

Establishing Management of English Fun Learning for Islamic Boarding-Based School Students at MI Al Ma'had An Nur Bantul

Mujawazah

Institut Ilmu Al Qur'an An Nur Yogyakarta, Indonesia

mujawazah@nur.ac.id

Abstract: This research study aims to explore the management of fun and engaging English learning for students at MI Al Ma'had An Nur, a pesantren-based (Islamic boarding school) elementary school. Considering the unique educational environment that integrates formal education with Islamic values, the research focuses on strategies that align English language learning with the students' cultural and religious context. Through qualitative methods, including classroom observation, teacher interviews, and student feedback, this research indicates effective practices that increase motivation, participation, and language retention. The result shows that games, storytelling, songs, and interactive group activities significantly enhance students' enthusiasm and comprehension. In addition, linking Islamic values to English learning materials can make the learners more comfortable and involved in the classroom process. This research may provide guidance for teachers in similar contexts to develop joyful and appropriate English learning experiences.

Keywords: English, Fun Learning, Management, Young Learner, Pesantren-Based School

Introduction

In today's rapidly globalizing world, English proficiency has become essential for students across various educational settings, including those studying in Islamic boarding schools. English is no longer only important for students who aspire to study abroad; it has become a vital tool for navigating the digital age.¹ Most digital content, from educational resources to everyday communication and entertainment, is presented in English. Students living in this digital era must develop a strong command of English to access and comprehend information effectively, enabling them to participate meaningfully in the global knowledge economy.²

¹ Ravi Kumar, "English Language and Digital Literacy: Navigating the Information Age," *Journal of International English Research Studies (JIERS)* 1, no. 2 (2023),

<https://languagejournals.com/index.php/englishjournal/article/view/11>.

² Mark Warschauer, "The Changing Global Economy and the Future of English Teaching," *Tesol Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2012), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/3587741>.

Focusing on young learners, particularly elementary students, preparing them early on to learn English is crucial. According to Nunan young children's brains are highly receptive to absorbing new information and building a solid language foundation. This developmental stage allows them to acquire language skills more naturally and easily than older learners. Early exposure to English enhances linguistic competence and lays the groundwork for more advanced language acquisition in the future.³ For students in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), integrating English learning at this foundational stage can bridge cultural and educational gaps in an increasingly interconnected world.⁴

Moreover, teaching English to young learners should be imaginative and enjoyable to maximize their motivation and engagement. The importance of creating playful and creative environments where children can find joy in games, stories, and other interactive experiences. This nurturing atmosphere helps transform language learning from a task into an enjoyable activity.⁵ Relating Cameron's emphasis on encouraging young learners to actively construct meaning from the language they encounter to the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) highlights a crucial pedagogical approach in these institutions.⁶ *Pesantren*, traditionally focused on religious and moral education, can benefit significantly from incorporating this learner-centered, interactive method in teaching English.⁷ By allowing students to engage actively with English through meaningful communication, rather than rote memorization, students at *pesantren* can develop a deeper understanding of the language within contexts that resonate with their daily lives and values.⁸

³ David Nunan, "Teaching English to Young Learners," in *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (England: Routledge, 2016).

⁴ Hafiz Taj Din, "The Contribution of Islamic Education to Bridging Global Knowledge Gaps," *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2025), <https://www.pakjip.com/index.php/pjip/article/view/260>.

⁵ Stoimcheva-Kolarska and Desislava Lyubomirova, "The Impact of a Relaxed and Fun Learning Environment on the Second Language Learning," *Turquoise International Journal of Educational Research and Social Studies* 2, no. 1 (2020), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED606062>.

⁶ Lynne Cameron, *Teaching Languages to Young Learners* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷ Muhammad Lutfi Alwi, "The Islamic Vocabulary Philanthropy in Students' Enhancing English Language Learning at As' Adiyah Islamic Boarding School Sengkang" (IAIN Parepare, 2024).

⁸ Ahmad Madkur et al., "Context-Responsive Pedagogy in English Language Teaching in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools," *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 18, no. 3 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v18i3.21085>.

Recent data indicate that English learning in *pesantren* presents both opportunities and challenges. *Pesantren* students have the potential to develop English language habits by transferring their existing linguistic skills from languages like Arabic.⁹ Some modern *pesantren* are adopting innovative, student-centered approaches such as English clubs and immersion programs to increase motivation and enjoyment in English learning. However, challenges remain, including students' perception of English as separate from Islamic studies and difficult to learn, limited competent English teachers, and insufficient facilities.¹⁰ Despite these obstacles, students' attitudes towards English language learning in *pesantren* show positive enthusiasm, with a 70% favorable attitude reported in a 2025 study of a major *pesantren* in West Kalimantan. Institutional support plays a critical role in shaping these positive attitudes and providing autonomy for English learning activities. Additionally, modern *pesantren* integrate English as a global communication tool through bilingual policies and create language environments, transforming traditional language culture toward more communicative use.¹¹ This evolving approach supports the establishment of effective, enjoyable English learning management for *pesantren*-based school students amid the digital era and globalization challenges.

