

# Contextual and Fun English Learning for Da'wah Students

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**Abstract:** Da'wah Faculty students who become the focus of this study are students majoring in Da'wah Management (DM) who, in the future, will become preachers. It makes them sometimes overlook the benefits of learning English. Learning English will be very important for those who will become important actors in spreading Islamic religion to local and international communities. This research aims to explore contextual and fun English learning for students at Da'wah Faculty at an Islamic University in Indonesia. It explores relevant previous studies and important theories and compares them with this study's findings. This study employed a descriptive-qualitative approach. The results indicated that DM students studied English according to the context of their knowledge as DM students; and that they studied English in fun ways which could encourage them to be more active in joining the class. These findings help English lecturers to create better learning activities to teach DM students. Meanwhile, further researchers can elaborate more toward the research subjects, so the results will be more varied.

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of English in Islamic da'wah communication can be seen from the fact that nowadays, we need a language that everyone can understand to communicate Islam's values. Certainly, the language refers to English. As Muslims who have studied Islam, we can talk about Islam with non-Muslims. In addition, English is also very important because this language can also be used as a medium to resolve misunderstandings between religions (Wardah, 2016).

Among Muslims, some people study specifically to become experts in promoting Islam. They are known as *da'i* or *da'iyah*. Juriana (2018) said that a preacher (*da'i*) is required to be able to speak English if he wants his da'wah to be well-received by global audiences (*mad'u*). Thus, the preacher's teachings can be carried out by audiences on any continent. America and Europe are big continents whose majority of the citizens can speak English, but most have negative views toward Islam (Marinov & Stockemer, 2020). Therefore, English language

proficiency is necessary as a preacher, especially in Indonesia, where English is learned as a foreign language. Da'wah students will have the mission to teach Islamic values, communicate about Islam and try to change bad perspectives about Islam. The fact also shows that Islam is alleged as the religion of terrorists (Yusof et al., 2013). Thus, one of a preacher's tasks is to change those wrong perspectives by communicating about peace in Islam to global communities, using good English as one of the international languages.

Moreover, on the two continents, the majority of the population is not Muslim, and the citizens tend to have little information about Islam values. Thus, it is necessary to reveal the facts that Islam delivers so many good values and peacefulness. An article written by Fitriyah (2021) shows the true story of Dr. Zakir Naik, a phenomenal preacher from India. He can speak English very well, so he successfully carried out da'wah communication in various countries. The reason is that English makes conveying messages to global audiences easier.

From the description above, it can be understood that Da'wah Management (DM) Department students who specifically study the science of preaching can also benefit from the importance of learning English. In conveying da'wah, especially to non-Muslims, it is endeavored not to offend other religions. It is in line with what has been stated by Khotimah (2020) that issues of religion are something that cannot be ignored in globalization. Since the renaissance, the role of religion has gradually begun to be eliminated. It becomes a demand for every religious leader to be able to relate his religious teachings so that they can still exist in society. The tolerant religious life of each religion needs to be applied and prepared to offer something meaningful in the formation of the global order of life.

Based on the previous statements, learning English for DM students is important. They will be the agent to communicate the values of Islam to people around the world. They can also start preaching activities to deliver values in Islam through various media using good English. That's why their education which aims to become a good preacher as well as a good English speaker, needs to be strengthened.

English lessons should be delivered based on students' needs in the contextual field of study and in interestingly fun ways to promote their learning progress. A study by Efrizal (2012) found a fun way to teach English to students in Islamic boarding schools, namely using bilingual fun, one of the games that use Arabic/English that can entertain and eliminate students' boredom, but not outside the existing educational norms. As reported in the study, the learning goal was achieved well, and students could understand the learning materials well. The students also could improve their English skills, especially in speaking. If students are

learning happily, they will learn easily. Similarly, as DM students experience English subjects appropriate for their major, they will consider English as important as the other Da'wah learning materials. To obtain the experience, English learning should considerably implement contextual and fun activities. Therefore, this current study is about to explore two main research questions. They are (1) What are the contextual English learning activities experienced by DM students? and (2) What fun do DM students experience in English learning activities?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Previous Studies on English Learning for Da'wah Students

