ICAIS — FAI UNISMUH MAKASSAR —	International Conference on Actual Islamic Studies		
	Vol. 4 No. 1	April 2026	ISSN: 2988-7925

Suara Siswa dalam Pembelajaran EFL: Tantangan dan Motivasi dalam Konteks Unik Pesantren di Deli Serdang

Student Voices on EFL Learning: Challenges and Motivations in the Unique Context of a Deli Serdang Islamic Boarding School

Adib Jasni Kharisma[1], Pirman Ginting[2], Mandra Saragih[3]

Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara[1] | email: adibjasnikharisma@umsu.ac.id
Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara[2] | email: pirmanginting@umsu.ac.id
Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara[3] | email: mandrasaragih@umsu.ac.id

Kata Kunci: suara siswa; EFL; motivasi; pesantren; trilingualisme; translanguaging

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji suara siswa mengenai tantangan dan motivasi dalam pembelajaran English as a Foreign Language (EFL) di lingkungan multibahasa Pondok Pesantren Modern Nurul Hakim, Deli Serdang. Penelitian menggunakan desain convergent parallel mixed-methods. Data kuantitatif diperoleh dari 60 siswa Madrasah Aliyah kelas X-XII yang mewakili program IPA dan IPS melalui kuesioner skala Likert, sedangkan data kualitatif diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan sekitar 15 siswa, dua focus group discussions, dan wawancara singkat dengan lima guru EFL untuk triangulasi. Hasil menunjukkan motivasi instrumental yang kuat untuk pendidikan tinggi dan karier, serta motivasi integratif untuk mengakses komunitas dan pengetahuan Muslim global. Hambatan utama meliputi kesulitan kosakata dan tata bahasa, kecemasan berbicara, terbatasnya kesempatan praktik autentik, serta beban linguistik yang dirasakan ketika siswa harus mengelola bahasa Arab, Indonesia, dan Inggris secara bersamaan. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa ekologi trilingual pesantren bukan hanya sumber interferensi, tetapi juga dapat menjadi sumber daya pembelajaran apabila guru memanfaatkan analisis kontrastif dan translanguaging secara terarah. Implikasi pedagogis mencakup pemetaan eksplisit perbedaan struktur tiga bahasa, latihan komunikasi berisiko rendah, dan penggunaan materi EFL yang terhubung dengan identitas keislaman dan tujuan profesional siswa.

Keywords: student voices; EFL; motivation; Islamic boarding school; trilingualism; translanguaging

Abstract

This study examines student voices on the challenges and motivations of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) within the multilingual environment of Nurul Hakim Modern Islamic Boarding School in Deli Serdang. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used. Quantitative data were collected from 60 Madrasah Aliyah students in Grades 10-12 representing both Science and Social Science streams through a Likert-scale questionnaire, while qualitative data were generated through semi-structured interviews with approximately 15 students, two focus group discussions, and brief interviews with five EFL teachers for triangulation. The findings indicate strong instrumental motivation for higher education and future careers, alongside integrative motivation to access global Muslim communities and international knowledge. Major challenges include vocabulary and grammatical difficulty, speaking anxiety, limited opportunities for authentic English use, and a perceived linguistic burden arising from the simultaneous management of Arabic, Indonesian, and English. The study argues that the pesantren's trilingual ecology is not merely a source of interference; it can also become a pedagogical resource when teachers deliberately employ contrastive analysis and translanguaging. Practical implications include explicit mapping of cross-linguistic differences, low-stakes communicative practice, and EFL materials connected to students' Islamic identity and professional aspirations.

