



Optimizing international class program diversification through digital technology at the Islamic junior high school in Malang, Indonesia

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Abstract: Through the International Class Program (ICP), SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang facilitates active English learning. Active English learning necessitates consistent actualization practice activities. Schools are expected to maximize the use of online media for educational purposes. This research explores technology-based ICP activities and the media used to optimize ICP program collaboration. This study employs a qualitative research method based on case studies; the data are presented descriptively. The investigation was conducted over the course of six months, from June to November of 2022. Several key informants, including principals, program coordinators, and program participants/students, were interviewed to collect data; they were assigned as research subjects. Additionally, researchers performed field observations and documentation. Data analysis techniques include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. The findings indicated that SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang could take advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic by optimizing online media, such as virtual meetings in the ICP class. Instagram, YouTube, and video production are other media. Another finding is that space, time, and financial constraints can be effectively managed. Differentiated learning requires intensive assistance from Kampung Inggris supplemented by International Student Discussions and project-based learning. Nevertheless, this program must still surmount two obstacles: the low level of student self-confidence and the diversity of student abilities.

Keywords: learning differentiation; online learning; International Class Program (ICP); English class.

A. Introduction

Education in Indonesia continues to develop along with the challenges and needs of the times. In its journey, Indonesia has several times made curriculum adjustments to the

times. Curriculum changes are a logical consequence of changes in the socio-political system, global developments, and the need to respond to the challenges of the times (Wahyuni, 2015). The development of the times has placed Indonesia in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0 where this period was marked by the development of community activities through the Internet of Things which is commonly called IoT (Ghufron, 2018). The industrial revolution 4.0, which is commonly referred to as the era of disruption, brings opportunities to face one of the challenges of education in Indonesia, namely digitalization. In the practice of education in Indonesia, in addition to the many challenges facing the era of disruption, education can find opportunities to develop interesting digital-based learning (Putra, 2019).

The transformation of education into the era of disruption was accompanied by the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic which almost paralyzed educational activities in Indonesia at its inception. Educators, both lecturers and teachers, are experiencing difficult times due to the transition from face-to-face learning to virtual meeting-based learning. Ultra-creative thinking is needed to face this challenge. In reality, online-based learning education or online learning is not an easy problem (Syaharuddin, 2020). Mastery of technology and information capabilities is an important prerequisite for presenting effective and efficient learning (Salsabila et al., 2020). The ability to adapt to technological developments for educators in Indonesia is still relatively low, especially for the elderly. Problems with internet networks, quotas, and the equipment needed are other problems (Astini, 2020). Furthermore, the ethical challenge, namely moral responsibility in ensuring the achievement of educational goals becomes a more fundamental challenge (Atsani, 2020).

Even so, online-based learning must still be carried out even though the challenges are not easy. Education must be open-minded about technological developments, especially those related to learning, such as the use of Zoom, Google Meetings, and so on. Another fact that is quite concerning is conveyed by Untari (2020) in the transformation of online learning, the level of educational creativity is still in the low category. Untari's data shows that the teacher's creativity category is less than 55%, the sufficient category is 37%, the good category is 8%, and the very good category is 0%. This means that in facing the transformation of technology and information-based education, ideas and

innovation are still needed. Educators must be able to seize opportunities by using technology and information and increase creativity in managing online learning. The ability to master learning technology and educators' creative reasoning, which are fundamental prerequisites, is still the biggest obstacle in presenting effective learning, especially those that are differentiated.

The problem of creative reasoning and the use of technology seems to be able to be handled well by the SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang. This school seized on online learning opportunities in one of its program diversifications, namely the International Class Program (ICP). In another study, [Kurniasih et al. \(2019\)](#) stated that the English Conversation Club (ECC) program supports students in forming an English language environment to increase students interest in speaking English. Similar programs are also found in the form of English Motipreneur ([Manurung et al., 2019](#)) and English Day ([Syahfutra & Niah, 2017](#)). In improving the active ability to speak English, this form of learning has been implemented in the ICP of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang. Not only that, SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang is collaborating on the ICP program by utilizing information technology to optimize the program. The collaboration of the ICP program with the use of digital technology has become a program update at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang.

