A CASE STUDY ON CULTURAL AWARENESS AMONG BILINGUAL LEARNERS AT AN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the cultural awareness of multilingual students in the unique setting of an Indonesian Islamic boarding school. It focuses on how people manage their cultural identities, both inside the Islamic framework and in a larger multicultural society. This study investigates the cultural experiences, challenges, and techniques used by these learners through qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. The findings show how cultural awareness influences the language acquisition process for bilingual learners. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of developing culturally sensitive teaching approaches to meet the requirements of students in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. This study adds to the larger discussion on bilingual education, cultural awareness, and the role of religious institutions in influencing students' cultural identities. It also provides useful insights for teachers and educational stakeholders who want to create inclusive and culturally relevant educational environments in a variety of contexts.
Keywords: *Bilingual Learner; Cultural Awareness; Islamic Boarding School*

INTRODUCTION

The ability to deal with cultural variety is essential as the globe becomes more globalized (Lifintsev & Wellbrock, 2019; Zhang, 2019; Ozer, 2020; Rizvi & Choo, 2020; Siregar, 2022). It helps people grow and enrich their lives in ways they may not realize. People who are exposed to diverse cultures, customs, and beliefs

learn to appreciate different viewpoints, ways of life, and experiences that they would not have had otherwise. It enables them to learn from one another and widen their perspectives. Bilingualism, in particular, provides individuals with a unique opportunity to study and comprehend various cultural viewpoints (Zand-Moghadam & Adeh, 2020; Ingram, 2023; Kim, Li & Lee, 2023; Marely & Coelho, 2023; Selleck & Barakos, 2023). Language has an important function in developing cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is a comprehensive notion that includes understanding one's own culture as well as appreciation and comprehension of other cultures. It is critical not just for effective communication, but also for promoting empathy, respect, and harmony among varied populations.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze cultural awareness in the unusual setting of an Islamic boarding school, where bilingualism takes on a distinct dimension. Islamic boarding schools, often known as madrasas or pesantrens, play a unique role in the educational environment. These institutions not only provide religious education but also help shape their pupils' cultural identities. Bilingualism in this context refers to the intricate interaction of Islamic culture and language with the greater linguistic and cultural variety of the modern world. Thus, this study gives insight on how cultural awareness effects language acquisition and intercultural competency at an Islamic boarding school.

This study delves deeply into the complexities of cultural awareness among bilingual learners, focusing on how cultural awareness is shaped in certain contexts, which provides insights into the dynamic link between language, culture, and identity in this educational context. This study, in particular, gives a case study of bilingual students attending Islamic boarding schools. The key goals of this research are to investigate the cultural experiences, obstacles, and methods used by these learners, as well as to improve their linguistic and cultural competence. By focusing on this context, the author hopes to provide insights into the junction of religious and cultural identities in language acquisition, as well as practical suggestions for educators seeking to foster cultural awareness among bilingual learners. Furthermore, it is planned to serve as a reference for future researchers conducting comparable study with larger samples, various educational levels, or contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bilingualism's cultural component varies depending on the situation. Bilingual learners experience cultural awareness in a unique way as they navigate the linguistic and cultural characteristics of two or more groups (Fielding, 2021; Shi & Guo, 2021). Thus, bilingual education refers to the delivery of academic content in two languages, one native and one second language. The amount of each language employed varies according to the model's outcome target. The advent of

bilingual education is attributed to educational development as a result of globalization, which has a substantial impact on the teaching and learning process. It becomes required since it can increase cognitive ability, particularly cognitive function, while also motivating the bilingual program. According to Mehisto (2012), bilingualism has the potential to benefit individuals, schools, and society by boosting mental flexibility, improving intercultural abilities, and expanding chances for global interchange and trade. Furthermore, education is an intentional endeavor to build and develop the quality of human resources, and one popular education system supports bilingual education, making it a viable option for parents. Thus, multilingual education has become popular and necessary.