Previous studies have explored English learning for DM students from various perspectives. An article has examined the evaluation of learning in international classes for DM students that used English as the medium of instruction (Chairawati, 2014). The article highlighted the importance of foreign language learning. Along with the rapid development of science and technology, mastering a foreign language is one of the ways to achieve success. Practically, it should be done interactively, and several factors contribute to successful learning. Those factors were media, methods, tools, and teachers as educators. She also added that in various educational institutions, various methods were used so that students were able to master foreign languages, both spoken and written. In this study, the findings discussed the mixed methods used by lecturers in delivering learning materials. The lecturers also implemented several methods, such as assignment, discussion, direct, and so on. From this study, the author can see similarities in terms of research data sources, namely DM students and English use in lectures. However, there is a fundamental difference here: the research is more focused on evaluating learning the use of foreign languages in an International Da'wah class. Meanwhile, this study focuses more on the implementation of contextual and fun English language learning and how it is implemented based on their discipline as DM students.

The study from Maksum (2016) investigated English learning and religious tolerance in *salaf* and modern Islamic boarding schools. There, English was designated as the language of communication and the medium of instruction for education. English was also a tool for learning sciences. In addition, in the context of modern boarding schools, tolerance-oriented education had become a basic education value that was not only taught in formal classrooms but also done daily. Formal education of tolerance was implemented in the form of teaching Indonesian/citizenship materials. The teaching system in modern boarding schools, dominated by foreign languages (Arabic and English) as the medium of instruction and interaction, did

not diminish the spirit of tolerance education for the students. That's why the basic value of this educational concept is tolerance (Wijdan, 2007). DM students must understand this value well as they are about to interact with global communities. Thus, it can be concluded that the study is almost the same as this current one, seen from the aspect of English learning and religious tolerance as an element of similarity, and the aspect of the place of research, as the difference. The previous study was conducted at Islamic boarding schools, while this research was conducted at an Islamic university.

Research shows that dozens of students (87.5% of the population) in boarding schools who will later become preachers feel the need to learn English and want a significant change in it (Rosyada & Ramadhianti, 2021). The reason is to enrich students' knowledge and communication skills and increase students' self-confidence to introduce Islamic values to the world as a medium of da'wah to global communities. Equally important, in this modern era, there is a need for a common language to communicate with people from other regions and countries of the world (Rao, 2019). To bridge this, English is a good tool for communicating Islamic values to global audiences. English is the only language spoken in almost all fields, globally and for multiple purposes.

Communication skills using English for students have many benefits related to scientific development, socio-political communication, economics and culture, and even everyday life (Emiliasari & Kosmajadi, 2019). Therefore, in higher education, English is a subject that all students in various fields of study must learn. It shows the importance of English mastery as a means to succeed individually in the academic field and the working environment (Megawati, 2016). English is a means of communication and needs to be taught through active interaction among students and teachers. It can be conducted directly or mediated using information and communication technology, both in face-to-face and blended learning situations. The use of technology in online learning, for example, the simplest one is WhatsApp, can be maximized in supporting students' English communication (Lina, 2021).

In addition, a study also reported the importance of understanding foreign languages (one of them is English) in taking the meaning of a Friday prayer speech at an Islamic college mosque in Jakarta (Setiawan, 2009). The students positively perceived the use of English in Islamic speeches during the Friday prayer. It was influenced by their background knowledge of English since most of them had learned English at previous education levels. It was also motivated by their awareness of English as an international language that global citizens must understand. From this study, it is revealed that students basically have background knowledge

of English and already realize the importance of this language. What needs to be done by English educators for DM students is to facilitate the learning process effectively of which by implementing contextual and fun English learning.

### **Contextual and Fun English Learning for Da'wah Students**

Contextual teaching and learning represent activities that help educators connect the situations of the students' real lives and the knowledge they got from their learning process (Ghonivita et al., 2021). As for contextual English learning, a study by Manabe et al. (2021) reported on English learning enhancement by collaborative, contextual drama in an authentic context. Under the context of traditional English learning, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have little opportunity to apply their knowledge to real-life environments. At the same time, there are different contexts and concepts related to the real experiences of students. Therefore, the researchers integrated drama activities into EFL learning with the support of mobile devices to create an authentic English learning environment.

In this study, the researchers developed a mobile-based system called Collaborative Contextual Drama (CCD), which provided students with text/image annotation and drama creation to encourage their learning of English in an authentic context. The purpose of this study was to examine how CCD, with contextual English drama activities, affected students' learning behavior and learning achievement. The post-test revealed that students who studied with CCD in a familiar authentic context could significantly improve their English compared to students who studied without CCD. Therefore, contextual learning for DM students is hoped to give them experience in learning English according to their context as DM students.

