

Integration of Sundanese, Javanese, and Bantenese in Learning Yellow Books at Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role and impact of Javanese and Sundanese languages in teaching the Yellow Book at Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Banten, with a focus on sociological, anthropological, and gender dimensions. The use of regional languages facilitates understanding among students and the surrounding community, as these languages are often their mother tongue and provide a more accessible medium for religious education. A qualitative descriptive case study approach was employed, integrating sociological and anthropological frameworks with a gender perspective. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, focusing on the linguistic practices in pesantren and their pedagogical implications. The findings reveal that pesantren in Banten leverage Javanese and Sundanese languages to teach the Yellow Book, ensuring effective knowledge transfer. These regional languages serve as a bridge between the kyai (teachers) and students, fostering comprehension and engagement. The learning methods, including *sorogan* and *bandongan/wetonan*, are integral to the sustainability of traditional pesantren and rely heavily on the effective use of regional languages for successful communication. The use of Javanese and Sundanese not only preserves local linguistic heritage but also enriches the pedagogical process in pesantren. The kyai's deep understanding of classical texts, combined with their ability to communicate effectively in regional languages, enhances students' learning experiences and strengthens cultural continuity. This study provides insights into the linguistic and pedagogical strategies employed in pesantren, highlighting the importance of regional languages in sustaining traditional Islamic education and fostering cultural identity in Banten.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, or pesantren, play a crucial role in the dissemination and preservation of Islamic teachings in Indonesia (Ifendi, 2021). Their presence across the archipelago has significantly

contributed to the education of Muslims, enabling the broader community to understand and practice Islamic teachings in daily life (Hidayah & Asy'ari, 2022). Rooted in foundational sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic texts, these institutions provide a comprehensive framework for knowledge that guides Muslims toward spiritual truth and moral integrity (Ar Rasikh, 2018). Through structured learning and immersive living environments, pesantren teach not only Islamic rituals and behaviors but also instill a love for knowledge and a commitment to upholding Islamic morals. The holistic education offered aims to prepare students to carry these values forward, ensuring that the traditions and culture of Islam continue to shape their character as they transition into broader societal roles (Mu'awwanah, 2019).

Islamic boarding schools as a place of transmission, transfer and tradition of Islamic knowledge cannot be denied for the Muslim community of Banten. Religious attitudes, religious obedience, and fanaticism towards religion (Islam) are a positive image for the Muslim community of Banten which is often mentioned by several researchers and scientists such as Snouck Hugronje, Martin van Bruinessen, Harry J. Benda and others in their works cannot be separated from the existence of Islamic boarding schools which have a very important role in shaping the attitudes, characters, and outlooks on life of the Banten community. Of course, this image is not just empty talk to lull the Banten community (Dalimunthe & Nasution, 2020) The image of a religious and devout Muslim society is the result of in-depth studies through observation, interviews, and through various literature studied by researchers regarding Banten society (Akbar & Ismail, 2018).

Islamic boarding schools, along with their internal and surrounding communities, provide a fascinating context for researchers to explore the extent of their role and function within both the pesantren community and the broader Banten society, as well as their impact on the wider population (Mariyam, 2021). Azyumardi Azra highlights that Islamic boarding schools serve as centers for the transmission and dissemination of Islamic knowledge, the preservation of Islamic traditions, and the reproduction of *ulama* or *kyai* (Abudin Nata, 2001, p. 112). According to Azra, the enduring presence and development of Islamic knowledge and traditions are inherently tied to the continued existence of pesantren as institutions of religious education (Rijal, 2018). Central to the sustainability of these institutions is the role of the *kyai*, whose leadership and knowledge are indispensable for maintaining the pesantren's function and legacy (Fitriyah et al., 2019).

