



Contextual English Learning to Empower Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School Students in Improving Daily Conversation Skills

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Abstract

This research was carried out to address the low oral communication skills of students in English at the Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School, particularly in the context of everyday conversation needed for global interactions. This problem arose because previous learning focused more on grammar theory and vocabulary memorization without providing authentic contexts for use. This activity aimed to empower students through the implementation of contextual English learning that emphasizes direct language use in real-life situations at the Islamic boarding school. The methods used included qualitative descriptive method, developing materials based on students' daily situations, interactive training through role-plays and thematic dialogues, and evaluation through performance observation and assessment of communication practices. The results of the activity demonstrated improvements in students' speaking fluency, communication confidence, and choice of context-appropriate expressions. Furthermore, the contextual approach proved more effective and relevant to their learning environment, although ongoing mentoring was still needed to ensure consistency of practice. Overall, this program successfully improved students' communication competencies while strengthening a culture of practical language learning at the Islamic Boarding School.

Keywords: Contextual Learning, Conversation Skills, Islamic Boarding School

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a bridge that is used for communication or as a medium of communication between people around the world. Language, including English, is not always used in terms of education, but language is also used in communication and other aspects (Aulia et al., n.d.). English has become a global language, serving as a means of communication across countries, cultures, and walks of life. In today's era of globalization and the development of information technology, English proficiency is a fundamental requirement for every individual to compete and adapt in an ever-changing world. English is not just about being able to communicate with native English speakers; it is the most common second language in the world (Ilyosovna, 2020). In Indonesia, English language proficiency has become an indicator of 21st-century competency that needs to be developed from an early age, including in religious educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools.

Islamic Boarding Schools or *Pesantren* are not only one of the religious education institutions that become the womb of prospective Muslim scholars, but they also have the mandate to carry out an educational mission (Fitria, 2023). Islamic boarding schools, as the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, play a strategic role in shaping a generation that is not only religiously knowledgeable but also globally competitive. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, Islamic boarding schools are now encouraged to integrate mastery of general knowledge and 21st-century skills without abandoning Islamic values. One of these essential competencies is English language proficiency, which can support students in accessing knowledge, preaching globally, and fostering cross-cultural communication.

However, the reality on the ground shows that English language learning in most Islamic boarding schools still faces serious challenges. First, the learning environment is less conducive to everyday English communication, making students less accustomed to using the language naturally. Second, teaching methods that are still oriented towards the grammar-translation method tend to make learning passive and less engaging. Third, teaching materials are often not tailored to the students' daily lives, making learning feel disconnected from their real needs. As a result, students' speaking skills tend to be low, and English use is limited to the classroom.

To address these issues, a more applicable and contextual learning approach is needed, one that connects language to everyday life in Islamic boarding schools. Contextual English teaching (Contextual Teaching and Learning, or CTL) emphasizes the connection between the material studied and the students' real-life situations. Based on (Zukin & Firdaus, 2022), Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), or contextual learning, is a concept that helps teachers relate subject content to real-world situations and motivates students to be interested

in learning Islamic Religious Education and make connections between their knowledge and their application in the real world. Through this approach, students can learn English by connecting it to their daily activities, such as studying, worship, social interactions, and preaching. Thus, English is no longer seen as a difficult subject separate from their lives, but as a useful and meaningful skill.

Various studies have shown that contextual learning is effective in improving students' English language skills. A contextual approach helps students connect material to personal experiences, thereby increasing comprehension and motivation to learn. The Culturo-Techno Contextual Approach (CTCA) is one of several methods that may be used to break down obstacles to meaningful learning (Awaah et al., 2023)

Research by Ulum & Syafi'i (2022) The learning approach implemented by educators is an effort that must be used regularly to create success in the process of learning activities in the classroom. The implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) improved secondary school students' speaking skills because they were encouraged to use language in the context of everyday activities such as role-playing, discussions, and simulated social situations. Furthermore, Fitriana (2023) reported that integrating daily conversation activities into the English Camp program at Islamic boarding schools (madrasah) successfully increased participants' self-confidence and expanded their vocabulary.

