



## The Use of English in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia (students' perspective)

\*Fury Yulia Damayanti, Titin Purwaningtyas  
Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Keguruan PGRI Ponorogo  
Jawa Timur, Indonesia

\*Correspondence Address: [fury@stkipgriponorogo.ac.id](mailto:fury@stkipgriponorogo.ac.id)

---

### ARTICLE INFO

---

**Received**  
01 Desember 2025  
**Revised**  
09 April 2026  
**Accepted**  
15 April 2026  
**Published**  
01 Mei 2026

---

### ABSTRACT

---

In the most Islamic boarding school setting in Indonesia, all students are required to master the English language for their daily interaction. Not only in their subjects, but English is also used in their daily conversations, in some competitions, and on written signs at the school. The present study seeks to discover the students' perspective on English language use in the Islamic boarding school in East Java. The participants of this study were the senior high school students. Informed by qualitative research, data were collected by interviews and analyzed the data involving data collection, data reduction, data display, and data conclusion. The goal of the study is to know how English is taught in Islamic boarding schools and the students' perspective on the use of English in Islamic boarding schools. The result showed that they use English not only in class but also out of class. The students used English because of the rules that obliged them to use English, and some challenges in using English in an Islamic boarding school. Especially the lack of vocabulary and how to pronounce words well. Furthermore, the implications of this study for teachers and stakeholders in Islamic boarding schools in order to improve better in teaching of English.

**Key Words:** ELT, Islamic boarding school, students' perception

---

**To cite this article:** Damayanti. F.Y., Purwaningtyas. T. The Use of English in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia (students' perspective). *Journal of Islamic Education El Madani*. 5 (2), 77-84 . (APA 7<sup>th</sup> Style)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

This is an open access article under the CC-BY License



# The Use of English in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia (students' perspective)

Fury Yulia, Titin

## Introduction

Boarding school plays a very important role in the educational world. History record that Islamic Boarding Schools are Islamic educational institutions that have existed since the 13 centuries in Indonesia (Huda, 2016). In the context of Indonesia, for instance, the establishment of boarding schools, such as Islamic Boarding School, allows the transformation of socio-cultural development to take place across society (Fathurrochman et al., 2021). Many contemporary Islamic Boarding Schools now also embrace various levels of education to comply with the national curriculum of Indonesia (Fathurrochman et al., 2021). To face the global competition, students are required to have the capability to master international languages. Being able to master an international language can be prepared through educational institutions, for example, an Islamic boarding school or *Pesantren* in Bahasa Indonesia.

Islamic boarding schools offer foreign language teaching, such as Arabic & English. Santris (students who are living in an Islamic boarding school) are required to master both foreign languages. Foreign language skill is the main goal that students should achieve successfully in order to face the competition. Using a foreign language is intended to improve the students' knowledge in Islamic studies and science through their English communication engagement (Departemen Agama, 2011). Unlike the common educational institutions, particularly in Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools have twenty-four-hours educational system (M. Muchlas, 2016). It means that all students are required to stay in boarding school during the learning process. During the twenty-four-hour learning process, the school makes rules for students. The students are required to speak English in their daily conversations. Daily conversation is one way to promote foreign language speaking improvement through daily communication (M. Muchlas, 2016). Daily conversation can support students in attempting to be more proficient in foreign language speaking.

Yet, foreign language learners often encounter problems in their attempts to learn to speak the language, such as when learning English. (Richard, 1990) stated that the types of students' problems in learning to speak English are: 1) students cannot sustain spoken interaction beyond segments, 2) frequent communication breakdowns, 3) lack of vocabulary needed to talk about common utterances, 4) lack of communication, and 5) cannot participate actively in conversation. These are the common problems that students find and may make them feel not confident to speak English and prevent them from comfortably practicing their English-speaking skill. The study reported in this article is, therefore, attempts to find out what the students think about using English as part of their everyday means of communication.