English fun learning is described as learning activities in which educators can create a warm and pleasant atmosphere in learning (Winarsih, 2021). Regarding English fun learning, Camargo & Lacer (2001) conducted a study on improving spoken interaction in English through the practice of games that enabled the development of communication. The research provided an opportunity to improve the methodology and to encourage good grades at the Henao y Arrubla Institute. The findings stated that not only the research samples enhanced their speaking skills, but other students could also interact in the process. From this research, it is known that fun English learning can make students interact well and can improve their speaking skills.

From some of the theoretical studies above, it can be inferred that English is really needed at the university level, including for DM students, for several purposes that have been

elaborated. They will learn more if they can master English and understand their preaching material. They will also take more advantage of the English language and *da'wah* understanding with their profession in the future.

## **METHODS**

This qualitative study employed a descriptive approach. The data collection techniques were observation and documentation. The data were collected from online class groups on WhatsApp, PowerPoint (collections of English presentation materials), the lecturer's teaching module, and the results of the lecture evaluation (SISKA) at the end of the semester. All the data came from 35 first semester students of DM department in Bahasa Inggris 2 course during the pandemic era, consisting of 16 female and 19 male students. They came from different backgrounds in high school, such as vocational and senior high schools, both from Islamic boarding schools and regular public schools.

Data collection techniques were in the form of observation and documentation. The online class observation through WhatsApp group was done to determine students' learning activities. Then, the documentation was carried out from the Bahasa Inggris 2 course syllabus, the screenshots of the WhatsApp class group, the students' PowerPoint file, and the screenshots of the lecturer's SISKA account. Meanwhile, triangulation of data sources and theory were carried out for validation, so there was a common perception among the research results, the data source, and the theory. Finally, the data analysis consisted of the following steps: analyzing the data, describing the data, and summarizing events or phenomena from the data obtained (Khasanah, 2021). The aim was to describe the events of the various phenomena in depth. In detail, after the data from online class observation, which contained contextual and fun learning, were found, the researcher tried to analyze them by searching the contextual learning content related to DM materials. Additionally, the results of the lecture evaluation in SISKA were utilized to strengthen the data of fun ways of English learning based on students' comments.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Contextual English Learning Activities Through A Group Presentation**

The English language learning activities for DM students in this university lasted for 14 meetings. However, blended learning was implemented because it was still in the post-pandemic period. The focus of the study was the online setting since it was more challenging

for both the students and the lecturer to involve in online learning contact. It also utilized various learning media. The class was divided into several groups of student presentations. This decision was supported by Lina (2021), who has reported that presentation groups can help students be more active in speaking English.

Meeting	PiC	Topics
1/	Lecturer	Introduction and Learning Contract
2/	Lecturer	Studying Abroad 1 (Text Comprehension & Collocations and idioms)
3/	Lecturer	Studying Abroad 2 (Conversational Practices: How Something Affect You & Grammar Focus: Gerund)
4/	Group 1	Applying for Scholarships 1 (Text Comprehension & Collocations and idioms)
5/	Group 2	Applying for Scholarships 2 (Conversational Practices: Expressing the main thing on an issue & Grammar Focus: Present Perfect)
6/	Group 3	Tips for Winning Scholarships 1 (Text Comprehension & Collocations and idioms)
7/ 1	Group 4	Tips for Winning Scholarships 2 (Conversational Practices: How to Express Personal Opinions & Grammar Focus: Predicate and Verbs)
8/	Lecturer	Mid-term Test
9/ 2	Group 5	Interview for Scholarships 1 (Text Comprehension & Collocations and idioms)

**Figure 1.** The topics of students' group presentations

The students were about to present an English presentation according to the material. For example, Figure 1 shows topics that try to connect the learning materials with the real use of the language for DM context. Meeting 7 offers the schedule of the group 4 presentation, which contains the instructions to create a dialog using the expressions of personal opinions about some issues in DM. Here, the students are supposed to explore the use of language expression and grammar with a contextual topic. Meeting 9 of group 5 presentation has the topic of scholarship interview 1. The topic was chosen as it could represent the real use of the materials that they have already learned, and the topic of scholarship interview is very actual and beneficial for the students once they are about to apply for a scholarship or daily interpersonal and transactional interactions. An example of the instruction can be seen in Figure 2 below.

Quiz 2

Buatlah kalimat dengan menggunakan salah satu kalimat percakapan yang tertera dibawah ini yang berhubungan dengan prodi Manajemen Dakwah!

