The Role of Madrasah and Islamic Boarding Schools in the Development of Foreign Language Skills among Students

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Abstract

Madrasah and Islamic boarding schools, such as the Al-Ishlah Sendang Agung Islamic Boarding School, have a strategic role in the development of Arabic and English language skills. Arabic is taught to delve into religious texts, while English is prepared to face the challenges of globalization. Learning is carried out in a structured manner, including mastery of vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, and speaking skills. The Islamic boarding schools also organizes discussion activities, additional courses, and prepares students for international certification exams such as TOEFL and IELTS. The effectiveness of foreign language learning is influenced by factors such as the availability of competent teachers, adequate facilities, and appropriate learning methods. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, lack of a foreign-speaking environment, low motivation to learn, diverse student backgrounds, busy schedules, and limited access to modern media hinder the learning process. Comprehensive efforts are needed to overcome these challenges in order to create a more conducive learning environment and support optimal mastery of foreign languages.

Keywords: Madrasah, Islamic Boarding School, Language Skills, Students

Introduction

In the era of globalization marked by advances in information technology and increasing interaction between nations, mastery of foreign languages has become one of the critical competencies needed to compete at the global level (Khoiroh et al., 2023). Foreign languages, especially English and Arabic, not only serve as a means of communication, but also as a bridge to access global science, technology, and culture. According to Crystal 2003, English has become the lingua franca in a variety of fields, including education, business, and international diplomacy (Crystal, 2003). Meanwhile, Arabic plays an important role in understanding Islamic religious texts, such as the Qur'an and Hadith, and is the key to accessing the treasures of classical Islamic scholarship (Azra, 2004). Therefore, mastery of foreign languages is an urgent

need for the younger generation, including students in madrasas and Islamic boarding schools.

Madrasah and Islamic boarding schools as religious-based educational institutions have a strategic role in shaping the character and skills of students, including in the development of foreign language skills (Khoiroh, 2020). Islamic boarding schools have long been known as centers for learning Arabic through traditional methods such as sorogan and bandongan (Dhofier, 1982). Meanwhile, madrasah as formal educational institutions that integrate religious and general curricula have also begun to adopt English language learning to prepare students to face global challenges (Hasan, 2012). These two institutions not only focus on religious education, but also strive to equip students with skills relevant to the needs of the times, including mastery of foreign languages.

However, although madrasah and Islamic boarding schools have made efforts to develop foreign language skills, there are still various challenges that hinder the effectiveness of learning. Some of these challenges include the limitation of competent teaching staff, the lack of adequate learning facilities, and learning methods that are still traditional and less innovative (Hidayati, 2016). In addition, the lack of exposure to the foreign language environment and the lack of motivation of students in learning foreign languages are also inhibiting factors. On the other hand, there are opportunities to improve the quality of foreign language learning through the use of technology, teacher training, and the development of more relevant curricula.

Several previous studies have examined the role of madrasas and pesantren in the development of foreign language skills. For example, research by (Azra, 2004) highlighting the role of pesantren in preserving and developing Arabic as a religious language. Meanwhile, research by (Hasan, 2012) revealed that the integration of English in the pesantren curriculum still faces obstacles, especially in terms of the availability of qualified teachers and effective learning methods. In addition, the study conducted by (Van Bruinessen, 1994) shows that the tradition of learning Arabic in Islamic boarding schools through the yellow book has become a characteristic that distinguishes Islamic boarding schools from other educational institutions.

This research has strong relevance to the educational context in Indonesia, where madrasas and pesantren are an integral part of the national education system. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, there are more than 27,000 madrasas and 28,000 Islamic boarding schools spread throughout Indonesia (Kemenag, 2021). These institutions not only play a role in religious education, but also contribute to forming competent and competitive human resources.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine more deeply the role of madrasas and pesantren in the development of foreign language skills among students. This study will also analyze the factors that affect the effectiveness of foreign language learning in the two institutions, as well as provide recommendations to improve the quality of foreign language learning in madrasas and pesantren. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to understanding the dynamics of foreign language learning in religious-based educational institutions, as well as provide solutions to overcome the challenges faced.

Method

This research is a qualitative research with a descriptive approach. According to Creswell, qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena in depth through the collection of rich and contextual data (Creswell, 2017). The descriptive approach was chosen to describe in detail the process of learning foreign languages in madrasas and pesantren, including the dynamics that occur in them. The location of this research is the al-Ishlah madrasah and the al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school which were chosen as the research sample. The selection of this location is based on the consideration that the two institutions have an important role in education, especially in learning foreign languages (Azra, 2004). The subjects of the study include students, teachers, and institution managers. Students are chosen as subjects because they are direct participants in the process of learning foreign languages. Teachers and institution managers are also the subject of research because they have a key role in designing and implementing the curriculum and learning methods (Mastuhu, 1994).

