



An Analysis of the English Conversation Program Used in Al-Aqsho Boarding School Kudus

Akhmad Nova Abdul Aziz

English Education Department, Universitas Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia Semarang, Indonesia
novaaziz909@gmail.com

T. Sri Suwarti

English Education Department, Universitas Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia Semarang, Indonesia
tarciasrisuwarti@gmail.com

Laily Nur Affini

English Education Department, Universitas Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia Semarang, Indonesia
lailynuraffini@upgris.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the English Conversation Program at Al-Aqsho Boarding School Kudus, an Islamic institution that promotes bilingual education in Arabic and English. The objectives of this research are to identify the rationale for implementing the program, describe the teaching strategies employed by tutors, and examine students' responses toward the program. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. Findings indicate that the program is designed to foster a language rich environment by encouraging spontaneous English use inside and outside the classroom through role-play, vocabulary routines, language festivals, and the use of educative punishment. Tutors and staff play an active role in enforcing English usage, while students' responses vary some are highly motivated, while others rely on enforcement rather than intrinsic motivation. The study concludes that spontaneous English speaking can be effectively developed through structured immersion, consistent teacher modeling, and supportive peer interaction. This research contributes insights for educators, particularly in boarding schools, on how to design and implement conversation program that promote communicative competence and character development.

Keywords: boarding school, English conversation program, immersion, spontaneous speaking, student perception

Introduction

English has established itself as a global lingua franca, playing a critical role in international communication across sectors such as business, education, diplomacy, science, and technology (Tuyen Dan, 2016; Annury, 2013). In the 21st century, proficiency in English is no longer optional but essential. Acknowledging this, the Indonesian government has designated English as a compulsory subject in secondary education, aiming to equip students with functional language skills.

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have responded to this national mandate by integrating bilingual education primarily Arabic and English into their curriculum. Al-Aqsho Boarding School, founded in Kudus in 2019, embodies this approach by combining religious instruction with global language education. Its vision to produce graduates who are both spiritually grounded and globally competent led to the initiation of the English Conversation Program, designed to foster spontaneous English communication in a supportive, immersive environment.

The selection of this program as the focus of the study is based on its strong potential to support speaking skill development. Speaking, as an active and productive language skill, requires real-time processing, accurate pronunciation, vocabulary retrieval, and confidence. Numerous factors influence speaking fluency, including psychological readiness, social interaction, and environmental exposure (Rodriguez et al., 2019). In Indonesian educational settings, fear of making mistakes often hampers students' willingness to speak, underscoring the need for structured programs that cultivate a safe and consistent language environment.

Al-Aqsho's English Conversation Program addresses these challenges through a range of activities, including vocabulary memorization, peer-to-peer dialogues, public speaking exercises, and English-speaking discipline enforced through daily rules and a "language court." These efforts are designed to normalize English usage in everyday student life, with tutors providing continuous support to guide student progress.

However, while the program's structure appears solid, its actual implementation and impact on students' speaking skills remain underexplored particularly from the perspective of those directly involved. Most existing studies focus on measurable outcomes, leaving a gap in qualitative understanding about how students and tutors experience such programs on a daily basis, especially in newer institutions like Al-Aqsho. To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative descriptive method to investigate the English Conversation Program at Al-Aqsho Boarding School Kudus. It specifically seeks to (1) explore the rationale behind the program, (2) understand how it is implemented by tutors, and (3) examine how it is perceived and experienced by students. The research is context-specific, focusing solely on Al-Aqsho and employing observation, interview, and documentation techniques to capture the program's dynamics, rather than standardized language proficiency tests.

By examining the lived experiences of students and tutors, this study contributes both practical and theoretical insights. It aims to inform English language educators especially within Islamic educational contexts on how structured conversation programs can enhance communicative competence. Furthermore, it offers implications for character building, as conversation-based learning promotes self-confidence, collaboration, discipline, and intercultural awareness qualities that are vital in a

- globalized world. These findings are expected to benefit English teachers by offering effective teaching strategies, assist students in improving their speaking skills, provide readers with deeper insights into such programs in boarding schools, and enhance the researcher's own understanding and skills in English communication.

In essence, this research not only highlights the integration of language learning and moral education at Al-Aqsho but also positions its conversation program as a model of immersive, student-centered English instruction in a pesantren setting.

Methods

The methodology section provides the information, allowing the reader to critically evaluate a study's overall validity and reliability. Therefore, it requires a clear and precise description of how a research design was done and the rationale for why specific procedures were chosen.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the implementation of the English Conversation Program at Al-Aqsho Boarding School Kudus. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the program's practices, the experiences of students and tutors, and its influence on students' English speaking skills. This design allowed the researcher to describe behaviors and interactions in a natural setting without manipulation.

The researcher acted as a non-participant observer, collecting data without being involved in the learning activities. Additional data were gathered through in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, enabling a comprehensive understanding of both instructional practices and student responses.

The participants consisted of 25 eighth grade students and the language coordinator (tutor), selected through purposive sampling due to their active roles in the program. The object of the research was the program's implementation, including methods, materials, assessments, and the language environment. Data were obtained from primary sources (observations, interviews, questionnaires) and secondary sources (syllabi, program documents, and modules). These sources were triangulated to enhance the study's credibility.

