

English Curriculum of a Modern *Pesantren* in Indonesia:

Alumni's voices

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Abstract—One of many changes that modern *pesantrens* makes within their curriculum in order to adjust it to the globalization era is to take English as a part of their curriculum. Most modern *pesantrens* develop their own English curriculum and place their own purposes. Even though English seems to be a new thing in the curriculum content of the modern *pesantren*, many alumni of modern *pesantrens* manage to continue their study taking English major. The alumni compete with other students from general schools to enroll at this major. It means that they start the college life with English knowledge they achieved from the *pesantren*. This study was conducted to investigate the alumni's perception on the English curriculum of the modern *pesantren*. A case study was employed with a semi structured interview of five purposive participants in order to gather data by using an adapted interview schedule from the Kirkpatrick's Four Level of Training Evaluation. It was found that there were strengths and weaknesses that the English curriculum has based on the alumni's perception. It is recommended to take the alumni's perception into consideration in curriculum development process.

Keywords—students' perception; English curriculum; modern *pesantren*

I. INTRODUCTION

The existence of English teaching and learning processes in a *pesantren* (an Islamic boarding school) is a response to the globalization, a demand of the community to balance the religious and general knowledge, and a *kyai's* (a muslim scholar and the founder and leader of the *pesantren*) awareness of the importance of English language in the modern era. Since the national curriculum only accommodates within school hours, most *pesantrens* develop their own curriculum in order to support their 24-hour education system, including English curriculum which makes their curriculums unique, different from one to another and it even becomes one of many characteristics that *pesantrens* have [1].

A modernization in all aspects of life contributes to the development of *pesantren* through the ages. As modernization applies, *pesantrens'* curriculum changed in order to adjust in to it. The adaptation of *pesantren* into modernization without losing their fundamental distinction is also the reason why this form of Islamic education institution has been survived until now [2]. In the mid-19th century, the Dutch introduced the

classical education in Indonesia and *madrasah* appeared as a response to muslim scholars to the Dutch schooling. Many *pesantrens* also adapted this new system; teaching methods were reformed, and general subjects such as mathematics, biology, geography, history, Dutch, and English, became parts of curriculum contents of some *pesantren* [3,4].

The change of the curriculum content classified *pesantren* into two types: *salafi* (traditional) and *khalafi* (modern) *pesantrens*. *Salafi* refers to those *pesantrens* that only teach classical Islamic textbooks and *khalafi* refers to those *pesantrens* that apply social-natural sciences in their curriculum along with religious sciences [3]. In terms of foreign language teaching, Arabic becomes the only language learned in the first category while the second one teaches English or other foreign languages along with Arabic within the *pesantren* curriculum [3-6].

The purpose of English curriculum in a modern *pesantren* where this study took place is to make English as a means of daily communication for their *santri* within the modern *pesantren* environments [7]. The curriculum contents, methods and evaluations devoted in order to achieve this purpose. The contents are selected based on scope and arranged in a sequence that the *santris* should learn during their three to six years period of study in this modern *pesantren*. The curriculum of English at this modern *pesantren* is organized in many English language programs such as giving and repeating daily vocabulary, conversation practice, public speaking practice, language encouragement program, and formal education during school hours.

This study investigated the alumni's perception on the English curriculum of a modern *pesantren* where they experienced those English language programs directly in order to investigate the outcomes of teaching and learning processes at this *pesantren* and to help the *pesantren* to evaluate their English curriculum.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The English Curriculum of a Modern *Pesantren*

A curriculum consists of four basic components; they are purpose, content, method, and evaluation [8]. When English

becomes a part of the modern *pesantren* curriculum, it must be constructed by these four components.

A construction of English curriculum within a modern *pesantren* curriculum was introduced and developed by Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. This *pesantren* applies integrative English teaching that provide formal and non-formal language environment where students are enforced to use English in their everyday communication [9]. Later, this English curriculum becomes the blueprint of other modern *pesantrens* to adapt and develop their own curriculum of English. Consequently, the outcomes of the adaptation are varied according to the purpose and belief of the curriculum developers. Unlike English curriculum of Indonesia that applied nationally, English curriculum of modern *pesantrens* tends to be different from one to another, which makes it more interesting to be investigated.

