



Students' Perceptions of English Learning in Islamic Boarding School: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores students' perceptions of English language learning at Raudlatul Ulum 2 Islamic Boarding School, examining its position within the curriculum, the challenges students face, and the factors influencing their motivation. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through surveys, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations and analysed thematically. The findings show that while students recognize English as a strategic skill for accessing global knowledge, higher education, international communication, and career opportunities, it remains secondary to the Islamic boarding school's primary focus on Islamic sciences and Arabic due to curriculum priorities, limited teaching resources, and less engaging instructional methods. Despite these institutional constraints, students demonstrate high internal motivation, particularly driven by aspirations for higher education and global engagement, and view English as a tool for preaching and disseminating Islamic values, indicating that religious principles support rather than hinder language learning. The study also highlights the potential of innovative, student-centred methods—such as interactive games, digital-assisted instruction, and contextualized projects—to increase engagement, enhance language competence, and integrate English into daily practice. These findings suggest that with systemic support, culturally sensitive, and contextually relevant programs, English learning in Islamic boarding school can become a strategic competence that aligns with students' academic, professional, and spiritual development.

Keywords: English Language Learning, Islamic Boarding School, Students' Perceptions, Motivation, Curriculum Integration

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INTRODUCTION

English language learning in Islamic boarding schools has its own abilities and challenges. Islamic boarding schools, which basically focus on religious education, use Arabic more as a teaching method, while English itself is often seen as an additional skill and not the main positivity, especially in Islamic boarding schools. This study aims to understand students' perception of English language learning in the Raudlatul Ulum 2 Islamic boarding school and identify the challenges to them. By learning to study the prevalence and factors that affect their motivation, this research is expected so that they have a view of how English language instruction can be digested with the needs and abilities of students in Islamic boarding schools

English, as an international language, plays an important role in many aspects of life, including education, business, and global communication. In Indonesia, learning English has become an integral part of the educational curriculum, both in public schools and in Islamic boarding schools. However, acceptance of English language learning among students (Islamic boarding school students) is often influenced by various factors, such as cultural background, religion, and values taught in Islamic boarding school. Therefore, it is important to understand the perception of students towards English learning to increase the effectiveness of learning in Islamic boarding schools. (Rofi'i *et al.*, 2023) said that English speaking skills training carried out with a combination of face-to-face methods and the use of digital technology has proven to be effective in increasing students' motivation and speaking skills. The results of the questionnaire showed that there was an increase in the motivation of students after participating in the training, although they still faced obstacles in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and the application of English in daily life. Group discussion activities and interaction-based projects also help build confidence in speaking. However, for maximum results, more effort is needed to integrate active speaking practices into their daily lives. Ariwibowo *et al.*, (2020) in the article entitled "English Language Training for students of Bismar Al mustqim Islamic Boarding School with a functional approach which was carried out from May to August 2019. At the initial meeting, the students were introduced pictures equipped with English writing under the picture so that the students could get to know and understand the vocabulary. Then they are expected to be able to apply the material given in English smoothly and correctly.

A study on students' perception toward English learning at SMP KATOLIK ST. Theresia tanawongko by desy f.ansow stated The findings of the data analysis led the researcher to draw several conclusions: (1) a large portion of the sampled students (87%) had a positive attitude toward learning English, (2) 90% were highly motivated to learn or had a passion for learning English, and (3) 93% studied English because it is a mandatory subject. Their reasons for learning the language included gaining internet access (89%), securing future employment (95%), and expanding their global knowledge (91%)(Desy F Ansow, Ollii and Kumayas, 2022). An Exploration of Students' Perception of English Language Learning in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Case Study in Bogor, Indonesia by Mas Muhammad Idris stated English language learning in Islamic boarding schools has a crucial role in improving student competence in the era of globalization. The results of the study at Madrasah Aliyah in Bogor showed that 85% of students had high enthusiasm for learning English, while the other 15% were less interested due to difficulties in understanding the material. These findings indicate the need for more interactive and interesting learning methods to increase students' interest and understanding. Therefore, teachers and education managers in Islamic boarding school need to adopt innovative learning strategies that suit the needs of students. With a more effective approach, English learning at Islamic boarding schools is expected to run more optimally, so that students have better competence in facing global challenges. (Idris, *et al.*, 2025).