Pesantren such as MI Al Ma'had An Nur have historically been pivotal in nurturing their students' religious knowledge and character. These institutions began as highly traditional settings, primarily focused on "*tafaqquh fi al-din*" – the deepening of Islamic knowledge essential for guiding personal and communal life. The *pesantren* structure emphasizes a comprehensive approach to learning, where students immerse themselves in classical Islamic texts and teachings to acquire religious scholarship and internalize values that mold their behavior and outlook based on Islamic ideals.¹²

⁹ Nanda Sholihah, Apri Wardana Ritonga, and Ayu Desrani, "Environmental and Institutional Support: A Study of English Language Education in *Pesantren* Settings," *JELITA* 6, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56185/jelita.v6i1.878>.

¹⁰ Sonia Aprilia, "Students' Attitude Towards English Language Teaching and Learning in Islamic Boarding School: A Mixed-Method Research at Pondok *Pesantren* Darussalam Sengkubang" (Universitas Tanjungpura, 2024), <http://36.95.239.66/3736/>.

¹¹ Adam Hafidz Al Fajar, "The Development of Arabic and English Language Culture in Modern Islamic Boarding Schools," *Jurnal Paradigma* 17, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.53961/paradigma.v17i1.309>.

¹² Muhammad Iksan, Husnaini, and Marsruddin, "Implementation of Weekly English Program with Fun Learning Method for *Pesantren* Students,"

Central to the mission of these *pesantren* is their unwavering commitment to moral and character development. The importance of *akhlak*, or noble character, is closely woven into both daily routines and the broader educational goals.¹³ Through habituation, exemplary conduct by teachers, and structured communal living, students are taught to embody virtues like honesty, responsibility, social awareness, and respect for others. This holistic approach means that the knowledge gained is not merely theoretical; it is applied in real life, shaping students into individuals who can serve as positive examples and contribute meaningfully to society as devout Muslims and ethical community members.¹⁴ However, nowadays, some schools of this type begin to grow step by step from traditional to modern. One proof is having English in their curriculum. One of the schools is MI Al Ma'had An Nur. English is part of the curriculum at this school, but it is often considered one of the most challenging subjects and difficult to relate to the students' daily lives.

Based on a literature review, several studies highlight the importance of English language learning management in Islamic boarding schools to create a fun and effective learning environment. Wahyu Riana's research revealed that the Al Anwar Petanang Islamic boarding school runs a bilingual program with systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation to improve English and Arabic language skills.¹⁵ A study by Rudiyanto at the Mathlabul Ulum Islamic Boarding School emphasizes structured learning management that manages supporting and inhibiting factors well to improve foreign language skills.¹⁶ Apart from that, research from Jazmi Zulhilmi Putra highlights the relationship between foreign language program management

Ethical Lingua: Journal of Language Teaching and Literature 9, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30605/25409190.479>.

¹³ Hati Murdani and Ahmad Fauzi, "Developing Noble Morals in Children through Al-Ghazali's Concept of Moral Education," *Berstari* 21, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36667/bestari.v21i1.1550>.

¹⁴ Abdullah Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Islamic Education in Contemporary World: Traditions, Rearticulations & Transformation* 9, no. 11 (2018), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110335>.

¹⁵ Wahyu Riana, "Analisis Program Bilingual Arab Inggris Dalam Menunjang Kemampuan Maharatul Kalam Santri "(Studi Kasus Di Pondok Pesantren Al-Anwar Petanang)"" (Universitas Jambi, 2023).

¹⁶ Rudiyanto, "Manajemen Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab-Inggris Dalam Meningkatkan Keterampilan Berbahasa Asing Santri Mathlabul Ulum Jambu Lenteng Sumenep" (IAIN Madura, 2022).

and *pesantren* marketing.¹⁷ Other research emphasizes the importance of needs-based learning planning for *pesantren* for meaningful and enjoyable learning, especially in the digital era.¹⁸

Research on the management practice of English fun learning in Islamic boarding schools is interesting to reveal, with this article's novelty lying in its focus on integrating innovative, student-centered strategies to enhance the enjoyment and effectiveness of English learning, particularly by addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by digital media integration in the current educational landscape. To overcome these challenges, this research explores the management practice of English fun learning, an approach designed to make language learning easier, more interactive, and relevant for *pesantren-based* students. Using role play, skits, games, storytelling, nursery songs, and other student-centered activities aims to increase a positive attitude toward English. The aim is not only to teach English as a subject but also to create an immersive environment where students at *pesantren* are motivated to learn and use the language confidently in their daily lives.

Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design because it focuses on providing a comprehensive, straightforward description of the teachers' perspectives on the challenges of teaching English in small groups and identifying effective fun learning strategies in a *pesantren-based* elementary school setting.¹⁹ Qualitative descriptive research is suitable here as it aims to explore and summarize events, answering "who," "what," "where," and "how" questions, providing rich, contextual insights without theoretical explanations, which fits the need to understand the learning environment and pedagogical approaches aligned with religious and cultural values.

Participants included 32 students from grades 4 to 6 and 3 English teachers at MI Al Ma'had An Nur, selected purposively to ensure representation of varied academic performance and interest in English. The sample size is justifiable to enable an in-depth exploration while maintaining

¹⁷ Jazmi Zulhilmi Putra, "Manajemen Pemasaran Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Di Pesantren Modern Darul Ilmi Indonesia" (UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2024).

¹⁸ Dhuhaa Isti'anah et al., "Manajemen Kurikulum Pendidikan Islam Di Era Digital: Studi Kasus Pengelolaan Kurikulum Pondok Pesantren Imam Asy Syafi'i (PPIA) Banyuwangi," *Al I'tibar: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30599/sfhgek07>.