Virtual meeting technology is a technology that is mushrooming during a pandemic. Seminars and public lectures can be carried out with cross-regional participants. This is one manifestation of the ability of education to capture opportunities for the use of information technology. One popular program that has been developing for a long time in the use of technology is the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) which has been used in many countries ([Husna, 2019](#)). The global-interdisciplinary network makes MOOC one of the revolutionary products in the field of education which is a role model for online and digital learning ([Veletsianos & Shepherdson, 2015](#)). Therefore, SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang optimizes the use of information technology in the ICP special program. Therefore, the researcher is interested in doing more in-depth research regarding this program at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang. Furthermore, researchers want to describe the diversification of the ICP program and examine the use of digital technology as a supporting medium in optimizing the ICP program.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative research approach based on case studies. This research was conducted at the SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang because this school is unique in terms of solving online-based learning problems, namely collaboration in the International Class Program (ICP) using information technology. The research was conducted for six months, from June to November 2022. Data was collected through interviews with school principals, ICP mentors, and students to obtain information related to ICP implementation, as well as observation and documentation of ICP activities. Data analysis techniques using the Miles and Huberman model include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. Data validity checking technique through source triangulation between school principals, ICP mentors, and students as well as method triangulation between interview data and documentation data.

C. Result and Discussion

ICP is a program differentiation at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang in the form of a special class that intentionally prepares a special curriculum for students in this class so they have better English skills. This class is presented as a school effort so that students can learn English more intensively, and then eliminate the view that English is a foreign language. On the other hand, this class was presented as an answer to the ineffectiveness of learning during a pandemic.

Apart from the ICP class, this school also has other special programs, including the inclusion program, tahfiz class, and an English class called ICP. The inclusion program is a program intended for students with disabilities or students who have different abilities, in other terms, children with special needs. There are 28 children with special needs at this school with various disabilities such as the physically disabled, autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and unsociable children. Then the tahfiz class is intended for children who have an interest in memorizing the Al-Qur'an the holy book of Islam. In this class, some students have been able to memorize 5 to 8 juz even without a boarding school.

However, in this paper, the researcher will only discuss English classes, especially concerning ICP. The implementation of ICP is based on the results of the SWOT analysis of

SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang implementing a diversification strategy. In the industrial world, the diversification strategy aims to increase sales by forming new products or finding new markets (Sari et al., 2014). The selection of the ICP program was motivated by the phenomenon of globalization in various lines, especially education. The rapid development of technology and information, especially from abroad, has encouraged SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang to form the ICP program. In addition, the ICP program has also created a new market, people who want schools with English-language development programs, especially active English. The principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang often motivates teachers and students regarding the virtue of mastering the language through proverbs.

Saya sering memotivasi guru dan siswa dengan pepatah ini, barang siapa mempelajari bahasa suatu bangsa, maka ia akan selamat dari tipu daya mereka. Saya menegaskan arti pepatah ini bahwa untuk mempelajari suatu ilmu dari bangsa atau negara lain, perlu mempelajari, dan menguasai bahasanya. Maka jika kita ingin bersaing dengan negara-negara lain, setidaknya kita harus mampu menguasai bahasa mereka. (S. S, personal communication, August 10, 2022)

[I often motivate teachers and students with this saying, whoever learns the language of a nation, will be safe from their deception. I emphasize the meaning of this saying that to learn science from another nation or country, it is necessary to study and master the language. So if we want to compete with other countries, we must at least be able to master their language.]

Students of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang are not only encouraged to improve their English speaking skills but are also motivated that Indonesian students are also able to compete to continue their education abroad. So, to improve students' skills in foreign languages, ICP formulates several intensive learning programs to improve the development of English language skills, such as Native Speaker Collaboration, International Students Discussion, Go to Kampung Inggris, Project-Based Learning, and English Camp.

