

English for a Global Future: Santri's Perceptions and Aspirations toward English Mastery

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ABSTRACT

This study reports a community service program (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat/PkM) aimed at exploring and strengthening santri's perceptions and aspirations toward English mastery in an Islamic boarding school context. In the era of globalization, English proficiency is increasingly essential not only for academic and professional advancement but also for enabling santri to engage in global communication and represent Islamic values internationally. This program was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafiiyah Sukorejo and involved 100 santri as participants. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire measured santri's attitudes toward English, motivation and passion for learning English, as well as perceived benefits and barriers, while interviews explored their experiences, challenges, and future aspirations. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using mean scores, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients, whereas qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that santri demonstrated highly positive attitudes and strong motivation toward English learning, particularly driven by aspirations for global engagement and the dissemination of Islamic values. However, moderate levels of confidence and limited practice opportunities were identified as key challenges. Overall, the program highlights the importance of communicative, supportive, and context-sensitive English learning initiatives in pesantren environments. The study recommends sustained English programs, increased speaking practice, and institutional support to enhance santri's English proficiency in a sustainable manner.

Keywords: *Santri; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Learning Motivation; Pesantren Education; Global Aspirations*

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1. INTRODUCTION

English is a global language that plays a vital role in education, technology, and international communication (Mauliska & Angelo, 2024). In the contemporary era of globalization, English proficiency has become a crucial competency for students worldwide, including those studying in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) (Alfisuma et al., 2025). Mastery of English enables learners to access global knowledge, engage with international academic communities, and participate in cross-cultural communication, positioning English as an essential tool for global citizenship (Ajisoko, 2025).

For santri, English proficiency carries additional significance beyond academic and professional advancement. English serves as a medium through which Islamic values, perspectives, and scholarship can be communicated to a broader international audience (Is & Febry, 2024). As global discourse increasingly takes place in English, santri who possess adequate English skills are better equipped to represent Islamic teachings and contribute meaningfully to global conversations (Kusumah P., Aminuddin, & Sajidin, 2024). Thus, English mastery functions not only as a practical skill but also as a strategic instrument for cultural and religious representation.

Traditionally, pesantren education has emphasized religious sciences such as Qur'anic studies, fiqh, and hadith, which remain central to santri's intellectual and spiritual formation. However, contemporary global demands require santri to develop additional competencies, including foreign language skills, to remain relevant in an interconnected world (Ziaulhaq et al., 2024). The integration of English learning into pesantren education reflects a growing awareness that religious knowledge and global communication skills must coexist to prepare santri for future challenges (Yuliasri et al., 2025).

Despite the acknowledged importance of English, English learning in pesantren contexts continues to face persistent challenges. Many santri experience limited exposure to authentic English use and lack sufficient opportunities for communicative practice. Instructional approaches often prioritize grammar and reading comprehension, leaving speaking and listening skills underdeveloped. Consequently, santri may perceive English as difficult and feel hesitant or anxious when required to use it actively in communication (Gufron, 2025).

In recent years, some pesantren have begun integrating English programs into their curricula to address these challenges and to prepare santri for higher education, scholarships, and international engagement. While these initiatives represent positive progress, their effectiveness varies depending on pedagogical approaches, institutional support, and learning environments. Without sustained practice and confidence-building strategies, santri may struggle to translate motivation into communicative competence (Fitria, 2023).

Understanding santri's perceptions, motivations, and aspirations toward English learning is therefore essential for designing effective and context-sensitive English instruction in pesantren settings. By examining how santri view English, the benefits they associate with it, and the challenges they encounter, educators and institutions can develop learning initiatives that are both pedagogically sound and culturally responsive. This PkM program was designed to address these needs by investigating santri's perspectives on English mastery and by offering insights for the development of more effective and sustainable English learning practices in pesantren environments.

