Difficulties in Learning Arabic with the Pegon Method at Salaf Islamic Boarding Schools in Java for Non-Javanese Santri

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Difficulties in Learning Arabic with the *Pegon* Method at *Salaf* Islamic Boarding Schools in Java for Non-Javanese *Santri*

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ABSTRACT

Salaf Islamic boarding schools in Java uniquely use the *Pegon* Method to teach Arabic and Islam. The *Pegon* method, which has been going on for more than 6 centuries, makes it easier for students to understand learning and creates difficulties, especially for students from outside Java. This study aims to reveal the problems faced by non-Javanese students studying in salaf Islamic Boarding Schools. The data obtained through interviews, observations, and document studies were analyzed using a constructivist approach. From the analysis carried out, it was found that. (1) The *Pegon* method became a way for students to more easily understand learning. (2) Not a few students have difficulty using the *Pegon* method. (3) The various obstacles experienced by the santri are responded to by the *Pesantren* with multiple alternatives, making it easier for the *santri*, especially non-Javanese, to learn Arabic and religion. These three things show that there are dynamics in learning practices that not only provide a way for students to understand Arabic more easily and quickly but also impact the difficulties experienced by students, especially those from outside Java. Therefore, this study suggests the need for conditioning non-Javanese students before starting Arabic language learning using the *Pegon* method in those Islamic Boarding Schools.

Keywords: Learning Arabic, *Pegon* Method, *Santri*, Islamic Boarding School, Learning Difficulties.

ABSTRAK

Pesantren Salaf di Jawa memiliki kekhasan dengan penggunaan Metode Pegon untuk mengajarkan bahasa Arab dan agama Islam. Penggunaan metode Pegon yang telah berlangsung lebih 6 abad ini tidak saja memudahkan santri memahami pembelajaran, tetapi juga menimbulkan kesulitan khususnya bagi santri yang berasal dari luar Jawa. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap kesulitan-kesulitan apa saja yang dihadapi oleh santri non-Jawa yang belajar di pesantren-pesantren salaf. Data yang diperoleh melalui wawancara, observasi dan studi dokumen dianalis menggunakan pendekatan konstruktivisme. Dari analisis yang dilakukan, ditemukan (1) metode Pegon menjadi cara bagi para santri untuk lebih mudah memahami pembelajaran; (2) tidak sedikit santri mengalami kesulitan dalam penggunaan metode Pegon; (3) berbagai kendala yang dialami oleh santri disikapi oleh pesantren dengan berbagai alternatif yang pada intinya memudahkan para santri khususnya non-Jawa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab dan agama. Ketiga hal tersebut memperlihatkan adanya dinamika dalam praktik pembelajaran yang tidak saja memberikan jalan bagi para santri untuk lebih mudah dan cepat memahami bahasa Arab, tetapi juga berdampak pada adanya kesulitan-kesulitan yang dialami oleh santri khususnya yang berasal dari luar Jawa. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menyarankan perlunya dilakukan pengkondisian terhadap santri non-Jawa sebelum memulai pembelajaran bahasa Arab dengan metode Pegon di pesantren-pesantren itu.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran bahasa Arab, Metode Pegon, Santri, Pesantren, Kesulitan Belajar

Name

INTRODUCTION

The *Pegon*[1] Arabic learning method which has been applied in almost all Islamic boarding schools in Java since 6 centuries ago (Ismail & Ismail, 2010; Yakubu, 2021), has caused difficulties for some students, especially for students from outside Java (non-Javanese). In general, *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) in Java have students from outside Java (Ansori, Rohmatulloh, Sudrajat, Am, & Utami, 2022; Ayyusufi, Anshori, & Muthoifin, 2022; Fakhrurrazi & Sebgag, 2020). For example, the Lirboyo Islamic boarding school in Kediri, in 2020, had 32,203 students, 1,717 students (5.3%) of whom came from outside Java (source: Recap of the Santri Parent Book). The application of the Javanese *Pegon* method in this *Pesantren* has occurred since the end of the 15th century, long before the founding of the State of Indonesia. This is in line with what Van den Berg did when compiling a list of the main textbooks studied in *Pesantren* (Bruinessen, 1990, 1994). The textbooks become an inseparable part because the delivery uses the *Pegon* method.

