

Exploring Bilingual Education Program at Private Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract. This case study aims to explore the process of curriculum design and development in bilingual program at private Islamic boarding school in Brebes. The data were collected from stakeholders, English teachers, the members, and Self-Development Club, through direct observation, site visits, interviews, and document analysis. The data were analyzed qualitatively. There are three modifications of the curriculum supporting bilingual students' English improvements. They are implementing four years of study that the students will have a matriculation grade in the first year; adding English school hours in each grade, and providing English supporting programs named School Outing Program, Teaching Program, and Malhikdua Explore. Then, the existence of students' bilingual organization called Self-Development Club significantly contributes by taking over students' language improvement activities besides school hours. After being facilitated with the programs mentioned, the student's English proficiency was assessed through TOEFL by a certified state university language center and LPKS by the Brebes Department of Employment, with average scores of 510 (TOEFL) and 83% Grade A (LPKS). As a result, bilingual program of MA Al Hikmah 2 has successfully designed a proper curriculum to enhance students' English proficiency.

Keywords: Bilingual Program, Curriculum, Private Islamic Boarding School, Curriculum Design, Education Program

Introduction

Bilingual education program has become one of trends to study since it offers an educational system emphasizing on the use of both students' native language and another language in the teaching learning and the students' daily activity. For several decades, the practice of bilingual program concerning on the use of English

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as the target language is well established (Margana, 2015; Ozfidan, et. al., 2018). Margana (2015) adds that this also happens in Indonesia to make Indonesians become more qualified and competitive citizens who are able to deal with global communication practices, intercultural awareness, and social global perspectives and contexts.

Indonesia actually had taken an action to deal with bilingualism. One concrete way decided was by creating UU No. 20 year 2013 chapter 50 articles 3 about the system of national education that finally be stopped due to many critics from society, parents, and even educators towards this program. People disagreed with this policy was because the fee was expensive and not appropriate with the constitution that caused stratification between regular schools and international schools. One of the policies of the program was establishing International-standardized Schools or locally called *Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional* for elementary level up to senior high school level. This program required both the teachers and students to use English since it was aimed at making a better quality of education that then would create competent students to compete in the globalization era. The approach used was CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). The term CLIL refers to learning through any language that is not the first language of the learner (Ball, 2006). In consequence, the educational community needs to be aware that using a foreign language when teaching content incurs in language learning since structures, vocabulary, and pragmatics, among other linguistic features, are implicit in the topic being taught (Bonces, J. R., 2012).

Related to the explanation above, it is shown that bilingual program is an effective program to be implemented to encourage learners' English proficiency. However, most schools cannot effectively implement this program. One of the main causes is students' motivation, as mentioned by Fakhrudin, M. U., Padmajati, A., & Pranata, S. (2024). They state that students get low motivation to practice their English due to having no prior English knowledge, lacking of English exposure in their environment, and coming from district areas. It is confirmed by Jayanti, D & Sujarwo, A. (2019) that most bilingual programs do not work optimally because most programs do not have qualified teachers who are capable of first language and second language to use as a classroom communication tool whereas Fakhrudin, M. U., et al (2024) emphasized that an English teacher must be a students' guide to learn the role of communication because learning a language is learning to communicate.

This research was conducted at private Islamic boarding school located in the rural area of Brebes. This school provides three main programs. They are Bilingual Program, Vocational Program, and Olympiad Program. The researcher focuses on the bilingual program which aims to enhance students' English proficiency. The program has a modified curriculum, implementing 4 years of study to provide the matriculation grade in the first year to build English foundations, applying English supporting programs called Teaching Program and School Outing Program to practice their English with the foreigners in several big tourism places, and conducting English proficiency tests namely TOEFL and LPKS tests. Besides that, the school also provides international program, a sit-in program in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Turkey for bilingual students to enhance their foreign language mastery.

Based on the programs and achievements mentioned above, the researcher attempts to conduct a case study which aims to explore curriculum design and development in bilingual program at private Islamic boarding school in Brebes.

Method

This current study was a case study. Creswell (2014: 177) state that this kind of research is interpretative research which demands the researcher to get involved with the participants to have a sustained and intensive experience. This research was conducted in Madrasah Aliyah Al Hikmah 2, Benda, Sirampog, Brebes, Central Java. The reason for choosing Madrasah Aliyah Al Hikmah 2 was because the school had implemented bilingual program that required the students to speak English and Arabic regularly, both in formal and informal activities.

The population in this research was the whole academicians of bilingual program MA Al Hikmah 2. In selecting the sample, purposive sampling was employed. The researcher chose the head of bilingual program, 3 English teachers, and 5 bilingual program boards (the committee of Self-Development Club) as the samples.

