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Technology on Language Teaching and Learning: A Research on Indonesian Pesantren

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Abstract

Pesantren (Islamic Boarding School) transform from religious school to a part of educational system in Indonesia. They do not only teach religion but also encourage santri (students) to take part of world progress. Therefore, pesantren teach students to acquire English and Arabic, both world languages. Furthermore, this study will investigate how pesantren complement technology on language teaching and learning. Qualitative research approach was applied to answer the research question. This study was conducted in Pesantren IMMIM Makassar City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Observation and depth interview were applied to collect data. Some document analysis was employed to clarify the interview and observation data. This result indicated that it is a meaningful activity during classes. When teacher tried to teach and the same time students learn. A model of teaching and learning that pesantren practiced bring students to enhanced their activity. As the language a tools to learn, it facilitates other subjects. In addition, students boost their knowledge and surf the globe opportunity. Finally, it proves that pesantren has two sides, first as a source of learning to shape young people to reach the world. Secondly, technology as part of teaching and learning took an important role in developing a better understanding on students' achievement process.

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1. Introduction

At a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), as an institution that focuses on religious education, teaching and learning is the main activity in enhancing students' capacities. Pohl (2006) noted that although *pesantren* is a place for learning the Arabic language, there have always been difficulties in the process of teaching and learning. One of which is the limited facilities and medium for teaching, so limited that teachers are left with no choice other than to just deliver their lessons in the classrooms. Alinejad (2012) also agreed with this finding, which stated that it is indeed a difficult task to change a habit. Also, the learning environment is unsatisfactory, and the teaching and learning of Arabic in public schools are neglected. On the other hand, at a *pesantren*, the *santris* (students) have the opportunity to learn Arabic because it is supported by a wholesome learning environment. Furthermore, according to Winarko (2007), learning at the pesantren can help students to develop more meaningful knowledge compared to individual learning at a public school.

The recent rapid growth of technology calls for a change in the system of teaching and learning delivery. Although technology is not the absolute replacement for existing conventional methods, its availability can fortify

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the education process (Keengwe & Georgina, 2012). Parallel to the advancement of information and communication technology, the approach and method of teaching languages have also been further developed. Language teachers, as well as others involved in language education, inevitably have to make way to include Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and dig deep of its various use in language class so that teaching a language can be achieved (El-Ghalayini & El-Khalili, 2012). The use of technology in teaching Arabic sprouted from a theory that holds a large percentage of someone's knowledge, competency and attitude are achieved highest through sight and hands-on experience, while the rest through listening and other senses.

Therefore, the writer of this paper attempts to focus the discussion on the use of technology in teaching and learning Arabic. The purpose of this study is to obtain the essence of how teaching and learning is done at the pesantren, which is usually lead by the *kyai*, and how the implementation of technology affects the process of teaching and learning Arabic.

2. Previous Research

There are several theories and past researches that can be used as supporting materials for this study on technology in education and teaching. Smith (2009), in a research focused his analysis on two issues, namely the *kyai* (leaders) and *kitab kuning* (teaching materials). He found the role played by the *kyai* is a vital one as a leading central figure that is unique in education. His research findings further inspire students to follow the example of the prophet, which conforms to the idealistic purpose of a pesantren and is the main mission in developing it. Whereas Hicks (2012), in his thesis showed that the Leadership of a *kyai* is influenced by three factors: competency, piety and linkage. The leadership style was found to be a combination of rational-traditional, whereby even though the leadership at *pondok pesantren* (boarding school) is seen to be rational in nature but when seen from Weber's concept of traditional (charismatic and legal-rasional), in reality, a lot are inconsistent with rational leadership principles.

Researchers conclude that the pesantren is a traditional Islamic education council that has survived until today. The same cannot be said about traditional Islamic education bodies in other parts of the Muslim world, whereby due to increasing modernization and reformation, have brought about their departure from traditional education.

Next, in a study conducted by Rissanen (2012), it was found that the teaching of *balaghah* (language) knowledge in high schools have gained the attention of both students and school administration. Furthermore, Hameed (2012), also found that the capability of speaking in Arabic can be obtained by learning the language during secondary school. In general, education has always been linked to the teaching and learning process of a skill, delivery of knowledge and assertion of values. In practice, the outcome of education should be able to produce individuals that are capable of applying learnt knowledge and benefit from the skills they have in their daily lives.