¹⁹ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (United Kingdom: Sage Publication Ltd., 2017).

manageability, reflecting typical qualitative sampling principles focusing on relevance over quantity.²⁰

Data collection spanned approximately two months and involved multiple instruments: classroom observation documenting teaching strategies, student engagement, and learning outcomes; semi-structured interviews with teachers capturing their practices, challenges, and views on fun learning integration; short questionnaires for students to provide feedback on their preferences and experiences; and documentation of lesson plans, teaching materials, and student work for instructional and engagement analysis. These instruments were validated through expert review and pilot testing to ensure credibility and relevance.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, involving coding transcripts and notes to identify recurrent patterns and themes related to teaching challenges, student engagement, and fun learning practices. This method facilitates a systematic organization and interpretation of descriptive data aligned with the study's objectives. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent from participants and their guardians, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and allowing participants to withdraw at any time without consequence. The study was approved by the relevant institutional ethics committee to uphold participant rights and research integrity.

Results and Discussion

This research discussed managing fun learning strategies in the English classroom for *Pesantren*-based students at MI Al Ma'had An Nur. The results are drawn based on data analysis from the previously explained method and are described as follows.

Three challenges were found in the English classroom at MI Al Ma'had An Nur. First, it deals with the limited vocabulary. Students struggle with vocabulary retention due to limited exposure outside of classroom settings. It is undoubtedly not a good situation. Vocabulary is one part of English that plays a significant role in understanding and communicating all thoughts in written or spoken form.²¹ The limited vocabulary will be a problem for the students when communicating in English.

Secondly, it deals with the fear of making mistakes. Some responded that they are reluctant to use English because they fear speaking it incorrectly. The last is coping with the monotonous teaching methods. Some responded

²⁰ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan (Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D)* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2019).

²¹ Bunga Kirana and Jade Jatuporn, "The Use of 'English Fun Learning' Program to Teach Vocabulary," *Applied Research in English Education (AREE)* 1, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26714/aree.1.2.2023.68-72>.

that the teachers typically relied on textbook-based instruction, which many students found boring. Teachers should transform learning activities into enjoyable and engaging methods. Educators can explore innovative and imaginative teaching strategies to address students' learning difficulties, including their disinterest and lack of focus on the subject matter.²² Considering the challenges explained previously, the class management during the learning process needs to be improved so that these problems can be addressed and do not persist. Managing an English classroom by applying fun learning can be a good choice. It is about how to make an engagement balanced and classroom management itself. Three ways are suggested for linking to managing the English fun learning for *the students of the pesantren-based school at MI Al Ma'had An Nur Bantul* as follows.

English Fun Learning by Implementing Games, Nursery Songs, Role-Plays, and Storytelling

Implementing games, nursery songs, role-plays, and storytelling as methods for teaching English is highly effective in creating an engaging learning environment. These approaches make learning enjoyable and facilitate better language absorption by catering to different learning styles. Such interactive and playful strategies significantly increase students' motivation and participation, which is crucial in language acquisition.²³ Incorporating fun elements helps transform the classroom atmosphere from a potentially stressful experience into a relaxed and inviting space, where students feel more willing to take risks and experiment with new vocabulary and grammar.

One of the key benefits of using games and songs in learning English is their ability to reduce anxiety associated with unfamiliar vocabulary and language structures. Many students tend to feel intimidated or embarrassed when encountering new words or when required to speak spontaneously. The playful nature of games, combined with the repetitive and rhythmic qualities of nursery songs, creates a low-pressure environment that encourages students to engage without fear of making mistakes. This experiential,

²² Zanyar Nathir Ghafar, "Enjoying Funny Ways for Learning English Language Skills: An Overview," *Journal of Digital Learning and Distance Education* (JDLDE) 2, no. 8 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56778/jdlde.v2i7.176>.

²³ Nurul An-Nisa and Tono Suwartono, "Fun Ways in Learning English," *Journal of Applied Linguistics (ALTICS)* 2, no. 1 (2020), <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tono-Suwartono/publication/372195913>.

immersive learning promotes retention and enables students to associate positive emotions with language learning, vital for long-term success.²⁴

Role-plays and storytelling further extend these benefits by fostering creativity and communication skills. Role-playing allows students to practice real-life conversations in a supportive setting, improving their confidence and fluency. On the other hand, storytelling stimulates imagination and contextual understanding, making abstract language concepts more concrete and relatable.²⁵ Moreover, these activities enhance cultural awareness and empathy by allowing students to step into different characters and perspectives, enriching their learning experience beyond mere vocabulary and grammar.

To complement classroom activities, organizing an English camp is another effective strategy to sustain student interest and enthusiasm. English camps provide an immersive environment where students can enjoy learning the language outside the conventional classroom setting.²⁶ Such camps often include diverse fun activities that reinforce language skills while promoting social interaction and teamwork.²⁷ This holistic approach helps combat classroom boredom and keeps the learning process dynamic and engaging, which is essential in maintaining students' motivation over time.

At MI Al Ma'had An Nur, integrating these diverse methods can create a joyful and supportive English learning environment tailored to students' needs. By blending games, songs, role-plays, storytelling, and experiential learning through English camps, the school can cultivate an atmosphere where students feel challenged and excited to learn. This comprehensive strategy improves language proficiency and builds positive attitudes towards learning English, setting a strong foundation for lifelong communication skills.

