The imbalance case in multilingualism practices at Pesantren: Students' voices

[1]Faiz Rizki Muhammad *, **[2]Widyastuti Purbani**

[1]*English Education Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia*
[2]*Graduate School Department, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

*Corresponding Author
Jl. Colombo Yogyakarta No.1, Karang Malang, Caturtunggal, Kec. Depok, Kabupaten Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55281
E-mail: faizrizki.2018@student.uny.ac.id

Abstract

Today, multilingualism is extremely common. In the Indonesian context, it has its own phenomenon in which the Indonesian and English languages coexisted and frequently earned special emphasis among the mother tongues of each region. Surprisingly, multilingualism has been practiced in pesantren for a long time, with Arabic becoming the primary choice alongside Indonesian and regional languages. Now, Pesantrens are currently developing and adding more languages as learning targets, including English. However, according to the authors' preliminary research at several renowned pesantren, English has not yet surpassed Arabic in terms of its practice in their daily usage. In fact, pesantren is an ideal setting for language environmental conditioning using the Multilingual Education technique. The purpose of this study is to investigate the causes of the language imbalance as viewed through the students' perspectives and how they influence the students' language behavior. The authors utilized a descriptive qualitative method to analyze data gathered from interviews with 40 grade X-XII students at two Pesantrens in Central Java and Yogyakarta. The recorded data was then analyzed using framework analysis method. The results showed 5 main factors from the case: 1) students' anxiety, 2) lack of language exposure, 3) unsupporting language environment, 4) students' religious identity, and 5) students' future needs. There were also different perceptions between Arabic as a language for studying religion and worship, while English only means for communication and preparation to advanced study. These findings also concluded that these perceptions influence their imbalance in multilingualism practices.

Keywords: language practice; multilingualism; pesantren

INTRODUCTION

According to Ethnologue, the number of language speakers is unevenly distributed, with 40% of the world's population speaking one of the eight most common languages as their first language: Mandarin, Hindi, Spanish, English, Bengali, Portuguese, Arabic, and Russian

(Gordon, 2005). This makes multilingualism very common and has a powerful effect on communication needs across speech communities (Edwards, 2008).

Multilingualism is a unique practice in Indonesia. There, Indonesian and English share linguistic space within indigenous and local languages (Zein, 2018). Surprisingly, many private schools in Indonesia with a long history, such as Pesantren or Islamic Boarding Schools, provide Multilingualism through Multilingual Education, the students learn and practice Arabic and English language after Indonesian (Bin Tahir, 2017). Almost every pesantren now focuses on using these two foreign languages as the language of instruction in the teaching and learning process, as well as the tools of communication in everyday life conversations with their peers and towards the teachers (Majid, 2013). There, multilingual education is organized into three major phases: 1) strengthening students' reading skills, 2) enriching literacy in target languages, and 3) boosting multilingual programs with transitional assistance. During these stages, pupils are expected to be multilingual. Bin-Tahir et al. (2017) considered this Multilingual Education technique as Multilingual Simultaneous-Sequential Model (MSSM). These multilingual practices are not something new in education context. Based on the report by Holmen in 2015, similar strategy was also used in University of Copenhagen in supporting academic studies as part of internationalization and wider participation. In the areas that so called by 'sites of multilingualism' where the place is surrounded with many different languages both written and oral practices (Preece, 2011) the institution should select the language instruction as the key component of language policy (Holmen, 2015). The difference lied in the applied policy in where the pesantren focusing on the practice of conversation based on the three phases while in University of Copenhagen used parallel language use principles where the foreign language is put to increase its extent as medium of instruction and text book as the emerging to lingua franca of research (University of Copenhagen, 2014).

However, the employment of this strategy in pesantren has not been entirely successful because students prefer to learn and communicate in Arabic rather than English (Meutia, 2018). One of the important reasons on learning Arabic is to achieve religious goals which is in line with the history of Pesantren as an institution that specialize in studying religious values and its spread (Farhani et al., 2023). Moreover, according to Farid and Lamb's (2019) quantitative research, this trend may also be related to students' negative impressions of English, which impact their motivation to learn English. Some students believe that English threatens their religious identity, but others believe that English is being utilized to expand Islam more generally. On this basis, the researcher did a preliminary investigation to determine if there were any tendencies or imbalances, and then conducted a subsequent qualitative study on students' perspectives as evidence supporting the prior research. According to the author's preliminary research at some of the most prestigious pesantren in Central Java and Yogyakarta, there is an imbalance in the practice of targeted language, with many students preferring to communicate in Arabic rather than English. It is exemplified by students' negative behavior when switching from Arabic to English and vice versa, their eagerness to communicate with native Arabic guests rather than native English guests, their difficulties understanding English instruction rather than Arabic instruction, and their difficulties answering English language questions during oral examination.

