

English language teaching in *pesantren*: challenges and strategies

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ABSTRAK

Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris telah menyebar ke sebagian besar institusi di Indonesia, termasuk di Pesantren. Penyebaran ini menimbulkan tantangan tersendiri karena bahasa Inggris telah menjadi mata pelajaran wajib bagi santri pesantren. Penelitian ini menyelidiki tantangan pengajaran dan strategi untuk mengembangkan Siswa Pesantren EFL. Dalam melakukan penelitian, dilakukan kajian literatur. Mengajar bahasa Inggris kepada siswa pesantren memberikan tantangan dan strategi. Berkenaan dengan masalah tersebut, artikel ini mengidentifikasi tantangan berdasarkan teori dan temuan penelitian dan kemudian mengusulkan beberapa strategi untuk kesulitan yang dapat menjadi referensi bagi lembaga pesantren dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

English Language Teaching in Pesantren: Challenges and Strategies

English Language Teaching has spread to most institutions in Indonesia, including in Pesantren. This spread has resulted in certain challenges because English has been a compulsory subject for *pesantren*'s students. The present study investigated the teaching challenge and strategies to develop EFL *Pesantren*'s Students. In conducting the study, a literature review was conducted. Teaching English to pesantren students provides both challenges and strategies. Regarding the issue, this article identifies the challenges based on theories and research findings and then proposes several strategies for the difficulties which can be the references for *pesantren* institutions in English teaching and learning.

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Introduction

Islamic education focuses predominantly on three goals: imparting Islamic knowledge (transmission of Islamic knowledge). Second is the maintenance of Islamic customs (maintenance of Islamic tradition). Thirdly, (candidate) ulama reproduction ('ulama' reproduction) (Azra & Jamhari, 2006) as cited in (Lundeto et al., 2021)).

Pesantren is one of the particular religious education institutions in Indonesia

(Abdurrahman, 2018). Pesantren is characterized by a hidden curriculum (Halid, 2019), state-independent leadership patterns (Wahid, 2002), bandongan and sorogan learning methods, and the study of the Yellow Book (classical literature) (Sutrisno, 2014).

Learning English is crucial in the modern era because it enables us to communicate with a larger global population. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and has become one of the required school subjects. Foreign language acquisition is closely related to pedagogy and linguistics knowledge. Moreover, when viewed from a psychological perspective, a sense of interest in learning foreign languages is essential; awareness among students that they adore English will be the most important factor in nurturing an interest in learning English. The learning strategies they employ can reveal their interests (Wati, 2018). Students in this age must have a solid understanding of English. If all components are utilized effectively, students will comprehend English with certainty and ease. However, acquiring a foreign language such as English is not as simple as mastering it. To avoid these challenges and misunderstandings, students require effective learning strategies (Sari et al., 2019).

Four skills must be mastered when studying English: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills will be taught at all English education levels, from elementary to advanced. English is therefore taught in both public institutions and Islamic boarding schools, also known as *pesantren*. According to Haedari (2004), *Pesantren* is interpreted as the dormitory where students from various regions and educational levels gather to study the Quran and other Islamic teachings. Pesantren, the oldest educational institution in Indonesia, has long required English as a foreign language (EFL) as part of their national curriculum (Daulay, 2009; Kamil et al., 2014; Sofwan & Habibi, 2016). The patterns and mechanisms of their values, behaviors, and educational models are their own.

In the context of Indonesia, where English is an alien language, it may be difficult to teach English, especially in pesantren where English serves limited functions. Students concentrate more on Islamic teachings than on general subjects such as English. Although they learn English, it is not as effective as acquiring English in public schools. However, teaching English in Pesantren becomes an important issue, and teachers may encounter some difficulties in the classroom. Some prospective difficulties may emerge in EFL

According to Songbatumis (2017), the difficulties associated with teaching English stem from the students, the instructors, and the school's infrastructure. Students struggle due to a lack of vocabulary mastery, poor concentration, tedium, and speaking difficulties. On the other hand, the challenges faced by teachers are a lack of teacher training, concerns regarding language competence, an insufficient comprehension of teaching methods, unfamiliarity with technology, and a lack of professional development. In addition to a lack of resources and

facilities to support the teaching and learning process and time constraints, it is difficult to teach English.

