

Language Policy in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools (*Pondok*

Pesantren): Implementation, Challenges and Impacts

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Abstract

In Indonesia's multilingual education landscape, Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) play a pivotal role in shaping students' religious and linguistic identities through bilingual language policies. While *pesantren* have historically emphasized Arabic for religious instruction, the inclusion of English reflects a growing need for global engagement. This study investigates the implementation, challenges, and impacts of language policies in three *pesantren* in Central Java. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis with coordinators (*pak kyai/bu nyai*), instructors (*ustadz/ustadzah*), and students (*santri*). This research integrates ethnographic tools particularly those oriented towards branding local wisdom activities to deepen the understanding of how *pesantren* construct and communicate their institutional identity through language practices. Findings revealed three distinct policy models: kitab-based instruction (*pesantren 1*), structured immersion (*pesantren 2*), and bilingual programs (*pesantren 3*). Challenges included limited vocabulary, low student confidence, policy-practice gaps, and insufficient interaction with native speakers. Nevertheless, bilingual policies fostered increased student confidence, enhanced public speaking skills, and multilayered linguistic identities grounded in both Islamic and global contexts. These findings highlight that effective language policy must align with institutional ideology, ensure consistent implementation, and provide authentic language exposure. It is recommended that *pesantren* leaders strengthen peer-based language zones, enhance teacher training in bilingual pedagogy, and explore digital platforms to connect students with native speakers. Future research should examine *pesantren* across other regions and investigate the long-term effects of bilingualism on students' academic and spiritual development.

Keywords: Language Policy, Bilingual Education, Pesantren, Islamic Education, Indonesia

Abstrak

Dalam konteks pendidikan multibahasa di Indonesia, pesantren (pondok pesantren) memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk identitas keagamaan dan linguistik siswa melalui kebijakan bahasa bilingual. Meskipun pesantren secara historis menekankan bahasa Arab untuk pengajaran agama, dimasukkannya bahasa Inggris mencerminkan kebutuhan yang semakin meningkat untuk keterlibatan global. Studi ini menyelidiki implementasi, tantangan, dan dampak kebijakan bahasa di tiga pesantren di Jawa Tengah. Dengan mengadopsi pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan analisis dokumen dengan koordinator (pak kyai/bu nyai), instruktur (ustadz/ustadzah), dan siswa (santri). Penelitian ini mengintegrasikan alat-alat etnografi, khususnya yang berorientasi pada branding kegiatan kearifan lokal untuk memperdalam pemahaman tentang bagaimana pesantren membangun dan mengkomunikasikan identitas kelembagaan mereka melalui praktik bahasa. Temuan mengungkapkan tiga model kebijakan yang berbeda: pengajaran berbasis kitab (pesantren 1), imersi terstruktur (pesantren 2), dan program bilingual (pesantren 3). Tantangan yang dihadapi meliputi kosakata yang terbatas, kepercayaan diri siswa yang rendah, kesenjangan antara kebijakan dan praktik, serta kurangnya interaksi dengan penutur asli. Meskipun demikian, kebijakan bilingual mendorong peningkatan kepercayaan diri siswa, peningkatan keterampilan berbicara di depan umum, dan identitas linguistik berlapis yang berakar pada konteks Islam dan global. Temuan ini menyoroti bahwa kebijakan bahasa yang efektif harus selaras dengan ideologi institusional, memastikan implementasi yang konsisten, dan memberikan paparan bahasa yang autentik. Disarankan agar para pemimpin pesantren memperkuat zona bahasa berbasis teman sebaya, meningkatkan pelatihan guru dalam pedagogi bilingual, dan mengeksplorasi platform digital untuk menghubungkan siswa dengan penutur asli. Penelitian selanjutnya harus mengkaji pesantren di wilayah lain dan menyelidiki dampak jangka panjang bilingualisme terhadap perkembangan akademik dan spiritual siswa.

