

Language and Cultural Adaptation of Non-Javanese Students at Mambaus Sholihin Boarding School: Islamic Education Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the language and cultural adaptation process of non-Javanese students at the Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School, Gresik, East Java. The focus of the study includes: (1) language adaptation in daily communication, (2) cultural adjustment to the norms, traditions, and rhythm of Islamic boarding school life, (3) the role of social support from peers, administrators, and ustadz, and (4) adaptation challenges experienced by students in the initial phase of boarding. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation of six non-Javanese students as primary informants and three ustadz as supporting informants, who were selected purposively. Data analysis was carried out using an interactive model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that non-Javanese students face initial difficulties in the form of limited basic facilities, Javanese language barriers, academic difficulties in learning Pegon-based yellow books, and adjustment to the strict Islamic boarding school discipline system. However, the adaptation process is gradual and shows positive developments through peer support, guidance from administrators, and the adaptive and inclusive pedagogical approach of the ustadz. These findings confirm that Islamic boarding schools serve as spaces for cultural integration and character development for students. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of responsive mentoring and communication strategies to support the adaptation of new students within the context of Islamic Religious Education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Inter regional educational mobility has become an increasingly prominent phenomenon in Indonesia, particularly the movement of students from regions outside Java to major Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) located on the island of Java. This mobility reflects not only the uneven distribution of educational institutions across the archipelago but also the symbolic and academic centrality of Javanese pesantren as long-established centers of Islamic scholarship, cultural transmission, and moral education (Kinoshita, 2023). Among these institutions, the Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Gresik stands out as a prominent destination due to its strong tradition of *kitab kuning* learning, strict institutional discipline, and deeply rooted academic culture. For students originating from non-Javanese regions, studying at this pesantren entails far more than academic pursuit; it involves navigating a complex process of linguistic, cultural, and social adaptation within a distinctive Javanese pesantren milieu.

From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, adaptation in the pesantren context carries significant pedagogical implications. Pesantren education is not limited to formal instruction but is fundamentally oriented toward the cultivation of adab, character, and social competence through everyday practices, interactions, and lived experiences. Javanese pesantren culture is shaped by the Salafiyah scholarly tradition, Javanese ethical values emphasizing respect, subtle communication, and social hierarchy, as well as a structured relational system between *kiai* and *santri*. Consequently, non-Javanese students must negotiate unfamiliar norms of communication, authority, and discipline that directly influence their learning trajectories, identity formation, and moral development.

This phenomenon is reinforced by the structural configuration of pesantren education at the national level. Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs show that Indonesia hosts more than 42,000 pesantren with over 1.6 million students spread across 34 provinces, highlighting the central role of pesantren within the national education system (Firmansyah, 2023). However, the distribution of these institutions is highly uneven. In Java particularly East Java accommodates a disproportionately large number of pesantren and students compared to many regions outside Java (Muhith et al., 2022; Nasution, 2020). This imbalance has positioned Java as a hub of pesantren education and intensified cross-regional student mobility, rendering cultural and linguistic adaptation a structural and recurrent phenomenon rather than an incidental individual experience.

Empirical realities within pesantren further illustrate the complexity of this adaptation process. Differences in daily rhythms, communication styles, and interactional norms between Javanese and non-Javanese pesantren are evident in students' everyday practices. Javanese pesantren commonly integrate the use of Javanese language in informal communication, Pegon-based textual instruction, and ritualized expressions of respect toward *kiai*. In contrast, pesantren outside Java often rely more heavily on regional languages or Indonesian. These differences reflect deeper ethical orientations and social values that require non-Javanese students to adjust to disciplined schedules, symbolic forms of authority, and culturally specific modes of interaction. During the early stages of residence, such adjustments often manifest as culture shock, communicative discomfort, or social withdrawal, before gradually evolving into processes of accommodation and negotiation.