²⁴ Elycheikh Ahmedtelba, "Rethinking ESL Education: Integrating Holistic and Experiential Learning Models," *Creative Education* 16, no. 4 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2025.164035>.

²⁵ Mackenzie S. Rose and Marcus Johnson, "The Power of Storytelling: Creatively Facilitating Conceptual Change in the Classroom," *JERAP* 15, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5590/JSBHS.2025.19.1635>.

²⁶ Pichitra Iamsamai et al., "The Roles of One-Day English Camp in Improving Language Learning Experiences of Primary School EFL Learners in Thailand from Learners' and Facilitators' Perspectives," *Lawarath Social E-Journal* 7, no. 1 (2025), <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/lawarathjo/article/view/275667>.

²⁷ Meida Rachmawati et al., "The English Camps as Method of Promoting Fun English at Elementary School Level in Indonesia," *Tapis: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmiah* 4, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32332/tapis.v4i2.2563>.

English Fun Learning by Integrating Vocabulary with Pesantren Values

Integrating Islamic values into English learning in a *pesantren* setting offers a unique and culturally harmonious approach to language education. By incorporating Islamic-themed vocabulary and contextual examples, teachers at MI Al Ma'had An Nur can create lessons that resonate deeply with students' identities and beliefs. This approach facilitates language acquisition and ensures that learning is meaningful and relevant, reinforcing students' connection between their faith and daily academic activities. For instance, using words and phrases drawn from Islamic teachings helps students expand their vocabulary while maintaining an appreciation for their cultural and religious background.²⁸

One effective way to implement this method is through storytelling that intertwines Islamic moral lessons with English language practice. Stories are powerful teaching tools; they enable students to encounter new vocabulary in context and grasp the nuances of language use.²⁹ When stories feature Islamic concepts such as patience, charity, or honesty, students can relate the language exercise to values they already understand and respect. This relevance makes the learning process more engaging and motivates students to participate actively, as they see the immediate benefit of mastering English within a familiar framework.³⁰

Furthermore, embedding religious themes in English lessons can promote comprehension by simultaneously appealing to students' cognitive and emotional faculties. Language learning is not just about memorizing words or grammar rules; it involves understanding cultural contexts and interpreting meaning.³¹ Teachers tap into students' prior knowledge and experiences using Islamic-themed content, enabling deeper cognitive connections. This approach fosters empathy and moral development, as

²⁸ Mohamad Abdalla, "Exploring Tarbiyah in Islamic Education: A Critical Review of the English- and Arabic-Language Literature," *Critical Perspectives on the Philosophy of Education* 15, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15050559>.

²⁹ Bonnie J. Nicholas, Marian J. Rossiter, and Marilyn L. Abbott, "The Power of Story in the ESL Classroom," *Canadian Modern Language Review* 67, no. 2 (2011), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.67.2.247>.

³⁰ Mohammad Zuhail Fathur Rohman, Moch. Chotib, and Abdul Muhith, "Islamic Education Teachers' Efforts in Instilling Islamic Values Through Prophet and Companion Stories in the Classroom," *Islamic Management: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30868/im.v8i01.7791>.

³¹ Claire Kramsch, "Language and Culture in Second Language Learning," in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture* (England: Routledge, 2014).

students reflect on the ethical lessons within the stories while practicing English, supporting holistic educational goals.³²

Culturally acceptable instruction is crucial in preserving the integrity of students' identities while introducing new knowledge. In *pesantren*, where religious values are central, the clash between secular content and spiritual teachings can sometimes create resistance or disengagement among learners.³³ Integrating Islamic values into English lessons respects and enhances students' worldview, promoting a positive attitude towards language learning. This cultural alignment helps reduce anxiety or reluctance related to foreign language acquisition, creating a safe and supportive learning environment.³⁴

This blended pedagogical strategy can prepare students linguistically, morally, and socially for future roles in a globalized world. Mastery of English combined with a strong foundation in Islamic ethics allows students to navigate diverse cultural settings while maintaining their beliefs.³⁵ By consciously intertwining religious values with language education, schools can develop well-rounded individuals who are competent communicators and principled members of society, capable of bridging cultural divides with respect and understanding.

English Fun Learning in Practicing Group Discussions and Group Work

The last way to manage English fun learning for MI Al Ma'had An Nur students is through peer teaching and group work. This strategy has shown significant benefits in fostering a more engaging and supportive learning environment. Peer teaching allows students to take on the role of both learner and teacher, which promotes more profound understanding and retention of

³² Dewi Puspitasari et al., "Integrating Moral Values into EFL Learning through a Multimodal Project: A Case Study," *Educational Process: International Journal (EDUPIJ)* 14, no. 1 (2025), <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1338853>.

³³ Imam Mujahid, "Islamic Orthodoxy-Based Character Education: Creating Moderate Muslim in a Modern Pesantren in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.185-212>.

³⁴ Umar, Muhammad Aulia Taufiqi, and M Bambang Purwanto, "Promoting Religious Moderation through English Language Teaching: Strategies and Challenges in Islamic Educational Settings," *Eternal* 15, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26877/eternal.v15i2.443>.

