

Behaviorism Perspective on English as Foreign Language (EFL) Program of an Islamic Boarding School: Theoretical and Application

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Abstrak: Pengulangan dan penguatan dalam struktur belajar yang telah terkondisikan biasanya dapat ditemukan dalam sebuah pembelajaran dalam lingkup pondok. Tapi, baru sedikit pembahasan yang ditemukan karena kompleksnya waktu dan penelitian didalamnya. Tapi, dalam penelitian ini, aspek teoretis dan aplikatif dari perspektif behavioristik dalam Program Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) akan diselidiki dalam konteks pesantren. Dikenal dengan perilaku yang dapat diamati, sistem penguatan, proses pengkondisian, dan pendekatan pembelajaran bahasa yang terstruktur, behaviorisme sangat cocok dengan lingkungan yang sangat terkontrol dan terstruktur yang disebut pesantren. Penelitian ini fokus pada pentingnya konsep-konsep perilaku seperti stimulus-respons, penguatan, dan repetisi dalam program pembelajaran bahasa. Kurikulum EFL di pesantren menunjukkan bahwa guru, staf, dan siswa dapat menerapkan penguatan dan latihan melalui repetisi yang terkontrol sebagai cara untuk meningkatkan kecakapan bahasa dalam lingkungan yang terstruktur. Beberapa penerapan nyata dari teknik behavioristik akan dieksplorasi yang menyoroti bagaimana behaviorisme mempengaruhi keterlibatan, motivasi, dan retensi siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa behaviorisme dalam EFL memberikan rekomendasi terkait kemungkinan perbaikan dalam strategi pengajaran EFL di pesantren.

Kata kunci: Behaviorisme, Behavioris, Penguatan, Perilaku, Pengulangan

Abstract: Repetition and reinforcement in structured conditions is normally found in language learning in a boarding school setting. But there is still view discussion on it as investigating this area needs time and complex analysis. As in this study, theoretical and application aspect of behaviorist perspective in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) Program will be investigated in an Islamic boarding school context. Known with the observable behavior, reinforcement system, conditioning process, and language learning structured approach, behaviorism is particularly suitable with highly controlled and structured environment called as a boarding school. This study focuses on the prominence of behavioral concepts such as stimulus-response, reinforcement and repetition in language learning program. The EFL curriculum in an Islamic Boarding school show that teachers, staffs and students can implement the reinforcement and practice through controlled repetition as a way to increase language proficiency in a structured environment. Some real-life application of behaviorist technique will be explored which highlight on how behaviorist influence students' engagement, motivation and retention in the language learning. This study found that behaviorism in EFL offers recommendation regarding possible improvements in EFL teaching strategies in boarding schools.

Keywords: Behaviorism, Behaviorist, Reinforcement, Behavior, Repetition

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INTRODUCTION

A boarding school offers a structured and distinctive learning environment that can enhance the effectiveness of language learning and especially in the area of acquiring English as Foreign Language (EFL). In a boarding school, students live and

learn in a focused environment where everything done is organized, started from the time they wake up in the morning till they went to bed in the night. Boarding school environment is essentially immersive, 24 hours a day, providing continuous exposure to the target language and fostering both formal and informal conditions for language practice.

Behaviorist theorists Pavlov, Skinner, Watson, and Thorndike propose that “Focuses on the effect of environmental changes on learning and aims at the predictability and control of behavior” (Skinner, 1974). The statement refers to the core principles of behaviorism, specifically the idea that learning is shaped by changes in the environment. Behaviorism stresses that behavior can be predicted and controlled by manipulating environmental stimuli. According to this view, the external environment, not internal thoughts or emotions, plays an important role in determining behavior.

In other words, behaviorism states that by changing or controlling external factors (such as rewards, punishments, or stimuli), we can predict and influence how a person or animal will behave. This approach focuses on observable actions and assumes that behavior can be systematically shaped through reinforcement or conditioning.

