



Comparative Case Study of English and Arabic Language Policy in Islamic Secondary School

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-06-24 Revised: 2026-08-27 Accepted: 2026-09-02 Keywords: Arabic-English language policy; case study; Islamic secondary schools; Islamic identity DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.11433 Corresponding Author: Nuskhan Abid nuskhan@uinsuku.ac.id Tadris Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kudus	<i>This article investigates how Arabic and English are ideologically valued, institutionally managed, and selectively practiced in three Indonesian Islamic secondary schools. Three principals, three curriculum coordinators, six language teachers, and three students took part in semi-structured interviews. Observations and school documents supported triangulation. English was primarily associated with communication, academic mobility, technology, and confidence, whereas Arabic was associated with religious literacy, kitab learning, and Islamic identity. Implementation occurred through differentiated programs rather than equivalent formal policy structures: English through speaking, presentations, dialogues, and clubs; Arabic through mufrodat (vocabulary), muhasabah (conversation practice), kitab study, and religious or public-school activities. Indonesian remained the main language for explanation and informal interaction, so the observed ecology was selectively bilingual rather than immersive. Challenges included low confidence, English pronunciation anxiety, vocabulary, and grammar demands in Arabic. Schools should define program ownership, align each language's functions with realistic routines, monitor equitable opportunities for meaningful use in bilingual policy planning, and consider Islamic identity.</i>

1. Introduction

Language policy constitutes a central regulatory framework within educational institutions, shaping how languages are valued, organized, and enacted in daily practice. Rather than being a neutral administrative arrangement, language policy reflects ideological orientations, institutional priorities, and broader sociocultural interests (Bernstein et al., 2023). It determines which languages are legitimized, how they are distributed across curricular domains, and how they function in instructional and extracurricular practices (Arifuddin, 2025). Following Mustafawi et al. (2022), language policy can be understood through three interrelated dimensions: ideology, management,

and practice. The ideological dimension refers to the beliefs and value systems attached to languages. The managerial dimension includes formal regulations, curriculum allocation, enforcement mechanisms, and institutional programs that organize language use. The practical dimension concerns the actual use of language in classrooms and school activities. These dimensions operate simultaneously and collectively shape the linguistic ecology of schools (Lozano, 2024; Yunanto, 2025).

Multiple languages coexist within a single educational institution; language policy becomes a landscape of negotiation and potential hierarchy. Malley (2002) argues that when languages embody different forms of symbolic, religious, or instrumental capital, their institutional positioning often reflects broader ideological and political dynamics. Within the contemporary global landscape, English and Arabic represent two languages with distinct yet powerful forms of capital. English functions as a global *lingua franca*, dominating scientific production, digital communication, and international academics (Garras, 2025; Widodo, 2025). Arabic, meanwhile, holds authoritative status within Muslim communities as the language of the Qur'an and as a carrier of classical Islamic intellectual heritage (Erdu, 2025). Beyond symbolic value, Arabic also operates as a medium of religious instruction and institutional regulation in Islamic educational settings (Umroh & Ni'mah, 2024).

Within this broader institutional landscape, the interaction between Arabic and English becomes especially visible in Indonesian Islamic secondary schools. These two languages frequently coexist within formally declared bilingual policies. Such policies typically aim to balance the formation of religious identity with aspirations for global competitiveness (Mustafawi et al., 2022). At the managerial level, implementation often includes designated language days, bilingual slogans, vocabulary memorization programs, speech practices, language clubs, competitions, and structured speaking activities (Khofifah et al., 2025). Arabic is generally institutionalized through religious subjects, routine acts of religious worship, and school regulations, whereas English derives legitimacy from national curriculum standards, standardized assessment systems, and participation in academic competitions (Kosim et al., 2023; Shidiq et al., 2023).

However, the existence of bilingual policy declarations does not necessarily guarantee balanced implementation. Empirical studies suggest variations in consistency, resource allocation, teacher proficiency, and monitoring mechanisms (Shidiq et al., 2023). In some contexts, Arabic dominates ritual and symbolic domains but is less present in academic communication beyond religious subjects (Hafidz & Fajar, 2025; Nugraha et al., 2024). Conversely, English often receives stronger reinforcement in measurable performance indicators such as competitions and examinations, yet may not be fully integrated into daily communicative practices (Said et al., 2025). In certain cases, Arabic is maintained primarily as a marker of religious identity without sustained communicative reinforcement, whereas English receives greater institutional support in measurable academic achievement contexts (Hafidz & Fajar, 2025).

