POLICY ANALYSIS OF ARABIC–ENGLISH LANGUAGE HABITUATION: A CASE STUDY AT THE REGIONAL OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, NORTH SUMATERA

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ABSTRACT

The policy of Arabic–English language habituation in madrasahs under the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of North Sumatra emerged as a strategic response to the low motivation and practical use of both languages among students. Despite Arabic and English being central to religious literacy and global competitiveness, they are often perceived as difficult and irrelevant to daily life. Therefore, this study addresses the policy gap by examining how the regional office formulates, implements, and evaluates language habituation programs to enhance students' linguistic competence and character development. This research employed a qualitative case study design involving officials from the Regional Office, madrasah heads, Arabic and English teachers, and students as key informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations of language habituation activities, and documentation analysis. The Miles and Huberman interactive model was used for data analysis, while validity was ensured through source and method triangulation and member checking. The findings revealed that 76% of state madrasahs received official policy circulars, but only 58% developed written work plans. Structured activities such as Language Day and morning conversations increased students' motivation and communication skills. Supporting factors included institutional backing and student enthusiasm, while inhibiting factors involved limited teacher competence and infrastructure. Linguistic proficiency scores improved by an average of 12 points, with 82% of students showing greater confidence and 78% higher motivation. The policy effectively strengthened bilingual culture and character formation in madrasahs. However, sustainability requires enhanced teacher training, equitable resource distribution, and systematic evaluation mechanisms to align local implementation with national educational goals in Arabic and world language education.

Keywords: Arabic education, bilingual competence, English habituation, language policy, madrasah

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ANALISIS KEBIJAKAN PEMBIASAAN BAHASA ARAB DAN BAHASA INGGRIS DI MADRASAH: STUDI KASUS PADA KANWIL KEMENTERIAN AGAMA PROVINSI SUMATERA UTARA

ABSTRAK

Kebijakan pembiasaan bahasa Arab–Inggris di madrasah di bawah Kanwil Kementerian Agama Provinsi Sumatera Utara muncul sebagai respons strategis terhadap rendahnya motivasi dan penggunaan praktis kedua bahasa tersebut di kalangan siswa. Meskipun bahasa Arab dan Inggris berperan penting dalam literasi keagamaan dan daya saing global, keduanya sering dianggap sulit dan kurang relevan dengan kehidupan sehari-hari. Penelitian ini berupaya mengisi kesenjangan kebijakan dengan menganalisis bagaimana Kanwil merumuskan, mengimplementasikan, dan mengevaluasi program pembiasaan bahasa untuk meningkatkan kompetensi linguistik dan pembentukan karakter siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan pejabat Kanwil, kepala madrasah, guru bahasa Arab dan Inggris, serta siswa sebagai informan kunci. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi terhadap kegiatan pembiasaan bahasa, dan analisis dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, dengan validitas yang dijaga melalui triangulasi sumber dan metode serta proses konfirmasi hasil (member checking). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa 76% madrasah negeri telah menerima surat edaran resmi kebijakan, namun hanya 58% yang menyusun rencana kerja tertulis. Kegiatan terstruktur seperti *Language Day* dan percakapan pagi mampu meningkatkan motivasi dan kemampuan komunikasi siswa. Faktor pendukung meliputi dukungan kelembagaan dan antusiasme siswa, sedangkan faktor penghambat mencakup keterbatasan kompetensi guru dan infrastruktur. Skor kemampuan bahasa meningkat rata-rata 12 poin, dengan 82% siswa lebih percaya diri dan 78% memiliki motivasi belajar lebih tinggi. Kebijakan ini efektif memperkuat budaya bilingual dan pembentukan karakter di madrasah. Namun, keberlanjutan program memerlukan peningkatan pelatihan guru, pemerataan sumber daya, serta mekanisme evaluasi yang sistematis agar implementasi lokal selaras dengan tujuan pendidikan nasional dalam pengajaran bahasa Arab dan bahasa dunia.

