



## Article

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# English Learning System in Islamic Boarding School: A Comparative Study

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## Abstract

In this era, the use of English is really needed in all aspects of education, even in Islamic boarding schools. Implementing English language learning in Islamic boarding school is a challenge, where students who focus on learning about Islamic studies are also demanded to learn and practice English skills. Therefore, the use of suitable and effective English learning system will decide to outcome of English learning in Islamic boarding schools. This study wants to compare English learning systems used by two Islamic boarding schools, in level of Junior High School. The comparison includes kinds of English learning activities, media for learning English, and obstacles of teachers during English learning activities. This study will use qualitative research where the data will be taken from and interview of English teachers of two Islamic Boarding Schools. The result show that there are some differences in kinds of English learning activities. However, the two Islamic boarding schools mostly have similarity in media for English learning and obstacles of teachers during English learning activities. Building students' confidence is not only felt by English teachers during English learning, but mostly teachers also feel the same obstacle for their students.

## Keywords

English, Learning System, Islamic Boarding School, Comparative.

## Introduction

Nowadays in the social media era, everyone can express what they feel and watch everything they want in social media, even for underage people. This free exchange of information can affect children's characters and habits. Therefore, the role of education towards personal character building becomes a major concern from most parents. Islamic education is a favorite choice for Muslim parents who want their children learning about character building based on Islamic education. One of popular institutions who carry out Islamic education is Islamic Boarding School.

Islamic boarding school is recognized for their high-quality education and excellence in teaching character building and language to their students (Nurjaman et al., 2022). Dariyanto et al., (2022) also stated that students at Islamic boarding schools live in areas equipped with facilities, like mosques, study rooms, and spaces for other religious activities. The school complex is typically surrounded by a wall to monitor and regulate the entry and exit of students according to the school's rules. Islamic boarding schools have

continuously evolved in recent years to meet the needs of modern society (Nur Fitria, 2023). The modern Islamic boarding school education system aims to blend traditional methods with contemporary approaches used in society. Thus, to meet the challenges of the modern world, most of Islamic boarding schools predominantly use English (Rahman et al., 2023).

English learning in Islamic boarding schools is unique because it combines formal education with traditional Islamic values. Many Islamic boarding schools have recently attempted to adapt their curriculum to include English as an essential subject to prepare students for global communication. As Putri et al., (2025) explains, English in Islamic boarding school not only serves as a linguistic tool but also as a medium to broaden students' worldview. In addition, the existence of Islamic boarding schools is not only limited to providing education, but also shaping the social, moral, and spiritual lives of students (Islamic, Ishaq & Dayati, 2024). Many parents believe that the integrated system of Islamic boarding schools, which combines religious knowledge, general knowledge, and life skills, can produce students with strong personalities (Komariah & Rahman, 2017). This holistic model of education becomes an alternative to conventional schools that are often seen as too focused on academic achievements while neglecting character building. Moreover, boarding school students are trained to be independent because they live far from their parents, which naturally builds responsibility and discipline (Hasanah, 2015).

In today's world, English plays a crucial role in education as a global language (Crystal, 2003). It enables teachers and students to connect with people from different countries, allowing them access to a wide range of knowledge sources (Pamungkas, 2019). In Indonesia education context, English is still considered a foreign language. According to Pamungkas (2023), English is a required subject starting in Junior High School, but many English courses also accept elementary students to teach them the basics (Rahman et al., 2025). Therefore, Islamic boarding schools, who mostly focus on Islamic education, start to implement English learning into students' daily activities.

The urgency of mastering English in Islamic boarding schools is interconnected to globalization and international communication (Alptekin, 2002). Many Islamic references, journals, and modern scientific articles are written in English, so students who are proficient in English will have wider access to knowledge. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools often send their alumni abroad either for higher education or international collaboration, which makes English a valuable skill. By embedding English in daily activities, such as morning conversations, group discussions, and even religious debates, students are indirectly trained to become global citizens without losing their Islamic identity (Saada, 2023).

