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## Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Learning English Skills at Boarding Islamic Schools

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**Abstract:** Learning English as a second language poses challenges for students worldwide, and this holds true for students studying at boarding Islamic schools as well. This research aims to analyze the difficulties faced by students in acquiring English language skills within the unique context of boarding Islamic schools. By identifying the specific challenges encountered by these students, educators and policymakers can develop targeted strategies to enhance English language learning in this educational setting. The study utilizes a qualitative research approach, involving interviews, observations, and document analysis to gather data from students and teachers. The findings highlight common difficulties faced by students in learning English skills, including linguistic barriers, limited exposure to English outside the school environment, curriculum constraints, and lack of resources. The research concludes with recommendations for addressing these challenges and improving English language learning outcomes in boarding Islamic schools.

**Keywords:** Difficulties, Learning English Skills, Boarding Islamic School

### 1. Introduction

English language proficiency plays a vital role in today's globalized world, enabling individuals to access better educational and employment opportunities. English is the primary language of instruction in many prestigious universities worldwide. Individuals proficient in English have the advantage of enrolling in academic programs, courses, and research endeavors offered by renowned institutions. English proficiency is often a requirement for admission to universities in English-speaking countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). However, students studying at boarding Islamic schools face unique challenges in acquiring English language skills due to the specific context and environment in which they learn. This research aims to analyse the difficulties faced by students in learning English skills at

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boarding Islamic schools, with a focus on understanding the underlying factors that contribute to these challenges. Students need to improve their abilities in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in order to master a new language. They need to have excellent command of the English language. Access to scientific and technological information is facilitated, and students are better able to engage with peers from around the world.

Learning difficulties are one of the challenges that students face while studying; these difficulties are characterized by challenges that must be solved in order to reach the desired outcome. Where the student might or might not encounter these challenges. The teaching and learning process can be hampered by a variety of obstacles, some of which are psychological, some social, and some physiological in nature (Sugiyanto, 2014). Results in the classroom will suffer because of this disturbance. There are two types of influences on a learner's ability to learn: those that originate within the student themselves (internal variables) and those from the outside world (external factors). School, family, the media, and the social environment all play a role in external variables (Supriyono & Ahmadi, 2004), while the two categories of internal elements are physical and psychological. Each student will inevitably be affected by some of these things. As a result, individual care from the instructor is required.

An English course can be challenging for the same reasons that any other course might be. Many factors can contribute to English learning challenges, as Mosha (2014) explains. To begin with, educators lack the requisite training and experience to effectively instruct students in English. Due to a severe lack of qualified English teachers, some educators are being forced to educate students who speak a language they are not fluent in. This causes them to skip over some of the more challenging material on the curriculum. Second, in terms of educator accountability, teachers often fail to offer students the books, modules, photos, posters, and worksheets they need to fully grasp the concepts being taught. Third, the classroom itself is an extremely uncomfortable place to learn. Classroom conditions, such as dirtiness, dustiness, lack of paint on the walls, roof leaks, and broken windows, can have a significant negative effect on both students' and teachers' ability to learn. Also, fourthly, students rarely utilize English at home or school. There are underlying causes at play here. Students, for instance, have a limited lexicon and lack the self-assurance to communicate in English with their peers and teachers. Furthermore, it may be at home because their parents are not educated, are not familiar with English, and some of them are elderly.

Based on the description above, it is clear that identifying and assisting students in overcoming their learning difficulties, increasing their learning outcomes, and enhancing English language abilities is critical. This is why the researcher was interested in researching learning issues, particularly those encountered by Boarding Islamic School students. The researcher believed that by doing this study, the researcher would be able to identify the types of learning issues that students have.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Students' Difficulties**

Students often encounter various difficulties during their educational journey. These challenges can stem from personal, academic, or environmental factors, and they can impact students' overall learning experience and outcomes. Here's an explanation of some common difficulties students face:

#### **a. Time Management and Workload**

Balancing academic commitments, extracurricular activities, and personal life can be challenging. Many students struggle with effectively managing their time and handling the demands of coursework. Poor time management can lead to stress, burnout, and reduced academic performance (Britton & Tesser, 1991).

#### **b. Language Barriers for Non-Native Speakers**

Students who are non-native speakers of the language of instruction may face language barriers that hinder their understanding of lectures, readings, and assignments. This can affect their overall academic performance and confidence. Language support and resources are crucial to help these students overcome this challenge (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994).