Kata kunci : Pendidikan bahasa Arab, kompetensi bilingual, pembiasaan bahasa Inggris, kebijakan bahasa, madrasah

A. INTRODUCTION

In the context of improving the quality of madrasah education in Indonesia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs continues to make various innovative efforts to strengthen the competitiveness of madrasah graduates at the national and global levels (Haddade et al., 2024; Widdah, 2022). One of the strategic initiatives carried out through the Regional Office (Kanwil) Kementerian Agama of North Sumatra Province is the implementation *of Arabic and English language habituation programs* in the madrasah environment. This program is designed not only to improve students' linguistic skills, but also as a means of building character, academic culture, and readiness to face the challenges of globalization. In the modern era marked by cross-border mobility of information and communication, the ability to speak a foreign language is one of the main indicators of the quality of human resources and the competitiveness of educational institutions, including madrasas (Rohman et al., 2023; Rössel & Schroedter, 2021).

This language habituation policy was born out of concern about the phenomenon of low interest and motivation of madrasah students in learning Arabic and English. In various madrasah education units, these two languages are often considered difficult, impractical, or less relevant to the daily needs of students. Arabic is often seen only as a language of religious rituals, not as a scientific means to understand the treasures of Islam more broadly, while English is often

considered a "foreign" language that is far from the lives of students and madrassas in the region (Bernikova & Redkin, 2017; Setiyadi & Sukirlan, 2016). This condition causes language learning in madrasas to tend to be cognitive and limited to the realm of theory, has not grown into a culture of active communication in students' daily lives. Therefore, the language habituation policy is present as a strategic effort to re-cultivate students' interest, motivation, and awareness of the importance of mastering the two languages, both for religious purposes and self-development in the global era.

The language habituation program in madrassas has strategic significance because madrassas not only function as religious educational institutions, but also as a vehicle for the formation of religious, disciplined, communicative, and open character to global civilization. Through the integration of Arabic and English language activities in madrasah routines such as greetings, prayers, light conversations, speeches, or *language day activities,* it is hoped that an educational ecosystem that supports the development of 21st century competencies, namely *critical thinking*, *communication*, *collaboration*, and *creativity* will grow. More than that, mastery of Arabic plays an important role in deepening understanding of Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and hadith, while English serves as a bridge to access global literature and expand the scientific horizons of madrasah students (Wulandari & Noor, 2020).

Various results of previous research show that language habituation has a positive correlation with improving communication skills, learning motivation, and student confidence. For example, Raswan et al, (2025) research revealed that the habituation of using Arabic in daily madrasah activities is able to improve students' speaking ability and understanding of religious texts . Meanwhile, the Huda study (2025) confirms that the implementation of *English Day* in madrassas can strengthen foreign language literacy culture and increase student participation in academic activities based on active communication. However, a number of studies also noted significant obstacles, such as the limitation of competent teacher resources in both languages, the lack of supporting facilities such as *language laboratories*, and the low consistency of program implementation in various educational units.

Although various efforts have been made, studies on language policy in madrasas, especially at the level of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province, are still very limited. Most previous research has focused on implementation aspects at the school level or the impact on students' abilities, while aspects of formulation, strategic planning, coordination, and policy evaluation at the institutional level have not been extensively researched. In fact, understanding how a policy is formulated, implemented, and evaluated is an important element in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of language habituation programs in madrasas.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the policies of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province in the implementation of Arabic and English language habituation programs in madrasas. This analysis includes three main aspects: (1) the planning process and normative basis of the policy, (2) the implementation strategy and the supporting and inhibiting factors in the field, and (3) the impact of the policy on improving linguistic competence and character formation of students. Through this approach, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of how language policy in madrassas is carried out within the framework of national education policy and the socio-cultural context of North Sumatra, as well as understand its effectiveness in increasing students' interest and participation in language learning.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the literature on linguistic policy analysis in Islamic education, especially in madrasah environments that have distinctive values and religious orientation. Meanwhile, practically, the results of the research can be used as evaluation and reference material for policy makers at the Regional Office, the district/city Ministry of Religion, and madrasah managers in strengthening the implementation of language habituation programs as an integral part of efforts to improve the quality of madrasah education. In addition, the findings of this research are expected to support the development of policies that are more adaptive,

participatory, and based on the real needs of educational units, so that language habituation really becomes an interesting, fun, and sustainable learning culture in the madrasah environment.