*I agree because...*

*That is trus*

*I agree with what x said*

*I think so too*

*Yeah, that is what i think too*

*You light/ mau/ could be right*

*That makes sense*

*Exactly! I couldn't agree more*

*Yes, in the lecture, s/ he said...*

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**Figure 2.** Instructions to create English sentences related to DM

Figure 3 shows DM students when they are having a presentation via WhatsApp group. Several features on WhatsApp can facilitate students' presentations, such as files and picture uploads, voice notes, and written messages. The lecturer guided contextual learning, as shown in figure 3, indicated by each number. First, the lecturer opened the online course, and the presenters were supposed to deliver their presentations. Second, the presenter presented the materials in English, in which Indonesian translation was also provided to ensure the students understood the talks. Third, they shared the materials in the form of PowerPoint and gave their friends (audience) time to review it. At the same time, the lecturer reviewed the PowerPoint to provide feedback later. Fourth, the presenters made a list of questions filled out by the audience. After all the questions were listed, and while waiting for the presenters to respond, intermezzo or fun English activities were carried out.

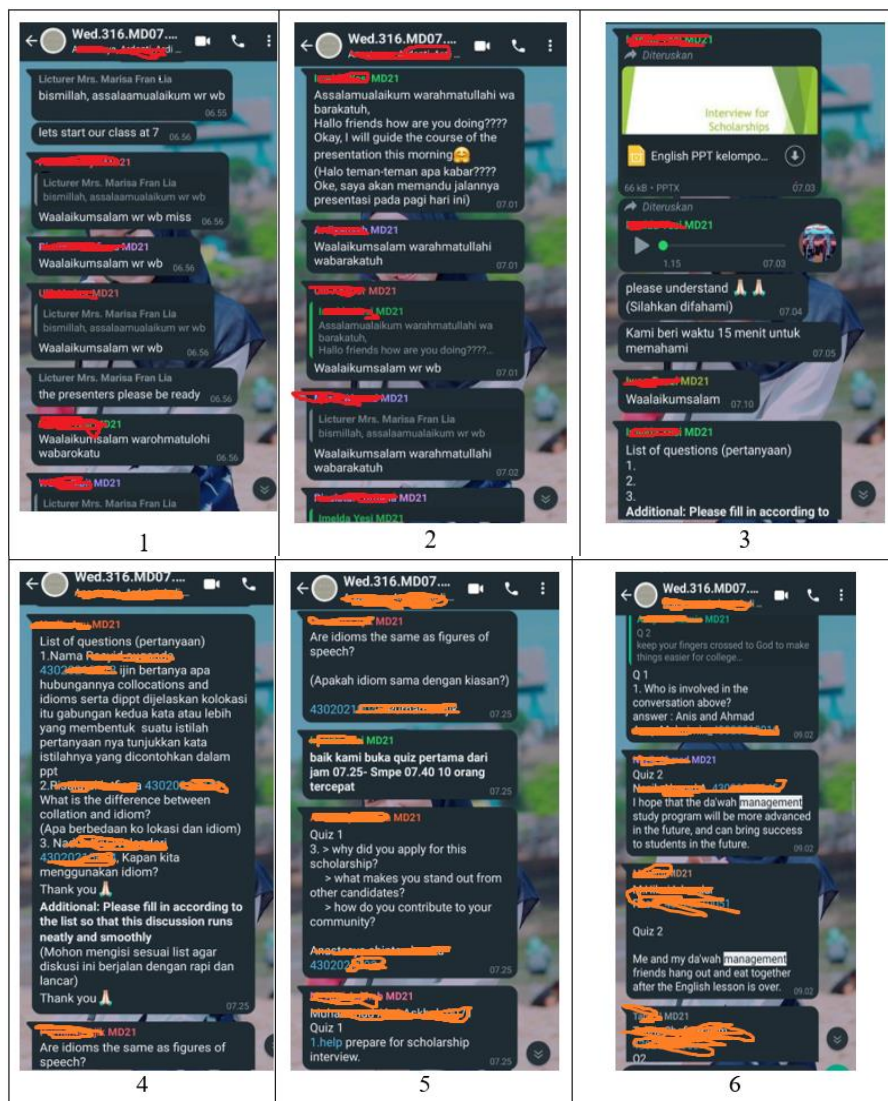


Figure 3. Learning activities on whatsapp group



After the intermezzo and question-and-answer session were answered, quizzes related to their material and DM topics were shared. The students who were not presenting the material would usually actively answer from the question-and-answer and quiz sessions. In order to encourage the students to participate in the discussions actively and complete the task, their participation was counted as an additional score. As is identified in the last column, the students share their thought as DM students. It shows that NAA (1) writes, “I hope that the da’wah management study program will be more advanced in the future and can bring success to students in the future.” Secondly, MHI (2) writes, “me & my da’wah management friends hang out and eat together after the English lesson is over.”