This imbalance is worth investigating since learning English in pesantren has the potential for cultural clashes because English is typically viewed as western culture, which

may be diametrically opposed to Islamic ideals reflected in Arabic (Fakhruddin & Megawati, 2018). This example is extremely crucial to investigate since the skill and mastery of foreign languages in pesantren is employed not only for the learning process, but also to create the world of pesantren education itself (Widyastuti, 2018).

Based on those cases, the authors sought to a research question: Why does the language imbalance happen in pesantren? The study then also explores its influence in Arabic and English practices based on their perceptions. Thus, the outcomes may also become valuable input in the form of information and evaluation for teachers or educators at pesantren in applying methods to multilingual education especially MSSM.

An imbalance in multilingualism

According to Cenoz (2009), balanced multilingualism is the ability of an individual or group of people to be equally proficient in two or more languages, whereas unbalanced multilingualism has varying levels of proficiency and use of the language that they have studied. Meanwhile, De Bres (2015) examines the balance in multilingualism in terms of how individuals or groups of people in specific settings can adjust their language.

According to Sharkey and Layzer (2000), an imbalance in the multilingual education process develops when individuals are unable to identify their linguistic demands and lack the necessary background to master or learn a second language (L2). Meanwhile, Francis (2011) saw the imbalance in the process of language learning in multilingualism is frequently related with outputs from these persons in the form of competence and performance.

The imbalance process that occurs in pesantren is more directed to what De Bres (2015) and Francis (2011) stated, where there are issues with language transfer that cause students to be unwilling to try to use the target language as an output of performance, particularly English.

Multilingualism practices at Pesantren

According to Bin-Tahir et al. (2017), multilingualism in pesantren is part of the Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) instruction model, which they call the Multilingual Simultaneous-Sequential Model (MSSM). This instruction's paradigm is centered on students transitioning from monolingual, those who speak and have active knowledge of only one language (Richards & Smith, 2002) to multilingualism where they speak and use three or more languages with code-mixing and switching from one to the others in various circumstances (McArthur, 1992; Edwards, 1994; Kemp, 2009) and then to mono-multilingualism where they master multiple languages but they are not using them actively at the same time in daily communication (Bin-Tahir et al., 2018). These phases are as follows: 1) Multilingual Introduction, in which they gain literacy in multiple languages (Indonesian, English, and Arabic) at the same time in order to increase students' vocabulary and phrase mastery in the target languages, and 2) Target language-only, in which they develop literacy in only one target language (English or Arabic) in order to stabilize on each target language, and 3) Focusing on the usage of English and Arabic as target languages on a daily basis.

Muhammad and Ashadi (2019) concluded from an ethnographic study conducted at one of Indonesia's most notable pesantren that foreign language learning and teaching at pesantren is primarily considered in a behaviorist setting. Furthermore, multilingual education there is based on three key activities: (1) vocabulary drilling, (2) environmental building, and (3) explicit grammar learning. The phases of MSSM are confirmed in the

three primary activities in pesantren multilingual learning. For example, the first phase focuses on students in classes VII-IX and then continues with environmental building, which enters the second phase and is intended for all grade levels. Finally, the explicit learning grammar beginning in grades X-XII, where students have entered the third phase in language use and practice.

Perception in the process of learning

According to Saleh and Wahab (2003), perception is a physical function that begins with sensation and progresses to the act of integrating information with phenomena and experiences in order to make some interpretation about some object. Purwanto (2011), on the other hand, claims that perception is a response. It is defined as the human brain's reaction to stimuli and then the projection of self-impression and orientation based on human experiences and attentions to anything. The students' perception itself might stand from how the learners perceive their learning environment in which related to their study and learning outcomes (Lizzio et al., 2002).

