



CULTURAL AWARENESS OF BILINGUAL LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY CONTEXTUALIZED IN AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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Abstract : This study aims to explore cultural awareness of bilingual learners in the unique context of an Islamic boarding school. It focuses on how they manage their cultural identities, both in the Islamic framework and in the broader multicultural context. This study uses qualitative research method, including semi-structured interview, observation, and document analysis in order to explore the cultural experiences, challenges, and strategies employed by these learners. The findings reveal the nuanced ways in which cultural awareness shapes the language acquisition process for bilingual learners. Moreover, it highlights the significance of creating culturally sensitive pedagogical approaches that accommodate the needs of learners in Islamic boarding schools. This research contributes to the broader discourse on bilingual education, cultural awareness, and the role of religious institutions in shaping the learners' cultural identity. In addition, it offers valuable insights for teachers or educational stakeholders seeking to foster inclusive and culturally relevant educational environments in diverse settings.

Keywords: Cultural Awareness; Bilingual Learner; Islamic Boarding School

Abstrak : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi kesadaran budaya para pelajar dwibahasa dalam konteks unik pesantren. Penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana mereka menyikapi identitas budaya mereka, baik dalam perspektif Islam maupun dalam konteks multikultural yang lebih luas. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif, meliputi wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan analisis dokumen untuk mengetahui pengalaman budaya, tantangan, dan strategi yang digunakan oleh para peserta didik. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan cara-cara yang berbeda di mana kesadaran budaya membentuk proses pemerolehan bahasa bagi pelajar dwibahasa. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menegaskan pentingnya menciptakan pendekatan pedagogis yang peka terhadap budaya yang mendukung kebutuhan para pelajar di pesantren. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pembahasan yang lebih luas tentang pendidikan dwibahasa, kesadaran budaya, dan peran lembaga keagamaan dalam membentuk identitas budaya peserta didik. Penelitian ini juga memberikan masukan yang berharga bagi para guru atau pemangku kepentingan pendidikan yang ingin mengembangkan lingkungan pendidikan yang inklusif dan relevan secara budaya dalam lingkungan yang beragam.

Kata Kunci : Kesadaran Budaya; PelajarDwibahasa; Pesantren

INTRODUCTION

The ability to deal with cultural diversity is necessary as the world becomes increasingly globalized (Lifintsev & Wellbrock, 2019; Zhang, 2019; Ozer, 2020; Rizvi & Choo, 2020; Siregar, 2022;). It helps people to develop and enrich their lives in ways they may not always recognize. By exposing to different cultures, traditions, and beliefs, people begin to appreciate different perspectives, ways of living and experiences that they would have not been exposed before. It allows them to learn from one another and broaden their horizons. Particularly, bilingualism gives people a special vantage point to study and comprehend various cultural perspectives (Zand-Moghadam & Akeh, 2020; Ingram, 2023; Kim, Li & Lee, 2023; Marely & Coelho, 2023; Selleck & Barakos, 2023;). Here, language plays a crucial role in forming cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is a multifaceted concept that encompasses an individual's understanding of their own culture, as well as an appreciation and comprehension of other cultures. It plays an essential role not only for effective communication but also for fostering empathy, respect, and harmony among diverse communities.

Bilingualism's cultural component varies depending on the circumstance. For bilingual learners, cultural awareness takes on a unique dimension, as they negotiate between the linguistic and cultural elements of two or more communities (Fielding, 2021; Shi & Guo, 2021). Thus, bilingual education is a term that refers to the teaching of academic content in two languages, in a native and second language. Varying amounts of each language are used depending on the outcome goal of the model. The emergence of bilingual education is due to the development in education as an impact of globalization that significantly influence the process of teaching and learning concept. It becomes necessary since it can stimulate the cognitive ability especially on cognitive function, and motivate the bilingual program. As suggested by Mehisto (2012), there are potential benefits to individuals, schools and societies in being bilingual such as increasing mental flexibility, improving inter-cultural skills and increasing opportunities for global exchange and trade. In addition, education as a conscious effort to build and develop the quality of human resources and one popular education system promote bilingual education becomes a choice by parents. Thus, choosing bilingual education become popular and be needed.