In detail, the topic discussed in the meeting was collocations and idioms, which should be made in the form of a sentence related to DM. Among them are ‘succeed in’ and ‘hang out’. Thus, the lecturer or other students were invited to give feedback and correction dealing with grammatical issues. The corrections were such as “I hope that *Da’wah Management Study Program* will be more advanced *and will succeed* in the future.” and (2) “*My Da’wah Management friends and I* hang out and eat together after the English lesson is over.”

Based on the findings, contextual learning has already been done by inviting DM students to relate the language use they learned from the learning materials with their daily practice as DM students. For instance, the English topic is about using correct idioms and collocations. Then the DM students make some sentences regarding the topic and about Da’wah material such as DM students’ hopes to be successful preachers in the future.

Those important findings are also linked to the previous studies. The first is a study from Chairawati (2014), which utilized the assignment method to teach Da’wah students. It is similar to the method used by the lecturer in assigning the students’ groups. The students also practice giving instructions to the audiences by considering the contextual use of the language expressions, such as making a dialog about DM using expressions of personal opinion. Second, this finding also supports research by Manabe et al. (2021), which underlies the importance of contextual learning using English drama. The difference is that this study uses shorter dialog than an English drama.

### **Fun English Learning Activities**

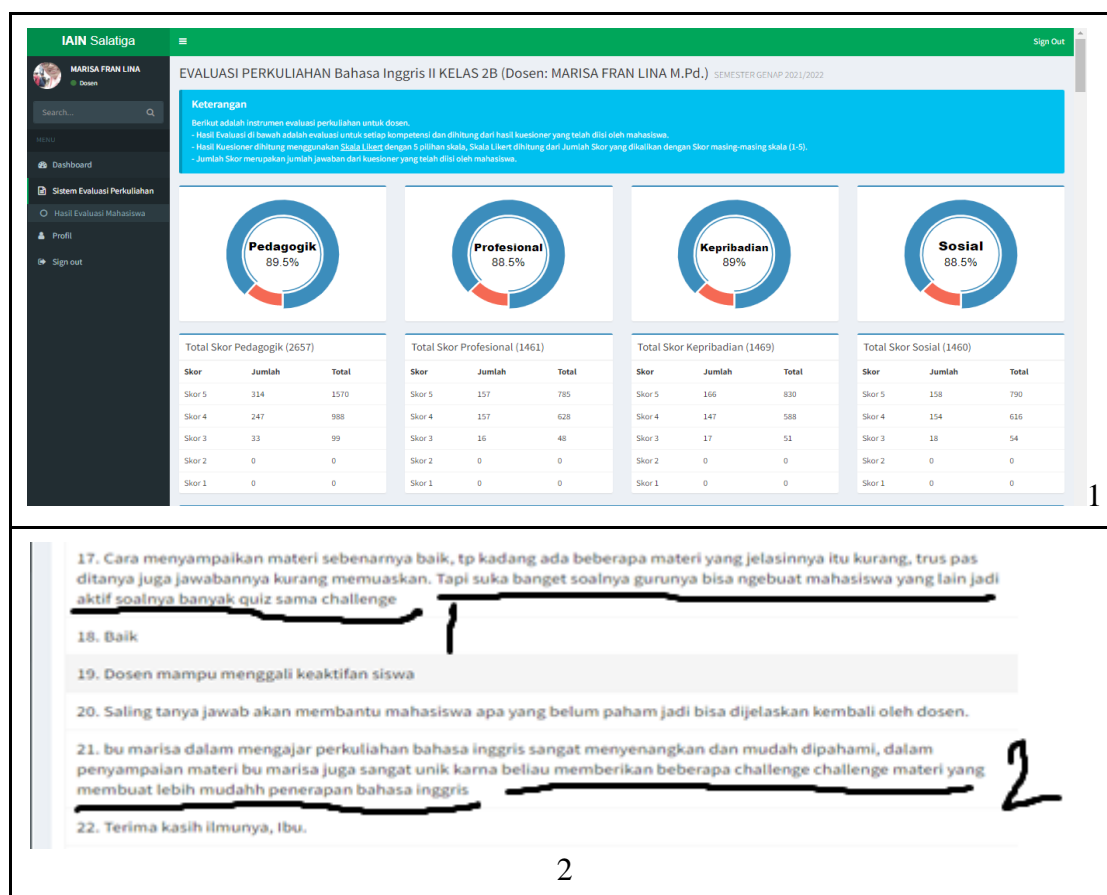
Evidence of how fun English classes were for DM students came from the module used in the teaching and learning activity. Meeting 1 began with introductions among the students. It was conducted by doing a fun activity such as ‘Tell Your Uniqueness’. Adopted from Kumar