In terms of the notions discussed above, the importance of cultural awareness in the context of bilingual learners cannot be overstated, as it plays a significant role in forming their identities and interactions with the world. Furthermore, the function of education, particularly Islamic education, in the process of character development that incorporates multicultural values is frequently viewed as a barrier to interreligious cooperation (Tabroni et al., 2022). Some factors contribute to Islamic education's inability to cultivate students' multicultural and pluralistic spirits. First and foremost, consider the curriculum's focus. Islamic education frequently focuses on religious teachings and Islamic studies, resulting in limited exposure to other cultures, religions, and worldviews. The curriculum may not include enough subjects or information to help pupils to investigate and understand the diversity of cultures and perspectives other than their own. This restricted emphasis may impede the formation of a more open and pluralistic perspective. Another reason is pupils' limited opportunity to interact with people from other backgrounds. Islamic educational institutions may not always encourage encounters or exchanges with persons of other faiths, cultures, or beliefs. Without such contacts, students may fail to acquire empathy, understanding, and the ability to successfully navigate a heterogeneous society. Interactions with people from different backgrounds are essential for developing an open-minded and welcoming perspective.

Some researchers have investigated cultural awareness within the setting of Islamic education. Rosyad (2020) examined an overview of Islamic and multicultural education in Indonesia. He stated that Islamic education and multicultural education are inextricably linked. Islamic education serves as the primary moral activator for students. Furthermore, democratic ideas should be absorbed in Islamic education as part of the formal learning process. It recognizes the need of multicultural education in assisting kids from other tribes, customs, faiths, socioeconomic statuses, and mental capacities so that they can grow and develop to their full potential. Another study by Zuhro et al. (2022). They want to know how overseas students adapt culturally and socially in Malang City. The

findings revealed a number of barriers to cultural adaption. First, there are communication and interpersonal interaction challenges associated with Indonesian language proficiency, mixed language use in the local population, and cultural values in communication. Second, consider the hurdles to adapting to changes in dietary preferences and tastes. Third, there is a cultural value gap or culture shock between habits from one's native culture and habits from another.

Fourth, hurdles to adapting to multicultural demographics include meeting and engaging with people from diverse tribes, nationalities, ethnicities, and races on campus and in Malang City. Fifth, there are hurdles to institutional and bureaucratic adaptation, such as insufficient language programs and cultural orientations, as well as inefficient administrative and bureaucratic services. Sixth, the limitations of the sojourner's ability to adapt to new cultures.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative research approach to investigate bilingual learners' cultural awareness in the unusual setting of an Islamic boarding school. Furthermore, it belonged to a case study because this research was well-suited to a thorough examination of the complicated phenomenon in a real-world setting. The individuals for this study were chosen through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender, linguistic background, and cultural exposure. The participants were multilingual students enrolled in one of the Islamic boarding schools who were eager to discuss their cultural awareness-related experiences.

It included 20 pupils of diverse ages and linguistic backgrounds, with an equal proportion of boys and females. Furthermore, this study's data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. A semi-structured interview was done to learn about the participants' cultural experiences, obstacles, and tactics for language acquisition and cultural awareness. Furthermore, the observation allowed the researcher to become engaged in the school's everyday routine, capturing real-time interactions and behaviors that contributed to cultural awareness. Furthermore, relevant papers such as school curricula, educational materials, and students' written reflections were evaluated to give further data. To improve the validity and reliability of the findings, multiple tactics were used, including member checking, peer debriefing, and data source triangulation. Member checking involved discussing preliminary findings with participants to ensure that their viewpoints were appropriately reflected. The data gathered via interviews, observations, and document analysis was then evaluated thematically. The data was used to generate initial codes, and themes formed through Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) proposed systematic approach of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drafting.

FINDING

The research findings are organized into certain themes. These themes offer a thorough knowledge of bilingual learners' cultural awareness in the setting of an Islamic boarding school. The first theme is students' cultural experiences, which emphasize their cultural identity and linguistic proficiency. One recurring element from the interviews and observations was the complex link between cultural identity and linguistic proficiency.

Participants in this study expressed how their bilingualism helped them navigate between their Islamic cultural identity and the wider cultural variety they encountered in everyday life. Most of them were proud of their capacity to speak in various languages, which they saw as a link between their religious and cultural history and the globalized world. It is possible to argue that bilingual education has an impact on learners' ability to engage with cultural diversity.