There is a relationship between the roles of instructors, students, and materials in the teaching and learning process. To improve the teaching of English, more can be done to enhance the efficacy of teachers and the selection of instructional materials, which can have an impact on student achievement and enrollment growth at a particular educational institution. *Pesantren* can foster a productive learning environment that focuses on language mastery. This language environment will significantly stimulate the students' desire to study English with greater zeal. Since they reside in dorms and are required to use English for daily communication, the students are able to learn English more intensively.

Several researchers, such as (Mumary Songbatumis, 2017), have conducted numerous studies on this topic and discovered that the difficulties encountered in teaching English as a foreign language are diverse and related to the students, instructors, and school facilities. The solutions to these challenges are divided into two categories: those provided by instructors and those provided by the school. Teachers are expected to apply a variety of teaching methods and techniques, taking into account students' proficiency levels and the learning situation, utilizing available resources and facilities, providing motivational feedback, searching for suitable methods or materials, and engaging in self-reflection. In contrast, MTsN Taliwang's solutions include altering attitudes and enhancing resources and infrastructure. Another study by (Marzulina et al., 2021) revealed that English instructors face five challenges when teaching the language. 1) enhancing students' motivation; 2) enhancing their language proficiency; 3) controlling classroom congestion; 4) managing limited time; and 5) coping with a lack of supporting facilities.

According to (Utomo et al., 2020), the difficulties in teaching English in EFL classrooms stem from the instructors, students, school, and parents. Less teaching materials, classroom management, ICT expertise, numerous teaching administration, a heavy workload, and memory loss pose difficulties for English instructors. From the perspective of the pupil, difficulties in learning English include a lack of vocabulary, issues with motivation, and juvenile delinquency. In addition, the lack of school facilities to facilitate teaching and learning activities is a problem in the teaching and learning four processes. In addition, many parents in the village are poorly educated and lack long-term perspective, which negatively affects their children's education. This study offered three recommendations for teaching English effectively: (1) teachers should create a teaching contract at the beginning of each semester; (2) principals should send teachers to MGMP meetings and continuous

professional development activities; and (3) schools should periodically motivate students and parents.

The successful completion of a challenge requires significant mental or physical effort, and thus tests one's abilities. It can be seen that a challenge is something or a problem that is difficult to solve and requires additional effort and abilities. Therefore, in this study, the term 'challenges' refers to obstacles or difficulties that students must overcome when learning English in English class.

Learning strategies can be defined as a flexible approach that utilizes operations, steps, plans, and routines to aid the learner in acquiring, storing, retrieving, and applying information. Learning strategy is a component of education because it is the first step in the learning process and plays a crucial role in achieving learning objectives, such as enhancing intellectual aptitude, behavior, and attitudes that are consistent with the learning process. Teaching strategies are the methods employed by educators to present content in a manner that maintains students' interest and allows them to practice a variety of skills. Therefore, instructors should be able to employ strategies that enable students to achieve desired outcomes (Linda, 2022).

Alongside this assertion, a number of studies on teaching English in *pesantren* institutions have been conducted. They include textbooks, English teachers (Marzulina et al., 2021) (Marzulina et al., 2021), teaching methods, instructional media, material development, and the loss of Muslim identity brought about by the English language's influence on western culture and lifestyle (Hidayati, 2017). Therefore, supplying solutions can aid schools in resolving issues that may arise during the actual implementation of English teaching-learning processes in *pesantren*. The answers can be found by providing training for English instructors in *pesantrens*, teaching management, material development training for teachers, and motivating students with appealing teaching materials, among other methods.

