, namely the act of shaving a student’s hair, in response to the use of inappropriate language - Coordinating with the culinary facility and student stationery store to identify and address students who fail to communicate in both Arabic and English - Administering language assessments prior to the commencement of semester examinations - Facilitating the creation of a wall magazine every month - Providing training in master of ceremonies (MC) skills for both Arabic and English languages - Incorporating educational and Islamic musical elements in both languages
3	Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizing a linguistic festival to celebrate language proficiency - Commending students through a system of rewards - Facilitating a competitive event between male and female boarding groups - Conducting a drama competition as part of the extracurricular activities
4	<i>Muhadatsah</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revoking exemptions for students who fail to employ the official language in their daily interactions within the boarding school - Administering conversational activities, referred to as <i>muhadatsah</i>, with a distinct theme every Friday
5	Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperating with fellow staff members to monitor students

Furthermore, the concept of ‘cooperation’ is introduced as a cross-cutting theme, emphasizing collaboration among staff members for effective student monitoring. In summary, these steps suggest a holistic and structured approach to foreign language learning, encompassing various dimensions of language acquisition, application, disciplinary measures, extracurricular activities, and collaborative efforts.

Challenges during the implementation of a pedagogical approach are identified to achieve proficiency in foreign languages. Zuhairati et al. (2022) note that, despite years of English language education for Indonesian students, the articulation of sentences poses a challenge, attributable to factors such as insufficient vocabulary and the impact of the student’s mother tongues. Fattah et al. (2022) agree that both linguistic and non-linguistic factors affect students’ mastery of a language, including English and Arabic. As a case in point, Hadijah (2014) revealed several reasons for students’ incompetence in speaking in boarding schools, such as a lack of personal motivation and confidence and insufficient speaking practice even within the boarding

environment. Additionally, they exhibited a greater eagerness to learn Arabic and Islamic knowledge than English.

Extending the foundation laid by previous studies, Zuhairati et al. (2022) analyzed the implementation of language programs in one boarding school in Aceh. The results indicated that the school had established regulations mandating students to adhere to specific guidelines, including the obligatory use of both Arabic and English in daily communication. Additionally, students are expected to remind their peers to consistently employ both languages, and those who disobey face the prospect of being taken to a 'language court' for disciplinary measures. Furthermore, their findings reveal that the school's schedule is intricately linked to the enhancement of language competencies.

Contributing to the ongoing discourse in this field, Zurqoni et al.'s (2020) study conducted among teachers in nine non-boarding Islamic schools identified challenges in learning Arabic that were present on both the teachers' and students' sides. On the students' side, challenges included (1) difficulties in reading the Al Qur'an, hindering their Arabic learning, (2) limited learning hours leading to insufficient Arabic practice, (3) inadequate learning facilities, and (4) a lack of support for students to communicate in Arabic. On the teachers' side, these factors also impacted the effectiveness of Arabic learning, as well as the teachers' competencies in teaching the language. Consequently, the researchers recommend integrating Arabic learning with technology, incorporating media and internet resources, upgrading facilities, providing matriculation for new students, and implementing standardized tests.

In previous related research, Silviyanti et al. (2023) conducted a study about bilingual students with a focus on examining the strategies employed by teachers in teaching English to enhance students' proficiency in the language. The research, which employed a linguistic ethnography case study, revealed that the teacher implemented various strategies, including trans-languaging (both intra- and inter-lingual), gestures, and translation.

The studies discussed shed light on various aspects of language learning challenges and strategies in different boarding school environments. The factors contributing to students' speaking incompetence in boarding schools include insufficient practice and a stronger inclination toward learning Arabic and Islamic knowledge. Meanwhile, the challenges faced in teaching foreign languages are limited language practice hours and inadequate facilities, technological integration, and standardized testing. These studies contribute to a nuanced understanding of language learning dynamics, which encompass both student and teacher perspectives.

Boarding schools face challenges in developing teaching and learning strategies to enable students to master both languages. The complexity of this duty is heightened by the fact that both languages function as foreign languages in Indonesia. Although individuals may possess the ability to read the Quran, achieving proficiency in the language represents a distinct and separate endeavor. Proficiency in Arabic enables reciters to comprehend the meaning of the Quran; however, translations are available in numerous printed editions of the holy book. Thus, learning Arabic was not compulsory. Meanwhile, the English language is not employed officially, and instruction in this language is limited to two hours per week in most schools (Masduqi & Subiyanto, 2020).