Qualitative Study Meta-Analysis English Language Learning and Learning in Islamic Boarding Schools stated if this This article aims to understand the process of learning and learning English in Islamic boarding schools by examining several aspects, such as learning methods, curriculum design, challenges faced, as well as the perception of policymakers and negative views that still exist. The results of the analysis show that research on English learning in Islamic boarding schools needs to be expanded to more institutions so that the perspectives obtained are more diverse. In addition, research methods must be more varied to obtain more quality data. Another recommendation is to encourage collaboration between academics from Islamic universities and public universities to produce broader and more comprehensive insights into English learning research in Islamic boarding schools (Abid, 2022). The English learning assistance program at the Nurul Islam Islamic Boarding School aims to improve basic understanding of English, both theoretically and practically, including commonly used expressions and vocabulary. This activity involved students with the guidance of competent English lecturers, taking place at Kekalik Sekarbela, Mataram. The

results of the training showed high enthusiasm from the participants, which was reflected in their liveliness and attendance levels, so it was hoped that their English skills would further develop (Ilham *et al.*, 2021). Research shows that the development of English learning at the Puncak Darus Salam Islamic Boarding School is based on the thinking of the caretaker of the Islamic boarding school, who believes that every Muslim has an obligation to spread the teachings of Islam throughout the world. Therefore, English is considered a skill to be mastered, given its status as an international language spoken by many nations (Solichin, 2013).

The training at Pondok An-Nahdlah has succeeded in improving the students' communication skills in English, with 72% of them able to speak fluently in public, while the other 28% still need continuous training and motivation. To have more optimal results, training should be carried out regularly at least twice a week, with students who are disciplined and willing to relearn the material provided. In addition, modules and activity plans need to be prepared more attractively according to the character of the students. With this training, it is hoped that students will be more confident, have broad insights, and can play an active role in the global community (Elfiyanto *et al.*, 2024).

The foreign language program at the Nurul Haramain Modern Islamic Boarding School NW Bogor aims to improve students' English language skills through structured planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation. This program is designed in annual meetings and the formation of management, managed by leaders, field coordinators, Language Advisory Councils, and OPPM. The implementation went well and produced student achievements even though they still faced several obstacles. Evaluations are carried out periodically every week, quarter, and semester through oral and written tests to assess the development of students. (Nurafni, Nasution in character formation and instilling positive values for prospective preachers., and Latifah 2022).

Workshop Penerapan Games Interaktif untuk Meningkatkan Kemauan Berbicara Bahasa Inggris Santri Alghozali by Anwar and Mahmud stated the workshop on the implementation of interactive games at the Al-Ghozali Islamic Boarding School succeeded in increasing the enthusiasm and confidence of students in public speaking. This method not only fosters the motivation and talent of students, but also plays a role. In addition, interactive games have proven to be effective in improving English language skills, especially in speaking, as well as building confidence to appear in public. Fun learning through game variations also helps improve students' language skills and speech techniques more effectively. (Anwar and Mahmud, 2022).

Development of student life skills at al mumtaz jayati Islamic Boarding School tangerang by Zainal Islamic boarding school stated if this This study examines the Al Mumtaz Islamic Boarding School in the development of students' life skills, especially in Arabic and English. With a descriptive qualitative method, this study highlights Islamic boarding school strategies, such as routine recitation, language organization, scientific forums, and extracurriculars. The main supporting factor is extracurricular activities, while the obstacles include limited facilities and student motivation (Zainal Mutaqin, 2023).

This article discusses the use of *the Last Man Standing game* as an effective method in improving English vocabulary for students at Madrasah Diniyah Baba Al Hikmah through a community service program in 2022. With lectures, questions and answers, and hands-on practice, this training is carried out through the stages of planning, action, observation, and evaluation. The results of the pre-test and post-test showed a significant increase, from a score of 50 to 90, proving that this method is able to provide an innovative and enjoyable learning experience for students (Sholikhi, 2022).