³⁵ Rafika Rabba Farah, Jarum, and Puji Sumarsono, "Navigating Western and Islamic Cultural Values in English Education: A Narrative Case Study of Teachers at International Islamic Boarding School," *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* 10, no. 1 (2025), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1467858>.

the language as students explain concepts to one another.³⁶ Group work, meanwhile, encourages collaboration, enabling learners to practice English in real communicative contexts that closely mimic natural language use outside the classroom. This interactive dynamic contrasts with the often passive receipt of knowledge in traditional teaching, thus making learning more active and enjoyable for students.

Several students reported feeling more comfortable practicing English within peer groups than in whole-class instruction or individual drills. This comfort stemmed mainly from a reduction in performance anxiety, which can be a significant barrier to speaking a foreign language. When learners work with peers rather than under the direct scrutiny of a teacher, they often feel less pressured and more willing to experiment with language.³⁷ The supportive peer environment decreases the fear of being corrected publicly, which allows students to take greater risks in their language output, a critical step toward fluency.

Moreover, using games and group activities in these peer settings further heightens student engagement and motivation. Learning English through play introduces a fun, low-stakes atmosphere that helps to normalize making mistakes as part of the acquisition process.³⁸ This gamified approach creates a dynamic where errors are not punished but seen as opportunities for learning and growth.³⁹ Increased interest and enthusiasm are essential for sustained language study, especially among young learners who might otherwise lose motivation due to the abstract nature of language learning.

Maulana and Fahriany contribute important insights to this approach by highlighting the need for positive reinforcement within peer group activities. Their research suggests that affirming students' efforts and successes encourages continued participation and boosts self-confidence. They emphasize that teachers must ensure equitable attention across all group members so that no student is left behind or disengaged.⁴⁰ Such balanced

³⁶ Rolf K Baltzersen, *Effective Use of Collective Peer Teaching in Teacher Education: Maximizing Student Learning* (Routledge: Britania, 2024).

³⁷ Stephen D. Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom* (United States of Amerika: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2015).

³⁸ Lori Dill Cohen, "Authentic Low-Stakes Practice to Make Meaning Lasting for ELLs: Creating Vocabulary Chants and Songs to Enhance the Word Generation Curriculum" (Otterbein University, 2022).

³⁹ Faraón Llorens-Largo et al., "Gamification of the Learning Process: Lessons Learned," *IEEE Revista Iberoamericana de Tecnologías Del Aprendizaje* 11, no. 4 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1109/RITA.2016.2619138>.

⁴⁰ Rivki Surya Maulana and Fahriany Fahriany, "Challenges of Teaching English to Young Learners in Small Classroom," *Journal of English*

encouragement promotes inclusivity and helps to develop social and linguistic skills within the group setting.

This nuanced understanding of peer teaching and group work has practical implications for educators designing small-group English courses, particularly in offline environments typical of many schools like MI Al Ma'had An Nur . Teachers can structure activities that foster interaction in manageable groups, monitor group dynamics carefully, and provide timely, individualized feedback. This approach enhances language competence and nurtures social interaction and teamwork skills, which are valuable beyond the language classroom.

Peer teaching and group work represent a multifaceted method for enhancing fun, effective English learning among young learners. By reducing anxiety, increasing engagement through interactive play, and thoughtfully applying positive reinforcement, educators can create supportive environments optimal for language development. The experiences and findings from MI Al Ma'had An Nur offer helpful guidance for teachers aiming to implement small-group strategies that maximize student participation and learning outcomes in English language education.

Enhancing Management of English Learning at MI Al Ma'had An Nur Bantul: Overcoming Vocabulary, Anxiety, and Monotony

The research findings reveal three prominent challenges faced by students at MI Al Ma'had An Nur in learning English: limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and monotonous teaching methods. Limited vocabulary is a critical barrier as students have minimal exposure to English outside of classroom settings, affecting their communication ability. The essential role of vocabulary in mastering English. Students cannot express their thoughts adequately without sufficient vocabulary, hindering their written and oral communication.⁴¹ This challenge underscores the need for a learning environment with repeated and meaningful language exposure.

Fear of making mistakes is a second significant obstacle identified in this setting. Many students hesitate to speak English due to anxiety over incorrect usage, which restricts their language practice and hinders fluency development. This fear can create a self-reinforcing cycle where students avoid speaking, leading to limited progress. This research suggests that addressing emotional and psychological barriers is as vital as improving students' language skills. Therefore, management strategies should focus on building a safe, encouraging environment that reduces anxiety and boosts confidence.

Educational Study (JEES) 8, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31932/jees.v8i1.4077>.

⁴¹ Ruzmetova Shahodat Komiljonovna, "Teaching English Vocabulary for Specific Purposes: A Comprehensive Guide," *Research Focus* 3, no. 9 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13852012>.

The third challenge is the prevalence of monotonous, textbook-based teaching methods, which cause disengagement and boredom among students. Traditional approaches often lack interactive elements, causing the learning experience to be passive rather than dynamic. Gregory and Kaufeldt highlight the necessity of transforming these methods into engaging, interactive activities that sustain students' attention and interest.⁴² This calls for innovative pedagogical approaches incorporating active participation and enjoyment, essential for motivating pesantren-based students with different cultural and learning expectations.

Introducing fun learning strategies—such as games, nursery songs, role-plays, and storytelling—was identified as an effective means to create a more engaging and supportive learning environment. These interactive approaches cater to various learning styles and help students absorb language more naturally. Such playful strategies increase student participation and motivation, turning the classroom into a relaxed space where students feel comfortable experimenting with language.⁴³ This shift can significantly counteract the fear of making mistakes and help students retain vocabulary more effectively.

