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## The Implementation of Bilingual Class Program in Islamic Elementary School

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Ila Amalia<sup>1</sup>, Abdul Gafur Marzuki<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin, Banten, Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu, Sulawesi Tengah, Indonesia.

\* Correspondence to: [gbudiperwira@gmail.com](mailto:gbudiperwira@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** For several decades, the expanding usage of English as an international language has resulted in a growth in its users all over the world, including in Indonesia. As a result, the bilingual education program becomes a medium for promoting English in society. This case study investigated the implementation of a bilingual class program at an Islamic elementary school in Indonesia, namely in Banten province. The participants of the study included a bilingual teacher, the school principal, the vice-principal for student affairs, and the vice-principal for curriculum division. Interviews, classroom observations, and documentation were utilized to collect the data. Meanwhile, the Miles and Huberman data analysis technique was employed to analyze the data, which consisted of data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The results elaborated on some aspects related to the practice of bilingual class programs in this school namely: the aspect of school administration, the aspect of human resources, the aspect of teaching and learning activities, and the aspect of program evaluation. The findings also revealed that the school adopted partial immersion as the bilingual program model.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism; bilingual class program; case study; Islamic school.

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### INTRODUCTION

This study presents the phenomenon of bilingualism in the field of formal education. It is widely known that bilingualism is a very broad field subject to study. It is not merely a cognitive issue but also psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic issues. Toward the start of the 21st century, it is assessed that in some measure half of the total populace was bilingual. Because of this quick development, bilingualism exists in practically all nations on the planet, in all various classes of society, and in all age gatherings (Saville-Troike, 2006; DeNicolò, 2016; Xiong & Feng, 2018). The bilingual population of the world is developing quickly as worldwide travel, correspondences and broad communications, migration, and a planetary economy make the worldwide town (Baker, 2001; Li, 2018).

Bilingualism is widely understood as a term that has been used to describe an attribute of an individual or social institution. The bilingual term includes an individual who can communicate in and comprehend two dialects (Steinberg, Nagata, and Aline, 2001). Bilingualism refers to the ability of an individual to speak fluently in two languages with equal proficiency. Bilingualism may vary in degree and type and includes different forms of language acquisition and use in different contexts (Rokita-Jaskow et al., 2022).

Bilinguals are people who speak two or more languages. They range from the migrant worker who speaks the host country's language but may not be able to read or

write it, to the professional interpreter who is completely proficient in two languages (Grosjean, 2015). May, et al (2004) explained that a bilingual program is a learning program that uses the first language and second language (for example, English) as the language of instruction for the various curriculum contents used.

In other definitions, bilingualism refers to the ability of an individual to use two or more languages effectively for communication purposes (Ovando, 2003). Thus, bilingual education is a learning approach in which a student's native language is used alongside the language of instruction. Bilingual education aims to support language development in both languages while providing academic content in a familiar linguistic context (Ovando, 2003).

Mastering a foreign language in the Indonesian context is much valuable even though there was controversy about this issue. But following the government policy on the latest school curriculum and how to cope with a 21st-century education, being able to speak in a foreign language (English particularly) is a great advantage. Especially in 21st-century education, students must have at least skills in communication and information communication technology that are connected to the global world (Hysa, 2014).

These skills are supported by the ability of language competence which is connected to the global world. According to 21st-century education, English is one of the major key subjects that should be mastered by students along with other subjects such as world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history, government, and Civics (Hysa, 2014). English is considered a global language, which is used in almost all aspects of life including education, health, technology, entertainment, lifestyle, and many more. It is considered that English is spoken by at least a quarter of the world's population and from the way its use has grown in the last decade (Harmer, 2002).

With the emergence of English as one of the most important languages in the world, some attempts are forced to implement English lesson programs more specifically through formal education at school starting from the primary until university level. It is considered that on the off chance that students rise out of essential training with a decent working order of English, they might be skillful English speakers when they get to the college level (Harmer, 2002).

Many schools have adapted bilingual classroom programs to improve students' English competence that is integrated with the school curriculum. The implementation of a bilingual classroom program generally has the goal of introducing foreign languages, such as English, to students. Schools that provide bilingual class programs are usually private schools that have independent control over school administration. It is no doubt that providing bilingual class programs requires substantial resources both human and financial resources (Puasa, Asrifan, & Chen, 2017; Heiman & Murakami, 2019).