As English instruction in *pesantren* institutions faces a number of obstacles, these issues require a deeper level of analysis. Consequently, a number of research questions are posed: What are the difficulties in teaching English to *pesantren* students? What are the solutions to the difficulties in teaching English in *pesantren* institutions? Consequently, the objectives of this study are to identify the challenges and strategies involved in teaching English in *pesantren* institutions, as well as to determine the solutions to these issues.

Method

This investigation utilizes library research, which accumulates extensive documentation on a single or multiple subjects. In this investigation, both primary and secondary sources are

utilized. Through Digital Library Initiatives-funded initiatives. Library research is a form of qualitative research that is typically conducted without leaving the library in pursuit of data sources. Literature research also refers to research based solely on written works, including both published and unpublished research findings. It is called "library research" because the information or materials needed to complete the research are found in books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, journals, papers, periodicals, and other library materials.

Literature in the form of textbooks, encyclopedias, monographs, and the like is a general source of reference that typically contains general theories and notions, whereas the reading materials used for this research can be broadly divided into two groups: (1) literature in the form of textbooks, encyclopedias, monographs, and the like is a general source of reference that typically contains general theories Various reference materials include books, articles, and dissertations, among others.

Discussion

1. Pesantren Institution

The *Pesantren* system of educational schools in Indonesia is one method for promoting and teaching Islam. It played a significant part in the early stages of the Islamization of the archipelago. Even though they play such a significant part, it is still unclear when *Pesantren* first appeared in Indonesia. Regarding the precise start of *pesantren* in Indonesia, various sites offer conflicting information. Islamic boarding school, known as *pesantren* is one of the Islamic institutions that are well-known for its education, (Marzulina et al., 2021).

(Habibi et al., 2018) claimed that quality and its superiority in teaching language to its students. As the oldest Indonesian education schools, *pesantren* have historically implemented English as a foreign language (EFL) as one of the compulsory subjects in their curriculum. Indigenous educational institutions known as *pesantren* have established themselves in the heart of Indonesian culture. *Pesantren* is one of the wombs that nurtures warriors who, in addition to being aggressive, are also entirely accountable for their responsibilities and surroundings. *Pesantren's* status as Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational establishment contributes significantly to the development of cadres of scholars who are trustworthy in the field of religious studies. To achieve this, several books that are decided to be studied in Islamic boarding schools are seen as the curriculum, along with the organization of book recitation, in which fundamental Islamic values are gathered and used as values in forming people who are intellectual and have noble character.

From different perspectives, according to the late KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)

Islamic boarding school. As "cultural institutions" that incorporate Javanese cultural symbols, "renewal agents" who popularized the concept of rural development, "centers of community learning," and Islamic educational institutions that adhere to the Itman al-dirayah syllabus introduced by Imam Al-Suyuti more than 500 years ago, Islamic boarding schools also serve these roles. In Pesantren, the santri, or students, live with their kiai, or teacher, in a particular complex to foster the traits of Pesantren life, such as a close relationship between the kiai and santri, santri obedience to the kiai, santri independence and simple life, and santri having the spirit of cooperation in a friendly environment.

Santri is a community that values brotherhood and leads a disciplined existence. According to (Habibi et al., 2018) Pesantren is divided into two types in terms of the curriculum, those are the traditional one and the modern one. The traditional *Pesantren* tends to be closed from the idea of internationalization to avoid any undesirable influences that might be brought by colonizers (Habibi, 2019). Thus, the traditional Pesantren solely teaches Islamic science and Arabic as a primary activity under Kiai guidance.

2. Teaching English at Pesantren Institution

According to Dhofier (1994) and vias (Linda, 2022), Islamic boarding schools are traditional Islamic educational institutions to learn, understand, appreciate, and practice Islamic teachings by emphasizing the importance of religious morality as guides for daily behavior. Haedar (2004), stated in his book that pesantren is defined as the dormitory-based place where students from various regions and levels come together to learn the holy book Al-Qur'an and other Islamic teachings. In general, pesantren is a traditional Islamic educational institution that studies religious knowledge (*tafaqquh fi al-dîn*) with an emphasis on the moral formation of students so that they can practice it under the guidance of kiai, and use the yellow book as the primary source and the mosque as the center of activity.

