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Unlocking Future Opportunities through English Learning: Students' Perceptions in an Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

Perceived relevance is widely associated with motivation to learn English, yet little is known about how pesantren students understand its future value for education, work, and intercultural communication. This exploratory study aimed to describe the perceptions of 26 second-year Madrasah Aliyah students at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fiqoriyah, Bogor, before and immediately after a brief orientation on the educational, occupational, and intercultural relevance of English. A single-group pretest–posttest design was used with a 15-item, five-point Likert questionnaire (three indicators of five items each: importance, motivation, barriers), reviewed by three English education lecturers. The item-level responses were later lost, so only summary percentages from the original analysis are reported; they are descriptive and could not be independently verified, and no subscale means or significance tests are reported. Favourable general interest rose from 30.8% to 84.6%, intercultural interest from 38.5% to 76.9%, and career-related motivation from 46.2% to 80.8%. Because the design had no comparison group, measured only one session, and the data cannot be verified, the changes cannot be attributed to the orientation, and the findings should be read as preliminary. Teachers may make the relevance of English explicit while pairing it with low-stakes speaking practice, and future studies should retain item-level data, add comparison groups, and follow-up measurement.

Kata kunci: *Peluang Masa Depan; Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris; Pendidikan Pesantren; Persepsi Siswa.*

Abstrak

Persepsi tentang relevansi bahasa Inggris dikaitkan dengan motivasi belajar, tetapi masih sedikit diketahui bagaimana santri memahami nilainya bagi pendidikan, pekerjaan, dan komunikasi antarbudaya. Penelitian eksploratif ini mendeskripsikan persepsi 26 siswa kelas XI Madrasah Aliyah di Pondok Pesantren Al-Fiqoriyah, Bogor, sebelum dan segera setelah orientasi singkat tentang relevansi bahasa Inggris. Desain yang digunakan adalah pretest–posttest satu kelompok dengan kuesioner Likert lima poin berisi 15 butir (tiga indikator, masing-masing lima butir: kepentingan, motivasi, hambatan) yang ditelaah tiga dosen pendidikan bahasa Inggris. Karena data respons per butir kemudian hilang, hanya ringkasan persentase dari analisis awal yang dilaporkan; angka tersebut bersifat deskriptif dan tidak dapat diverifikasi secara independen, sedangkan skor rerata, simpangan baku, dan uji signifikansi tidak dilaporkan. Minat umum yang positif naik dari 30,8% menjadi 84,6%, minat antarbudaya dari 38,5% menjadi 76,9%, dan motivasi terkait karier dari 46,2% menjadi 80,8%. Karena tidak ada kelompok pembanding, pengukuran hanya satu sesi, dan data tidak dapat diverifikasi, perubahan tidak dapat dikaitkan dengan orientasi dan temuan ini bersifat awal serta hanya berlaku untuk satu kelas di satu pesantren, sehingga perlu ditafsirkan secara hati-hati. Guru dapat menjelaskan relevansi bahasa Inggris sekaligus menyediakan latihan berbicara berisiko rendah, dan penelitian

selanjutnya perlu menyimpan data respons per butir, menggunakan kelompok pembanding, serta pengukuran lanjutan.

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in access to international information, higher education, and employment, and English proficiency is widely regarded as important for Indonesia's participation in global competition (Muslim et al., 2020). Its relevance, however, is not experienced uniformly. In Indonesia, where English is learned as a foreign language, learners' motivation has been shown to vary with school and community context, including between urban and rural settings (Lamb, 2007, 2012). Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are a distinctive context: they combine intensive religious education, residential life, and institution-specific educational priorities, and English teaching in these schools faces context-specific challenges (Jon et al., 2021). Learning activities organised by individual pesantren have also been examined in relation to students' speaking performance (Kamaliasari & Amrizal, 2021). No single pattern should therefore be assumed across institutions, and national or international proficiency rankings cannot stand in for evidence about the students of a particular school.

Two bodies of theory help explain why perceived relevance matters. In the socio-educational tradition, attitudes and motivation were treated as central to second language learning (Gardner, 1985), and later work asked how integrative motivation should be understood when English functions as a global language (Lamb, 2004). Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System reframed motivation around the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience, and it has been applied to learners of different ages and settings (Kormos & Csizér, 2008), including Indonesian adolescents (Lamb, 2012). In this view, motivation is not a fixed trait but is shaped by learners' contexts and imagined futures (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Expectancy–value theory adds that learners' choices depend not only on their expectations of success but also on the value they attach to a task, including its perceived usefulness for future goals (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). For students who must decide how much effort to give English alongside a demanding religious curriculum, perceived usefulness for further education, employment, and communication with others is therefore a plausible entry point to motivation.