One particular advantage of games and nursery songs is their ability to create a low-pressure learning atmosphere. The repetitive, rhythmic nature of songs and the playful context of games help reduce students' anxiety and embarrassment.⁴⁴ This positive emotional association with language activities promotes deeper retention and a willingness to engage. These elements are essential for young learners who must develop linguistic competence and positive attitudes towards English, which can foster lifelong learning habits.

Storytelling and role-plays deepen the engagement by developing creativity and conversational skills. Role-playing simulates real-life interactions, providing students opportunities to practice English in meaningful contexts and thus improve fluency and confidence. Storytelling connects language learning with imagination and cultural knowledge,

⁴² Gayle Gregory and Martha Kaufeldt, *The Motivated Brain: Improving Student Attention, Engagement, and Perseverance* (United States of Amerika: ASCD Member Book, 2015).

⁴³ Alice Covelli, "The Teacher's Role in Motivating Preschool Children to Learn English as a FL in a Classroom Environment: An Exploratory Study" (UNITesi, 2025).

⁴⁴ Sharofat Pakriddinova and Xursanova Xusnidabonu, "Teaching English Speaking Skills: Exploring the Use of Songs, Rhythms, and Games for Developing Speaking Skills," *Innovation in the Modern Education System* 6, no. 1 (2025), <https://interoncof.com/index.php/USA/article/view/11361>.

making abstract language forms more concrete and understandable.⁴⁵ Additionally, such activities promote empathy and cultural awareness by encouraging students to adopt different perspectives, enriching their educational experience beyond mechanical language drills.

Integrating Islamic values into English learning provides a culturally relevant framework that aligns language education with students' religious identities. Using Islamic-themed vocabulary and moral stories enables lessons to resonate with students' beliefs, making learning more meaningful.⁴⁶ This approach fosters cognitive and emotional connections that enhance comprehension and motivation. By incorporating values like patience and honesty within language tasks, students are encouraged to see English learning as an extension of their faith, which can reduce resistance and increase positive engagement.⁴⁷

Peer teaching and group work also emerged as meaningful strategies in managing English fun learning. This method shifts students from passive recipients to active participants who learn by teaching and collaborating with their peers. Such interaction decreases performance anxiety and encourages experimentation with language in a supportive setting. Group work and gamified learning promote a dynamic environment where mistakes are normalized as part of progress, boosting motivation and social skills.⁴⁸ Positive reinforcement and equitable participation in groups further enhance confidence and inclusivity, crucial in pesantren contexts where communal values are essential.⁴⁹

The MI Al Ma'had An Nur research demonstrates that managing English learning through fun, culturally integrated, and collaborative

⁴⁵ Claudio Rezende Lucarevschi, "The Role of Storytelling on Language Learning: A Literature Review," *WPLC* 26, no. 1 (2016), <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/WPLC/article/view/15309>.

⁴⁶ Nurtina Irsad Rusdiani, Hera Yuantika, and Sri Handayani, "Moral Worlds of Play: Digital Islamic Games and the Formation of Early Childhood Values in Ponorogo," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Raushan Fikr* 14, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24090/jimrf.v14i2.14079>.

⁴⁷ Beatrice N. Manyasi, "Speaking Skills and Values Education in the Language Classroom," *International Journal of Current Research* 17, no. 4 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.48785.04.2025>.

⁴⁸ Cigdem Uz Bilgin and Abdulmenaf Gul, "Investigating the Effectiveness of Gamification on Group Cohesion, Attitude, and Academic Achievement in Collaborative Learning Environments," *TechTrends* 64 (2020), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-019-00442-x>.

⁴⁹ Asnal Mala et al., "Fostering Tolerance Through Inclusive Islamic Education: The Role of Pesantren in Navigating Global Challenges," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education Studies)* 12, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15642/jpai.2024.12.2.153-178>.

strategies effectively addresses students' challenges. These approaches – combining games, songs, moral storytelling, and peer engagement – create an enriching environment that nurtures both linguistic proficiency and personal development. Such holistic classroom management raises language competence and establishes positive attitudes toward English that are essential for students' academic and social future.

Conclusion

This research highlights that effectively managing fun learning strategies in the English classroom at MI Al Ma'had An Nur significantly contributes to overcoming key challenges such as limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and monotonous teaching methods. Educators can create engaging, meaningful, and supportive learning environments by integrating interactive approaches like games, nursery songs, role-plays, and storytelling, alongside culturally relevant content that aligns with *pesantren* values. Furthermore, peer teaching and group work enhance collaboration and reduce language anxiety, fostering greater student participation and confidence. These comprehensive strategies promote linguistic proficiency and nurture moral and social development, preparing students to become competent and principled communicators. The findings underscore the importance of holistic and culturally sensitive classroom management to sustain motivation and improve English learning outcomes in *pesantren*-based schools.

