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“English Is Not Useful for My Afterlife”: Teachers’ and Students’ Perspectives of English Language Teaching in *Pesantren*

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Abstract

This study investigates the core beliefs of English teachers facilitating English language learning in Islamic boarding schools. Using a phenomenological research method, the research explores the lived experiences of six participants, four students (S1, S2, S3, S4) and two teachers (T1, T2), regarding English learning in Islamic educational settings. The study conducted detailed, semi-structured interviews and observations at a privately-run Islamic boarding school in Pasuruan regency, East Java, Indonesia. The results reveal that the teachers face significant challenges including inadequate technological resources, poor student motivation, and beliefs that religious knowledge supersedes English proficiency. Likewise, the students initially demonstrated low motivation due to limited extracurricular activities and perceptions that English conflicts with religious studies. However, institutional interventions through interactive techniques, modern teaching practices, and cultural exchange programs gradually improved student attitudes. Adaptive strategies emerged, incorporating Islamic values into language education while emphasizing English’s practical applications. The findings suggest that culturally sensitive and innovative teaching strategies are crucial for effective English language acquisition in religious educational settings. By integrating Islamic principles into language instruction, educators can enhance student engagement while preserving cultural identity. This study provides important perspectives on English language learning in Islamic boarding schools and presents recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance language education in similar contexts, while maintaining respect for religious and cultural values.

Keywords: Cultural immersion, English teachers, Islamic boarding school, language acquisition, teaching approaches.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Islam, pursuing knowledge is considered an inherent obligation for all adherents, as underscored by the hadith: "Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim" [HR. Ibnu Majah]. This fundamental tenet serves as the foundational ethos behind the establishments of *Pesantren*, which are religious educational institutions within the Indonesian Islamic tradition (Marzulina et al., 2021). These educational establishments provide a unique pedagogical approach that harmonizes both religious and secular disciplines, offering a comprehensive and holistic framework for learning. Within the Indonesian education framework, Islamic boarding schools have emerged as a discernible option, accessible to the populace (Assalihee et al., 2019). In their early stages, these institutions mainly served as centers for Islamic learning, focusing on Quran interpretation, Hadith studies, Arabic language, Islamic law, and related fields. This focus created a common stereotype within the *Pesantren* environment, which led to the neglect of secular subjects, including English language instruction.

The use of English as a teaching tool in some traditional Islamic boarding schools faces challenges because it is often viewed as the language of non-believers, creating an indirect link to Christianity (Farid & Lamb, 2020; Tsantila et al., 2016). Despite this, interest in English education in *Pesantren* has grown significantly, driven by the need to meet international standards and the recognition of English as a key to expanding knowledge and career opportunities (Isbah, 2020; Islam & Aziz, 2020; Maesaroh et al., 2022). This change reflects an effort to improve language skills while still maintaining Islamic values. However, the shift is not without difficulties. English teachers are challenged to integrate Islamic principles into their lessons while also dealing with the historical and cultural associations of English, which come mainly from Christian contexts and colonial legacies (Skourdumbis & Madkur, 2020). Additional challenges also stem from the perception of English as a foreign language and the stronger emphasis placed on Indonesian and Arabic in *Pesantren* (Bin-Tahir et al., 2019; Muhajir, 2022; Rohmana, 2020).

In the contemporary era, students have shown a growing interest in the English language due to the evolving societal landscape (Murray & Christison, 2021). At this institution, there is a notable enthusiasm for acquiring English proficiency. However, limited human and technological resources within Islamic boarding schools often lead to reliance on a single English teacher, whom students only engage with during formal educational sessions (Jubba et al., 2022). This creates challenges for both students and instructors in the English language education setting. To better understand these challenges, it is essential to explore students' faith-based perspectives, their expectations regarding English acquisition, and the persistent pedagogical obstacles that teachers face in Islamic boarding schools.