Thus, the formulation of the main problem to be answered in this study is how the policy of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province in planning and implementing Arabic and English habituation programs in madrasas. To answer these questions comprehensively, this study outlines several sub-questions, namely how the policy foundation, strategic direction, and planning of language habituation programs in madrasas; what are the factors that support and hinder the implementation of language habituation policies in the madrasah environment; and how the impact of language habituation programs on improving linguistic competence, character building, and learning motivation of madrasah students in North Sumatra Province. These three aspects are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of language policies implemented by the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion in an effort to foster interest in learning Arabic and English and improve the quality of madrasah education that is competitive and globally insightful.

B. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design because it focuses on an in-depth analysis of the Arabic and English habituation program policies implemented by the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province. This design was chosen so that researchers can understand contextually how the policy is formulated, implemented, and evaluated in the madrasah environment. The qualitative approach also allows researchers to explore the meaning, experience, and perceptions of policy implementers in more depth.

The research data sources consist of key informants, namely officials of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province who play a role in the formulation and implementation of language habituation policies; the main informants, namely madrasah heads, Arabic and English teachers, and students in several public and private madrasas who have implemented a language habituation program for at least one year; as well as secondary data in the form of policy documents, technical guidelines, activity reports, evaluation results, and relevant administrative archives. The selection of informants is carried out by purposive sampling technique, which is to select data sources that are considered to have the most understanding and experience regarding the implementation of policies in the field.

The data collection process was carried out through in-depth interviews with key and main informants, participatory observation of language habituation activities such as *morning conversations*, *language days*, and language interactions in the madrasah environment, and documentation studies of various policy documents and official reports. Data collection is carried out systematically until it reaches the saturation point, which is when the information obtained has been considered sufficient and no new findings have emerged.

Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman interactive model which includes three stages, namely data reduction to sort and simplify raw data into relevant categories, presentation of data in the form of descriptive narratives and tables so that the relationships between findings are easy to understand, and conclusion drawing and verification to interpret the meaning of data according to the focus of the research (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). The validity of the findings is maintained through triangulation of sources, methods, and times, as well as confirmation of findings to informants through *the member check* process (Marlina et al., 2024).

In its implementation, this study pays attention to the ethical principles of social research. Each informant is given an explanation and informed consent before being interviewed or observed. Identity confidentiality is maintained by not including the names of individuals or institutions without permission. This research also adheres to the principle of nonmaleficence, which does not cause harm to any party, and upholds transparency and scientific integrity by presenting data objectively without manipulation. Thus, the results of this study are expected to be able to provide an accurate, comprehensive, and ethical picture of the implementation of

Arabic and English habituation policies in madrassas under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province.

C. RESULTS

1. Planning and Basis of Language Habituation Policy in Madrasah

Based on the results of interviews with officials of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province, it is known that the policy of habituating Arabic and English in madrasas is part of a program directed to improve the quality and competitiveness of madrasah graduates. This program began to be designed in 2023 through a circular letter from the Regional Office of the Kementerian Agama of Religion of North Sumatra Number: B-11922/Kw.02/2.a/HM.00/09/2023 concerning the Arabic and English Language Habituation Program in Madrasah Areas of the Ministry of Religion Office of North Sumatra.

The basis of the policy is guided by several important regulations that are the basis for strengthening the direction of curriculum development and learning programs in madrasas. First, the Decree of the Minister of Religion (KMA) No. 184 of 2019 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of the Madrasah Curriculum which emphasizes the importance of implementing the curriculum in an integrated, contextual, and adaptive manner to the needs of students and the development of the times. Second, KMA No. 90 of 2013 concerning the Implementation of Language-Based Madrasah which is a reference in strengthening language skills, both Arabic and other foreign languages, as a means of developing global competencies of madrasah students. Third, the Ministry of Religion's Strategic Plan for 2020–2024, which focuses on improving foreign language literacy and competence as one of the main policy directions in increasing the competitiveness of madrasah graduates at the national and international levels. These three policies synergistically become a strategic foothold for madrasas in implementing educational programs that are oriented towards quality, relevance, and competence in the 21st century.