Bibliography

- Abdalla, Mohamad. "Exploring Tarbiyah in Islamic Education: A Critical Review of the English- and Arabic-Language Literature." *Critical Perspectives on the Philosophy of Education* 15, no. 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15050559>.
- Ahmedtelba, Elycheikh. "Rethinking ESL Education: Integrating Holistic and Experiential Learning Models." *Creative Education* 16, no. 4 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2025.164035>.
- Alwi, Muhammad Lutfi. "The Islamic Vocabulary Philanthropy in Students' Enhancing English Language Learning at As' Adiyah Islamic Boarding School Sengkang." IAIN Parepare, 2024.
- An-Nisa, Nurul, and Tono Suwartono. "Fun Ways in Learning English." *Journal of Applied Linguistics (ALTICS)* 2, no. 1 (2020). <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tono-Suwartono/publication/372195913>.
- Aprilia, Sonia. "Students' Attitude Towards English Language Teaching and Learning in Islamic Boarding School : A Mixed-Method Research at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Sengkubang." Universitas Tanjungpura, 2024. <http://36.95.239.66/3736/>.
- Baltzersen, Rolf K. *Effective Use of Collective Peer Teaching in Teacher Education*:

- Maximizing Student Learning*. Routledge: Britania, 2024.
- Bilgin, Cigdem Uz, and Abdulmenaf Gul. "Investigating the Effectiveness of Gamification on Group Cohesion, Attitude, and Academic Achievement in Collaborative Learning Environments." *TechTrends* 64 (2020). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-019-00442-x>.
- Brookfield, Stephen D. *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom*. United States of Amerika: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2015.
- Cameron, Lynne. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Cohen, Lori Dill. "Authentic Low-Stakes Practice to Make Meaning Lasting for ELLs: Creating Vocabulary Chants and Songs to Enhance the Word Generation Curriculum." Otterbein University, 2022.
- Covelli, Alice. "The Teacher's Role in Motivating Preschool Children to Learn English as a FL in a Classroom Environment: An Exploratory Study." UNITesi, 2025.
- Creswell, John W., and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. United Kingdom: Sage Publication Ltd., 2017.
- Din, Hafiz Taj. "The Contribution of Islamic Education to Bridging Global Knowledge Gaps." *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2025). <https://www.pakjip.com/index.php/pjip/article/view/260>.
- Fajar, Adam Hafidz Al. "The Development of Arabic and English Language Culture in Modern Islamic Boarding Schools." *Jurnal Paradigma* 17, no. 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.53961/paradigma.v17i1.309>.
- Farah, Rafika Rabba, Jarum, and Puji Sumarsono. "Navigating Western and Islamic Cultural Values in English Education: A Narrative Case Study of Teachers at International Islamic Boarding School." *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* 10, no. 1 (2025). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1467858>.
- Ghafar, Zanyar Nathir. "Enjoying Funny Ways for Learning English Language Skills: An Overview." *Journal of Digital Learning and Distance Education (JDLDE)* 2, no. 8 (2024). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56778/jdlde.v2i7.176>.
- Gregory, Gayle, and Martha Kaufeldt. *The Motivated Brain: Improving Student Attention, Engagement, and Perseverance*. United States of Amerika: ASCD Member Book, 2015.
- Iamsamai, Pichitra, Jitraporn Ngamnet, Chanakant Boonkaew, and Shin Fuangfungsuk. "The Roles of One-Day English Camp in Improving Language Learning Experiences of Primary School EFL Learners in Thailand from Learners' and Facilitators' Perspectives." *Lawarath Social E-Journal* 7, no. 1 (2025). <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/lawarathjo/article/view/275667>.

- Iksan, Muhammad, Husnaini, and Marsruddin. "Implementation of Weekly English Program with Fun Learning Method for Pesantren Students." *Ethical Lingua: Journal of Language Teaching and Literature* 9, no. 2 (2022). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30605/25409190.479>.
- Isti'anah, Dhuhaa, Sulistia Salsabiilaa, Suci Dwi Aprillia, Dzaky Mohammad Dzaky Zaidan, and Anggi Kurniawan. "Manajemen Kurikulum Pendidikan Islam Di Era Digital: Studi Kasus Pengelolaan Kurikulum Pondok Pesantren Imam Asy Syafi'i (PPIA) Banyuwangi." *Al I'tibar: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 2 (2025). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30599/sfhgek07>.
- Kirana, Bunga, and Jade Jatuporn. "The Use of 'English Fun Learning' Program to Teach Vocabulary." *Applied Research in English Education (AREE)* 1, no. 2 (2023). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26714/aree.1.2.2023.68-72>.
- Komiljonovna, Ruzmetova Shahodat. "Teaching English Vocabulary for Specific Purposes: A Comprehensive Guide." *Research Focus* 3, no. 9 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13852012>.
- Kramsch, Claire. "Language and Culture in Second Language Learning." In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture*. England: Routledge, 2014.
- Kumar, Ravi. "English Language and Digital Literacy: Navigating the Information Age." *Journal of International English Research Studies (JIERS)* 1, no. 2 (2023). <https://languagejournals.com/index.php/englishjournal/article/view/11>.
- Llorens-Largo, Faraón, Francisco J. Gallego-Durá, Carlos J. Villagrà-Arnedo, Patricia Compañ-Rosique, Rosana Satorre-Cuerda, and Rafael Molina-Carmona. "Gamification of the Learning Process: Lessons Learned." *IEEE Revista Iberoamericana de Tecnologías Del Aprendizaje* 11, no. 4 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1109/RITA.2016.2619138>.
- Lucarevski, Claudio Rezende. "The Role of Storytelling on Language Learning: A Literature Review." *WPLC* 26, no. 1 (2016). <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/WPLC/article/view/15309>.
- Madkur, Ahmad, Muhammad Syihab As'ad, Agus Prayogo, Aisyah Sunarwan, Syahreni Siregar, Trisna Dinillah Harya, and Dedi Irwansyah. "Context-Responsive Pedagogy in English Language Teaching in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools." *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 18, no. 3 (2024). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v18i3.21085>.
- Mala, Asnal, Zulkarnain Zulkarnain, M. Yunus Abu Bakar, and Siti Marpuah. "Fostering Tolerance Through Inclusive Islamic Education: The Role of Pesantren in Navigating Global Challenges." *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education Studies)* 12, no. 2 (2024). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15642/jpai.2024.12.2.153-178>.