Research in Indonesian Islamic schools shows that motivation for English is closely tied to religious identity and institutional context. In three pesantren in Java, religious factors helped shape students' motivation, and a da'wah-oriented motive was prominent but did not appear to generate much learning effort (Farid & Lamb, 2020). A survey of 250 respondents found that ethnoreligious background shaped pesantren students' generally positive attitudes toward English, and students reported that learning English is important and not forbidden by religious teaching (As Sabiq et al., 2022). Other studies have examined pesantren students' attitudes toward English conversation habits (Asgara et al., 2022) and teachers' perspectives on English teaching in religiously rooted settings (Madkur

& As'ad, 2024). Beyond pesantren, a study of senior high school students in West Java reported integrative and instrumental motivation alongside low investment in learning (Muslim et al., 2020), indicating that favourable orientations do not automatically translate into effort. English is also discussed in relation to intercultural communicative competence and cross-cultural communication in multilingual settings (Idris & Widyantoro, 2019; Santoso et al., 2023; Shanta & Merga, 2018).

Taken together, these studies show that attitudes and motivation toward English in pesantren are not unexplored. In the studies reviewed here, they largely address broad constructs such as religious beliefs, general attitudes, or overall motivation. Less attention has been paid to how students perceive the specific future value of English, for further education, employment, and intercultural communication, and to whether making that value explicit changes how students describe their interest in the short term. This is the gap addressed here. The aim is not to claim a first study of pesantren students' perceptions, nor to test an intervention, but to provide a preliminary, context-specific description of perceived future relevance in one Madrasah Aliyah class and to be transparent about what such a design can and cannot show. Accordingly, this study asks: (1) how did students' reported interest in English, including intercultural interest, compare before and after a brief orientation on its future relevance; and (2) what proportion of students reported career-related motivation after the orientation, and what proportion remained unfavourable on general interest? The findings are intended to inform context-sensitive teaching while remaining limited to this class and measurement occasion.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a single-group, pretest–posttest descriptive design to document students' self-reported perceptions before and immediately after a brief orientation on the relevance of English; no comparison group was included. Data were collected on 1 September 2026 at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fiqoriyah, Bogor, West Java. The participants were 26 second-year Madrasah Aliyah students from one social science class, selected purposively on the basis of access granted by the school and the class's relevance to the research setting. Participation was voluntary; the school granted research permission and consent was obtained from students and, through the pesantren administration, from guardians.

The questionnaire contained 15 items in three indicators of five items each, rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree; Likert, 1932): perceived importance of English (items 1–5; e.g., "English will help me continue to higher education"), motivation to learn English (items 6–10; e.g., "I am interested in learning English"), and perceived learning barriers (items 11–15; e.g., "I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking English"). Items 6, 5, and 3 were used as single indicators of general interest, intercultural interest, and career-related motivation, respectively. Because each of these three indicators rests on a single item, they are treated as indicative rather than as validated scales. Three lecturers in English language education reviewed the items for content relevance and clarity, and two items were reworded after review. The same questionnaire was administered before and

after a 30-minute interactive orientation on the uses of English in communication, further education, and careers. A response of 4 or 5 was classified as favourable; only the percentage of favourable responses on the three single indicators is reported, taken from the summary of the original analysis. The item-level responses, subscale scores, and test statistics could not be recovered and are therefore not reported (see Limitations). Individual responses are reported only in aggregate.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceived interest before and after the orientation (RQ1)

Table 1 shows the percentage of students giving favourable responses on the three single indicators. These percentages come from the summary of the original analysis; the item-level responses were lost, so the figures could not be independently verified. General interest in English rose from 30.8% (8 of 26) at pretest to 84.6% (22 of 26) at posttest. Intercultural interest rose from 38.5% (10 of 26) to 76.9% (20 of 26), and career-related motivation from 46.2% (12 of 26) to 80.8% (21 of 26). The intercultural indicator concerns interest in understanding people from other cultures; the study did not measure cultural identity or acceptance of other cultures.

Table 1: Favourable Responses (4 or 5) before and after the Orientation

Indicator	Pretest n (%)	Posttest n (%)
General interest (item 6)	8 (30.8%)	22 (84.6%)
Intercultural interest (item 5)	10 (38.5%)	20 (76.9%)
Career-related motivation (item 3)	12 (46.2%)	21 (80.8%)

Note. N = 26. Percentages are taken from the summary of the original analysis and counts are derived from them; item-level data were lost, so the figures could not be verified.

Career-related motivation and unfavourable responses (RQ2)

After the orientation, 80.8% of students (21 of 26) gave favourable responses on career-related motivation, compared with 46.2% at pretest. Four of 26 students (15.4%) remained not favourable on general interest. Perceived barriers are not analyzed here, because the item-level responses needed to describe them were lost.

