

Bilingual Curriculum in EFL Speaking: Teachers' Strategies at Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

English language proficiency was one of the most important skills in education, prompting many schools to implement bilingual curricula to improve students' English skills, particularly their speaking skills. Although the implementation of bilingual curricula had become increasingly common, understanding of the strategies teachers used to implement them in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking classes especially in Islamic boarding schools remained limited. This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design involving three English teachers at an Islamic boarding school in Garut Regency, West Java. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation and were analyzed using the interactive analysis model by Miles et al. (2014), which consisted of data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The results indicated that the teachers implemented three main strategies in delivering the bilingual curriculum: instructional strategies, psychological support strategies, and classroom management strategies. These strategies were manifested through eight specific features, including combining direct and indirect teaching approaches, pairing students based on proficiency levels, providing spontaneous praise, creating a psychologically safe classroom environment, and consistently using English as a model for instruction. These findings provided a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies teachers used to implement the bilingual curriculum in EFL speaking instruction in Islamic boarding schools.

1. Introduction

English proficiency has become one of the essential requirements in 21st-century global education. In the Indonesian context, English is learned as a foreign language (English as a Foreign Language/EFL), encompassing four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Husna et al., 2023; Quimosing, 2022). Among these skills, speaking occupies a particularly important position because it directly reflects students' ability to use the language for authentic communication (Brown, 2015). Speaking proficiency is determined not only by mastery of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, but is also shaped by psychological factors such as confidence, motivation, anxiety, and the courage to express ideas (Osama et al., 2026).

This growing demand for English proficiency has also prompted Islamic educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools and integrated Islamic schools, to combine religious education with bilingual curricula (Amalia & Marzuki, 2023). In practice, English is used not only as a subject taught in class but also as a medium of daily interaction, through policies such as the English Area, routine conversational practice, the use of English in academic activities, and intensive teacher–student interaction within the boarding environment (Hasyraf et al., 2026; Silviyanti et al., 2024). This suggests that the bilingual curriculum in boarding functions not merely as a classroom instructional tool, but also as part of a broader effort to build a language-rich ecosystem.

Nevertheless, the implementation of bilingual curricula in Boarding school settings faces distinct challenges. Boarding school are characterized by an educational model that integrates general education, religious instruction, and boarding-school life, meaning that English instruction must compete with the dominance of Arabic and religious studies. Many students also still have limited foundational English proficiency and are prone to anxiety when required to speak, particularly due to fear of making mistakes or being negatively judged by teachers or peers (Habibi et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022). Such conditions may lead students to become passive, avoid English communication, or revert to their first language during speaking activities (Surotun et al., 2022).

Under these circumstances, the success of a bilingual curriculum depends not only on institutional policy but also on teachers' ability to translate curricular demands into everyday instructional practice. Teachers play a central role in selecting methods, designing speaking activities, managing student interaction, providing feedback, and creating a safe and supportive learning atmosphere particularly when confronted with students' varying proficiency levels, speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary, and tendency to rely on their first language (Marzulina, 2022). Teachers' strategies are therefore an important area of inquiry, as they serve as the link between the formal goals of the bilingual curriculum and the actual conditions students face in boarding.

Several prior studies have addressed issues related to this theme, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Relevant Previous Studies

Research (year)	Focus	Method	Context	Research Gap
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Silviyanti et al. (2024)	Daily practice of English and Arabic among students and teachers in an Islamic boarding school	Qualitative	Islamic bilingual middle boarding school, Aceh	Examined bilingual language practices broadly; did not focus on the specific pedagogical strategies teachers use in EFL speaking instruction	
Fitria (2023)	Strategies and challenges of integrating English Language Teaching into Islamic Boarding Schools	Qualitative	Bilingual Schools	It has not yet specifically outlined the concrete strategies teachers use to address these implementation challenges.	
Wang et al. (2022)	Psychological dimensions (anxiety, motivation) in speaking	Quantitative	General context	EFL	Has not yet explored how teachers respond to and manage students' psychological factors in speaking instruction.
Surotun et al. (2022)	Teachers' challenges in implementing English instruction	Qualitative	EFL School		Has not specifically examined teachers' strategies for overcoming these challenges in the context of Islamic boarding schools.
Hasyraf et al. (2026)	The "English Area" policy and teacher-student interactions	Qualitative	Islamic Boarding Schools		Has not elaborated in detail on teachers' instructional strategies in EFL speaking instruction.