Table 1. The Interviewees

No	Participants	Code	Objective
1	Head of Bilingual Program	HP	To gain information about curriculum and program implemented in the bilingual program of MA Al Hikmah 2.
2	English Teachers	ET	To obtain the information about the implementation of teaching and learning activities in the classroom.
3	Bilingual Program Boards	BPD	To gain information about the programs that supported the development of students' foreign language skills outside of the formal hours.

To collect the data, an observation and interview was conducted. In this case, the researcher wrote field notes of the teachers and students' activities either in the classroom or in the dormitory. Moreover, interviews with stakeholders, English teachers, and the committee of Self-Development Club were conducted. Semi-structured interview which the researcher prepared some questions as a guide before interviewing the interviewee and some additional questions were developed on the spot based on the participants' answers. It was taken to confirm what had been observed, and to provide more detail and historical information from the participants.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The bilingual program in MA Al Hikmah 2 was firstly initiated in 2001. The program focuses on the development of students' English and Arabic proficiency. Arabic was the first foreign language spoken since the school is located in the Islamic dormitory. The idea of implementing bilingualism in the

Islamic boarding school was to answer societies' demand that *santri* should learn Islamic studies, read classical Islamic books, and speak international languages. To realize the demand, the program designed particular innovations covered in the form curriculum, English proficiency, and language management that were presented below.

A) Curriculum Innovation

Curriculum is a set of learning plans. To realize good learning in the bilingual program, the stakeholders made a serious effort. The head of bilingual program coded with HP stated that one of the earliest efforts was visiting MAPK Solo, a school with a bilingual program, to gain insights into building a bilingual program. From the visit, the school took a program to implement, KSPD (*Klub Studi Pengembangan Diri*) that was changed to SDC (Self-Development Club).

After realizing SDC, MA Al Hikmah 2 did not stop doing several innovations to upgrade the implementation of the bilingual program. One of the most challenging innovations was declaring that students had to take four years in the program. HP considered that four years of study was enough for the students to master classical Islamic books, Qur'an, Arabic, and English languages. The head of the bilingual program stated,

"Akhirnya dibuatlah hal seperti itu, yang mana itu eee tahun pertama adalah matrikulasi, matrikulasi disini adalah pemantapan untuk bahasa Arab, bahasa Inggris, dan untuk sebagai bekal di kitab kuningnya baik itu di ilmu alat atau ilmu-ilmu lainnya."

"Finally, it was implemented that the first year became a matriculation grade to build the students' Arabic and English efficacy, and to make them ready to learn Islamic classical books."

HP added that the existence of matriculation grade was very crucial because it became the foundation for the students to build their bilingualism before heading to the following grades.

At first, in realizing the program, the school employed a national curriculum from the Ministry of Religion Affairs because the literacy of the books both English was well-written, said the head of the bilingual program. However, due to policy changes that English and Arabic books were not entirely written in English, the school did not follow the rules by still using the old books.

Furthermore, the next innovation was the learning time allocation. Other schools might have 56 hours in a week, while a bilingual program of MA Al Hikmah 2 had 60 hours. HP stated that it was decided by considering both the program's goal and students' needs. HP added that this action did not break the government policy since KMA (*Keputusan Menteri Agama*) no 184 about the school's authority to do innovation, especially by adding three additional lessons.

From those 60 hours, English took a significant part. Based on the document obtained, there were 27 hours in a week for English subjects. They were 9 hours for matriculation grade, 7 hours for the first graders, and 5 hours for second and third graders.

From those English hours, the school considered that the quality of teachers was also needed to maximize the running of the program. Through the observation, the researcher found that the teachers of the bilingual program were heterogeneous. Some teachers graduated from Middle East universities, English countries, and most of them were from Indonesian universities.

Furthermore, HP mentioned two primary qualifications to be a teacher in the program. First, it was a commitment. A teacher with a high commitment was highly hired for the program. HP explained that having a commitment meant a teacher was ready to deliver the materials, take care of the students' personalities, and pay attention to the students' progress so that the program's objective could be achieved. To find one, the school commonly recruited alumni of the program who had graduated from university. The school considered that alumni were the right ones since they had known the school's vision and mission, especially the bilingual program. The second qualification was a teacher's educational background. It was clearly understood that the teacher should have taught a subject based on their major when studying in the university.

B) English Proficiency Programs

The researcher found that the data related to school programs supporting students' English proficiency was from the interview with the teacher in charge coded with ET. ET explained that there were many programs created to upgrade students' language proficiency. Most of the programs were conducted by a bilingual students' organization called Self-Development Club, and there were four main programs run by the school; School Outing Program, ProTEFL, LPKS, and Malhikdua Explore.