In boarding schools, effective English learning depends greatly on the teacher's ability to present lessons in a clear, enjoyable, and engaging manner. When teachers make the subject interesting and fun, it sparks the child's desire to learn English, both now and in the future (Dariyanto et al., 2022). Learning English often face some problems like the lack motivation to practice or shy to take a part conversation. Besides that, there are many factors can cause the problem of the students' English skills, namely the students' interest, the material, and the media among technique can be applied (Pratiwi & Bahtiar, 2021).

However, there is a need for effective strategies to implement English learning in boarding school. Hotak et al., (2024) state that teacher should also promote positive factors to improve the quality of English language learning programs. Teacher can achieve the English language learning goals by creating a more motivating and engaging learning environment for students. For example, learning strategies for speaking English play a key role in enhancing students' language skills. Another example, vocabulary learning strategies involve various activities that help students improve their vocabulary knowledge and skills, making the learning process more effective, focused, and successful. These strategies also encourage students to learn in a more independent and enjoyable way (Al Febi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, Buckingham (2009) mentioned that aside of the strategies, teachers also need to pay attention to students' confidence. Teachers worldwide deal with the constant challenge of helping students gain confidence and encouraging them to speak.

The previous study of this research comes from research conducted by Dariyanto et al., (2022) entitled "An Analysis of the English Learning Process in Islamic Elementary Boarding Schools". The focus of this study is designating the English learning of elementary school students in the Al-Multazam boarding

school. This study employed qualitative research methods, focusing on observation, interviews, and documentation for data collection. The study revealed that English learning among students in boarding schools is quite basic. Teachers have faced challenges related to their qualifications, particularly in English. Learning is not limited to formal classes; it also includes vocabulary sessions, morning conversations, and activities that promote language use at Al-Multazam boarding school. The conclusion is the teachers found various obstacles in teaching English both in formal class and extracurricular class. In Addition, English became priority in language learning at the Islamic Boarding School.

The other previous study is research entitled “Integrating English Language Teaching (ELT) into Islamic Boarding School: A Review of Strategy and Challenges” written by Nur Fitria (2023). This research explores the strategies and challenges of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Darul Istiqamah Modern Islamic Boarding Schools. This research focuses on the strategies and challenges of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Islamic Education Institutions, particularly Islamic Boarding Schools. The researcher used library research approach, utilizing written materials like books and articles to gather information. The findings showed that teaching foreign languages, like English, encounters several challenges during implementation. The strategies used by English teachers are influenced by factors such as their educational background, enthusiasm, understanding of student behavior, and the specific norms practiced at Islamic Boarding Schools. The study concluded that English teachers at Islamic Boarding Schools face challenges like limited exposure to English and a lack of understanding of other cultures. Overcoming these obstacles requires strong dedication from teachers and a willingness to learn from students.

The last previous study is a research from Al Febi et al. (2023), entitled “Digital Learning Vocabulary Through Modern Boarding School System and Implementation in Daily Conversation”. This research explored how learning was done by students so that they mastered vocabulary and conversation in English. This research is a case study that uses a qualitative approach, involving participant interviews. The findings revealed that vocabulary is distributed every morning without breaks. The method is both direct and written, ensuring that the vocabulary is retained and can be reviewed later by the students. Using the vocabulary in daily conversations is mandatory, and there are penalties for those who do not follow the language rules. The conclusion of the research showed that the learning system encourages students to be diligent in using the language.

Moreover, recent studies highlight that English learning in Islamic boarding schools cannot be separated from the integration of technology and digital literacy. According to Warschauer & Liaw (2011), digital tools play a significant role in enhancing language learning outcomes, particularly in contexts where English is a foreign language. Similarly, Murdianto (2023) emphasizes that Islamic boarding schools need to balance traditional values with modern pedagogical innovations to maintain their relevance in the global era. This perspective is also supported by Arifin et al. (2024), who argues that student-centered learning models supported by technology can increase motivation and confidence among learners in Islamic schools. Therefore, it is important to examine not only the learning activities but also the challenges and opportunities that English teachers face in implementing such approaches in Islamic boarding schools.

