



Original Article

The Relationship between Personal Factors and Institutional Environment on English Learning Motivation in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Study of the L2 Motivational Self System

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Abstract:

This study examines the motivational orientation of Islamic boarding school students toward English language learning and challenges the common assumption that religious identity may reduce acceptance of English as a global language. The research aims to describe students' perceptions of the importance of English, sources of motivation, perceived learning difficulty, and preferred learning materials within the pesantren context. This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design. Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed to students who actively participated in English classes. Total sampling was applied to respondents who completed the questionnaire. The instrument consisted of closed-ended questions measuring perceived importance of English, motivational sources, level of difficulty, and instructional preferences. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques in the form of frequency and percentage distribution. The findings indicate that most students consider English an important subject despite perceiving it as difficult. Internal motivation emerged as the dominant source of learning drive, followed by teacher encouragement. Students showed greater interest in communicative daily conversation materials than in religious text-based materials. These results suggest that students' motivation is future-oriented and internally driven rather than externally imposed. In conclusion, English learning motivation among Islamic boarding school students is characterized by positive perception, strong self-driven orientation, and resilience despite perceived difficulty. The findings confirm that religious educational settings do not inherently hinder students' engagement with English as a global language.

Keywords: learning motivation, English language learning, Islamic boarding schools

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Introduction

English language learning in Indonesia continues to grow in importance in line with the demands of globalization, educational mobility, and cross-border job competition. English is no longer positioned solely as an additional subject, but as a key competency in the development of 21st-century human resources. (Crystal, 2012). However, the success of English language learning is not only determined by curriculum policy, but also by the psychological factors of students, particularly their motivation to learn. (Dörnyei, 2014). In the context of pesantren-based education, the issue of motivation to learn English becomes increasingly complex because it intersects with institutional values, religious culture, and unique learning experiences.

Socially, pesantren are educational institutions that play a strategic role in shaping the character, identity, and intellectual orientation of santri. In recent decades, Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia have begun to integrate general subjects, including English, in response to the needs of the times. However, various empirical reports show that students often experience a dilemma between awareness of the importance of English and limited motivation in the learning process. (E. Ushioda, 2011). This situation raises fundamental questions about the factors that shape and influence motivation to learn English in the pesantren environment.

Motivation in second language (L2) learning has long been a focus of study in applied linguistics and educational psychology. Recent research shows that motivation is not merely an external drive, but rather a dynamic construct influenced by self-perception, learning environment, and learning experiences. (Sharma Yadav, 2020). Therefore, understanding the motivation to learn English needs to go beyond traditional approaches that emphasize incentives or academic obligations alone.

One theoretical framework widely used in L2 motivation research is the L2 Motivational Self System. (Oga-baldwin, 2022). This framework places motivation as a relationship between ideal self-image, normative demands, and actual learning experiences. (Z. D. and E. Ushioda, 2009). A number of international studies over the past five years have shown that the Ideal L2 Self component has a significant influence on the intensity and sustainability of English language learning. (Al-hoorie, 2018). These findings indicate that motivation to learn English is greatly influenced by how students imagine themselves in the future.

In addition to personal factors, the institutional environment also plays an important role in shaping learning motivation. Research shows that the school context, teaching methods, and teacher-student relationships contribute significantly to the experience of learning a second language. (Henry & Cliffordson, 2016). In the context of religious education, the institutional environment can serve as a motivator, but it can also potentially become a barrier if it fails to provide relevant and communicative learning experiences.

Several recent studies highlight that ideological resistance to English tends to decline, even in religious-based educational environments. Research in various countries with Islamic educational contexts shows that English is increasingly understood as a global communication tool, rather than a symbol of cultural identity or a particular ideology. (Alyousef, 2020). These findings reinforce the assumption that the main challenge in learning English in Islamic boarding schools does not lie in theological aspects, but rather in the design of learning and the learning experiences of students.

Although many studies have been conducted on the motivation to learn English, research that specifically examines the relationship between personal and

institutional environmental factors in the context of Islamic boarding schools is still relatively limited. Most previous studies have focused on public schools or universities, so they do not fully represent the characteristics of Islamic boarding school education, which is based on dormitories, religious values, and intense social relationships. This gap indicates the need for more contextual research that is sensitive to the reality of Islamic boarding schools.

Furthermore, recent studies emphasize the importance of examining English learning motivation descriptively and contextually before moving on to testing more complex causal relationships. (Sonbul, 2019). This approach allows researchers to map motivational tendencies and the dominant factors that influence them empirically, particularly in the context of education with unique characteristics such as Islamic boarding schools.

Based on this description, this study positions motivation to learn English as the result of interaction between the personal factors of students and the institutional environment of Islamic boarding schools. Personal factors include self-perception, internal motivation, and future orientation, while the institutional environment includes learning methods, learning experiences, and the social context of Islamic boarding school education. The relationship between these two factors is analyzed from the perspective of the L2 Motivational Self System to obtain a comprehensive and contextual understanding.