Many countries in the world, including Indonesia, have adopted English as part of the national curriculum. It is a foreign language taught as a compulsory subject in secondary and tertiary education institutions. The purpose of teaching this language is, one of which, to help the students with the ability to read English textbooks in their related fields as they continue to study at a higher educational level. Given this, societies that live in countries of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), like Indonesia, usually speak English more with their friends rather than with native speakers of English. The number of people in the world who communicate in English with international speakers is steadily rising compared to other language speakers (Crystal, 2009).

Due to English's status as a global language, the Indonesian government decided to oblige people to learn English in all secondary-level schools and other private schools. In fact, they have been taught English from elementary to tertiary level education or higher degrees, who perceive that English language learning has a significant role in the educational system in Indonesia. At the secondary level English is an obligatory lesson from junior high school to senior high school. Furthermore, some private institutions introduce compulsory English for students from the elementary level, and some others use it as an instructional language in all classes. Related to the enthusiasm for English as an international language and as a language of science, this language is applied in junior high school and university level as a foreign language, and sometimes English is used in outside classes. However, the teaching of English in Indonesia in many parts of the country has been labeled as unsuccessful for various reasons (Gunantar, 2016). This can be seen from the fact that after school ends, many Indonesian students cannot use English properly in their communication.

# **The Use of English in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia (students' perspective)**

Fury Yulia, Titin

In the context of an Islamic boarding school, English is an integrated part of the teaching process. At such schools, in addition to Indonesian and local languages, Arabic and English are compulsory subjects (Zulfiqar Bin-Tahir et al., 2018). Both languages are used on a daily basis in daily communication. The purpose of requiring foreign languages in this school was to improve students' knowledge of Islamic studies and science through the use of their language skills (Zulfiqar Bin-Tahir et al., 2018). Yet, studies on students' English-speaking skills in the context of Islamic boarding schools have shown different results. (Zulfiqar Bin-Tahir et al., 2018), for instance found that there was a gap of speaking performance between motivated and less motivated students when involved in English interaction. Likewise, a study by (Khodaifi, 2021) revealed that students, as well as their teachers, faced particular challenges when attempting to integrate the use of a foreign language like English in an Islamic Boarding School, such as time management and finding an appropriate bilingual model. Little is understood, however, about students' perspectives in using English as a language for their daily interaction in the boarding school. Two research questions guiding the present study are (1) How is English used and taught in an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia? (2) What do students think about the use and the teaching of English in the Indonesian Islamic boarding school?

## **Research Method**

This study is conducted in one of the Islamic Boarding schools in East Java, particularly in the sixth class. Four students enrolled in the English lesson were recruited to participate in this study. In this study, a qualitative research approach was employed. Qualitative research focuses on the explanation of social phenomena (Hancock, 1998). Qualitative design was chosen because this research requires a deep understanding of students' perception. Data were collected from students studying in an Islamic Boarding School located in the Province of East Java, with research permission approval from the school headmaster. To recruit them as research participants, a specific requirement was used. Targeted participants who were the representative students with the best and lowest academic achievement were invited, following their teachers' recommendation. All these students participated voluntarily in the present study, which means that they could withdraw at any time during the period of data collection. To analyze the data involved data collection, data reduction, data display, and data conclusion (miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., Saldana, 2014).

The data that are collected from observation and interview process in three stages (a) data reduction, as a process of structuring data to be more systematic, thematic grouping; (b) data display, to present the research result in the form of experts of the interview, and (c) data verification, as a stage data conclusion. First, the required data are reduced based on the thematic category derived from research objectives and parameters which focus on students' perception of using English in Islamic Boarding school. Afterwards, we presented the data results in the form of an interview excerpt. Finally, we came to a conclusion on whether the data had reached consistency with the research problem, as well as whether the data were able to answer the research questions

## **Result and discussion**

The goals of the English subject at the Islamic boarding School in Indonesia are not only to study in the class but also to introduce international languages. Because, as is common and well known, schools with boarding systems tend to focus on moral education. So, for the English subject, it is different for the school level with the dormitory model. The boarding school seeks to prepare a generation of competent and able to communicate in one of the world's languages. Equipping students with world language skills is a primary need that is the responsibility of educational institutions, with the design of the curriculum to program the skills of students to be able to master foreign languages well. It is explained that good language skills are needed to support good learning (Nurkaeti et al., 2019).