Perception plays a crucial function in the learning process. It is concerned with how good we are as learners in perceiving or believing in knowledge. Suryabrata (2012: 39) notes "Perception has to be developed and managed correctly because it plays a key role in learning and development of the learner". According to those assertions, perception is the product of a human response to information and phenomena through the process of integrating and interpreting experiences and attentions on both. In fact, there is a link between students' opinions about the topic of study under consideration and the learning approach. More specifically, perception is directly tied to motivation, which can be measured using a scale of connection, interest, and sense of duty. Perception is also related to learning orientation, which can be tested using in-depth, surface, and strategic approaches (Entwistle et al., 1989).

METHOD

The author used a descriptive qualitative method to explore the human elements on the topic where this method examines how the individuals see and experience the phenomenon (Given, 2008). It is because the author wanted to answer the 'why' questions on the imbalance case that happened in pesantren instead of answering 'who' is engaging and 'what has happened' during the case that might be provided in quantitative method. The author saw that the reasoning factors might have a bigger impact and deciding the learning policy and conditioning after the study had been conducted.

Participants

The participants of this research were 40 students from grade X-XII of two pesantrens that used Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islamiyyah (KMI) or Tarbiyyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islamiyyah (TMI) as their educational system. Both systems were chosen because language learning and practice are integrated into their daily life communication through Multilingual Education, specifically through the Multilingual Simultanoues-Sequential Method (MSSM). Each pesantren is located in Central Java and Yogyakarta. The present researchers recruited participants from classes X-XII since their studies at the pesantren lasted at least three years. This time period could symbolize their comprehension of the language tasks that were completed. They were selected by requesting students' attendance lists of class X-XII from the two institutions with the total of 236 students from all of the grades, then

the researchers randomly gave informed consent according to the quota desired by the researchers and approved by the institution.

Instruments

The researchers employed semi-structured interview guidelines as the instrument in this study. It was created using comparable guidelines developed by Abubakar, Atmowardoyo, and Korompot (2017), as well as Nursanti and Andriyanti (2020). In the instrument developed from Abubakar et al. (2017), the researchers adjusted some of the required details of the material based on the patterns of questions asked. In Nursanti and Andriyanti (2020), the researchers adapted by substituting religious identity for various key words in identity and nationalism.

Procedures

First, the researchers conducted a pre-observation. There, the researchers spoke with the person in charge of language education in pesantren, and he requested permission to perform the research and stated the goal of the study. After obtaining permission, the researchers identified individuals who had already provided informed consent and agreed to participate in the interview session. Each interview lasted 15-30 minutes, or until all agreed participants were interviewed. The researchers then conducted triangulation with language teachers and language responsibility students to clarify the replies from the participants. The recorded answers were then transcripted to be decoded and analyzed.

Data analysis

Following transcription, the researchers evaluated the data using framework analysis, where they identified the data from what the respondents had experienced of the policies in a certain time, how they perceive them during those periods of time, and what do they expect from them (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). There the authors collect the excerpts and then classified the selected codes from them. The codes were then summarized and interpreted by the researchers. The findings were then triangulated using the teachers' responses to the same themes and codes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the excerpts gains several points of what the students perceive during their time of study within the language policy that applied. Here the researchers obtained five main factors of the imbalance case in Arabic and English practices at pesantren. They are the students' anxiety, the lack of language exposure, an unsupporting language environment, the students' religious identity, and the students' future needs of language. Those five factors are mostly stated and mentioned in their interview session following the questions given by the authors.

Students' anxiety

The study discovered that students were reluctant to speak English rather than Arabic due to anxiety. This is due to their lack of understanding of pronunciation and grammar. They believe that English is difficult to pronounce due to variations in writing and pronunciation. In contrast to Arabic, where the pronunciation conforms to the alphabet and transliteration that is known to their tongue and everyday accent.

Excerpt 1 – YU
"for me, the students are not fond of English language because of the difficult pronunciation…".
Excerpt 7 – TM
"English pronunciation is different from Arabic, the Arabic more likely similar to alphabet in Indonesia with a different way to write. Meanwhile, English has similar in writing in alphabet but has different way of speaking it or pronounce it…"

The students are hesitant to utilize English as a language of everyday communication because they are fearful of making mistakes when practicing (Tang, 1997; Abubakar, et.al, 2017). In relation to the students' pronunciation issues, Nushi et.al (2019) proposed that the acquisition of a good second language in terms of pronunciation must be based on three balanced factors: 1) input, 2) instruction, and 3) interaction; however, these three factors cannot be separated from the learner's personal and social factors, which can speed up or slow down the process of acquiring L2 pronunciation. According to Goodwin (2001), during the speaking activity, all factors including pronunciation, pauses, and intonation are crucial. These language characteristics become the central axis, influencing the understanding and clarity of the topic under discussion (Wang, 2014).