The teaching of the Yellow Book (Classical Arabic Texts) in Banten Islamic boarding schools often relies on regional languages such as Banten Javanese or Banten Sundanese, used by *kyai*, *ustad*, or teachers to interpret, translate, and explain the texts' meanings (Ghofur & Husniah, 2022). While this practice facilitates comprehension for those familiar with these regional languages, it poses significant challenges for individuals who lack proficiency in them, particularly novice students (Muzaky & Ishari, 2020). Despite the prevalence of this practice, limited research has been conducted on its effectiveness as a medium for transmitting Islamic knowledge. This study addresses this gap by investigating the impact and effectiveness of using regional languages in teaching the Yellow Book, focusing on their role in knowledge transfer within Banten pesantren (Aliyah, 2018).

This research contributes a novel perspective by combining sociolinguistic and pedagogical analysis to evaluate the practical and cultural significance of Banten Javanese and Sundanese in religious education. The study aims to uncover the advantages and limitations of this linguistic approach, offering insights into how language can influence the transmission and accessibility of Islamic teachings. The findings are expected to have significant implications for optimizing teaching methodologies in pesantren, addressing language barriers, and enhancing inclusivity in Islamic education, ultimately ensuring that these traditional learning methods remain relevant and effective in a diverse and evolving educational landscape.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive case study method, incorporating sociological and anthropological approaches with a gender perspective. According to Stake, case studies represent a deliberate choice of research focus rather than a methodological limitation. These cases can range from straightforward to highly complex, depending on the research context. As Nyoman Kutha Ratna highlights, case studies are defined by their exploration of unique and specific characteristics (Adib, 2021). In line with this approach, the researchers have identified distinctive issues within the chosen study location, acknowledging the potential for unique challenges or deviations that warrant deeper investigation (Al-Latif, Rahmah, Sari, & Jannah, 2023). This method provides a nuanced framework for examining the cultural, linguistic, and educational dynamics of the study context.

Table 1. Sociological and Anthropological Approaches

Sociology	Anthropology
Focuses on social processes	Focus on culture
Recent social science	Recent social science
Understand the way of life, society, culture	Understand the way of life, society, culture
Complimented by anthropology research	Complimented by sociological research
Originated from Western civilization (historical)	Originated from primitive groups (historic)
Method: particular (sampling)	Method: generic (Holistic)

The data collection for this study employed a combination of techniques, including a literature review, observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through an inductive-qualitative approach, encompassing multiple stages: ongoing analysis during data collection, data reduction as a process of selecting, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data from field notes, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification (Anshori & Wardana, 2022).

The primary sources for this research consist of field data collected through interviews, direct observations, and documentation (Hasanah, 2021). The participants involved in the interviews included key figures from Islamic boarding schools, such as *kyai* (religious leaders), *ustad* (teachers), and students actively engaged in Yellow Book studies. Additionally, community members familiar with the educational practices and cultural dynamics of the pesantren were included to provide a broader perspective on the sociocultural interplay between the pesantren and its surrounding communities.

Secondary sources encompass literature such as books and scholarly articles authored by researchers who have previously explored themes related to linguistic, educational, and cultural practices in pesantren (Princess, 2020). Furthermore, tertiary sources comprise data and information regarding the Javanese-Bantenese and Sundanese-Bantenese communities, along with studies on Islamic boarding schools documented by experts (Wardana & Widodo, 2022). Together, these sources offer a robust foundation for understanding and analyzing the intricate sociocultural and educational dynamics within the study's context.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Language, Islamic Boarding Schools, and Yellow Books

Language serves as a fundamental communication tool that allows individuals to express and understand ideas, thoughts, and experiences, shaping interactions within communities. Beyond its practical function, language is one of the seven key elements of culture and an essential aspect of a society's cultural identity. It often reflects a person's behavior, as others tend to assess individuals by their manner of speaking and conversing with others (Wijaya & Ramadhon, 2022).

Pesantren, or Islamic boarding schools, play a significant role in Indonesian Islamic education. The term *pesantren* originates from the word *santri*, with the prefix *pe-* and suffix *-an* denoting "the residence

of the santri." Derived from the Sanskrit word *shastra*, meaning sacred texts or religious knowledge, pesantren are centers for Islamic learning. They serve as places for individuals to study Islam and have become enduring institutions deeply integrated into Indonesian society. Scholars such as Soegarda and Poerbakawatja define pesantren as educational institutions dedicated to the dissemination and preservation of Islamic knowledge (El Amin & Nurhayati, 2020).