So far, research on the *Pegon* method in *salaf* Islamic boarding schools has been carried out. These studies at least describe some trends. First, focus on the uniqueness and special characteristics of the *Pegon* method (Ahmad, 2020; Irfan, 2017; Masduki, 2019; Noordyanto, 2017; Rosyid, 2019; Wahyuni & Ibrahim, 2017). Second, focus on applying the *Pegon* method in learning Arabic and Islam (Mahfudz, 2018) (Hidayah, 2019; Yahya, 2015). Third, this study is almost the same as the second trend. However, these studies study Arabic learning without looking at the background of the area of origin of the *santri* (Student in Pesantren). Consideration of the experience of the *santri* is necessary for selecting a method, including the *Pegon* process (Barnard, Richards, & Rodgers, 2002; Chaplin, 2018; Thohir, Supriadi, Mulyana, Arifin, & Septiadi, 2021). On this basis, this study focuses on the third trend, namely the difficulties caused by applying the *Pegon* method concerning the background of the area of origin of the *santri*.

This study aims to fill in the gaps in existing studies by focusing on the difficulties some students from outside Java faced in learning Arabic and Islam using the *Pegon* Method. Three questions were asked. First, how is the construction of the *Pegon* Method used in learning Arabic? This question is related to the *Pegon* strategy's purpose, which is to make it easier for students to learn and understand Arabic. Second, how do students, especially non-Javanese, face the difficulties? This Method is closely related to the language barrier experienced by students with different cultural backgrounds. Third, how does the *Pesantren* adopt the strategy to solve these difficulties? This question relates to what methods are carried out by *Pesantren* to overcome the constraints of *santri*, especially those outside Java. These three questions are described in detail in the sub-sections of this paper.

The difficulties experienced by non-Javanese students in learning Arabic not only due to their mastery of Arabic and its contents but rather to the technical problems of the target language in its translation into the native language of the students. Because the *Pegon* method itself only uses translation into Javanese, except in a small number of Islamic boarding schools. This method has happened "discrimination" in learning in Islamic boarding schools against non-Javanese students. In this context, efforts are needed to prepare students before learning, both physically, mentally, and culturally, including language. Because in the context of education, everyone has the same rights and opportunities to get an education and teaching regardless of where they come from. If this effort is carried out institutionally, the problem of student difficulties caused by the application of the *Pegon* method using the Javanese language will be solved.

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[1] *Pegon* is the Arabic alphabet modified to write Javanese, Madurese, Sundanese

METHOD

This study examines learning Arabic and Islamic religion in *salaf*[2] Islamic boarding schools in Java using the *Pegon* method with translation into Javanese. However, these *Pesantren* are in Java and use the local Javanese language. *Pesantren* development many students from outside Java -even from abroad- are studying there. The *salaf* Islamic boarding school that is the location of this research is a boarding school that uses the *Pegon* method in teaching Arabic and its content through books inherited from Middle Eastern scholars and Nusantara scholars. Some of the *Pesantren* studied represent pure *Salaf pesantren* whose students do not attend traditional schools, such as the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School, Kediri. The students at this *Pesantren* only learn religion at the *madrasah diniyah*. *Pesantren* Al Islah Bandar Kidul Kediri, Al Hikam Jombang and An Nur Malang represent *pesantren* whose students not only study at *madrasah diniyah* inside the *pesantren* but also in formal schools outside the *pesantren*. Meanwhile, the Nurul Huda Mergosono Islamic boarding school has special characteristics where most students are from college circles. All three are representations of the various *salaf pesantren* in Java.