Concerning to the ideas above, the significance of cultural awareness in the context of bilingual learners is undeniable, as it plays an important role in shaping their identities and interactions with the world around them. Further, the role of education, especially Islamic education in the process of character building that contains multicultural values is often considered as an obstacle in supporting inter-religious harmony (Tabroni, et al., 2022). There are some factors that cause the incompleteness of Islamic education in fostering the students' spirit of multiculturalism and plurality. First, the focus of curriculum. Islamic education often places a primary emphasis on religious teachings and Islamic studies, which can lead to a limited exposure to other cultures, religions, and worldviews. The curriculum may not adequately incorporate subjects or content that encourage students to explore and

appreciate the diversity of cultures and perspectives beyond their own. This narrow focus can inhibit the development of a more inclusive and pluralistic worldview. Another contributing factor is the limited opportunities for students to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Islamic educational institutions may not always facilitate interactions or exchanges with people of different faiths, cultures, or beliefs. Without such interactions, students may struggle to develop empathy, understanding, and the ability to navigate a multicultural world effectively. Interactions with diverse individuals are crucial for fostering an open-minded and inclusive mindset.

The investigation of cultural awareness in the context of Islamic education have been conducted by some researchers. Rosyad (2020) analyzed an overview of Islamic education and multicultural education in Indonesia. He concluded that both Islamic education and multicultural education are interconnected. Islamic education has primary role as students' moral activator. Further, the practices of democracy values should be internalize in Islamic education through learning process in formal education. It strongly realize that in order to help students with different tribes, traditions, religions, social-economic status, and mental abilities, it is needed multicultural education, so that they can optimally grow and develop it. Another study conducted by Zuhro, et al. (2022). They seeks to answer the question of how the process of cultural adaptation and social experience of international students in Malang city. The findings showed that there are several challenges of cultural adaptation. First, communication and interpersonal interaction barriers related to Indonesian language proficiency, the use of mixed languages in the local community, as well as aspects of cultural values in communication. Second, the barriers of adaptation to differences in food choices and tastes. Third, the gap in cultural values or culture shock between habits and home culture with habits and host culture. Fourth, the barriers of adaptation to multicultural demographics such as meeting and interacting with various people on campus and Malang City consisting of various tribes, nations, ethnicities, and races. Fifth, the barriers of institutional and bureaucratic adaptation such as inadequate language programs and cultural orientations, and low efficiency in administrative and bureaucratic services. Sixth, the barriers of the sojourner's own ability in cultural adaptation.

Thus, this study aims to investigate cultural awareness within the unique setting of an Islamic boarding school, where bilingualism takes on a distinctive dimension. Islamic boarding schools, also known as madrasas or pesantrens, hold a distinct place in the educational landscape. These institutions not only impart religious education but also play a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of their students. Bilingualism within this context involves a complex interplay between Islamic culture and language and the broader linguistic and cultural diversity present in the modern world. thus, this study sheds light on the ways in which cultural awareness influences their language acquisition and intercultural competence in the context of an Islamic boarding school. The complexity of cultural awareness among bilingual learners is explored in-depth in this research, especially on how

the cultural awareness is molded in the certain circumstance that offering insights into the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and identity in this specific educational context. Particularly, this study presents a case study concerning to the bilingual learners of Islamic boarding school. The primary objectives of this study are to examine the cultural experiences, challenges, and strategies employed by these learners as well as they develop their linguistic and cultural competencies. By focusing on this context, it aims to offer insights into the intersection of religious and cultural identities in language learning and to provide practical guidance for educators pursue to cultivate cultural awareness among bilingual learners. Besides, it expected to be reference for future researchers who conduct similar research with larger samples or different educational level or context.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative as the research design to explore the cultural awareness of bilingual learners in the unique context of an Islamic boarding school. Further, it belonged to case study since this research was well-suited to in-depth exploration of complex phenomenon in real-world context. The subjects of this study were selected using purposeful sampling to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender, linguistic background, and cultural exposure. The participants were bilingual learners who currently enrolled in one of Islamic boarding schools that willing to share their experiences related to the cultural awareness. It involved 20 students, with different ages, various linguistic backgrounds and an equal distribution of males and females. Further, the data collection of this study used a combination of semi-structured interview, observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interview was conducted in order to gain insights into interviewees' cultural experiences, challenges, and strategies related to language acquisition and cultural awareness. Further, the observation allowed the researcher immersed in the school's daily life, and captured real-time interactions and behaviors that contributed to the cultural awareness. Additionally, relevant documents such as school curricula, educational materials, and students' written reflections were analyzed to provide supplementary data. In order to enhance validity and reliability of the findings, various strategies including member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of the data sources were employed. Here, member checking involved sharing preliminary findings with the participants to verify that their perspectives have been accurately represented. Then, the data collected from interviews, observation, and document analysis was analyzed using thematic analysis. Initial codes was generated from the data, and themes emerged through a systematic process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing as proposed by Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of this study are described in this section, and discussed by comparing and constrasting with the interrelated theories and the relevant research findings.