A well-organized Islamic boarding school environment, which includes a variety of academic and social activities, creates an ideal environment for implementing behaviorism in education. Behaviorism is a teaching theory that focuses on learning through reinforcement (reward) and repetition. In this organized setting, students can receive regular feedback, repeatedly practice their skills, and experience rewards or consequences, which reinforce positive behaviour and enhance their learning process. The structured nature of the environment, considering various academic and social activities, tends to create ideal conditions for the application of pedagogical theories of behaviorism, which relies upon reinforcement and repetition (Ellis, 2008; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Besides, well structured environment can increase the effectiveness of the language learning where this environment allows for immersion in the language and more opportunities to practice and use English in various context. The 24-hour living will not only increase social contact in the target language but also give every chance for constant practice that reinforces language skills outside of class time. The learning environment in boarding school is unique and tends to be an excellent basis in cases of EFL learning. “The mutual engagement of educators and learners fosters a dynamic learning atmosphere, enhancing language acquisition” (Suardi et al., 2017).

By providing a continuous interaction with a language and structured learning exercises, boarding schools offer conditions that uniquely optimize EFL acquisition. Activities like prayers and language practice sessions serve as reinforcement, enhancing student motivation and engagement in language learning (Muhja & Wijaya, 2024). In their qualitative his study, Muhja and Wijaya 2024 found the application of behaviorist theory in a boarding school setting. They found that reinforcement, motivation, and practice enhance student learning and behaviour, particularly in religious activities, but may overlook other educational approaches.

Additionally, the structure, schedules, and established activities at a boarding school provide an almost ideal setting for implementing behaviorist principles in

language learning. "The consistency of routines ensures repeated exposure to the language, which is essential for behaviorist learning. This supports the concept that language acquisition occurs through interaction with the environment" (Abidin, 2016).

Behaviorism, which focuses on observable actions, repetition, reinforcement, and conditioning, aligns well with the organized and consistent setting of a boarding school. Teachers and staff can apply both positive and negative reinforcement techniques to promote desired linguistic behaviors by rewarding correct language use or providing corrective feedback for errors. This controlled reinforcement leads to gradual development in language.

Another aspect of behaviorism is the quantification of learning outcomes. It assumes that it is vital to clearly and numerically measure behavior so one will be able to tell if learning has taken place. Measuring, over time, a person's performance in a particular task, or a frequency increase of a desirable behavior can ascertain if the techniques or strategies of learning have actually taken effect. The measuring of progress in behavior shows clearer, helping the learning professional if goals have been met. "Behavioral changes should be measured quantitatively to assess the effectiveness of the learning process" (Veranica, 2024).

The principles outlined above serve as the foundation for behaviorist teaching approaches, which focus on observable and measurable behaviors to assess progress and learning outcomes. Behaviorism is applied in various educational settings, primarily to develop structured learning environments that enhance student competence. For example, biology students benefit from behaviorist strategies such as guided repetition, which helps reinforce concepts and improve understanding" (Susanti et al., 2024).

This evidence from research shows that the use of differential reinforcement-where specific language is reinforced-makes a tremendous jump in spontaneous language production and comprehension. The technique speeds up not only vocabulary acquisition but also complex social-verbal behaviors through structuring of interactions and consequences to verbal acts. "Differential reinforcement leads to increased spontaneous use of foreign vocabulary in children, as shown in studies where children were rewarded for using a foreign language" (Whitehurst & Valdez-Menchaca, 1988).

Boarding institutions typically offer strong facilities and resources, including designated spaces aimed at language education: language laboratories, media centers, and areas conducive to group activities. These contribute to foster an advantageous atmosphere for language learning. As Widiarini (2022) highlighted, "Boarding schools can implement SLT, which is based on behaviorist principles, to create meaningful learning experiences through guided repetition and contextualized activities."

The combination of the educational resources with a conducive academic environment is able to create the best condition to apply behaviorism technique, such as drilling, repetition, imitation and reinforcement in which centered in the audiolingual method. The incorporation of these techniques in a structured environment, along with sufficient resources and regular exposure to the English language in a boarding school environment, will create a solid base on which EFL learners can rely to enhance their target language skills both efficiently and practically. This approach emphasizes the

importance of mechanical practice, repetition of sentence patterns, and verbal practice in the learning process, perhaps through habit formation.

Looking from this angle, behaviorist techniques, such as positive reinforcement, drilling, and repetition, can be particularly effective in improving both retention and fluency. This paper discusses ways in which the principles of behaviourism can be tapped through the unique cultural environment of a boarding school to further enhance the learning process and raise standards in English language competence. Thus, this study will look into the applicability of behaviorist methods in the EFL curriculum within a boarding school framework for better achievement of language proficiency. This study seeks to assess the effectiveness of reinforcement, coupled with systematic repetition and practice, on improving student performance.