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency has become increasingly important for access to higher education, professional mobility, and participation in international knowledge networks. In Indonesia, however, EFL outcomes remain uneven because learners encounter diverse pedagogical and contextual constraints, especially in institutions where English is only one component of a broader multilingual curriculum.1

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) represent a distinctive multilingual ecology. Arabic is closely associated with Qur'anic studies, classical Islamic texts, and religious identity; Indonesian functions as a national and academic language; and English is increasingly valued for global communication, higher education, and professional advancement. Rather than treating these languages as isolated systems, research on third or additional language acquisition suggests that multilingual learners draw on an interconnected linguistic repertoire and that cross-linguistic influence may arise from more than one previously learned language.2

This perspective is especially relevant to modern pesantren. Research in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools has shown that translanguaging can enable learners to use Indonesian and Arabic as resources for learning English vocabulary and meaning, while multilingual teaching practices can support interaction across classroom and dormitory contexts.3The key issue, therefore, is not simply whether Arabic competes with English, but how the three languages interact in learners' cognition, identity, and everyday communicative routines.

Previous studies on EFL in pesantren have often emphasized teaching techniques, vocabulary development, speaking performance, or teacher practices. Student-centered evidence that simultaneously examines motivation, anxiety, and the perceived burden of managing Arabic, Indonesian, and English remains comparatively limited. This gap is important because motivation is not static: instrumental goals such as career and university access can coexist with integrative goals related to identity and participation in wider communities, but persistent language difficulty and speaking anxiety can gradually weaken engagement.4

Accordingly, this study investigates student voices at Nurul Hakim Modern Islamic Boarding School in Deli Serdang through a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. It asks: (1) What motivations drive students to learn English? (2) What linguistic, psychological, and environmental challenges do they experience? and (3) How does the pesantren's trilingual ecology shape the relationship between motivation and challenge? The novelty of the study lies in treating Arabic-Indonesian-English interaction as a central analytical feature rather than a background characteristic of the institution.

METHODS

The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the

[1]Christine M. Tardy, 'The Case for a GELT Paradigm in Teaching Multilingual Writing,' Journal of Second Language Writing 69 (2025): 101232; W. Santoso, R. M. P. Silalahi, and B. S. Hutauruk, 'Investigating English as Lingua Franca in the Indonesian Multilingual Context: Perceptions of English Learners at the University,' International Journal of English Linguistics, Literature, and Education (2023).

[2] Jasone Cenoz, 'The Influence of Bilingualism on Third Language Acquisition: Focus on Multilingualism,' Language Teaching 46, no. 1 (2013): 71-86, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000218.

[3] Siti Nihayati Aribah and Intan Pradita, 'The Use of Translanguaging to Facilitate Students' English Learning in an Indonesian Pesantren,' Communications in Humanities and Social Sciences 2, no. 1 (2022): 7-13, https://doi.org/10.21924/chss.2.1.2022.27; A. S. Zarkasyi et al., 'Pendampingan Penyusunan Materi Percakapan Bahasa Arab di Pondok Pesantren Al-Ishlah Paciran Lamongan Jawa Timur,' Room of Civil Society Development 1, no. 2 (2022): 52-58.

[4]Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda, Teaching and Researching Motivation, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2021); Elaine K. Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz, and Joann Cope, 'Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety,' The Modern Language Journal 70, no. 2 (1986): 125-132.

same phase, analyzed separately, and integrated at the interpretation stage. This design was selected because the survey could identify broad motivational and challenge patterns, whereas interviews and focus groups could clarify how students interpreted those patterns in the context of pesantren life.5

The study was conducted at Nurul Hakim Modern Islamic Boarding School in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra. Using purposive sampling, the quantitative strand involved 60 Madrasah Aliyah students from Grades 10 to 12, representing both Science and Social Science streams. Five EFL teachers also participated as contextual informants. The student population was selected because they experienced the institution's Arabic-Indonesian-English language environment on a daily basis.6

Quantitative data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The instrument covered demographic information, motivation (including instrumental and integrative orientations), and perceived challenges encompassing linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, and environmental barriers. For the qualitative strand, approximately 15 students were selected for semi-structured interviews, and two focus group discussions involving 6-8 students each explored shared experiences. Brief interviews with the five EFL teachers were used to triangulate classroom and institutional perspectives.