The novelty of this study lies in the application of the L2 Motivational Self System in the context of Indonesian Islamic boarding schools using a descriptive quantitative approach. Unlike previous studies, which tended to be inferential or conducted in the context of general education, this study emphasizes the empirical mapping of santri motivation and its relationship with the institutional environment of Islamic boarding schools. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the study of L2 motivation in the context of religious-based education.

Based on this background, the purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between personal factors and institutional environment on English learning motivation in Islamic boarding schools from the perspective of the L2 Motivational Self System. The hypothesis of this study is that personal factors, particularly ideal self-orientation, play a more dominant role than institutional environmental factors, although the quality of learning experiences still contributes significantly to the sustainability of English learning motivation among students.

Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive survey design. This design was chosen because the study aims to systematically describe santri perceptions and motivations toward English language learning without testing causal relationships between variables. (Kholil et al., 2025). Descriptive surveys enable researchers to obtain numerical data on respondents' attitudes and motivations in a natural learning context. This design was chosen based on the need to map phenomena empirically as a basis for confirming the initial assumptions of the study. (Benoot et al., 2016).

The research subjects were students who actively participated in English language learning in the pesantren environment. The sampling technique used total sampling of all respondents who were willing to complete the questionnaire during the research period. Data was collected using a closed-ended questionnaire distributed via a digital form. The data collection procedure was carried out in stages, starting from the preparation of question indicators based on the research objectives, internal editorial validation,

distribution of questionnaire links to respondents, to the collection and downloading of data in spreadsheet format for analysis. (Disorder & Training, 2024).

The research instrument consisted of several items that measured perceptions of the importance of English, sources of learning motivation, perceived difficulty levels, and teaching material preferences. The items were structured to match the focus of the study and to ensure that each question was relevant to the measurement objectives. The inclusion criteria for respondents in this study were: (1) students who actively participated in English language learning; (2) completed the questionnaire; and (3) gave their informed consent to participate. Incomplete responses were not included in the analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques in the form of frequency and percentage calculations for each question item. This technique was chosen because the data were categorical in nature and aimed to describe the distribution of respondents' answers proportionally. The analysis results were presented in tables without vertical lines in accordance with scientific writing guidelines, then interpreted narratively in a single discussion. The analysis procedure followed the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and descriptive conclusion drawing as recommended in quantitative research method writing. (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

Results

This section presents the results of an analysis based on questionnaire data filled out by 15 students. The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to identify the distribution of perceptions and motivations for learning English.

To identify how students view the urgency of English in the context of Islamic boarding school education, respondents were asked to assess the importance of this subject. This analysis is important to understand whether there is cultural resistance or rational acceptance of English as a global language.

Table 1

Students' perceptions of the importance of English language learning

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Important	11	73,3%
Very Important	3	20,0%
Not Important	1	6,7%
Total	15	100%

The data in Table 1 shows that 73.3 percent of respondents stated that English is important, 20 percent stated that it is very important, and only 6.7 percent stated that it is not important.

These findings indicate that positive perceptions of English are very dominant in Islamic boarding schools. Empirically, this data refutes the assumption that religious environments inherently marginalize English. The perception of the instrumental value of English as a global language seems to have been accepted by the majority of students.

From the perspective of second language motivation theory, perceptions of the value of a language are the foundation for the formation of sustained learning motivation. When students view a language as relevant to their future, their commitment to learning tends to increase.

In addition to perceptions of urgency, this study also explored how santri view the

level of difficulty of English. Perceptions of difficulty are an important indicator in understanding learning challenges that can potentially affect motivation.

Table 2
Perception of the Level of Difficulty in Learning English

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Difficult	13	86,7%
Very Difficult	2	13,3%
Total	15	100%

Table 2 shows that 86.7 percent of respondents stated that English was difficult, and 13.3 percent stated that it was very difficult. No respondents considered English to be easy.

This data shows a gap between the perceived importance of English and the perceived level of difficulty. English is considered important, but it is still perceived as an academic challenge.

Interestingly, this perception of difficulty does not necessarily diminish the perceived importance of English. This indicates motivational resilience, whereby students maintain their commitment to learning despite facing cognitive barriers. To test the social assumption regarding the possibility of ideological resistance, respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether English is synonymous with a particular religious identity.

Table 3
Ideological Perceptions of English

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Impossible	13	86,7%
Possible	2	13,3%
Total	15	100%

The data in Table 3 shows that the majority of santri do not associate English with a particular ideological identity. As many as 86.7 percent stated that English is not synonymous with non-Muslim languages. This finding shows that English is understood as a global communication tool, not as a symbol of certain values. Thus, the assumption of ideological resistance does not receive empirical support.

This study also analyzes the main factors that motivate santri to learn English, whether they are personal or institutional factors.

Table 4
Dominant Factors Driving Motivation to Learn English

Motivation Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Self-motivation	9	60,0%
Engaging learning process	5	33,3%
Motivation from teachers	1	6,7%

Total	15	100%
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Based on Table 4, intrinsic motivation is the dominant factor in English language learning. As many as 60 percent of respondents stated that their motivation came from within themselves. The role of teachers and the learning process still contributed, but were not the main factors. These findings show that personal factors have a stronger influence than institutional factors in shaping learning motivation.