Pesantren which maintains a vital role among Indonesians has added English, as well as other secular sciences and technology as part of its curriculum in its current advancement. In organizing the educational programs, Pesantren is now encouraged their students to require not only religious knowledge but also general knowledge such as English. Some pesantren also provide a bilingual system of language use in daily communication that includes Arabic and English to develop learners' language skills. Teachers may face many challenges while teaching English in pesantren since. English serves limited purposes. The students are more focused on learning Islamic teachings rather than general knowledge. They are unmotivated to learn English because it is not their native language and provides only limited purposes. Therefore, teachers' abilities to utilize various teaching strategies are very needed. Besides, many stakeholders participate to establish a conducive environment that is measured and set

up to achieve the greatest output of the educational process.

Teachers and students are the main actors to determine the success of classroom learning. They have their perspectives on how the learning process, environment, and instruments work. Students must have personal motivation, which influences both their perspective and their learning behavior. English is believed to be a language that must be mastered, considering that English is an international language used by the majority of countries in the world. Therefore, mastery of English and the ability to communicate in English is considered crucial

Pesantren's continued presentation of an educational model that can result in the development of qualified human resources is, of course, a commitment to the organization's survival in response to the changes in the times (HRD). The students need to be equipped with a variety of Islamic values as well as skills to accomplish this objective. According to the *Pesantren's* identity, the boarding school must focus on at least three elements:

- a. To meet the needs of modernization and development in science and technology, scholars need to be more capable, intellectually capable, and perceptive, have access to enough knowledge and information, and be open to new ideas and developments.
- b. *Pesantren* are still regarded as having a limited understanding of science and methods. *Pesantrens* only impart religious information in the traditional sense. Therefore, *Pesantren* must undoubtedly have the capacity to serve as a "land" for the advancement of sacred knowledge.
- c. The *Pesantren* universe needs to be able to present itself as a transformative, inspiring, and innovative force. The idea that *Pesantren* only imparts religious information while omitting general education is beginning to shift.

3. Challenging in Teaching English at *Pesantren* Institution

Teaching English in *pesantren* institutions is not easy since the way how to teach *pesantren* students is different from how to teach non-*pesantren* students. It also has many challenges according to (Marzulina et al., 2021),(Taib, 2021), (Wajdi & Nur Aulia, 2019), and(Hidayati, 2017). The problems are in terms of internal and external factors, and immersing Islamic values in learning materials (teaching material). The internal factor refers to pedagogy, motivation, and identity. The external factor includes textbooks, learning resources, teachers' level of English, and class size, (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). Those challenges are discussed below:

a. Internal Factor

The first challenge that relates to the internal factors is pedagogy competence dealing

with the proper use of teaching strategies. Most of the *Pesantren* in Indonesia found still use classical teaching. In classical teaching, Learning is a constant process of discovery, a process without end. Learning must take place with the student, and thus the student should be the focus of the process, not the instructor. Classical teaching is also limited because it assumes that all learners are the same. Learners vary widely in terms of personal learning styles, backgrounds, and preexisting knowledge, which makes any single teaching strategy inappropriate for some of the students in your class. Learning is a unique experience for each individual and using a variety of teaching strategies allows you to reach more students

In terms of motivation, it is difficult to motivate *pesantren* students to learn the language, because they have different motivations. The lowly motivated students felt that they do not need to learn English for their future lives. English is something to learn for the national examination rather than something to be used to communicate or something necessary for higher education, (Yulia, 2013). Besides that, (Yulia, 2013) adds that the last particular trigger is students' motivation though their motivation is more instrumental, due to the national examination. Most students realized that English is a global language that would be valuable for their future life.