To compete in an innovative education institution in Aceh, Indonesia, a school was finally established in 2021 that promotes two programs of learning: full-day and boarding. This is a private Islamic school located in the city of Banda Aceh. This newly established school offers bilingual classroom environments as the language instruction used at the school. This means that all teachers should be able to communicate in English as well as teach in English. However, Silviyanti et al. (2023) discovered that creating an English-speaking environment for non-native speakers presents a multitude of challenges. Puasa et al. (2017) agree that if the teacher uses less of the target language in a class, they will probably use less of the target language outside of class. Hindrances are found in the teacher's incompetence in using English and students' demotivation to use and learn English (Husniyah, 2019; Iftanti et al., 2023). Furthermore, forcing students to study more than one foreign language at the same time is very challenging for students and teachers. Yet, there is a need to observe how the school attempts to implement the language program. Therefore, this research has developed two research questions: (1) How is the

integration of English and Arabic instructions employed at the Islamic bilingual boarding school?
 (2) What challenges do teachers and students encounter in the execution of English and Arabic language practices?

METHOD

The study used a qualitative approach. Positioned within the established literature in this domain, this research contributes by examining the implementation of English and Arabic instruction within an Islamic bilingual boarding school, as well as elucidating the challenges encountered by both educators and students in the attempt. Following Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the qualitative method adopts a multi-method approach characterized by an interpretive and naturalistic orientation toward its subject matter. This implies that qualitative researchers investigate phenomena within their natural contexts, seeking to comprehend and interpret them based on the meanings ascribed by individuals.

The entire school community, comprising students and staff, constitutes the observational sample for this study, observed during their routine activities at the school. The study collected data from students and teachers. Two students were chosen as participants: one male from the 8th class and one female from the 9th class. Additionally, interviews were conducted with two teachers: an Arabic teacher and an English teacher. Notably, the Arabic teacher also serves as the boarding supervisor for students and maintains a continuous presence with them around the clock.

The bilingual boarding school under investigation comprises a total of 40 students. Functioning as a private institution, the school provides both boarding and full-day learning activities. Full-day students commence their school day at 7.30 am until 4.30 pm. On the other hand, boarding students, though participating in the same subjects and classes as their full-day counterparts, stay at the school and do not return home in the afternoon. These boarding students, consisting of 13 males and 14 females, form the primary sample group for the study, totalling 27 participants. Furthermore, the school staff includes 11 teachers, 1 finance professional, and 1 cleaning staff, all of whom engage with the students. Each teacher possesses distinct competencies in both English and Arabic fluency.

Two instruments were employed for data collection: observation checklist and interview guidelines. The implementation of Arabic and English language practices within the school setting was systematically observed, and the framework derived from Fattah et al. (2022) was utilized. The analysis focused on five categories: (1) *mufrodat*, (2) controlling language use, (3) competition, (4) *muhadasah*, and (5) cooperation. Table 2 is a checklist that guides the observation process.

Table 2. Checklist for observation

No	Terms	Applied		Examples of activities
		Yes	No	
1	<i>Mufrodod</i> (Vocabulary)			
2	Controlling the language use			
3	Competition			
4	<i>Muhadatsah</i>			
5	cooperation			

The interview guidelines are structured as follows:

Questions for Students:

1. Are you aware of the significance of learning English?
2. Are you aware of the importance of learning Arabic? (Mahbubah et al., 2019)
3. How do you perceive the implementation of English and Arabic at school? (Zuhairati et al., 2022)
4. Have you ever faced disciplinary measures?
5. Do you encounter any challenges in learning English and Arabic?

Questions for Teachers:

1. What strategies do you employ to facilitate students' mastery of English and Arabic? (Silviyanti et al., 2023)
2. In instances of rule violations, do you administer punishment to students? If so, how? (Fattah et al., 2022)
3. What obstacles do you encounter in teaching English and Arabic?
4. In your perspective, what are the root causes of these obstacles?
5. In your view, do parents endorse the implementation of English and Arabic at school?