Previous research has acknowledged that student adaptation in pesantren is multidimensional and socially mediated. Studies on Pegon-based learning demonstrate that non-Javanese students frequently encounter linguistic barriers due to the integration

of Javanese language and Arabic script, which may hinder both academic comprehension and social participation (Aziz et al., 2022). Other studies highlight the role of peer support in accelerating the internalization of pesantren values and reducing feelings of isolation (Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Latif & Hafid, 2021), as well as the effectiveness of pesantren environments in instilling discipline and positive habits (Mujahid, 2021). While these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to address adaptation in general terms and often treat pesantren as culturally homogeneous spaces.

A critical gap emerges from this body of literature. Existing studies rarely offer a contextualized analysis of how local cultural specificities particularly Javanese linguistic norms, ethical values, and symbolic interaction patterns shape the adaptation experiences of non-Javanese students in large pesantren settings. Moreover, the majority of prior research does not sufficiently engage with the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, which places adab, character formation, and socio-religious competence at the core of educational outcomes. As a result, adaptation is frequently conceptualized as a pragmatic or psychological process, rather than as an integral component of religious and moral education within pesantren life.

From a theoretical standpoint, this gap is equally significant. Berry's (1997) acculturation model offers a useful framework for understanding individual strategies of integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization when encountering a dominant culture. However, its application in religiously grounded educational environments such as pesantren remains limited. Similarly, Goffman's symbolic interactionism emphasizes the role of language, symbols, and everyday interactions in shaping identity and social relations, yet few studies have examined how pesantren-specific symbols such as Pegon literacy, honorific speech, and ritualized obedience function as mechanisms of cultural negotiation. Within pesantren studies, Dhofier's (1982), foundational framework underscores that pesantren life is governed by tradition, hierarchy, and adab, but empirical research has not sufficiently explored how non-Javanese students internalize, reinterpret, or contest these structures in their daily educational experiences.

Responding to these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study offers a contextual and in-depth analysis of language and cultural adaptation among non-Javanese students at the Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) analyze the language adaptation processes of non-Javanese students, (2) identify cultural adjustments to pesantren norms and customs, (3) examine the role of pesantren institutions in facilitating adaptation through guidance and social support, and (4) map adaptation challenges, including culture shock, resistance, and identity negotiation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the refinement of acculturation and symbolic interaction theories by situating them within the socio-religious context of pesantren education. Practically, it provides insights for pesantren educators and administrators in designing culturally responsive guidance strategies that support student adaptation while strengthening character education grounded in Islamic values. By integrating adaptation theory with Islamic Religious Education perspectives, this study positions pesantren not only as centers of religious learning but also as dynamic spaces of cultural integration and moral formation.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using a descriptive phenomenological design grounded in Husserlian phenomenology. This epistemological orientation emphasizes the systematic description of participants' lived experiences and

the meanings they attribute to those experiences, with the aim of revealing the essential structures of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). Husserlian phenomenology was deemed appropriate because this study seeks to capture how nonJavanese students consciously experience and interpret linguistic and cultural adaptation within a Javanese Islamic boarding school, rather than to construct interpretive ontologies of being.

Within this framework, knowledge is understood as emerging from participants' subjective experiences as expressed through language, interaction, and reflection. The phenomenological approach thus enables an in-depth exploration of adaptation as a lived educational process embedded in everyday pesantren life.

Consistent with phenomenological methodology, the researcher served as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. To address potential researcher bias, bracketing (epoché) was applied throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, the researcher engaged in reflexive journaling to identify personal assumptions related to pesantren culture, Javanese norms, and student adaptation. These assumptions were consciously suspended during data collection and analysis to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts.

Reflexivity was maintained during the coding and thematic development stages through iterative self-examination and peer debriefing with qualitative research colleagues, enhancing analytical credibility and interpretive discipline.