Based on a review of previous studies presented in Table 1, a research gap can be identified that justifies the need for the present study. Previous studies have examined the use of English in Islamic boarding schools, the challenges of implementing bilingual curricula, psychological factors affecting speaking skills, and the obstacles teachers encounter in using English. However, limited attention has been given to the concrete strategies teachers use to implement a bilingual curriculum in EFL speaking instruction in Islamic boarding schools, particularly in addressing students' varying levels of initial English proficiency, speaking anxiety, and tendency to rely on their first language. This gap provides a basis for the present study to examine in depth how teachers implement a bilingual curriculum in EFL speaking instruction and how they adapt their strategies to students' actual learning conditions. The novelty of this study lies in its explicit focus on three interconnected dimensions of teacher strategies; instructional strategies, psychological support strategies, and classroom management strategies in implementing a bilingual curriculum in EFL speaking classes within a boarding setting. The study also examines how these strategies are adapted to support students' participation and English use despite differences in proficiency, speaking anxiety, and reliance on their first language.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine the phenomenon in depth within its natural context Yin (2018). This design was chosen to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences in the context of their daily lives

Creswell (2014), particularly regarding teachers' strategies in implementing a bilingual curriculum for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking instruction in a boarding setting.

The research was conducted at a boarding school in Garut Regency, West Java, which was selected because it consistently implemented a bilingual curriculum. English was not only taught as a subject but was also used as a medium of daily communication between teachers and students. The participants consisted of three English teachers (T1, T2, and T3) who were selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in EFL speaking instruction and the implementation of the bilingual system at the boarding school. All three participants had a background in English language education and relevant teaching experience.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Interviews were conducted individually in a single session for each participant, lasting 20–30 minutes, using 14 questions covering teaching strategies, motivation, and classroom management in a bilingual context. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Observations were conducted once in each classroom, lasting approximately 60 minutes, and were continued in the dormitory setting to observe the use of English outside the classroom. The observed aspects included teacher instruction, the use of code-switching, teacher responses to student anxiety, and English-language interactions among students. Observation results were recorded in field notes as supporting data for the interviews.

The researcher served as the primary instrument in the data collection and analysis process. During observations, the researcher acted as a non-participant observer without intervening in either classroom learning activities or dormitory activities. This approach was adopted to ensure that interactions occurred naturally and to minimize the researcher's influence on participant behavior. Self-reflection was also practiced throughout the research process to reduce potential interpretive bias.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which included data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The validity of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing interview results across participants with observational findings. In addition, member checking was conducted by having participants review and confirm the interview transcripts to ensure that the data aligned with their experiences and intended meanings.

3. Result

This study was conducted in three EFL Speaking classes taught by T1, T2, and T3. The results of the observations and interviews showed that the three teachers implemented three main strategies in delivering the bilingual curriculum: learning strategies, psychological support strategies, and classroom management strategies. These strategies were reflected in eight strategic features, each of which had distinct characteristics and implementation techniques across the classes. The data also showed that the students did not yet consistently use English independently during speaking activities. They still

needed encouragement from their teachers and exhibited shyness and anxiety about making mistakes when speaking. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 2 below.