The medium of visual technology has several advantages, among them are: attract the interest of students, increase students' attention, provide reliable and solid data, complete information and assist data interpretation. Learning technologies can also motivate students to study and stimulate in them the desire to learn. Other than that, technology can also bring about a sense of ease and joy among the students and renew their spirits. With this sense of ease and high level of motivation, learning Arabic in class can be more effective, innovative, and communicative and consequently, strengthen Arabic knowledge in the minds of the students. Indeed, technology cannot totally replace existing conventional methods but it is deemed required to realize desired goals (Zaid, 2011).

Information technology is seen as an agent that makes it possible for organizations to increase operational efficiency and strategize an organization's position in the ever competitive business world (Palmero & Rodriguez, 2012). The development of information technology, particularly computer technology, has left a positive impact on organizations in terms of 1) increased efficiency, saves time and lessen the use of paper, 2) increased memory capacity and making computers easier to use, and 3) increased quantity and quality of decision making in the organization and the products it produces. According to Newman, Biedrzyky & Baum (2012) information technology, especially computers, helps managers to prepare better information for managerial decisions.

3. Research Methods

This research was conducted in the Southern Sulawesi Province by using a phenomenological approach. Field data was collected in series over a period of 9 (nine) months. Field research utilized three data collection techniques, namely participant observation, non-participant observation and in-depth interview. Non-participant observation was implemented by attending various daily activities of learning Arabic at the *pesantren* community. Through this approach, the researcher was able to grasp the types of Arabic learning being practiced. Moreover, in-depth interviews were conducted with the *kyai* and Arabic language teachers. Interviews were also conducted with the students. In order to achieve the objectives of the research, the researcher has made use of research methods to address the research problem stated.

The approach used in the research is phenomenology. The use of phenomenology involved attaining solid theories from the field. And so it can be said that through this research, new theories are developed, whereby the research not only addressed the case in question and then escape the reality of the field but the research outcome has always been connected to the culture of the local *pesantren*. In this sense, the researcher attempts to describe the phenomenon of Learning Arabic on technology at the *Pondok Pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in South Sulawesi Province. The approach taken for this research is a descriptive qualitative approach because in order to fully understand a phenomenon, every context must be understood and a holistic analysis must be done, including providing a comprehensive description (Bruce, 2001). The type of research planned for this descriptive study is intensively planned and in-depth research of a facet in an organization, body or individual (Huang, Wu, Yang, & Hwang, 2012). The main focus of the research understands the subjects' views on the surrounding environment by finding the important variables of the subjects' development.

Based of the research objectives, the type of design used in the study is investigative research (Seddon, McDonald & Schmidt, 2012). This means the study of various research findings at the *pesantren*. Also, in order to achieve the research objectives, language learning and technology theories were used. The inclusion of cultural analysis is an important analysis tool. Whereas the use of language learning theories may not be useful at all, if not in tandem with cultural theory principles. Finally, the learning language theories used are those that conform to practiced analysis theories.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

The teaching and learning of Arabic in Indonesia begins at the elementary school (*ibtidaiyah*). The Arabic education is continued at the first year of junior high school (*tsanawiyah*). Learning activities are conducted in a normal fashion. Should there be a problem during this time, not much attention will be given because, as we all know, the learning of Arabic has yet to attain serious attention for students at this level. Moreover, there are many that still believe the students at *tsanawiyah* level are new to learning Arabic and so, problems that arise are deemed common and should not be concerned with. In contrast, when a problem occurs during upper level of high school, teachers will definitely be concerned. The problem can no longer be accepted as a normal occurrence like it is at *tsanawiyah* level. For this reason, problems in teaching Arabic is said to only appear at the *alijah* (senior high school) level, when it is given serious attention.

In the context of teaching and learning Arabic, education needs to be seen as a continuous cognitive process that develops simultaneously with the students' individual development – students that absorb knowledge from the environment. With attained knowledge or skill, it will be applied in various environmental contexts, be it in their daily lives or as preparation for the future. Although the implementation of learning technology is lacking among the teachers that teach Arabic, they still feel that it is important to improve the quality and professionalism of teachers to transfer their knowledge of the language. This is because, generally, students find it difficult to understand and apply the language in daily communication. This paradigm must be changed to something that is easier and simple to understand. It is believed that through reconstruction and formatting of methods, as well as the use of technology, more interactive new methods can be accomplished.