The data for research analysis is qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018). Interviews were conducted with several caregivers/*ustadz*, students, and other parties who could contribute information, such as data managers for Islamic boarding schools at the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. *Santri* were selected from non-Javanese students who are currently studying or have graduated from some of these Islamic boarding schools to dig up information related to the focus of research with selection based on the representation of the area of origin. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, several interviews were conducted (online). Observations focused on Arabic and religious learning activities in the three selected *Pesantren*. In the implementation of learning, it was found that there were student complaints due to limitations in the Javanese language. The documentation study was conducted to obtain data on the number of Islamic boarding schools, especially the number of non-Javanese students in these *pesantren*. The documents studied included written documents in the three Islamic boarding schools and online data stored on the website of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia.

Data were also grouped regarding the questions asked during the data collection process. After grouping, the data obtained were then analyzed using a constructivist approach. This approach focuses on the need for solutions to learning Arabic and religious problems in Islamic boarding schools. This data analysis uses restatement, description, and interpretation techniques (Miles et al., 2018). The rendition was carried out by exploring the contents of interviews conducted directly and through Whatsapp chat. The report is done by clearly describing the results of interviews and documentation. And Interpretation is made by analyzing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Difficulties faced by non-Javanese learners in learning Arabic with the Pegon Method

Several findings were obtained from the results of research on the difficulties faced by non-Javanese students in learning Arabic using the *Pegon* method in Salaf Islamic boarding schools in Java. **First** is the difficulty in translating from Arabic to Javanese. The problem is due to the locality of the language of origin of the students, where non-Javanese students have their local language that is different from the Javanese language used in the *Pegon* method. As Ahmad

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[2] something or someone who was before

Fajri admitted, a student from Besuki Situbondo said: "*I had a hard time in the first years of learning Arabic at the (Islamic boarding school) I had never studied Javanese at all,*"

A similar confession was made by Ade Destri Deviana, a female student from Banjarasih who has now returned to her hometown. "*I used to cry (because I couldn't understand the Javanese language taught in learning Arabic) when I saw other friends from Java who were smart*" (Interview, in Malang, 2020).

Forms of difficulty due to differences in the language of origin of students, for example, in interpreting the text الحمد لله العالمين in the Javanese *Pegon* method translated. "*utawi sekabehi puji iku kagungane Allah, kang mengerane alam kabeh.*" It is translated as "*Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.*" While in the local language of Banjarmasin the text is translated "*all praise is for Allah, the Lord of the universe,*" "coincidentally, many are the same as in Indonesian," in Madurese "*Sekabina poji panika kaagungna Allah SWT,*" in balinesse "*ngiring sareng-sareng ngaturan majeng ring Allah SWT*".

Second, the difficulty also experienced by non-Javanese students in learning Arabic using the *Pegon* method is that the Javanese language is written in Arabic letters composed of *Hijaiyah* letters. The Arabic or *Hijaiyah* letters used to write the *Pegon* Javanese language slightly differ from the original Arabic. This slight difference in writing contributes to difficulties, especially for non-Arabic students. As expressed by a student, Humaira, when asked why you think Arab *Pegon* is difficult? He replied: "*because the writing is also different.*" The writing of the word *menungsa* (human) to translate الانسان which is written with منوغسا with a three-dot above the letter *'ain* and *harakat* on the letter *mim* is written like a wavy *harakat fathah* whose pronunciation is between *fathah* and *kasrah*.

Third, the difficulties faced by students because the scientific basis of the Arabic language possessed by students is indeed weak, as admitted by one of the female students with the initials M who studied at the Salafiyah Nurul Huda Islamic boarding school in Malang. It says:

"If it's at my cottage, it's up to you. That means you don't have to interpret using Javanese pegons. but the difficulties in understanding the book (in Arabic) are usually because you are weak in the nahwu sharaf." (Interview, M, in Malang, 2020).

Some of the informants' statements show that some difficulties are experienced by students in learning Arabic using the *Pegon* method. In general, the difference between the original language of students and Javanese; difficulty writing Javanese with Arabic letters; Arabic grammatical difficulties, especially for students whose Arabic language skills are low, are some of the difficulties that are commonly found so far.