# The Use of English in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia (students' perspective)

Fury Yulia, Titin



Figure 1. Interview teacher

## The use and the teaching of English in an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia

From the picture 1. that boarding school curriculum is designed for Islamic educational institutions such as homeschools that emphasize character development, religious knowledge, practical life skills, and cultural awareness. (Anwar & Maman, 2023; Salam, 2023). This curriculum aims to provide students with noble morals, strong understanding of Islam, and readiness to contribute positively to society.

The curriculum used by the Islamic boarding school in this study comprises 2 curricula: the Kemendikbud *Kurikulum Merdeka*, a special subject, and the curriculum for the special pesantren religious subject, which uses the KMI (Kuliyatul Mu'allimin wal Mu'allimat Al Islamiyah) curriculum. Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) for junior high school and Madrasah Aliyah (MA) for senior high school. At the MA level, there are 2 specializations: Science and Social Studies.

The dual curriculum in Islamic boarding schools plays a vital role in preparing students to meet the demands of globalization and technological advancements. The *Kuliyatul mu'allimin wal Mua'allimat* curriculum focuses on Islamic teaching, moral education, and religious practices, providing a strong spiritual and ethical foundation for students. Meanwhile, the national curriculum, specifically the *Merdeka Curriculum*, aligns with national education standards, ensuring that students meet academic expectations while fostering a well-rounded personality that balances intellectual knowledge with spiritual depth (Ab Halim et al., 2021). As outlined by the Ministry of Education, Culture, research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022) the *Merdeka curriculum* grants educational institutions the flexibility to develop learning models that cater to students' needs, promoting 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. Additionally, it reinforces character education based on Pancasila values, supporting moral development alongside academic achievements.

According to Zainury et al (2023) the *merdeka kurikulum* has excellent potential to improve Islamic boarding school education standards by giving students autonomy over their learning methods. This allows them to learn according to their respective interests and potentials without ignoring the unique characteristics of Islamic boarding schools that focus on spiritual values and character development. The existence of 2 curricula is because Islamic boarding schools have a learning system not only on religious lessons but also on general subjects. Preparation of *Modul Ajar* prepared in detail about *Capaian pembelajaran (CP)* and *Tujuan pembelajaran (TP)* selected material, learning, time allocation, media, and learning resources. While *Modul Ajar* is based on *Tujuan Pembelajaran* that use the operational verbs to achieve learning objectives. In The Islamic boarding school curriculum is very accommodating in equipping students to be skilled in a foreign language (English) according to their level. Learning design should accommodate the needs of students in learning, especially in learning English (Hardi & Rizal, 2020).

By implementing this dual curriculum model, the Islamic boarding school provides students with opportunities for comprehensive personal and intellectual development. Graduates from the Islamic Boarding School are expected to be academically outstanding, morally upright, and socially responsible individuals who contribute positively to both local and global communities.

For the learning materials, the English Lesson textbook published by Gontor Press is used, including short and simple interpersonal texts, grammar, and exercises. There are two subjects regarding English material: English lessons and grammar. The English subject gets one meeting per week, and English grammar also gets one meeting per week. The teacher used English and

## The Use of English in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia (students' perspective)

Fury Yulia, Titin

Indonesian in teaching. Firstly, the teacher wrote the vocabulary on the whiteboard, asked the students to write it, continued by explaining the text and at the end of the chapter, the teacher asked the students to do the exercise in the last chapter.

*English is explained with the explanation of the text, ustadzah explains it first (understands the text together) then writes the vocabulary on the blackboard followed by doing exercise as a means of knowing the level of understanding of students (Question-1. Student-3)*

Teachers who taught English may be unprepared well before giving the material to students, or they may not even have enough experience in English teaching. Thus, it has become a factor that students feel English is difficult to learn. Recent research shows that *pesantren* must reconsider and adapt their educational system, especially in the instruction of the English language Teaching (Darwis 2020; Muzakky et al.2023). So, improvements in teaching methods are needed to increase the effectiveness of English language education in islamic boarding school.