Several academic studies, including those conducted by Farid and Lamb (2020), Khusumadewi (2021), Marzulina et al. (2021), and Akmal et al. (2022), demonstrated a shared viewpoint on the educational methodology for acquiring English language skills in Islamic boarding schools. In another study, Rohmah et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study examining how Islamic principles were integrated into English language teaching at an East Javanese Islamic educational institution. The study explored teachers' viewpoints concerning this educational integration approach. The findings revealed that educators' beliefs regarding the incorporation of Islamic values into English instruction centered on three key areas: their understanding of the subject matter, the significance they attributed to such integration, and the practical implementation of these principles within their classroom instruction. Additionally, Rahmawita and Putriani (2022) conducted a quantitative investigation analyzing learners' perspectives toward language acquisition at a private Islamic educational institution in Riau, incorporating 83 study participants. Their research outcomes highlighted the varied nature of beliefs regarding English foreign language learning.

Although earlier studies have provided important findings, there is still a gap that needs deeper investigation, especially one that includes both teachers' and students' perspectives. To address this, the current study focuses on exploring how learners and instructors view English language learning in Islamic boarding schools, using time-based (past, present, and future) aspects

as a key framework for analysis. Based on this approach, the research raises two main questions that connect to the latest studies, namely:

1. What are teachers' views on the role of learning English in Islamic boarding schools, and how do they deal with challenges and changes over time?
2. How do students see English learning in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, what difficulties do they face, and how do they adjust to changing situations?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks for Language Acquisition

This research is grounded in several theoretical frameworks. [Krashen \(1981\)](#) emphasized that acquiring a language requires exposure to a linguistically meaningful environment that frames language acquisition as a process driven by learners' cognitive engagement. [Gardner and Lambert \(1959\)](#) extended this perspective by highlighting the importance of socio-linguistic factors that suggest students' behaviors, motivation, and the broader social context play a critical role in successful language learning. These theories position language acquisition as both a cognitive and socio-linguistic process. Complementing this view, [Pajares \(1992\)](#) put emphasis on the influence of teachers' beliefs on educational objectives and perceptions of students' capabilities, while [Kern \(1995\)](#) accentuated the role of students' confidence and optimism in shaping their language learning experiences. These frameworks provide a multidimensional lens for understanding English language acquisition, encompassing cognitive, social, and belief-based dimensions.

Moreover, [Pajares \(1992\)](#) explained that teachers' and students' beliefs form an important part of the learning process. In his view, teachers' beliefs focus on their goals for education and their expectations of students' abilities to meet those goals. [Kern \(1995\)](#) added that students' confidence in learning a language is strongly linked to their optimism about the learning process itself. These theories highlight how both teachers' and students' beliefs shape language learning. Taken together, they provide a multidimensional view that helps to understand the different perspectives influencing English language acquisition in educational settings.

2.2 Teachers' and Students' Beliefs about Language Learning

There is an ongoing discussion in academic literature about whether the beliefs held by teachers and students directly influence classroom practices and outcomes, or if they simply mirror what is already happening in classrooms. While some research has shown clear connections between beliefs and practices ([Waluyo & Apridayani, 2021](#)), other studies have not been able to prove a strong cause-and-effect relationship, pointing to the need for more research into these complex processes ([Irawan, 2020](#); [Rahman et al., 2021](#)). [Wyatt and Dikilitaş \(2021\)](#) explained that teachers' beliefs are often shaped by their own experiences of learning a language and by the teaching methods highlighted in their teacher training programs. However, [Huang et al. \(2021\)](#) noted that beliefs formed early can be difficult to change, even when teachers are presented with different, research-based perspectives. Commonly held teacher beliefs include placing more importance on accuracy and fluency than on communication skills, focusing heavily on grammar teaching, and assuming that certain ethnic groups have natural language ability. These views do not always match modern ideas of communicative language teaching (CLT) ([Hien, 2021](#); [Huang et al., 2021](#)).

Students, too, develop beliefs about language learning, which are influenced by cultural norms and prior educational experiences, and according to [Hermagustiana and Anggriyani \(2020\)](#), the students' attitudes toward the perceived difficulty of different language skills and their own linguistic abilities have been shown to affect their motivation and achievement. A disconnect between teacher and students' beliefs within the same classroom can hinder the learning process, particularly if students resist pedagogical methods that do not align with their expectations

(Motlounq et al., 2021). Moreover, in single-gender Islamic boarding schools, the social and religious context may distinctly shape the language acquisition beliefs of both teachers and students (As Sabiq et al., 2022; Sari, 2023).