#### **c. Study Skills and Learning Strategies**

Many students lack effective study skills and learning strategies, such as note-taking, critical thinking, and test preparation. These skills are essential for academic success, and students who struggle with them may find it difficult to perform well in exams and assignments (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986).

d. Motivation and Engagement

Maintaining motivation and engagement with academic tasks can be a struggle for some students. Lack of interest in subjects or feeling disconnected from the learning process can lead to procrastination and lower achievement. Motivational support and creating engaging learning environments can address this challenge (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

e. Financial Constraints

Financial difficulties can impact students' ability to access necessary resources, textbooks, and technology. It might also force them to work part-time, which can take time away from their studies and increase stress. Financial aid programs and resources can help alleviate this challenge (Eisenberg et al., 2009).

In conclusion, students face a range of difficulties that can impact their educational journey. These challenges may have personal, academic, or environmental origins. Recognizing and addressing these difficulties through targeted support, resources, and interventions can enhance students' learning experiences and outcomes.

## 2.2. Learning English Skills

Learning English skills encompasses the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities in the English language. Proficiency in these skills is essential for effective communication, academic success, and participation in a globalized world.

a. Listening Skills

Listening skills involve understanding spoken language, processing information, and comprehending spoken messages. Effective listening is crucial for academic learning, workplace communication, and social interactions. Students with strong listening skills can follow lectures, participate in discussions, and engage in effective communication (Field, 2010).

b. Speaking Skills

Speaking skills involve articulating thoughts, ideas, and opinions fluently and coherently in spoken form. Developing speaking skills enhances communication abilities, self-confidence, and oral presentation prowess. Proficient speakers can express themselves clearly, engage in debates, and participate in discussions (Bygate, 1987).

c. Reading Skills

Reading skills involve understanding written text, extracting meaning, and critically analyzing information. Proficient readers can comprehend various types of texts, such as academic articles, literature, and news articles. Strong reading skills aid in academic research, information gathering, and expanding vocabulary (Grabe & Stoller, 2001).

d. Writing Skills

Writing skills involve composing coherent and organized written content for various purposes, such as essays, reports, emails, and creative pieces. Proficient writers can convey ideas effectively, use appropriate grammar and vocabulary, and present arguments logically. Strong writing skills are essential for academic assignments, professional communication, and creative expression (Hedge, 2001).

e. Integrated Skills

English language learning often involves the integration of these skills. For instance, language learners might read a text, listen to an audio clip, and then write a response. This integrated approach mirrors real-life communication scenarios where individuals use multiple skills simultaneously (Canale & Swain, 1980).

f. Cultural Awareness

Alongside language skills, developing cultural awareness is important. Understanding cultural contexts, idiomatic expressions and nuances enriches language proficiency. Cultural awareness fosters effective cross-cultural communication and empathy (Kramsch, 1993).

In conclusion, learning English skills is a multifaceted process that involves mastering listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. These skills are crucial for effective communication, academic excellence, and participation in a globalized world. Combining these skills with cultural awareness enhances learners' capacity to engage meaningfully in various contexts.

## 2.3. Boarding Islamic School

A Boarding Islamic School, also known as an Islamic boarding school or "madrasa," is an educational institution that offers both academic and religious education to students, often with a focus on Islamic teachings and values. In these schools, students not only receive a traditional academic curriculum but also engage in religious studies and activities aimed at nurturing their understanding of Islam and moral character.

a. Educational Approach

Boarding Islamic Schools combine secular education with religious teachings, offering a comprehensive curriculum that includes subjects such as mathematics, science, literature, and languages, alongside Islamic studies, Quranic recitation, and understanding of Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). The integration of secular and religious education aims to create well-rounded individuals with strong Islamic values (Tohidi, 2003).

b. Cultural and Moral Education

These schools often emphasize the development of moral character and ethical behaviour in line with Islamic teachings. Students are taught values such as humility, compassion, respect, and social responsibility. The holistic approach seeks to prepare students not only for academic success but also for becoming responsible and ethical members of society (Khalid, 2008).

c. Religious Immersion

Boarding Islamic Schools offer an environment where students live on campus, allowing them to immerse themselves in a religious atmosphere throughout their daily activities. Students participate in prayers, Quranic recitations, and other religious practices alongside their academic pursuits. This immersion facilitates a deeper understanding of Islam and its practices (Kose & Aydin, 2015).

d. Cultural Preservation

In many cases, Boarding Islamic Schools play a role in preserving cultural and religious traditions, especially in societies with a significant Muslim population. These schools ensure the continuation of Islamic values, teachings, and cultural practices from one generation to another (Burhani, 2015).

e. Community and Brotherhood

Boarding Islamic Schools often foster a sense of community and brotherhood among students. Living and learning together creates a supportive environment where students can form strong bonds with their peers, share experiences, and collaborate in both their academic and religious journeys (Van Bruinessen, 2002).

f. Adaptation to Modern Times

While some Boarding Islamic Schools adhere to traditional teaching methods, many have adapted their curriculum to include modern subjects and technologies. This balance between traditional Islamic teachings and contemporary education equips students with the skills and knowledge needed for success in today's world (Laffan, 2003).

