

A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING INITIATION AT RA'İYATUL HUSNAN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This preliminary study aims to initiate English language learning at Ra'iyatul Husnan Islamic Boarding School, where no internal English learning activities had previously been implemented. Although students received English instruction in formal schools, their practical language ability remained limited due to the lack of continuous practice and learning support within the pesantren environment. This study employed a qualitative approach using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving approximately 60 first- and second-grade Islamic junior high school students. Initial findings revealed that 65% of students were unfamiliar with the English alphabet and 80% were unable to construct simple English sentences. The learning program focused on basic materials such as alphabets, daily vocabulary, introductions, numbers, and simple sentence structures. After fifteen days of implementation, more than 70% of students were able to introduce themselves, mention numbers, tell time, and use basic personal pronouns in English. The findings also indicate increased student motivation and participation in collaborative learning activities. The study concludes that the ABCD approach effectively supports the initiation of English language learning in pesantren by utilizing existing institutional and social assets to create sustainable learning practices.

Keywords: *English language learning initiation, Islamic boarding school, ABCD approach, preliminary study, qualitative research.*

INTRODUCTION

English is widely recognized as an international language that plays a significant role in communication, education, science, and technology. In the modern educational era, English proficiency is considered an important competency that enables students to access global information and participate in international communication. Therefore, English language learning has become one of the priorities in many educational institutions, including Islamic

educational institutions.

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) are deeply rooted educational institutions in Indonesia's Islamic education history (M. Falikul, 2020). Traditionally, pesantren have focused on strengthening Islamic sciences and shaping students' (santri) character. However, in the face of globalization and rapid technological advancement, pesantren can no longer rely solely on traditional learning. Mastery of 21st-century skills such as digital literacy and foreign language proficiency has become increasingly crucial.

The implementation of English language learning in Islamic boarding schools requires appropriate educational strategies because pesantren possess distinctive cultural, social, and religious characteristics. English instruction in pesantren should not only focus on linguistic competence but also maintain Islamic values and students' cultural identities. Fitria (2023) explains that English language teaching in Islamic educational institutions needs adaptive methods and innovative approaches to support effective learning processes.

Moreover, the initiation stage of English language learning is particularly important because it determines students' early perceptions, motivation, and participation in learning activities. A preliminary study can provide an initial understanding of how English learning programs are introduced, implemented, and received by students within the pesantren environment. Preliminary studies are valuable for identifying potential challenges and opportunities before implementing broader educational programs.

Several previous studies have emphasized the importance of context-responsive pedagogy in English language teaching within Islamic boarding schools. Madkur et al. (2025) argue that English learning in pesantren contexts should consider learner needs, authentic communication, cultural relevance, and suitable teaching strategies. These aspects are necessary to create meaningful and sustainable language learning experiences for students.

One of the most important skills for santri today is English language proficiency, which serves as a gateway to global information, higher education, and future career opportunities. At Ra'iyatul Husnan Islamic boarding school,

English learning has not yet been integrated into the pesantren's curriculum or regular activities. Santri only receive English instruction through formal institutions such as MTs (Islamic junior high schools) and MA (Islamic senior high schools). Unfortunately, these formal classes tend to be highly theoretical, offer minimal practice, and lack an immersive English-speaking environment resulting in generally low English proficiency among students.

This condition reflects an urgent need to initiate community-based and contextual English learning within the pesantren environment itself, using approaches that align with pesantren values and available resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language Learning

English language learning refers to the process through which learners acquire the ability to understand, speak, read, and write in English as a foreign or second language. In the context of globalization, English has become an essential international language used in education, communication, technology, and business. Consequently, many educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools, have initiated English language learning programs to equip students with linguistic competence and global communication skills.