Besides the use of English as the subject in the class, English is also used outside of the class. In the dormitory, the students have to speak using two languages: Arabic or English, if they do not use both languages, they will get punishment from the language section. Therefore, Islamic Boarding School created formal and informal English programs that fit the *pesantren* setting (Andriani, 2024). Some schools-scape likes announcement boards, and also some competitions are conducted in English. Groter et al (2021) discussed the linguistic environment as a resource for learning and improving language awareness. The linguistic landscape may supply for language acquisition, that language on exhibit in public spaces can be essential resource for language learning and instruction and that language awareness can be raised. The linguistic environment provides an opportunity to connect classroom learning with real-word language use.

Dumaining & David (2019) found linguistic landscape as a pedagogical tool in teaching and learning English. Public sign allows language teachers to maximize the potential of using real-life language in circumstances relevant to students. Using English landscape in an EFL context may contribute significantly to building a better approach to English language education. So, the students learn and practice English in their support environment. Activities that were applied in the Islamic boarding school gave influence towards students' skills, especially in upgrading their English performance, such as vocabulary and speaking skills. It was also obtained that the students can improve their confidence through public speaking. So, it can have a positive effect on their English.

The use of English in an effective communication involves skills like speaking, listening, reading, and writing, which are crucial for meaningful interactions and global engagement (Zulkarnindra, 2021) Speaking English also gives challenges for students, where the rules in the boarding school ask students to speak English in their daily life matter how challenging it is for them. They confirmed that the challenges to use English in boarding school were limited in vocabulary mastery and inappropriate grammar in sentences.(Susanto.A., 2016) in his study, he agreed that the acquisition of vocabulary is essential for successful foreign language use and plays an important role in the formation of complete spoken and written texts. Another student stated that her challenge was difficulties in pronouncing English words (pronunciation) as we know to pronounce English in difficult for those who not accustomed to using it.

The availability of infrastructure is one of the determining factors for success in learning, one of the primary challenges faced by an Islamic Boarding School is the limited facilities and resources available for integrating advanced technology into the learning process. While efforts have been made to incorporate technology, several obstacles remain, including insufficient infrastructure, reliance on outdated learning media. Whereas creating an interactive, accessible, and interesting learning environment is important for students, the students can learn English by watching videos and listening, but in an Islamic boarding school, there are still many limitations in using them; they study only from their teacher in the class, and the language section gives them the new vocabulary every morning.

*lack in learning media (laptop/computer) (Question-5. Student-1)*

Amjah (Amjah, 2014) reported that for some students, learning English as a foreign language is a very difficult subject that they have to learn, due to the difficulties in learning English can make students lose their interest easily. (Abid, 2018) Also confirmed that many English language learners always find difficulties despite the prolonged formal language training they have, and this is influenced by a wide range of factors, such as teacher profile, curriculum in use, students' prior

## **The Use of English in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia (students' perspective)**

Fury Yulia, Titin

learning, and exposure to language use in and outside classes. Almost every student has the same challenges in learning English, for example, in vocabulary, grammar pronunciation, adaptation with English and trying to arrange sentences.

### **Students' perspectives on the use and the teaching of English at the school**

From the interviews conducted with four students of an Islamic boarding school, it can be concluded that there are two languages used in Islamic boarding schools: Arabic and English, which languages also being taught in the classroom. The teacher used English and Arabic in teaching. In junior high school, they have to use the Arabic language, and in Senior high school, they have to use English. At first, they had difficulty using it, but because of the rules, they became accustomed.