In conclusion, Boarding Islamic Schools provide a unique educational environment that combines academic learning with a strong emphasis on Islamic teachings and values. These schools play a significant role in educating students both academically and spiritually, fostering cultural preservation, and preparing students to become active members of their communities.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research on students' difficulties in learning English skills at boarding Islamic schools adopts a qualitative approach to gain in-depth insights into the challenges faced by learners in this context. Qualitative research allows for a deeper exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in language learning.

Data collection methods in this research include semi-structured interviews with both students and teachers. Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility in questioning, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about learning English in boarding Islamic schools. Through these interviews, researchers can capture the unique perspectives and personal narratives of the participants.

Additionally, classroom observations are conducted to observe language classes in boarding Islamic schools. Observing language instruction in real-time allows researchers to understand the instructional methods employed, the level of student engagement, and the practical challenges faced during language learning. Classroom observations provide valuable context and help corroborate the data gathered through interviews.

Moreover, the research involves an analysis of relevant documents, such as curriculum guidelines and textbooks. Examining these documents provides insights into the language learning goals set by educational institutions, the resources available for language instruction, and the prescribed teaching methodologies. The analysis of documents complements the primary data collection methods and offers a broader understanding of the language learning context at boarding Islamic schools.

The study participants are selected from a diverse range of boarding Islamic schools to ensure a representative sample. By including participants from various schools, the research can capture variations in language learning environments, instructional approaches, and student backgrounds. The diverse sample enhances the research's credibility and increases the transferability of the findings to similar educational contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

#### **4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Through the data analysis, several key difficulties emerge that hinder students' acquisition of English skills at boarding Islamic schools:

##### **a. Linguistic Barriers**

Students often face difficulties in mastering the complex grammar rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation of the English language. The stark contrast between Arabic and English structures poses a significant challenge. These barriers arise from differences between English and the learners' native languages, leading to difficulties in various language aspects. Pronunciation poses a significant challenge as English has a wide range of phonetic sounds that might not exist in learners' native tongues. This can result in miscommunication and hinder learners from being understood clearly by native English speakers. Additionally, vocabulary acquisition can be daunting due to English's vast lexicon and the presence of words borrowed from multiple languages. Learners may struggle to remember and use new words effectively, impeding their language fluency.

Moreover, English grammar and syntax can differ significantly from the learners' native language, making it challenging to grasp and apply the correct rules, leading to grammatical errors in speech and writing. These linguistic barriers necessitate tailored language learning approaches to help learners overcome challenges and achieve proficiency in English. Addressing these linguistic barriers requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates interactive language learning activities, exposure to authentic English language materials, and the creation of a supportive language learning environment. Integrating English language learning with Islamic teachings can also emphasize the language's relevance and enhance students' motivation to develop their English language skills. Additionally, providing specialized language support programs and resources can help students overcome linguistic challenges and become more proficient in English (Selinker & Gass, 2008).

##### **b. Limited Exposure to English Outside the School Environment**

The immersive English language environment is typically absent in the home and community settings of boarding Islamic school students. Limited exposure to authentic English conversations hinders their language acquisition and fluency development. These challenges arise from the structural differences between English and learners' native languages, presenting obstacles in various language components. Pronunciation is one such difficulty, as English contains a wide range of phonetic sounds that may not exist in learners' mother tongues. This discrepancy can lead to miscommunication and make it challenging for learners to achieve clear and accurate speech.

Additionally, vocabulary acquisition can be daunting, as English has an extensive lexicon with words borrowed from various languages. Learners may struggle to remember and use these new words effectively, hindering their language fluency. Furthermore, English grammar and syntax differ significantly from the grammar of learners' native languages, leading to confusion and grammatical errors in speech and writing. These linguistic barriers necessitate well-designed language learning approaches that address these difficulties and help learners progress towards English proficiency (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

##### **c. Curriculum Constraints**

The curriculum at boarding Islamic schools is primarily focused on religious education, leaving limited time and resources for English language instruction. The lack of dedicated English language learning opportunities affects students' progress and proficiency. The curriculum constraints refer to the specific guidelines, requirements, and limitations set by educational institutions or governing bodies that dictate the English

language learning process. These constraints can impact the scope, depth, and effectiveness of English language instruction, thereby affecting students' language acquisition experiences.