These previous studies indicate that although English learning in Islamic boarding schools is already implemented but it still requires adjustments to achieve maximum results. For instance, teachers' professional development programs must be enhanced through training, workshops, or even collaborations with native speakers to improve English proficiency. Moreover, the curriculum in Islamic boarding schools should be designed in a flexible way to integrate language skills with religious subjects, ensuring that students can see the relevance of English in their daily lives. Another important gap is the lack of comparative studies that explore differences between various types of Islamic boarding schools, such as formal and non-formal institutions. By filling this gap, researchers can provide valuable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and parents (Nation & Macalister, 2010; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Based on several previous studies, the researcher has similar concept to explore English learning system in Islamic boarding school. However, there is research gap between this research and the previous studies. The researcher not only explore one Islamic boarding school, but the researcher also explores

another one and compare their English learning system in scope of comparative study. This research compares English learning system of Junior High School A and Junior High School B in Madiun, Indonesia. Both schools are Islamic boarding schools, but Junior High School B is registered as non-formal school while Junior High School A is formal school. Concept of non-formal school brings a better benefit where non-formal school has flexibility in setting the learning curriculum compared to formal school. However, mostly formal school has more enthusiasts in society than non-formal school. Therefore, this research aims to compare English learning system of two Islamic boarding schools; Junior High School A which is a formal school, and Junior High School B which is registered as non-formal school. However, the researcher makes a limitation of this research by not judging or rating which English learning system is better.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the development of English education within Islamic boarding schools. By identifying similarities and differences between formal and non-formal Islamic boarding schools, this study is expected to provide insights for future improvements in language teaching methods. Furthermore, recent studies emphasize that integrating language learning with character education and digital literacy is essential for preparing students to face global challenges without losing their cultural and religious identity (Rohmah et al., 2020). Therefore, this research is not only relevant for academic purposes but also practical in providing recommendations for sustainable English education in Islamic boarding schools.

## Method

This research is designed as descriptive qualitative research. According to Thanya et al. (2023), qualitative research usually does not involve a hypothesis, which means it does not rely on statistical tools. It focuses on explaining, describing, and analyzing data, which is presented in the form of field notes (Andi-Pallawa & Alam, 2013). The study's findings are not based on statistical procedures or other quantitative methods. Instead, it is classified as "qualitative research" because its primary data collection methods include observation, interviews, and recordings (Andi-Pallawa & Alam, 2013). In this research, researcher describe English learning system of two Islamic boarding schools, Junior High School A, and Junior High School B. Both schools are in Madiun, Indonesia.

To obtain the data, this research interviews two English teachers of Junior High School A, and one Junior High School B. Interview is a type of interaction where a researcher typically asks someone about their life experiences, opinions, dreams, fears, and hopes, and the person being interviewed provides answers (Knott et al., 2022). The researcher also uses voice recording so that the researcher does not neglect any important information from English teachers. The main topics of interview are (1) English learning activities in a week, (2) media used by students in English learning activities, and (3) obstacles of teachers in doing English learning activities.

The data obtained from interview is shown in table to explore the differences between English learning system of Junior High School A and Junior High School B. The data analysis process in this research follows three qualitative steps: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. During the reduction stage, the researcher gathers all the information from interview. In the display stage, the data is presented visually or as narrative text for easier understanding. Finally, the researcher interprets the data by identifying patterns, similarities, or differences to arrive at conclusions and address the research questions.

In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the key instrument in collecting and interpreting the data. This means that the researcher's role is not only to gather information but also to interact directly with participants to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Taylor et al., 2015). According to Creswell & Poth (2018), qualitative research requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the field and develop close engagement with participants so that the meaning of their experiences can be fully captured. In this study, the researcher positions themselves as a facilitator who seeks to understand the English learning systems implemented in both formal and non-formal Islamic boarding schools.