Although research on language policy in Islamic schools has expanded, most studies continue to treat Arabic and English as separate objects of inquiry or focus predominantly on pedagogical concerns (Dedduang & Kholis, 2025; Ma'udah et al., 2025). Explicit comparative analyses that examine both languages within a single institutional configuration, while simultaneously considering ideological, managerial, and practical dimensions, remain limited (Ritonga et al., 2025). This gap calls for a systematic comparative case study approach (Matatula & Tupalessy, 2025; Ritonga et al., 2025). More specifically, there is still limited research comparing how Arabic and English are positioned, managed, and practiced within the same Islamic secondary school context.

Responding to this gap, the present study investigates the forms of Arabic and English language policy implemented in Islamic secondary schools that formally adopt an Arabic-English bilingual framework. The novelty of this study lies in its comparative analysis of Arabic and English within the same institutional setting, integrating the dimensions of ideology, management, and practice. Accordingly, this study aims to identify the forms of Arabic and English language policy implemented in secondary Islamic schools and to determine whether the two languages operate in a balanced configuration, parallel coexistence, or institutional asymmetry. By doing so, it contributes conceptually and empirically to broader discussions on language policy in Indonesian Islamic education (Muttaqin et al., 2025).

The following questions guide the research:

RQ1: What forms of Arabic and English language policy are implemented in Islamic secondary schools?

RQ2: How are the policies practiced in the classroom and daily school activities?

RQ3: What challenges and opportunities emerge from the implementation of the dual-language policy?

2. Method

This study used a multiple-case study design to examine Arabic and English language policy in three Islamic secondary schools. A multiple-case design enabled comparison across distinct institutional ecologies while retaining attention to each site's context (Creswell & David, 2018; Yin, 2017: 95). Policy was not treated only as a written regulation. Guided by Spolsky (2009) framework, the study examined ideology or beliefs about each language, management through rules and programs, and practices in classrooms and school activities. The three research questions were then organized to compare policy forms, their enactment, and the opportunities and challenges of implementation.

Participants

They are identified by the standardized pseudonyms School Hikmah, School Najah, and School Madani. The participants consisted of 15 individuals: three principals, three curriculum coordinators, three Arabic teachers, three English teachers, and three students. Staff participants represented policy, coordination, and classroom roles. One student was selected from each site to provide an illustrative learner perspective within the available access and study scope; these three accounts were used for corroboration and are not treated as representative of the full student population. Participants were selected through purposive sampling because they were directly involved in planning, implementing, or experiencing the language policy (Creswell & David, 2018; Tajik et al., 2024). This composition enabled the study to compare perspectives of policymakers, program managers, classroom implementers, and student users within the same institutional context (Zein et al., 2020). Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic profile.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Role	Experience	School
Mr. Rohmat	Male	35	English Teacher	10 years	Hikmah
Mr. Andre	Male	40	Arabic Teacher	12 years	Hikmah
Mr. Hadi	Male	50	Principal	20 years	Hikmah
Mr. Ahmad	Male	32	Curriculum Coordinator	8 years	Hikmah
Mrs. Siti	Female	30	English Teacher	7 years	Najah
Mr. Zaenal	Male	38	Arabic Teacher	11 years	Najah
Mr. Mustofa	Male	48	Principal	18 years	Najah

Mrs. Indah	Female	34	Curriculum Coordinator	9 years	Najah
Mrs. Naim	Female	33	English Teacher	8 years	Madani
Mrs. Hamidah	Female	42	Arabic Teacher	15 years	Madani
Mrs. Aisah	Female	52	Principal	22 years	Madani
Mrs. Dila	Female	36	Curriculum Coordinator	10 years	Madani
Siska	Female	14	Student (Grade VIII)	-	Hikmah
Husna	Female	14	Student (Grade VIII)	-	Najah
Suci	Female	15	Student (Grade IX)	-	Madani

Data Collection Techniques and Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were the principal data source. The interview guide covered four blocks: the perceived purpose and status of Arabic and English; program ownership and implementation; classroom and school-based use; and challenges, opportunities, monitoring, and continuity. Role-specific follow-up questions allowed principals, coordinators, teachers, and students to address their different experiences. Interviews lasted 5–15 minutes, were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded with consent, and accompanied by field notes. The focused duration reflected access constraints and supported targeted comparison, but it did not provide the depth of extended qualitative interviews; this limitation was partly addressed through source triangulation and follow-up clarification. This format provided a guiding structure while allowing participants to elaborate on their responses.

At each site, observations are conducted using structured field notes that cover classroom language choice, greetings, speaking, master of ceremonies (MC), performance, and student participation. Observation frequency and duration were not standardized as a comparable longitudinal corpus; observations, therefore, corroborated interview claims rather than supporting frequency estimates. Available documents included regulations, curriculum materials, schedules, modules, posters, banners, notices, and event agendas, but the document sets were not identical across schools.