Table 1. Basis and Policy Document for Language Habituation

Key policy documents	Circular Letter of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Number: B-11922/Kw.02/2.a/HM.00/09/2023
Regulatory Reference	KMA No. 184/2019, KMA No. 90/2013
Key Targets	Public and Private Madrasas in North Sumatra
Policy Focus	Strengthening Arabic and English language competencies
Key Implementers	Madrasah Education Division (Penmad) Regional Office and Regency/City Ministry of Religion

From the results of data collection, it was obtained that 76% of state madrassas in North Sumatra have received the policy circular, but only 58% have prepared a work plan for language habituation in writing. Most private madrassas do not have standard implementation guidelines and still depend on the initiative of madrasah heads.

2. Implementation Strategy for Language Habituation Program

The implementation of the program is carried out through structured and non-structural activities. Structured activities include language day, morning conversation, speech competitions, and classroom speaking corners which are systematically designed to foster language skills through communicative activities. This approach is in line with the theory of Communicative Language Teaching (Phothongsunan, 2020), which emphasizes that language learning will be effective if learners are actively involved in the context of real communication. Meanwhile, nonstructural activities include the use of Arabic and English in informal communication between teachers and students outside of school hours. This pattern supports the view of Krashen (1982) in the Input Hypothesis, that natural and sustained

exposure to language in the social environment contributes significantly to language acquisition. Thus, the integration of structured and non-structural activities in language habituation programs creates a bilingual ecosystem that allows students to internalize language skills naturally as well as contextually (Walz, 1982).

Table 2. Form of Implementation of Language Habituation Program in Madrasah

Daily activities	Greetings and prayers in two languages, *morning conversation*
Weekly activities	*Language Day*, *Public Speaking Friday*, Arabic and English speeches
Monthly activities	Debate competitions, vocabulary quizzes, memorization of short dialogues
Supporting media	Vocabulary *wall*, bilingual poster, language reading corner
Person in charge	Arabic teacher, English teacher, and *madrasah* language club team

The results of observations in 10 madrassas show that 7 madrassas have carried out *language days* routinely every week, while 3 madrassas carry out these activities incidentally due to limited time and educators.
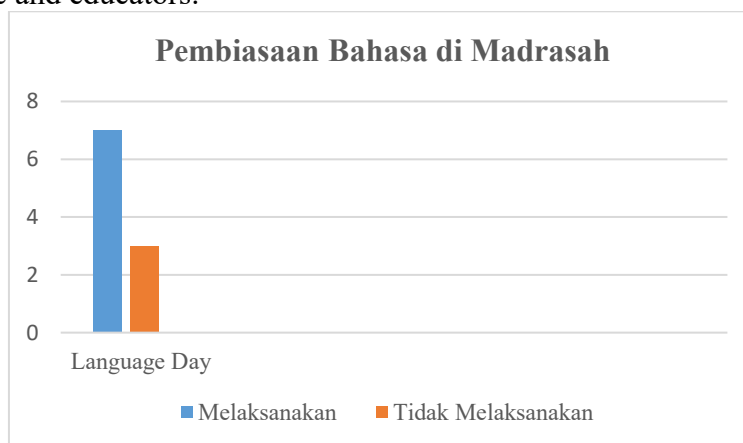

Pembiasaan Bahasa di Madrasah

Language Day

■ Melaksanakan   ■ Tidak Melaksanakan

Figure 1. Frequency of Language Habituation Activities in Madrasah

3. **Supporting and Inhibiting Implementation Factors**

Based on the results of interviews and observations, a number of factors were found that affected the successful implementation of the language habituation policy, both in terms of support and constraints.