1) School Outing Program

School Outing Program was one of the most supporting programs for students' English improvement. ET explained that School Outing Program, commonly called SOP, was to complete students' language skills, especially their speaking skills because other three language skills were covered in another English proficiency program. Thus, SOP was to measure the students' speaking skills by practicing their English with English native speakers. This program got them to have good communication with foreigners from the worldwide. Since the objects were tourists, the program was conducted in the tourism places like Borobudur temple, Prambanan temple, and Malioboro. ET added that the program made them go around and find foreigners in those places, asking for spare time to practice their English. Fortunately, native speakers appreciated students' English very well as long as this program was implemented. In short, students' speaking skill is tested through this program.

This program was expected to encourage students' confidence to use their English in person with native speakers worldwide.

2) TOEFL

TOEFL was a final English test for bilingual students, third graders. This test measured the students' English proficiency after learning for about four years in the bilingual program. The test was organized by an official language center of related universities. To make the students ready do

TOEFL, the school already created a handbook that covered all materials tested in TOEFL. ET stated that the book could be utilized for the whole grade because the book's purpose was to prepare the students to face TOEFL.

Furthermore, the head of the bilingual program coded with HP expected that TOEFL program could measure students' English proficiency with international standards. HP added that as an effort to realize the TOEFL for students, the bilingual program collaborated with language centers of several state universities, such as Gadjah Mada University, Indonesian Education University, and Yogyakarta State University. Analysis of the test outcomes indicated that the students' average TOEFL score of 510 surpassed the minimum requirement set by the school, which was 475.

3) LPKS Test

LPKS stands for Lembaga Pelatihan Kerja Swasta. LPKS test was another final English proficiency test for the third graders of MA Al Hikmah 2. All programs had their criteria to test the students. For the bilingual students, four language skills were tested. ET 2 stated that the purpose of LPKS was similar to TOEFL that to evaluate the students' English comprehension learned from matriculation up to third grade.

HP stated that the school collaborated with the Department of Labor Brebes regency in conducting this test to make it legal and official. Moreover, another objective of this test was to prepare the students who would try to work by teaching. The assessment indicated that 83% of the students attained an overall score equivalent to Grade A.

4) Malhikdua Explore

Malhikdua Explore was an international school event held to practice the students' English and Arabic language and other subjects they learned. The agenda of this program was going abroad for 1 up to 2 weeks to have sit-in agenda, teaching practice, and cross-culture performances. Moreover, the event was divided into two; South East Asia Malhikdua Explore and Europe Malhikdua Explore.

Southeast Asia Malhikdua Explore was a sit-in program conducted in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. The students accompanied by the supervisors were sent to teach students of an elementary school in Malaysia and school visits in Singapore and Thailand. The students were expected to be able to share the knowledge they learned by using either English or Arabic. This program was believed to foster students' public speaking and confidence effectively.

Meanwhile, Europe Malhikdua explore was held only in Turkey for a week. It was pretty different from the previous program since the students only visited universities and historical buildings in Turkey. The school expected the students to gain much knowledge and information from the visit so that they would have a preference to continue their study in Turkey.

C) Language Management

To maintain the implementation of the bilingual program, the stakeholders created punishments for language destroyers and a handbook for the shake of the students' vocabulary treasury. To handle this, the stakeholders cooperated

with the committee of Self-Development Club since they considered that the committee of Self-Development Club knew the students' needs.

1) Punishments

Bilingual students in this program are obliged to speak both English regularly. To make the program work effectively, Language Department created certain punishments for language destroyers. The board of the Language Department mentioned there were two kinds of punishment implemented. They were as follows:

a) Points for Vocabulary

The board coded with BPD explained that this first type was for the students who wrote the vocabulary inappropriately. BPD added that the point given was based on their errors. The more issues obtained, the harder punishment they got.

b) Language Destroyer

This punishment was addressed to the language destroyers. To detect language destroyers, Language Department chose spies in every grade. When they found one who did not speak Arabic or English, they would report to the Language Department.

The punishment was asking the language destroyers to show their talents in the public area and in front of bilingual teachers at the rest of the hours. However, BPD said that the punishment did not work very well due to too many activities in the previous semester,

"Iya, dan baru jalan sekali kemaren. Hehe Jadi gini Tadz, pas semester kemaren kan banyak waktu yang ga kosongnya ya Tadz, jadi susah tuh buat ngumpulin asatidz. Jadi baru terlaksana sekali."

"Yes, It worked once yesterday because there was too much ineffective time in the previous semester that made it difficult to gather with teachers."