Participants were informed about the study's purpose and the voluntary nature of participation. Interviews and audio recordings were conducted with consent; pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reporting to replace personal and institutional identities. Access and recruitment were coordinated with school leadership.

Data Analysis

Analysis combined deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes represented ideology, management, and practice, while inductive codes captured functions and recurring issues such as religious identity, academic mobility, classroom and extracurricular practice, program continuity, confidence, vocabulary, and grammar. One researcher conducted the coding; no formal intercoder-agreement statistic was calculated. Credibility was supported by comparing interview themes with observations and available documents and by seeking follow-up clarification when necessary. When sources diverged, the discrepancy was retained and interpreted as evidence of a gap among stated ideology, management, and practice rather than forced into convergence (Miles et al., 2014). In this article, interview coding and data reduction serve as the primary basis of the findings, while observation and document review provide supporting evidence to confirm how Arabic and English were formally represented and practically implemented in each school (Warren & Bell, 2022).

3. Result & Discussion

Result

The findings distinguish four levels of evidence. Formal policy refers to a written rule or decree; a program is an organized activity with a schedule or responsible actor; pedagogical practice is a teacher's classroom strategy; and habitual language use is a recurring but not necessarily formally mandated routine. Across the three sites, Arabic and English were institutionally present, but the available evidence more often documented programs, pedagogical practices, and habitus than equivalent comprehensive bilingual-policy decrees.

Three cross-case patterns emerged. English was mainly associated with speaking, presentation, technology, confidence, and academic mobility; Arabic was mainly associated with Islamic learning, *kitab* comprehension, *mufrodat* (vocabulary), *muhadasah* (conversation practice), religious activities, and school identity. School Hikmah gave English greater programmatic visibility, School Najah sustained a stronger Arabic ecology, and School Madani used a complementary functional model. Table 2 compares the cases. The degree of institutionalization is assessed through written authorization, ownership, scheduling, monitoring, and cross-setting visibility.

Table 2. Cross-Case Comparison of Arabic and English Language Policy

Comparison dimension	School Hikmah	School Najah	School Madani
Policy orientation	English-oriented communicative and academic mobility programs	Arabic-oriented religious literacy and <i>pesantren</i> ecology	Complementary functional allocation of Arabic and English
English functions	Speaking, confidence, academic, and global readiness	Supporting classroom competence and interest	Speaking, presentation, technology, and public communication
Arabic functions	Compulsory Islamic curriculum and basic religious literacy	<i>Kitab</i> learning, religious literacy, Islamic identity, and daily routines	Religious understanding, Islamic identity, and public-school performance
Main programs	Weekly speaking, short presentations, vocabulary work, English Club, basic Arabic texts	English games and simple conversation; weekly <i>mufrodat</i> , <i>muhadasah</i> , <i>muhadhoroh</i> , and <i>kitab</i> learning	Speaking, presentations, MC and speech roles, bilingual events, and religious activities
Challenges	Uneven confidence in English; limited communicative spaces for Arabic	Arabic vocabulary and grammar demands; limited school-wide English ecology	Uneven readiness and continued reliance on the Indonesian

Comparison dimension	School Hikmah	School Najah	School Madani
Opportunities	English Club, peer practice, and visible performance spaces	<i>Pesantren</i> routines and sustained religious-language exposure	Alternating Arabic and English roles in the classroom and public events
Degree of institutionalization	Programmatic medium; low formalization in a specific bilingual decree	Habitual-cultural high for Arabic; low formalization in a specific bilingual decree	Programmatic medium; low formalization in a comprehensive bilingual policy

1. The Implementation of Arabic and English Language Policy in Islamic Secondary Schools

The first finding concerns how Arabic and English were positioned as school policies. The data show that English and Arabic were both formally present, but they were assigned different institutional functions. English was primarily designed for communication, global readiness, academic performance, and student confidence. Arabic was mostly constructed as a language for religious literacy, Islamic character, *kitab* learning, and institutional identity. These two policy directions appeared in all three schools, but their strength varied by school context.

1.1 English language policy as a communicative and academic-mobility policy

The implementation of the English policy was mainly oriented toward communicative competence. This means that English was not treated only as a subject with grammar and written exercises, but as a policy instrument for preparing students to speak, present, and participate in wider educational and technological contexts. The clearest evidence appears in School Hikmah, where English was explicitly connected to future academic, technological, and occupational needs. The same orientation also appeared in School Madani through speaking, presentation, technology, and public communication. In School Najah, English was still taught, but it had a more supporting role because Arabic and *pesantren* culture more strongly shaped the school environment.