The study was conducted at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School, Gresik, East Java, a large pesantren characterized by a strong Javanese cultural environment and a diverse student population from regions outside Java. The setting was purposively selected due to its institutional prominence, Salafiyyah scholarly tradition, and sustained influx of nonJavanese students.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria aligned with the research objectives: (1) students originating from outside Java, (2) a minimum of one year of residence in the pesantren to ensure adequate cultural exposure, and (3) active involvement in daily educational and cultural practices. In total, nine participants were involved, consisting of six non-Javanese students as primary informants and three supervising ustadz as supporting informants.

In accordance with phenomenological research conventions, the sample size was determined by data saturation, which was reached when subsequent interviews yielded no new experiential themes but reinforced existing patterns related to language adaptation, cultural negotiation, and institutional mediation.

Data were collected over a one-year period, enabling prolonged engagement with the research context. Data collection techniques included semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis.

Each participant was interviewed once. Interviews focused on participants' experiences of language adaptation, cultural adjustment, communication challenges, emotional responses, and the internalization of Islamic educational values. An interview guide was used consistently across participants to ensure procedural coherence while allowing flexibility for experiential elaboration.

Nonparticipant observations were conducted intermittently throughout the year to capture naturalistic patterns of language use, social interaction, and daily routines within the pesantren. Relevant institutional documents, including regulations and learning schedules, were analyzed to contextualize participants' narratives.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Miles et al., 2014), which includes an iterative process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts and observation notes were inductively coded to identify significant statements and units of meaning. These codes were then grouped into thematic categories representing core dimensions of adaptation. Analytical interpretations were continuously verified through recursive comparisons across data sources.

To ensure reliability, several strategies were employed. Method triangulation was achieved by integrating interview and observation data, while source triangulation involved comparing the perspectives of students and supervising teachers. Member checking was conducted by sharing initial findings with selected participants.



Figure 1. Data Analysis Process

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Reasons Students from Outside Java Choose Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School

The decision of students from outside Java to enroll at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School reflects a complex interplay between institutional legitimacy, social endorsement, and individual religious aspirations. Rather than being a purely pragmatic choice, the findings indicate that students' decisions are embedded within broader socio religious and cultural considerations characteristic of the pesantren tradition. This pattern suggests that the choice of boarding school functions as a preliminary stage of cultural and educational adaptation, shaping students' readiness to engage with a new linguistic, academic, and social environment.

The most prominent theme emerging from the data is institutional reputation as symbolic religious capital. Informants consistently emphasized Mambaus Sholihin's strong tradition of classical Islamic scholarship, particularly its mastery of the *kitab kuning*. In sociological terms, this reputation operates as a form of symbolic capital that legitimizes the pesantren as an authoritative center of Islamic knowledge (Dhofier, 2011).

The attraction to the *kitab kuning* tradition indicates that students perceive pesantren education not merely as formal schooling but as access to an authentic chain of religious transmission (*sanad keilmuan*). This finding aligns with studies showing that pesantren reputation and scholarly lineage remain decisive factors in educational choice within traditional Islamic communities (Rohmah, 2022).

Beyond institutional reputation, social and religious recommendation emerged as a crucial mediating factor. Recommendations from teachers, religious leaders, or alumni function as trust-building mechanisms that reduce uncertainty prior to enrollment. From the perspective of Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory, such endorsements help prospective students manage anticipatory anxiety regarding unfamiliar cultural and linguistic environments by providing symbolic reassurance (Gudykunst, 2004). For students from outside Java, who anticipate significant cultural adjustment, these recommendations play a strategic role in legitimizing the decision to migrate educationally.

A third theme concerns family influence as a moral and affective driver. Parental trust, often grounded in familial connections with pesantren alumni, reflects the collective nature of educational decision making in religious contexts. Rather than individual autonomy alone, students' choices are embedded within family expectations and moral aspirations. This finding corroborates research emphasizing the dominant role of parents in religious values based education, where schooling is perceived as an extension of moral upbringing rather than solely academic advancement (Sabirin et al., 2024).