Table 3. Supporting Factors for Program Implementation

Institutional Support	Official Circular Letter of the Regional Office and Periodic Monitoring
Student Enthusiasm	72% of students say language activities increase learning motivation
Teacher Support	65% of active teachers use Arabic/English outside the classroom
Environmental Support	60% of madrassas have *bilingual language corners* and poster media
Collaboration	There is a collaboration with IAIN language universities

Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors found are presented in the following table:

Table 4. Factors Inhibiting Program Implementation

Human Resources Limitations	Teachers are not yet trained to speak actively in both languages
Infrastructure	Not all madrasas have language laboratories
Program Consistency	There is no routine evaluation mechanism from the regional office
Administrative burden of teachers	The implementation time is often interrupted by other academic activities
Lack of intensive	There is no special award for madrasas that excel in language habituation

The results of a survey of 30 language teachers showed that 67% felt that additional training was needed, especially in *the communicative language teaching* (CLT) method to make habituation activities more effective.

4. **The Impact of the Program on Linguistic Competency and Student Character**

Data from observation and documentation shows that language habituation programs have a positive impact on improving students' linguistic skills and attitudes. The results of a simple ability test on 120 students in five madrassas showed an increase in average scores as follows:
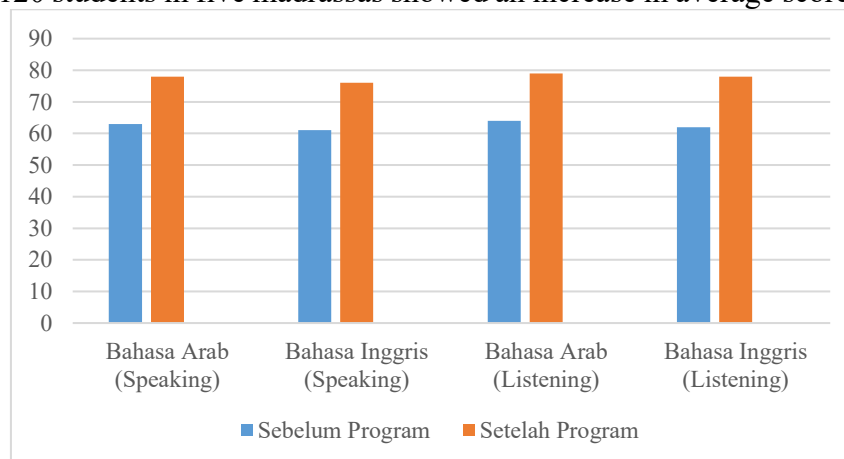

Figure 2. Frequency of Language Proficiency Score Comparison

In addition to improving linguistic skills, the results of interviews with teachers and students showed that language habituation activities also foster disciplined, confident, and communicative characters. Based on the results of the questionnaire of 200 students, the following data was obtained:
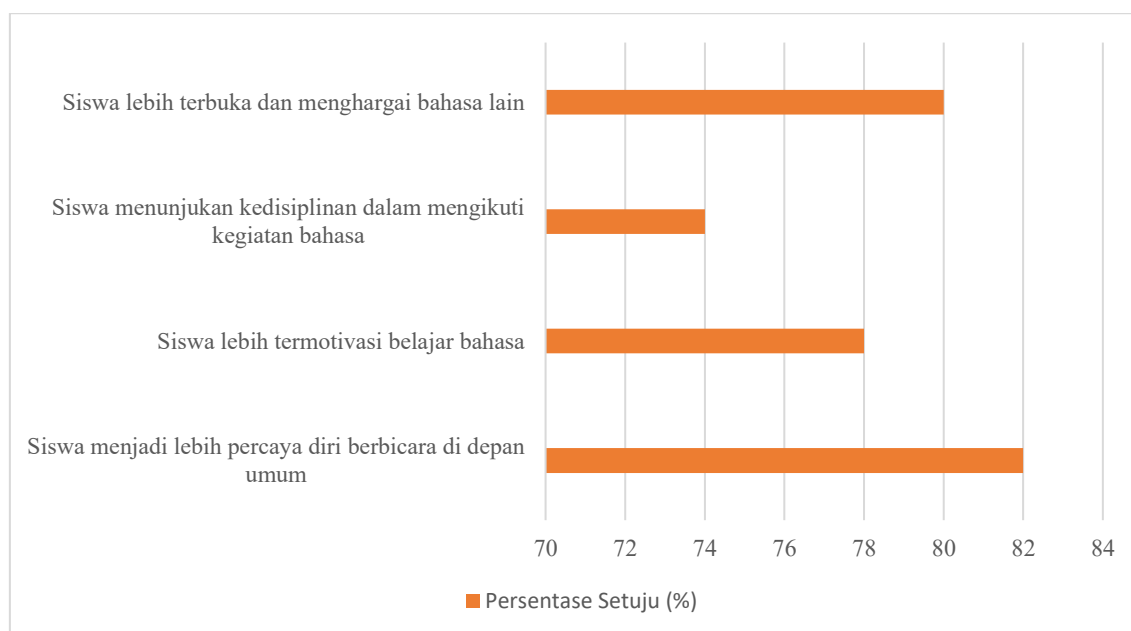
Figure 3. The Impact of the Program on Students' Learning Character and Motivation

5. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism

Based on the results of the documentation, the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province has carried out annual monitoring of madrasas implementing the program. However, there is no standardized evaluation instrument. Monitoring is carried out through independent reports of madrasas and limited field visits.

Table 5. Frequency and Mechanism of Program Evaluation by Regional Offices

Types of Evaluation	Annual Monitoring
Report Form	Activity reports and photo documentation
Executive	Regional Office and Regency/City Ministry of Religion Team
Frequency	1 time per year
Madrasah Involvement	68% of madrassas report regular activities

D. DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the policy of habituating Arabic and English in madrassas implemented by the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province has a direction that is in line with the national policy in strengthening language competence and global literacy. This policy reflects the spirit of *Madrasah Reform* which places madrasas not only as religious education institutions, but also as institutions that prepare a generation with character, competitiveness, and adaptation to global changes.

1. Policy as an Instrument for Strengthening Language Literacy

Conceptually, the language habituation policy is a form of implementation of public policy based on improving the quality of education (*quality-oriented policy*) (Alhendi et al., 2021; Umansky & Porter, 2020). Based on the theory of policy implementation according to George C. Edwards III (1980), the success of a policy is determined by four main factors: communication, resources, the disposition of the implementer, and the bureaucratic structure (Carr-Hill, 2023; Irawan et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2021). The results of this study show that the policies of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra already have good policy communication through official circulars and initial socialization. However,

limited human resources and infrastructure have caused the implementation to not run optimally.

This finding is in line with the results of Zain (2025) research, which states that language policy in madrassas requires strong structural support in order to be able to become a cultural movement, not just a ceremonial activity. Thus, language habituation in North Sumatra madrassas is still at the stage of institutional strengthening and has not been fully integrated into the formal learning system.

2. Implementation Strategy and Field Dynamics

The implementation of activities such as *language day*, *morning conversation*, and speech competitions is an effective contextual strategy in building a bilingual environment in madrasas. These activities are in accordance with the *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)* approach which emphasizes the use of language in the context of real communication, as stated by Richards & Rodgers (2014).

However, the findings of the study show that there is significant variation between madrasas in the consistency of the implementation of activities. Only about 70% of madrasas carry out activities regularly, while the rest are incidental. This shows that the implementation of the policy is still highly dependent on the commitment of the head of the madrasah and the ability of teachers. In the context of *the theory of bottom-up policy implementation* proposed by Lipsky (1980), this condition reflects the strong role of street-level bureaucrats in determining the success of policy programs. This means that the success of the language habituation program is not only determined by policy documents from above, but also by creativity and implementation initiatives at the madrasah level.

3. Supporting Factors and Barriers

The main supporting factors found were student enthusiasm and teacher support. Data shows that 72% of students feel that language activities increase learning motivation, and 65% of teachers actively use foreign languages outside of the classroom. These findings reinforce the theory of learning motivation from Deci & Ryan (2000) in *Self-Determination Theory*, that intrinsic activities such as the desire to be able to communicate in a foreign language are more effective in encouraging learning engagement than external instruction alone (Oga-Baldwin et al., 2017).