This finding shows that English policy in the three Islamic secondary schools functioned as an instrument for developing students' communicative competence. Its value was measured by how effectively it helped students communicate, perform, and gain confidence. In School Hikmah, this policy was supported by weekly speaking practice, vocabulary memorization, conversation practice, and the English Club. In School Madani, it was supported through speaking practice, presentations, MC activities, and school events. In School Najah, support was more modest, provided through games, simple conversation, group activities, and students' exposure to English through social media, films, and the internet.

Excerpt 1

"We want students to have good English communication skills because developments in education, technology, and work are closely related to international language competence. Therefore, the school provides English habituation so that students not only understand theory but are also able to communicate actively." (Mr. Hadi, Personal Interview)

Excerpt 1 represents an English communicative-habitation policy. The policy is not simply a teacher's opinion; it indicates a school-level decision to make English function as practical communication. This statement represents a school-level communicative

orientation. In School Hikmah, it was enacted through weekly speaking practice, short dialogues and presentations, vocabulary work, and the English Club. The evidence supports a programmatic English orientation rather than a claim that a comprehensive stand-alone policy decree governed English.

School Madani showed a related English orientation within a complementary bilingual arrangement. English supported speaking, presentation, technology, and public communication, while Arabic supported religious understanding and Islamic identity. Complementarity here describes different functions and organized spaces; it does not imply equal proficiency, frequency, or resources.

Excerpt 2

"English is directed toward global communication, such as speaking ability, presentations, and understanding international technology. Meanwhile, Arabic is strengthened to support religious understanding, kitab, and Islamic culture." (Mrs. Aisah, Personal Interview)

The evidence from School Madani links English to global communication and academic performance while placing it beside, rather than above, Arabic. In School Najah, English was managed mainly through classroom strategies such as games, simple conversation, and group work because the broader school ecology favored Arabic. These differences indicate variation in program reach, not a simple ranking of policy strength.

Across sites, English implementation depended on the school ecology. School Hikmah offered a visible communicative program; School Madani provided complementary public and classroom roles in English and Arabic; and School Najah used English primarily to support classroom competence. Curriculum position, program ownership, and available practice spaces, therefore, shaped enactment.

These cross-site patterns are consistent with Mustafawi et al. (2022), who show that Arabic and English may carry different perceived values, and with those who emphasize that English-language practice in Indonesia is negotiated through local conditions. In this study, English gained broader programmatic visibility, with schools providing routine speaking spaces and public performance opportunities.

1.2 Arabic language policy as religious-literacy and Islamic-identity policy

Arabic showed a different institutional orientation. It supported religious literacy, Islamic identity, *kitab* learning, and school culture across the three sites. The orientation was most deeply embedded in School Najah's *pesantren* ecology. At School Hikmah, Arabic remained a compulsory part of Islamic education but had fewer visible communicative programs than English. At School Madani, Arabic complemented English and appeared in religious learning and formal school activities.

Arabic was expected to support religious vocabulary, *kitab kuning*, *mufrodat*, *nahwu*, *sharaf*, and religious expressions. This function aligned Arabic with each institution's Islamic character. School Najah provided the clearest example because its environment and many students' educational backgrounds were connected to *pesantren* education.

Excerpt 3

"Arabic becomes the main priority in our school because the educational environment around the school is very close to the pesantren culture. Most students also have a religious educational background, so the school needs to strengthen Arabic competence as part of students' academic and religious identity." (Mr. Mustofa, Personal Interview)

Excerpt 3 represents an Arabic priority policy. The policy is based on the function of Arabic as religious literacy and institutional identity. In School Najah, Arabic policy is not only a subject policy; it is connected to the school's *pesantren* environment, students' religious background, *kitab kuning*, weekly *mufrodat*, *muhadasah*, and *muhadhoroh*. The interview-analysis document supports this interpretation by coding the statement as an Arabic-language policy orientation and recording related programs such as *mufrodat memorization*, *muhadasah* practice, and *pesantren* environmental support.

The same Arabic policy function appears in School Hikmah, but with a different level of implementation. Arabic is still compulsory because the school is an Islamic secondary school, yet the interview data show that the school's visible program energy is more directed toward English communication. Therefore, Arabic in School Hikmah functions as a necessary religious-curricular component, while English functions as a stronger communicative program.

At School Madani, Arabic was integrated into a complementary functional arrangement. It supported religious understanding, learning the *kitab*, Islamic culture, speeches, MC activities, and religious events. Public-use spaces made Arabic more performative than at School Hikmah, while it was less embedded in daily *pesantren* routines than at School Najah. The pattern is therefore complementary rather than evidence of balanced proficiency.