Kata Kunci: Kebijakan Bahasa, Pendidikan Bilingual, Pesantren, Pendidikan Islam, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Language Policy in Indonesian Boarding Schools (Pondok Pesantren). Many Indonesian Boarding Schools (Pesantren) have implemented language policy in improving the program and quality. The implementation of language policies is (Arabic, English, Indonesian, and local languages). Indonesia, as a linguistically diverse country, has numerous educational institutions that implement specific language policies, particularly in Islamic boarding schools, known as pondok pesantren. These institutions aim to develop students' proficiency in Arabic and, in some cases, English, alongside the national language, Bahasa Indonesia¹. However, the implementation of language policies

¹ Azra, A. (2012). *Islamic Education in Indonesia and Malaysia: Shaping Minds, Saving Souls*.

in pesantren is often influenced by various sociocultural, institutional, and pedagogical factors. This paper examines how language policy is implemented in pesantren, the factors influencing it, its impact on students' language competencies, and the challenges faced in enforcing these policies.

Indonesia is a linguistically diverse country with over 700 languages spoken across its archipelago². The country's educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools or pondok pesantren, play a significant role in shaping students' linguistic competencies through language policies that promote Arabic and English alongside the national language, Bahasa Indonesia³. These policies are implemented with the objective of enhancing students' religious knowledge, academic proficiency, and global communication skills⁴. Language policy in pesantren varies significantly depending on institutional goals, pedagogical approaches, and sociocultural influences. Some pesantren adopt a rigid enforcement of Arabic and English, requiring students to communicate exclusively in these languages within designated environments⁵. Others implement more flexible policies that encourage but do not strictly mandate multilingual communication. The extent and effectiveness of these policies are influenced by institutional commitment, teacher competence, and students' linguistic backgrounds⁶.

Examining language policy in pesantren is crucial for understanding how multilingual education can be effectively integrated into religious schooling. Given the growing importance of English and Arabic in global and religious contexts, this study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness, challenges, and sociolinguistic consequences of language policies in pesantren. It contributes to the broader discussion on language-in-education policy in Indonesia and offers recommendations for optimizing multilingual education in religious institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing ethnographic methods

Routledge

² Sneddon, J. (2003). *The Indonesian Language: Its History and Role in Modern Society*. UNSW Press.

³ Ibid., 2.

⁴ Hamied, F. A. (2012). *English in Multicultural and Multilingual Indonesian Education*. Springer.

⁵ Daulay, H. P. (2011). *Pendidikan Islam dalam Sistem Pendidikan Nasional di Indonesia*. Kencana.

⁶ Ibid., 14.

such as observations, interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis. Data were collected from 3 pesantren in Indonesia, focusing on their language policies, instructional methods, and students' linguistic behaviors. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns related to policy implementation, challenges, and impacts. This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the implementation, challenges, and impacts of language policies in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren). The case study method enables an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena within real-life contexts⁷. Given the cultural and sociolinguistic uniqueness of pesantren, this approach is appropriate for capturing the multifaceted ways in which language policies are understood and enacted by stakeholders.

In addition to the case study framework, this research integrates ethnographic tools particularly those oriented towards branding local wisdom activities to deepen the understanding of how pesantren construct and communicate their institutional identity through language practices. Ethnographic tools allow researchers to immerse themselves in the natural settings of the participants, observe linguistic practices as they occur, and document the symbolic meanings embedded within daily activities⁸. In the context of pesantren, local wisdom-based activities such as *mujahadah*, *pengajian kitab kuning*, and language day rituals serve as not only spiritual or educational practices but also as branding mechanisms that reflect the institution's commitment to specific language ideologies.

The branding of local wisdom activities becomes a medium through which pesantren assert their cultural and linguistic values. These practices are not merely incidental; rather, they are intentionally positioned as identity markers that distinguish one pesantren from another, reinforcing internal language policies and shaping students' language attitudes⁹. By employing ethnographic observation and informal interactions, the study documents how these localized, often ritualistic activities embody ideological functions related to Arabic and English language

⁷ Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

⁸ Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2019). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429028064>

⁹ Abdullah, M. (2021). *Tradition and transformation in Indonesian Islamic education: Pesantren and modernity*. Routledge.

promotion, the negotiation of traditional and modern identities, and the tensions between national language policy and institutional autonomy. From a social constructivist lens, the study views language policy as not only a top-down directive but also a socially constructed process shaped through interaction, cultural practice, and institutional discourse¹⁰. Thus, the ethnographic tool complements the case study design by capturing the lived experiences and local agency involved in policy interpretation and enactment. In summary, this research design merges case study methodology with ethnographic tools to investigate how pesantren implement language policies in ways that are deeply interwoven with their cultural, spiritual, and institutional identity. This methodological synergy allows for the illumination of both formal policy documents and the informal, often symbolic enactments of language ideology within the pesantren environment.