The main goal of ICP is to improve English language skills, especially speaking skills, so the learning program implemented includes speaking actualization activities. The ICP program is also published intensively through social media, especially Instagram. This is a form of institutional branding for its flagship program, an example of such branding efforts can be seen in [Figure 1](#).



Figure 1. Profile documentation of ICP English Class (Source: [Instagram SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang](#))

1. Learning programme

a. Native Speaker Collaboration (NSC)

Native Speaker Collaboration (NSC) is a learning program that is carried out by presenting a native speaker or guest from abroad to interact directly with students. This activity is carried out twice in one semester. A native speaker who was presented was a guest lecturer at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Mathew, from Australia. Learning activities are carried out by sharing information related to routine activities and cultural diversity between the two countries, Indonesia and Australia. Each student is required to submit one question as a trigger and an effort to bring students the confidence to speak English. This activity is relevant to Abraham Maslow's motivational theory regarding the hierarchy of needs that a person's highest motivation is self-actualization (Mendari, 2010). Self-actualization activities or showing the best ability through relevant practice to improve students' active skills (Djafar, 2020), in this case, is speaking English. All students in the ICP class are enthusiastic, but some have not shown confidence. Several students showed enthusiasm confidently, especially 'I', a student with autism who is very interested in learning English. NSC's activities became

a facilitator and 'I' enjoyed exchanging information about other countries, especially Australia. 'I' had the right opportunity to dig up more information about other countries to better understand conditions in other countries. Understanding the conditions of other countries helps students find their interests in other countries to increase students' motivation to study abroad.

Apart from presenting natives, every month, this school presents guest teachers who are considered to be able to increase children's interest in English as well as motivate them to dream of studying abroad. The visiting teachers include graduates from overseas campuses, Indonesian students currently studying abroad, and mentors who are used to guiding prospective foreign students. Sometimes English lecturers are also presented so that the nuances of learning are more varied. Collaborative activities with native speakers can be seen in [Figure 2](#) based on documentation of activities in SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang.



Figure 2. Native Speaker Collaboration Activity

b. International Students Discussion (ISD)

International Students Discussion (ISD) is a collaborative program with communities that are collaborators of schools from various countries to meet through virtual meetings. SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang had the opportunity to collaborate with students from schools in three countries, namely India, Vietnam and Nepal. Learning activities are carried out by presenting certain discussions related to

each country according to the theme determined by the collaborator. Each student is required to deliver a presentation and is not allowed to be passive. So before participating in the learning process, students will try to prepare themselves and the material presented in the form of Microsoft PowerPoint. The ISD implementation schedule is held once a week.

The ISD program is also a solution for students to be able to communicate directly with other students from various countries. In addition to gaining impressive English experience, students also gain insight into other countries through their collaborators. In implementing ISD, students are also asked to make an introductory video, country of origin, and a brief description of their country. This video is then sent to collaborating partners to be introduced to schools from other countries. This is justified by the statement of one of the ICP class tutors.

Program ISD merupakan program kerja sama dengan sekolah-sekolah di luar negeri. Biasanya siswa-siswa kami melakukan virtual meeting dengan siswa-siswa dari sekolah lain di luar negeri, berbincang, dan saling tukar informasi tentang kultur masing-masing. Sesekali mereka akan diajak membuat video singkat berisi perkenalan atau tema lain untuk saling berkirim dengan teman-teman dari negara lain (N, Personal Communication, August 15, 2022).

[The ISD program is a collaborative program with schools abroad. Usually, our students hold virtual meetings with students from other schools abroad, talk, and exchange information about each other's culture. Occasionally they will be invited to make a short video containing introductions or other themes to exchange with friends from other countries.]

In the era of globalization, educational institutions are currently not only aiming to gain competitive advantages but also increasing collaboration, one of which is through optimizing information technology. This practice is following the development of the 4-C competencies of 21st-century students, namely communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration (Kembara et al., 2019). Collaboration in discussion is not only done with students from abroad. This school is also used to holding virtual collaborations with other students in Indonesian schools, especially those with the same program. Several schools that have collaborated with this school include SMP IT Insan Cendekia from Boyolali, Central Java and SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Taman Sidoarjo, East Java. This collaboration activity not only hones students' collaboration skills but also communication skills, creativity, and children's critical

thinking. One of the collaboration activities with international students through virtual meetings is also socialized as shown in [Figure 3](#).