1. Result

The research findings are break down into some themes. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural awareness of bilingual learners in the specific context of an Islamic boarding school. The first theme is students' cultural experiences that focused on their cultural identity and linguistic competence. One prominent theme that emerged from the interviews and observations was the intricate relationship between cultural identity and linguistic competence. The participants of this study described how their bilingualism allowed them to navigate between their Islamic cultural identity and the broader cultural diversity which they encountered in everyday life. Most of them expressed pride in their ability to communicate in multiple languages, which they viewed as a bridge between their religious and cultural heritage and the globalized world. It can be said that bilingual education have implication in developing learners' ability to attempt the diversity of cultures.

The second theme is challenges in cultural adaptation. Despite the advantages of bilingualism, students who belonged to be subject of this study also reported challenges in adapting to different cultural contexts. They described instances of cultural misunderstandings and the need to continuously negotiate their identity. Some of them noted that the Islamic boarding school played an important role in shaping their cultural awareness and provided a safe learning space for cultural exploration. In other words, there is a significance influence of Islamic boarding school in cultivating the cultural awareness of bilingual learners. The participants of this study indicated that the school emphasizes on Islamic values and teachings which contributed to their sense of cultural identity. Moreover, the curriculum and extracurricular activities encouraged them to appreciate the cultural diversity within the Islamic world and beyond.

The third theme is strategies for cultural awareness. This findings showed that the participants shared various strategies which they employed to enhance their cultural awareness. These strategies included engaging in intercultural dialogues within the Islamic boarding school, participating in community service activities, and seeking mentorship from teachers and elders. In addition, the Islamic boarding school environment offered a supportive atmosphere for the development of cultural awareness, and provided opportunities for students to learn other cultures while reinforcing their Islamic values.

2. Discussion

The discussion section delves deeper into findings of the study concerning to the cultural awareness of bilingual learners in the specific context of an Islamic boarding school as the focus of case study by comparing and constrasting with the interrelated theories and the relevant research findings. Regarding to the finding of cultural identity and linguistic competence, it is in line with existing research in the field of bilingualism and cultural

awareness. Bilingualism has long been recognized as a powerful tool for navigating and understanding different cultural perspectives. As Grosjean (2010) emphasizes in his work on bilingualism and identity, individuals who speak multiple languages often have the capacity to adapt their behavior and communication style to various cultural contexts. Similarly, Bagea (2023) highlights that language is a tool not only for communication but also for fostering cross-cultural harmony and appreciation in an ever-evolving world. The ideas above also found in this research findings that the participants of this study demonstrated a similar ability to bridge their Islamic cultural identity with the broader multicultural world through their linguistic competence.

Besides discussing the challenges of cultural adaptation that students must encounter to deal with their Islamic cultural identity and the diverse cultural backgrounds of their peers, it also examines some strategies in order to enhance their cultural awareness. Based on the findings of this study, what students did are supported with Chen and Starosta (2000) that state intercultural competence can be developed through various strategies, including seeking out intercultural experiences, engaging in dialogue with individuals from different backgrounds, and reflecting on one's cultural assumptions. Further, it points out that there is a significant role of educational institutions in shaping cultural awareness. As proposed by Banks & Banks (2019) that the concept of educational environments that shaping cultural values and awareness is well-documented in research on multicultural education. In addition, they define that multicultural education helps current and future educators fully understand the sophisticated concepts of culture, become more effective practitioners in diverse classrooms, and view race, class, gender, social class, and exceptionality as intersectional concepts. In this study, Islamic boarding school provides a unique context where religious teachings and values have significant effect to the cultural awareness. Thus, the implications of this study extend to the broader fields of bilingual education, cultural awareness, and religious education. For teachers or other educational stakeholders, it is needed to recognize the aim of language in cultural mediation and understand the challenges and opportunities faced by bilingual learners in adapting to diverse cultural contexts. In addition, it highlights the need for culturally sensitive pedagogical approaches that cultivate cultural awareness and inclusivity among students in Islamic boarding schools and similar settings.

CONCLUSION

The interplay between linguistic competence, cultural identity, challenges, and strategies offers a nuanced understanding of the complex process of cultural awareness development among the bilingual learners in Islamic boarding school. It proves that bilingualism provides a bridge between Islamic cultural identity and the diverse world context, and emphasizes the role of language in cultural awareness since learning additional languages increases one's empathy for culturally different individuals. It also has connection on the significance of cultural awareness in promoting cross-cultural understanding,

offering valuable insights into the dynamics of multiculturalism and pluralism in the context of Islamic education. In addition, it needs more holistic approach to education that integrates cultural awareness as a fundamental component, ultimately fostering a sense of tolerance, inclusivity, and appreciation for diversity among bilingual learners in such setting.

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