This qualitative study was conducted at three *pondok pesantren* in Central Java, Indonesia, which were selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria emphasized pesantren affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama that have clearly articulated language policies to ensure the relevance of the data to the research objectives. The selected pesantren Pondok Pesantren 1, 2, and 3 represent diverse sociolinguistic environments and programmatic structures. Participants were drawn from three key stakeholder groups to enable data triangulation: Three language program coordinators (*locally known as Pak Kyai or Bu Nyai*), three language instructors (*Ustadz or Ustadzah*), and nine students (*santri*), with three selected from each pesantren. The participants selection was based on their direct involvement in the design, delivery, and experience of language policies and practices. This aligns with the principles of criterion sampling commonly used in qualitative educational research¹¹.

To ensure triangulation, the following methods will be used: observation, documents, and Semi-structured interviews with coordinators, teachers, and students. Participant observation during daily language activities. Researcher also do observation at Pesantren. Document analysis (language policy documents,

¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

student handbooks, program guidelines). The researcher did semi structured interviews with coordinators (*Pak Kyai/ Bu Nyai*), Instructors (*Ustadz/Ustadzah*), Students (*Santri*). Data collection employed multiple methods to ensure methodological triangulation¹², including: Semi-structured interviews with language coordinators, instructors, and students. Interviews explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in the implementation of language policies. Questions were open-ended to allow participants to share nuanced insights. Participant observation was conducted during daily language activities (such as language immersion programs, public speaking sessions, and language patrols). Observational data were recorded through field notes to capture naturalistic interaction and language use. Document analysis included language policy documents, student handbooks, program syllabi, and internal memos related to language use. These documents provided contextual background and institutional perspectives on language planning and implementation. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Field notes and institutional documents were used to cross-check and validate interview data.

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze qualitative data. Transcribed interviews, observations using field notes, and documents will be coded inductively. Key themes will emerge related to: language policy implementation, challenges and educational impacts. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as described¹³, which allows for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, several strategies were applied¹⁴: Triangulation of data sources (interviews, observation, documents) was used to cross-validate findings. Member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to participants for verification, ensuring accurate representation of their viewpoints. An audit trail was maintained; documenting decisions related to data collection, coding, and theme development to provide

¹² Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.

¹³ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa)

Canagarajah, A. S. (2005). *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice*. Routledge.

¹⁴ Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.

transparency. These measures enhanced the study's credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. To protect identities, pseudonyms were used for both individuals and pesantren. Additionally, the study was conducted with respect for religious and cultural sensitivities of pesantren environments, particularly regarding gender interaction, prayer times, and modest dress codes. The researcher's presence was designed to be minimally intrusive and culturally appropriate¹⁵.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings on how language policies are implemented in three selected Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pesantren): Pesantren 1, Pesantren 2, and Pesantren 3. Drawing from qualitative data obtained through interviews with coordinators, instructors, and students, the analysis explores the processes of decision-making, the underlying objectives of the policies, enforcement strategies, and methods of policy evaluation. Each pesantren adopts a bilingual approach involving Arabic and English, reflecting a commitment to enhancing both communicative competence and religious literacy. While the structure and operationalization of the policies differ across institutions, they share a common goal of promoting language use as a means of both academic and spiritual development¹⁶. The implementation strategies at each pesantren are shaped by institutional histories, educational goals, and administrative structures. Pesantren 1 adopts a kitab-based bilingual training embedded in regular religious instruction, while Pesantren 2 emphasizes structured immersion through scheduled programs like “English Day” and intensive courses. In contrast, Pesantren 3 institutionalizes its language policy through the LDID (Language Development and Information Division), offering a more systemic and long-term approach. These variations illustrate how each pesantren negotiates tradition and modernity to align language education with both global competencies and Islamic

¹⁵ Mertens, D. M. (2015). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (4th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.

¹⁶ Ibid., 44.

values¹⁷. The following subsections detail the specific mechanisms and rationales underlying the decision-making, objectives, enforcement, and evaluation of language policies within these pesantren settings.