However, there is still a lack of comprehensive research that combines students' perceptions, the challenges they encounter, and their hopes or needs regarding English

Most existing studies tend to examine these elements in isolation. A deeper, more integrated understanding of how students perceive the learning process—considering internal factors (such as self-motivation and prior exposure) and external influences (like curriculum and school culture)—is still needed to inform more effective teaching practices.

Considering this, the novelty of this study lies in its effort to bridge the gap between students' actual abilities and needs with the design of English learning strategies that are appropriate for the Islamic boarding school context. Rather than focusing solely on method or material, this study seeks to generate a clearer picture of how English learning can be adapted to suit the unique environment of Islamic boarding schools, particularly by understanding the students' own views and learning barriers.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore student's perceptions of English language learning in an Islamic boarding school context (K Robert, 2018). This design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how students view the importance of English, its position within Islamic boarding school education, and the role of religious values in shaping their motivation. A qualitative case study allows the researcher to examine participants' experiences and interpretations in their natural setting, providing rich contextual insights (Tisdell, Merriam and Stuckey-Peyrot, 2025).

The research was conducted at Raudlatul Ulum 2 Islamic Boarding School, with the population consisting of student who participated in English learning activities. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, there are twenty student's focusing on students with sufficient experience in learning English in the Islamic boarding school (Patton, 2014). Students from different grade levels were involved to capture diverse perspectives, particularly related to learning priorities and future educational aspirations.

Data were collected through, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation to ensure triangulation and credible findings (Denzin, 2012). The qualitative survey provided general insights into students' perceptions of English learning, including its perceived importance and role in Islamic boarding school education. Semi-structured interviews allowed deeper exploration of students' awareness of English as a gateway to global knowledge, their internal motivation, and the supportive role of Islamic values. Classroom observations were conducted to examine learning practices and student engagement, providing additional context for triangulating data.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Survey responses, interview transcripts, and observation notes were coded and categorized into themes such as the priority of English learning, perception of English as a supplementary subject, motivation driven by higher education goals, and the supportive role of Islamic values.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Islamic boarding school, as traditional educational institutions, play an important role in shaping the character, religious knowledge, and skills of their students. In their development, Islamic boarding school do not only focus on strengthening Islamic sciences but also begin to recognize the importance of additional skills that are relevant to global needs, one of which is the mastery of English. English is regarded as an international language that opens access to scientific literature, global communication, and opportunities for education

as well as careers abroad. This awareness becomes increasingly relevant in the digital era, where the flow of information and cross-cultural interactions occurs at a very fast pace.

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In the context of globalization and the competencies required in the 21st century, mastering English has a strategic role. This language not only serves as a tool to access modern knowledge but also to broaden perspectives, communicate across cultures, and prepare students to face global challenges. Among students, there is a positive view regarding the importance of English. They understand that mastery of this language can become an important asset in continuing higher education, participating in international scholarships, and building a competitive career.

Although awareness of the importance of English is high, mastery of this language in practical learning at Islamic boarding school still faces various obstacles. Factors such as the primary focus on Islamic sciences and Arabic, the limited number of competent teachers, and less engaging teaching methods make English not yet fully integrated into the curriculum and daily activities of students. This condition creates a paradox: students understand the importance of English, yet institutionally, this language is still considered supplementary.

Individual awareness and motivation of students become a crucial starting point. Many students are personally driven to master English, not only for academic purposes but also as a means of preaching and disseminating Islamic values to the global community. This perspective shows that mastery of foreign languages, particularly English, is not contradictory to Islamic values but can instead strengthen each other. This internal motivation of students becomes an important asset for Islamic boarding school to develop more effective, targeted, and contextual English learning strategies.

