Article

Investigating the Bilingual Education Program at Malhikdua School

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Abstract: This research delves into the curriculum design and evolution of the bilingual program at MA Al Hikmah 2, popularly known as Malhikdua School. Employing qualitative methodologies, data were gathered through direct observations and interviews. The program's innovations include four English proficiency programs: School Outing Program, Test of English as Foreign Language, English Competency Test by LPKS, and Malhikdua Explore. The findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the Malhikdua bilingual program in advancing students' English proficiency through a strategically designed and supportive English proficiency programs.

1. Introduction

Bilingual education has emerged as a significant area of interest, offering a learning framework that incorporates both students' native and foreign languages in academic instruction and daily routines. Over the years, the use of English as a target language in bilingual programs has become a well-established practice (Margana, 2015; Ozfidan et al., 2018). In Indonesia, Margana (2015) highlights that such programs aim to produce citizens who are globally competent, capable of effective communication, and attuned to intercultural dynamics.

Despite its potential, implementing bilingual programs effectively remains a challenge for many schools. According to Fakhrudin, M. U., Padmajati, A., & Pranata, S. (2024), low student motivation, stemming from limited prior English knowledge, minimal exposure, and rural backgrounds, often hinders success. Similarly, Jayanti, D., and Sujarwo, A. (2019) note that many bilingual programs lack adequately qualified teachers proficient in both the native and target languages. Fakhrudin et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of English teachers as facilitators of communication skills, as language learning is inherently about fostering communication. Furthermore, many schools prioritize the National Examination (UN) as the primary assessment, aligning bilingual programs with regular school standards.

In contrast, MA Al Hikmah 2, known as Malhikdua and located in rural Brebes, demonstrates an exemplary bilingual program. The program integrates supporting

initiatives such as the Teaching Program and School Outing Program, allowing students to practice English with international visitors at prominent tourist sites. Additionally, English proficiency is formally assessed through standardized tests like TOEFL and LPKS. The school also facilitates international exposure through sit-in programs called Malhikdua Explore in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Turkey, further refining students' language abilities.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, as described by Creswell (2014), which emphasizes interpretative research requiring active engagement with participants over a prolonged period. Conducted at MA Al Hikmah 2 in Benda, Sirampog, Brebes, Central Java, the research site was chosen due to its established bilingual program mandating regular use of English and Arabic in both formal and informal settings.

The research population comprised all academicians involved in the bilingual program at MA Al Hikmah 2. A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants, including two key stakeholders, and three English teachers. These individuals provided diverse perspectives on language-support initiatives. Data collection methods included observations, interviews, and document analysis were employed.

3. Results

The researcher discovered that the data regarding school programs aimed at improving students' English proficiency was gathered from an interview with the teacher in charge. He explained that several programs were established to enhance students' language abilities: School Outing Program, ProTEFL, LPKS, and Malhikdua Explore.

3.1. School Outing Program

The School Outing Program (SOP) was one of the key initiatives supporting students' English language development. ET elaborated that SOP, designed to complement the other language skills covered in other programs, primarily focused on improving students' speaking abilities. The program provided students with opportunities to engage in conversations with native English speakers, practicing their speaking skills in real-life settings. The SOP took place in tourist destinations such as Borobudur Temple, Prambanan Temple, and Malioboro, where students interacted with international tourists. Native speakers were generally impressed by the students' efforts. The program aimed to boost students' confidence in using English with native speakers, covering topics like politics, education, and culture.

3.2. TOEFL

LPKS, which stands for Lembaga Pelatihan Kerja Swasta, was another final proficiency test for third-grade students. Similar to TOEFL, the LPKS test assessed students' English language comprehension from their matriculation to third grade. The school collaborated with the Brebes Regency Department of Labor to ensure the test's

legitimacy. Additionally, the LPKS certificate was intended to help students who sought employment, especially in teaching positions.

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3.4. Malhikdua Explore

Malhikdua Explore was an international event designed to help students practice their English and Arabic skills, along with other subjects. The program involved travel abroad for one to two weeks, where students participated in sit-in agendas, teaching practice, and cross-cultural performances. It was divided into two segments: Southeast Asia Malhikdua Explore and Europe Malhikdua Explore.

The Southeast Asia segment included visits to Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, where students taught at elementary schools in Malaysia and participated in school visits in Singapore and Thailand. The goal was to help students practice their language skills while building public speaking and confidence.

The Europe segment took place in Turkey, where students visited universities and historical sites. This program aimed to broaden students' knowledge and inspire them to consider studying in Turkey.

The results showed that bilingual program integrated several English proficiency initiatives into their curriculum, including the School Outing Program, ProTEFL, LPKS, and Malhikdua Explore. The School Outing Program allowed students to practice their English with native speakers in tourist locations for two weeks, where they exchanged knowledge, cultural insights, and language skills. This program was believed to enhance students' English proficiency, as it provided direct interaction with foreigners. This approach aligns with the views of Canagarajah (2007) and Kramsch (2006), as cited in Cenoz & Gorter (2011), who argue that bilingual individuals acquire and refine their language skills through practical engagement. By participating in such activities, students use their language skills in social contexts and shape their communicative interactions.

ProTEFL and LPKS, on the other hand, were formal English proficiency assessments designed to evaluate students' language skills after nearly four years of study. ProTEFL was a test focused on listening, structure, and reading, conducted at a university language center, while LPKS assessed listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

The final program, Malhikdua Explore, involved sending students abroad to practice their English and explore historical sites. This program was split into two categories: ASEAN Malhikdua Explore and Turkey Malhikdua Explore.

4.   Conclusions

In conclusion, this study significantly contributes to the field of bilingual education, particularly in how it supports the enhancement of students' English proficiency. The program has successfully developed a curriculum that aligns with its objectives. Based on the national curriculum under the Ministry of Religion Affairs, it incorporates modifications designed to better achieve the program's goals. Key innovations include creating specialized programs such as the School Outing Program, TOEFL/ProTEFL, LPKS, and Malhikdua Explore. These initiatives collectively foster an environment that effectively nurtures students' English language skills, ensuring their proficiency and readiness in real-world communication.

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