The data collection techniques used in this study include:

a. Observation

Researchers will directly observe the process of learning foreign languages in madrasas and Islamic boarding schools. According to (Patton, 2014), Observation allows researchers to understand the context and social interactions directly.

b. Interview

The researcher will conduct in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and institution managers. In-depth interview is an effective technique to explore the perception and experience of the research subject (Sugiyono, 2017).

c. Documentation

The researcher will analyze documents related to the curriculum, syllabus, and foreign language teaching materials used in madrasas and Islamic boarding

schools. Documentation helps researchers understand the framework of learning policies and practices (Yin, 2018).

The collected data will be analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. According to (Miles et al., 2019), The qualitative data analysis process includes three main stages:

a. Data Reduction

The data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation studies will be reduced by selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives.

b. Data Presentation

The reduced data will be presented in the form of narratives, tables, or diagrams to facilitate understanding and interpretation.

c. Drawing conclusions

Based on the data that has been presented, the researcher will draw conclusions that answer the research question.

Results and Discussion

1. The Role of Madrasah and Islamic Boarding Schools in the Development of Foreign Language Skills

Madrasah and pesantren have an important role in the development of foreign language skills, especially Arabic and English, in Indonesia. In the context of the al-Ishlah Sendang Agung Islamic Boarding School in Paciran, Lamongan, these two languages are taught with an in-depth and comprehensive approach, with the aim of equipping students with useful language skills, both in the context of religion and the professional world.

Learning Arabic at the al-Ishlah Sendang Agung Islamic Boarding School has a very integral dimension, because Arabic is the main language in many ancient books and Islamic religious teachings. These madrasas and pesantren offer a curriculum that focuses on understanding the Arabic language to delve into religious knowledge, which includes tafsir, hadith, fiqh, and others. The skills acquired by students are not only in understanding Arabic orally and in writing, but also in understanding the meanings contained in religious texts.

Learning English at this Islamic Boarding School is an increasingly important part of student education. Madrasah and Islamic boarding school al-Ishlah Sendang Agung integrate English learning as an effort to answer the challenges of globalization and equip students with the necessary communication skills in the

international world. English language teaching programs are often implemented through methods that combine theory with direct communication practices, both in the form of conversation, writing, and understanding of English texts.

The al-Ishlah Sendang Agung Islamic Boarding School has a very large contribution in shaping students' foreign language skills, both Arabic and English, which is carried out through a structured and holistic approach. This language learning not only aims to meet the requirements of formal education, but also to provide practical skills that can be used by students in daily life and the professional world.

The formation of Arabic Language Skills in this pesantren is very focused on mastering vocabulary, grammar, and the ability to read and write religious texts well. Students are trained to read the Qur'an, tafsir, and classical books using Arabic, so that their ability to understand religious texts is very high. Conversational Practice in Arabic was also introduced to equip students with the ability to communicate in Arabic, which is very important in the context of Islamic da'wah. This institution organizes activities such as recitation and discussion in Arabic to improve students' speaking skills (Ardiyanto, 2014).

English language skills are also an important focus at the al-Ishlah Sendang Agung Islamic Boarding School, with various methods such as the use of English teaching materials that are adjusted to the level of understanding of students. This institution organizes additional courses or classes to improve speaking and writing skills in English, so that students can compete in a global world. In the era of globalization, English language skills are an important asset. This pesantren provides opportunities for students to take international certification exams, such as TOEFL or IELTS, to prepare them for further education abroad or to have a career in international organizations (Muharlisiani et al., 2023).

2. Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Foreign Language Learning

Learning a foreign language is a complex process that involves various factors to achieve optimal results. In the context of globalization, the ability to communicate in foreign languages is becoming increasingly important, both for academic, professional, and personal purposes. However, the effectiveness of learning a foreign language does not only depend on the motivation and effort of the student, but also on the external factors that support the learning process. Some of the key factors that affect the success of foreign language learning include the availability of human resources (competent teachers), the availability of facilities and teaching materials, and the learning methods and approaches used. These factors are interrelated and

play an important role in creating a learning environment that is conducive to foreign language mastery. The following is an in-depth discussion of these three factors.

a. Availability of Human Resources (Competent Teachers)

Competent teachers play an important role in the effectiveness of foreign language learning. According to (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), Teachers who have a deep understanding of language teaching methodologies, good communication skills, and the ability to create an interactive learning environment can improve student motivation and learning outcomes. Competent teachers are also able to identify student learning needs and adjust teaching methods according to the level of students' abilities.