Instead, the main obstacles lie in the lack of teacher training and the limitations of supporting facilities such as language laboratories. This is consistent with the findings of research by Huiling & Lilliati (2025) and Muhammadi & Moradi (2017), which emphasized that without infrastructure support and sustainable teacher competency development, language habituation programs are only short-term and are not able to form a strong language culture. Thus, a continuous *professional development system* for Arabic and English language teachers is needed, as well as a more equitable resource allocation policy between madrasas.

4. Impact on Linguistic Competence and Character

The improvement in linguistic ability scores after the implementation of the program shows that the language habituation policy contributes significantly to students' mastery of Arabic and English. The average *speaking* and *listening* score increased by more than 12 points within one year. These results reinforce the view of Krashen (1989) in *the Input Hypothesis*, that natural and sustained exposure to language through informal activities can significantly improve students' communication skills.

In addition, the findings that 82% of students became more confident and 78% more motivated showed that language habituation not only had an impact on linguistic aspects, but also on the formation of character and positive attitudes towards language. This supports the theory of character education from Lickona (1991) which states that positive habits internalized in daily activities can foster discipline, responsibility, and confidence. Thus, language habituation programs can be categorized as a dual-oriented policy: strengthening cognitive competence as well as character building (Kurniawan & Fitriyani, 2023).

5. **Policy Monitoring and Evaluation**

The results of the study also show that the evaluation mechanism carried out by the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province is still administrative, in the form of activity reports and documentation without standard assessment instruments. This condition has the potential to cause a gap between reporting and the reality of implementation in the field. In the context of policy evaluation theory, according to Dunn (2018), this shows the need to increase the dimension *of responsiveness* and *accountability* in the monitoring system.

A more systematic evaluation instrument is needed, for example with indicators of student involvement, frequency of activities, students' language skills, and program sustainability. Evaluation based on measurable indicators will help the Regional Office in assessing the effectiveness of policies and determining the next strengthening strategy.

6. **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Theoretically, the results of this study enrich the study of the implementation of Islamic education policies, especially in the field of language in madrasas. Language habituation policy can be seen as an integrative model between religious values-based education policies and global competency needs.

Practically, this finding emphasizes the need to strengthen a tiered policy system that involves synergy between the Regional Office, the Ministry of Religion, and madrasas. Language habituation policies should not only be top-down, but developed through a *participatory policy approach* that involves teachers and students as the main subjects. In addition, incentives and awards for outstanding madrassas need to be developed to maintain the sustainability of motivation and consistency of the program.

E. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of research on the policy of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province in planning and implementing Arabic and English language habituation programs in madrasas, several main findings were obtained that answered the research questions comprehensively.

First, the policy foundation, strategic direction, and planning of language habituation programs in madrasas are rooted in the vision of the Ministry of Religion to increase the competitiveness of madrasah graduates in facing the challenges of globalization. This program is prepared with a normative foundation in the form of national regulations such as PMA Number 90 of 2013 concerning the Implementation of Madrasah Education and the internal policies of the Regional Office which emphasizes the integration of foreign language learning in daily activities. However, planning still faces challenges in the form of limited needs maps for educational units, lack of coordination between sections, and lack of optimal training of educators in the two languages.

Second, from the aspect of policy implementation, it was found that some madrassas have implemented *language day programs* and the integration of the use of foreign languages in non-formal activities such as apples, extracurriculars, and morning literacy. The main supporting factors include the support of madrasah leaders, student enthusiasm, and cooperation with language institutions and universities. The significant inhibiting factors are the limited number of competent teaching staff, the lack of facilities such as language laboratories, the lack of incentives for supervisors, and the low motivation of some students towards foreign languages that are considered difficult or less relevant to their needs.

Third, the impact of the language habituation program showed quite positive results. Madrasas that consistently run programs show an improvement in students' basic communication skills, increased confidence, and the emergence of a bilingual communication culture in the madrasah environment. In addition, familiarity with Arabic has been shown to strengthen understanding of religious materials, while English opens students' access to global literature and enriches

academic insights. The program also contributes to the formation of religious, disciplined, and self-confident character. However, these achievements have not been evenly distributed in all madrasas due to resource inequality and lack of systematic monitoring from the Regional Office.

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G. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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