*In Islamic boarding schools, students are required to always use English, because students are used to being able to apply it every day, even though they difficult at first. (Question-5.Student-1)*

Another students stated that the use English in boarding school is still lacking but it can be enough provision to continue studying English at the next level, so the students use it as preparation to continue to the next level, using English in the boarding school is better than in public school, because the students use it in daily conversation even though there are many mistakes in their pronunciation and sentence. And lastly, the students hope that their ability in speaking English can prove to the world that although they stay in an Islamic boarding school they can speak English well.

*So that Islamic boarding school students in Indonesia are not always looked down upon, Indonesian students can prove that being an Islamic boarding school student do not reduce their insight into developments outside of the world.(Question-5.Student-4)*

According to (Burkart, Grace Stovall, 1998) one of knowledge involved within speaking the English language learners have is relative roles of students, where the students have to understand how to take into account who is speaking to whom and in what circumstances. The statement above indicates that as foreign language students who are living in a boarding school, they have to establish the boarding school's environment as their relative role to speak English with each other. This way can be an opportunity for students to increase their English fluency. Also, the teachers have to take a role in motivating students in learning English. (Abid, 2018) reported that increasing students' proficiency in English requires the teacher assisting the students to build confidence by putting the language. they learn into practice. So in Islamic boarding schools, the students apply their ability in English in their daily life.

*not everyone can apply it as daily communication; the use of English in Islamic boarding schools, even if by force, will eventually get used to it. (Question-5.Student3)*

The statements above indicate that, as foreign language students who are living in a boarding school, they have to establish the boarding school's environment as their responsibility to speak English with each other. This way can be an opportunity for students to increase their English fluency. Also, the teachers have to take a role in motivating students in learning English. (Abid, 2018)reported that increasing students' proficiency in English requires the teacher assisting the students to build confidence by putting the language they learn into practice.

### **Conlusion**

Using 2 curricula, Islamic boarding schools set their teaching, Kemendikbud with *Kurikulum Merdeka* for special subjects and the curriculum of special pesantren religious subjects used KMI (Kuliyatul Mu'allimin wal Mu'allimat Al Islamiyah) curriculum. The existence of 2 curricula is because Islamic boarding schools have a learning system not only on religious lessons alone, but the However there are also general subjects Arabic and English are the mandatory languages used in islamic boarding schools, they also taught in the class, used not only in the class but also in their daily conversation in dormitory and boarding school scape, some competitions and written sign also written in English, this is the prove that Islamic boarding school give many chance to their students to learn English, although in implementation there are some challenges and obstacles faced by the students. Despite the fact that the findings of this study cannot be generalized, it at least attempts to provide a picture of how boarding school students view the use of English as part of their everyday communication in the context of Indonesia's religious-based boarding schools.

The finding of this study implies that the implementing of English as a daily communication tool in Islamic Boarding schools, both inside and outside the classroom, is effective in promoting students' language use through an immersive environment. However, the existence of challenges

## The Use of English in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia (students' perspective)

Fury Yulia, Titin

such as limited vocabulary and poor pronunciation indicates that language policies alone are not sufficient to ensure students' proficiency. Therefore, the researchers and institutions should complement these policies with structured support, including vocabulary enrichment, pronunciation practice and communicative activities, while also fostering a supportive environment that encourage students to use English confidently without fear of making mistakes.