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research method because of its ability to gather deep insights in a systematic way. These methods are especially effective for exploring complex topics (Creswell, 2007), providing flexibility in research design and allowing new themes to emerge. Since the focus is on participants' real-life experiences in learning English, a phenomenological approach was chosen to closely examine their personal perspectives and feelings, giving a detailed understanding of the language learning process (Alase, 2017). The data were collected by observing and interviewing students and teachers. This careful process helps create a full understanding of the topic being studied, making qualitative methods the best choice for uncovering multifaceted insights.

3.2 Location and Subjects

This study was carried out at a privately-run Islamic boarding school in the Pasuruan region, East Java, Indonesia. The research focused on two key groups within the boarding school: two English teachers and a group of five students, commonly called *santri* in the Islamic educational context. Data were collected from the two teachers, referred to here by the pseudonyms 'T1' and 'T2'. Both are responsible for teaching English to students in this setting. Table 1 shows that T1 has a teaching background with three years of experience in English instruction, while T2 has eight years of experience specializing in teaching English in Islamic boarding schools.

Table 1. English teachers' background.

Name (code)	Gender	Teaching experiences
T1	Male	3 Years
T2	Female	8 Years

For this study, it was necessary to collect data from student participants. The researcher had previously observed the students and noted their performance on an English proficiency test given by their teacher one month earlier, which allowed an assessment of their English levels. Based on these observations, a random sampling method was used to select four students for detailed investigation and analysis, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' background.

Name (code)	Gender	Class	English level
S1	Male	10 th grade	Elementary
S2	Male	11 th grade	Beginner
S3	Female	12 th grade	Intermediate
S4	Female	10 th grade	Elementary

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of four student participants (S1-S4) in the study. The sample includes equal gender representation with two male students (S1, S2) and two female students (S3, S4) across three grade levels: 10th grade (S1, S4), 11th grade (S2), and 12th grade (S3). Their English proficiency levels vary from elementary (S1, S4), beginner (S2), to intermediate (S3), demonstrating diverse language competency across different academic years. Notably, both 10th-grade students have elementary-level English skills, while students in higher

grades show mixed levels of proficiency, offering a broad range of perspectives for examining English language learning experiences in the Islamic boarding school context.

3.3 Data Collection

This research used systematic data collection techniques, including carefully conducted, in-depth interviews with participants. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to encourage detailed and meaningful responses (Ahlin, 2019). The researchers used carefully designed question frameworks suited to the different groups of students and teachers, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Research interview guidelines.

No.	For teachers	For students
1	Can you tell me about your experiences teaching English in an Islamic boarding school context?	Can you explain your experience of learning English in your school?
2	How do you adapt your teaching methods to the unique cultural and religious context of <i>Pesantren</i> ?	What are the main challenges you face when you learning English here, and how do you overcome them?
3	How has English language instruction in <i>Pesantren</i> evolved, and what changes do you anticipate?	Have you noticed any changes in English studies at <i>Pesantren</i> during your time here?
4	What effective strategies do you use to teach English to Students with varying language backgrounds?	How do you plan to use English in your future, both within and outside of <i>Pesantren</i> ?
5	How do you balance teaching English with promoting religious and cultural values in <i>Pesantren</i> ?	Can you share any unique methods used at <i>Pesantren</i> to study English and how they benefit you?

Table 3 presents the semi-structured interview questions used to collect data from both teachers and students. The teacher questions (five in total) focused on pedagogical experiences, cultural adaptation strategies, changes in English instruction over time, differentiated teaching approaches, and the balance between language education and religious values within the *Pesantren* context. The student questions (five in total) explored learning experiences, challenges, and coping strategies, observed changes in English learning over time, future aspirations for using English, and unique institutional teaching methods. Both sets of questions were designed to capture participants' lived experiences and perspectives on English learning in the Islamic boarding school environment, aligning with the study's phenomenological approach to understanding beliefs, challenges, and adaptive strategies of teachers and students.