The selection of participants is also important in ensuring the relevance and richness of the data. This research applies purposive sampling, which is widely used in qualitative research to select participants who have specific knowledge and experience related to the research topic (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). English teachers were chosen because they are directly responsible for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of English learning activities. By focusing on teachers, the researcher can gain insights into instructional strategies, challenges, and pedagogical practices within both school contexts.

Furthermore, interviews are complemented by observations and document analysis. Observation enables the researcher to verify whether what teachers describe in interviews corresponds with actual classroom practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Classroom interactions, student participation, and the use of learning media were observed to provide a more holistic understanding. Document analysis, such as lesson plans or internal school policies, was also included to triangulate the findings and strengthen the validity of the research. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, this study employs triangulation by combining interviews, observations, and document analysis. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2017), triangulation enhances the validity of qualitative findings by cross-checking information from different sources. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing the interpreted results with participants to confirm whether the data accurately reflected their experiences. Peer debriefing was also carried out by discussing the research process with colleagues to minimize researcher bias.

The process of data analysis in this study follows Miles's et al., (2020) framework, which involves three concurrent stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming data from field notes and transcripts. Data display involves organizing information into tables, charts, and narrative descriptions for better comprehension. Finally, drawing and verifying conclusions means identifying emerging patterns, themes, and relationships to answer the research questions. This step also requires continuous reflection and validation against the data to ensure consistency. In addition to methodological rigor, ethical considerations are central to this research. The researcher ensures that participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained before conducting interviews and observations. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for both the schools and the teachers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Lastly, qualitative research emphasizes the contextual nature of findings. This means that the results of this study are not intended to be generalized to all Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Instead, the findings provide an in-depth and contextualized understanding of how English learning systems are implemented in two specific schools in Madiun. This contextual orientation is considered a strength of qualitative research because it allows researchers to highlight the uniqueness of each case while still identifying broader implications for practice (Yin, 2018).

## Findings & Discussion

The result is obtained by interviewing two English teachers of Junior High School A and one English teacher of Junior High School B. The researcher only interviews English teacher without interviewing students in English learning activities This is done to get valid results because each student will have different obstacles in English learning activities.

Based on table of the findings (table I), there are some points that can be discussed on each topic. In topic of English learning activities, in Junior High School A, they have interesting activities like; English day every Wednesday from morning until evening, English conversation every Tuesday afternoon, and English contest, consist of storytelling, speech and spelling competition. Each part of contest will be a challenge for participants who must present in front of audiences. Meanwhile, in Junior High School B, they also interesting activities like; vocabulary session where they must write 5 English words and memorize them, telling story on every Friday, and presenting creating English mind map and present them in front of students and teacher. Based on interview of English teacher from Junior High School B, English words that

they wrote and memorized before, must be memorize on the next day. However, those words are reset in each month so that the previous words will not be a burden for students in vocabulary session. The two Islamic Boarding Schools have different interesting English activities. Although Junior High School B is registered as non-formal school, their portions of English learning activities are not much different than Junior High School A who runs as formal school.