Another challenge relates to identity. It is not easy to teach English to *pesantren* students in keeping Islamic values in the learning material. (Hidayati, 2017) assumed that interestingly, Islamic education that maintains a vital role among Indonesians has included English alongside other secular sciences and technology as part of its curriculum in its current advancement. Islamic education remains the choice of the Indonesian Muslim communities as long as it can meet the demands of living in the globalization era while keeping Islamic values in the learning process. It further suggests that ELT in Indonesia needs to incorporate Islamic values and show that English learning put no threats or negative influences on Indonesian culture in general and Islamic religious values in particular. (Kholili, 2021) proved that Islamic boarding schools in the 5.0 era must face contemporary challenges that are in line with the development of science and technology, namely having the ability for morals implanting, technology-based *pesantren* systems, digital literacy, and digital ethics. If this ability can be realized and developed, the *pesantren*'s existence can be maintained and accepted by the community 5.0.

b. External Factor

The first challenge is a curriculum. Most *pesantren* schools have complicated curriculum, where they adopted two or three kinds of curricula; the Minister of National Education curriculum (KEMENDIKBUD), the Ministry of Religious Affairs curriculum (KEMENAG), and *Pesantren* curriculum, (Bin-Tahir et al., 2019). Likewise, in the language curriculum of

pesantren, the students were compelled to learn hard in fulfillment of the need of the curriculums. It shows that students feel confused about learning Indonesian, Arabic, English, and local languages based on three curricula with different schedules, teachers, and books. Pesantren schools also face several 7 obstacles in managing the schedule of language teaching, and they need more teachers to teach these languages, while most of their teachers have multilingual competencies that can be empowered in language teaching to fulfill the need of pesantren vision and mission.

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

Next, the teachers’ English proficiency can influence their teaching. Teachers play a vital role in encouraging children’s intellectual and social development during their formative years, (Linda, 2022). English teachers must assist students in identifying significant concepts and key terms in the language and how to use it properly in communication. Some so many teachers are still low in mastering all skills in English and be able to transfer the knowledge to students properly so that they can achieve the objectives of the learning.

4. Strategies used to overcome the problem in the *pesantren* institution

Based on the several challenges presented previously, the writers propose several solutions to those challenges found in teaching English in primary schools.

a. Internal factor

The first strategy to solve the challenge is that teachers used varied instructional strategies in teaching English to the ninth-grade of students at Pesantren Nurul Falah.

- 1) Translation. It was used on classroom observations 1, 2, 3, and 4. The teacher mostly used translation to help the students understand the vocabulary from an English text (Pramesti, 2018).
- 2) Group work has occurred on classroom observations 1, 4, 6, and 7. It was an effective strategy for the teacher in teaching reading when all students were actively engaged in the group work. They can share their understanding within the group, and motivate

others.

- 3) A pictorial illustration is used in classroom observation 3. The teacher used the picture as a media in teaching reading comprehension, the reading material is a kind of narrative text which explained through a picture. It also represented vocabulary building.
- 4) Reading aloud. It started with the teacher's modeled and was followed by the students; it happened in the classroom observation 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8. It was used to measure students' reading skills.
- 5) Silent reading happened in the first and last observation in the classroom. The teacher did this to prepare students to comprehend a text deeply before answering the questions about it.

Secondly, to solve the students' motivation (Linda, 2022), some strategies are utilized by teachers. First, both teachers mentioned giving students a lot of motivation by telling them motivational stories that can make students feel interested and enthusiastic to learn. In this case, the parent's role was also important. Teachers needed to make parents aware of the importance of learning English so that they can encourage their children to be more interested in learning. To summarize, both teachers and parents were responsible to give motivating the students to make students feel interested in learning

Dealing with Islamic teaching material that must be integrated into Islamic values, (Hidayati, 2017) said that the learning process needs to be able to instill Islamic teachings in Muslim students. In this regard, integrating Islamic values in Indonesian ELT, especially in Islamic education is highly necessary. As shown by the new trend of Islamic education, Indonesian Muslim communities increasingly require a model of Islamic education that can answer the demands of living in the globalization era but also does not forget Islamic values as the guideline to be a good moral individual and to serve as an obedient self to-ward Allah. The teacher can use Islamic magazines (Munir & Hartono, 2016), and Islamic websites as alternative teaching materials (Dhian Marita Sari & Nunun Indrasari, 2022).