Students consider English important, but it has not yet become a top priority

Within the Islamic boarding school education system, there is a positive view among students regarding the importance of mastering English. They recognize that the ability to speak English plays a strategic role in opening access to modern knowledge and serves as a bridge to understand an increasingly interconnected global world. This awareness grows in line with the increasing need for global competencies in the digital era and the openness of information.

“ saya merasa Bahasa Inggris sangat penting untuk kita di kemudian hari “

Although students realize that English plays an important role in global life, such as opening access to modern knowledge and opportunities for study or work abroad, this language has not become a primary priority within the Islamic boarding school environment. The learning focus, which is still centred on Islamic sciences and mastery of Arabic, makes English tend to be placed in a secondary position. In addition, the limited number of competent teachers and less engaging teaching methods also become inhibiting factors. As a result, although it is considered important, English has not yet been fully positioned as a necessity, and English learning can be better accepted and become an integral part of the Islamic boarding school education process.

There is a high awareness that English opens access to knowledge and the global world

Nevertheless, within the context of the Islamic boarding school education system, English has not yet fully obtained a place as a top priority. English teaching is often still positioned as a complementary or additional subject, rather than as a part integrated into the core curriculum of the Islamic boarding school. The focus of Islamic boarding school institutions generally remains on strengthening traditional Islamic sciences, such as fiqh,

tafsir, hadith, and mastery of Arabic. Therefore, although English teaching is available, its intensity and approach are often not optimal and have not yet been fully well-structured.

“ Despite high awareness of its global importance, English remains a secondary priority in Islamic boarding schools”

There is a high awareness among students that English is a key to opening access to knowledge and the global world. They understand that mastery of this language can broaden perspectives, facilitate understanding of international literature, and increase opportunities to continue studying abroad or enter a more competitive workforce. This awareness grows in line with the increasing flow of information and the need for global skills. However, even though this awareness has been formed, challenges regarding priorities, teaching methods, and environmental support remain obstacles in achieving optimal English mastery.

However, this does not mean that Islamic values hinder students' interest in learning foreign languages, especially English. On the contrary, many students see English proficiency as one of the important tools for preaching and spreading Islamic values to the global community. This perspective shows that Islamic values are not only compatible with the spirit of learning English but also provide moral and spiritual encouragement for students to continue developing their competence in this field.

English learning in the Islamic boarding school environment is often perceived merely as a complement, not as a core part of the education system. This perception arises because the focus of Islamic boarding school is still centred on teaching Islamic sciences and Arabic, which are considered more relevant to the identity and primary objectives of the institution. As a result, English does not receive adequate allocation in the curriculum or in the daily activities of students. Although the importance of English is beginning to be recognized, especially in the context of globalization and access to modern knowledge, its implementation is still limited and has not been fully integrated. This indicates the need for a paradigm shift so that English is no longer considered merely an additional subject, but as a strategic skill that supports the development of students in the future.

Islamic values do not hinder, but rather support the motivation to learn

Students see English as a tool for preaching and spreading Islamic knowledge. However, this does not mean that Islamic values hinder students' interest in learning foreign languages, especially English. On the contrary, many students view mastery of English as one of the important tools for preaching and disseminating Islamic values to the global community. This perspective shows that Islamic values are not only compatible with the spirit of learning English but also provide moral and spiritual encouragement for students to continue developing their competence in this field.

“Islamic values do not hinder students' motivation to learn English; instead, they strengthen it by positioning English as a tool for preaching and disseminating Islamic knowledge globally”

Islamic values, in fact, do not hinder students' motivation to learn English; they even serve as a foundation that supports their enthusiasm. Many students view English as an important means to preach and disseminate Islamic knowledge internationally. By mastering this language, they can convey Islamic messages to the global community, access Islamic literature in foreign languages, and participate in cross-cultural and interfaith dialogues. This perspective demonstrates that religious spirit and mastery of foreign languages are not mutually exclusive but can strengthen each other within the framework of preaching development and students' contributions at the global level.

