

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The emergence of English language education within the curriculum of Islamic boarding schools, known as *pesantren*, represents a significant transformation in the traditional educational landscape. This development is a response to the demands and challenges posed by the globalization era (Sinan & Yusuf, 2019). Historically, traditional *pesantren* have maintained a primary focus on religious education, with a curriculum deeply rooted in Islamic studies and centered around the transmission of classical Islamic knowledge (*Tafaquh fiddin*). Traditional *pesantren* emphasize the development of strong moral character and spiritual discipline, viewing religious education as the core of a student's life. The values of traditional *pesantren* are often associated with simplicity, spiritual devotion, and a focus on mastering classical religious texts in Arabic.

However, with the evolving dynamics of the contemporary world, modern *pesantren* have undergone a noticeable paradigm shift. In response to the growing interconnectedness of nations and cultures, modern *pesantren* have recognized the compelling need to incorporate modern subjects, particularly foreign languages such as English (Nur et al., 2021). This evolution reflects an acknowledgment of the importance of equipping students with skills that extend beyond religious studies to engage effectively in a globalized society. The values of modern *pesantren* are shaped by a balance between maintaining traditional Islamic education and embracing modernity, particularly through the inclusion of global

competencies such as language skills, critical thinking, and technological literacy. According to Azami (2021), the integration of English into the curriculum can be seen as a proactive response by modern *pesantren* to the challenges of modernization and the evolving expectations of society. By embracing English teaching, these educational institutions are not only preserving their traditional values, but also adapting to the changing educational landscape and societal demands. This shift reflects the core value of modern *pesantren*: an emphasis on producing students who are not only religiously knowledgeable but also globally competitive, prepared to navigate both the Islamic world and the modern, secular world.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of English language education within *pesantren*, there remains a notable research gap that calls for further exploration. While a considerable body of research has focused on the integration of English into the curriculum and its pedagogical aspects, there is a scarcity of studies that delve deeply into the specific difficulties faced by students during their English language learning journey within *pesantren*. The existing literature has primarily examined the structural and programmatic changes within *pesantren*, as well as the broader implications of these changes, including the effectiveness of curriculum adaptation and its impact on the overall educational landscape (e.g., Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019; Sulistiyo et al., 2019; Anwar et al., 2020). However, in the context of learning English, there is a scarcity of research that delves into or explores the experiences from the students' perspective. The scarcity of studies that explore students' difficulties in learning English within

pesantren has become a significant research gap in this context. Exploring these difficulties can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the personalized English curriculum adopted by many modern *pesantren*.

Beside the gaps mentioned above, based on the researcher's search using the keyword 'difficulties in learning English in *pesantren*,' no specific studies addressing this issue were found. What appeared in the search results were teacher experience in teaching speaking in modern *pesantren* (Agustin, 2023), motivation and challenges in English language learning (Azzura et al., 2023), teaching challenges and strategies (Sari, 2023), and English classroom management (Habibi et al., 2018). Meanwhile, in different settings, research on students' difficulties in learning English has already been conducted within the context of vocational school (Hapsari, 2018), senior high school (Sutra & Baharudin, 2020), Islamic elementary school (Rezeki & Sagala, 2021), elementary school (Sintadewi et al., 2020), and junior high school (2022). This is also what underscores the importance of conducting this research within the context of *pesantren*. These alternative learning environments may present unique opportunities and challenges for language learners and studying them can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of language acquisition processes.

Based on interviews with two teachers at one of the modern *pesantren*, it was observed that students primarily use English in their daily conversations when they are under the teachers' supervision. They show less interest and confidence in interacting with both teachers and peers in English in the classroom, frequently opting for Bahasa Indonesia or Arabic. Considering the preliminary study, the

researcher is interested in identifying the types of difficulties students face in learning English and exploring the strategies they employ to overcome these difficulties in the context of a modern *pesantren*. Additionally, this study aims to describe the internal and external factors that contribute to students' English learning difficulties. To investigate this case, the researcher will conduct a study entitled **“Exploring Student’s Difficulties and Strategies for Learning English: A Case Study of a Modern *Pesantren*.”**

1.2. Research Objectives

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulated the research objectives of the study. The first objective is to identify the types of students’ learning difficulties in learning English in modern *pesantren*. The research then aims to describe the factors that contribute to students’ learning difficulties in learning English in modern *pesantren*. Additionally, the study seeks to describe the external factors that contribute to students’ learning difficulties in learning English in modern *pesantren*. Lastly, the research aims to explain how the students at the modern *pesantren* solve the difficulties they encounter in learning English.

1.3. Research Questions

- 1) What difficulties do students encounter in learning English at modern *pesantren*?
- 2) What are the internal and external factors contributing to student’s difficulties in learning English at a modern *pesantren*?
- 3) How do students at the modern *pesantren* solve the difficulties they encounter when learning English?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This research holds significance for various domains, including stakeholders, *pesantren*, researchers, and policy implications as well. For the stakeholders, identifying and understanding students' difficulties in learning English within *pesantren*, educators and curriculum developers can design their approaches to address these difficulties effectively. For the *pesantren* itself, the research can contribute to enhance the quality of English language teaching in *pesantren*, refine the teaching methods and curricula, ensuring that their students receive quality language instruction that prepares them for global interactions. From the researcher's standpoint, this study fills a critical gap in language education research. It focuses specifically on the context of *pesantren*, an area previously underexplored, and delves into the detailed and nuanced difficulties faced by students in the setting of *pesantren*. Finally, in terms of policy implications, the findings of the research can inform policy decisions and educational reforms in *pesantren* settings to optimize English language learning outcomes for students.

1.5. Limitations

The research, while insightful, presents certain limitations that need to be acknowledged for a comprehensive understanding of its scope and applicability. Firstly, this research primarily focuses on a specific modern *pesantren*. As a result, the findings may be limited in their generalizability to other *pesantren* settings with potentially unique characteristics and practices. Secondly, while the study outlines students' difficulties qualitatively, it does not incorporate quantitative data or

standardized assessments to provide a more quantifiable measurement of these difficulties.

1.6. Definition of Terms

- 1) **Modern *Pesantren*:** Modern *pesantren* in this study is an Islamic educational institution in Indonesia that integrates religious teachings, cultural values, and broader curriculum.
- 2) **Difficulties:** The various obstacles and difficulties students face in learning English in *pesantren*.