From a pedagogical perspective, effective English instruction in pesantren contexts requires approaches that

emphasize meaningful communication rather than mere linguistic accuracy (Madkur, 2025). Communicative-oriented instruction encourages learners to use English as a tool for expressing ideas, sharing experiences, and engaging in interaction. For santri, such approaches are particularly relevant, as they help reduce anxiety and foster confidence in using English in both academic and everyday contexts. Creating a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment is therefore crucial in encouraging santri to participate actively in English communication (Aminulloh et al., 2025).

Psychological factors, especially motivation and self-confidence, also play a decisive role in determining the success of English learning among santri. Learners who perceive English as relevant to their personal goals and religious aspirations are more likely to engage persistently in the learning process (Fatimah et al., 2025). However, without adequate confidence and opportunities to practice, high motivation alone may not lead to improved proficiency. Addressing affective factors such as fear of making mistakes and speaking anxiety is thus essential in bridging the gap between santri's aspirations and their actual language performance (Setyawati, 2025).

In response to these pedagogical and psychological considerations, this PkM program positions English learning as an empowering process that aligns global competencies with Islamic values. By exploring santri's perceptions and aspirations toward English mastery, the program seeks not only to generate empirical insights but also to inform the development of sustainable English learning initiatives in pesantren environments. Ultimately, strengthening santri's English competence is expected to enhance their academic readiness, global engagement, and capacity to contribute constructively to international discourse while maintaining a strong Islamic

identity (Hermansyah & Sadapotto, 2024).

2. PARTNER INSTITUTION'S CHALLENGES

Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafiiyah Sukorejo is a religious educational institution that emphasizes Islamic studies while also encouraging students to develop complementary skills relevant to global challenges. However, several challenges related to English learning were identified:

1. Limited confidence in using English, especially in speaking.

One of the most prominent challenges faced by santri at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafiiyah Sukorejo is their limited confidence in using English, particularly in spoken communication. Although many santri have been exposed to English through formal schooling, they often hesitate to speak due to fear of making grammatical mistakes, mispronouncing words, or being judged by peers. This lack of confidence discourages active participation in English interactions and limits opportunities to practice speaking skills in authentic contexts (Mai et al., 2024).

The issue of low speaking confidence is closely related to limited exposure to communicative English learning environments. In the pesantren setting, daily communication predominantly takes place in Indonesian and Arabic, while English is rarely used outside the classroom. As a result, santri have few opportunities to practice English in natural and meaningful situations. When speaking activities do occur, they are often perceived as high-stakes tasks rather than supportive learning experiences, further increasing anxiety and reluctance to speak (Anugrawan & Samad, 2025).

Furthermore, instructional practices that emphasize accuracy over fluency can

unintentionally reinforce santri's lack of confidence. A strong focus on grammatical correctness and written exercises, with minimal emphasis on oral communication, may lead santri to believe that speaking English requires near-perfect mastery. This perception creates psychological barriers that prevent them from experimenting with the language and developing communicative competence. Without deliberate efforts to foster a supportive and confidence-building learning environment, santri may continue to view speaking English as intimidating rather than as a skill that can be gradually developed through practice (Laili et al., 2023).

2. Lack of regular English practice opportunities in daily pesantren life.

Another major challenge in English learning at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafiiyah Sukorejo is the lack of regular English practice opportunities in daily pesantren life. Although English may be introduced in formal learning sessions, its use is not integrated into everyday communication among santri. Daily interactions within the pesantren primarily rely on Indonesian for general communication and Arabic for religious activities, leaving little space for English to be practiced naturally. As a result, English remains confined to the classroom and is perceived as an academic subject rather than a practical communication tool (Arisandi & Irawan, 2022).

The absence of a supportive English-speaking environment limits santri's ability to reinforce what they have learned and to develop fluency through repeated use. Without consistent exposure and routine practice, santri struggle to internalize vocabulary, expressions, and speaking patterns, which in turn affects their confidence and communicative competence. This situation highlights the need for structured yet informal practice opportunities, such as English-speaking

zones, conversation clubs, or daily expressions programs, to embed English use into pesantren life and support continuous language development. (Rahman et al., 2023).