The purpose of learning English or other foreign language learning in most modern *pesantrens* is to make them a means of daily communication within the modern *pesantren* neighbors [10]. In order to make it happen, English programs, teaching materials, and strategies are selected and developed in accordance with this purpose. In addition, the modern *pesantren* provides not only formal education in the classroom but also educative environment that have power to support individual's development [11], including foreign language mastery. Apart from preparing conducive environment, a set of regulation is also employed.

The English curriculum of modern *pesantrens* covers formal and non-formal activities outside the classroom. The non-formal activities are developed by the modern *pesantren* itself because they are not supported by the national curriculum of English. A comprehensive learning approach which is called all-in-one system is applied in order to achieve the purpose of English curriculum in the modern *pesantren*, that is to make English as a means of daily communication along with Arabic [10]. These two languages are often called as 'the formal language' of the modern *pesantren*.

The English curriculum refers to the English language programs arranged by the *pesantren* [12]. In terms of English in the classroom, there are Language, Grammar, Conversation, Reading and Composition subjects. The content of each subject is organized and intended for different grades. Moreover, those subjects are supported by non-formal activities such as, conversational practice, daily vocabulary, public speaking practice, vocabulary repetition, and language encouragement. The non-formal activities are administered in both English and Arabic. It is alternately changed in every two weeks. To make sure that *santris* use formal language in their daily communication, a regulation regarding formal language is also arranged.

B. Alumni

The word alumni means an institution's graduates and former students of a certain institution [13]. Since the alumni is former students of an education institution, they are considered as a good informant in giving feedback because they can highlight strengths and weaknesses of the institution in order to promote and improve the school performance based on their

own experience [13]. Thus, they can utilize their experiences to build their own perception.

Alumni are ones of the stakeholders who take part in curriculum development [14]. Stakeholders in curriculum development are those people who can be directly or indirectly affected or affect the curriculum) such as curriculum developers, teachers, students, alumni, experts, and parents [15,16].

Studies on alumni's voice or perception on their education institution where they graduated from have been conducted by many researchers as a part of program evaluation process that focus on different area [13]. Since education is a huge area to be explored, limitation should be set.

C. Kirkpatrick's Four Level of Program Evaluation

The Kirkpatrick's four level of program evaluation was originally used for evaluating training programs, it has been largely employed to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs [17]. The four levels are Reaction, Learning, Behavior, and Results [18]. Reaction investigates a measure of customer or stakeholders' satisfaction. Participant's reaction must be favorable. The reaction covers participants' perception on teaching and learning, instructors or teachers, facilities, schedules, and asking participants suggestions on what would have improved the program. Learning refers to the extent to which participants change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skill as a result of attending the program. Behavior investigates the extent whether there is changes in behavior because the participants attended the program. Results refers to the final results that occurred because the participants attended the program.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Research Design

A case study was used in the study. This kind of study sets out to describe and interpret what thing is about and to bring out the details from the participants' point of view by using multiple source of data [19]. This study presents what happened in the real situation without giving any treatments or interventions to the subjects. It was in line with the purpose of this research that investigates alumni's perception on English curriculum of a modern *pesantren*.

B. Data Collection

1) *Sample*: The subjects of the research were non-random or purposive participants. The purposive participants were selected based on researchers' judgement that they believe, based on prior information, that they were able to provide the data the researchers need or in other words [20], the participants were selected based on who they are and what they know [21]. Since this research investigates the alumni's perception, therefore the subjects of this research are alumni with two requirements: the alumni completed their high school level at this *pesantren*; second, the alumni took English studies as their major at higher education.

This modern *pesantren* is one of the biggest modern *pesantrens* in Subang. There were five alumni who agreed to participate. Each of them fulfils two requirements. They are English education major students from five different colleges and universities located in Subang, Karawang, Bandung, and Jakarta

2) *Instrument*: The instrument that was used in this study was an interview. It was employed in the form of a semi-structure interview with open and close-ended questions followed by clarification in order to conduct an in-depth interview. The interview schedule was adapted from the Kirkpatrick's Four Level of Training Evaluation [18]. The contents of the evaluation are the same but different in form. Since this study was aimed to gather alumni's perceptions, the in-depth interview was chosen in collecting the data.