Brown (2007) explains that language learning involves cognitive, emotional, and social processes that require meaningful communication and active participation. In line with this idea, Harmer (2007) states that successful English learning depends on teaching methods, motivation, learning environments, and opportunities for language practice. Modern English language teaching emphasizes communicative competence rather than grammatical mastery alone. Richards and Rodgers (2001) argue that communicative language teaching encourages learners to use language actively through interaction and real-life communication. Consequently, English learning activities often include discussions, role plays, presentations, and collaborative tasks.

Recent studies also show that language exposure and learning environments significantly affect English acquisition. Wafiroh and Indah (2022)

found that Islamic boarding schools provide language environments that support English acquisition through daily communication practices and language programs. The study highlighted that interaction intensity, institutional culture, and language exposure contribute positively to students' language development (Wafiroh & Indah, 2022).

Initiation of English Language Learning

The term "initiation" refers to the beginning or introduction of a new program or activity. In educational contexts, the initiation of English language learning involves the preparation, implementation, and adaptation of English instruction in an institution. This process includes curriculum development, teacher preparation, learning facilities, and students' readiness.

Fullan (2007) states that educational innovation begins with institutional awareness of learners' needs and social changes. Educational institutions initiate English learning programs to improve students' communication abilities and prepare them for future academic and professional opportunities. Rogers (2003), through the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, explains that successful innovation depends on communication, institutional commitment, and gradual adaptation. The initiation of English learning requires collaboration among teachers, administrators, and students to create sustainable learning programs.

Recent research indicates that English language learning initiation in Islamic boarding schools often faces challenges related to limited resources, teacher competence, and student adaptation. Fitria (2023) explains that English Language Teaching (ELT) implementation in Islamic boarding schools requires appropriate strategies and institutional support. The study revealed that teacher background, student characteristics, and Pesantren norms strongly influence English learning implementation (Fitria, 2023).

Similarly, Kuswanto (2023) states that English learning initiation in pesantren is increasingly important in the Era 5.0 because students need communication and critical-thinking skills to face global challenges. The study also emphasized that English learning contributes to students' creativity and collaborative skills.

English Language Learning in Islamic Boarding Schools

Islamic boarding schools, commonly known as pesantren, are Islamic educational institutions emphasizing religious education, moral development, and discipline. In recent years, many pesantren have integrated English learning into their educational systems to respond to globalization and educational modernization. English language learning in pesantren aims to improve students' communication skills and broaden access to international knowledge. English is commonly taught through classroom instruction, language programs, extracurricular activities, speeches, and daily conversation practices.

Research by Silviyanti et al. (2024) found that bilingual Islamic boarding schools implement English and Arabic practices through structured communication programs and daily interaction. The study revealed that continuous language exposure and institutional discipline positively influence students' language competence (Silviyanti et al., 2024).

Wafiroh and Indah (2022) also explain that Islamic boarding schools provide opportunities for students to practice English through language environments and communicative activities. Their systematic review highlighted the importance of Islamic culture, student attitudes, and institutional support in English language acquisition (Wafiroh & Indah, 2022). However, implementing English learning programs in pesantren also presents several challenges. Sofyan, Widyanoro, and Adoma (2023) found that students in boarding Islamic schools experience difficulties in speaking, listening, reading, and writing due to limited resources, learning anxiety, and curriculum constraints.

Another study by Akbarani, Pamungkas, and Fahmi (2026) compared English learning systems in Islamic boarding schools and found that suitable learning systems and communicative activities strongly influence students' English proficiency. The study also identified challenges such as students' lack of confidence and limited learning media.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive, qualitative approach, aiming to

portray the initiation process of English language learning at Pesantren Ra'iyatul Husnan in a natural, in-depth, and contextual manner. This approach enables the researcher to explore social and educational phenomena with a focus on understanding the meanings and processes that occur within the pesantren community. In addition, the study adopts the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to identify the local potentials, assets, and internal strengths possessed by the pesantren as the foundation for developing a foreign language learning program. The subjects of this study were approximately 60 students from grades 1st and 2nd of the Islamic Junior High School (MTs) at the Ra'iyatul Husnan Islamic Boarding School. These students had not previously received specialized English instruction in the Islamic boarding school environment, but only in formal schools. Therefore, they were grouped into several small study groups to facilitate a gradual learning process tailored to their basic abilities.