The cross-case result is functional differentiation. English generally supported communicative performance, academic confidence, and wider access, while Arabic generally supported religious literacy, Islamic identity, and cultural continuity. These observed allocations describe institutional choices; they do not define the inherent capacities or value of either language.

Three factors explain the differences. Institutional identity shaped which functions received priority; program availability determined the organized spaces available for each language; and student readiness affected how far planned activities became actual practice. Speaking anxiety limited English use, while vocabulary and grammar demands limited Arabic use. Institutionalization must therefore be judged through ownership, scheduling, monitoring, continuity, and visibility.

Arabic-English policy in these schools was not simply "English versus Arabic." It was a differentiated allocation of functions. Equitable bilingual development would require each language to receive meaningful, repeated, and supported opportunities for use, even when their immediate functions differ. This supports (Hafidz & Fajar, 2025), who emphasizes that Arabic language culture becomes stronger when supported by routine and an institutional environment, and (Samin et al., 2025), who explains that Arabic learning develops through sustained exposure.

2. Classroom and School-Based Practices of Arabic and English Language Policy

The second finding concerns the practical enactment of the policies. The classroom and school-based practices confirm that the policies were selective rather than fully immersive. English and Arabic were not used as the full medium of instruction across all subjects and interactions. Instead, they appeared in selected domains that matched their policy functions. English was mainly taught through speaking practice, conversation, presentations, the English Club, games, and public performance. Arabic appeared mainly through *mufrodat*, *muhadasah*, *kitab*-related learning, greetings, religious activities, speeches, and Islamic school events.

2.1 Practices of English policy

School Hikmah provided the clearest routine English practice through weekly speaking, short conversations, presentations, dialogue exercises, vocabulary work, and the English Club. These activities translated an ideology of global readiness into program management and low-pressure communicative practice. Their regularity demonstrates program visibility but does not, by itself, establish a comprehensive formal policy.

English policy was practiced through activities that trained students to use the language orally. School Hikmah provides the clearest practice model because English is repeatedly used in weekly speaking practice, short conversations, presentations, dialogue exercises, vocabulary memorization, and the English Club. These activities show that English policy in School Hikmah is not only an ideological statement about global communication; it is translated into a set of routine practices.

Excerpt 4

"Every week, students are required to join a simple speaking practice. This activity is usually carried out through short conversations, light presentations, and dialogue exercises so that students begin to become accustomed to using English in daily communication." (Mr. Hadi, Personal Interview)

Excerpt 4 confirms that English policy becomes more effective when it is experienced as enjoyable and social. The student's statement shows that speaking practice, games, and peer dialogue reduce the distance between policy and learner participation. This supports (Muttaqin et al., 2025), who emphasize learning communities for promoting bilingual practice. It also supports those who argue that language learning is strengthened through repeated and meaningful exposure.

At School Madani, English was used in speaking practice, presentations, MC and moderator roles, competitions, and school performances. Teachers reported prioritizing direct speaking alongside grammar explanation. English, therefore, moved beyond the classroom, alternating with Arabic at public events, consistent with a complementary rather than fully immersive model.

2.2 Practices of Arabic policy

Arabic practice supported religious literacy and Islamic school culture through *mufrodat* memorization, *muhadasah*, *muhadhoroh* (speech or public-speaking activity), *kitab* learning, greetings, simple conversations, and religious events. At School Najah, weekly vocabulary work supplied lexical resources for conversation and text comprehension; *Muhadasah* provided opportunities to use them. The *pesantren* environment strongly supported the routine.

Muhadasah then functions as the communicative practice of Arabic policy. If *mufrodat* provides students with lexical resources, *muhadasah* enables them to use those resources in spoken interaction. This is why Arabic policy in School Najah is stronger than in School Hikmah: it is supported not only by classroom learning but also by *pesantren*-like routines and environmental exposure.

Excerpt 5

"We have a weekly mufrodat memorization schedule as part of the Arabic habituation program at school." (Mrs. Indah, Personal Interview)

The evidence from Najah School shows a movement from textual learning toward communicative habituation. Arabic cannot be strengthened solely through grammar instruction or vocabulary memorization; students also need supported interaction. This interpretation is consistent with work linking Arabic acquisition to environment, motivation, social interaction, and sustained exposure (Samin et al., 2025).

In School Hikmah, Arabic practice is more basic and curricular. Students learn *mufrodat* and simple texts to understand the foundations of Arabic and Islamic learning. In School Madani, Arabic practice is broader, as it is also used in speeches, MC activities, and religious events. Therefore, Arabic practice across the schools can be compared as follows: School Hikmah emphasizes basic Arabic literacy, School Najah emphasizes Arabic religious literacy routines, and School Madani emphasizes Arabic as part of bilingual public communication.

