



Strengthening Foreign Skills in The AEDS (Arabic English Development System) Program for Students at Al-Ikhsan Beji Islamic Boarding School Purwokerto

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ABSTRACT

Optimizing the quality of language development classes through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, emphasizing participatory and collaborative learning between students and instructors. Initial findings indicate that low student participation is largely influenced by a teacher-centered teaching model, which positions students as passive recipients and limits their cognitive and emotional engagement. Through participatory reflection, both students and instructors identified the need for a more dialogic and collaborative learning model that provides opportunities for students to actively engage in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning activities. The PAR-based intervention involved redefining the instructor's role as a facilitator and actively engaging students in group discussions, language practice, presentations, and collaborative evaluations. The results showed significant improvements in student motivation, active participation, learning enjoyment, and comprehension of language materials. This study concludes that the success of AEDS program is largely determined by equitable collaboration between students and instructors, which enables a more participatory, motivating, and responsive learning environment to students' learning needs.

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Introduction

Higher education plays a crucial role in developing a young generation that is not only academically intelligent but also possesses skills relevant to global needs. One crucial skill students must master in today's era of globalization is foreign language proficiency. Language skills, particularly English and Arabic, within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), are essential for students to compete in the academic world. Al-Ihksan Beji Islamic Boarding School in Purwokerto is one such boarding school committed to developing students' foreign language skills through various programs, one of which is the Arabic English Development System (AEDS).

This program is designed as a supplementary learning platform outside of regular instruction to help students prepare for globalization. However, in practice, many students still fail to achieve the expected competency standards, with some requiring remedial courses or even repeating the development program. This situation demonstrates a gap between the program's objectives and its outcomes. This situation suggests that the implementation of the AEDS program still requires in-depth review, particularly in terms of its effectiveness and student participation. Development programs often operate with a top-down approach, with tutors at the center of learning, while students tend to be passive. This can lead to low student engagement and motivation, even though active participation is key to improving language skills.

Therefore, in this context, student empowerment is crucial. Empowering students means providing space for active participation in the learning process, including in designing, implementing, and evaluating program activities. Through a participatory approach, students become not only objects of learning but also subjects contributing to improving the learning process. This approach aligns with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between researchers and participants in finding solutions to existing problems through reflection and action. Theoretically, student empowerment in language learning can increase intrinsic motivation, a sense of responsibility, and critical thinking skills. According to Nurfadhilah (2020), active student participation in the learning process has a positive impact on improving learning outcomes, particularly in communication skills and self-confidence. Furthermore, Wulandari (2021) states that participatory learning strategies encourage students to be more independent and reflective about their own learning process.

This aligns with the characteristics of foreign language learning, which requires repeated practice, self-awareness, and constructive feedback from the learning environment. Furthermore, challenges faced in implementing development programs stem not only from teaching methods but also from environmental and policy factors.

As a result, learning motivation is low, and the program's success does not reach its target. Therefore, a new approach is needed that more actively involves students and provides them with space to collaborate, reflect, and improve the learning process together. Thus, through this research, it is hoped that an effective student empowerment model can be found in the AEDS program. This model is expected to not only improve students' foreign language skills but also strengthen the character of independent and collaborative learning. In addition, the results of this study are expected to provide recommendations for institutions in designing AEDS policies that are more participatory, adaptive, and appropriate to student needs. And not only focusing on academic aspects, but also becoming a concrete step in creating a more participatory, reflective, and sustainable learning culture in Islamic boarding schools.

Methods

A. Research Type and Approach

This research uses a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objective, which is to empower students through the Arabic English Development System (AEDS) program as an effort to improve their foreign language skills at the Al-Ihsan Beji Islamic Boarding School in Purwokerto. This approach empowers students not only as passive participants in learning activities but also actively participates in planning, implementing, and evaluating the Arabic English Development System (AEDS) program. The PAR approach emphasizes the involvement of research subjects as active participants in every stage of the research, from problem identification and action planning to activity implementation and collaborative reflection.

This provides students with the opportunity to develop their foreign language competencies practically while gaining self-empowerment experiences in an academic context. Furthermore, this approach allows the researcher to act as a facilitator guiding students through the learning and reflection process, rather than simply as an observer. The research method used is participatory qualitative research. This study emphasizes an in-depth understanding of the experiences, dynamics, and processes of student empowerment through the AEDS program. Data was collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of development program activities, so as to be able to capture the interaction process, challenges, and strategies of students in improving their foreign language skills.

B. Research Location and Research Participants

The research was conducted at the Al-Ihsan Beji Islamic Boarding School in Purwokerto, specifically within the AEDS program, organized by MTs Al-Ikhsan Beji. This location was chosen because the AEDS program is an official forum for students to improve their foreign language skills and also serves as a medium for student empowerment through collaborative practices and participatory learning. The research participants were as follows:

1. Student development program participants, who were the primary subjects in the learning and empowerment process.
2. Program development facilitators, who guided students in learning activities, evaluation, and reflection.
3. The Islamic boarding school's academic support team, such as language program staff, who assisted in the implementation of the development program activities.