Figure 3. Socialization schedule of International Students Discussion (Source: [Instagram SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang](#))

c. Go to Kampung Inggris (GTKI)

Go to Kampung Inggris (GTKI) is a teaching study activity that aims to improve student's communication skills in active English. This activity was carried out for one full day. The learning system is implemented directly by Kampung Inggris mentor with a one-day curriculum. In a day, students carry out various activities using English. This activity is carried out with eight mentors so that each mentor assists 5-6 students. Some of the activities carried out in daily activities include an environmental introduction, educational games, and reflection. Introduction to the environment is carried out by exploring the area of Kampung Inggris. The mentor introduces each area and interesting things around it then allows students to ask questions and discuss. The second activity is carried out through educational games in English. The game method is used to break the ice so it's not stiff and boring. Students who study happily and enthusiastically can enjoy the learning process well. the last activity is a reflection of

the activities that have been carried out in a day. This activity was not carried out in groups but again in a large forum. Mentors challenge students to convey reflections on activities that have been carried out in a day. Rewards are given to students who dare to submit voluntarily.

The GTKI program is a means of stimulating students to get used to communicating in everyday English. However, carrying out visits to Kampung Inggris regularly is a separate obstacle for schools. So with the development of information technology, SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang is following up on the GTKI program through face-to-face activities through virtual meetings accompanied by the English Village mentor to have more intensive conversations. The use of information technology such as Zoom is a solution to face-to-face constraints so that distance learning is possible (Kholifah et al., 2020). Learning through virtual meetings with mentors from Kampung Inggris is held twice a week.

Apart from virtual communication, the children were also invited to visit Kampung Inggris, Pare, Kediri. This activity is carried out once a school year. During one day, students are required to communicate in English although sometimes it stutters. Then they were also introduced to various other students who were taking English courses there. It is intended that they gain field experience not just theories in class.

d. Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Other learning is carried out through a project-based learning (PBL) model. This time students develop self-skills through assigned projects. Students are asked to make interesting videos in English, and then upload them on the school's Instagram. Video content created includes self-introduction videos, product reviews, group conversations, and so on. The specified video content is activities that are familiar to teenagers so that students feel more interested in developing content creation skills as well as English language skills. This activity also trains students' confidence in speaking because they have to publish videos on social media. Based on Darmuki's research, assignment projects based on video uploads on social media are also able to improve students' speaking skills effectively (Darmuki, 2020).

Figure 4 is the result of a screenshot of one of the tasks of a self-introduction project for a student at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang. Videos are uploaded on the school's Instagram and also sent to partner schools to be shared with collaborating international students.



Figure 4. Project video of self-introduction (Source: [Instagram SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang](#))

Optimization of the International Class Program through information technology using a virtual meeting model. Utilization of information technology is a solution to the limitations of space, time and finance for the development of the ICP program. Active English learning requires intensive practice so it requires learning with routine intensity (Wibowo, 2015). This is because the ability to speak is not genetic, but it is closely related to the environment in which one lives and the motivation to learn. This means that every child can maximize their ability to speak English even though both parents do not have this ability.

e. English Camp

At the end of every odd semester, students who are part of the English class must attend the English camp. Regarding the place and time, it was discussed with the curriculum section and parents so that all parties could jointly make the program a success. English camp activities are held for two days and one night. As with other programs, English camp is also oriented towards the habit of communicating in English. In this session, all students are prohibited from using languages other than English. If they want to carry out activities but cannot use English, they must use sign language. There are even special sanctions if they break this rule, of course, educational sanctions such as writing down several vocabulary words in English and memorizing them. This is an agreement that was deliberately built between the program coordinator and the parents' association.