There have been many studies conducted describing the bilingual program at schools from many subject areas. Research conducted by Fitriyani & Rasyid (2018) illustrated how a bilingual program was implemented in Islamic boarding schools to improve foreign language skills among students. The intended foreign languages were Arabic and English. The school prepared various tools for the implementation of the bilingual program from the curriculum to the social environment. On the other hand, several studies had also been carried out related to the application of a bilingual program along with the necessary resources (Miranda & Echeverry, 2010; Chi, 2017).

Several studies had investigated the effectiveness of certain bilingual program models that were highly dependent on social and political contexts. The context also related to the level of education where the bilingual program was applied (Durango Isaza

et al., 2018); (Tibategeza, 2010). Some studies had been conducted to see the effect or impact of the application of a bilingual program on students' achievement, both academic and non-academic achievement (Alanís, 2000); (Jong, 2002); (Hofstetter, 2004); (Polanco & Luft de Baker, 2018). The results of these studies indicate that bilingual programs if it is implemented in a proper way that there is significant info on the student's ability in subject matters related to English and non-English.

Based on the above explanation, many studies have been conducted on bilingual programs, however, only a few studies conducted in the Islamic school context. This choice of context is appropriate since Indonesia is a Muslim-majority country, so this study is relevant to conduct. As the evidence showed by the new trend of Islamic schools in Indonesia, Muslim communities are increasingly in need of a model of Islamic education that can meet the demands of living in the globalization era while also practicing Islamic values as the guideline for being a good Muslim (Islamic follower) (Hidayati, 2017). These findings demonstrate that Muslims continue to prefer Islamic education as long as it is managed professionally in terms of management, teaching and learning, and curriculum design (Hidayati, 2016).

An Islamic school or in a more current term Integrated Islamic School is one of the schools that is focused on the formation and development of religious character (Rohmawati, 2019). In terms of how the school is structured, this typical school incorporates both general education and religious education within a curriculum. Additionally, this institution practices the idea of Islamic education founded on the Holy Qur'an and Hadith. The introduction of this Islamic school to Indonesia's educational landscape appears to have received strong support from society. This is evident from the rise in the number of Islamic schools in Indonesia, particularly in metropolitan and suburban areas (Dewi et al., 2020).

Sutrisno & Suyatno, (2015) states that Islamic schools are the optimum type of educational institution in Indonesia because they aim to integrate the benefits of the modern schools with the Islamic boarding schools (traditional ones). Through these two benefits, it is hoped that Islamic schools can better equip their students to acquire both science and technology and strong moral character to support the development of the future generation (Fuadi, 2020). Thus, the purpose of this study is to describe the implementation of a bilingual class program in one Islamic integrated school that integrates the national curriculum (including the teaching of English as a foreign language) and the Islamic character. The focus of the current study is to describe the aspects involved in the bilingual class program, meanwhile, the sub-focus is to describe the model of a bilingual class program implemented in the school.

## METHOD

This study applies a case study as its research method. Case study research is a qualitative research approach in which researchers focus on a unit of study known as a bounded system (e.g., individual teachers, a classroom, or a school) (Gay et al., 2012). Case study research is an appropriate choice of research method for this study since it tends to describe the context of the study and the extent to which a particular program or innovation has been implemented (Gay et al., 2012). The case or the unit of study of the current study is the implementation of the bilingual class program, particularly on the aspects involved in the practice of bilingual class programs at Islamic primary schools.

The object of the research includes the fourth-grade students of a bilingual class program, a bilingual teacher, the school principal, the vice-principal for student affairs, and the vice-principal for the curriculum division. To collect the data, an unstructured interview with the participants was conducted. The instructed interview was carried out with questions prompted by the flow of the interview (Gay et al., 2012). The interview was conducted to gain more deep information concerning the practice of the bilingual class program in this school. Meanwhile, to obtain a real picture of the bilingual class program activities, classroom observations were conducted during the teaching-learning in progress. In the observation, the researchers took the role of a nonparticipant observer since she just sits at the back of the classroom to watch and record the phenomenon under study (Gay et al., 2012). The researcher used field notes to record the data being observed.

Meanwhile, the last data collection technique was documentation. The Documents consisted of school public and private records that the researchers obtain about a site in a study. The documents included in the study were archival curriculum documents, materials from the school administration, (for example: school accreditation document, school's profile), students' books, and teachers' books. Meanwhile, to analyze the data, it followed some steps in qualitative data analysis such as data reduction, data display, and conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1992). Whereas checking the validity of the data using triangulation and member checking (Sugiyono, 2009).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The focus of the study is the practice of bilingual class programs at the Islamic school, meanwhile, the sub-focuses are aspects related to the implementation of the bilingual class program and the kind of bilingual class program model. Based on the result of the interview with the school principal, vice-principal for student affairs, vice-principal for curriculum, and a bilingual teacher of the fourth grade 4 of the program, the following section will be described.