Students' internal motivation toward English is quite high, driven by the desire to continue higher education

Thus, even though English has not yet become a priority within the Islamic boarding school education system, it has gained a distinct place in the awareness of students. What is needed is systemic support from Islamic boarding school educational institutions to formulate English learning approaches that are more targeted, contextual, and integrated with the Islamic values upheld. In this way, Islamic boarding school can produce a generation of students who are not only strong in Islamic values but also resilient in facing global challenges.

“Students demonstrate strong internal motivation to learn English, primarily driven by their aspirations to pursue higher education and access broader academic opportunities.”

Students' internal motivation toward learning English is quite high, especially driven by their desire to continue their studies to higher education levels, both domestically and abroad. The awareness that mastering English is an essential requirement to access higher education, participate in international scholarships, and understand academic literature serves as a strong motivator for students to study more seriously. This drive arises from personal aspirations and the desire to achieve greater accomplishments beyond the Islamic boarding school environment. This shows that, although English has not yet become an institutional priority, students individually have strong awareness and determination to make English proficiency a preparation for their future.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the complex position of English language learning in Islamic boarding schools, where religious education remains the primary focus. Consistent with prior research, students in Islamic boarding school recognize the strategic importance of English as an international language that opens access to knowledge, global communication, and career opportunities (Desy F Ansow, Olii and Kumayas, 2022; Idris, Wijayanti and Rahmawati, 2025). Students are aware that English proficiency can broaden their perspectives, facilitate access to international literature, and enhance their chances of pursuing higher education both domestically and abroad. This awareness aligns with global trends emphasizing the necessity of English as a tool for 21st-century competencies, particularly in a digital and interconnected world.

Despite students' recognition of its importance, English learning in Islamic boarding school is often positioned as a supplementary skill rather than a core component of the curriculum. The study found that the primary focus on Islamic sciences and Arabic, combined with limited teaching resources and less engaging instructional methods, results in English being treated as secondary (Ilham *et al.*, 2021; Rofi'i and Susilo, 2023). This situation reflects a common paradox: while students are motivated to learn English, institutional structures and curriculum priorities limit the opportunities for fully integrating English into daily educational practice. These findings are consistent with (Idris, Wijayanti and Rahmawati, 2025), who suggested that interactive and student-centred learning methods are necessary to increase engagement and comprehension in English learning at Islamic boarding schools.

Interestingly, the findings also show that Islamic values do not hinder English learning but instead can reinforce motivation. Students perceive English proficiency as a means to preach and disseminate Islamic teachings globally. This observation supports the notion that religious and linguistic goals can be mutually reinforcing (Solichin, 2013). By viewing English as a tool to expand their religious influence and access broader knowledge, students demonstrate that cultural and religious frameworks can complement rather than conflict with language learning initiatives.

Another notable finding is the high level of internal motivation among students, particularly driven by aspirations to continue higher education. This intrinsic motivation aligns with (Desy Fransiska Ansow, Oliy and Kumayas, 2022), who found that students' interest in English is strongly influenced by practical goals, such as gaining access to higher education, securing employment, and acquiring global knowledge. In the Islamic boarding school context, this motivation provides an important leverage point for educators, suggesting that strategically designed learning programs can harness students' personal goals to enhance engagement and proficiency in English.

The findings also emphasize the need for innovative teaching approaches that integrate English learning with students' interests and Islamic values. Studies have shown that methods such as interactive games, digital-assisted instruction, and contextualized projects significantly improve motivation and language competence (Wafiroh and Indah, 2022; Rofi'i and Susilo, 2023). Implementing such strategies in Islamic boarding school could address existing barriers, such as the perception of English as a supplementary subject, and create a more holistic learning environment where English is seen as a strategic skill rather than an optional addition.

Overall, the results of this study underscore the importance of balancing institutional priorities, religious values, and students' aspirations in English language learning. While English has not yet become a core component in Islamic boarding school education, the combination of high student motivation, awareness of global opportunities, and the compatibility of English with Islamic values provides a strong foundation for developing more structured, engaging, and culturally sensitive English learning programs. By leveraging these factors, Islamic boarding school can equip students with competencies that are relevant both locally and globally, supporting their academic, professional, and spiritual development.

CONCLUSION

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