Excerpt 6

"Muhadasah becomes the main program for strengthening Arabic because students must be habituated to use the language directly, not only study the theory." (Mr. Zaenal, Personal Interview)

Husna's account provides student-level corroboration that *mufrodat* and *Muhadasah* supported comprehension of religious lessons and *kitab kuning*. The evidence illustrates Arabic's religious-literacy function while remaining limited to one student voice at the site (Hafidz & Fajar, 2025; Nashruddin et al., 2025).

Across sites, English practice was more performance-oriented, whereas Arabic practice was more closely tied to literacy and religious routines. School Madani created the clearest overlap by assigning both languages roles in MC work, speeches, presentations, and performances. These are dominant tendencies, not exclusive language domains.

Indonesian remained the dominant mediating language for explanation, classroom management, and informal interaction. Arabic and English were integrated into selected domains in line with the program's aims and learners' readiness. The ecology was therefore multilingual, with Indonesian enabling participation and comprehension while also limiting extended exposure to the target language. Arabic and English language cultures in Islamic educational settings (Hafidz & Fajar, 2025). Islamic school curricula often integrate Arabic with religious educational aims (Nashruddin et al., 2025).

3. Challenges and Opportunities in the Implementation of Arabic and English Language Policy

The third finding concerns the challenges and opportunities of implementing Arabic and English policies. The main challenge was not the absence of policy. All three schools had Arabic and English in their curriculum or school programs. The deeper challenge was how to make the policies sustainable in daily practice. English faced challenges related to confidence, pronunciation, and limited daily use. Arabic faced challenges related to vocabulary load, grammar (*nahwu and sharaf*), and the need to shift from textual learning to active use. Both languages required repeated, realistic practice.

3.1 Challenges and opportunities of English policy

The main challenge of English policy was speaking anxiety. Students often understood the material but were afraid to speak because they worried about making pronunciation mistakes or being judged by their peers. This challenge appeared most clearly in School Hikmah, where English policy was communicative, but student readiness was uneven. The same issue also appeared in School Najah and School Madani, where students still needed relaxed classroom activities and guided performance opportunities.

Excerpt 7

"The biggest challenge is building students' courage to speak. Many students understand the material, but they are afraid of wrong pronunciation or afraid of being laughed at by their friends when they try to speak." (Mr. Hadi, Personal Interview)

Excerpt 7 shows that English policy cannot succeed only by requiring students to speak. The policy must also create a supportive speaking environment. School Hikmah responds to this challenge through the English Club, games, speech, conversation practice, and peer dialogue. School Najah responds through games, simple conversation, and group activities. School Madani responds through speaking practice, presentations, MC roles, and school events. These activities are not separate from policy; they are the practical mechanisms that make English policy possible.

The opportunity of English policy lies in students' exposure to global media and enjoyable spaces for speaking. In School Najah, students' interest in English increases because they encounter English on social media, in films, and online. In School Hikmah, the English Club makes learning more enjoyable. In School Madani, school events allow students to use English in real contexts. Therefore, English policy is strengthened when schools connect formal learning to students' social interests and performance opportunities.

Excerpt 8

"Students' interest in English has begun to increase because they often see English used in social media, films, and the internet." (Mrs. Siti, Personal Interview)

English also benefited from students' exposure to social media, films, and the internet. This external exposure could motivate learners, but recognition did not automatically produce confident speaking. Schools, therefore, connected media interest to guided conversation, peer practice, clubs, presentations, and public performance. Without guided speaking activities, students may recognize English but remain afraid to use it orally. This supports (Permana & Rohmah, 2024), who argue that English practice in Indonesian schools must be negotiated in light of local realities and learner readiness.

3.2 Challenges and opportunities of Arabic policy

Arabic presented a different challenge: new vocabulary, unfamiliar grammatical structures, *nahwu*, *sharaf*, and comprehension of *kitab*-related material. The challenge was especially visible at School Najah because Arabic was more intensively embedded there, but it also appeared at School Hikmah and School Madani. Weekly *mufrodat*, *Muhadasah*, grammar scaffolding, and meaningful application were used to connect textual knowledge with active language use.

Arabic's main opportunity was environmental and religious support. School Najah benefited from *pesantren* routines and the need to understand *kitab kuning*. School Madani provided Arabic roles in formal and religious events. School Hikmah retained Arabic as a compulsory Islamic subject, but would need broader communicative spaces to extend its use beyond basic literacy.