Implementation Language Policy in Pondok Pesantren

Decision Making Processes

All three Islamic boarding schools; pesantren 1, pesantren 2, and pesantren 3 have implemented bilingual language policies (Arabic and English), each with different models but similar objectives: to enhance students' communicative competence and deepen their understanding of Islamic texts.

At pesantren 1, a bilingual policy was introduced in 2021, focusing on Arabic and English usage in daily life and formal instruction. A central component of the implementation is the use of the Shafinah kitab as a linguistic and religious training tool during structured sessions every Saturday night and Sunday morning. According to the language coordinator, *"We implement a bilingual policy since 2021, promoting the use of Arabic and English in daily activities"*¹⁸. Pesantren 2 has adopted a highly structured approach called the English Day, which includes a 3-month intensive language course, morning vocabulary drills, speaking zones, and evening conversation classes. The aim is to create an immersive language environment: *"We aim to build an active language environment, so students can communicate fluently, not just understand the theory"*¹⁹. Pesantren 3 implements a modern bilingual program under the Language Development and Information of Pesantren 3 (LDID) initiative. Since 2003, the program has incorporated structured extracurricular sessions, language skill tracking, and bilingual textbooks. The coordinator noted, *"The LDID program was transformed into a bilingual program in 2019/2020 that includes both English and Arabic"*²⁰.

Objectives of the Language Policy

The primary objectives of the language policy across the three institutions include: (1) Developing communicative proficiency in English and Arabic. (2) Preparing students for global engagement, including further education and da'wah (Islamic preaching). (3) Enhancing students' ability to read and understand

¹⁷ Interview (2025).

¹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁹ Ibid., 44.

²⁰ Ibid., 44.

classical Islamic texts.

As one coordinator explained, *“The goal is for students to develop strong linguistic skills both communicatively and through reading classical Islamic texts”*²¹ Pesantren 2 emphasizes global readiness: *“It also prepares students for global competition and higher education opportunities abroad”* (Interview, 2025). Pesantren 3 focuses on ideological and intellectual integration: *“We want them to master religious knowledge and develop effective communication skills in international languages”*²².

Enforcement and Evaluation of Language Policy

Language policies are communicated and enforced through a variety of mechanisms:

- a. Academic orientation programs at the beginning of the school year.
- b. Weekly meetings and workshops (particularly at Pesantren 2 and Pesantren 3).
- c. Printed handbooks outlining policy procedures (e.g., Pesantren 3 Guidebook at Pesantren 2).
- d. Dormitory-based language mentors or supervisors.
- e. Mujahadah in daily activities at Pesantren
- f. Posters and public announcements (notably at Pesantren 3).
- g. Language is practiced independently during daily routines after class and religious study/ngaji. (notably at pesantren 1,2,3)

One student noted, *“It’s a rule that applies both in class and in certain public areas of the pesantren”*²³.

Each pesantren has established methods of evaluating language policy outcomes: Pesantren 1 evaluates student ability through kitab reading sessions and feedback from language mentors: *“We assess students during kitab training, through reports from language supervisors, and through students’ ability to explain the texts in Arabic or English”*²⁴. Pesantren 2 monitors progress through daily reports, weekly supervision, monthly speaking tests, and final projects. Pesantren 3 assesses all four language skills through regular tests, monthly and semester evaluations, and after-hours peer activities: *“Teachers conduct*

²¹ Ibid., 44.

²² Ibid., 44.

²³ Ibid., 44.

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

evaluations once a month, and coordinators conduct evaluations once every semester”²⁵

Challenges in Implementation

Despite structured implementation, all three pesantren face similar challenges:

- a. Inconsistent language use outside of formal programs. As one instructor stated, *“It’s hard to keep them using the target languages consistently outside structured sessions”*²⁶.
- b. Limited vocabulary and student confidence, particularly at the beginning. A student from Pesantren 2 mentioned, *“At first, I was scared to speak because I was afraid of making mistakes”*²⁷.
- c. Program intensity and fatigue, especially in Pesantren 2’s rigorous schedule: *“The schedule is tight, and sometimes I feel tired”*²⁸.
- d. Lack of interaction with native speakers, raised by multiple students at Pesantren 3: *“It would be better if we had more interactions with native speakers”*²⁹.