The data collection was spent one semester, while direct observations were regularly conducted twice a week. Additionally, arbitrary visits to students were made during evening activities to observe English and Arabic practices. Comprehensive notes were taken on all observations made during these visits. After the completion of the observations, interviews were conducted with both teachers and students. The interviews were recorded for 15-20 minutes and transcribed.

For data analysis, the steps suggested by Creswell (2009) were adopted. Creswell (2009) outlines a systematic approach that involves organizing and preparing the data, immersion in data through thorough reading, and initiating the initial coding process to label concepts or themes. The next step was to search for recurring patterns or themes across the data, reviewing and refining them to accurately represent the essence of the information. After defining and naming these themes, a coherent narrative is produced, supported by quotes or examples from the data. Validation is pursued through discussions with our respondents to ensure that interpretations align with their experiences. The final steps involve interpreting the overall meaning of the findings, drawing conclusions, and discussing implications for the broader field. Importantly, this approach is an iterative process, which allows for flexibility and openness to emergent insights as the interpretations are continually refined and engaged with.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Observation

There are 11 teachers with varying schedules determined by their teaching hours. Out of the total, 8 teachers work the day shift, categorizing them as full-time teachers. Three of the teachers work at night. The detailed profiles of the teachers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The teachers

No	Teachers and Staff	Schedule	Arabic and English language competence	Teaching subjects
1	DS	Day, night	Basic English and Arabic	Islamic knowledge, Sports
2	ZM	Day, night	Proficiency in both English and Arabic	Arabic language, Al Qur'an
3	ARA	day	Proficiency in both English and Arabic	English and Indonesian language
4	PA	Day	Basic English and Arabic	Math
5	DD	Day	Basic English and Arabic	Science
6	NK	Day	No basic English and Arabic	Physical activities
7	YS	Day	Proficiency in both English and Arabic	Arabic language
8	MN	Day	Proficiency in both English and Arabic	Al Qur'an
9	FD	Night	No basic English and Arabic	Al Qur'an
10	N	Night	Basic English and Arabic	Kitab (a book in Arabic or another language that serves as a reference in the scholarly tradition of Islam in Islamic boarding schools)
11	YR	night	Proficiency in both English and Arabic	Arabic language

Table 3 illustrates the diversity in language competence, teaching subjects, and schedules among teachers and staff, highlighting the varied skills and roles within the boarding school setting. In terms of language competence, teachers and staff exhibit varying levels of competence in Arabic and English. While 4 teachers demonstrate proficiency in both languages (e.g., ZM, ARA, YS, YR), others have only basic competencies in English and Arabic. Pertaining to teaching subjects, the range of subjects taught by teachers includes Islamic knowledge, sports, Arabic language, Quran, English language, Indonesian language, math, science, and *Kitab*. The allocation of subjects is not strictly correlated with language competence. Finally, teachers and staff work on different schedules, including both day and night shifts. The language competence of teachers is not necessarily allied to their work hours.

School activities

Based on the observations, the class structure consists of two rounds of learning activities. In the morning until noon (12.30 pm), students engage in the study of general subjects, including English, Math, Science, Indonesian language, Islamic knowledge, Quran, and *Hadists* (the words and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his family), Civic education, and Islamic history. The second round commences after the lunch break, focusing on skill development and life skill programs such as Boy and Girl Scouts (Wednesday afternoon), speech, writing, role play, and language practice (Monday), karate (Thursday), and creativity and art (Tuesday). This approach aims to ensure that students not only acquire knowledge but also develop competence in public speaking while building physical strength through various activities. On Saturdays, students participate in sports and art activities where communication in English with teachers and peers is encouraged. However, it was observed that they predominantly talk in their mother tongue while specifically switching to Arabic pronouns like ‘ana’ (I am) and ‘antum’ (you all) when referring to themselves, for example:

“*Ana udah siap.*” (I am finished.)

“*Tungguin ana.*” (Wait for me.)

“*Tadi antum kemana?*” (Where have you been?)

Supporting media

It was observed that teachers had made efforts to establish an English-Arabic language setting for school displays. Students are instructed to write some *mufradat* (vocabulary) on a large sheet of paper to be displayed on the wall. Figure 1 depicts the placement of this *mufradat* in various locations of the school. To familiarize students with the spelling of words, teachers have also attempted to write notices and announcements in English. Figure 1 illustrates the room name written in both languages.