The research will also examine real-life applications of behaviorist strategies, such as mimicry, drilling, and the audio-lingual method, and their impact on student engagement, motivation, and language retention. It will also seek to explore, further, how these techniques of behavioral influence affect the general learning atmosphere in a boarding school context, where there is a 24-hour immersion in the language under study. Through the analysis of the implementation of these methodologies, the research is likely to generate substantial knowledge concerning the manners in which behaviorism can augment language acquisition within controlled educational settings. Consequently, the results will ultimately provide recommendations that may help to sharpen EFL teaching practices in boarding schools, while enriching knowledge of language learning in this immersion setting.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research to explore the application of behaviorism in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program on an Islamic Boarding School located in Central Java. The research examines the theoretical foundations of behaviorism as well as its practical implementation in the program setting, focusing on how behaviorist principles, such as reinforcement, repetition, and stimulus-response mechanisms, are used to improve language proficiency.

The study takes place in a Boarding School, especially in the high school level with a structured environment that supports the implementation of behaviorist techniques in language learning. The participants include a purposive sample of EFL teachers, students, and staff members involved in the language program. These participants are taken based on their involvement with the English language program and activities, ensuring that the data collected is relevant to the research questions.

There are three instruments that are used in collecting the data. They are interview, observation field note and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with EFL teachers, students, and staff members. These interviews provide in-depth insights into how behaviorist techniques such as the reinforcement, repetition, and conditioning were applied in the activities. The interviews explore the impact of these methods on student engagement, motivation, and language retention.

Observations are conducted during key language activities, such as vocabulary enrichment sessions, language security sections, speech practice and conversation

practice. The observations focus on identifying the use of behaviorist strategies in these activities, particularly how reinforcement and repetition are utilized to improve language proficiency. The observations are structured to capture both verbal and non-verbal reinforcement and how these techniques are incorporated into daily language instruction.

The study also includes an analysis of the language program's curriculum and materials to assess how behaviorist principles are integrated into the structure and design of the EFL program. This will help determine the alignment between theoretical behaviorist concepts and the practical application within the curriculum.

Qualitative data from interviews, observations field notes and document analysis are analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to the application of behaviorism in the EFL program. The data found are triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of how behaviorism is applied in the EFL context of a Boarding School.

The findings from this study will contribute to the evaluation of behaviorism's application in language acquisition, providing insights into how behaviorist strategies can be adapted to improve EFL teaching and learning in boarding school environments. The research will also offer recommendations for refining EFL teaching practices to better meet the needs of students and enhance language proficiency in controlled learning environments.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reveal that behaviorist practices are indeed applied in EFL improvement in the boarding school, for a number of reasons which logically relate to the structured controlled nature of the setting. The application of behaviorism in this context appears to be largely driven by requirements for consistency, routine, and measurable outcomes in language learning. Some of the most important behaviorist techniques, such as reinforcement, repetition, and conditioning, were found to be at the particular of language acquisition. These practices were consciously selected and used because of structured environment and consistent learning.

There are some activities found in the boarding school as written in the annual program of the language section in the boarding school.

Table 1. Language section in the boarding school

No	Activity	Participant	Target	Schedule	Time allocation
1	English vocabulary enrichment	VII, VIII, IX of MTs Takhasus X, XI, XII of SMA, MA, SMK	Students can enrich some new daily vocabularies as written in the book of <i>tazwidul Mufrodat I fir MTs and II for Takhasus, SMA, MA, SMK</i>	Three times a week (Monday, Wednesday, Friday)	15 minutes (06.45-07.00)
2	Speech	VII, VIII of MTs Takhasus X, XI of SMA, MA.	Students can deliver the idea through speech	Once a week (Thursday)	1 hour (16.30-17.30)

SMK					
3	Language Security	Teacher and staff as the language security	Students can practice English in daily life and social interaction	In the school break time, everyday	20 minutes (09.40-10.00)

One of the primary reasons for the use of behaviorist techniques in the boarding school is the structured environment that naturally supports behaviorist principles. In a boarding school, students are immersed in a routine that includes frequent and predictable interactions with the language. This continuous exposure to english allows for regular practice, and it is essential for strategies like repetition and reinforcement.