Language Policy Impacts

Most students/santri responded positively to the language policy, though with varied adaptation periods. Many noted improvements in confidence and vocabulary, especially in speaking and understanding religious texts.

*“Now I can do public speaking in English, and I also understand Arabic better”*³⁰.

*“I used to be shy, but now I’m more confident in using both English and Arabic”*³¹.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the policies have fostered multilingual identities and redefined how students perceive language learning not just as a skill, but as a religious and intellectual responsibility. Arabic and English are increasingly viewed as tools for da’wah and self-development.

This chapter interprets the findings of the study in relation to the theoretical

²⁵ Ibid., 44.

²⁶ Ibid., 44.

²⁷ Ibid., 44.

²⁸ Ibid., 44.

²⁹ Ibid., 44.

³⁰ Ibid., 44.

³¹ Ibid., 44.

perspectives and empirical studies reviewed in Chapter 2. Grounded in language policy theory^{32,33}, and critical theories of language and power³⁴, the discussion explores how bilingual language policies are enacted, challenged, and experienced in three pesantren in Central Java. These theoretical perspectives serve as analytical tools to explain the complex interactions between policy, identity, language ideologies, and institutional authority.

Language Policy Implementation: Practices, Beliefs, and Management (Enforcement and Evaluation)

The findings show that all three pesantren implemented bilingual language policies using different models: kitab-based language integration in Pesantren 1, structured immersion in Pesantren 2, and extracurricular enhancement or bilingual program in Pesantren 3. These variations reflect how each pesantren aligns language policy with its institutional identity and pedagogical priorities. The use of kitab Shafinah in Pesantren 1 exemplifies the integration of religious texts into language learning. This resonates with³⁵, who argues that effective language policy in Islamic schools should be grounded in religious culture and curriculum. Similarly, ³⁶posits that language policy implementation must reflect the values and beliefs of the institution. One coordinator remarked, “*We use the kitab not only for religious instruction but as a medium for Arabic and English training*”³⁷, indicating an intentional merging of language and faith-based instruction. In contrast, Pesantren 2's Pesantren 3 represents a structured, accountability-driven approach, characterized by scheduled drills, progress reports, and outcome-based assessments. This aligns with the findings of³⁸, who emphasized the role of formalized systems in promoting policy fidelity in bilingual education. Pesantren

³² Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language Policy*. Cambridge University Press.

Spolsky, B. (2009). *Language management*. Cambridge University Press.

Spolsky, B. (2012). *What is Language Policy?* In B. Spolsky (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy*. Cambridge University Press.

³³ Hornberger, N. H. (2006a). *Frameworks and models in language policy and planning*. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*. Blackwell.

³⁴ Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press.

³⁵ Alwasilah, A. C. (2014). *Pokoknya rekayasa bahasa: Politik bahasa dan pendidikan*. Kiblat Buku Utama.

³⁶ Ibid., 12.

³⁷ Ibid., 44.

³⁸ Liddicoat, A. J., & Taylor-Leech, K. (2015). Micro language planning for multilingual education: Agency in local contexts. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 16(3), 238–244. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2015.1054452>

3's LDID program takes a softer, extracurricular approach that echoes the concept of language learning as social practice³⁹, where language is acquired through community interaction rather than formal instruction alone.

⁴⁰Tripartite model of language policy practices, beliefs, and management offers a useful framework for analyzing how language policy unfolds in pesantren. Each pesantren in this study demonstrated a distinct implementation pattern that reflects this model. At Pesantren 1, language practices center on religious study, particularly through the use of Shafinah kitab as both content and medium. This practice reflects a strong belief that Arabic is a sacred language, and English is a tool for global engagement. These beliefs are managed through weekend kitab sessions and dormitory monitoring. As the coordinator stated, *"This policy will support global experiences and prepare the students to do dakwah in multilingualism"*⁴¹. Pesantren 2 represents a more institutionalized form of language management through the Pesantren 3. Daily schedules, vocabulary drills, and speech evaluations exemplify deliberate and explicit efforts to regulate language use, which⁴² calls "language management." The program's structure corresponds to⁴³ model of acquisition planning deliberate planning of how languages are learned. At Pesantren 3, language policy is embedded in the LDID Program, which combines extracurricular bilingual activities with ideological goals of modernization and global outreach. This reflects⁴⁴ concept of "domain-specific language use," where Arabic dominates religious domains, while English occupies academic and social functions.