Results of the study found that the need and potential for Arabic learning materials to be based on multimedia is

high. However, the findings do not correspond to the available materials in the market. The existing materials are typical. Interactive multimedia materials are very much anticipated, which will also provide diversity to the targeted users. The development of relevant and realistic materials at competitive prices will surely attract the interest of users from various backgrounds. In order to increase the public's interest, efforts to improve the use of Arabic ought to be increased and of course, this will need the support and commitment of all concerned consistently and continuously. The research clearly shows that the development of multimedia teaching and learning Arabic materials is needed.

Information technology plays a vital role in the education system that is becoming more and more challenging. The world seems limitless in term of information mobility and this should inspire every school to accept without a doubt the application and implementation of ICT in their respective organizations. Even though there may be numerous obstacles such as lack of expertise and knowledge but once ICT becomes routine, it will facilitate managerial and administrative tasks. In the long run, ICT will increasingly serve as an effective tool. New challenges in education, especially on the school level such as school expansion, development of universal education concept, world standard education concept, information sharing and communication, are always being discussed and addressed. In this sense, schools that still implement manual teaching and learning will not be able to cope with the new situation.

It is clear from the discussion above that the use of technology will help tremendously the processes of teaching-learning in class, especially for the students. Therefore, the use of technology as a medium to teach students will improve their competency in the Arabic language.

5. Theory Implication

Regarding the findings on methods in the teaching and learning, it needs to be relevant to the matters and purpose of learning. It is important to note that every method has its advantage and disadvantage. It would be ideal to review, understand and master various methods of the learning process so that every time a problem arise from a method, the problem can be solved using an alternative method. Which then the implemented method is called an eclectic method. In term of learning Arabic at a pesantren, it is very much related to the surrounding environment, including the habit of students using Arabic as communication in their daily lives. This is further supported by the culture that exists at the pesantren in the form of rules such as students are required to memorize ten vocabularies in a day. Then, on certain days, it is compulsory to only use Arabic. In addition, there are also other Arabic enrichment activities such as *muhadharah* (speech), special gatherings to learn Arabic and so on. For this, a student must be active.

This finding supports the theory of Westera (2012) that stated the most important matter in teaching and learning is that the student takes the initiative to participate in teaching and learning. The rapid development of technology and communication has directly contributed to the process of teaching and learning languages. In this matter, Arabic is not an exception and efforts have been and is currently in the works to ensure that this development can be benefitted in teaching and learning of the language. Theoretically, technological benefits can be interpreted through the eyes of cognitive theory using multimedia (Cakir, 2012) and flexible learning theory (Samah, 2012). In planning the use of technology for teaching, an instruction development model, a software (Al-Issa & Al-Buluski, 2012) was applied for the said purpose. It is the researcher's hope that this study can, at least, serve as a guide to teaching members, especially Arabic teachers, of ways to benefit technology in teaching the language.

The effectiveness of a teaching and learning process relies heavily on the teaching and learning method and strategy used. According to Al-Issa (2005), a teacher needs to choose and use the most suitable methods to help his students, and himself, in order to achieve the objectives of the planned lesson. Furthermore, according to Direkci (2012), there are all sorts of teaching and learning approach that can be used such as teacher-centred approach, student-centred approach and material-centred approach. Teacher's selection and plan in determining the approach, method, technique and activities of a lesson to achieve their objectives is what is called the teaching strategy (Lubis, Embi & Yunus, et al, 2009).

6. Conclusion

From this research, it was found that learning Arabic can be made a culture or habit. But the form of learning must be enjoyable so that the students can grasp everything and anything being conveyed by their teachers. Research findings show that the development of human character must be supported by surrounding factors (culture). Indeed we cannot deny the power of education and environment on an individual's development. So in other words, we require external stimuli to develop and advance. This finding is hoped to provide an implication for incorporating technology in colleges in Surabaya in terms of policy making and provision of facilities so that they can be easily used and accepted by all. As for the teachers at the pesantren, information technology can be accepted as a medium in conducting the processes of education, including helping the process of teaching and learning, which also involves searching for references and information resources.

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