2. Learning challenge and solution

a. Level of self confidence

Actually, in daily learning activities, children are used to using English, but the main obstacle is their low self-confidence. In class, children are used to having dialogue in English, but some children still seem shy. Mentors must try harder so that their self-confidence grows because this is the main capital so that their speaking skills are optimal. To overcome this, at the end of each month, the mentors carry out a monthly assessment; in various forms such as presentations, drama performances, speeches, focus group discussions (FGD), and storytelling in English. The results of the assessment are conveyed to parents and children, so they know their monthly progress.

b. Heterogeneity of students' ability

This class has 60 students consisting of grades 7, 8 and 9. The average number of students in each class is 20 children. From this number, they have very diverse abilities, some are already considered experts or proficient in aspects of speaking, moderate, and just learning English (basic skills). This class has been oriented towards specialization, not ability-based, meaning that anyone can join this class if they have an interest or desire to learn English and are able and able to participate in all program activities, including financing issues. This then becomes the main factor in the heterogeneity of

children's abilities. There was even a considerable gap between one child and another. The following is an explanation from the English mentor:

Anak-anak ini memiliki kemampuan yang berbeda-beda, mulai dari mahir, sedang hingga dasar. Khusus di kelas 7 ditemukan kesenjangan yang cukup signifikan antara satu anak dengan anak lainnya. Ada satu anak kelas 7 bernama "Y" memiliki kemampuan berbahasa Inggris sangat baik karena sejak SD ia sudah terbiasa berdialog dengan bahasa Inggris namun di sisi lain ada anak bernama "R" yang sama sekali tidak bisa berbahasa Inggris. Kami cukup mengalami kesulitan untuk menyelesaikan persoalan ini, sebab itulah kami lakukan asesmen bulanan (W, personal communication, August 10, 2022)."

[These children have different abilities, ranging from advanced, moderate to basic. Especially in grade 7, there is a significant gap between one child and another. There is one 7th grader named "Y" who has very good English skills because since elementary school he has been accustomed to having dialogues in English, but on the other hand there is a child named "R" who cannot speak English at all. We are having quite a hard time resolving this issue, that's why we are conducting a monthly assessment.]

The data presented above shows that offline-based activities are only realized once or twice a year, and cannot be carried out intensively. While online-based activities can be carried out routinely once or twice a week. In addition, without having to visit learning resources that are far away and require large funds, students can already gain learning experience from remote learning resources. The use of social media in assignment projects is also able to stimulate students' speaking skills in English while increasing self-confidence (Fauziah & Utomo, 2021). So the use of information technology is effective in optimizing the International Class Program which requires intensive activities in active learning.

International Class Program (ICP) in the English class conducted by SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang can be a reference for other schools to present effective and differentiated learning. Optimizing online mode of learning can be an opportunity for educational institutions if it is held properly (Wulandari et al, 2022), the proof is that even though the pandemic is now over, webinars or online training are still commonly held. Related to the challenges faced by SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang, the school can implement an English habituation program for children and teachers of other subjects. So that it is not only during the process of learning English but other lessons can also use English. In addition, English Day can also be another

alternative, for example, all students, both in English and other classes, are required to speak English on Monday so that the culture of speaking English does not only occur classically but can be universal.

D. Conclusion

Globalization requires educational institutions, especially Islamic educational institutions to be able to face the times. The development of information technology and educational institutions requires schools to be able to utilize and develop media optimally. The use of online-based media in active English class learning at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Inovasi Malang is one of the efforts to optimize the use of online-based media including Zoom Meetings, video creation, Youtube, and Instagram. Through online media, schools can overcome space, time and financial limitations in learning, especially those that require routine intensity. The use of online media also encourages educational institutions to be able to expand networks and relationships. However, this program is still faced with two challenges, namely the low level of student self-confidence and the heterogeneity of student abilities. This kind of ICP program is recommended to be implemented in schools in the era of globalization. The implementation of cooperation with native speakers and collaboration abroad will have a more optimal impact if carried out intensively, in a structured and constrained manner.

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