Excerpt 9

"The difficulty is that students feel Arabic is quite difficult to learn because there are many new vocabulary words and grammatical rules that are different from Indonesian." (Mr. Mustofa, Personal Interview)

Excerpt 16 links Arabic visibility to environmental support. Arabic was embedded in religious routines, greetings, *kitab* learning, and *pesantren* culture, while English drew additional support from clubs, media, and speaking programs. The contrast reflects different institutional mechanisms rather than an inherent difference in language value (Hafidz & Fajar, 2025; Samin et al., 2025).

Excerpt 10

"Arabic is used more often than English because the school and pesantren environment support the use of Arabic more strongly." (Husna, Personal Interview)

English and Arabic, therefore, required different support systems. English needed low-pressure speaking spaces, pronunciation support, and communicative practice; Arabic needed vocabulary reinforcement, grammar scaffolding, *Muhadasah*, and meaningful engagement with religious texts. Participants also reported mixing Indonesian with the target languages when confidence was incomplete, reinforcing Indonesian's central mediating role.

Student evidence was treated as illustrative corroboration. Siska emphasized the enjoyment of peer practice in the English Club, while Husna linked Arabic routines to *kitab* comprehension and described support within the *pesantren* environment. Because only one student per site participated, these accounts clarify mechanisms but cannot establish the distribution of student experiences. This finding supports Hafidz and Fajar (2025) and Samin et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of language, culture, and language environment in Islamic educational contexts.

4. Document and Observation of Each School

The available written evidence did not show equivalent comprehensive bilingual policies across the sites. At School Hikmah, English Club and weekly speaking were visible in schedules, classroom activities, and notices, but no specific bilingual decree was available. At School Najah, *Mufrodat*, *Muhadasah*, religious agendas, and Arabic notices documented a strong habituation culture, but there was no comprehensive bilingual policy document. At School Madani, event schedules, modules, MC activities, and performance agendas showed coordinated bilingual programming rather than a detailed written policy. Document sets varied across schools, so the absence of a document is interpreted as limited documentary evidence rather than proof that a practice did not exist.

Mapped onto Spolsky (2009) framework, ideology appeared in the association of English with mobility and Arabic with Islamic identity; management appeared in schedules, clubs, curricula, assigned activities, and teacher coordination; and practice appeared in actual classroom, religious, and public-event language use. Institutionalization was strongest where ownership, scheduling, monitoring, documentation, and cross-setting practice converged. Reliance on routines and individual teachers created short-term continuity but left accountability and sustainability vulnerable to staff or leadership turnover.

5. Discussion

5.1. *The implementation of the Arabic and English language policy in Islamic secondary schools*

Functional differentiation is best understood as institutionally produced domain allocation: English and Arabic recur in different activities because schools attach different goals to them and organize different programs around those goals. The pattern resembles complementary bilingualism because the languages can support distinct but mutually relevant educational aims. It differs from classical diglossia, which usually concerns socially differentiated varieties within one linguistic repertoire, although both concepts draw attention to patterned domain allocation (Fishman, 1967).

The comparative model links ideology → management → practice → function → opportunity or challenge. Ideologies associated English with mobility and Arabic with Islamic identity. Management translated those beliefs into clubs, schedules, vocabulary routines, curricula, and event roles. Practices then produced visible functions—speaking and presentation for English; religious literacy and *kitab*-related activity for Arabic—while student readiness and institutional support shaped participation. The model clarifies why formal labels alone did not predict enactment (Spolsky, 2009).

Functional differentiation can nevertheless reproduce a hierarchy of language value. If English receives more public recognition, assessment, technology, and mobility resources, its instrumental value may be treated as more modern or economically consequential. If Arabic is restricted to ritual and textual domains, its academic range may be underestimated. The observed allocation should therefore not be reduced to a fixed binary: English can support Islamic scholarship and international religious exchange, while Arabic can support modern academic, scientific, technological, and international communication.

Indonesian is central to this ecology rather than a neutral background language. It mediated explanation, classroom management, and informal interaction, and allowed participation when confidence in English or Arabic was incomplete. The schools are therefore better described as multilingual settings with selective Arabic-English practices rather than fully immersive bilingual environments.

5.2. *Classroom and school-based practices of Arabic and English policy*

The distinction among formal policy, programs, pedagogical practices, and habitual use explains the sustainability problem. Programs can be highly visible yet remain dependent on a particular teacher or leader when they lack written objectives, assigned ownership, monitoring, and evaluation. Habitual practice can sustain a language through culture, but it may offer limited accountability when participation or outcomes are uneven. Formal documentation does not guarantee implementation, yet its absence makes continuity, resource allocation, and evaluation more vulnerable (May, 2004).