The second theme is problems in cultural adaptation. Despite the benefits of bilingualism, pupils in this study expressed difficulty adapting to varied cultural environments. They spoke about cultural misconceptions and the necessity to constantly negotiate their identity. Some of them stated that the Islamic boarding school influenced their cultural awareness and provided a safe learning environment for cultural study. In other words, Islamic boarding schools have a significant impact on promoting cultural awareness among bilingual students. Participants in this survey stated that the school stresses Islamic principles and beliefs, which helped them develop a feeling of cultural identity. Furthermore, the curriculum and extracurricular activities taught pupils to recognize the cultural variety of the Islamic world and beyond.

The third theme is strategies for cultural awareness. The findings revealed that the participants used a variety of ways to increase their cultural awareness. These tactics included engaging in intercultural dialogues at the Islamic boarding school, performing community service, and seeking mentorship from instructors and elders. Furthermore, the Islamic boarding school setting fostered the development of cultural awareness and allowed pupils to learn about other cultures while reaffirming their Islamic principles.

DISCUSSION

The discussion part goes deeper into the study's findings on the cultural awareness of bilingual learners in the specific context of an Islamic boarding school, which is the subject of the case study, by comparing and contrasting them with interrelated ideas and pertinent research findings. The discovery of cultural identification and linguistic competency is consistent with previous research in the field of bilingualism and cultural awareness. Bilingualism has long been seen as an effective tool for navigating and comprehending diverse cultural perspectives.

Individuals who speak many languages, as Grosjean (2010) notes in his work on bilingualism and identity, are frequently able to adjust their behavior and communication style to different cultural circumstances. Similarly, Barea (2023) emphasizes that language can be used not just for communication, but also to encourage cross-cultural harmony and appreciation in an ever-changing world. The notions mentioned above were also found in the research findings, which revealed that the participants in this study displayed a comparable ability to bridge their Islamic cultural identity with the larger multicultural world through their linguistic competency.

Aside from exploring the cultural adaption problems that students must face when dealing with their Islamic cultural identity and their peers' different cultural origins, it also looks at several ways for increasing cultural awareness. According to the findings of this study, what students did is consistent with Chen and Starosta's (2000) statement that intercultural competence can be developed through a variety of strategies, including seeking out intercultural experiences, engaging in dialogue with people from different backgrounds, and reflecting on one's cultural assumptions.

Furthermore, educational institutions play an important role in fostering cultural awareness. According to Banks and Banks (2019), the concept of educational environments that shape cultural values and awareness has been well-documented in multicultural education research. Furthermore, they state that multicultural education enables current and future educators to completely comprehend the complicated notions of culture, become more successful practitioners in different classrooms, and see race, class, gender, social class, and exceptionality as intersecting concepts. In this study, Islamic boarding schools create a unique setting in which religious teachings and values have a substantial impact on cultural awareness. As a result, the findings of this study have far-reaching consequences for bilingual education, cultural awareness, and religious education. Teachers and other educational stakeholders must appreciate the role of language in cultural mediation, as well as comprehend the obstacles and opportunities that bilingual learners experience while adapting to different cultural situations. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive instructional practices that promote cultural understanding and inclusivity among students in Islamic boarding schools and comparable contexts.

CONCLUSION

The interaction of linguistic ability, cultural identification, difficulties, and strategies provides a more nuanced view of the complicated process of cultural awareness development among bilingual students in an Islamic boarding school. It demonstrates how bilingualism bridges the gap between Islamic cultural identity

and the diverse world setting, as well as the importance of language in cultural awareness, as learning more languages enhances empathy for culturally diverse persons. It also has implications for the role of cultural awareness in developing cross-cultural understanding, providing vital insights into the dynamics of diversity and pluralism in the context of Islamic education. Furthermore, it requires a more comprehensive approach to education that includes cultural awareness as a vital component, thereby promoting a sense of tolerance, inclusivity, and appreciation for variety among bilingual learners in such settings.

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