

Religious Identity influence on English Language Learning in Pesantren: Policies and Practices

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ABSTRACT

Several Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia has applied bilingual to support their education for balancing between science and religion. There are different purposes of English language learning in pesantren such as in English for Daily Communication in Pesantren Modern and General English in Pesantren Salafiyah (Traditional Pesantren). This study examines the impact of religious identity on English language learning within the context of Pesantren Modern. By analyzing the policies and the practices implemented the research aims to provide how religious value and identity shape language acquisition processes. The data was collected through literature research from reviewing academic articles, the policies document, and the practices observation from the related institutions which focus on English language learning and the religious identity effect in pesantren. This research reveals that there are some influences on how the students perceive the English language learning and their motivation on its learning regarding to their point of view of their religious identity. There, it can be suggested that pesantren or similar institutions may consider a new way of learning English language in the specific terms in line with the students' point of view of their religious identity.

Keywords: *Religious identity, English language learning, Pesantren, Policies and practices.*

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren or Islamic Boarding School is a place where the students and kiyai or his representatives learn formally and informally whether in the morning, afternoon, or evening. (Manshuruddin et al., 2019) pesantren is one of educational institution characterist of educational institutions of traditional education in Indonesia. (Pasi et al., 2020) Islamic boarding school is part of a religious community that consist of some elements namely kiyai, Islamic students, Islamic religious identity, mosque, and Islamic boarding school. In addition many stakeholders said that Islamic boarding school are educational institutions have a role as a model of religious character education in Indonesia (Ihsan et al., 2021). Pesantren which is termed as salaf in nowadays exactly growing and increasing to modernization. Many of salafiyah pesantren grew into modern pesantren due to the role of kiyai is make less. While modern Islamic boarding school is institution that the stakeholders is from their students, most of the rule are comes from the students but it does not reduce the role of kiyai. Modern Islamic boarding school at least has 3 aspect of modernization that is method, material content, and management. (Nurmahmudah, 2023)

Indonesian has many of modern pesantren most of them such as Darussalam Gontor, Darunnajah, Aisyah islamic boarding school etc. Modern pesantren is very well known for modernity. The modernity in this boarding school focuses on the language learning process and this boarding school focuses on direct method in the language learning process. Then the bilingual used at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor and refers to international languages such as Arabic and English. Language learning process in Modern Pesantren focusing on communicative learning. Communicative learning is an approach to language learning that emphasizes interaction and communication as both the means and the goal of study. This method focuses on developing students' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations through various activities and interactions. The purpose of many boarding schools uses bilingual because language is a tool for communicating between people and giving understanding consisting of various components.

In Indonesian, language dominance is not only a local language but an Indonesian language. Nowadays many people use international language as their second language and are useful in daily activities or in the teaching and learning process. According to the article from the Department of Language Development and Guidance that state Arabic and English languages has been an international language. So, focuses on many institutions in Indonesia use for Arabic and English language.(Ratih et al., 2024). Bilingual is unique practice in Indonesia. Indonesian and English share linguistic spaces within authentic and local language. In nowadays there are many private school, traditional pesantren, or even modern Islamic boarding school use bilingual language such as Arabic and English after Indonesia. Majority every pesantren in Indonesia now focus on using bilingual as the guideness in the teaching and learning process, as the tool of communication in everyday life conversation with a whole school community.(Muhammad & Purbani, 2024)

There are policies for practicing bilingual in everyday life conversation at modern Islamic boarding school that should be obey with their students. Almost all the modern Islamic boarding school has similarity for the policies in general, maybe the difference is about how often the students practice the language themselves. But, in fact the students are prefer to speak in Arabic rather in English even though both of Arabic and English has the same rules in general. So, here the author wants to analyze why the students are prefer to speak in Arabic rather in English. This research is aimed to reveals that there are some influences on how the students perceive the English language learning and their motivation on its learning regarding to their point of view of their religious identity.