In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), it was shown that daily conversation-based English training can strengthen students' communication skills while raising awareness of the importance of using English in Islamic da'wah and education. English Daily Conversation materials help to instill character building in the students. By studying the materials, the students acquire insights, a good attitude, and act accordingly based on the norms and values in society, and they can conduct effective communication (Epafras Elbes, 2022). However, this research did not explicitly integrate contextual learning with students' daily activities at Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, a community service model that combines English for Daily Conversation with a contextual approach is still needed as a form of student empowerment. Based on Ima Agista (2022), Daily Conversation Program that for to develop students' speaking fluency through daily communication

These issues served as the basis for the community service team to design the English for Daily Conversation program, based on contextual learning at the Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School. Activity Objectives This community service activity has several main objectives: To improve students' oral communication skills (speaking skills) through applicable and contextual English learning, to empower students at Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School to use English in daily conversations and da'wah activities, to develop an English language learning model based on the Islamic boarding school context, relevant to the needs and characteristics of students, to foster students' motivation and self-confidence to speak English fluently and naturally, and to create a globally-minded Islamic boarding school environment that remains rooted in Islamic values and local culture.

Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School is an Islamic educational institution located in the rural area of OKU TIMUR Regency. This institution carries the vision of nurturing students with noble character, strong knowledge, and the ability to participate in global communication. Based on initial observations and informal interviews with the boarding school administrators, it is known that the number of active students is approximately 600, with an age range between 11 and 18 years. Teaching and learning activities at the boarding school take place every day, with a curriculum integrating religious studies and general education.

Based on Susylowati et al., (2019) The existence of the Modern Islamic Boarding School (*pesantren*) in Indonesia significantly affects the lives of Muslims in Indonesia. In addition, students who live in an Islamic boarding school neighborhood for years become an important aspect of life. They are the young generations and successors with a strong basis of faith, piety, intelligence, independence, creativity, and the ability in communication. Despite the potential of this *pesantren* environment, the English learning process still faces several challenges. The most notable issue is the low level of students' speaking ability, especially in the context of daily communication. Students tend to rely on memorized vocabulary and grammar rules without being able to apply them naturally in real-life interactions.

Interviews with teachers revealed that learning activities often focus on written exercises such as translating, completing grammar worksheets, and memorizing word lists. This approach results in limited exposure to authentic communication practices. Students rarely receive opportunities to use English meaningfully in daily activities, whether in the classroom or the dormitory environment. As a result, they frequently feel anxious, hesitant, and lack confidence when asked to speak. This becomes a concern because English-speaking competence, particularly in daily conversation, is increasingly important in academic, social, and global contexts. Research by Mariam et al. (2022) several techniques can help teachers make students active in English. In this case, the researcher chose a short conversation combined with an English conversation application in speaking skills for students, because the researchers believe this technique can make students more interested in speaking English.

Based on the description above, several key issues underlying the implementation of this community service activity can be identified, namely: The students' low ability to use English for daily conversation, the lack of application of contextual learning models that link English material to the students' real lives at the Islamic

boarding school, limited student empowerment activities to develop English language skills integrated with Islamic values and Islamic outreach activities.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to explore the implementation of contextual English learning aimed at empowering students at *Pesantren* Nurul Huda. The method was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of how English for daily conversation can be integrated into the *pesantren* learning environment and how students respond to the contextual learning activities provided. Data were collected through observation, informal interviews, and analysis of instructional activities conducted during the program. Qualitative descriptive designs are common in nursing and healthcare research due to their inherent simplicity, flexibility, and utility in diverse healthcare contexts (Doyle et al., 2020)

The target participants consisted of *santri* from Junior and Senior levels who were actively involved in daily learning activities at *Pesantren* Nurul Huda. These students were chosen because they represent the group that most frequently engages in *pesantren* routines and therefore require practical English communication skills to support their academic and personal development. Selection was based on availability and willingness to participate, ensuring that the participants could contribute actively to each stage of the program.

The activities were conducted at *Pesantren* Nurul Huda, specifically in designated learning spaces such as language classrooms, dormitory discussion areas, and open communal spaces used for group practice. The choice of location was intended to integrate English learning into the natural environment of the *pesantren* so that students could practice communication within a familiar and supportive setting. Therefore, it is necessary to approximate the training process by the nature of the real communication process. We must know that students need to be provided with foreign language instruction in organic unity with active communication (Mukhiddinova & Jurayeva, 2021)

The learning materials focused on English for daily conversation, emphasizing expressions and vocabulary used in everyday communication. Research by (Masniati Murni Ritonga, 2024) The use of Intensive Daily Conversation in Speaking Skills increases students' activeness while studying. The content was contextualized to reflect real situations encountered by the *santri*, such as greeting routines, asking for permission, expressing needs, giving directions, discussing daily activities, and interacting with peers or teachers. The activities included: Role-plays and situational dialogues based on *pesantren* contexts, pair and group conversations aimed at building fluency and confidence, vocabulary enrichment sessions tied to real-life scenarios, interactive tasks, such as problem-solving conversations, peer interviews, and mini-projects that required students to use English in meaningful situations, daily conversational practice, integrated into routine interactions to ensure consistent exposure.