### Aspects of the Bilingual Programs School Administration

Based on the results of interviews conducted with the school principal and vice-principal for curriculum, it could be explained that the school has implemented the national curriculum, *The 2013 Curriculum*, both for regular class and bilingual class programs. The 2013 curriculum refers to a new curriculum that was implemented by the Indonesian government in 2013. The curriculum applies a scientific approach to the learning process and includes five key components known as the 5Ms: observing, questioning, experimenting, reasoning, and communicating the results (Suyanto, 2018). The difference between regular classes and bilingual classes lies in the subjects being taught in each program. There were thematic subjects for both programs and additional subjects typical for bilingual classes such as English, Mathematics, and Science. For thematic subjects, English was only used as a language of instruction, while to explain the materials, the teachers used the Indonesian language. Meanwhile, for bilingual subjects (such as English, Mathematics, and Science) the teacher used English and Indonesian as the language in the teaching and learning process.

The bilingual class is a typical program owned by this school. It was first open-enrolled in the 2015/2016 academic year. The difference between a regular class program and a bilingual class program lies in the subjects being taught. There were two additional

subjects, such as Science and Mathematics with an allocation of two hours of the lesson each week. Both of these additional subjects began to be applied in the second grade.

In addition, for the bilingual program, there was an additional time in English subject for two hours each week. So, it can be referred that Bilingual education in this context refers to the promotion and use of more than one language, in this case, Indonesian and English, for teaching and learning curriculum subjects. However, the specific content of bilingual education can vary widely depending on the curriculum configuration and context in which it is implemented (Leung, 2005).

According to the vice-principal for curriculum, the bilingual class program had been implemented for four academic years starting since the 2015/2016 academic year. The first academic year's students were currently in the sixth grade, which means that there will be the first graduate in this academic year 2021/2022. Another issue related to school administration was the collaboration with Mentari Book (a book publishing company based in Jakarta) in terms of the provision of bilingual textbooks and teachers' training or workshops to improve bilingual teachers' competence. The textbooks used in bilingual classes for Mathematics and Science were My Pals textbooks from Mentari Book Publishing which referred to the Cambridge Curriculum standards. Collaboration with the Mentari Book publishing was teachers' training or teachers' workshop. This activity was held to improve the English skills among the bilingual teachers and it was scheduled every four months in a year. Besides improving the English skills among bilingual teachers, the workshop or training was also held to improve the teachers' teaching skills and to equip the teachers with the most recent teaching strategies and teaching resources (Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, 2016).

### **Human Resources**

From the aspect of human resources, the teachers who taught in bilingual classes had been selected for both subject contents and English language proficiency. Their study, (Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, 2016) states that bilingual teachers should possess language competencies related to linguistic features, translanguaging, and intercultural communication skills for effective teaching.

Based on the result of an interview with the school principal, in recruiting the teachers for the bilingual class program, there were no standard tests to select these teachers' candidates. There were also no specific criteria required for teacher candidates for the bilingual classes. The selection was only based on the result of the interview and the English language skills which was proved by the English language proficiency test. For the level of English proficiency, it was required for every bilingual teacher to have at least a certified English proficiency such as a TOEFL (Test of English Foreign Language) certificate with the level intermediate to advanced level or B2 to C1 referring to CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) (cambridgeenglish.org). The TOEFL test is a standardized test that measures the test-taker's mastery of the English language (Montgomery, 2017). In the future, specific training for bilingual teachers is highly demanded that includes language acquisition, cultural exchange, bilingual content teaching, and technology integration (Gutierrez & Fernández, 2014).

### **Teaching and Learning Activities**

Based on the result of classroom observation conducted by the researcher and also supported by the result of the unstructured interview with the teacher, it was revealed

that the teaching-learning process was held in two languages, there were English and Indonesian. The use of English was stressed more during the learning process's starting and closing activities.

Apart from that, English was utilized when the teacher provided the students with directions for their assignments. In addition, the students were used to ask, answer, and request permission in English. English was also used when the teacher explained the lessons. The teacher would use the Indonesian language to describe the things that required more extensive explanation so that the students could understand them. According to (García & Wei, 2013) this kind of situation is categorized as the mainstream+withdrawal foreign language classes in which students are in mainstream classes for all subjects and in addition are pulled out or withdrawn for foreign language instruction with a language teacher. This is also categorized as weak bilingualism (García & Wei, 2013).