With this participant structure, this research emphasized collaboration between students, facilitators, and researchers to empower and improve foreign language competency, in accordance with the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR).

C. Flagship Program

The flagship program in this study is the Collaborative Participatory AEDS Program based on Participatory Action Research (PAR). This learning program is designed to increase student participation, motivation, and language competence through the active, equal involvement of students and teachers throughout the learning process.

This program stems from the finding that a one-way learning model leads to low student engagement, resulting in the AEDS program being perceived solely as an academic obligation. Therefore, PAR emphasizes transforming the program into a dialogic, comfortable, and meaningful learning space. Flagship Program Components:

1. Participatory Learning Planning

Students are involved from the beginning in identifying language learning needs, determining learning objectives, and agreeing on the format of program activities relevant to their needs.

2. Implementation of Dialogic and Collaborative Learning

The learning process is carried out through small group discussions, conversation practice, real-world simulations, simple presentations, and group work that encourages active interaction among students.

3. 3. Teachers as Learning Facilitators

Teachers act as mentors and facilitators, creating a safe space for students to experiment, ask questions, and make mistakes as part of the language learning process.

4. 4. Continuous Participatory Reflection

Students and teachers regularly reflect together on the learning process, obstacles encountered, and achievements for continuous improvement.

5. 5. Collaborative and Authentic Evaluation

Assessment focuses not only on the final outcome but also on the learning process through peer feedback, self-assessment, and collaborative evaluation between students and teachers.

This flagship program demonstrates that active student involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning can foster a sense of ownership of the program, strengthen learning motivation, and positively impact students' understanding and language skills. Therefore, it is worthy of recommendation as a model for strengthening the quality of AEDS programs in Islamic boarding schools.

Result and Discussion

The research findings indicate that optimizing the AEDS program cannot be achieved if the learning process is solely teacher-centered. Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, we identified, together with students and teachers, that the low student participation in the AEDS program is influenced by a one-way learning model. Teachers dominate the delivery of material, while students are positioned as passive recipients without sufficient space to express opinions, discuss, or determine their own learning needs. This situation results in the AEDS program not being perceived as a comfortable and meaningful learning space, but rather as merely an academic obligation.

Field findings indicate that many students still participate in the AEDS program without active involvement. They are physically present but not cognitively or emotionally engaged in the learning process. As a result, understanding of the material is low, motivation to learn declines, and foreign language competency is impacted. This situation confirms that the main problem lies not solely in students' initial abilities, but rather in a learning approach that fails to foster participation and a sense of ownership in the program. Through participatory reflection, students expressed the need for a more dialogic, collaborative learning model that allows them to actively participate. Students not only wanted material explanations from instructors but also opportunities for hands-on practice, group discussions, feedback, and involvement in designing learning activities. Based on this reflection, it was agreed that strengthening the quality of the AEDS program needed to be done through collaboration between students and instructors, with both acting as learning subjects.

The implementation of actions within the PAR framework was carried out by changing the learning model to be more participatory. The teacher no longer acted as the sole source of knowledge, but rather as a facilitator, creating space for interaction and dialogue. Students were involved in determining learning models, such as small group discussions, conversation practice, simple presentations, and joint evaluation of the learning process. Student involvement in determining learning models was proven to increase their sense of responsibility and ownership of the AEDS program.

The results of these actions were expected to show significant changes. Students began to show greater enthusiasm for the program, were more motivated to arrive on time, and were actively involved in every learning activity. The program atmosphere became more lively and communicative, so students felt more comfortable experimenting, asking questions, and making mistakes as part of the language learning process. Collaboration among students also encouraged the creation of a supportive learning environment, where they helped each other understand the material and complete assignments. This study found that active student involvement in the learning process had a positive impact on their commitment to completing program assignments. Students no longer viewed assignments as an administrative burden but rather as a means of practice relevant to their learning needs. This contributes to a gradual increase in material comprehension and language skills, and reduces the tendency for students to participate in the program without understanding the content of the learning.

This research confirms that the success of the AEDS program is largely determined by equal collaboration between students and instructors. The PAR approach demonstrates that when students are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning, the AEDS program can transform into a participatory, motivating, and comfortable learning environment. Therefore, strengthening the quality of the AEDS program depends not only on the competence of instructors but also on the institution's ability to create a collaborative learning model that respects students' experiences and learning needs.

Conclusion

The quality of the AEDS program can be optimized through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that emphasizes equal collaboration between students and teachers. Low student participation in learning is caused by a teacher-centered learning model, which limits active student engagement. Through participatory and dialogic learning, students are involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning, while the teacher acts as a facilitator. Research results demonstrate that this approach can increase student motivation, active participation, learning enjoyment, and understanding of language materials. Therefore, PAR-based learning can be an effective model for strengthening the quality of the AEDS program in Islamic boarding schools..

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