The instruments included observation sheets, interview guides, and document checklists, developed based on research objectives and refined with expert input. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure validity, the study applied triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing, allowing cross-verification and minimizing researcher bias. This approach helped generate reliable insights into the strengths and challenges of the English Conversation Program in the boarding school context.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This study aimed to analyze the implementation of the English Conversation Program at Al-Aqsho Boarding School, a modern Islamic boarding school that integrates Islamic education and foreign language acquisition. The findings were obtained through data triangulation involving in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and

- documentation. These findings are categorized into four main aspects: (1) institutional characteristics, (2) the implementation of the conversation program, (3) the role of teachers and their strategies, and (4) students' responses to the program.

1. General Description of Al-Aqsho Boarding School

Al-Aqsho Boarding School, established in Kudus, Central Java, in 2019, is an Islamic educational institution that blends traditional religious values with modern educational approaches. Its mission is to produce graduates with strong Islamic character, Qur'an memorization skills, and fluency in Arabic and English, alongside proficiency in science and technology. This aims to cultivate a generation ready for global engagement and the resurgence of Islamic civilization.

As an integral part of its curriculum, Al-Aqsho implements a bilingual education system (Arabic and English). This bilingual approach is actively applied throughout the school environment, encouraging students not only to learn both languages as subjects but also to use them in daily communication.

The school implements four key programs: Qur'an memorization (targeting five juz annually), Islamic studies (focusing on classical texts), science and technology education, and a bilingual language program. Al-Aqsho's unique curriculum integrates the KMI Gontor system with its distinct tahfidz method, ensuring graduates are intellectually capable, spiritually grounded, and globally competent.

2. The English conversation program used in Al-Aqsho Boarding School

The English Conversation Program at Pondok Modern Al-Aqsho has been implemented since 2019, aligning with the establishment of the boarding school. This program supports the school's vision to become a bilingual institution that emphasizes the use of both Arabic and English. By mastering these two languages, students are expected to stay current with global developments and prepare themselves for a better future.

Through this program, students are trained to speak English correctly, fluently, and confidently. They also expand their vocabulary and improve their listening skills. Moreover, students are encouraged to use English in daily activities, such as talking to friends, shopping, or greeting guests. This not only enhances their language abilities but also builds essential social skills for today's global era.

The program also provides opportunities for students to interact with native speakers, such as foreign volunteers involved in cultural exchange programs. In addition, students are supported in taking English proficiency tests such as TOEFL or IELTS, which are useful for continuing their studies or entering the workforce. Overall, this program helps students improve their language skills, boost their confidence, and prepare for global challenges.

3. The tutors apply for the English conversation program

One of the key efforts to improve students' English speaking skills at Pondok Modern Al-Aqsho is through the implementation of the English Conversation Program. This program has been running actively since the boarding school was established in 2019. The goal is to create a bilingual environment (Arabic and

- English), where students are immersed in the daily use of these two international languages to prepare them for global communication and competition.

Tutors act as the primary facilitators in executing this program. They are responsible for managing and supervising students' English usage throughout the day. One strategy includes enforcing an English area policy, where students are expected to speak English during all activities, particularly outside classroom hours. To support this, the school places English vocabulary posters in strategic spots such as classrooms, prayer rooms, and hallways. Students are also required to carry pocket notebooks to record new vocabulary daily.

Tutors do not limit English learning to the classroom. They conduct English-based activities in diverse environments like the garden, dormitories, and prayer halls to make learning more dynamic. Activities such as peer conversations, discussions, role-plays, and vocabulary games are often integrated to reduce student anxiety and build their confidence. English usage becomes a cultural norm within the school rather than just a subject, aligning with the school's goal of "language habituation."

To ensure discipline, the school implements educational sanctions for those who violate the English area rules. For example, students caught speaking their native language during English hours may be assigned to memorize vocabulary, write English sentences, or appear before a student run "language court." This system, although designed to be educational rather than punitive, helps build student responsibility and strengthens their awareness of consistent English use.

Despite its advantages, the program also faces challenges. Students sometimes mix English with Javanese or Indonesian, and not all are equally motivated. Some students feel shy or afraid of making mistakes. To address this, tutors apply motivational strategies such as verbal praise, competitions, and regular feedback. The school also organizes annual events like the Language Festival, featuring competitions such as storytelling, speech contests, and poetry readings to foster student enthusiasm.

The following table summarizes the interview results with tutors regarding the implementation and challenges of the program:

Table 1. Summary of Tutor Interviews

No	Questions	Summary of Tutor Respons
1.	What is the goal of the program?	Tutors monitor daily conversations and give warnings when students break rules.
2.	How is English implemented daily?	Through role-play, games, rewards, and punishments to reinforce habits.
3.	What strategies ensure discipline?	Assign tasks such as memorizing vocabulary or participating in language court.
4.	What challenges are faced?	Lack of motivation, students feeling shy, and mixing languages.
5.	How effective is this program?	Storytelling, speech contests, and group conversations in fun settings.