This study is categorized as a preliminary study because it aims to explore the initial condition of English language learning initiation at the Islamic boarding school environment. The study focuses on identifying early practices, challenges, and opportunities that may serve as the foundation for further comprehensive research.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: (1) participant observation, to directly observe the dynamics of learning and student participation during the learning process (2) semi-structured interviews with students, Islamic boarding school administrators, and other relevant parties to explore their perspectives on English language learning at the Islamic boarding school and (3) documentation, in the form of activity photos, learning diaries, and student assignments, used as material for reflection and evaluation.

The data collection used thematic analysis, identifying key patterns and themes that emerged from observations and interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2023). This analysis was conducted through data coding, grouping themes, and interpretation based on theory and the field context. To maintain data validity, source and method triangulation techniques were used, as well as member

checking to ensure that the results presented align with the reality experienced by participants.

The Asset Best Community Development approach was implemented by mapping the pesantren's key assets, such as the students' enthusiasm for learning, the availability of simple study spaces, the support of the administrators, and the students' free time after Qur'anic study. These assets serve as the foundation for designing a learning program that is not only cognitive but also participatory and community-based. It is hoped that this initiative model can develop into a sustainable program at the pesantren, even after the researcher or external facilitator has completed their role.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Initial Condition of Students

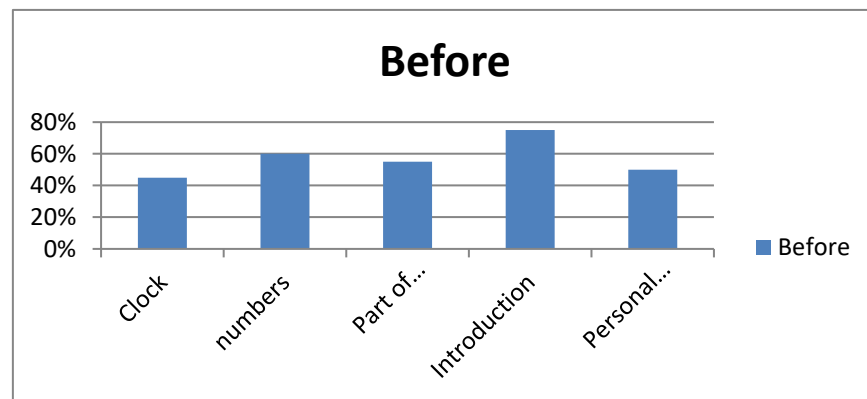
Initial Conditions of Student Based on initial observations conducted in the first week, the majority of first- and second-grade students at the Ra'iyatul Husnan Islamic Boarding School lacked adequate foundational English skills. This is understandable, as English learning is not yet part of the Islamic boarding school curriculum and is only taught in their respective formal schools. Of the 60 students involved in this study, approximately 65% were unfamiliar with the English alphabet, 80% were unable to construct simple sentences, and only 30 had active experience learning English in formal schools.

This condition strengthens the initial hypothesis that the learning initiation program needs to start from the most basic level namely the introduction of letters vocabulary, and simple sentences related to the daily lives of students.