Strategies taken to Solve the Difficulties of Non-Javanese Santri in Learning Arabic with the Pegon Method

There are several strategies to anticipate the difficulties experienced by non-Javanese students in learning Arabic with the *Pegon* method. The first is a preparatory class program, in which students are taught the *Pegon* Javanese language, which includes preparing the speech and its writing in Arabic (*Hijaiyah* letters) and writing *pegon* symbols and grammatical explanations. This class must be taken within a few months to prepare students for regular classes when they understand the Javanese language. As expressed by the caretaker of the Al Hikam Islamic Boarding School.

"In other *pesantren*, I don't know how it is (facing the difficulties of non-Javanese students), if here students have only been trained in Arabic for one month, learning the symbols of *Pegon*, what they mean, how to understand them, after one month, they can because of the translation into Indonesian." (Interview, 2020).

This effort is quite helpful for non-Javanese students, but the consequence is that while attending the preparatory class, the students have not been able to join the regular class. The second is the peer tutor program. This program, like the first, was prepared by several Islamic boarding schools to condition the readiness of new non-Javanese students. One of the *ustadz* (teacher) at *Pesantren* An Nur Malang, Zulfikri Ali said:

> "New students from outside Java are usually asked to learn the meaning of the meaning (giving pegon symbols and writing their meanings) to senior brothers who are already smart" (Interview, Z.A, 2020).

This peer tutoring program usually occurs in Islamic boarding schools either formally (as determined by the management of the *pesantren*) or non-formally (when new students cannot naturally learn from their more capable friends. And vice versa, students who can already do it (seniors) who live in the same room will teach new roommates who cannot. This independent effort was naturally taken because some *pesantren* did not conduct special classes for non-Javanese students. MRH, a student from Kalimantan who had not even one year of study at the *Pesantren* An-Nur Malang, now still doesn't understand the *Pegon* method of learning Arabic. However, he asked his classmates. Some students are willing to prepare three different copies of the book at once: one bare book (which has no pronunciation and meaning), one which has been given the importance of *Pegon* (in Javanese), and the other translated into Indonesian. Students do this method to overcome their weaknesses in learning. ADD, for example, students from Banjarmasin admit that. "*I bought three books, one blank, one sasahan (it has been given a Javanese meaning), and one was translated into Indonesian*" (Interview, A.D.D, 2020).

Third, modification of the translation. This translation modification has been practiced in several *pesantren*, such as Malang's Salafiyah Nurul Huda Islamic boarding school. This modification has been carried out for a long time because it carries a message from the late founder of the pesantren. KH. Masduqi Mahfudz. This was stated by the head of his *Madrasah Diniyah*,

> "In the past *Abah* (KH Masduki Mahfudz's nickname) always advised the *asatidz* (teachers) to translate the meaning of *Pegon* into Indonesian because more and more students from outside Java did not understand Javanese."

The Pegon method in several Islamic boarding schools in Java has been translated into Indonesian. One of these practices was carried out by the Salafiyah Nurul Huda Islamic boarding school. This *pegon* method succeeded in overcoming the difficulties of non-Javanese students. When he was met, one of the students, M, said, "if it's at my cottage, whatever, it means you don't have to interpret using Javanese Pegon because there is already a translation." The evaluation results of the preparatory class program for new students depict modifications. Arabic texts were translated into Indonesian at the Al Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. This can be briefly seen in the following figure.

Figure 1. Javanese Pegon
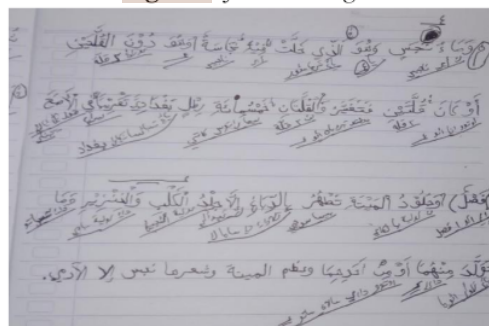
Source: the results of the evaluation of the process of preparing non-Javanese students

From the explanation of the data above, it is clear that learning Arabic using the *Pegon* method causes difficulties for non-Arabic students; The difficulties that occurred in almost all of the *salaf pesantren* required an appropriate response, including the preparation of aspects of the language and the *Pegon* method and modification of the translation of the *Pegon* method into Indonesian.