Evaluation was conducted using both formative and summative approaches. Formative evaluation took place throughout the learning sessions through direct observation of students' participation, the accuracy of expressions used, and their level of confidence in speaking. Summative evaluation involved assessing students' progress at the end of the program through Short conversational tests, peer-to-peer dialogue performance, and self-assessment reflections, where students evaluated their own improvements and remaining challenges. Based on Svensäter & Rohlin (2023) Both formative and summative assessment events of the model provided information about the levels of understanding, unique to each student. A comparison of results from the assessments demonstrated that most responses developed to a higher level of understanding. With the summative assessment, it was possible to make judgments about whether or not individual students passed the pre-set standards.

The evaluation emphasized communicative competence rather than grammatical perfection, focusing on fluency, clarity, appropriateness, and the ability to function effectively in everyday English communication.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The program, which focuses on improving English for Daily Conversation skills for students at the Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School, is carried out through a series of activities designed to effectively achieve the program's objectives. Very important for us as humans to communicate within the current era of globalization (Ansar et al., 2022). The program begins with initial observations to identify learning needs, the conditions of the Islamic boarding school environment, and the students' basic English skills. Based on these observations, the team designs context-based learning that emphasizes the use of English in real-life situations frequently encountered by students in their daily activities.

During the program, students are encouraged to practice various forms of simple conversation through role-plays, group exercises, paired dialogues, and simulations of Islamic boarding school situations. The material provided includes everyday expressions, vocabulary related to Islamic boarding school activities, informational questions, and basic conversation patterns that support social interaction. The learning is interactive so that students feel comfortable and confident using English without fear of error. This strategy has proven effective in

creating a more communicative learning environment and enabling students to apply English in contexts they understand.

The success of this activity can be seen from several established indicators. One of the most prominent aspects is the increased confidence of students in speaking. Before the program began, most students tended to be passive and reluctant to initiate conversations in English. However, after participating in several training sessions, their ability to respond and initiate simple dialogues was evident. Furthermore, students demonstrated a better grasp of vocabulary and practical expressions relevant to the Islamic boarding school environment. Summative evaluations showed that the majority of participants had achieved the minimum expected proficiency in basic conversation, indicating that the program's objectives were successfully achieved.

The output of this activity has several advantages, primarily due to its contextual nature and relevance to the students' lives. The material can be directly applied in everyday interactions, so students experience the tangible benefits of the learning. The activity also does not require special facilities, making it suitable for implementation in Islamic boarding school environments with limited resources. Furthermore, the interactive approach used increases students' self-confidence, which is an important foundation for developing English language skills.

However, this activity also has its drawbacks and challenges. The students' varying abilities result in uneven learning, requiring some students to receive more intensive support. Limited time due to the busy Islamic boarding school schedule also hinders deepening conversation practice. The Islamic boarding school environment, which does not fully support the use of English outside of class, also hinders the continuation of language practice after the program concludes.

The level of difficulty of implementation can be considered moderate, particularly related to scheduling and managing large groups. Nevertheless, the students' enthusiasm and the support of the Islamic boarding school are important factors in ensuring the program runs smoothly. The results of this implementation demonstrate significant opportunities for further development, such as implementing English Day, establishing independent study groups, developing conversation pocket books, and conducting advanced training to enhance students' skills to a more complex level.

Overall, this community service activity resulted in positive changes in the students' basic English communication skills. Activity documentation, such as photos of conversation exercises, situation simulations, and evaluation notes, demonstrates an increase in student participation over time. Thus, this program not only provides new knowledge but also strengthens the students' readiness to play an active role in a broader context in the global era.

4. CONCLUSION

The community service program empowering students at the Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School through English for Daily Conversation learning has significantly contributed to improving the participants' basic English communication skills. The contextual learning approach implemented allows students to practice English in everyday situations appropriate to the Islamic boarding school environment, making the learning process more relevant, meaningful, and applicable. Increased speaking confidence, mastery of thematic vocabulary, and the ability to respond to instructions and simple dialogues indicate that the program's objectives have been effectively achieved. These findings confirm that the context-based learning model has great potential to become a sustainable strategy for improving students' English competency.

Furthermore, this activity opens up opportunities for further development through the implementation of an English Area, advanced training, and strengthening learning communities that can support the sustainability of English language practice in the Islamic boarding school environment.

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