Questionnaire data were summarized using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis involving familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and reporting. 7 Integration occurred after the two strands had been analyzed: numerical patterns were compared with recurring qualitative explanations to identify convergence, complementarity, or tension. Ethical safeguards included voluntary participation, informed consent, parental consent for minors where applicable, anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw.

RESULTS

Student Motivation: Instrumental and Integrative Drivers

The quantitative results show a strongly positive motivational profile. Career-related motivation was reported by 82% of respondents, while 85% agreed that English was important for higher education. In addition, 75% wanted English to understand global Muslim issues and 88% valued it as a means of accessing international knowledge. These patterns indicate that instrumental and integrative orientations coexist rather than operate as competing categories.8

Table 1. Student Motivations for Learning English (N = 60)

Motivation factor	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Future career	82%	12%	6%
Higher education	85%	10%	5%
Global Muslim issues	75%	15%	10%
International knowledge	88%	8%	4%

The qualitative data explain why these percentages matter. Students repeatedly connected English with professional futures, overseas study, access to scientific literature, and engagement with international Muslim scholarship. One student described English as necessary for reading medical literature and possible study abroad, while another emphasized access to Islamic lectures and ideas from scholars beyond Indonesia. These accounts suggest that English was perceived as an expansion of religious and professional horizons rather than a threat to Islamic identity.

[5]John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research, 3rd ed. (SAGE, 2017); Michael D. Fetters, Leslie A. Curry, and John W. Creswell, 'Achieving Integration in Mixed Methods Designs: Principles and Practices,' Health Services Research 48, no. 6 Pt 2 (2013): 2134-2156.

[6] Ilker Etikan, Sulaiman Abubakar Musa, and Rukayya Sunusi Alkassim, 'Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling,' American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics 5, no. 1 (2016): 1-4.

[7]Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis,' Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health 11, no. 4 (2019): 589-597.

[8]Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda, Teaching and Researching Motivation, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2021).

Linguistic, Psychological, and Environmental Challenges

High motivation did not eliminate learning difficulty. Seventy-eight percent of respondents identified linguistic difficulty, especially vocabulary and grammatical accuracy, as a major challenge, while 70% reported anxiety about making mistakes when speaking. Speaking anxiety is therefore not a peripheral issue; it interacts with linguistic difficulty and can restrict willingness to participate orally even among students who recognize the long-term value of English.9

Qualitative data revealed two context-specific barriers. First, students described limited opportunities to use English beyond the 90-minute English lesson. Second, they described the simultaneous management of Arabic, Indonesian, and English as mentally demanding. A recurrent student account was that Arabic was expected in dormitory life, Indonesian dominated formal academic communication, and English was added as another grammatical system. Because the study did not directly measure cognitive load with a validated cognitive-load instrument, this pattern is interpreted here as a perceived cognitive and linguistic burden rather than as a measured cognitive-load effect.

The Trilingual Pesantren Ecology

The trilingual environment also produced potential learning resources. Students already possessed experience in shifting between languages, noticing differences in vocabulary, and adapting language choice to setting and audience. Third-language acquisition research suggests that multilingual speakers can draw on their full repertoire, but prior languages may also produce facilitative or interfering transfer depending on structural similarity and task demands.10

This duality is visible in the present data: Arabic and Indonesian could compete with English when students mixed grammatical patterns, yet the same languages could support English learning when teachers deliberately highlighted similarities and differences. This interpretation is consistent with pesantren-based translanguaging research showing that Indonesian and Arabic can function as resources for learning English as an additional language.11

DISCUSSION

Motivation under Multilingual Pressure

The findings show that the students' motivation is both future-oriented and identity-compatible. Instrumental motives are evident in aspirations for university, careers, and access to international knowledge, while integrative motives appear in the desire to engage with global Muslim communities. Such motives can sustain effort, but they do not automatically overcome anxiety or limited opportunities for practice. Persistent difficulty can erode motivation when learners do not receive sufficient pedagogical support.12

The pesantren context makes this relationship more distinctive. Students are not learning English in a monolingual or simple bilingual setting; they are negotiating a language hierarchy in which Arabic has religious prestige, Indonesian has institutional and national utility, and English carries global academic and professional value. The contribution of this study is therefore to frame EFL motivation as operating within a trilingual ecology in which language choice is linked to purpose, identity, and institutional routine.