Data collection was primarily conducted through semi-structured interviews. The research began with an observational phase to gain insights into the participants' classroom and school context. Interviews were conducted using both technological and conventional methods. Student interviews took place immediately after class, using face-to-face sessions recorded on a smartphone. Teacher interviews were conducted via WhatsApp calls to accommodate their schedules and minimize potential delays. This approach ensured that interviews were flexible while capturing detailed and meaningful information from all participants.

3.4 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the researchers used a data processing approach described by Hycner (1999). This approach was chosen because phenomenological research differs from other methods and resists simple data-reduction techniques. According to Hycner (1999), qualitative data analysis involves several systematic steps. It begins with transcription, carefully converting data from recorded interviews or written materials into text. After transcription, the researchers engaged in bracketing and phenomenological reduction. Bracketing requires setting aside personal biases to allow a neutral examination of the data. Phenomenological reduction then followed, involving a methodical analysis aimed at identifying the essential phenomena present in the data.

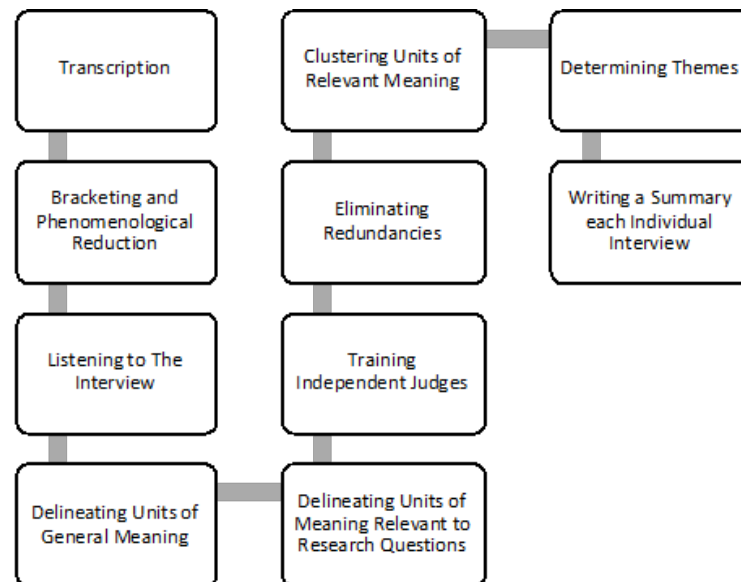


Figure 1. Data processing phases (Hycner, 1999).

After completing the interviews, the next step involved a thorough analysis of the collected data to identify any potential issues. The researchers aimed to detect general patterns without being influenced by prior assumptions, ensuring the data's context is accurately represented. Relevant segments were then separated in relation to the research questions. To ensure reliability, impartial evaluators were trained to assess these segments, providing external validation that strengthens the study's credibility. Repeated information within the segments was removed, leaving clear and concise data. The researchers then examined whether these segments naturally form groups that represent common concepts. These groups were analyzed to identify key themes that capture the core of the data. Finally, individual summaries were created for each participant, synthesizing their unique perspectives within the study framework.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings from interviews with both teachers and students regarding English language learning in Islamic boarding schools. The data provide perceptions into the challenges and experiences associated with teaching and learning English in a religious educational context. Teachers' perspectives inform the initial obstacles they faced, the strategies they employed to navigate these challenges, and the positive shifts in student attitudes facilitated by institutional support and culturally responsive teaching practices. Meanwhile, students' voices reveal their early experiences with English, the cognitive and communicative challenges they encounter, and the strategies they adopt to overcome language barriers. These perspectives offer a comprehensive view of the dynamic interplay between pedagogical approaches, student engagement, and the integration of Islamic values in English language education within the *Pesantren* environment.

4.1 Teachers' Perspectives on English Instruction in Islamic Boarding Schools

4.1.1 Initial challenges in the pesantren context

In this section, the teachers shared their different experiences of teaching English at an Islamic boarding school. T1 and T2 gave very similar accounts, showing agreement in their stories. They expressed similar feelings about teaching English in this unique setting. The similarity in their experiences shows common patterns in both their successes and challenges,

emphasizing the shared difficulties of teaching English in the special environment of an Islamic boarding school.