Another way how to incorporate Islamic teaching while the main goals of training students the language skills are still achieved. The textbook is obviously vital for classroom instruction. The draft called English in Context (EIC) designed for junior secondary school or Madrasah Tsanawiyah students has been completed. It depicted the lives of young Muslim people with attractive pictures of learners in the pesantren environment providing plenty of opportunities for speaking and listening activities. The assessment by ELTIS (English Language Training for Islamic Schools) team gave EIC the best scores among other most commonly used books in East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, and South Sulawesi, (Hidayati,

2017).

b. External factors

The first challenge of external factors is the curriculum. (Bin-Tahir et al., 2019) said that the strategy to solve the challenge of the pesantren curriculum is by designing a syllabus using British and American which includes the formal and non-formal language genres. It is specified on daily speech and pesantren environment, so the researcher is also rearranging the topic based on the daily communication that occurred in the pesantren atmosphere.

The strategy to solve classroom management challenges is by making effectively managed classrooms in pesantren. Local government in cooperation with pesantren stakeholders and local universities should provide teachers with a variety of training to deal with students as the sources of CM problems. It will be valuable to provide them with in-service training in their area as their pesantren have not enough funds to participate in professional development training. Our findings also revealed that participants in this study faced problems related to their teaching skills in teaching. Local government in cooperation with pesantren stakeholders and local universities should provide them with programs for helping them receive and internalize practices, training, experience, and supports related to the lack of new techniques in teaching. We also found that participants had problems with their discipline. However, their lack of discipline was not due to their laziness; rather they had to find financial support from other sources (e.g., working or teaching in other places) as their income from pesantren was not enough. Local government in cooperation with pesantren stakeholders should provide them with more incentives so that they remain in school for the whole week and day. Failure to provide supporting policies or programs will make the quality of teaching in pesantren remains behind public schools which receive more support from the government, (Habibi et al., 2018).

The third, (Linda, 2022) stated that several strategies implemented by the teachers overcome the challenges that arise from themselves. Both teachers mentioned that improving their skills and abilities was one of the ways to overcome the challenges. Teachers need to always be motivated to improve their skills and abilities. Other than that Bbeing able to create various creative and fun teaching and learning media was one of the strategies to overcome the challenges so that students did not feel bored and uninterested in learning English. (Yulia, 2013) adds that teachers need to participate actively to improve their teaching professionalism through pre-service and in-service training though such a situation is not easily realized.

Conclusion

Teaching English language skills as a foreign language to *pesantren* learners is challenging. There are several factors are derived from internal and external factors. Teachers should consider many things to engage the student at *pesantren* in learning. The findings of this study identified two main themes related to the challenges and the strategies in teaching the English language in *pesantren*. The term internal factors are pedagogy, motivation, and identity, while the external factors include curriculum, classroom management, and teachers' proficiency.

Not only the teaching-learning process in the classroom, but also the people's perspective on the significance of English instruction in *pesantren*, must be taken into consideration by stakeholders. In addition, several strategies or solutions are provided in the study. Additionally, it must be well-planned and organized so that the aforementioned challenges can be overcome and high-quality English teaching and learning can be accomplished.

In addition, it is anticipated that the subsequent study on the same topic will be able to measure or analyze within a broader context. This is due to the fact that the researchers are aware that a few preliminary studies on the same topic have been conducted in order to learn more about the challenges and strategies involved in teaching English to *pesantren* students. Therefore, the supplied solutions are insufficient. Consequently, the use of more comprehensive methods and both quantitative and qualitative approaches can be one of the suggestions for obtaining broader and clearer results. The perceptions of stakeholders involved in the development of teaching English to *pesantren* students can be explored through survey research.

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