### References:

- Ab Halim, A. S., Osman, K., Aziz, M. S. A. M., Ibrahim, M. F., & Ahmad, A. A. K. (2021). The Competency of Science Teachers in Integrating Higher Order Thinking Skills in Teaching and Learning. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1793(1). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1793/1/012005>
- Abid. (2018). Perceived Challenges in Improving English Oral. *Jeels*, 5(2), 147–170.
- Amjah, D. Y. P. H. (2014). A Study of Teachers' Strategies so Develop Students' Interest towards Learning English as a Second Language. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 134, 188–192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.238>
- Andriani D, Zulfi Zumala. 2024. "Adjustment and Adaptation: English Curriculum Development in Pesantren." *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*11(2):249. doi: 10.22373/ej.v11i2.19862
- Anwar, H. A., & Maman, M. (2023). Kurikulum Dan Sistem Pembelajaran Di Pondok Pesantren Salaf. *Jurnal Ilmiah Global Education*, 4(2), 521–531. <https://doi.org/10.55681/jige.v4i2.655>
- Burkart, Grace stovall, E. (1998). *modules for the professional preparation of teaching assintant in foregn languages*.
- Darwis. M. (2020). "Revitalisasi Peran pesantren di Era 4.0. *Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam (Dakwatuna)*. Vol. 6 (1)
- Dumaining, F., P. & David, M., K. (2020) Linguistic landscape as A Pedagogical tool in Teaching and Learning English in Oman. *Modern journal of Studies in English Language teaching and Literature*, 1 (1), 1-13 <https://doi.org/10.56498/11201988>.
- Crystal, D. (2009). *English as a Global Language*. cambridge university press.
- Fathurrochman, I., Danim, S., Anwar AB, S., Kurniah, N., & Hajja Ristianti, D. (2021). Theoretical Review of the Implementation Islamic Boarding School Curriculum Management in Indonesia. *International Journal of Education Research and Development*, 1(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.52760/ijerd.v1i1.2>
- Gorter, D., Cenoz, J., & Worp, K., V., D. (2021) The linguistic landscape as a resource for language learning and raising language awarnes. *Journal of Spanish language teaching*, 8 (92), 161-181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23247797.2021.2014029>.
- Gunantar, D. A. (2016). The impact of English as an international language on English language teaching in Indonesia. *Language Circle:Journal Lof Language and Literatur*, X(2), 141–151. <http://journal.unnes.ac.id>
- Hancock. (1998). *An Introduction of Qualitative research Nottingham*. Tent Focus Group.
- Hardi, A. V, & Rizal, S. M. (2020). Analysis of English Textbooks for Elementary Schools Based on the Characteristics of Young Learners in Lower Grades. *Jurnal Basicedu*, 4(4), 1398–1407.
- Khodaifi. (2021). Bilingual Education Program: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions and Its Challenges in Pesantren Context. *Language-Edu: Journal of English Teaching and Learning*, 4(1), 6.
- M. Muchlas. (2016). the influence of DCM towards student foreignt language speaking fluency in modern islamic boarding school in indonesia. *Proceding of Sosionit, May*, 62–67.
- miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd ed)*. Sage.
- Nurkaeti, N., Aryanto, S., & Gumala, Y. (2019). Read Aloud: a Literacy Activity in Elementary School. *PrimaryEdu - Journal of Primary Education*, 3(2), 55. <https://doi.org/10.22460/pej.v3i2.1377>
- Richard, J. . (1990). *Conversationally Speaking: Approaches to the teaching of conversation*. In Jack Ricard. *The Language Teaching Matrix*. cambridge university press.
- Salam, S. (2023). Desain kurikulum berbasis pondok pesantren (studi kasus di pondok pesantren almuhammad cepu). *An-Nuur*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.58403/annuur.v13i1.23>
- Susanto.A. (2016). how English learner succeeded in difficult circumstances. *Jurnal Pendidikan UNSIKA*, 4, 135–148.

## **The Use of English in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia (students' perspective)**

Fury Yulia, Titin

- Zainuri, A., Yunita, Y., Baim, I., Wijaya, W., Purnamasari, A., & Meyrinda, J. (2023). Pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar di Pondok Pesantren Latansa Palembang Darussalam. *Cendekia: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 9(1), 29–43. <https://doi.org/10.37348/cendekia.v9i1.230>
- Zulfiqar Bin-Tahir, S., Atmowardoyo, H., Dollah, S., Rinantanti, Y., & Suriaman, A. (2018). Multilingual and Mono-Multilingual Students' Performance In English Speaking. *Journal of Advanced English Studies*, 1(2). <http://sastra.unifa.ac.id/journal/index.php/jes/index>
- Zulkarnindra. E. Metode Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Tingkat SMP di Nuraida Islamic Boarding School Bogor', *Rayah Al-Islam*, 2021, 437–46, doi:10.37274/rais.v5i02.474