Figure 1. Name of the principal's room

It was also observed that certain notices and announcements are written in a mixture of languages, predominantly English and Indonesian. Ideally, the text displayed includes the Arabic

language and English versions. However, there is a noticeable inconsistency in the language used within a single document, with English titles and Indonesian content.

The implementation of foreign languages learning in an Islamic boarding school context

Fattah et al. (2022) identified activities in an Indonesian boarding school presented in the framework. Table 4 illustrates the activities implemented in this school as examples, along with potential punishments that may occur.

Table 4. The activities implemented in the school

No	Terms	Applied				Notes		
		English		Arabic				
		Yes	No	Yes	No			
1	<i>Mufrodot</i> (Vocabulary)	√		√		Students must memorize vocabulary as part of the language-learning process		
		√		√		The practice involves revisiting the previously learned words on the subsequent day to reinforce retention		
		√		√		Assessing students' memory to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning strategy		
		√		√		The evaluation of students' memory extends to checking the <i>mufrodot</i> book to ensure comprehension and retention of vocabulary		
				√		√	A practice for students is to maintain a journal book, providing a written record of their language learning progress.	
					√		√	Systematically documenting contemporary English and Arabic expressions
				√		√		Implementing alterations in language content on a bi-weekly basis
2	Controlling the language use	√		√		Coordinating students' time involves organizing and managing their schedules effectively		
		√		√		Disciplining students who display disruptive behavior		
				√		√	Engaging in language surveillance, reaching out to as many as 15 or more people in a single day to monitor and encourage the use of English and Arabic within the school community	
				√		√	Imparting strict consequences to students who abstain from participating in language activities, such as <i>muhadatsah</i> and <i>mufrodot</i>	
				√		√	Administering a bald punishment for students who employ offensive language	
		√		√			Coordinating with the culinary facility and student stationery store to identify and address students who fail to communicate in both Arabic and English	
				√		√	Organizing a wall magazine every month	
		√		√			Conducting Master of Ceremonies (MC) training in both Arabic and English	
3	Competition	√		√		Integrating education and Islamic music in both Arabic and English		
		√		√		Organizing a linguistic festival to celebrate language proficiency		
		√		√		Commending students through a system of rewards		
		√		√		Facilitating a competitive event between male and female boarding groups		
4	<i>Muhadatsah</i>	√		√		Conducting a drama competition as part of the extracurricular activities		
		√		√		Revoking exemptions for students who fail to employ the official language in their daily interactions within the boarding school		
		√		√		Administering conversational activities, referred to as <i>muhadatsah</i> , with a distinct theme every Friday		
5	Cooperation		√		√	Cooperating with fellow staff members to monitor students		

From Table 4, it was observed that '*mufradat*' refers to activities designed to facilitate the memorization of vocabulary. While originating from the Arabic language, it is commonly employed to denote vocabulary remedial sessions for Arabic. In the context of English, these sessions are commonly referred to as vocabulary practice. These activities take place four times a week, spanning from Monday to Thursday, with the expectation that students memorize 10 words each day. The assigned teacher has curated a pocket dictionary containing the specific vocabulary designated for use. These words are selected from the textbook, which emphasizes the importance of memorizing them to enhance students' proficiency in reading the textual content of their textbooks.

Next, in 'controlling language use', there is a rule that English must be utilized when students purchase snacks and drinks at the canteen, with English and Arabic phrases displayed on the wall for guidance. However, observations revealed a lack of enforcement regarding language use during snack breaks. Both students and canteen staff commonly communicate in local languages. Transitioning from local to English language habits necessitates substantial effort. Motivation from teachers is crucial, and students' self-awareness regarding the importance of a foreign language should be heightened. Despite these challenges, teachers have attempted to enforce language policies by imposing penalties on students who do not practice speaking in a foreign language during the 'English day'.

In 'Competition' it is divided into onsite and offsite competitions. Onsite competitions involve students competing among themselves internally, with teachers organizing various English competitions each semester. During the observations, students participated in events such as spelling bees and storytelling, and winners were awarded trophies. To broaden their experiences, students also engage in competitions against other schools hosted by external institutions. In the year under observation, two students achieved the second position in an English Speech contest and secured the third position in a Spelling Bee contest held at other schools and the Aceh Provincial Education Office. Such accomplishments serve as motivation for students to further immerse themselves in language learning activities.