---

[9] Elaine K. Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz, and Joann Cope, 'Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety,' The Modern Language Journal 70, no. 2 (1986): 125-132; Zana N. Ghafar and B. R. Raheem, 'Factors Affecting Speaking Proficiency in English Language Learning: A General Overview of the Speaking Skill,' Journal of Social Science 2, no. 6 (2023): 507-518.

[10] Jasone Cenoz, 'The Influence of Bilingualism on Third Language Acquisition: Focus on Multilingualism,' Language Teaching 46, no. 1 (2013): 71-86.

[11] Siti Nihayati Aribah and Intan Pradita, 'The Use of Translanguaging to Facilitate Students' English Learning in an Indonesian Pesantren,' Communications in Humanities and Social Sciences 2, no. 1 (2022): 7-13.

[12] M. M. Idris, 'The Proposed Elements of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) for Indonesian EFL English Teachers,' SAGA Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics 2 (2021): 65-72; Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda, Teaching and Researching Motivation, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2021).

Cross-Linguistic Influence and Perceived Linguistic Burden

The reported difficulty of keeping language rules separate can be interpreted through cross-linguistic influence in third/additional language acquisition. Learners may activate features of both Indonesian and Arabic when processing English, rather than transferring from a single first language. This is important because cross-linguistic influence is not inherently negative: similarity can accelerate learning, while mismatched structures can produce predictable errors.13

For example, Indonesian and English typically allow Subject-Verb-Object clauses, whereas Arabic can prominently use Verb-Subject-Object order. A teacher can place parallel sentences side by side - English "The student wrote the lesson," Indonesian "Siswa menulis pelajaran," and Arabic "كتب الطالبُ الدرسَ" - and ask students to identify where the verb and subject appear. A second high-value contrast concerns the copula: Arabic "الطالبُ مجتهدٌ" and Indonesian "Siswa itu rajin" can occur without an overt present-tense equivalent of English "is," whereas English requires "The student is diligent." Making this contrast explicit can help reduce omission of the English verb *be*.

A third contrast concerns adjective position. Indonesian and Arabic commonly place many adjectives after the noun (e.g., *rumah besar*; *بيت كبير*), while English normally places the adjective before the noun (*a big house*). Teachers can turn these contrasts into a short "notice-compare-produce" cycle: students first notice three parallel examples, then explain the structural difference, and finally produce new English sentences in a meaningful speaking task. Such contrastive work should not become translation-only grammar teaching; it should function as a brief metalinguistic scaffold before communicative practice.

Pedagogical Implications: Contrastive Analysis and Translanguaging

The most practical implication is that teachers do not need to suppress Arabic and Indonesian in order to strengthen English. Instead, those languages can be used strategically and temporarily as scaffolds. Pesantren-based research has shown that translanguaging can support vocabulary learning and interaction when learners use Indonesian and Arabic resources to construct English meaning. 14 A teacher might, for instance, introduce a new English concept through a short Indonesian explanation, invite students to connect it with a familiar Arabic term or pattern, and then require the final task to be completed in English.

This strategy can also address speaking anxiety. Low-stakes pair rehearsal can begin with multilingual brainstorming, followed by an English-only two-minute presentation or role play. Error correction can prioritize one contrastive target at a time - for example, the English copula in one lesson and adjective-noun order in another - rather than correcting every cross-linguistic error simultaneously. This reduces the perceived burden of managing three systems and gives students a clear path from awareness to communicative control.

At the curriculum level, English materials can draw on students' integrative motivation by using topics such as global Muslim communities, science in Muslim societies, international scholarship, and professional ethics. In this way, English becomes institutionally compatible with the pesantren's religious mission while still functioning as a language of global participation. The school can also create structured English-use zones or short weekly English forums so that authentic practice is not restricted to the formal 90-minute lesson.