2) Coolin' Book

One of the most effective programs related to language management in the bilingual program was providing a special handbook called Coolin' Book for students designed by the board of the Language Department. BPD stated that Coolin' Book consisted of English – Arabic vocabulary (part of speech), Arabic expressions, some English - Arabic fundamental grammatical materials, and English – Arabic speeches. BPD added that the book was designed simply and practically so that the students could bring the book everywhere as stated,

"Cooling Book itu kaya buku paketnya anak-anak bahasa biar, ee isinya itu mufrodat-mufrodat atau vocabulary. Karena kan kalau misalnya anak-anak itu pasti lah ya, ga mau kalau harus bawa kamus gede kemana-mana kan gitu. Jadi kalau Coolin Book kan lebih praktis dan bisa dibawa kemana-mana jadi kita bikin Coolin Book."

"Cooling Book is a students' language handbook. It contains vocabularies. This is to provide students with a more straightforward book that can be brought anywhere, not like an extensive dictionary."

Discussions

From the findings, the researcher found that the program's curriculum was a national curriculum that referred to Ministry of Religion Affairs. However, school did several innovations reach the objective of the that was similarly to studies by Cummins (1991); Ricento (2013); Bialystok, Peets & Moreno (2014) cited in Ozfidan et al. (2018) that bilingual students are expected to understand the content of their lessons more effective and successful in their schooling, express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings more comfortably in their classes once they would be educated in their mother tongue, and have more self-confidence to be successful on their course.

The first innovation to realize the objective was adding one year study for bilingual students. The students would spend four years to graduate in that program. One additional program was for matriculation grade in their first year to develop English and Arabic from both written and spoken ways. The students of matriculation grade had 9 hours per week to study English. Those 9 hours were divided into speaking, writing (grammar), and listening class. Moreover, when other senior high schools had 4 hours of English subject per week for the first up to third grade, this bilingual program differed by having 7 hours for the first grade and 5 hours for the second and third graders. It was done to make students understand when the materials were delivered in a second language. It was in line with Baker (2011) and Garcia (2011) that bilingual education requires teaching delivery in two languages, a native and a second language, with varying amounts of each language used in accordance with academic content.

Secondly, the bilingual program conducted English proficiency programs in their curriculum. They were School Outing Program, ProTEFL, LPKS, and Malhikdua Explore. School Outing Program was a program that students practiced their English with native speakers in the tourism objects for two weeks. They exchanged general knowledge, cultures, language, etc. This program was believed to encourage students' English efficacy since they could directly talk to foreigners. It was also agreed by Canagarajah (2007), and Kramsch (2006) cited from Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2011) that bilingual users acquire and practice their languages while engaging in language practices. By implementing this, students use their resources in a social context and shape this context in communicative interaction. Meanwhile, ProTEFL and LPKS were official English proficiency tests. Those two tests were employed to measure students' English after learning for almost 4 years. ProTEFL was a test consisting of listening, structure, and reading conducted in the university language centre, while LPKS consisted of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The last program was Malhikdua Explore. It was an agenda that took students abroad to practice their English and learn historical places in that country. The program was divided into two; ASEAN Malhikdua Explore and Turkey Malhikdua Explore.

The last program to maintain the existence of bilingual program was language management. To manage the language, there were 2 points implemented in this program. The first was punishments for English destroyers. The program did not give space for the students to speak other language instructed, or called submersion approach. Bin Tahir (2017) stated that no allowance was made for students who did not speak the language of instruction. They were placed in classrooms where all instruction, classroom routines, and peer interactions occur

only in a language unknown to them. The following was providing a special handbook called Coolin' Book. It was a book consisted of English – Arabic vocabulary, expressions, part of speeches, simple grammatical materials, and speeches. This was provided to make students easier in memorizing vocabulary. By having this book, the committee also could track and control how far the students' vocabulary mastery.

Conclusion

The highlight of this study gives a contribution to the knowledge field of bilingual education implementation that supports the development of students' English skills. the program has has developed an adapted curriculum that effectively supports bilingual education. The curriculum is a national curriculum under the Ministry of Religion Affairs with some modifications to achieve the program's objectives. The innovations implemented were providing a matriculation grade in the first year of study, so the students have to spend four years to study in this program, adding English school hours up to 27 hours per week, and creating particular programs that support students' English proficiency such as School Outing Program, TOEFL/ProTEFL, LPKS, and Malhikdua Explore. Moreover, to maintain and upgrade the implementation of a modified curriculum, the program recruited alumni to become the teachers because the stakeholders consider that alumni know better the vision and mission of the program. However, this study was limited to a single institutional context, and further research is needed to explore the applicability and effectiveness of the adapted curriculum in different educational settings.

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