- (1) some challenges because the environment was quite different from what I was used to. We had a small number of students, no access to technology, and very low levels of student ability and interest in learning English, mainly because they had very little exposure to it in their previous education. Moreover, some students argued that learning English was not essential because it did not pertain to their religious knowledge. (T1)

During the interview, T1 explained the challenges faced when starting to teach at an Islamic boarding school. These included having few students, limited access to technology, and low student motivation to learn. To better understand these challenges, it is helpful to compare T1's experiences with T2's. Looking at both perspectives highlights the specific difficulties teachers face in this unique setting. Comparing T1 and T2's views provides a clearer understanding of the challenges in Islamic boarding schools and helps to better grasp the overall educational context.

- (2) Transitioning to teaching at a Pesantren posed difficulties due to students placing a higher emphasis on Arabic than English. Specific individuals perceived English as insignificant in the context of the "Afterlife." In response, I interacted with students to promote comprehension of various viewpoints and establish a connection between the significance of language and religious identity, with the goal of surmounting this obstacle. (T2)

Furthermore, T2, echoing T1's findings, discussed teaching English in an Islamic boarding school, noting student motivation issues and the perception of English as non-Muslim. T1 emphasized adapting to the cultural context due to her non-religious background, while T2, already familiar with the environment, deemed assimilation unnecessary.

- (3) ...I did not find it difficult to adjust to the Islamic school area. However, what I found difficult was dealing with students who behave in a disruptive or disrespectful manner. They tend to pay less attention to their teachers. At that time, I was very overwhelmed with dealing with students when the English class started. (T2)

The data shows the challenges students faced while learning English, which were also noted by T1. When T1 began teaching English at the Islamic boarding school, many students seemed to see English as less important in their studies. Most students tended to focus more on language skills related to their religious studies, viewing English mainly as an academic requirement rather than a valuable subject.

4.1.2 Positive shifts in student attitudes and institutional support

Despite the challenges the teacher faced earlier while teaching English at the Islamic boarding school, recent insights from participants reveal changes in students' learning experiences. Notably, researchers found significant improvements in how students approach learning, a view also shared by T1:

- (4) Have observed a positive mindset shift as they have grown more receptive to learning English. Through dedicated efforts in delivering engaging lessons, some have achieved notable proficiency. This transformation reflects the impact of my commitment to fostering a dynamic and interesting English learning environment... (T1)

Aligned with T1's perspective, T2 explained a significant difference in students' attitudes toward learning English in Islamic boarding schools:

- (5) Over time, a discernible transformation occurred as students progressively exhibited greater receptiveness towards learning English, acknowledging its significance. This shift has facilitated a more streamlined process of teaching English within the Islamic boarding school context, rendering the task noticeably easier for me...(T2)

The data from both teachers showed clear similarities in their experiences at the Islamic boarding school. Both noticed a significant increase in students' motivation to keep learning English. They attributed this improvement to factors such as the school's curriculum policies.

These shared observations display how the school's strategies help create an environment that encourages student interest and active participation in learning English:

- (6) I believe there has been a significant change in the field of English education at the Islamic boarding school where I have been teaching for the past few years...currently, students are becoming more aware of the importance of English in their lives. This may also be attributed to the policies implemented by the boarding school, such as making the policy about internationalizing the curriculum of the Islamic boarding school, and instilling the values of learning moderation in every religious study, which has ignited their enthusiasm for learning English. (T1)

4.1.3 Future aspirations and integration of Islamic values

Students in Islamic boarding schools demonstrate strong commitment to following institutional regulations to excel in English, recognizing its importance for effective global communication. They eagerly pursue improving their English skills because it allows them to communicate effectively with people from different cultures. This commitment to learning shows their focus on both language ability and cultural understanding. Participant T1 expressed confidence and positivity in his role as an English teacher, aiming to help all students achieve strong English skills that can be applied in real-life situations. Meanwhile, participant T2 focused on integrating Islamic values into language learning materials adapting to the changing cognitive approaches and teaching methods within Islamic boarding school environments.