- English Conversation Program at Al-Aqsho Boarding School is a structured initiative that integrates language learning into students' daily lives. The role of the tutors is vital in maintaining discipline, encouraging practice, and supporting students' psychological readiness to speak. Although some obstacles remain, such as varied motivation and linguistic interference, the combination of creative learning strategies and community support contributes significantly to the program's effectiveness in preparing students for real-world communication.

4. The students respond English conversation program

The English Conversation Program at Al-Aqsho Boarding School received varied responses from students. Some students found the program helpful in building confidence and improving speaking fluency, particularly through activities such as speech contests, storytelling, and peer conversations. These structured and immersive experiences were considered effective in motivating students to overcome speaking anxiety and use English more naturally in their daily interactions.

However, not all feedback was positive. A number of students described the program as unengaging or overly rigid. Several challenges were mentioned, including the tendency of peers to speak Indonesian or Javanese, fear of making mistakes when speaking, and a heavy workload. Some students also criticized the program's focus on grammar and vocabulary memorization, which they felt left little room for practicing conversational English in authentic, everyday contexts. Additionally, the use of punishments as part of the program's discipline was met with mixed reactions; while some found it helpful, others felt it added unnecessary pressure and reduced their motivation.

The following table presents a summary of student responses collected through interviews:

Table 2. Summary of Student Interviews

No	Questions	Summary of Student Respons
1.	How do you feel about the program?	Some felt motivated and improved, while others found it boring or difficult.
2.	What are the main challenges?	Friends speaking Indonesian/Javanese, nervousness when speaking, and too many tasks.
3.	What activities help most?	Speech contests, talking with peers, and storytelling.
4.	Do punishments help?	Some said punishments helped with discipline, but others felt they were stressful or demotivating.
5.	Has your English improved?	Many students felt more fluent and confident, although the progress varied from student to student.

Despite these challenges, many students acknowledged the program's positive impact not only on their language proficiency but also on their personal development, including discipline and communication skills. These findings indicate that while the program has notable strengths, improvements are still

- needed. Adopting a more student-centered approach one that balances structure with flexibility, integrates both formal and informal English, and considers students' academic and emotional needs could significantly enhance the program's effectiveness and appeal for all learners.

Discusison

This research discusses the English Conversation Program at Al-Aqsho Islamic Boarding School and the teaching methods used to encourage students' English-speaking abilities. Data gathered from students and English teachers at the school show that the program has created a language-learning environment similar to that of an English-speaking country. This atmosphere motivates students to speak English more naturally and spontaneously.

Two main methods used in the program are role-play and collaborative learning. In role-play, students act out specific roles in English. This method helps them practice using the language in meaningful contexts. It also supports creativity and builds their confidence to speak without fear of making mistakes, allowing them to improve their speaking skills both during and outside the classroom.

Collaborative learning allows students to work together in pairs or groups. This reduces teacher dominance and encourages peer-to-peer interaction. Students are free to express their ideas, ask questions, and correct each other's pronunciation. This method increases students' confidence, motivation, and vocabulary, as they become accustomed to using English in everyday conversations.

These findings are supported by Jones' theory, which defines spontaneous speaking as speech without a script, where speakers respond based on what they hear and understand. The ability to speak spontaneously is typically developed through continuous exposure and practice. The results also align with studies by Ari Irfan and Colin, who found that discussion methods and informal communication play an important role in improving speaking skills. Similar to what was observed in this study, students became more comfortable using English when they regularly practiced through conversations and discussions.

Furthermore, the English conversation program not only improves language skills but also supports students' personal growth. It helps them to become more confident, fluent, and familiar with English. Because students live in the same boarding area, they have many opportunities to practice English in both formal and informal settings.

In conclusion, the program provides a supportive environment that encourages speaking inside and outside the classroom. With consistent practice and appropriate teaching methods, students can improve their speaking skills and become more spontaneous in using English. This study offers useful insights for teachers and future educators in designing effective speaking programs that promote student motivation and language development.

Conclusion

This study explored the implementation of the English conversation program at Al-Aqsho Islamic Boarding School and its role in improving students' speaking abilities. The findings showed that creating a supportive English-speaking environment through interactive strategies, such as role-playing and collaborative activities, significantly enhances students' confidence and fluency in using the language. Role-playing allowed

- students to simulate real-life situations, encouraging spontaneous speech and better pronunciation, while collaborative activities promoted peer interaction and reduced teacher-centered learning.

These findings align with the theory of spontaneous speaking, which emphasizes natural language use through habitual exposure and interaction. The results also support prior research, such as Ari Irfan's study, which affirms the value of discussion-based methods in language acquisition. Overall, the program successfully contributed to the development of communicative competence among students, not only in formal settings but also in daily interactions.

Nevertheless, the study has certain limitations, such as being conducted in a single educational context with a specific focus on eighth-grade students. Future research should consider broader populations, diverse educational levels, and the long-term impacts of conversation programs. Additionally, integrating digital platforms or intercultural exchange may further enrich the learning experience.

These results imply that structured conversation programs can serve as effective models for English language education in Islamic boarding schools and similar institutions, especially in non-English speaking environments.

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