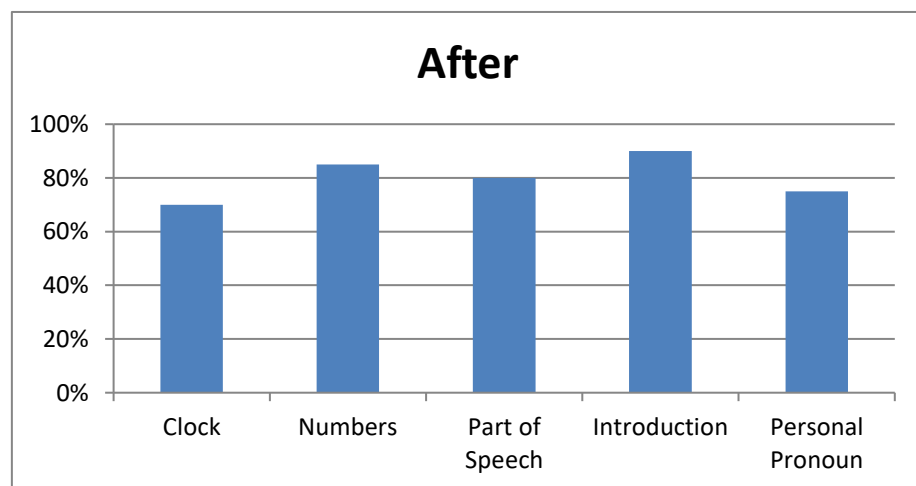
The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach is implemented by utilizing the potential and resources already available in Islamic boarding schools including: Human assets: More advanced students are appointed as peer tutors to help their peers Institutional assets: Utilization of the Islamic boarding school's prayer room in the evenings after religious study. Social assets: Support from administrators and religious teachers in allowing and motivating students to participate in these activities (Kardi, et al, 2023)

This method has proven effective in creating a participatory and collaborative learning environment. Learning activities also become more relevant to the students' daily lives.

Changes in Language Skill



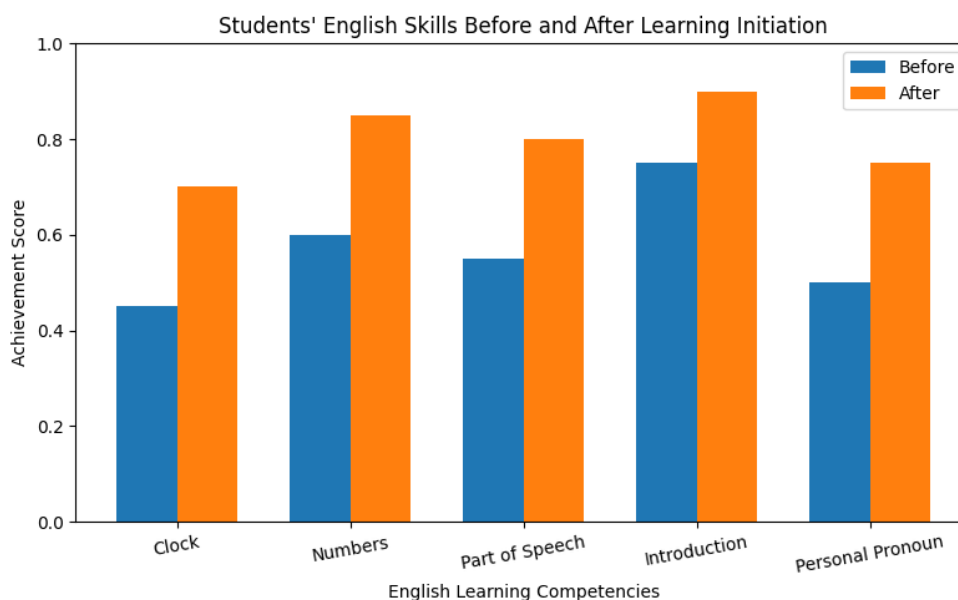
The graphs above shows the abilities of students before the initiation of English language learning at the Ra'iyatul Husnan Islamic Boarding school. Therefore, it is very important to initiate English language learning to hone students' abilities in the field of English.



The diagram above shows a significant improvement after the initiation of English language learning, even though our learning period was only 15 days. We hope that after this program is completed, English language learning can continue so that students' abilities continue to improve.

Graphic Representation of Research Findings

The graph below illustrates the comparison of students' English language competencies before and after the implementation of the English learning initiation program.