At the individual level, the data reveal personal religious motivation and future oriented aspirations as internal drivers. Students articulated desires for self-improvement, spiritual discipline, and becoming morally exemplary individuals. When analyzed through the lens of Self Determination Theory, these motivations represent autonomous regulation, complementing externally driven factors such as family encouragement and religious authority (Ryan & Deci, 2024). The coexistence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is particularly significant for students from outside Java, as it contributes to persistence and resilience during subsequent phases of cultural and linguistic adaptation.

From a broader adaptation perspective, these findings can be interpreted using Berry's acculturation theory, even at this pre-adaptation stage. The choice of Mambaus Sholihin reflects an anticipatory orientation toward *integration*, whereby students willingly enter a new cultural environment while maintaining their original identities. The pesantren's strong religious ethos provides a shared symbolic framework that mitigates potential cultural dissonance, allowing non-Javanese students to perceive adaptation not as cultural loss but as religious enrichment.

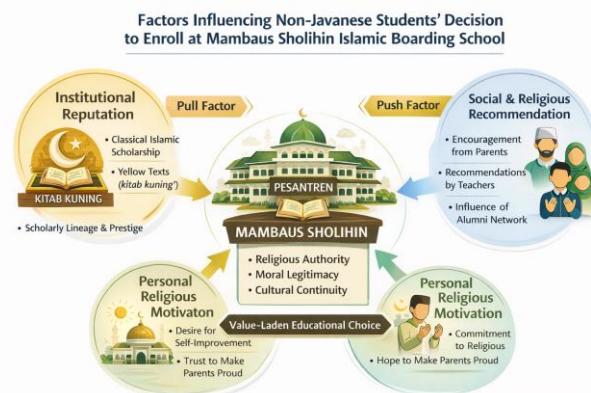


Figure 2. Factors Influencing Non-Javanese Students' Decision to Enroll at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School

Comparatively, this pattern differs from adaptation motives commonly reported in studies of international students in secular universities, where academic ranking and economic prospects dominate decision making. Instead, the findings resemble adaptation patterns in faith based educational institutions, where moral legitimacy and spiritual continuity outweigh instrumental considerations. Studies on pesantren modern and traditional contexts also indicate similar motivations, although modern pesantren often emphasize institutional facilities and global orientation, whereas traditional pesantren foreground scholarly lineage and classical texts (Adiska & Sudrajat, 2025).

From the perspective of Islamic Religious Education, the findings underscore that adaptation begins before physical entry into the learning environment. The decision-making process itself constitutes an initial phase of values internalization, where students enter the pesantren with pre formed religious motivation, mental readiness, and moral commitment. This pre-adaptive disposition becomes a critical foundation for later engagement with challenges such as Javanese language use and the study of *kitab kuning* with *pegon* script, which are explored in subsequent sections.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting educational choice as a form of intellectual and spiritual migration within Islamic education. Unlike dominant models of student adaptation that focus on post-enrollment adjustment, the findings demonstrate that pesantren adaptation is deeply rooted in pre-enrollment motivational structures shaped by religious authority, family trust, and symbolic capital. This insight enriches global discussions on student adaptation by foregrounding the role of faith-based legitimacy and communal endorsement in shaping adaptive readiness.

3.2 Initial Difficulties in Adapting to Islamic Boarding Schools Outside of Java

The initial adaptation phase experienced by non-Javanese students at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School reveals a multidimensional process involving physical, linguistic, academic, and psychosocial challenges. Rather than functioning as isolated difficulties, these challenges interact dynamically and shape students' early perceptions of the pesantren environment. From a cultural adaptation perspective, this phase represents a critical transition period in which students encounter unfamiliar norms, communication patterns, and learning traditions that require significant cognitive and emotional adjustment.