Discussion

Taken at face value, the reported pattern, higher favourable interest immediately after an orientation that foregrounded educational, occupational, and intercultural uses of English, is consistent with the expectancy–value view that perceived usefulness contributes to the value learners attach to a task (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). In terms of the L2 Motivational Self System, an orientation of this kind may have made an imagined future in which English is useful more salient, which is what the ideal L2 self-construct points to (Dörnyei, 2009). These readings are interpretive. The figures themselves could not be verified against item-level data. The data cannot show that the orientation, rather than the testing context, the presence of the researchers, or students' wish to give socially desirable answers, produced

the difference, and a one-group pretest–posttest comparison is vulnerable to such threats (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

The pattern also needs to be read against research showing that favourable orientations toward English do not necessarily become effort. Farid and Lamb (2020) found that a da'wah motive was prominent among pesantren students yet did not appear to generate much learning effort, and Muslim et al. (2020) reported that Indonesian senior high school students expressed integrative and instrumental motivation but low investment. At the same time, As Sabiq et al. (2022) reported that pesantren students generally viewed English learning as important and compatible with religious teaching, so a favourable response to an orientation about the usefulness of English is not surprising in itself. Together, these studies suggest that a high proportion of students endorsing the value of English immediately after an orientation is not, on its own, evidence of sustained learning behaviour. Whether the reported change would persist, and whether it would be accompanied by greater effort, cannot be determined from a single-session measurement.

The intercultural indicator warrants particular caution. Interest in intercultural understanding is not the same as intercultural communicative competence, whose elements have been discussed for Indonesian EFL contexts (Idris & Widyantoro, 2019), and perceptions of English as a lingua franca have been examined among Indonesian university learners (Santoso et al., 2023), but the present study cannot say whether pesantren students conceptualise English in similar terms. In a religiously grounded school, a higher reported interest in intercultural understanding should also not be read as a change in cultural identity or in attitudes toward the students' religious community; neither was measured.

Approximately 15% of students were not classified as interested at posttest, and the study cannot explain their responses. Research on English teaching in pesantren points to context-specific challenges (Jon et al., 2021), and learning activities in pesantren have been examined in relation to students' speaking performance (Kamaliasari & Amrizal, 2021). These strands suggest hypotheses about barriers, such as limited opportunities to use English or low confidence, but such barriers cannot be examined here, because the relevant item-level data were lost, and are offered as directions for future research rather than as findings. The quality of the learning experience is another candidate: Lamb (2012) found that a positive view of the experience of learning English was the strongest predictor of motivated learning behaviour among Indonesian junior high school pupils. An orientation on relevance alone is therefore unlikely to be sufficient without positive classroom experiences.

Implications

Within these limits, the study suggests three practical directions. First, teachers may make the educational and occupational relevance of English explicit, since perceived usefulness is a plausible lever for motivation. Second, such orientations are best paired with structured, low-stakes opportunities to use English, so that favourable perceptions can be matched by positive learning experiences (Lamb, 2012). Third, teachers who wish to

address intercultural aims may integrate cross-cultural communication into lessons (Shanta & Merga, 2018) while taking students' religious framing of English seriously (Farid & Lamb, 2020). The contribution of this small study is modest: it documents, for one class, a way of eliciting perceived future relevance and clarifies what evidence would be needed to evaluate such an orientation.

Limitations

Several limitations constrain interpretation. The sample comprised 26 students in one class at one pesantren, and there was no control group or delayed follow-up. The questionnaire received expert review, but the revision history is undocumented, and reliability could not be reassessed. Critically, the original item-level responses and tabulations are unavailable; the percentages reported here are inherited from the earlier manuscript and cannot be audited, and the matching of pretest and posttest responses and the precise indicator definitions cannot be established. For this reason, subscale means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients, and significance tests are not reported, and the figures presented are descriptive only.

Future work should retain anonymised item-level data, publish the questionnaire and score rules, document the number and expertise of validators and the revisions made, assess reliability, and use a comparison group and follow-up measurement to examine whether reported interest persists and whether it is accompanied by learning effort.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study described students' perceptions of English in one Madrasah Aliyah class at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fiqoriyah, Bogor, before and immediately after a brief orientation on its future relevance. The aggregate summary available reports higher favourable interest after the orientation (approximately 31% to 85%) and a similar direction for intercultural interest (approximately 39% to 77%), with approximately 80% reporting career-related motivation afterwards. Because the item-level responses cannot be recovered, these figures are descriptive and unverified, and the single-group design supports neither causal attribution nor generalization beyond the class. The contribution of the study is therefore limited: it shows how perceived future relevance can be elicited and described in a pesantren class and clarifies the evidence needed to evaluate such an orientation. In practice, teachers may consider making the educational and occupational relevance of English explicit and pairing it with positive learning experiences. Future research should use documented and validated instruments, retain anonymised item-level data, include a comparison group, and follow students over time to examine whether favourable perceptions persist and translate into learning effort.

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