This research was conducted in an Islamic school that teaches things or habits to Islamic values. It conveys Islamic teachings as integral parts of the national curriculum. nationalistic and religious values to students through habituated activities in school culture to habituate the students to stand on attitude, behave, and think properly according to Islamic teachings (Fuadi, 2020).

Based on the result of the interview with the vice-principal for curriculum, in general, the school had two habituation programs like the school's character strengthening programs. They were the school habituation and the bilingual class program habituation. The school habituation included lining up before entering the classroom, reading The Holy Quran, reading and memorizing *Asmaul Husna* (the beautiful and good names of God), praying before studying, reading hadiths (the sayings of Prophet Muhammad), performing the *Dhuha* prayer (praying which is done in the morning) in the congregation, singing the national anthem, and reciting *hamdalah* (thanking God for his blessings) after studying (Fuadi, 2020).

In another hand, the habituation related to the bilingual programs included English dialogue practice (short conversation) once a week every Wednesday, memorizing vocabulary related to the lessons being learned that day, spelling bee competition, storytelling, drama performance, and reading day. In addition, English was also used as formal language in the information boards, the school bulletins, and other information related to student activities during the school year. Based on the explanation above, the school habituation reflected in the bilingual class program tends to enrich the students' experience in using English, meanwhile, the habituation in Islamic teachings was by the Islamic education which tends to promote Islamic values in education in the forms of teaching Islamic beliefs, values, morals, and practices as well as Arabic language (Ayuningsih et al., 2020).

### **Program Evaluation**

From the aspect of the evaluation of the program, the school had not yet determined a standardized evaluation tool to measure the success of the bilingual class program. The evaluation of the bilingual program itself can take place for a variety of purposes (Baker, 2011). Since the foreign language used in the bilingual class is English, the effectiveness of the program in improving English skills among the students was only monitored through the students' learning achievement on English subjects at the end of the semester. So this kind of evaluation is categorized as summative evaluation, in which

the student's performance was measured using a wide variety of language proficiency and achievement test at the end of the program (Baker, 2011).

Meanwhile, the other subject also used the same evaluation test as the regular class. However, the kinds of tests to evaluate the students' output in learning were in the form of summative and formative tests. Summative assessments were tests that evaluate how much students had learned throughout a course. Meanwhile, formative tests were tests that evaluate how students were learning the materials throughout a course (Baker, 2011). In the classroom, formative tests took place during a course and summative tests took place at the end of the course. The formative and summative tests applied to both regular class and bilingual classes. The difference was in the language utilized in the test items, which were written in English in the bilingual class.

According to the results of interviews with the school principal, a standardized English test, such as the TOEFL (Test of English Foreign Language) might be held in the future for bilingual students at the end of the program or before the students graduated. The test would be utilized in evaluating the level of English language proficiency achieved by the students after they finished the bilingual class program. The TOEFL which stands for Trial of English as a Foreign Language is a government-sanctioned test that actions a test taker's dominance of the English language (Montgomery, 2017). The test likewise gauges the capacity of non-local English speakers to utilize and comprehend English as it is utilized.

### **Kind of Bilingual Class Program**

Based on the result of the interview with the school principal, it was revealed that the purpose of the implementation of the bilingual program at this school was among others: (1) preparing the students for the next educational level (secondary school) where English is a compulsory subject, (2) upgrading educational services/facilities to meet the needs of the school, (3) establishing a curriculum, and (4) to address the needs of the society. According to Fishman in Margana & Sukarno (2011), there are three reasons for the implementation of a bilingual program, namely: (1) language maintenance, (2) a transitional purpose, and (3) an enrichment program.

The first reason refers to keeping the local language or the first language alive and continuing to be used in communication. The second reason has the understanding that the use of bilinguals is used as a temporary goal (transitional purpose) to master the target/foreign language to the fullest. The third reason, the bilingual system is used as a language enrichment program that allows learners to be able to use both languages according to their functions and uses (García & Wei, 2013).

Based on the various objectives of bilingual education mentioned above, the enrichment program is the main reason for the implementation of English as the second language of teaching instruction in the bilingual classroom program in this school. It is correlated with the second purpose mentioned by the principal that one of the purposes to implement the bilingual class program was to improve the school services and facilities. In this case, the parents who want to enroll their children in this school have many choices on the class programs they want to choose. Through this bilingual class program, the students are expected to have foreign language skills that might be useful for their academic or non-academic purposes (García & Wei, 2013).