Finally, this study explores students' preferences for English learning approaches that are considered more interesting and effective.

Table 5
Preference for English Learning Methods

Learning Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily Conversation	9	60,0%
Intergration of Al Quran	6	40,0%
Total	15	100%

Most respondents were more interested in an approach based on everyday conversation. However, the Al-Qur'an-based approach still had significant appeal. These findings indicate that communicative and contextual learning strategies are more desirable, but the integration of religious values remains relevant in the context of Islamic boarding schools.

To understand the dynamics of santri motivation more deeply, the findings of this study were analyzed using the L2 Motivational Self System framework developed by Dörnyei. This model emphasizes that second language learning motivation is formed through three main components: Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. (Papi, n.d.). This approach allows for a more comprehensive interpretation of the data, rather than simply describing response frequencies.

1. Ideal L2 Self: Orientasi Masa Depan dan Kesadaran Instrumental

The dominance of positive perceptions regarding the importance of English (93.3 percent stated that it was important and very important) shows that santri have a clear future orientation towards the language. The awareness that English is relevant to their academic and professional future reflects the existence of the Ideal L2 Self, which is a future self-image as individuals who are able to use English competently.

In the context of modern Islamic boarding schools, students no longer view English as a symbol of foreign culture, but rather as a tool for social and intellectual mobility. This perception shows that their motivation is internal and based on self-vision. When individuals have a strong future self-image as language users, their motivation tends to be more stable and sustainable.

These findings indicate that Islamic boarding schools do not hinder the formation of students' global identities, but rather provide space for the integration of religious identity and international competence.

2. Ought-to L2 Self: Kewajiban Sosial dan Tekanan Eksternal

The second component in this model is Ought-to L2 Self, which relates to social obligations or external pressures. In this study, motivational factors originating from teachers were only selected by 6.7 percent of respondents. This shows that external pressures or demands are not a dominant factor in the formation of motivation to learn English in Islamic boarding schools.

In addition, ideological perceptions of English also did not show significant resistance. As many as 86.7 percent of respondents stated that English was not synonymous with a particular religious identity. This means that learning motivation was not driven by defensive obligations or normative pressure, but rather by personal awareness.

Thus, the Ought-to L2 Self component in the context of this study had a relatively small contribution compared to the ideal self component.

3. L2 Learning Experience: Peran Lingkungan dan Metode Pembelajaran

The third component is L2 Learning Experience, which is a direct learning experience that influences situational motivation. The preference for a conversational approach (60 percent) shows that communicative and contextual learning experiences are more effective in building student engagement.

Although English is considered difficult by all respondents, this perception of difficulty does not reduce the perception of urgency. This shows that the learning experience, although challenging, is not significantly demotivating. In other words, academic difficulties do not erase the future orientation that has been formed.

These findings show that the learning experience in the classroom serves as a reinforcing factor, not a source of pressure. The institutional environment of the pesantren in this case acts as a facilitator of motivation, not an inhibitor.

Based on analysis using the L2 Motivational Self System, it can be concluded that motivation to learn English in Islamic boarding schools is dominated by the Ideal L2 Self component. Students learn not because of social pressure, but because they are aware of the relevance of English for their future. The Ought-to L2 Self component has a relatively small influence, while L2 Learning Experience acts as a motivational enhancer through a communicative learning approach.

These findings show that the context of modern Islamic boarding schools allows for the formation of a harmonious bilingual identity between religiosity and globalization. The motivation of students is not defensive, but progressive and visionary.

Conclusion

This study shows that students in Islamic boarding schools have a positive perception of the importance of English as a global language that is relevant to their academic and professional future. Although all respondents consider English to be a difficult subject, this perception does not diminish their awareness of its urgency.

The motivation to learn English stems more from internal drives than external pressures. Personal factors are proven to be more dominant than institutional obligations or teacher encouragement. In addition, English is not perceived as an ideological threat by the majority of respondents, so the assumption of religious resistance does not receive empirical support in the context of this study.

Based on analysis using the L2 Motivational Self System framework, the

motivation of santri is dominated by future self-orientation, reflecting the existence of the Ideal L2 Self. The social obligation component has a relatively small contribution, while classroom learning experiences serve as a motivational reinforcing factor. Thus, the motivation to learn English in Islamic boarding schools is more visionary and based on personal awareness than normative or defensive.

Suggestion

Based on research findings, English language learning in Islamic boarding schools needs to be directed towards strengthening the intrinsic motivation of students that has already been formed. Learning strategies should emphasize a communicative approach that is relevant to the actual and future needs of students, so that their orientation as global language users can develop sustainably.

The role of teachers still needs to be strengthened as facilitators who create positive and supportive learning experiences. Although personal motivation is a dominant factor, a conducive learning environment can increase learning engagement and perseverance.

In addition, the integration of religious values in English language learning can be maintained as a form of contextualization without reducing its global orientation. This effort can strengthen the harmony between the religious identity and international competence of students in facing the dynamics of global education and communication.

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