Table. 2 Summary of Teachers' Strategies in Implementing a Bilingual Curriculum in the EFL Speaking Class

NO	Teachers' Strategies	Strategy Features	Characteristic	Representative Quotes
1	Learning Strategies	Direct Approach	1) Materials delivered sequentially 2) Clear objectives stated at the outset	"I usually begin the lesson with a short greeting, then I state the learning objectives so students understand the competencies they need to achieve." (T1)
		Indirect/Communicative Approach	1) Warm-up and elicitation activities 2) Ability-based peer pairing 3) Communicative activities (dialogue, role play, discussion)	"I usually start with something close to students' daily lives first. I also often use short videos or audio as a trigger before moving into the core material." (T1) "I prefer to draw students in first through apperception, In my experience, this approach is far more effective for boarding students." (T2) "I usually pair students who are already proficient with those who are still less proficient, so the less proficient ones can learn while building confidence." (T3)
2	Psychological Support Strategies	Fostering Personal Meaning	1) Relating the material to real-life situations. 2) Emphasizing the communicative value of English.	"I instill in students an understanding of the importance of speaking skills gradually and continuously (pause) all four skills are equally important to master." (T1) "I often give examples of situations close to their experience, such as watching English-language films or videos." (T2) "I always relate the material to their daily lives, so students realize English is easy and can be used directly, not merely theory in the classroom." (T3)
		Affective Reinforcement	1) Providing spontaneous praise 2) Providing praise without prior promise 3) Providing praise for tangible achievements	"Appreciation is not promised at the beginning as a reward. It is given spontaneously when a student successfully demonstrates good ability." (T1) "I sometimes give extra points, reward stickers, or other simple forms of appreciation." (T2) "I give verbal appreciation, for

				example by saying 'Masya Allah,' 'Good job', on some occasions, I also give small snacks." (T3)
	Psychologically Safe Atmosphere	1) Mistakes normalized as part of learning 2) Personal approach used with low-confidence students		"I try to build students' confidence gradually so they dare to try." (T1) "I always explain that making mistakes is natural in language learning (pause) so students feel comfortable trying to speak without fear of being mocked." (T2) "If everyone here were already smart, I'm sure you wouldn't be here, it is precisely through mistakes that we know what needs to be improved." (T3)
3	Classroom Management Strategies	Procedure & Routines 1) Consistent routines 2) Behavioral rules	opening	"I usually begin the lesson with a short greeting such as 'good morning,' 'how are you today.'" (T1) "I habituate students to use basic expressions such as Yes, No, thank you, Excuse me, I think." (T2) "The rule is simple but I apply it consistently: when a peer is presenting, no one may make noise, laugh, or fail to pay attention." (T3)
	Group Management & Turn-Taking	1) Facilitating inclusive participation 2) The use of varied grouping methods was observed to support students' participation and provide opportunities for more consistent English use during classroom activities.		"I usually first explain the assessment rubric that will be used, it does not only focus on the final outcome but also includes participation." (T1) "I usually arrange groups in rotation and give every student an equal opportunity to participate." (T2) "Quiet or less confident students are paired with more proficient ones, so they can learn directly from their peers." (T3)
	Time Management & Teacher-Student Relationship	1) Flexible adjustment of activities 2) Consistent post-lesson reflection		"I make adjustments by changing an activity originally intended for all students into one carried out by just a few student representatives." (T1) "When students appear tired, unfocused, or unenthusiastic. I replace the planned activity with a more engaging one." (T2) "When students appear tired or unfocused, I replace the main activity with a lighter, more engaging one such as language games or songs." (T3)

4. Discussion

The findings of this study show that the implementation of the bilingual curriculum in EFL speaking instruction at the boarding does not rely on a single strategy, but rather involves a set of interrelated strategies encompassing learning strategies, psychological support, and classroom management. These findings confirm that students' willingness to speak is related not only to linguistic ability but is also strongly influenced by the quality of interaction and the emotional comfort teachers build. This deepens the perspectives of Asty et al. (2025) and Lintang Sari & Kurniawati (2024), positioning teacher support as a crucial foundation for students in boarding-school environments to begin expressing themselves.

Within the psychological support strategy, the teacher strategies observed focused on fostering personal meaning and reinforcing affective engagement. Through a policy of normalizing mistakes and appreciating students' courage to speak, teachers sought to lower the psychological barriers students often experience when using a foreign language. This aligns with Krashen (1982) Affective Filter theory, in which the teacher acts as a provider of a sense of safety so that student anxiety does not hinder language acquisition. These findings reinforce Khan (2023) argument that a non-judgmental atmosphere gives students room to express themselves. In particular, teachers' verbal appreciation is seen as an instrument for building students' confidence amid their concerns about social judgment.