LIMITATIONS

The study is based on one modern Islamic boarding school and a sample of 60 students, so the findings should be interpreted contextually rather than generalized to all pesantren. The qualitative evidence deepens interpretation but does not establish causal relationships. In addition, the study did not directly measure cognitive load; references to burden reflect student perceptions of simultaneously managing multiple languages. Future research could compare several pesantren with different language policies and use validated measures of

[13] Jasone Cenoz, 'The Influence of Bilingualism on Third Language Acquisition: Focus on Multilingualism,' Language Teaching 46, no. 1 (2013): 71-86.

[14] Siti Nihayati Aribah and Intan Pradita, 'The Use of Translanguaging to Facilitate Students' English Learning in an Indonesian Pesantren,' Communications in Humanities and Social Sciences 2, no. 1 (2022): 7-13.

language anxiety, cognitive load, and proficiency to test the relationships identified here.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that EFL learning at Nurul Hakim Modern Islamic Boarding School is shaped by a productive but demanding interaction between motivation and multilingual context. Students show strong instrumental motivation for higher education and careers as well as integrative motivation to access global Muslim communities and knowledge. At the same time, linguistic difficulty, speaking anxiety, limited authentic practice, and the perceived burden of managing Arabic, Indonesian, and English constrain participation.

The central contribution is the recognition that the pesantren's trilingual ecology should not be treated only as a problem of interference. It can also function as a pedagogical resource. Explicit contrastive analysis can make structural differences visible, while translanguaging can use students' existing languages as temporary scaffolds toward more controlled English production. For teachers and administrators, the priority is therefore to design low-anxiety communicative practice, systematic contrastive support, and contextually meaningful materials that connect English with students' Islamic identity and future aspirations.

REFERENCES

Aribah, S. N., & Pradita, I. (2022). The use of translanguaging to facilitate students' English learning in an Indonesian Pesantren. Communications in Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(1), 7-13. https://doi.org/10.21924/chss.2.1.2022.27

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11(4), 589-597.

Cenoz, J. (2013). The influence of bilingualism on third language acquisition: Focus on multilingualism. Language Teaching, 46(1), 71-86. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000218

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2021). Teaching and researching motivation (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics, 5(1), 1-4.

Fetters, M. D., Curry, L. A., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Achieving integration in mixed methods designs: Principles and practices. Health Services Research, 48(6 Pt 2), 2134-2156.

Ghafar, Z. N., & Raheem, B. R. (2023). Factors affecting speaking proficiency in English language learning: A general overview of the speaking skill. Journal of Social Science, 2(6), 507-518.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. The Modern Language Journal, 70(2), 125-132.

Idris, M. M. (2021). The proposed elements of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) for Indonesian EFL English teachers. SAGA Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 2, 65-72.

Kamaliasari, S., & Amrizal, A. (2021). Aktifitas pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di pondok pesantren Nurul Hidayah Bantan dalam meningkatkan speaking performance santri. Akademika: Jurnal Keagamaan dan Pendidikan, 17(1), 14-30.

Rachman, R. F. (2021). Enhancing students' English language skills through active learning at an Islamic university. ELE Reviews: English Language Education Reviews, 1(2), 99-109.

Santoso, W., Silalahi, R. M. P., & Hutauruk, B. S. (2023). Investigating English as lingua franca in the Indonesian multilingual context: Perceptions of English learners at the university. International Journal of English Linguistics, Literature, and Education.

Tardy, C. M. (2025). The case for a GELT paradigm in teaching multilingual writing. Journal of Second Language Writing, 69, 101232.

Zarkasyi, A. S., Rofi'i, M. A., Robi'aqolbi, R., Rahmawati, F. A., Istiqomah, A., & Hazrah, A. (2022). Pendampingan penyusunan materi percakapan bahasa Arab di Pondok Pesantren Al-Ishlah Paciran Lamongan Jawa Timur. Room of Civil Society Development, 1(2), 52-58.