Research by (Hattie, 2008) in his book Visible Learning shows that teacher quality is one of the biggest factors that affect student learning outcomes. Teachers who have good pedagogical skills and in-depth knowledge of teaching materials can create a more effective learning experience for students.

b. Availability of Facilities and Teaching Materials

Adequate facilities and teaching materials are an important factor in supporting foreign language learning. Facilities such as language labs, access to information technology, and relevant teaching materials can improve student interaction with the target language. According to (Tomlinson, 2011) Good teaching materials must be interesting, relevant, and in accordance with the level of students' abilities. Interactive teaching materials, such as videos, audio, and language learning apps, can help students develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

In addition, research by (Chun, 2003) demonstrate that the use of technology in foreign language learning can increase student engagement and provide opportunities for them to practice in an authentic context. Facilities such as computers, the internet, and language learning software can be effective tools to support the learning process.

c. Learning Methods and Approaches Used

The learning methods and approaches used also affect the effectiveness of foreign language learning. Student-centered learning methods such as task-based learning and communicative language teaching have proven to be effective in improving students' language skills. According to Balsells, task-based learning allows students to use language naturally in meaningful contexts, thereby improving their communicative abilities (Balsells, 2005).

Learning approaches that integrate language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are also considered more effective than approaches that focus on just one skill. Richards emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to foreign language learning, where students are invited to use the language in real-life situations and relevant contexts (Richards, 2005).

3. **Challenges in Foreign Language Skills Development**

The development of foreign language skills, especially Arabic and English, in Madrasah and Al-Ishlah Sendang Agung Islamic Boarding School faces various challenges, one of the main obstacles is the limitation of supporting infrastructure. Facilities such as language laboratories, libraries with adequate collections of foreign language books, and stable internet access are still very minimal. In fact, these facilities are very important to support the learning process that requires hands-on practice and exposure to diverse learning resources.

In addition, the environment of Islamic boarding schools and madrasas tends to focus more on religious teaching, so the use of foreign languages in daily life is still very limited. In fact, a supportive environment (language environment) is a crucial factor in honing language skills. On the other hand, although teachers are available, training related to modern and effective foreign language teaching methods is still lacking. This causes the learning process to tend to be monotonous and less interesting for students.

Not only external obstacles, obstacles also come from the internal students themselves. One of them is low motivation to learn. Some students consider learning a foreign language irrelevant to their daily life or educational goals, so they are less motivated to learn it. In fact, intrinsic motivation plays an important role in the success of learning (Dörnyei, 2001). In addition, the diverse educational backgrounds of students are also a challenge. Students at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School come from various backgrounds, ranging from those who have a strong foreign language foundation to those who have never studied it at all. This creates a gap in ability in the classroom, making it difficult for teachers to adjust learning materials (Tomlinson, 2023).

Time and focus limitations are also a problem. Students at Islamic boarding schools often have busy schedules with religious activities, so the time to focus on learning foreign languages is limited. In fact, practice and repetition are very important in language mastery (Ellis, 1997). Finally, limited access to modern learning media such as language applications, learning videos, or online platforms also hinder the learning process. In fact, these media can increase the interest and

effectiveness of student learning (Warschauer, 2000). Thus, comprehensive efforts are needed to overcome these various obstacles so that the development of foreign language skills in Madrasah and Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding Schools can run more optimally.

Conclusion

Madrasah and Islamic boarding schools, such as the Al-Ishlah Sendang Agung Islamic Boarding School, play an important role in developing Arabic and English language skills. Arabic is taught to understand religious texts, while English is prepared to face globalization. Learning is carried out in a structured manner, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and reading, writing, and speaking skills. The Islamic boarding schools also organizes discussion activities, additional courses, and prepares students for international certification exams. The effectiveness of foreign language learning is influenced by competent teachers, adequate facilities, and appropriate learning methods. Quality teachers create an interactive learning environment, while facilities such as language labs and relevant teaching materials support the learning process. Task-based learning methods and communicative approaches have been proven to be effective in improving language skills. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, lack of a foreign-speaking environment, low motivation to learn, diverse student backgrounds, busy schedules, and limited access to modern media hinder the learning process. A comprehensive effort is needed to address these challenges and create a more supportive learning environment.

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