In the learning strategy, teachers linked the material to students' daily dormitory routines and religious activities. This strategy helped students connect abstract language concepts to real situations they encounter in their daily lives at the boarding school. As facilitators, teachers provided scaffolding through step-by-step explanations and the use of communicative media to accommodate students' varying starting abilities. This approach aligns with Ly (2024), who emphasizes the importance of teacher flexibility in facilitating students' learning experiences according to their needs. Fitria (2023) similarly highlights the importance of flexible learning strategies in addressing differences in students' readiness and language ability. In the Boarding school densely scheduled environment, teachers applied practical, contextual strategies by linking English use to dormitory routines and students' religious activities. This approach is relevant to students' psychosocial conditions, as it allows them to practice English in situations close to their daily lives.

Furthermore, classroom management was carried out through consistent teacher role modeling both inside and outside the classroom. Based on Bandura (1977) Social Learning Theory, the teacher's presence as an active language user serves as a key stimulus for students to imitate communication. Rayes & Albelaihi (2023) also emphasize that this modeling is essential in boarding-school environments that prioritize habituation. In addition, the strategy of distributing speaking turns evenly guaranteed participation for passive students, ensuring that communicative space is not dominated by particular individuals but becomes a collective right within the classroom.

However, this study also noted a degree of limited language autonomy, in which student participation was generally responsive to teacher instruction rather than self-initiated. This phenomenon relates not only to language mastery but reflects the Boarding school strong sociocultural dimension. As examined by Uktolseja (2026), the deep obedience, respect, and tawadhu (humility) students hold toward teachers tend to make them wait for direction rather than take their own initiative. This reality offers a new perspective that a highly hierarchical-religious school culture is an important context that can shape the dynamics of student engagement.

Overall, EFL speaking instruction at the Boarding school is related not only to linguistic mastery but is also shaped by students' psychological conditions, teaching strategies, classroom management, and the dormitory communication environment. The novelty of this study lies in depicting three integrated aspects: contextual learning, psychological support, and classroom management. Accordingly, the implementation of the bilingual curriculum needs to be adapted to the characteristics of boarding-school life and students' need to develop into more autonomous language users.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that teachers implemented the bilingual curriculum in EFL Speaking instruction through three interrelated strategies: instructional strategies, psychological support strategies, and classroom management through language modeling. The instructional strategies involved scaffolding and ability-based grouping, while the psychological support strategies included allowing students to make mistakes and providing encouragement to reduce anxiety and affective barriers. Classroom management was reflected in teachers' consistent use of English in daily classroom communication, which provided students with opportunities to encounter and use English in meaningful contexts. The findings further showed that the integration of these strategies helped create a safer and more supportive learning environment, enabling students to respond orally with greater confidence when prompted or encouraged by their teachers. However, students still showed limited initiative in communicating independently without external prompts. This finding suggests that although teacher support facilitated students' willingness to speak, greater attention is needed to foster learner autonomy in initiating English communication.

The main contribution of this study lies in proposing an integrative understanding of teacher strategies that connects the implementation of a bilingual curriculum with the psychosocial conditions of EFL speaking instruction in an Islamic boarding school context, where English coexists with Arabic and students' native languages. Practically, the findings suggest that teachers in similar contexts should prioritize students' psychological comfort and opportunities for meaningful language use alongside linguistic accuracy. This study was limited by its small number of participants and its focus on a single Islamic boarding school, which limits the transferability of the findings to other Boarding Schools. In addition, the study relied primarily on teachers' perspectives and therefore did not comprehensively capture students' experiences. Future research should involve more participants and multiple institutions and incorporate students'

perspectives, either through a phenomenological approach or a mixed-methods design, to provide a broader understanding of teacher strategies and their effectiveness in supporting sustained English Speaking development.

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