& Umland (2019), by using 'Tell Your Uniqueness', the students introduce themselves by mentioning names and unique things about themselves which are different from the others and are easily remembered by other students. It was conducted on the Google Meet platform. They could get to know each other and see their friends' faces. After everyone got acquainted, a session was held to review some names and special things their friends could remember, for example, "I am Mrs. Marisa Fran Lina, your English Lecturer. I have two daughters named Lily & Jasmine". These activities could be carried out through WhatsApp groups as well.

Another activity was 'Running Dictation'. It is appropriate for the reading section to warm up. It aims to dictate one or several sentences, which will be taken randomly from the reading text, and students are asked to write the dictation accurately. It can be used for intermediate to advanced levels. The duration of this activity is about 10-15 minutes, and it can be less if the students have done this activity faster. In an online class, this activity was performed by the lecturer recording or saying the sentences for the dictation activity. Then, the students listened to it carefully and might repeat it once or twice. The winning team or student was the fastest and most accurate in writing. This activity supported the concept of contextual learning by involving DM materials in the dictation. These forms of learning activities, quizzes, or group activities could challenge the students and encourage them to be more active. In addition, a "quote of the day" was given to close each lecture session, which was expected to motivate students.

To strengthen the research results on the point of English learning for DM, the researcher added the results of research data from SISKKA, an academic evaluation system that students must complete at the end of each semester before they take a list of courses for the next semester. This online system enabled students to evaluate lecturers' performance anonymously. Thus, they could assess without any worries.

Figure 4 shows students' feedback toward learning activities in the English course. In column 1, the lecturer is quite competent in teaching, as it is obtained from the acquisition scores above 80% of the poll result by 35 DM students. Next, column 2 represents the students' comments regarding the English class they have taken for one semester. Most students give positive comments. The point is that they feel happy, joyful, and excited because there are games, quizzes, and challenges in the class (numbers 1 and 2 in column 2). In addition, the way of teaching is easy to understand, making the English theories easier to apply. They also become more active and put in more effort when studying in class.



**Figure 4.** A collection of DM students’ feedback on English learning (SISKA)

The explanation of the English class activities actually supports several studies that have been done previously. The first is research by Rosyada & Ramadhianti (2021), which emphasizes the importance of English for students who will later become preachers. After being aware of the importance of English for DM students, it becomes the educators’ responsibility to encourage the students’ ability to use the language. One of which is by promoting fun learning. In addition, Rao (2019) also highlights that English is the language of global interaction, so it is important to master it. It will enable them to interact actively in the social world, starting from active interactions in the classroom, as explored in this article. Certainly, English must also be mastered by students as part of global citizens who will later broadcast Islam to local communities and the world. Therefore, the learning activities are designed to help the students deliver their ideas or opinion, use English properly, and be confident. Three further studies that also prioritize English as a very important communication language to learn are Emiliasari & Kosmajadi (2019), Megawati (2016), and Lina (2021).

## CONCLUSION

Based on what has been found in the research findings and discussion section, several conclusions are drawn. First, DM students learn English related to their majors. They learned English materials and then used them for DM context as well as daily usage for communication and academic purposes. Second, DM students studied English in fun ways, such as having fun and challenging warm-up activities, games, and energizers to give students insight that learning English is fun.

These results are expected to be able to provide implications for previous studies. In this research, the emphasis is on combining two things: the importance of practicing English based on their major and experiencing fun English learning. As for further research, it is possible to view the students' background knowledge about da'wah and English. It also recommends expanding the scope of research, for instance, in face-to-face classes and also taking subjects with more than 1 class so that the results are more varied and strengthening.

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