The role of institutional support through mentoring, monitoring, and program design was found to be critical. At Pesantren 2, for instance, success was attributed to structured supervision and evaluative practices: *"We evaluate daily through supervisors, weekly through reports, and monthly through speaking tests"*⁴⁵. This finding is consistent with⁴⁶, who argue that implementation

³⁹ Canagarajah, A. S. (2005). *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice*. Routledge.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁴¹ Ibid., 44.

⁴² Ibid., 19.

⁴³ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 19.

mechanisms are as crucial as policy formulation. Mentoring in dormitories, language zones, and punishment-reward systems are local innovations that sustain language use. These grassroots strategies align with bottom-up perspectives in language policy⁴⁷, emphasizing how language policies are negotiated and co-constructed by local actors.

The findings of this study affirm, extend, and nuance the theoretical perspectives reviewed in Chapter 2: From⁴⁸ model, this study confirms that language practices, beliefs, and management coexist but do not always align leading to implementation gaps. From⁴⁹ the concept of domain helps explain how different pesantren allocate Arabic and English according to religious, academic, or social contexts. From⁵⁰, the study supports the idea that language reflects power relations, and that language proficiency is both a symbolic and social resource. In the context of pesantren, language policy is not merely an educational tool but a reflection of institutional ideology, religious authority, and aspirations for global relevance⁵¹. It is shaped by and shapes the social structures in which it is embedded⁵².

This study reinforces and extends prior research on language policy in Indonesian Islamic education. While earlier studies^{53,54} have identified the symbolic and instrumental role of Arabic and English in pesantren, this study adds empirical depth by comparing policy implementation models across three pesantren. It also contributes to the sociolinguistic literature by highlighting how pesantren foster multilingual identities not just through formal curriculum, but through lived linguistic experiences embedded in faith and community life.

Challenges in Language Policy Implementation

The findings also highlight tensions between language policy intentions

⁴⁷ Hornberger, N. H. (2006b). *Negotiating the Languages of Literacy: Teachers' and Students' Repertoire*. Routledge.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁰ Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press.

⁵¹ Ibid., 14.

⁵² Ibid., 9.

⁵³ Zulfikar, T., & Mujiburrahman. (2018). Engaging with Islamic traditions in Indonesian Muslim schools: Voices of pesantren graduates. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 40(3), 277–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2017.1327856>

⁵⁴ Muhammad, R., & Purbani, W. (2023). Multilingual Practice in Indonesian Pesantren: A Sociolinguistic Review. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Practice*, 3(1), 45–58.

and actual practices. Inconsistencies in language use outside formal programs reveal a common phenomenon of “policy-practice gaps”. Students often revert to Bahasa Indonesia in informal interactions a finding echoed in previous studies⁵⁵. A critical aspect is the symbolic role of language in pesantren. As⁵⁶ argues, language is not just a communicative tool but a form of symbolic capital. Arabic, as a sacred language, represents spiritual capital, while English signifies intellectual or global capital. This hierarchy reinforces linguistic authority within the pesantren: “Fluency in Arabic can symbolize religious authority, while proficiency in English may signify intellectual capital”⁵⁷. Moreover, some students internalize language ideologies that affect their confidence. As one student shared, “*Sometimes I don’t understand what to say in Arabic or English. I’m afraid of making mistakes*”⁵⁸. These attitudes are shaped by institutional power relations, as described in Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic domination” where authority is embedded in accepted language norms⁵⁹.

A common challenge across the pesantren was the inconsistency in target language use outside structured sessions. Students often revert to Indonesian in informal contexts, which reflects findings from earlier studies on language policy in similar environments^{60,61}. As one student noted, “*Outside the program, we often switch back to Bahasa Indonesia unless mentors remind us*”⁶². Another persistent issue was students' lack of confidence and vocabulary. This aligns with studies by^{63,64}, which highlight student anxiety and limited lexical resources as major barriers in EFL contexts in pesantren. One instructor explained, “*Some students are still shy to speak in a foreign language. Also, not all students have the same*

⁵⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁰ Fata, I. A. (2021). EFL learning obstacles in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools: Teachers’ perspectives. *Dinamika Ilmu*, 21(2), 345–359. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v21i2.3423>

⁶¹ Yi, Y. (2008). Relay writing in a bilingual classroom: A closer look at peer interaction. *Foreign Language Annals*, 41(4), 642–661. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2008.tb03323.x>

⁶² Ibid., 44.

