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# **A Report on the English Language Immersive Programme for Pondok Pesantren Modern Al Ikhlah**

## **Laporan Program *English Language Immersive Programme* bagi Pondok Pesantren Modern Al Ikhlah**

Nik Liyana binti Nik Ahmad Zahid\*

### **Introduction**

English Language Immersive Programme was executed at AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) with a total of 16 students from Pondok Pesantren Modern Al Ikhlah from West Java, Indonesia. The programme was held for two weeks from 9th to 23rd September 2024 as an initiative to provide participants with an intensive language learning programme to equip the students with language skills by conducting in-class sessions, interactive workshops, project-based learning, and outdoor activities. The team of language instructors comprises both local and international lecturers from the Department of English Language and Literature (DELL) AHAS KIRKHS and Centre for Languages and Pre-University Academic Development (CELPAD), IIUM, providing students with real-life exposure reflective of the diverse learning environment at IIUM. The programme involves 18 face-to-face classroom sessions, and this report covers two sessions as samples.

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The programme plays a significant role in assessing the effectiveness of language immersion for enhancing language learning. During this era of globalisation, students require competency in language for improvement of quality of life, as the English language is not merely useful for reading Western books. It allows one to be able to understand a lease, advocate for oneself, navigate systems and even regulate emotions for better outcomes. The English language is functional in navigating the world and giving opportunities to respond to various situations. Thus, this programme can serve as an initiative to investigate potential strategies for improving language acquisition, specifically in writing, reading, speaking and comprehension.

### **First session: News Writing with The BENL Chronicle**

This section reports on a writing lesson by Sr. Siti Sarah Sofea and Sr. Nik Liyana, who were mainboards of a student-driven journalism website, The BENL Chronicle. In this session, students were introduced to the process and structure of news writing and publication and asked to write a quick and simple news headline. The objectives of the lesson were to:

1. Understand the process and structure of news writing and publication.
2. Apply the understanding through analysing an existing news article.
3. Write a simple news headline and lead.

At the beginning of the session, the instructors gave an overview of TBC and explained the structure of a news organisation and the process of news publication. The main purpose was to encourage and inspire news writing amongst youngsters within their own ability and drive. Game 1 “Word Search” was employed to familiarise students with relevant keywords related to news publications such as “Writer”,

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“Editor”, and “Headline”, and news writing such as “Title”, “Lead”, and “Source”. During this game, students exhibited understanding of the meanings and functions of the words in news publication and news writing.

In Game 2 and 3, “Relay Report” and “*Makcik Bawang*” respectively, students participated in interactive, team-based activities designed to enhance their understanding of responsible news writing while maintaining engagement and interest in class. In “Relay Report”, students were divided into groups of five. The first person in each group was shown a news headline and had to convey it through physical actions to the next person in line and the final group member would attempt to guess the original headline. Similarly, “*Makcik Bawang*” was a storytelling game wherein each student contributed to a growing sentence by adding one word at a time. Both games humorously demonstrated how information can become distorted or exaggerated when clarity is absent through continuous embellishments—echoing the concept of misinformation in the media. They serve as practical demonstrations of how easily information can be misrepresented or sensationalised. These activities not only sustained student engagement but also deepened their understanding of media ethics in an experiential way.

In the next session, the session transitioned into a focused lesson on the fundamentals of news writing. The instructors guided students through the key elements of a news article, highlighting examples of ‘headline’, ‘byline’, and the inverted pyramid ‘lead’, ‘body’, ‘tail’. They emphasise that news writing is significant in its ability to reinforce formal sentence structure in a real-world context, wherein the journalistic structure helps students to organise their thoughts logically and effectively. Continuing upon this, game 4 “Once Upon a Headline” commenced where the students were asked to write a simple news headline and lead on their favourite fairytale story. However, only several students followed the instructions while most of them wrote a

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news headline and lead on various topics regarding their own interests. The instructors read and asked each of the students to explain their chosen headline and fixed their grammars. The instructors noted that a few of the students even wrote in their native language instead of English.

By the end of the session, two of the three objectives were achieved. The students were able to comprehend the process and structure of news writing and publication and had shown an interest in news writing in general. The students also recognised each key element of a news article on an existing article, applying their understanding. However, the third objective to write a simple news headline and lead was not realised as a few students struggled to express their sentences in English.

#### **Second session: Speak Up & Act Out!**

The second session was an interactive acting lesson conducted by Sr. Ha Mi Da and Sr. Zaiti, aimed at boosting students' confidence and fluency in English through drama-based activities. In this session, students were encouraged to act while speaking, creating an engaging and holistic English speaking behaviour. The objectives of the lesson were to:

1. Remember and recall emotion-related vocabulary.
2. Apply appropriate facial expressions and gestures to convey different emotions.
3. Create and perform a short role-play skit.

The class started with a circle seating arrangement, setting the tone for openness and inclusivity. The session kicked off with a self-introduction ice-breaking activity, allowing the students' to get comfortable in the group. This eased initial nervousness and created a sense of active participation. The first major activity, "Act it Out,"

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required students to randomly draw two slips of papers—one with a verb and another with an emotional adverb . They then performed the combined phrase in front of the group. For example, “eating” and “sadly” are picked out and they act out “eating sadly.” Every student had to draw two papers and act the phrase, sometimes resulting in entertaining acts. This encouraged creative expression, body language awareness, and the use of contextual emotion.

Following that, the class transitioned into a high-energy game of “Charades.” The students were divided into small groups of four, and each group sent a representative to silently act out a word or phrase, while the other groups that guessed right got a point. This friendly competition promoted teamwork and vocabulary recall, while reinforcing the importance of non-verbal communication.

For the final activity, students were presented with several role-play prompts to choose from. Each group selected one prompt, brainstormed a short skit, and were given 20 minutes to prepare. The students then presented their role-plays to the class. This final task consolidated the learning, providing a platform to apply their creativity, collaboration, and language skills in a structured performance.

The session provided students with a safe and enjoyable space to express themselves creatively. By learning how to convey different emotions and working together on a short play, students developed important life skills such as communication, empathy, and collaboration. The final activity, in particular, helped build their confidence in public speaking and encouraged quick thinking under time pressure. After the session, they became more comfortable speaking in front of others and showed greater enthusiasm when participating in group activities. Some students who were shy began to open up, contributing ideas and taking on roles during the short play. Their teamwork and willingness to collaborate were very good too after they became more relaxed and confident.

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**Conclusion**

Both sessions “News Writing with The BENL Chronicle” and “Speak Up & Act Out!” were successfully held during the programme, with most of the objectives achieved. The News Writing session had allowed the students to understand and analyse the structure of news writing, simultaneously piquing their interest in a student-driven journalism. The second session provided the students a safe platform to express their emotions and enhance their confidence to speak in English. Nonetheless, it should be noted that these were only two sessions out of a total of 18 class sessions throughout this programme. While several researches available support the thesis that immersive learning increases students’ interest and potential language acquisition, there is a lack of similar research that focuses specifically on the South East Asian community. Hence, there is a need to execute English Language Immersive Programmes and examine its effectiveness within our community.