Discussion

Religious education in Islam is an integral character formation effort (Oktaviani, Syahid, & Moormann, 2020). The basis of Islamic education is divided into three, the first is the religious basis, the second is the philosophical basis, and the third is the scientific basis (As'ad, 2022, 2022; Assa'idi, 2021). Bishop and Nash define religious literacy as the ability to understand religion's meaning, language, and beliefs required in education (Weinberger et al., 2020). Weinberger et al. (2020) also said that religious literacy is a deepening of religion and links religion with political, social, and cultural phenomena. In line with that, the study of (White, Baimel, & Norenzayan, 2021) shows that cultural diversity can affect the practice of religious learning. Religious learning affects every aspect of life. (Michaelson, Swinton, King, & Pickett, 2020) shows that spiritual health for people with disabilities is more important than for peers. One of the religious learning in Islam is an Islamic boarding school. Typologically, *pesantren* are divided into three types, namely *salafiyah* (traditional), *khalafiyah* (modern), and integrated (Isnaniah & Mustofa, 2020). The *pesantren* education system has five important elements: the dormitory as a place to live, the mosque as a place of worship, teaching classical books, *santri*, and *kiai* (Musyaffa, Asiah, Fadhil, & Hindun, 2022).

Salaf Islamic boarding schools are said to be traditional *pesantren*, but their existence still exists today. This is in line with the three elements that influence its existence, namely the figure of the kiai who is the caretaker of the *pesantren*, the various values and curriculum of the *pesantren*, and the service of the *pesantren* to community activities(Aisyah, Ilmi, Rosyid, Wulandari, & Akhmad, 2022; Indrawati, 2014). (Chaplin, 2020)study shows that *salaf pesantren* are not merely a medium for the internal transformation of students' self but are also related to the creation of communal ethics that determine how a *santri* navigates teachings, society, and religious identity. When discussing *pesantren* concerning learning, several models are needed to study ancient Arabic writing and see the importance of these manuscripts to enrich historical information (Khayyat & Elrefaei, 2020). This learning can improve Arabic language competence (Wahdan, AL Hantoobi, Salloum, & Shaalan, 2020). In line with that, sentiment analysis of Arabic texts is also needed to determine whether a text can be said to have expressed negative, positive, or neutral sentiments (Oussous, Benjelloun, Lahcen, & Belfkih, 2020).

Using *Makna Gundul* to interpret *pegon* became an Arabic-Javanese dictionary to make it easier for Javanese people to understand the Koran. The problems faced in the Arabic learning process are divided into two: language and non-linguistic problems. Language problems include *aswat-arrabiyya, mufradat, Qawaid and I'rab*, and *Tarakib* (Akmaliyah & Ratnasih, 2017). Meanwhile, non-linguistic problems have motivation and interest in learning, learning facilities, teacher competencies, learning methods used, available time, and the environment that influences Arabic learning (Wekke, 2015; Wekke & Hamid, 2013; Yusuf & Wekke, 2015). In addition, the techniques in teaching Arabic are considered less attractive and do not follow what is expected (Ridho, Gumilar, & Ratnasih, 2020)(Akmaliyah et al., 2020)project-based learning is an effective foreign language learning method to be applied with an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting students to solve and develop problems (Ayu Sukerti & Yuliantini, 2018; Dooly, 2013).

There are differences in the level of understanding and acceptance among students learning Arabic with the Arabic *Pegon* method, which causes difficulties for students who come

from outside Java. The problems experienced are not only cultural but also institutional-structural. Culturally, students have difficulty understanding the rules of Arabic and the content of the Arabic texts. Structurally, the existing *pesantren* education system in Java requires using the Pegon method. Only a few Islamic boarding schools give students a choice to use other ways, so it is difficult to avoid them. However, the difficulties are faced by providing special "treatment" to non-Javanese students while focusing on how Arabic learning can run with maximum achievements.