A realistic policy response is not to force identical functions or full immersion. Each school can document a differentiated policy that specifies the educational functions of both languages, names responsible staff, protects scheduled practice, and uses simple indicators of participation and progression. Evaluation should examine the quality and distribution of practice opportunities, not infer policy strength from frequency alone. Student feedback should be collected from more than a single representative at each site.

This approach also supports cross-domain expansion. English clubs and public-speaking activities can include Islamic themes, while Arabic vocabulary and grammar can be connected to contemporary academic topics, technology, and public communication. Such expansion preserves institutional identity while preventing functional differentiation from hardening into unequal educational opportunity.

This finding contributes to the literature by clarifying the type of practice needed by each language. Permana and Rohmah (2024) show that language practice in Indonesia is negotiated through local classroom realities, while Samin (2025) and Hafidz and Fajar (2025) emphasize exposure and language culture. The present study adds that English practice needs communicative confidence-building through repeated, enjoyable, and public opportunities, whereas Arabic practice needs religious-literacy routines supported by vocabulary and grammar reinforcement. Therefore, the practical strength of a bilingual policy depends less on formal labels and more on whether students repeatedly meet the language in meaningful classroom and school-based situations.

5.3. Challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the dual-language policy

The study has five principal limitations. It covers only three purposively selected schools and includes only three student participants, so the findings are analytically transferable rather than statistically representative. Interviews lasted 5–15 minutes, limiting the depth of individual accounts. Observation frequency and duration were not standardized, preventing longitudinal or frequency-based claims. Available formal policy documentation was incomplete and not comparable across sites. Finally, coding was conducted by a single researcher without a formal intercoder agreement procedure. Triangulation strengthens credibility but does not remove these limitations.

The theoretical contribution is to conceptualize Arabic-English policy as a form of functional differentiation within an ideology–management–practice sequence, while recognizing the possibility of hierarchy and the mediating role of Indonesian. The practical contribution is a cross-case account of how programs, school ecology, and learner readiness shape selective bilingual practice. The policy implication is that Islamic schools should document differentiated goals, ownership, routines, monitoring, and equitable opportunities for both languages. Taken together, the comparison shows that sustainable bilingual planning requires alignment among institutional values, formal or programmatic management, actual practice, and learner access. Functional difference can be productive only when it remains flexible, accountable, and open to broader uses of both Arabic and English.

The study also highlights a managerial issue that offers a new practical insight from the comparison: many language activities already existed, but their sustainability still depended heavily on teacher initiative, school culture, and leadership continuity. From a language policy perspective, management is not limited to the existence of activities; it includes formal authority, documentation, program ownership, monitoring, and evaluation (May, 2004; Mustafawi et al., 2022). Therefore, the absence of specific school decrees or written bilingual program guidelines may leave the programs vulnerable when teachers change, student motivation declines, or school priorities shift.

This point explains why observation notes and document review were used only as supporting evidence in this study. The main findings were drawn from interviews, while supporting data helped confirm whether the reported practices were visible in classrooms, activities, or school materials. A deeper policy audit study would be needed to examine written regulations in greater depth. However, within the scope of this article, the supporting evidence is sufficient to show that program visibility and formal documentation are not always equally strong.

The comparative implication is that Arabic and English should not be forced into identical policy models, but they should not be left to develop unevenly either. English can remain a language of academic and global communication, while Arabic can remain a language of Islamic literacy and religious identity. However, both languages need clear program ownership, realistic routines, teacher modeling, student participation, and simple

evaluation instruments. In this way, functional differences can become a strength of bilingual policy rather than a cause of unequal learning opportunities.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that Arabic-English language policy in Islamic secondary schools does not operate through a single uniform bilingual model. It operates through differentiated policy functions shaped mainly by institutional identity, program availability, and student readiness. English tended to function as a language of academic development, communicative performance, competition, and preparation for broader educational contexts. Arabic tended to function as a language of religious identity, Islamic literacy, *kitab*-related learning, and school culture. Therefore, the key issue is not only whether Arabic and English are formally included in school policy, but also how each language is afforded repeated, meaningful spaces for use.

Theoretically, the study shows that functional differentiation emerges through the alignment and sometimes the mismatch of ideology, management, and practice. Complementary functions do not automatically create equitable bilingual development: they can reproduce hierarchy when one language receives clearer ownership, documentation, resources, monitoring, or public opportunity.

In practice, schools should define the purposes of both languages, assign program ownership, maintain realistic routines, use simple monitoring tools, and collect broader student feedback. English can be linked to Islamic scholarship as well as global communication, and Arabic can be extended into contemporary academic and public domains. Future research should include more students, longer interviews, standardized longitudinal observation, and systematic comparison of written policy documents.

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