Subsequently, conversation practice, known as *muhadasah*, is conducted once a week. In the case of English, this is referred to as English Practice and takes place every Monday, during which the use of English is mandatory. At 2 pm, students assemble in a hall or a large room to engage in assigned tasks. During observations, various topics were assigned, such as (1) storytelling of a legend, (2) creating a conversation, and (3) performing it. Similarly, for Arabic practice, it is still called *Muhadasah* and occurs every Saturday morning after the students perform the dawn prayer. In this session, students practice speech and engage in dialogues in Arabic.

Finally, in 'cooperation', it was observed that the school administration has emphasized the importance of English communication for all teachers and staff, both inside and outside the classroom. Despite this directive, not all teachers are fully committed to achieving this objective, as some continue to communicate primarily in Indonesian. The teachers' limited proficiency in using foreign languages is evident in their performance when utilizing English. The challenge of recruiting teachers with sufficient foreign language competence poses a significant obstacle, hindering the establishment of an English or Arabic language environment within the school.

Teachers' interviews

Two teachers served as respondents for the study: ARA and ZM. ARA is an English teacher, whereas ZM is an Arabic teacher but is also proficient in spoken English. The responses from the interviews with these two teachers are organized and presented thematically in this subsection.

Adopting several strategies in teaching

Both the English and Arabic teachers have tried to implement various teaching strategies. These teachers are youthful and dynamic in their language instruction. They have actively sought to acquire diverse methods, strategies, and techniques that they can incorporate into their teaching practices.

- (1) “There are several strategies that I use to help students master English; (1) creating an English-rich environment in the classroom and outside the class, (2) practicing real-life communications, like English phrases or commonly used vocabulary, (3) Providing reading material, (4) giving regular writing tasks, as well as teaching grammar rules in context. Also, the most important thing is to keep consistency in establishing a routine practice” (ARA).
- (2) “I implement several ways such as creating an Arabic atmosphere inside and outside of the class, practicing conversation or *muhadasah*, giving some new *mufradat* (vocabulary) every Monday and Thursday night, assigning them to practice speech in Arabic, and teaching Arabic grammar” (ZM).

Both ARA and ZM emphasize the adoption of strategic approaches to facilitate language mastery among students. ARA accentuates the importance of creating an English-rich environment, incorporating real-life communication scenarios, providing sufficient reading materials, assigning regular writing tasks, and contextual teaching grammar rules. Consistency in establishing routine practices is identified as a key element in this process. On the other hand, ZM focuses on creating an Arabic environment by engaging students in conversational practices (*muhadasah*), introducing new vocabulary (*mufradat*) twice a week, assigning speech practice in Arabic, and teaching grammar within the context of the language. Both teachers emphasize immersive and practical language learning strategies tailored to their respective subjects.

Giving positive penalty

ARA and ZM correspond on the need to discipline students when they disobey rules. However, they do not support physical punishment, such as making students stand outside the class. They recognize that such forms of punishment could be detrimental, potentially causing distress to students and fostering a negative attitude toward foreign language learning.

- (3) “Yes, I do, but I warn them first if they break the rules for the first time. If they cross the limit, I give them a positive punishment like assigning extra school work or memorizing new vocabulary”. (ARA)
- (4) “Yes, I give punishment by asking them to mention 10 vocabulary words”. (ZM)

ARA and ZM acknowledge the necessity of imposing disciplinary measures for students who violate rules. ARA adopts a progressive approach, issuing a warning for the first offense and resorting to positive punishments, such as additional schoolwork or memorization of new vocabulary, for repeated violations. On the other hand, ZM opts for a more direct consequence, assigning students the task of mentioning ten vocabulary words as a form of punishment. Both teachers emphasize the use of educational and constructive measures rather than punitive actions that may negatively impact students’ attitudes toward language learning.

Failing to create an English environment atmosphere

They express that establishing an English environment is highly challenging. The students struggle to converse in lengthy English sentences and consistently resort to Indonesian when not under supervision. Throughout the observation, it became apparent that most students exhibit a lack of commitment to using English, with only one or two students demonstrating motivation to speak English outside of the classroom.