- (7) In anticipation of the future evolution of English language teaching, the integration of Islamic values into learning materials emerges as a pivotal aspect. Crafting resources that harmonize language acquisition with Islamic principles ensures a culturally inclusive and ethically grounded educational approach, fostering a more holistic and diverse learning environment... (T2)

Furthermore, T1 and T2 both hoped that students in Islamic boarding schools would become skilled in English while also mastering Arabic. They also wanted to create a special English learning program designed for the unique setting of these schools. T1 emphasized his commitment to understanding and respecting the values of Islamic boarding schools, helping him better understand the students' religious thinking.

4.2 Students' Voices in Learning English

4.2.1 Early experiences and shifting attitudes toward English

The following views come from the students who shared many interesting stories about their experiences learning English in the Islamic boarding school. For example, S1 described his journey of learning English, explaining that he first started studying the language when he was in elementary school at this Islamic boarding school:

- (8) I started learning English when I entered Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (elementary school level), and I used to really enjoy it because my teacher made the lessons fun and engaging. However, when I moved on to Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Middle School), my enthusiasm for English started to fade because the material became more challenging, and my teacher's emotional teaching style made it hard for me to stay focused... (S1)

S1 explained that he enjoyed English lessons in elementary school because his teacher made them fun and interesting. However, his experience changed when he moved to junior high school, where he found the lessons much more difficult. He also mentioned that the teacher was strict and often punished students who did not meet academic expectations. In contrast, S2 shared more details about why he initially disliked learning English. He said his dislike was mostly because he felt English conflicted with the main teachings of his faith:

- (9) ...At first, I held doubts about the value of acquiring English language skills while attending an Islamic boarding school that prioritized religious teachings. I pondered over its significance. However, as time passed, I came to acknowledge English as a vital link that enables me to engage with the global community, promoting

comprehension and cooperation. This proficiency has become indispensable in spreading my faith on a global scale and improving my ability to communicate effectively. (S2)

S2 explained that he felt English sometimes conflicted with the spiritual values he followed. However, as he reflected more, he shared how his view gradually changed. He began to appreciate the expressive power of English, and this positive view grew as he learned more about different ways of using language and cultural differences. This change shows how people's understanding can grow over time and how initial beliefs can be reconsidered.

4.2.2 *Vocabulary retention and cognitive demands*

The perspectives of participants S3 and S4 regarding their English learning experiences in the Islamic boarding school setting show significant similarities. S3 explained that her introduction to English education began during her time at junior high school within the Islamic boarding school. Notably, S3 highlighted that she became more focused during this stage of her education. This focus, she explained, was especially clear during her secondary school years. This aligns closely with the views expressed by S4:

- (10) ...I began learning English during my time at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (junior high school level), where the education was quite intense, especially during junior high school. Initially, I faced challenges with complex vocabulary. In Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Elementary level), the focus shifted to basics like fruit names, numbers, and colors, but stringing these words into sentences proved occasionally challenging for me. (S4)

Similarly, S4, like S3, preferred a focused approach to learning language skills during lower secondary school at the Islamic boarding school. This shows that both students valued paying close attention to succeed in learning English. Both also mentioned that memorizing English vocabulary was a major challenge, especially for students like S1 and S2, who had difficulty understanding the delicate meanings. S1 further explained the difficulty of learning both Arabic and English vocabulary at the same time, which is a mental challenge. Managing these two languages creates a unique obstacle to mastering English.

4.2.3 *Communicative challenges and classroom pressure*

Unlike S1 and S2, whose main challenge was remembering vocabulary, S3 and S4 faced a different difficulty in learning English at the Islamic boarding school. They said the hardest part was having unexpected conversations with teachers, where they had to respond quickly but did not know enough words. S3 explained that this created mental stress during unplanned interactions with teachers. These differences in language skills show how complex learning English can be in this school setting:

- (11) Engaging in conversation with my English teacher is challenging for me. I often struggle with stuttering and worry about the correctness of my grammar. It hampers my confidence, making the communication process stressful... (S3)

This example shows how the stress of speaking and worries about grammar added to students' difficulties, and shows the emotional challenges that exist together in learning English at Islamic boarding schools. These struggles show that learning English is more than just memorizing words; it also requires confidence to use the language in real and sometimes unexpected situations. It also points to the need for teaching methods that improve students' speaking skills while helping them feel less anxious in class.