One of the earliest challenges identified is related to basic facilities, particularly limited access to water during the initial days of residence. Although seemingly technical,

this issue plays an important role in shaping students' early emotional responses to the boarding school environment. Within cultural transition theory, such difficulties correspond to the *initial disorientation* or confusion phase, where individuals experience discomfort due to unfamiliar physical conditions and the absence of established coping strategies (Ward et al., 2020). For students coming from regions with different infrastructural norms, limited water access disrupts daily routines such as bathing and ablution, thereby affecting not only physical comfort but also religious practices. This finding underscores that adaptation in pesantren contexts begins at the level of embodied experience, not merely cultural or academic engagement.

The most prominent and persistent challenge reported by informants is language adaptation, particularly difficulties in understanding and using Javanese in daily communication. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the dominance of Javanese functions as a form of *local linguistic capital* that implicitly structures access to information, social participation, and authority within the pesantren community. NonJavanese students' limited proficiency restricts their communicative agency, often resulting in silence, passivity, and reduced social interaction. Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory provides a useful lens for interpreting this phenomenon: linguistic limitations increase uncertainty and communication anxiety, which in turn inhibit social engagement and the formation of interpersonal relationships (Gudykunst, 2004). Thus, language barriers do not merely reflect technical difficulties but actively mediate students' social integration trajectories.

These linguistic challenges are closely intertwined with academic adaptation, particularly in the study of *kitab kuning* using Arabic Pegan and Javanese *gandul* explanations. For non-Javanese students, this learning process constitutes a form of *double cognitive load*, requiring simultaneous decoding of Arabic textual content and unfamiliar Javanese linguistic structures. From the perspective of educational psychology, this condition increases extraneous cognitive load, potentially hindering comprehension and slowing academic progress (Bruinessen, 2012). Empirical studies have similarly demonstrated that Pegan-based instruction poses significant barriers for students without prior exposure to Javanese linguistic conventions (Aziz et al., 2022; Mawaddah, 2022).

However, these academic difficulties should not be interpreted solely as deficits. Drawing on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the challenges encountered by nonJavanese students indicate a transitional learning space where appropriate scaffolding becomes crucial. Peer assistance, repetition by ustaz, and gradual immersion in pesantren linguistic practices can transform initial difficulties into developmental opportunities. Comparative research suggests that when local cultural elements are integrated through adaptive pedagogical strategies, they can enhance rather than hinder learning outcomes in multicultural religious classrooms (Sopian et al., 2025). This implies that academic barriers are contingent upon instructional design rather than inherent linguistic incompatibility.

Another significant dimension of initial difficulty concerns discipline and daily routines. The tightly structured schedules and strict rules of pesantren life are often perceived as overwhelming by new students, particularly those from less regimented educational backgrounds. Within Berry's acculturation framework, this condition represents the *encounter phase*, where individuals confront differences in values, temporal rhythms, and behavioral expectations (Berry, 2017). The pesantren discipline system, characterized by high context norms and implicit expectations, requires students

to internalize cultural values through practice rather than explicit instruction (Dhofier, 1982). Studies on student adaptation in religious boarding institutions indicate that such discipline often triggers culture shock but may later function as a stabilizing structure once internalized (Fasadena & Yunuh, 2024).

Importantly, these various challenges physical discomfort, language barriers, academic complexity, and disciplinary rigidity do not operate independently. Instead, they form an interconnected adaptation ecology that shapes students' early experiences. For instance, linguistic anxiety can exacerbate academic difficulties, while strict schedules may limit opportunities for informal language learning. This multidimensionality aligns with global research on student adaptation, which emphasizes that successful adjustment depends on the interaction between environmental demands and individual coping resources rather than isolated variables (Ward et al., 2020).

Comparatively, the adaptation challenges observed in this pesantren context share similarities with those faced by international students in higher education, particularly regarding language anxiety and academic adjustment. However, they differ in the centrality of religious practices, communal living, and moral discipline, which intensify the adaptation process. Unlike secular educational settings, pesantren adaptation requires simultaneous adjustment to cultural, spiritual, and pedagogical systems, making early-stage difficulties more complex but also potentially more transformative.