Addressing these curriculum constraints requires a comprehensive approach that involves curriculum development, teacher training, and resource allocation. Integrating English language learning across subjects and embedding it into the curriculum can enhance its relevance and exposure for learners. Additionally, providing professional development opportunities for teachers can equip them with effective language teaching strategies to cater to diverse learning needs (Richards, J C., 2002).

d. Lack of Resources

Insufficient access to English language learning resources, such as textbooks, multimedia materials, and language laboratories, inhibits students' ability to practice and engage with the language effectively. The lack of resources can significantly impede the process of learning English for language learners. Resources play a crucial role in providing learners with the necessary support, materials, and tools to develop their language skills effectively. When resources are scarce or inadequate, learners may face several challenges that hinder their language acquisition journey. Addressing the lack of resources requires concerted efforts from educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders. Investing in language education and allocating resources to provide updated materials, technology, and trained language teachers can create a more supportive language learning environment.

Collaboration between the public and private sectors can also help bridge resource gaps and provide equal opportunities for language learners to thrive. Access to a variety of English language learning resources, including textbooks, multimedia materials, and language laboratories, is vital for students to engage in meaningful practice. Limited exposure to authentic language usage and contexts can hinder students' ability to develop strong listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed to address the difficulties faced by students in learning English skills at boarding Islamic schools:

a. Integrating English Language Learning

Boarding Islamic schools should prioritize the inclusion of English language learning as an integral part of their curriculum, allocating dedicated time and resources for English instruction. By embedding English language instruction into various academic disciplines, students can have more meaningful and authentic language practice, fostering a deeper understanding of English and its real-life applications. By integrating English language learning into various subjects and creating a language-rich learning environment, students can experience a more immersive and purposeful language learning journey. This approach not only improves language skills but also enhances students' overall academic performance and prepares them to succeed in a globalized world (Coyle et al., 2010)

b. Language Immersion Programs

Creating opportunities for students to engage in immersive English language environments, such as language camps, language clubs, or partnerships with English-speaking schools, can enhance their exposure and language acquisition. Language immersion involves creating an immersive environment where students are fully surrounded by the target language, in this case, English. Through this approach, students can experience an intensive and authentic language learning experience that accelerates language acquisition and improves language proficiency. By implementing Language Immersion Programs, schools can provide students with a unique and effective language learning experience. The immersive environment, coupled with qualified instructors and culturally enriching activities, accelerates language acquisition and equips students with essential language skills for their academic and professional pursuits (Genesee, 1987).

c. Professional Development for Teachers

Offering professional development programs for teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills in teaching English as a second language can improve the quality of English instruction. Professional development programs enable educators to enhance their teaching skills, acquire new instructional strategies, and gain a deeper understanding of effective language teaching methodologies. By investing in professional development for teachers, educational institutions can strengthen their language programs, improve teachers' instructional capabilities, and ultimately enhance students' language learning experiences and outcomes (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

d. Collaboration with English Language Centers

Collaborating with external English language centres or institutions can provide additional resources, such as language labs, digital resources, and training opportunities, to supplement the English language learning environment. English Language Centers are specialized institutions focused on language education and can provide valuable support and resources to enhance students' language learning experience. By fostering collaboration with English Language Centers, educational institutions can supplement their language programs

and provide students with a comprehensive and effective language learning experience. This collaboration strengthens language instruction, enhances students' language skills, and prepares them to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world (Pawlak, 2017).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of students' difficulties in learning English skills at boarding Islamic schools highlights the linguistic, environmental, and curricular challenges that hinder their language acquisition. By recognizing and addressing these difficulties, educators and policymakers can design targeted interventions and strategies to improve English language learning outcomes for students in boarding Islamic schools. Enhancing English language proficiency will not only benefit the students personally but also equip them with the necessary skills to engage globally in the 21st-century context.

Environmental challenges stem from the prioritization of religious education in Arabic or the local language, which may lead to limited opportunities for English language exposure and practice. Cultural perceptions towards English as a secondary subject can also affect students' motivation and attitudes towards learning the language. Curricular constraints, such as limited instructional time for English and outdated language teaching materials, further hinder students' language learning experiences. The focus on exam-oriented teaching and standardized testing may prioritize rote memorization over communicative competence, affecting their ability to use English effectively in real-life situations.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Integrating English language learning across subjects, providing professional development for teachers, and collaborating with English Language Centers can enhance language instruction and provide additional language support. Emphasizing cultural understanding, creating immersive language environments, and utilizing authentic resources can contribute to a more effective language learning experience.

Recognizing and understanding these difficulties in learning English at boarding Islamic schools is crucial for devising targeted interventions and implementing inclusive language education practices. By addressing these challenges, educators and policymakers can better support students' language acquisition journey, foster language proficiency, and empower learners to thrive in an interconnected global society. Ultimately, overcoming these barriers contributes to student's holistic development and equips them with essential English language skills for their future endeavours.

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