3. Minimal exposure to communicative English learning activities.

Another challenge identified in the pesantren context is the minimal exposure to communicative English learning activities. English instruction, when available, tends to focus predominantly on theoretical aspects such as grammar rules, vocabulary memorization, and reading comprehension. While these components are important, limited attention is given to communicative practices that require santri to actively use English for meaningful interaction. As a result, santri rarely engage in activities such as role plays, discussions, simulations, or problem-solving tasks that promote real-life language (Saifudin & Purwokerto, 2023).

This lack of communicative exposure restricts santri's development of functional language skills, particularly speaking and listening. Without opportunities to practice English in interactive and supportive settings, santri struggle to develop fluency and communicative confidence (Ramadhan, 2024). Moreover, the absence of learner-centered and participatory activities may reduce motivation, as santri are unable to experience English as a living language used for expressing ideas and engaging with others. Addressing this issue requires the incorporation of communicative language teaching approaches that emphasize interaction, collaboration, and contextualized language use to better support santri's English proficiency development.

4. Moderate awareness of the long-term benefits of English mastery.

Another challenge faced by santri is their moderate awareness of the long-term benefits of English mastery. While some santri recognize English as an important subject, many still perceive it as having limited relevance to their immediate academic or religious pursuits. This perception leads to a tendency to prioritize subjects that are directly related to Islamic studies, while English is viewed as supplementary rather than essential. As a result, santri may engage with English learning only to meet basic academic requirements, without a clear understanding of how English proficiency can support their future educational and professional trajectories (Izzah & Suryanto, 2024).

The limited awareness of English's long-term benefits also affects santri's motivation to invest sustained effort in language learning. Without a clear vision of how English can enable access to global Islamic scholarship, international academic opportunities, or broader career prospects, santri may struggle to see the value of continuous practice and skill development. This highlights the importance of raising awareness through guidance, role models, and contextual examples that demonstrate how English mastery can empower santri to participate in global discourse while maintaining (Salviya et al., 2025).

These challenges underline the need for targeted interventions through community service programs (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat/PkM) that are specifically designed to address the linguistic, pedagogical, and psychological needs of santri. Through well-structured PkM initiatives, universities can provide context-sensitive English learning programs that emphasize communicative practice, confidence building, and learner motivation while respecting the cultural and religious values of pesantren life. Such interventions enable santri to

experience English as a practical and meaningful tool rather than merely an academic subject, while also fostering sustainable collaboration between higher education institutions and pesantren in developing globally competent yet value-oriented learners.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 English as a Global Language

English functions as a lingua franca, enabling access to international education, knowledge exchange, and professional networks. Proficiency in English enhances learners' global competitiveness and academic mobility (Ramadani & Ninaj, 2025).

3.2 Motivation in EFL Learning

Motivation is a key factor in successful language acquisition. Both instrumental motivation (e.g., career and scholarship opportunities) and value-based motivation (e.g., sharing Islamic values globally) shape santri's engagement in English learning (Siahaan et al., 2022).

3.3 Confidence and Communicative Competence

Self-efficacy theory emphasizes that learners with higher confidence are more willing to use a foreign language. Supportive learning environments and communicative practices are therefore essential in fostering English-speaking confidence among santri (Natalina, 2025).

4. METHODOLOGY

This PkM program employed a mixed-method approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative research strategies to obtain a comprehensive understanding of santri's perceptions, motivations, and experiences in learning English (Ahmed et al., n.d.). The quantitative component involved the use of a structured questionnaire to capture measurable trends related to attitudes, motivation, and perceived benefits and

challenges, while the qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to articulate their personal experiences, challenges, and reflections in greater depth (Patton, 2014). By combining these two approaches, the study was able to triangulate numerical data with rich narrative insights, thereby enhancing the validity and depth of the findings. This mixed-method design was particularly appropriate for the pesantren context, as it not only identified general patterns in santri's English learning orientations but also revealed the underlying psychological, cultural, and contextual factors influencing their engagement with English.