Open access to education for all students indirectly creates distinctions, especially regarding the ability to accept and understand ongoing learning. Non-Javanese students, on the one hand, experience linguistic problems on the other. This learning also affects the absorption of knowledge, which tends to vary. Not all students can understand Arabic learning easily due to the language barrier. The use of Javanese as the main language used by Islamic boarding schools opens space for easing the learning process on the one hand but continues to create "discrimination" against certain *santri* circles on the other. Although the learning model using the *Pegon* method contains simplifications of learning methods that allow students to understand Arabic easily, the simplification content hinders the acceptance process for students who do not understand Javanese.

Several studies on Arabic language learning using the Pegon Method in Islamic boarding schools have been carried out (Gutub & Alaseri, 2021; Irfan, 2017; Masduki, 2019; Nira & Fauziyah, 2021; Rosyid, 2019; Suhendi & Kosim, 2022; Yahya, 2015). Rosyid results that teaching *Pegon* to students aims to make it easier for students to master Arabic and its content. Yahya studied the *Pegon* letters and the application of the Interpolation search method to search for its meaning in the Java *Pegon* letter translator application. A broader study of the *Pegon* Method of learning Jombang highlights its advantages because with the *Pegon* method, students can capture all the elements of the text; know the position in the grammatical structure; get a large vocabulary, and maintaining the local cultural wealth of the archipelago. (Hidayah, 2019) focuses on linguistic and non-linguistic problems, where problems in non-linguistic issues occur because students have not mastered the source language. All the research results tend to describe the *Pegon* method, which has special characteristics in language learning and concerning the cultivation of values. However, there are some fundamental differences in this study.

These differences can be seen in three important things. First, focus on learning. In this study, the focus is the *Pegon* Method. There are several language learning methods in the existing literature, including *al Qawa'idu wa al Tarjamah* or Grammar and Translation. Although this method is considered the longest found, this method is very suitable and suitable to be applied to learning Arabic in Islamic boarding schools, which can be categorized as language learning for specific purposes. Second, learning objectives. This research focuses on the learning process for non-Javanese students who have experienced many obstacles in learning Arabic. Non-Javanese students who will learn Arabic using the *Pegon* Method require special conditioning. This conditioning can be done classically or by opening preparatory classes (matriculation) or non-classical by applying peer tutors, in the sense that each new student is handed over to his senior fellow students. The third is method development. In this case, modifications were made in the translation of the *Pegon* method. From the translation into Javanese, the translation was modified into Indonesian. The amendment will make it easier for non-Javanese students as well as avoid students from difficulties, as the findings have described in the previous description.

CONCLUSION

It turns out that learning Arabic with the *Pegon* method in *salaf* Islamic boarding schools in Java does not always provide convenience for the students. This method was not a problem for students who speak Javanese as their mother tongue. However, students from outside Java

experienced issues in translation, writing typical Javanese letters (using Arabic or *hijaiyah* letters), and the original Arabic grammatical characters that had not been mastered by students, especially those from outside Java. From these findings, it is clear that learning Arabic using the *Pegon* method in *salaf* Islamic boarding schools in Java has created distinctions or discrimination against students from outside Java. The bias occurs structurally because the *Pesantren* applies the *Pegon* approach in learning Arabic, in which the Arabic text is translated into Javanese. Discrimination will disappear if the *Pesantren* anticipates holding special classes (matriculation), especially for new students from outside Java, in addition to developing the *Pegon* method of learning design using translation into Indonesian.

The findings above also indicate that further research is needed relating to the development of Arabic language learning designs using the Indonesian-language *Pegon* method to convey the contents of the teachings in the *Turats* texts. Second, how is the effectiveness of the development of the Indonesian language *Pegon* method on Arabic grammatical competence and the contents of the Arabic texts?

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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