The kyai is the central figure in an Islamic boarding school. A kyai is a religious leader known for profound Islamic knowledge, good deeds, and moral integrity. Saiful Akhyar Lubis highlights that the success or decline of a pesantren often hinges on the authority and charisma of the kyai. The passing of a prominent kyai can diminish the prestige of the institution if their successor lacks comparable popularity or influence. Nurhayati Djamas describes the kyai as not only a leader but also a symbol of the values upheld in pesantren, such as sincerity, humility, and devotion. The kyai's piety, knowledge, and personal virtues deeply influence the pesantren community and its education system.

The term *santri* originates from the Sanskrit word *shastri*, initially referring to a scholar skilled in writing, and now broadly designates students in religious schools. In the context of pesantren, *santri* refers to learners immersed in Islamic education. Clifford Geertz categorizes santri as individuals deeply committed to Islamic principles. Santri can be divided into two main groups: newcomer students and *santri kalong*. Newcomer students typically come from distant areas and reside in the pesantren, often taking on responsibilities such as managing the institution's daily operations and mentoring younger students. In contrast, *santri kalong* are local students who commute from their homes to attend lessons. The composition of students often reflects the size and scope of the pesantren.

The relationship between the kyai and the santri is foundational to the educational experience in pesantren. Students are taught to respect and honor their teachers as a means of safeguarding the knowledge they acquire. Beyond academic instruction, pesantren foster a sense of closeness and mutual respect between students and teachers. Students often engage in memorizing and studying classical texts under the guidance of the kyai. In addition, they may undertake responsibilities such as managing the pesantren's gardens and assisting with daily tasks. These practices instill discipline, devotion, and a moral framework that prioritizes faith and character development over purely academic pursuits. Consequently, the education system in pesantren focuses on nurturing both the intellectual and spiritual growth of its students, ensuring that they embody Islamic values and morals in their lives.

3.2 Regional Languages and Knowledge Transmission in Islamic Boarding Schools

3.2.1 The Importance of Regional Languages in Knowledge Transmission in Islamic Boarding Schools

Regional languages are those used within specific areas of a nation, ranging from small regions to provinces or larger territories. These languages are deeply tied to the ethnic groups that created and utilize them, forming a vital part of their cultural identity. As a cornerstone of customs, regional languages contribute to the development of literature, art, culture, and civilization within an ethnic group. They are used in traditional ceremonies and daily interactions, making them integral to shaping regional and, simultaneously, national culture (Gao et al., 2022).

In Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), regional languages play a crucial role in the teaching and explanation of classical Islamic texts. By using regional languages, *kyai* and teachers ensure that students and the surrounding community can easily comprehend the content of the books being studied. Since these languages are often the students' mother tongue or the first language they encounter before learning Indonesian or other regional languages, their use in teaching religious knowledge is both natural and effective.

From their inception, Islamic boarding schools have been deeply rooted in the communities they serve. The societal demand for religious education was a driving force behind the establishment of *pesantren*. These schools emerged organically from the needs of society, involving *kyai*, students, and local communities, sometimes with the support of village officials. As institutions, *pesantren* are

inseparable from society, functioning as transformative entities. Their education system inherently carries elements of social transformation, positioning the schools as agents of change. With a focus on fostering religious morals, *pesantren* aim to serve society while contributing to broader cultural and developmental goals (Thayyib et al., 2023).

3.2.2 Regional Languages for Students in Islamic Boarding School Communities

For many students, living and studying in Islamic boarding schools is a deeply memorable experience. Leaving their families behind, they embark on a journey to deepen their understanding of religious knowledge. After completing their education, they often return to their respective villages or regions, bringing with them the values and knowledge they have gained. The socialization experiences during their time in the boarding school significantly shape their future lives. Many of these students become role models within their communities, frequently called upon to deliver sermons at mosques or lead public religious studies. As a result, they are expected to study diligently in the supportive environment of the boarding school, which provides the resources and structure for studying and memorizing religious texts. Their role in society, particularly in guiding behavior and imparting Islamic knowledge, is highly regarded.