4.1 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 100 santri from Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafiiyah Sukorejo, who were selected through purposive sampling based on their prior exposure to English learning activities within the pesantren environment. This sampling technique was employed to ensure that the participants possessed relevant experiences and insights related to English learning, allowing for more meaningful data collection. The selected santri represented diverse educational backgrounds and levels of English proficiency, providing a broad perspective on attitudes, motivation, and challenges associated with English mastery. By involving participants who were actively engaged in pesantren life, the study was able to capture authentic perceptions and aspirations that reflect the real conditions of English learning in the pesantren context.

4.2 Instruments

Questionnaire: The questionnaire employed in this study was designed using a five-point Likert scale to measure santri's attitudes toward English, their motivation and passion for learning the language, as well as their perceived

benefits and barriers related to English mastery. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), allowing participants to express varying degrees of agreement with each statement. This instrument enabled the systematic collection of quantifiable data reflecting santri's perceptions and experiences, and it was structured to capture multiple dimensions of English learning relevant to the pesantren context. By using a Likert-scale format, the questionnaire facilitated clear statistical analysis while ensuring that participants could respond easily and consistently to each item.

Interview Guide: The interview guide used in this study consisted of semi-structured questions designed to explore santri's experiences, challenges, motivations, and future aspirations related to English learning. This flexible interview format allowed participants to elaborate on their responses and share personal reflections while still ensuring that key topics aligned with the research objectives were consistently addressed. Through open-ended questioning, the interviews provided rich qualitative data that captured santri's perspectives in depth, offering valuable insights into the affective, contextual, and aspirational dimensions of English mastery within the pesantren environment (Xu et al., 2025).

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis.

Quantitative data in this study were analyzed descriptively by calculating mean scores and standard deviations to identify general trends and variations in santri's perceptions, motivation, and perceived benefits and challenges of English learning, while Cronbach's alpha was employed to examine the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire. Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically through a systematic process of coding, categorization, and interpretation to

identify recurring patterns, dominant themes, and meaningful insights (Jnanathapaswi, n.d.). This combined analytical approach enabled the study to integrate numerical trends with in-depth qualitative explanations, providing a more comprehensive understanding of santri's experiences and perspectives toward English mastery.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Results

Descriptive statistics were computed using SPSS to examine santri's perceptions, motivation, and perceived benefits and barriers toward English mastery. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Theme 1: Attitude toward English

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Santri's Attitudes toward English (N = 100)

Item	Statement	M	SD
1	English is important for my future career	4.28	0.71
2	English helps me connect with people from other countries	4.12	0.76
3	I feel confident when using English to communicate	3.05	0.83
4	English learning is enjoyable and interesting	3.68	0.79
5	English is part of my personal development	4.05	0.74
Overall Mean		3.84	0.77

Reliability: Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$

Note. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

As shown in Table 1, santri demonstrated a high level of positive attitude toward English (M = 3.84, SD = 0.77). The highest mean score was found

for the item "English is important for my future career" (M = 4.28, SD = 0.71), indicating a strong belief in the instrumental value of English. However, confidence in using English for communication was only moderate (M = 3.05, SD = 0.83).

The reliability analysis showed good internal consistency for this construct (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Theme 2: Motivation and Passion toward English Learning

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Santri's Motivation and Passion toward English (N = 100)

Item	Statement	M	SD
1	Learn English to explore opportunities abroad	4.15	0.73
2	Learn English to share Islamic values globally	4.32	0.68
3	Practice English outside the classroom	3.02	0.88
4	Teachers inspire me to love learning English	4.08	0.75
5	English can turn my passion into a global career	4.18	0.72
Overall Mean		3.95	0.75

Reliability: Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$

Note. Higher mean scores indicate stronger motivation and passion toward English learning.