Lack of language exposure
Another aspect discovered was a lack of clear examples of the usage of ordinary language from teachers and seniors. They suggest that teachers communicate with students more frequently in Arabic than in English. This is especially common during English language week, when the conditioning of the speaking environment should be English.
Excerpt 2 – ZR
"…the language teacher should enforce languages to the students of grade X, XI, and XII so their junior may follow them…"
Excerpt 8 – AU
"that is because the managers and teachers commonly talk to the students in Arabic instead of English, the language policies (for teachers) is not tight and not bond enough"

Regarding those perceptions, students actually want this language practice to be carried out in a systematic and comprehensive manner in which not only students but also teachers and senior students are expected to give examples in daily conversations so that they get more language exposure, particularly English. During triangulation, the teacher stated that it was difficult for them to govern the language of other teachers since they saw the existing language regulations and policies as only binding on the kids and did not feel obligated to obey them. These impressions demonstrate that the habit development that is attempting to be created on the basis of Behaviorist theory is ineffective. This situation arises as a result of contextual conditions that do not support pupils who wish to communicate in one of the target languages. One of the implications of behaviorism theory on language learning, as outlined by Budiman (2017), is modeling. The teacher's position as a language model for his students is implied in this assumption. When the learning process begins, the students will imitate all of the teacher's speech acts. If teachers recognize the importance of modeling behavior and language, they should endeavor to provide examples and input so that students can replicate them. Chaudron (1988) stated that the teacher must dominate the discussion during the learning process and linguistic

examples so that students become accustomed to receiving input and attempt to respond to it.

Unsupporting language environment
As a cause-and-effect relationship, this component is still linked to the preceding exposure factor. Due to a lack of exposure to English from teachers and senior students, the students are finally afraid to speak and are unfamiliar with the linguistic environment when the English week is in session. This was aggravated by incidences in which certain students were labeled arrogant or smart-ass by other students when they attempted to speak English. Some students were also subjected to unflattering verbal bullying and mockery.
Excerpt 2 – ZR
"the students are often shy to practice English, they also may get bullied. Once I tried speaking in English, some students laugh at me"
Excerpt 11 – DH
"Javanese people often immersed with their "medhok" dialect, so if we try to talk in English and our javanese dialect is shown, the friends may laugh at us"

These statements clarify Farhani et al. (2020)'s language perception theory, which addressed the student's dread of other people's negative reactions. It was also related to the English exposure and input because they had received enough in Arabic and were frightened to speak English for fear of receiving bad reactions from other pupils or the surrounding environment. The comments further clarify Watson and Friend's (1969) definition of dread of a negative response as a concern about judging others, avoiding evaluation circumstances, and expecting others to negatively evaluate themselves. This is extremely typical because many students who acquire a second language are uncomfortable when they are seen or observed by other people when learning their language, or they do not want to be the center of attention (Wörde, 2003). In another study, Ohata (2005) indicated that the feeling of being continually watched by other peers causes people to feel insecure, which leads to subpar performance.

Students' religious identity
The study discovered that the students' perspective of Arabic was more familiar with their lives since it is more frequently utilized in everyday religious worship. They also stated that the Quran and Hadith, which serve as rules for the Muslim community, are provided in Arabic and are read, studied, and even remembered by them practically every day and time at the pesantren. In contrast to English, which they only meet on rare occasions, particularly during the teaching and learning process and language practice.
Excerpt 2 – ZR
"the Arabic language is often used in tahfidz program, and also in reciting the Quran, we often hear the reiteration of some verse in Arabic"
Excerpt 14 – RSA
"It is more important in Islam, here we also hear mostly that Arabic language is a language of The Heaven"
Excerpt 19 –FQ
"from my experience, in our daily prayer we use Arabic language…"

These findings supported Farid and Lamb's (2020) theory of language preference based on religious reasons, which stated that language religions are always having complex intersection relationships in which presented and associated through their holy books

such as Arabic and Quran, Hebrew, and Torah, and Sanskirt and Vedas. Meanwhile, English was not identified with the Bible until King James promoted it as part of a missionary drive (Pennycook, 1994). Their reasons, however, are not as close to the previously presented finding in which they felt the degradation of Islamic faith (Haggan, 1998), immersion in negative western cultures (Sellami, 2006), a showing commitment to Islam and Arabic as a form of resistance (Chowdburry, 2017), and the perception of English as a threat to their religious identity (Farid & Lamb, 2020). These perceptions may influence the way they approach other communities and how well they will adapt to them in the future needs as its mentioned by Blommaert & Rampton (2011) that the way students rethink and perceive the learning it may reshaped their way in achieving the language competency and its requirements in wider society through the changing communicative practices and multilingual literacies.