METHODS

This research was conducted by applying the descriptive qualitative method. This method consists of explaining the results of the research by giving several descriptions. This was prioritized by observing the phenomena and analyzing the phenomena which emphasizes the process of interpreting the result(Putra & Agung, 2023). This research focuses on the phenomenological that needs an understanding of people's lived experiences and closest on creating an in-depth description of the specific experiences including understanding the nature of human beings by analyzing language in its cultural context (Mansilla-Domínguez et al., 2024). The phenomenological based on CLI description, LAC explanation, and the students of modern pesantren through several interviews and observations gained this data. The researcher's recorded interview was written and analyzed into descriptive explanations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Diversity of Language in Modern Pesantren

Modern pesantren is a famous institution that focuses the learning process on language learning. Based on the students' point of view, the teaching and learning process in this modern pesantren focuses on Arabic and English. However, this boarding school is in the Java region where the mother language is between Indonesian and Javanese, this phenomenon should become a challenge for the learners. Then, the four languages dominate the boarding school environment and the way of learning. Furthermore, the policy in educational setting should be English and Arabic an important language that must be used in students' daily communication. The students are required to communicate with one another in Arabic and/or English. The percentage of learners of Indonesian, which is slightly lower than the use of foreign languages, reflects the fact that students come from all throughout Indonesia, not only Java, where the school is located(Rohmah et al., 2024).

Bilinguals Policies in Modern Pesantren

The language policy adopted by the school seems to be implemented well in the use of foreign language and the percentage of the policy between Arabic and English language was in the neutral position there are 50% policies for Arabic and 50% policies for English. For the Arabic policies and English policies there are, having twice a week for practicing both languages, while in Arabic weeks a whole student of modern pesantren must practice this language in their daily conversation even

though in the room, class, masjid, etc. Then in English weeks were almost the same but the reverse from Arabic in practicing the language.

Furthermore, who spoken another language in Arabic week and English week the student would obtain language court and vigilant system. Then the language section being a part of an upholder in language discipline. They played a crucial role in enforcing language protocols such as having the authority to impose sanctions on offenders, with penalties being appropriate to the severity of the offense (Mulyanto et al., 2024). In case of repeated offenders, the formal courtesy may be conducted at the language court, which serves as a platform for deliberation and the imposition of sanctions, which elevate for repeated offenders. Several sanctions were written on the rules of language section as CLI or LAC, for the first sanction as the lower offender who speaks the Indonesian language in Arabic or English weeks, the student must write several vocabularies and writing of composition about a page of paper. The second for the higher offender is the repeated offenders more than a time that should get the social penalties, such as sun-dried, cleaning around the boarding school and get the offender veil.

Furthermore, there are weekly conversation drill such a reading text conversation and held on Tuesday and Friday mornings after Fajr prayer. The technique of reading this text conversation is between the two students then, each student must look for a partner and practice the text conversation between two students. This weekly conversation drill would enhance the conversational fluency on students modern pesantren. Based on the daily conversation books that can engaging in dynamic dialogues by conversations includes in variety's theme and be able to enriching language performance. This activity reflects the principles of communication language teaching (CLT) which emphasize the important of authentic language use and interaction. Such as providing student with opportunities to apply their language skills in real-life situation (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

In addition, modern pesantren providing to have a comprehensive and engaging language learning experience. And the institution effectively captures student attention and enthusiasm for language learning should be several competitive elements introduced through prizes and trophies be able to cultivate an excellence and achievement among students. It motivates them to invest time and effort in serious preparation and rehearsal, thereby enhancing their language skills and performance abilities. Recognizing outstanding dorms and people in language-related categories fosters healthy competition and friendship, strengthening the feeling of community at the institution. The institution's emphasis on language events is consistent with research on the benefits of extracurricular language activities.

These activities offer students opportunities for immersion and practical language usage, improving their overall language skills (Makarova & Reva, 2017). Furthermore, several event above, explain that modern pesantren will not be missed from Islamic religion. Although modern pesantren have several extracurricular activities, many events and language activities always involve Islamic elements, it also involves the relationship between religious identity and policies in modern pesantren.