Results presented in Table 2 reveal that santri possessed high motivation and passion toward English learning (M = 3.95, SD = 0.75). The highest mean score was observed for "I learn English to share Islamic values globally" (M = 4.32, SD = 0.68), suggesting a strong value-based and religiously oriented motivation.

Conversely, practicing English outside the classroom yielded a moderate mean

score ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.88$), indicating limited learner autonomy. The motivation scale demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

Theme 3: Perceived Benefits and Barriers

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Benefits and Barriers in Learning English (N = 100)

Item	Statement	M	SD
1	English gives access to more information and knowledge	4.10	0.74
2	English helps obtain scholarships/international experience	4.22	0.69
3	My environment supports English learning	3.18	0.86
4	English is difficult due to lack of practice	3.74	0.81
5	Commitment to improving English in the future	4.25	0.67
Overall Mean		3.90	0.75

Reliability: Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$

As shown in Table 3, santri perceived substantial benefits from English learning ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.75$). Commitment to improving English proficiency in the future recorded a very high mean score ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.67$). Environmental support, however, was perceived as moderate ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.86$).

The reliability coefficient for this scale was acceptable to good (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

Overall Scale Summary

Table 4

Overall Mean Scores and Reliability by Theme

Theme	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Attitude toward English	3.84	0.77	.82

Theme	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Motivation and Passion	3.95	0.75	.85
Perceived Benefits & Barriers	3.90	0.75	.80
Overall Scale	3.90	0.76	.87

Interpretation:

Cronbach's alpha values above .80 indicate good internal consistency, confirming that the questionnaire is a reliable instrument for measuring santri's perceptions and aspirations toward English mastery.

Overall Scale Reliability

The overall questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .87, indicating that the instrument was reliable for measuring santri's perceptions and aspirations toward English mastery.

The findings from the quantitative data reveal that santri demonstrated highly positive attitudes and strong motivation toward English learning. English was perceived as important for future careers, global communication, and the dissemination of Islamic values. However, confidence in speaking English and opportunities for autonomous practice remained moderate. These results suggest a motivation–proficiency gap, indicating the need for more communicative and practice-oriented English programs in pesantren settings.

The findings indicate that santri hold consistently positive attitudes and strong motivation toward English learning, as reflected in high mean scores across all three dimensions. In line with Gardner's (2010) motivation theory, both instrumental motivation (career and scholarships) and integrative-value motivation (global communication and Islamic representation) significantly influenced santri's engagement.

Notably, the religious motivation dimension emerged as the strongest predictor of motivation. This supports prior studies in Islamic EFL contexts, which argue that English learning is increasingly framed as a means of global da'wah rather than cultural assimilation. This finding extends Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, suggesting the presence of a *religious-global ideal L2 self* among santri.

Despite high motivation, confidence and autonomous practice remained moderate. This discrepancy reflects a motivation-proficiency gap, often observed in EFL environments with limited authentic exposure. The moderate perception of environmental support further suggests that institutional reinforcement needs strengthening.

Teacher inspiration emerged as a key facilitating factor, confirming that teacher agency plays a critical role in pesantren-based English education. Communicative, supportive, and contextually relevant pedagogy is therefore essential to translate motivation into proficiency.

Qualitative Results

Qualitative analysis using an ATLAS.ti-informed approach indicates that religious motivation plays a particularly significant role in shaping santri's engagement with English. Interview data demonstrate that santri perceive English as a form of global-religious capital, enabling them to participate in international discourse while maintaining their Islamic identity. This finding helps explain the high quantitative mean score for motivation related to sharing Islamic values globally. It also extends existing theories of second language motivation by highlighting a context-specific motivational dimension that integrates faith-based identity with global aspirations.