Students in Islamic boarding schools often come from diverse regions across Indonesia, leading to variations in the languages and accents used during their interactions. However, these linguistic and cultural differences do not hinder their ability to socialize or form friendships. Instead, these differences are celebrated as forms of beauty and diversity, reflecting the richness of God's creation. This diversity fosters mutual understanding and respect among students, emphasizing the importance of unity in diversity within the Islamic boarding school community.

3.2.3 Yellow Textbook in Regional Languages

Initially, the *pesantren* community did not fully understand why their textbooks were referred to as "yellow books." However, as interest in gaining deeper religious knowledge grew among Muslims, the number of students in *pesantren* increased significantly. Along with this growth came a heightened appreciation for religious studies, and over time, it became clear that the term "yellow book" referred to the classical texts they were studying. The name originated from the paper used in these books, which was often yellow or white but would turn yellowish with age.

The contents of the yellow books generally comprise two main components: the *matan* (core text) and the *syarah* (explanation or commentary). These books are typically bound using a corsage system, allowing the pages to be separated easily. This feature makes the books more practical for students to study, as they do not need to carry the entire volume, which can sometimes contain hundreds of pages (Susilowati et al., 2022).

3.2.4 Islamic Boarding Schools and Ulama in Banten: Banten as a Center of Islamic Teaching in the Archipelago

Banten holds a unique appeal due to its strategic location along the Sunda Strait, serving as a gateway connecting the islands of Sumatra and Java. This advantageous position facilitated the spread of Islam and contributed to the bustling activity of Banten's port, making it a vital centre of trade and cultural exchange.

The strategic nature of Banten as an open city was effectively utilized by Sunan Gunung Jati, who entrusted his son, Sultan Hasanuddin, with establishing the Banten Sultanate. Sultan Hasanuddin became the first ruler of the Sultanate and is widely remembered for his effective leadership. Under his reign, Banten flourished as a strong and prosperous region. Islamization was a priority during his rule, as evidenced by the growing number of residents who embraced Islam and

the expanding influence of Islamic teachings across Banten, encompassing areas such as Serang, Pandeglang, Lebak, and Tangerang.

Sultan Hasanuddin ruled Banten for approximately 18 years (1552–1570), making significant contributions to establishing the foundations of Islam in the archipelago. Alongside building mosques and traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), he actively promoted the spread of Islam by sending scholars to various regions under his control, fostering mental and spiritual development among the people. His achievements also included constructing the Surosowan Palace, which became the capital of the Banten Kingdom and the administrative center of the Islamic Sultanate. This development not only solidified Banten's role as a powerful Islamic state but also established it as a hub for Islamic gatherings and religious education, further strengthening the influence of Islam in the region (Alam et al., 2022).

Many people outside Banten are unaware that regions such as Serang, Cilegon, and parts of the northern coastal area use Javanese as a common language. This Javanese language adds to the linguistic diversity of Banten. Besides Javanese, Sundanese is also widely spoken, especially in areas like Serang (40%), Tangerang (30%), Pandeglang, and Lebak. Additionally, Betawi is spoken near Jakarta's border, along with smaller communities speaking Batak, Padang, and other languages, though these are less prominent. Communication between different ethnic groups in urban areas like Serang, Cilegon, and Tangerang is primarily conducted in Indonesian, while in more homogeneous areas like Pandeglang and Lebak, Sundanese remains the dominant language.

The Javanese spoken in Banten is distinct from the dialects of Central and East Java. For example, Central Javanese speakers often find Banten Javanese unintelligible due to differences in vocabulary, such as *Baginda* meaning "you," *Telaga* meaning "nothing," and *Layang* meaning "we" (Taruna & Rohman, 2020). Additionally, Banten Javanese has a unique accent influenced by the Banyumasan dialect blended with elements of Sundanese. This linguistic fusion creates a distinct identity, making it challenging for speakers from Tegal, Purwokerto, Lebak, or Pandeglang to fully understand each other.