4.2.4 *Strategies for overcoming learning barriers*

Furthermore, in addressing the challenges participants face in acquiring proficiency in the English language within the context of an Islamic boarding school, several respondents outlined

their strategies for overcoming these obstacles. S1 clearly explained their experience, sharing how they dealt with and overcame challenges in learning English:

- (12) I have a game plan going on. Why not get a head start on beefing up my English vocabulary? You know, to give my brain a little extra time to soak it all in. By doing this, I will likely stick some of those words in my memory bank. It is all part of the master plan to smoothly tackle the challenge of learning both Arabic and English... (S1)

S1 showed a focused and proactive approach to learning language skills, especially English vocabulary, from the start. This reflects their strong time-management skills. Their goal is to improve memory by studying vocabulary early, aiming to recall it better over time. They value gradual progress and use methods like spaced repetition and step-by-step learning. They recognize the importance of both English and Arabic vocabulary and adjust their learning strategies to meet their educational needs. By using multimedia tools such as flashcards and images, they effectively tackled challenges in learning vocabulary.

- (13) I sought guidance from my teacher to enhance my pronunciation skills. Employing flashcards and employing visual inference techniques proved to be effective in enhancing my English proficiency. Despite encountering difficulties along the way, I witnessed noticeable advancements in my language abilities. The inclusion of English subtitles in biographical films about the Prophet Muhammad greatly contributed to my learning experience. Despite facing various challenges, I found this approach to be highly valuable, as it allowed me to enjoy the process while reaping its benefits... (S2)

This teaching approach uses different types of learning media to improve students' vocabulary skills. By including these media in lessons, the teacher aims to support the intellectual processes involved in learning a language. Using various media creates a multisensory learning experience that meets different learning styles and preferences. At the same time, S3 and S4 worked together to address vocabulary difficulties by using tools like YouTube and music. Their shared effort confirms the value of multimedia in helping students learn vocabulary, following modern multimodal learning strategies. This approach creates a well-rounded learning environment that makes vocabulary instruction more effective and engaging.

5. DISCUSSION

This research explores the complex relationships involved in teaching and learning English in Islamic boarding schools. Examining the perspectives of teachers (T1 and T2) and students (S1, S2, S3, and S4) provides a detailed understanding of the factors that influence English education in this context. By drawing attention to common challenges and transformative experiences, the study offers insights into the goals, difficulties, and evolving dynamics of language instruction in Islamic boarding schools.

The teachers in these schools face unique challenges related to cultural and religious factors, including language barriers, limited resources, and low student motivation. The use of technology in English instruction is often limited by religious beliefs and lack of infrastructure, leading teachers to rely more on direct communication and hands-on learning (Akmal et al., 2022; Rahmawita & Putriani, 2022; Rohmani & Andriyanti, 2022). Student motivation is also affected by limited extracurricular activities, repetitive daily routines, and a focus on memorization rather than practical application. This aligns with Dewaele and Li's (2021) argument that teacher motivation strongly affects student performance. To address these issues, teachers are encouraged to implement innovative teaching strategies (Bin-Tahir et al., 2019; Farid & Lamb, 2020) and to highlight the importance of English in a global context, demonstrating its relevance beyond religious studies to encourage academic and professional development (Akmal et al., 2022; Lorenz et al., 2021).

For teachers, addressing language barriers alongside cultural and religious considerations is a significant challenge. Yuliantari and Huda (2023) emphasize that English curriculum integration requires cultural sensitivity, respect for linguistic diversity, and attention to the

practical value of English. Teachers can direct religious teachings that encourage learning new knowledge and languages to broaden students' perspectives. Professional development programs specifically designed for Islamic boarding school instructors are essential, covering teaching methods suited to available resources, strategies for increasing student motivation, and techniques for conveying the importance of English within cultural and religious frameworks (Suweni et al., 2022). Collaboration among schools, policymakers, and communities can create a supportive environment for effective teaching and learning.