The findings indicate significant improvement across all competencies, particularly in numbers, part of speech, and clock expressions. This demonstrates that the English language initiation program effectively improved students' basic English abilities within a relatively short learning period.

Limited Learning Media

The learning media available in many Islamic boarding school are still limited, usually only in the form of printed modules, blackboards, and a few pictures or audio materials. Access to modern tools such as projectors, learning videos, digital applications, or language laboratories is still rare.

The learning media available in many Islamic boarding school are still very limited. In most cases, teachers rely only on traditional tools such as printed

modules, blackboards, and a small collection of pictures or basic audio materials. These resources are often used repeatedly, which makes the learning process less dynamic and less engaging for students. Unlike modern schools that are equipped with multimedia facilities, Islamic boarding school generally do not have access to advanced technology. Access to modern educational tools—such as projectors, interactive learning videos, digital applications, or even language laboratories—is still rare. This limitation creates a significant gap between the ideal methods of language teaching and the actual practices in the Islamic boarding school classroom. Without visual and interactive support, students often struggle to fully understand how English is used in real-life contexts. For example, listening skills cannot be trained effectively without sufficient audio exposure, and speaking practice becomes less lively without multimedia interaction.

Moreover, the absence of varied media can lower students' motivation. When the learning environment feels monotonous, students may become less enthusiastic and only see English as a theoretical subject rather than a practical skill. In the long term, this can slow down their progress and reduce their confidence in using the language.

Student's Condition After Learning English.

After several weeks of following a well-designed learning program, students generally experience significant changes in their cognitive (knowledge), psychomotor (skills), and affective (attitude and motivation) aspects. These changes occur because a good program is usually designed with careful planning, appropriate methods, and the support of relevant learning media. The following is a more detailed description of the observable developments.

Improved Understanding and Mastery of the Material, Students begin to demonstrate their ability to grasp concepts previously considered difficult. The material is presented in a gradual, clear, and appropriate manner, making the learning process more effective. After a few weeks, it becomes clear that students are not only memorizing but also able to explain the material in their own words. The systematic learning process helps them build a deeper understanding.

One indicator of a successful program is the improvement in students'

practical skills. For example, in language learning, students not only understand new vocabulary but also confidently use it in everyday conversation. In other subjects, such as science or mathematics, students become more skilled at solving problems and applying theory to real-life problems. Regular and repeated practice makes them more confident in using these skills without fear of mistakes.

For instance, the improvement in students' basic English competencies is discussed in relation to communicative language teaching theory proposed by (Richards and Rodgers, 2001) which emphasizes meaningful interaction and active language use in authentic contexts. The findings also support the perspective of (Lev Vygotsky, 1978) regarding social interaction and collaborative learning, particularly through the implementation of peer tutoring and group-based activities within the pesantren environment.

Furthermore, the discussion now relates the implementation of the ABCD approach to previous studies on community-based English learning in Islamic boarding schools, such as the works of (Tira Nur Fitria.2023 and Luluk Wafiroh, 2022) which highlight the importance of institutional support, language exposure, and contextual learning environments in improving students' English acquisition. The challenges identified in this study, including limited learning time and inadequate learning media, are also interpreted in connection with previous research findings on English learning barriers in pesantren contexts.

CONCLUSION

The English language initiation program at the Ra'iyatul Husnan Islamic boarding school shows that even though the student did not initially have adequate English language skills, they experienced gradual progress from recognizing the alphabet to being able to use basic vocabulary and simple sentences.

More than 70% of students successfully achieved basic skills such as introducing themselves, counting numbers, telling time, and interacting with each other. The main obstacle was limited time, only 30 minutes a day, however, with a strategy of integrating English into daily activities, utilizing simple media, and cooperative learning. This program has succeeded in improving the students' abilities, skills, and

confidence in using basic English.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1: The activity of night club program after Isya' prayer



Figure 2: Students' activities during the English alphabet introduction session



Figure 3: Students' activities during the English introduction session