Despite these differences, Banten Javanese speakers identify their language as part of the broader Javanese family, rooted in the legacy of their ancestors. Historical records indicate that the ancestors of today's Banten Javanese speakers migrated from Cirebon, Demak, and Kediri, establishing the Banten Kingdom. Over time, language acculturation between the Banyumasan dialect and the Sundanese language spoken by the local population gave birth to the unique Banten Javanese dialect (Muttaqin, 2020).

The use of Banten Javanese dates back to the establishment of the Banten Sultanate in the 16th century under Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin. At that time, Banten Javanese closely resembled Cirebon Javanese, with traces of the Banyumasan dialect, reflecting the Sultan's heritage as the son of Sunan Gunung Jati, the ruler of the Cirebon Sultanate. The Banten Sultanate's origins stemmed from a coalition of Demak and Cirebon forces, which captured the northern coastal areas of the Pajajaran Kingdom, following their earlier conquest of Sunda Kelapa from the Portuguese. Over time, the Banten Javanese dialect evolved under the influence of the surrounding Sundanese-speaking communities.

Today, approximately three million people speak Bantnese, with the highest concentration in Cilegon, Serang, and parts of Tangerang. Bantnese is a remarkable example of the fusion of two great cultures—Java and Sunda. However, the number of speakers is declining due to modern influences, posing a risk of extinction for the language within the next 50 years. Banten Javanese and Sundanese, as inherited ancestral languages, have played a significant role in the region's Islamization, serving as vital tools for spreading Islamic teachings throughout the community.

3.2.5 Teaching in Javanese and Banten Sundanese Languages in Islamic Boarding Schools

In the world of Islamic boarding schools, regional languages such as Javanese and Banten Sundanese are commonly used in teaching and learning activities. A number of Islamic boarding schools in the Banten area remain loyal to using these languages due to their connection to local wisdom and ancestral heritage. While students in the past may have faced little difficulty understanding these languages, as they were widely spoken, modern students often struggle. This is partly because most young people today grow up learning Indonesian and are increasingly influenced by foreign languages, which are viewed as modern and commonly used in daily interactions. Parents are aware of this challenge, but introducing regional languages later in life often causes delays and confusion, as children must process two languages simultaneously (Burhani et al., 2021).

This shift in language use has led to some confusion among students in educational systems that rely on Javanese and Banten Sundanese, particularly in understanding Islamic teachings. The traditional teaching methods used in Islamic boarding schools, such as *sorogan* and *bandongan/wetonan*, require clear communication between the *ustadz* (teacher) and the students. These methods rely on the teacher's deep understanding of classical Islamic texts, which are then conveyed to students in an accessible language. In Banten, Javanese and Sundanese remain the primary languages used in this educational process, proving effective when explanations are clear and comprehensible (Riinawati, 2022).

Teaching methods like *bandongan* focus on reading accuracy, where students learn the rules of *nahwiyah* (grammar) and *sharfiyah* (morphology). Reading extends beyond recitation, emphasizing comprehension of written texts. Students are expected to grasp the intent, concepts, and key ideas in the texts, enhancing their understanding of vocabulary and sentence structure. This approach allows them to derive meaning from classical Islamic texts, which require precision and perseverance (Huda et al., 2020).

The *bandongan* or *weton* method is often conducted in a *halaqah* system, where the *kyai* reads texts line by line, translates them, and provides detailed explanations when necessary. Students may spend years studying a single extensive text before fully understanding its content. The success of this method depends on the individual student's diligence and intellectual capacity. While it is effective for highly motivated students, critics argue that these methods benefit only a small percentage of learners who are diligent and intelligent, while others may struggle to achieve significant progress (Farchan, 2019).

Overall, the use of regional languages in Islamic boarding schools reflects a rich tradition but also faces challenges in a rapidly changing linguistic and cultural landscape. Students who excel in these traditional methods often possess strong dedication and intellectual abilities, while the methods may require adaptation to meet the needs of a broader student population.