The bilingual program model implemented in this school has adopted the bilingual partial immersion program model. Partial immersion is the use of English that is not fully

used in the learning process in the classroom (Li, 2018; Heiman & Murakami, 2019). This immersion model has eight characteristics, namely (1) the second/foreign language is used as the language of instruction besides the first language, (2) the immersion curriculum is in line with the first language curriculum, (3) there is tolerance for the use of the first language, (4) the model aims to form additive bilingual, (5) apperception is limited to the classroom context, (6) students have the same level of mastery of second language, (7) culture developed in the classroom is local culture, and (8) teachers involved in mastering two languages (Margana & Sukarno, 2011; DeNicolo, 2016).

This bilingual immersion program model is widely used in several countries because it has flexibility in the use of the first language and second language in the classroom (May, et al., 2004). The usage rates of the two languages are as follows: 90% (second language) - 10% (first language), 80% (second language) - 20% (first language), 70% (second language) - 30% (first language), 60% (second language) - 40% (first language), and 50% (second language) - 50% (first language) (May, et al., 2004). Based on observations in class it showed that the teacher used the proportion of 70% (second language) - 30% (first language) where the first language was merely used when explaining material that requires emphasis to be more understood by the students. Meanwhile, for the rest of the teaching activities, the teacher used English in explaining and giving assignment instructions.

Concerning foreign languages (English) as the language of instruction in delivering material in the classroom in bilingual education programs, Chi (2017) stated in his research that in bilingual education, the second language (English) must be the dominant language. He added that the use of the native language must be limited to certain cases, such as giving clarifications or in-depth explanations. In addition, English must be used not only in teaching and learning but also in other communication contexts. In other words, students will benefit from the application of this immersion model gradually to an English-speaking environment.

Chi's argument seems to focus on the bilingual model of full immersion (total immersion), where the learning process undertaken by the teacher uses the English language to the fullest (Margana & Sukarno, 2011). The bilingual learning model that uses total immersion occupies the position of the first language as a transitional language until the students master the second language (foreign language; English). It has the major implication that the use of the first language as much as possible is minimized.

However, the bilingual model applied in the school, which is the object of the research, employed a partial immersion learning model that applied a second language/English in the classroom without eliminating the first language/Indonesian language. This is consistent with the statement (Roberts, 1995) in his initial research, which stated that the general purpose of the bilingual model of immersion was to promote bilingualism and obliteration with additional knowledge in terms of language and culture (additive bilingualism).

The importance of introducing English as a foreign language in an education system is also consistent with the research conducted by Tibategeza (2010) which proposed a 50-50 Dual Language Model bilingual education model in Tanzania. The model proposed in Tatigian's research aimed to promote bilingualism and literacy in which Kiswahili (the first language in Tanzania) and English were used as the language of instruction at primary and secondary education levels. According to Tibategeza, with this model and strong intention and support from the government, "additive bilingualism" at the school level could be realized. It can be concluded that promoting two languages (English and Indonesian) is one



of the objectives of the implementation of bilingual education in this school. Another main objective is to prepare the students for higher education levels in terms of English skills. From the learning process and other related aspects, the use of the Indonesian language is still used and maintained. It gives the positive view that English as an additional language could enrich students' insights and knowledge that might be very useful in later life.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be concluded that promoting two languages (English and Indonesian) is one of the objectives of the implementation of bilingual education in this school. Another main objective is to prepare the students for higher education levels in terms of English skills. From the learning process and other related aspects, the use of the Indonesian language is still used and maintained. It gives the positive view that English as an additional language could enrich students' insights and knowledge that might be very useful in later life. From these objectives and their characteristics, it can be confirmed that this school has implemented the partial immersion bilingual model. From the research findings, it was also revealed that a few aspects related to the implementation of the bilingual program in this school can be explained. These aspects are school administration, human resources, teaching and learning activities, and program evaluation.

This study is situated in a specific context where the implementation of the bilingual program under Islamic values and characteristics is still under-investigated. As with other research in bilingual education, this study is not without its limitations. Firstly, this is a small-scale study that includes only one class and one bilingual teacher as the subject of the study. As bilingual education programs evolve along with the fast growth of English use, further research may consider conducting various levels of schools and grades. The data gathered from various levels and grades will strengthen the findings of the research. Secondly, the findings of the present study were supported by incomprehensive data, so further study regarding this topic with additional data is needed. However, despite its limitations, this study is a useful reference for the literature on bilingual education programs, especially in Indonesia's context where English is a foreign language. Moreover, since the study of the use of English in a minority-speaking English community within the Islamic education context is still limited, the present study has given a new contribution to a new field of bilingual education study.

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