- (5) “Since English is a foreign language, it’s difficult to create an English environment. Some students only practice English during the learning process in the class, and when they get out of the class, they automatically change to speak their native languages. Also, grammar complexity can lead students to fear making mistakes when they practice English” (ARA)
- (6) “I admit that implementing an Arabic language environment is still a problem. The students still cannot speak in Arabic so there is no Arabic atmosphere” (ZM)

ARA and ZM highlight the challenges in fostering language environments, particularly in the case of English as a foreign language and Arabic. ARA notes the difficulty in maintaining an English environment outside the classroom, as students tend to revert to their native languages. Additionally, the complexity of grammar instills a fear of making mistakes during English practice. On the other hand, ZM acknowledges that the implementation of an Arabic language environment remains problematic, citing the students' struggle to speak Arabic and the absence of a conducive Arabic atmosphere. Both teachers highlight the persistent obstacles in creating immersive language settings within the school context.

Students' lack of motivation

The teachers acknowledge that their students exhibit low motivation to learn English. Despite the teachers' efforts to implement diverse activities aimed at improving students' language proficiency, the students still encounter difficulties in speaking English. During observations, it was noted that the students engaged in afternoon vocabulary activities, where they were tasked with memorizing 10 vocabulary words each day. However, the students display reluctance to speak, and this hesitation has constrained their ability to acquire language skills, which often went unnoticed.

- (7) "The fear of being judged, lack of motivation in learning English, and limited exposure to English are the causes of those barriers." (ARA)
- (8) "They have low motivation to learn Arabic" (ZM)
- (9) They also mention that the students' parents are actually very supportive and that the parents always support students' activities and encourage them to learn English.
- (10) "Parents actually support their kids to master a foreign language, but more parents want their children to master English" (ZM)

The identified barriers to language learning, as expressed by the teachers, include the fear of judgment, lack of motivation to learn English, and limited exposure to the language. ARA attributes these barriers to the students' reluctance to speak and the challenges associated with the complexities of grammar. Additionally, ZM notes that the students have low motivation to learn Arabic. Despite these obstacles, both teachers highlight the supportive role of parents in encouraging their children's language development. ZM emphasizes that parents actively support their children's language mastery, with a preference for English, reflecting a broader societal inclination toward English proficiency.

Students' interviews

Two students were chosen as interview participants: a male student in the 8th grade (MYA) and a female student in the 9th grade (RNR). The findings from their interviews are categorized and presented thematically.

Mastering English and Arabic is important

Both interviewed students acknowledged the importance of studying English and Arabic, and recognized the benefits of mastering these languages. According to the interviews, both students demonstrated a good command of English competence. They are proficient in a wide range of vocabulary and can engage in basic communication in English. However, they still encounter challenges when attempting to express themselves in longer sentences.

- (11) "Yes, it is important to master English because English is the language spoken around the world by many people. Arabic is also important since it is the second largest spoken language in the world and is the language used in the Al Qur'an" (MYA).
- (12) "English is important to study and Arabic is also equally important" (RNR)

According to MYA, English is crucial because it is a globally spoken language, while Arabic holds significance as the second most spoken language worldwide and is the language used in the Al Qur'an. Similarly, RNR concurs, stating that both English and Arabic are important languages to study.

Educational punishment is given

Both students concur that teachers occasionally administer educational punishments when students violate the rules, such as memorizing additional vocabulary. However, one student mentions that he cannot recall the specific types of punishments. He acknowledges that he has never faced disciplinary measures because he consistently strives to use English.

(13) "Yes, but I don't remember." (MYA)

(14) "The teacher asks us to memorize vocabulary. That's it." (RNR)

Discussion

The findings indicate a comprehensive array of activities implemented to encourage English and Arabic language practices among students. Notably, daily vocabulary memorization activities, termed *Mufdarat*, are ingrained in the students' routine, with weekly evaluations to gauge their progress. Although these activities contribute to vocabulary mastery and language competence, there remains a challenge in transitioning to consistent English and Arabic communication outside supervised settings. This is consistent with Silviyanti et al.'s (2023) study, which identifies students' persistent use of Indonesian as a barrier to foreign language learning. Interviews with teachers, particularly ARA, acknowledge issues of perceived judgment and demotivation as hindrances, aligning with the perspective that demotivation impedes English acceptance (Husniyah, 2019; Iftanti et al., 2023).