In the boarding school, teachers, staffs, the language councils who are in charge in succeeding the language can implement daily drills, vocabulary enrichment program, and language security sections, where the students engage in controlled repetition. This regular, systematic practice reinforces correct language use, help to solidify students understanding of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

There are some behaviorist principles found in the boarding schools. They are reinforcement and motivation, routine and repetition and behavior modification. Activities like prayers and language practice sessions as reinforcement, enhancing student motivation and engagement in language learning. Motivation and engagement through reinforcement are also found in the implementation of the behaviorism in a EFL of a boarding school.

The use of positive reinforcement is another key behaviorist technique applied in the Boarding School. The reinforcement systems, including reward systems and verbal praise given to students who are actively speaking the target language, were consistently observed to motivate students and encourage participation. This approach is effective in maintaining boarding school students' engagement in language learning activities, particularly in a highly disciplined environment where motivation can sometimes be a challenge.

As the data taken in the interview with 20 students who are involved in the English enrichment program, 15 of them said that by giving the reinforcement, especially the negative one, they are more engaged in speaking the Target language as they do not want to be punished. Student A (17 years old, XI grade) said. "I do not want to go the language court. I do not want to wear red veil as the consequences not speaking the language. I can imagine my self, go to mosque with that veil. What an embarrassing moment. That's way, I better to speak English."

In accordance with that statement, student B (17 yaers old, XI grade) said, " the security guard is scary. I do not want to be punished. So, I speak English. When I make mistake, they will tell me the correct one by asking me to repeat after them. It is easier then get punished."

While other 5 students may say that getting positive reinforcement encouraged them to speak English in their daily. As student C (18 years ole, XI grade) said, "I like speaking English, teacher praises me when I speak English or arabic. They said I am good. That's way I like speak English, I am not afraid of making mistake. Because they will tell me the correct one when I make mistake."

According to the observation, Behaviorist technique applied in an Islamic Boarding School's language program is reinforcement conducted by the language security during the break. The language security is formed to motivate and encourage students in their English language use. The school employs both positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement to foster better language behavior among students. Positive reinforcement is implemented by awarding students who consistently use English correctly, such as offering praise or rewards. This reinforces desirable language behaviors, encouraging students to continue using English in daily interactions.

On the other hand, negative reinforcement is also employed to promote adherence to the English-only rule. Female students who break the rule by speaking in another language are required to wear a red veil or a special veil to remind them to speak English, while male students face a similar consequence by wearing a special piece of clothing. This negative reinforcement discourages undesirable behavior and ensures that students stay committed to speaking English, as the uncomfortable consequence serves to remind them of the expectations.

Here are some data related with the list of punishment in an Islamic Boarding school .

Tabel 2. List of punishment in an Islamic Boarding school

Language violation	Number of points
Speak bahasa, a sentence/ word at once	1 point
Accumulation of points in a month	Punishment
0-9	Forgiven
10-19	Making a commitment letter, signed by the language staff
20-39	Asking for a suggestion letter and signed by language staff, guardian teacher, room teacher
40- more	Asking for motivation or suggestion letter from the language staff, guardian teacher and room teacher, plus wearing red veil in three days

CONCLUSION

The application of behaviorist practices in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at the Boarding School demonstrates the significant benefits of techniques such as mimicry, repetition, drilling, and reinforcement in improving students' daily English practice. The use of these behaviorist strategies creates a structured and consistent environment in which students are continuously exposed to English, reinforcing correct usage and facilitating language acquisition. These techniques are particularly effective in a controlled setting like a boarding school, where regular practice and reinforcement help students build language proficiency over time.

However, while the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) used in the program is beneficial, there is room for improvement. Introducing more varied and engaging activities could further increase students' motivation and participation in speaking English. By diversifying the activities and incorporating more interactive, communicative approaches, the program could foster greater student engagement and improve language retention.

Additionally, regular teacher training is essential to ensure that educators are equipped with the skills and creativity needed to effectively implement these techniques. Ongoing professional development will enable teachers to better motivate students, encourage their peers and staff members to speak English, and contribute to creating an environment that supports the overarching goal of language acquisition. Such improvements will ultimately contribute to a more dynamic and successful EFL program, ensuring that students are not only learning English but are also motivated and empowered to use it effectively in their daily lives.

Further studies could be conducted in investigating the learning culture in a boarding school context as it is an interesting topic due to the complexity of the structured learning environment which can influence second language acquisition of language learners.

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