Students' future needs of languages
When discussing language and the future, the students shared their thoughts on the future needs for Arabic and English when they left the pesantren. The researchers discovered two perceptions on the need for the two languages here.
Excerpt 2 – YU
"....although not all of us become islamic preacher, there will always some people who knew us as pesantren alumni. They may ask some religious question to us, so we need to check our previous learning books which mostly delivered in Arabic"
Excerpt 9 – NT
"....English language is also important to be learn as university preparation"
Excerpt 13 – ND
"....as other people know that we are alumni from pesantren, they will ask some religious question such as fiqh, aqidah, etc. Automatically we need to recheck our previous understanding and sometimes open the books that we have learned."
Excerpt 14 – RSA
"English is international language, so in my opinion it is very useful later on as the basic if we want to study abroad or when we gradute, it is very needed"

The researchers can deduce from the two perceptions above that the students comprehend the significance of the two languages taught in pesantren. It is only that, in practice, English is less desired due to various factors, as described in the previous subtheme's conclusions. When we discussed this with the language department staff, they responded that both pesantren were quite aware of the aims of language study where they want all the students to master both language in balance to gain since both are important for their future study. On the contrary, from students' perspective they only think that Arabic is the most important once since there are so many formal lessons are taught in Arabic while English is only having a few chances to be learned. The language department staff should try to encourage them in a hard way to strive to learn English, which will benefit them after they graduate from the pesantren where they may have other literatures and academic opportunities that need English as the main language.

According to Suryabrata (2013), perception plays a vital part in shaping the attitude and developing student learning; thus, perception must be correctly developed and managed. Their view of English effects their learning motivation as well. In addition, Al-Khairy (2013) stated that students' perception is vital to learn English well as they master other subjects, so they will enjoy the learning process more passionately. Furthermore,

Hosseini and Pourmandnia (2013) stated that students who have clear and focused perceptions of the language being studied will conduct more productively within and outside of the classroom and will last longer in language acquisition. These disparities in students' perceptions of the two target languages they learn influence how they approach learning the two languages. In this case, English is seen as a more difficult language to learn than Arabic. Although it is necessary to encourage international communication and preparation for furthering their education, they cannot feel close to Arabic, the language in which they learn and practice their daily worship. In the end, they argued that the English language learning process should not be taken too seriously and should be taken for granted.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the researchers drew several conclusions regarding the case of imbalance in Multilingualism practices at pesantren. First, the language imbalance at pesantren may caused by five main factors: 1) the students' anxiety where they could not express their English because of difficulties in pronunciation, 2) the lack of language exposure where the senior and teachers did not give them proper input as modelling and example as it should be in behaviorism context, 3) unsupporting environment where the students who try to practice English often get negative feedback and response, 4) religious identity where the students feel close to the Arabic as language of daily worship activities rather than English, and 5) students' future needs as they see Arabic will give them more input to study religious lesson needed by people rather than English that they only see as the needs for university preparation. Second, these factors influence their high motivation and attitude towards learning Arabic instead of English in term of enthusiasm, productive skills, and demand in practice during the learning phase. As a suggestion to some similar institutions there are several strategies that should be concerned regarding to achieve the balance in multilingual practices; 1) Shifting the learning purpose from English as foreign language into the English for specific purposes in the area of their needs, where English is taught to help them in spreading the Islamic teaching to the global world. 2) Adding more approach in English learning not only with their daily conversation in language shifting but also by helping them with more specific literacies from their specific reasoning to learn during the shifting phase. 3) Maintaining the controlling activities through the system by providing the language master to consult without judging the language barrier that the students have so they may have their own bravery to cover the anxiety and try what they have learned into the context that they need.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection and Analysis, and Writing; **Author 2:** Instrument Validation, Theoretical Analysis, and Reviewing

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.