Bilinguals Practices in Modern Pesantren

After doing an observation and interviewing some people who graduated from modern pesantren the result reveal that most of the students of modern pesantren are preferring to speak Arabic than English. Although the policies between these two languages are balance and there is no significant difference the students concern to speak Arabic. From this statement the researcher finds several reasons or factors that make the students of modern pesantren more concern to speak or even continue their study which is related with Arabic language, those are:

1. Most of the subjects including textbooks and how teacher explain the material are frequently using Arabic language.
2. The students and teacher in modern pesantren frequently use Arabic language in their daily communication also when it is English week, they often to mix Arabic language into English language.
3. Arabic language has easily pronunciation and language form English language.

4. More Arabic lesson than English lesson, it can be three time of offline classes in a week for English lesson but, it can be more than five times of offline classes for Arabic lesson in a week.
5. Religious identity of the students that make point of view that Arabic language as a language of daily worship.

Considering all these aspects the result provides the unbalancing between the practice of Arabic language and English language. However, in policies there is not the unbalancing rules or even punishment in fact the students of modern pesantren most interest to speak and study Arabic more. According to Faiz Rizki Muhammad and Widyastuti Purbani in his paper state that there is the imbalance case in multilingual practices at pesantren. The proof for the imbalance in multilingual practice such as 1) students' difficulties in pronunciation, 2) lack of language exposure, 3) religious identity make the student's feel close to Arabic language of daily worship activities (Muhammad & Purbani, 2024). However, all the aspect and the covered of religious identity did not make the students lack motivation to study another language such as English, Japanese, Korean, etc.

Religious identity takes control over the practice of bilinguals Modern Pesantren

Based on Lia Jumana thesis she explores that the use of language is constructing religious identity depend in Abu Dhabi Romance Webtoon which tells about forbidden love of an Arab woman, and a Korean man that have different culture, nationally, and religion. This thesis explores in constructing religious identity, language takes important role to who is that the individuals is recognized as personal or part of a certain community through the utterance. The example of language is constructing religious identity in novel is when the Arab woman wants to eat dumpling, but she still realizes that most of dumpling in Korea consist of pork which is prohibition in Islam. Related to this trouble an Arab woman tries to preserve the Islamic law (syariah) related to the prohibition for eating forbidden (haram) food. According to this thesis, it is clear enough to explain that religious identity takes control over the practice of utterance or even behaviors(Jumana, 2019).

In the other hand, this research observation discovered that the students' perspective of Arabic language was more familiar with their daily lives because it is frequently utilized in everyday religious worship such as reading holy Qur'an, five time pray and Islamic teaching (pengajian) so, they want to understand the meaning of the Arabic language while they are doing the religious worship activities. They emphasize that religious identity was influence their motivation to study Arabic language. These finding supported Achmad Farid and Martin Lamb they said that language and religion have always related each other in complex way. For the example sacred texts are often closely bounded with the language they usually utilized like Arabic with the Qur'an, Hebrew with Torah, and Sanskrit with Vedas (Farid & Lamb, 2020).

In addition, according to Dwi Wulan and Afif Noor state that Arabic language learning is a more confident compared to English learning at modern pesantren or madrasah as it is used for performing good rituals in Islam and learning values. Also, Moslems often learn Arabic to read the holy Qur'an even without being the students of any institution as it is considered a good deed. Understanding the meaning of the Arabic grapheme is one of most common reason of the students at modern pesantren or madrasah (Wulandari & Noor, 2020). These finding emphasizes that most all modern pesantren students are preferring to study Arabic more than English due to it utilized to read Arabic grapheme such as Qur'an and to understand the context of the holy Qur'an. But it is not a limitation for modern pesantren students to learn another language such as English. Students of modern pesantren also interest to study English to communicative learning.

CONCLUSION

The paper discusses the language policies and preferences in modern Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). It analyzes why students in these pesantren prefer to speak Arabic over English, despite both languages having similar rules. The research used a descriptive qualitative method and focused on phenomenological analysis of students' experiences. The results reveal that the language learning process in these pesantren emphasizes Arabic and English, with equal policies for both languages. However, the majority of students prefer speaking Arabic. The paper identifies several reasons for

this preference, such as the location of the pesantren in a region where Indonesian and Javanese are the dominant languages, and the requirement for students to communicate in Arabic and/or English daily. The study also highlights the role of Islamic elements and religious identity in language policies and activities at these pesantren.

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