Regarding the control of language use, teachers employ strategies such as coordinating students' schedules, disciplining disobedient students, and collaborating with canteen staff. Notably, physical punishment is discouraged, while teachers opt for additional vocabulary memorization as a disciplinary measure. The results also highlight challenges in cooperation among non-language teachers for language supervision due to limited language proficiency and low motivation. Masduqi and Subiyanto's (2020) findings concur and emphasize the impact of non-language teachers' language incompetence.

The competition category underscores the school's efforts to motivate students through various competitions, including gender-based competitions, storytelling, drama, and rewards. In alignment with Zurqoni et al.'s (2020) recommendations, the integration of technology is noted as a positive influence on enhancing students' English skills, emphasizing the teachers' incorporation of technology in language learning activities.

To resolve the obstacles for students, the teachers at the school need to monitor the persistent challenges of students reverting from English and Arabic to Indonesian when not supervised and the teachers' efforts to curb this trend. Students' motivation can be influenced by four key factors, including (1) the atmosphere and settings of the class, (2) the methods or approaches employed in teaching, (3) the teachers themselves, and (4) the sense of achievement (Humaida, 2012; Yusuf et al., 2020). Therefore, a more immersive English and Arabic environment and increasing motivation through these factors can yield favourable educational results for these students. Yusuf, Inayah, and Mutiarani (2020) suggest that teachers invite accomplished senior students in English to the class, which can foster better encouragement and collaborative learning with the students. Furthermore, Achmad and Yusuf (2016) and Yusuf, Nailufar, Harun, and Usman (2020) document integrative motivation to be more dominant to Acehese learners who learn English and Arabic in schools compared to instrumental motivation. This is attributed to the nurturing aspect of integrative motivation which focuses on the acceptance and integration into the language community (Yusuf et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers can focus more on developing integrative motivation for their students in the future.

To improve the overall effectiveness of the educational environment, it is imperative to increase teacher motivation and competency, as well, particularly in addressing the identified

barriers among non-language teaching staff. Several studies have suggested the importance of providing training to teachers and staff at schools to enhance their ability to employ diverse motivational strategies, thereby contributing to improved academic performance among students within the context of classroom engagement skills (Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2018; Rahman & Sahayu, 2020; Yusuf, Inayah & Mutiarani, 2020). Teacher motivations may manifest through words of encouragement, various activities, teaching methodologies, attitudes toward their students, and commendable personalities, and these can play a pivotal role in fostering students' motivation for learning (Masruddin & Pratiwi, 2016).

In some studies, using disciplinary measures in controlling language use may not be effective as some have noted that psychological factors, such as anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation, are among the many hindrances to speaking English (Abrar et al., 2018; Erdiana et al., 2020; Mukminin et al., 2015; Qaddumi et al, 2023). Managing students' behavior is among the challenges faced by teachers in boarding schools (Habibi et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the punishment given to the students who did not follow the rules in this study was to only memorize vocabulary. Meanwhile, Sidin (2021) has discussed various positive punishments that can reduce the occurrence of undesirable behavior. Examples of effective positive penalties include assigning tasks such as cleaning school facilities or tending to the garden for students who display unwanted behavior or break school rules.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the incorporation of English and Arabic as foreign languages within a bilingual Islamic boarding school in Aceh. Through observations and interviews with teachers and students, various activities were uncovered. Meanwhile, physical punishment, wall magazine creation, and collaboration with other staff were not conducted by the school. The lack of collaboration with non-English and Arabic teachers was identified as a potential hindrance to the establishment of a successful foreign language environment. To address this, it is recommended that all teachers be involved in English and Arabic proficiency training, as well as provide continuous motivation for students through interactions with native speakers, for example. The study also suggests that educational penalties are effective and recommends diversifying educational penalties for a richer student experience.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this study is limited to a single school with a small number of participants. Future research should delve into the effects of these activities on students' language performance, as well as conduct broader implementations across various boarding schools to yield valuable insights for stakeholders, teachers, students, and parents.

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