Despite these positive perceptions and strong motivation, both quantitative and qualitative findings reveal persistent challenges related to confidence and

practice opportunities. Quantitatively, confidence in using English communicatively recorded only a moderate mean score, while interview data further explain this pattern by revealing widespread speaking anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Santri frequently reported limited opportunities to practice English in daily pesantren life, which restricts their ability to develop fluency and self-efficacy. This motivation-performance gap underscores the importance of addressing affective and contextual barriers alongside cognitive and linguistic factors.

The qualitative findings also provide important insight into the transformative role of the seminar of *Santri's Motivation*. Interview data indicate that the seminar functioned as a critical intervention that reshaped santri's perceptions of English, reduced anxiety, and increased confidence to speak. Participants described experiencing a shift in mindset, viewing English as an achievable and meaningful skill rather than an intimidating subject. This qualitative evidence supports the quantitative trends showing high overall commitment to improving English proficiency and highlights the effectiveness of short-term, motivational, and communicative interventions in pesantren contexts.

ATLAS.ti Code System: Codes, Definitions, and Examples

Code	Definition	Example
Future Career Aspirations	Motivation to learn English help me study for education abroad and work or career goals internationally."	
Global Communication	Desire to interact with people from different countries	"With English, I can communicate with people from other cultures."
Da'wah through English	Using English to spread Islamic values globally	"English helps us explain Islam to people outside Indonesia."

Code	Definition	Example
Religious Responsibility	Perception of English as part of Islamic mission	"Learning English is important for sharing Islamic teachings."
Lack of Speaking Confidence	Low self-confidence in oral English use	"I am afraid to speak my English is not good."
Fear of Making Mistakes	Anxiety related to errors in speaking	"I worry about making mistakes in and being judged."
Limited Practice Opportunities	Lack of English use in daily pesantren life	"We rarely use English in our daily activities."
English Difficult	Perception of English as challenging	"English feels difficult because we don't practice often."
Increased Motivation after Seminar	Boost in motivation due to seminar	"After the seminar, I feel more motivated to learn English."
Change in Mindset	Shift in perception toward English	"Now I see English as an opportunity, not a burden."
Confidence Improvement	Increased self-efficacy in using English	"I feel more confident trying to speak English."

Taken together, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings suggests that effective English programs for santri must go beyond traditional, form-focused instruction. Communicative pedagogy that emphasizes interaction, confidence building, and meaningful language use is essential for translating motivation into communicative competence. Moreover, institutional support in the form of regular practice opportunities, English-speaking communities, and sustained mentoring is necessary to maintain the positive impact of intervention programs. By aligning pedagogical practices with santri's motivational orientations and contextual realities, pesantren-based English

education can more effectively prepare learners for global engagement while preserving their religious and cultural identity (Sugito, 2024).

7. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that santri at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafiiyah Sukorejo possess highly positive perceptions, strong motivation, and future-oriented aspirations toward English mastery. English is not merely perceived as a global communication tool, but also as a strategic medium through which santri can access international knowledge, academic opportunities, and convey Islamic values on a global platform. These findings indicate that santri are increasingly aware of the role English plays in enabling them to engage with the wider world while maintaining their religious identity.

Despite these positive dispositions, several challenges continue to hinder the effective development of English proficiency among santri. Issues related to limited confidence in speaking, insufficient opportunities for regular practice, and moderate levels of environmental support remain significant barriers. These challenges highlight the need for pedagogical approaches that prioritize communicative competence, reduce speaking anxiety, and provide meaningful opportunities for language use. Creating supportive and non-judgmental learning environments is essential to help santri translate motivation into actual communicative performance.

To address these challenges, sustained institutional support and well-designed English programs are crucial. English instruction in pesantren contexts should incorporate communicative pedagogy, increased exposure through formal and informal activities, and structured

opportunities for continuous practice. Furthermore, future research is recommended to explore instructional interventions that effectively enhance santri's English proficiency and to examine the long-term impact of English programs through longitudinal studies. Such research would contribute valuable insights for developing sustainable and context-sensitive English education models in pesantren environments.

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