The interview schedule consists of twenty questions that cover four level of training evaluation. The first seven questions focus on the first level-Reaction in order to investigate alumni's perception on their satisfaction of the English learning program at the modern *pesantren* in terms of the implementation of the English curriculum, teachers, facilities, schedule, teaching materials and how to improve the program. The next five questions investigate alumni's perception on the second level-Learning that cover the change on attitudes, knowledge and skills after attending the program. The next five questions seek for alumni's perception on the third level-Behaviour. The last three questions investigate alumni's perception on the forth level-Results that they gained after they attended the program. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia for freer expression of the participants to gain the required detail information.

3) *Procedure*: Before collecting the data, a list of purposive participants was made. The purposive participants were then contacted and invited to join in the research. Once they agreed to join in the study, then the time of interview was determined. It was supposed to be recorded phone-call interviews but three participants could not make it, so the interviews were conducted through chatting application. The recorded interviews were transcribed and the messages were compiled into one document.

C. Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research means making meaning of the data gathered during the data collection process and it is considered as simultaneous activities [21,22]. Furthermore, Malik and Hamied argued that the process of data analysis and interpretation of the data is critical since it is going to be the result of the research.

The gathered data were analysed and interpreted to make meaning. It was analysed by coding the data, making categories between positive and negative perceptions, translating the findings into English, describing the findings, representing the findings, and interpreting the findings [22]. In representing the findings, the participant names are coded by A1, A2, A3, A4, and A5. Positive and negative perceptions were identified from the word choice used by the participants.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The finding and discussion are presented as follows.

A. Reaction

It covers the alumni's perception on teaching and learning processes, teachers, facilities, schedules, and teaching materials. In terms of teaching and learning processes in formal and non-formal education, generally, the participants shared the same thought; A2, A3, A4 and A5 agreed that the processes of both formal and non-formal educations provided by this modern *pesantren* were good enough, well organized, fun, and easy to understand. A4 even stated that both type of activities supported each other. However, A1 thought that the processes were less effective in improving *santris*' English skills because they focus on memorization instead of comprehension. In addition, A2 stated that comparing to Arabic, the implementation of English curriculum was not efficiently conducted.

When the participants were asked about their perceptions on English teachers or instructors, all of them gave positive responses by saying that the teachers used to give clear and detail explanations and their instructions were easy to follow; especially senior teachers who usually gave broader knowledge of English. However, A4 stated that there were some teachers who gave confusing explanation or reasons which were different from another teacher's explanations and A5 recalled that there was an English teacher who taught so fast and hardly understood by the students.

In terms of facilities that support the teaching and learning processes of English, A5 stated that the existing facilities in this *pesantren* did not support *santris* to improve their listening skill. In this case, A1 agreed with A5 that there were no facilities for improving listening skill. In addition, A3 said that the facilities were inadequate because there was no language or audio-visual laboratory.

When A1 was asked about the arrangement of English program, she said that timing of English program was effective because the timing was right such as conversation practice and daily vocabulary were conducted in the morning and vocabulary repetition was conducted at night. In addition, A2 said that there were more Arabic subjects than English which made the schedule less effective but the conversation practice and vocabulary repetition program help the English schedule to be more effective especially on the English weeks. A3 revealed that even though the schedule of English was well organized, (*santris*) tended to use Arabic more; so, the students get used to speak Arabic than English. A4 and A5 had no problems with the schedule of English.

In terms of teaching materials, all of the participants confirmed that the English curriculum content of the modern *pesantren* was beneficial, useful, and practical.

The alumni were also asked to give opinions on how to make the current curriculum applied at the modern *pesantren* to be more effective. A list of their suggestions was 1) teachers should use a wide variety of teaching methods and teaching media, 2) to ask students to read a lot of English texts, 3) to organize an additional English class for *santris* after school

hours, 4) to frequently evaluate *santris'* vocabulary mastery, and 5) to use English as a means of daily communication.

When the participants were also asked to give opinions on how to improve the English programs at the modern *pesantren*, each alumnus gave different suggestions. A1 suggested the *pesantren* needs to change rooted learning into comprehension method. A2 revealed the reason why *santris* were less interested in using English for their daily communication is because of the English pronunciation which is harder than Arabic. She suggested them to keep practicing till they become familiar with English. A3's recommendations were to add a target vocabulary that *santris* should memorize for every batch and to let teachers and members of student body use English to address *santris*. A4 thought that the most important thing is to build *santris'* confidence to use English because the English program is already good. A5 suggested the *pesantren* should improve the vocabulary memorization program and listening and reading skills of the *santris*.