**Table 1.** Result of interview from English teachers Junior High School A and Junior High School B

Topics	Junior High School A	Junior High School B
English learning activities in a week.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Every Wednesday, students must speak English from 04.00 until 22.00.</li> <li>2. English lesson is held two times in a week. Each session consists of 80 minutes.</li> <li>3. Materials of English lesson is taken from English book, published by Erlangga publisher.</li> <li>4. Every Tuesday at 15.30 until 16.30, students are asked to make English conversation with their friends. Each conversation consists of 2 or 3 students. There are some teachers of boarding schools who accompany their activities.</li> <li>5. Every Saturday, there is English contest from 07.30 until 11.30. English contest consists of story-telling, speech, and spelling competition. Each class sends 3 participants to join the contest.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Every morning at 7.00 until 7.30, students write 5 English words in their vocabulary books and memorize them in front of teacher.</li> <li>2. English lesson is held two times in a week. Each session consists of 90 minutes.</li> <li>3. Materials of English lesson is taken from English book, published by Yudhistira publisher.</li> <li>4. Every Friday at 13.00 until 14.30, students are given a paper of English story. They are asked to do story telling in front of students and teacher.</li> <li>5. In the first and third Saturday in a month, students are given topic (example; apple, flood, etc). They are asked to make a mind map based on topic in A3 paper in Indonesia language. Laptops are provided for them to access information related topic. Then they are asked to present their papers in front of students and teacher using Indonesia language.</li> <li>6. In the second and forth Saturday in a month, students are asked to re-write their mind map using English. They also must present their English mind map in front of students and teacher. Laptops are provided for them to translate from Indonesia to English.</li> </ol>
Media used by students in English learning activities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PC/Computers for listening and watching English dubbed video.</li> <li>2. English modules, English story books, and Encyclopaedias.</li> <li>3. Pocket dictionaries.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Laptops for browsing and translating words in mind map session.</li> <li>2. English modules, English story books, and English pop-up books.</li> <li>3. Pocket dictionaries.</li> </ol>
Obstacles of teachers in doing English learning activities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students sometimes feel bored and less motivated when they are asked to read text and answer questions based on text.</li> <li>2. In English contest, students are noisy and disturb participants of the contest.</li> <li>3. Each student has different skill and understanding, so teachers need to adjust speed their teaching so that every student understands knowledge taught by teachers.</li> <li>4. Some of students are not confident when they are asked as participant of English contest.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students feel sleepy when English lesson is held after lunch.</li> <li>2. Students need much time in mind map session and sometimes they open their social media accounts when they browse about topic of mind map.</li> <li>3. Some students are not confident when they present their English mind map in front of students and teacher.</li> <li>4. Few students are getting difficulties in memorizing English words in vocabulary session.</li> </ol>

In topic of media used in English learning activities, both schools use laptop or computer to ease learning activities. However, Junior High School A mostly uses computer to practice listening and vocabulary by watching English dubbed video while Junior High School B uses laptop to browse and translate words in mind map session. Junior High School B can optimize the use of laptop by adding listening session using laptop and speaker. Meanwhile, both schools demand students to have pocket dictionary to ease translation during learning English. In addition, both schools provide English modules, and English story books to enhance students' English knowledge and skills.

In topic of obstacles during English learning activities, English teachers at Junior High School A and Junior High School B have quite similar problems. First, students feel bored or sleepy during certain English learning activities. This obstacle mostly happens in most of schools. Second, some students are not confident when they must act or present in front of people. Building students' confidence will be a "challenging homework" for teacher. This is appropriate with Angela Buckingham statement that Teachers worldwide deal with the constant challenge of helping students gain confidence and encouraging them to speak (Buckingham, 2009). Meanwhile, each student has different level of understanding and skill, so that teachers cannot implement fast teaching method to English class (Nurjaman et al., 2022). Further, they need to adjust their speed of teaching by observing the understanding of students in class (Rofi'i, 2018). In addition, rule of preventing the use of mobile phone in Islamic boarding school becomes a trigger for students to access their social media when they use laptop or computer (Syarifah, 2023). Although it seems normal for human, teachers should remind students for not breaking rule by access students' social media.

## Conclusion

Based on result and discussion above, it can be concluded that two Islamic boarding schools, in level of Junior High School, have different English learning system. In scope of activities, Junior High School A highlight English contest (storytelling, speech, and spelling), conversation, and English day in their English learning activities. Meanwhile Junior High School B focus on memorizing vocabulary, storytelling, and presenting mind map. In scope of media, both schools use laptop or computers, English books, and pocket dictionary. In obstacles of teachers, both schools have similar problems in building students' confidence and achieving students' interest to enjoy English learning in English class. In addition, the strict rule of Islamic boarding school which preventing the use of mobile phone, becomes a trigger for students to cheat by accessing their social media when they use laptop or computer. At the end of sentence, Junior High School B who runs non-formal school, needs to optimize the flexibility of non-formal school especially in portion of English learning activities.

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