- Manyasi, Beatrice N. "Speaking Skills and Values Education in the Language Classroom." *International Journal of Current Research* 17, no. 4 (2025). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.48785.04.2025>.
- Maulana, Rivki Surya, and Fahriany Fahriany. "Challenges of Teaching English to Young Learners in Small Classroom." *Journal of English Educational Study (JEES)* 8, no. 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31932/jees.v8i1.4077>.
- Mujahid, Imam. "Islamic Orthodoxy-Based Character Education: Creating Moderate Muslim in a Modern Pesantren in Indonesia." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.185-212>.
- Murdani, Hati, and Ahmad Fauzi. "Developing Noble Morals in Children through Al-Ghazali's Concept of Moral Education." *Berstari* 21, no. 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36667/bestari.v21i1.1550>.
- Nicholas, Bonnie J., Marian J. Rossiter, and Marilyn L. Abbott. "The Power of Story in the ESL Classroom." *Canadian Modern Language Review* 67, no. 2 (2011). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.67.2.247>.
- Nunan, David. "Teaching English to Young Learners." In *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. England: Routledge, 2016.
- Pakriddinova, Sharofat, and Xursanova Xusnidabonu. "Teaching English Speaking Skills: Exploring the Use of Songs, Rhythms, and Games for Developing Speaking Skills." *Innovation in the Modern Education System* 6, no. 1 (2025). <https://interoncof.com/index.php/USA/article/view/11361>.
- Puspitasari, Dewi, Sri Wuli Fitriati, Widhiyanto Widhiyanto, and Katharina Rustipa. "Integrating Moral Values into EFL Learning through a Multimodal Project: A Case Study." *Educational Process: International Journal (EDUPIJ)* 14, no. 1 (2025). <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=1338853>.
- Putra, Jazmi Zuhilmi. "Manajemen Pemasaran Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Di Pesantren Modern Darul Ilmi Indonesia." UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2024.
- Rachmawati, Meida, Suzana Widjajanti, Ahmad Ahmad, and Aslan Aslan. "The English Camps as Method of Promoting Fun English at Elementary School Level in Indonesia." *Tapis : Jurnal Penelitian Ilmiah* 4, no. 2 (2020). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32332/tapis.v4i2.2563>.
- Riana, Wahyu. "Analisis Program Bilingual Arab Inggris Dalam Menunjang Kemampuan Maharatul Kalam Santri "(Studi Kasus Di Pondok Pesantren Al-Anwar Petanang)". Universitas Jambi, 2023.
- Rohman, Mohammad Zuhul Fathur, Moch. Chotib, and Abdul Muhith. "Islamic Education Teachers' Efforts in Instilling Islamic Values Through Prophet and Companion Stories in the Classroom." *Islamic Management: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30868/im.v8i01.7791>.

- Rose, Mackenzie S., and Marcus Johnson. "The Power of Storytelling: Creatively Facilitating Conceptual Change in the Classroom." *JERAP* 15, no. 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5590/JSBHS.2025.19.1635>.
- Rudiyanto. "Manajemen Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab-Inggris Dalam Meningkatkan Keterampilan Berbahasa Asing Santri Mathlabul Ulum Jambu Lenteng Sumenep." IAIN Madura, 2022.
- Rusdiani, Nurtina Irsad, Hera Yuantika, and Sri Handayani. "Moral Worlds of Play: Digital Islamic Games and the Formation of Early Childhood Values in Ponorogo." *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Raushan Fikr* 14, no. 2 (2025). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24090/jimrf.v14i2.14079>.
- Sahin, Abdullah. "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education." *Islamic Education in Contemporary World: Traditions, Rearticulations & Transformation* 9, no. 11 (2018). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110335>.
- Sholihah, Nanda, Apri Wardana Ritonga, and Ayu Desrani. "Environmental and Institutional Support: A Study of English Language Education in Pesantren Settings." *JELITA* 6, no. 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56185/jelita.v6i1.878>.
- Stoimcheva-Kolarska, and Desislava Lyubomirova. "The Impact of a Relaxed and Fun Learning Environment on the Second Language Learning." *Turquoise International Journal of Educational Research and Social Studies* 2, no. 1 (2020). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED606062>.
- Sugiyono. *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan (Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D)*. Bandung: Alfabeta, 2019.
- Umar, Muhammad Aulia Taufiqi, and M Bambang Purwanto. "Promoting Religious Moderation through English Language Teaching: Strategies and Challenges in Islamic Educational Settings." *Eternal* 15, no. 2 (2024). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26877/eternal.v15i2.443>.
- Warschauer, Mark. "The Changing Global Economy and the Future of English Teaching." *Tesol Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2012). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/3587741>.