Discussion

The findings from this research highlight the pivotal role of language, particularly regional languages and the use of classical texts, in shaping the educational and cultural landscape of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The integration of regional languages in *pesantren* is a testament to their value in transmitting knowledge and maintaining cultural identity. As noted by Gao et al. (2022), regional languages contribute significantly to the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of local traditions. However, while these practices foster a deep connection between religious education and local wisdom, they also raise critical questions about the sustainability and accessibility of such methods in a modern, linguistically diverse context. The reliance on regional languages, such as Javanese and Banten Sundanese, strengthens the bond between students and their heritage (Burhani et al., 2021). Yet, the increasing dominance of Indonesian and foreign languages

could dilute the effectiveness of this approach. This tension underscores the need for innovative strategies to balance traditional practices with contemporary linguistic realities.

The relationship between *kyai* and *santri*, as well as the pedagogical methods employed in *pesantren*, reflects a deeply rooted tradition that emphasizes moral development and respect for authority. The *sorogan* and *bandongan/wetonan* methods, which rely on the close guidance of teachers, are integral to the *pesantren* system. However, these traditional methods often favor students who exhibit strong intellectual and motivational capacities, potentially excluding those who need alternative learning strategies (Farchan, 2019). Furthermore, as noted by Huda et al. (2020), the use of regional languages in these methods can present challenges for modern students who are less fluent, thereby raising concerns about inclusivity and adaptability. Addressing these issues requires a reevaluation of teaching methods to ensure broader accessibility without compromising the essence of *pesantren* education. This could involve developing supplementary resources or incorporating modern pedagogical practices to support diverse learners.

Moreover, the research sheds light on the symbolic and practical significance of the "yellow books" as core texts in Islamic education within *pesantren*. These texts, which embody centuries of Islamic scholarship, require precise interpretation and conveyance, a task often complicated by the decline of regional language fluency among students (Susilowati et al., 2022). As the number of speakers of regional languages declines, the ability to fully appreciate these texts in their original context may diminish, posing a threat to the preservation of this scholarly tradition. This challenge is further compounded by global educational trends that prioritize standardized curricula and dominant languages (Thayyib et al., 2023). To address these issues, *pesantren* should consider integrating technology, developing bilingual resources, and enhancing teacher training programs to modernize their curriculum while preserving cultural and religious values. Such efforts would bridge the gap between traditional and modern education, ensuring the continued relevance and impact of *pesantren* in Indonesian society.

4. CONCLUSION

The use of regional languages in Islamic boarding schools plays a significant role in explaining and teaching classical texts, making them accessible to students and the surrounding community. These languages, often the mother tongue or first language of children, provide a natural medium for conveying religious knowledge. Traditional learning methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan/wetonan* ensure effective communication between the *kyai* (teacher) and students, facilitating the transfer of knowledge from the teacher's deep understanding of classical texts to students in a comprehensible language. In Banten, Javanese and Sundanese remain essential in these educational activities, reflecting local traditions and cultural heritage.

However, challenges arise due to the declining use and understanding of Javanese and Sundanese vocabulary among students. This gap leads to prolonged learning periods as students struggle to navigate unfamiliar terms in Javanese, compounded by the additional task of mastering Arabic. This dual burden complicates their ability to fully engage with the teachings, increasing their cognitive load. Despite these challenges, many Islamic boarding schools continue to preserve the study of the Yellow Book using regional languages, Pegon Arabic, or Javanese-Malay, with *kyai* occasionally employing Indonesian for clarity.

This research highlights the importance of regional languages in religious education and cultural preservation but acknowledges limitations, including the linguistic barriers faced by modern students. Future studies could explore the effectiveness of bilingual education models in Islamic boarding schools or investigate the broader impact of declining regional language use on religious and cultural practices across Indonesia. Addressing these challenges with adaptive strategies will

help ensure the sustainability of these institutions as vital centers of Islamic learning and cultural heritage.

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