⁶³ Wijaya, Y. (2020). *Anxiety and EFL oral performance among Islamic boarding school students*. 5(1), 19–33. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v5i1.568>

⁶⁴ Ibid., 77.

background in Arabic or English”⁶⁵. These disparities contribute to uneven language acquisition outcomes.

Additionally, the absence of native speakers was identified by students at Pesantren 3 as a limitation: “*It would be better if we had more interactions with native speakers*”⁶⁶. This echoes ⁶⁷, who found that limited authentic input can hinder learners’ progress in speaking fluency.

Language Policy Impacts

Despite challenges, the bilingual policies positively influenced students’ sociolinguistic development. Many students expressed greater confidence in using Arabic and English and began to internalize multilingual identities. This supports the view that language policy shapes not only proficiency but also language attitudes and identity^{68,69}.

As one student noted, “*I used to be shy, but now I’m more confident in using both English and Arabic*”⁷⁰. This transformation illustrates what⁷¹ refer to as translanguaging, where learners dynamically navigate and negotiate multiple language systems in social practice. In pesantren, the religious function of Arabic and the global prestige of English create a layered linguistic environment. As⁷² points out, language ideologies are central in shaping language behavior. The pesantren environment supports a dual linguistic identity Islamic and global allowing students to situate themselves within both religious and modern discourses.

The sociolinguistic impact of language policy was significant. Many students reported increased confidence and engagement with both Arabic and English. This affirms findings by^{73,74}, who emphasize the role of language policy

⁶⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁷ Hasanah, U. (2022). Enhancing speaking fluency in pesantren through virtual exchange: A case study. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 7(1), 112–126.

⁶⁸ Hornberger, N. H. (2006b). *Negotiating the Languages of Literacy: Teachers’ and Students’ Repertoire*. Routledge.

⁶⁹ Setiyadi, A. B., M., & Sukirlan, M. (2016). Language policy in Indonesian education: Challenges and future directions. Indonesian. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 5(2), 242–252. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v5i2.1347>

⁷⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁷¹ García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁷² Ibid., 10.

⁷³ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁴ Tollefson, J. W., & Tsui, A. B. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Medium of instruction policies: Which agenda?*

in shaping language attitudes and identity formation. Such developments illustrate what⁷⁵ call translanguaging the fluid and dynamic use of multiple languages in constructing meaning, identity, and participation. The pesantren thus becomes a multilingual ecology where Arabic represents religiosity, English signals global mobility, and Bahasa Indonesia signifies national identity. This trilingual context fosters a layered sociolinguistic identity, aligning with ⁷⁶ view of domain-based language use and⁷⁷ theory of linguistic capital.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation, challenges, and impacts of bilingual language policies (Arabic and English) in three Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Central Java, Indonesia. The findings revealed that each pesantren adopted a different implementation model: integrating languages through religious texts, enforcing a structured system such as English Day, and utilizing extracurricular activities focused on communicative competence. Successful implementation was closely linked to institutional support, including language mentoring, monitoring systems, and alignment with religious objectives. The main challenges included inconsistent language use outside formal programs, limited vocabulary, low student confidence, and restricted access to native speakers. Despite these obstacles, the bilingual policies positively influenced students' language confidence, academic engagement, and the development of multilingual identities. Students increasingly associated Arabic and English not only with academic success but also with religious values and global relevance. Theoretically, the study highlights the importance of context-sensitive language policy design in multilingual religious settings. Practically, it emphasizes the need to balance religious education with global language demands through strong institutional support, teacher development, student motivation, and consistent language-learning environments. The study also recommends expanding future research to other regions, conducting longitudinal studies, involving a broader range of stakeholders, and exploring the role of digital technologies in supporting

Whose agenda? Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 95.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 76.

bilingual education. Overall, the findings suggest that, with appropriate support and contextualized implementation, bilingual education in pesantren has significant potential to develop globally competent and religiously grounded multilingual Muslim learners..

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