The challenges faced by teachers highlight the need for culturally aware and adaptive teaching approaches. Bishop and Vass (2021) note that many students in Islamic boarding schools are not fully aware of the importance of English. Challenges such as limited technology, low student motivation, and perceptions of English as irrelevant require innovative solutions (Basar et al., 2021). In this study, T1 emphasized bridging a secular background with Islamic values and creating an environment aligned with the school's religious principles, while T2, already familiar with the context, focused on managing disruptive student behavior and understanding unique institutional challenges. These differing perspectives illustrate the varied experiences of teachers adapting to cultural and religious settings, encompassing curriculum design, behavior management, and cultural awareness. This diversity enriches the learning environment and deepens understanding of the interaction between teaching, culture, and religion in Islamic boarding schools (Ihsan et al., 2021; Jallow, 2023).

Creative teaching methods and cross-cultural exchange programs help students appreciate the value of learning English. Integrating Islamic values into lessons enhances both language acquisition and cultural sensitivity (Gallagher, 2020; Kim, 2020; Marzulina et al., 2021). Teachers emphasize including resources that reflect Islamic heritage to nurture respect and intercultural understanding. Incorporating ethical principles, beliefs, and historical context into English instruction strengthens learning and promotes global cultural awareness (Onosu, 2021; Umar, 2022). English curricula are designed to align with school values and traditions, making lessons relevant and engaging (Hudriati et al., 2021). By linking language learning with cultural identity, educators aim to produce students who are proficient in English and globally aware.

Student experiences reveal the challenges of transitioning between school levels and reconciling religious upbringing with English education. These challenges also reflect evolving attitudes toward English and the ability to adapt, demonstrating how language learning shapes perspectives and personal growth. Learning English is a complex process requiring multiple strategies to achieve proficiency (Alharbi, 2022). Effective methods include early vocabulary exposure, multimedia integration, and focused pronunciation practice. Tools such as visual aids, videos, and flashcards on the life of Prophet Muhammad support language learning (Rifiyani et al., 2023; Romadhon & Heriyawati, 2023). Multimedia accommodates diverse learning styles and provides cultural context (Ubaidillah et al., 2023). Activities like mimicking native speakers and using speech recognition apps improve pronunciation, while visual flashcards aid vocabulary retention (Rachmadi et al., 2023). Biographical films on Prophet Muhammad promote cultural awareness and immersive language practice. Combining these strategies enables students to maximize their English learning, with visual aids connecting words to real objects and *Pesantren* culture enriching the educational experience (Burga & Damopolii, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

This analysis examines the complex process of learning English in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, focusing on the challenges faced by both students and teachers in the *Pesantren* setting. The teachers encounter difficulties related to the unique cultural and religious environment, such as limited technological resources, low student motivation, and the perception that religious knowledge is more important than English proficiency. To address these challenges, teaching strategies must be innovative and culturally sensitive.

Initially, students often show low motivation, influenced by factors such as the lack of extracurricular activities and the belief that English is irrelevant to religious studies. Over time,

however, targeted efforts by schools, including interactive teaching methods, modern educational practices, and cultural exchange programs, can positively change students' attitudes. Adaptation strategies involve overcoming resource limitations while incorporating Islamic values into English lessons, emphasizing the practical and meaningful uses of the language.

The study illustrates how teaching strategies, cultural immersion, and evolving attitudes of both teachers and students interact actively within Islamic boarding schools. It also suggests that future research could explore the long-term effects of creative teaching methods and institutional policies on students' English proficiency and cultural sensitivity. Examining how cultural exchange programs and the integration of Islamic values into language instruction affect students over time could provide insight into their effectiveness.

Furthermore, investigating the role of teacher professional development programs in Islamic boarding schools may reveal how instructional strategies evolve. A deeper understanding of the relationships between language learning, cultural identity, and ethical awareness could emerge from examining these practices longitudinally. This study is limited by its short-term perspective and does not fully address the long-term impacts of creative teaching approaches or policies on students' English skills and cultural understanding. Future studies should consider the ongoing effects of integrating Islamic values into language teaching and teacher development in these educational contexts.

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