B. Learning

It refers alumni's perception on the extent to which they change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skills as a result of attending the program. Based on their own perception of their attitude, it revealed that these alumni were confident in accomplishing their assignments at college with the English they achieved from the *pesantren*. When they were asked to rate their English skills from 1 to 10, with 1-2 means poor, 3-4 means fair, 5-6 means good, 7-8 means very good, and 9-10 means excellent after they finished their study at this modern *pesantren* [18], they gave 7 and above. It means that the participants believed that their English skills were at a very good to excellent level. This also shows level of alumni's satisfaction. However, even though A4 was confident with her skills in English, she thought that the *pesantren* needs to give not only vocabularies for daily use but also scientific terms or more advance vocabularies. When they were asked to compare their English knowledge before and after they attended the English curriculum of *pesantren*, they claimed that they have been improved well. Grammar was the subject that they agreed on that have improved their confidence in English. Whereas morning conversation practice, public speaking practice, daily vocabulary, and English encouragement program contributed to the positive perception they had.

C. Behavior

It refers to alumni's perception on the extent to which the change in behaviour has occurred because the alumni attended the English program at the modern *pesantren*. The change in behaviour that the alumni perceived were on obeying rules and discipline, memorizing diligently and using new learned vocabulary whenever possible, and confident in using English. These alumni also clearly stated that they were eager to use the English they have after graduation. This change in behaviour is in line with Wekke and Hamied's statement which said that both formal and nonformal education in *pesantren* have power to support individual's development [11].

The alumni were asked to mention activities our routine at *pesantren* that they think are useful in their current English study. It was revealed that weekly public speaking practice and

morning conversation practice were considered as the activities that contribute to their change of behaviour after attending the English program. Those activities make them feel comfortable in speaking in public or presenting in front of the class.

D. Results

It refers to the final results that occurred because the participants attended the program. All of these alumni considered that the *pesantren* gave them basic level of English. The alumni further revealed that what they learned at the modern *pesantren*, helped them cope up with the college life. A1 stated that grammar and language are two useful subjects. In addition to that, A2 mentioned that vocabulary that she got from the *pesantren* is beneficial. A5 revealed that the result of attending the modern *pesantren* curriculum was that the materials she got at the college were almost the same with the materials she got from the *pesantren*. This was supported by A3 and A4 statements that they still use the hand-out given from the *pesantren* in their college.

The final question was asking the alumni's opinion on what to change in the curriculum of English at the modern *pesantren*. A1 stated that she wanted to change the teaching method used at the *pesantren* because the current method used mainly focus on memorization. A3 recommended a change in conducting public speaking practice. Instead of only the speakers who memorize the text, it is suggested that all group members were asked to memorize the text. She also recommended the *pesantren* to conduct weekly fun English program. In contrast, A2 stated that the concept of English program is very good but the problem is on the implementation of the program. A4 suggested the *pesantren* to organize the vocabulary in sequence and gradation, so the vocabulary given to year 1 is different to year 5 and also introduce *santris* to scientific terms. A5 suggested the *pesantren* to be focus on the teaching of pronunciation.

Feedbacks that are gained from the alumni indeed gave an insight of the English curriculum of the modern *pesantren* since they highlighted not only the strengths but also the weaknesses which are useful in order to improve the construction and implementation of the curriculum [13]. It is also found that the Kirkpatrick's four level of program evaluation can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of educational program [17], in this case, the English curriculum of a modern *pesantren*.

V. CONCLUSION

Alumni's perception in this study have highlighted and given feedback on the English curriculum of the modern *pesantren* which cover strengths and weaknesses. It can be concluded that the alumni gave positive perception on the English curriculum of the modern *pesantren*. However, improvements in some areas are needed in order to make a better construction and implementation of the English curriculum of this modern *pesantren* such as using wide variety of teaching methods, providing facilities for improving listening skill, arranging vocabularies in a sequence for *santris*, and teaching pronunciation.

It is recommended to take into account the alumni's perception on the curriculum development process. This study showed that the alumni are able to recall their experiences and to express their needs, which are beneficial for curriculum evaluation process.

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