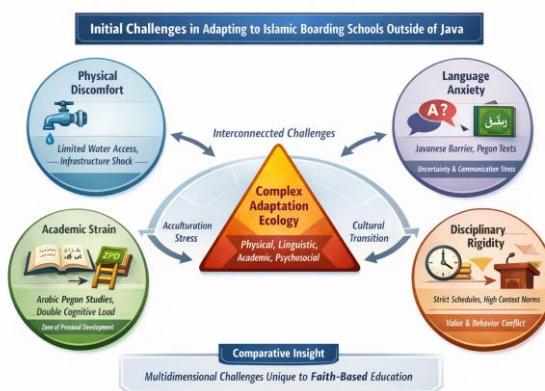


Figure 3. Initial Adaptation Challenges of NonJavanese Students at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that adaptation among nonJavanese pesantren students is a layered process encompassing physical, linguistic, academic, and psychosocial dimensions. The findings extend existing adaptation models by situating them within a faith-based educational environment, where language functions as cultural capital, discipline as moral pedagogy, and learning as spiritual practice. This integrative perspective enriches global discussions on student adaptation, intercultural education, and Islamic education studies by highlighting the distinctive mechanisms through which adaptation unfolds in traditional Islamic boarding schools.

3.3 Student Adaptation Strategies: The Role of Peers, Administrators, and Ustadz

The adaptation strategies employed by non-Javanese students at Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School demonstrate that adjustment to pesantren life is fundamentally a socially mediated process rather than an individual endeavor. Field data reveal that students rely extensively on interpersonal relationships with peers, administrators, and ustaddz to navigate linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges

encountered during the early stages of residence. This finding reinforces the argument that adaptation in religious boarding institutions is embedded within collective social structures and everyday interactions.

A central strategy identified in the data is peer-based adaptation, particularly through deliberate friendship formation with Javanese students. Non-Javanese students consciously position Javanese peers as linguistic and cultural resources, enabling them to acquire communicative competence and understand pesantren norms more efficiently. From Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, this strategy reflects learning through *more capable peers* within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where social interaction functions as the primary mechanism for cognitive and cultural development (Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, Javanese students act not merely as friends but as informal cultural mediators who scaffold language acquisition and social integration.

Beyond intentional friendship-building, adaptation also occurs through informal language socialization, particularly via observation, listening, and imitation in daily interactions. This process aligns with sociolinguistic theories of language socialization, which emphasize that language learning is inseparable from participation in social practices and cultural routines. Rather than formal instruction, non-Javanese students gradually internalize communicative norms by overhearing conversations and reproducing frequently used expressions. Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory helps explain why this indirect learning strategy is effective: passive observation reduces communicative anxiety while allowing students to accumulate linguistic knowledge without the immediate risk of social error (Vygotsky, 1978). As uncertainty decreases, students progressively transition from silent observers to active participants in pesantren communication.

The role of Islamic boarding school administrators emerges as another crucial adaptation mechanism. Administrators and senior students function as institutional intermediaries who provide guidance on rules, schedules, and acceptable behavior. Their role extends beyond disciplinary enforcement to include emotional reassurance and practical problem-solving. In adaptation studies, such figures are often described as *social anchors* who stabilize newcomers' experiences during periods of uncertainty (Elmy et al., 2025). For non-Javanese students, administrators serve as accessible authority figures who translate institutional expectations into understandable terms, thereby reducing cognitive overload and fostering a sense of belonging.

The involvement of ustaz further strengthens the adaptation process through pedagogical responsiveness. Interviews indicate that ustaz consciously adjust their communication styles by using Indonesian, simplifying explanations, and showing sensitivity to students' diverse backgrounds. This approach reflects humanistic and learner-centered pedagogy, which prioritizes students' psychological comfort and learning readiness (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). From a sociocultural standpoint, such pedagogical flexibility functions as instructional scaffolding, enabling students to bridge gaps between prior knowledge and new learning demands. The strategic use of Indonesian as a lingua franca also aligns with findings in intercultural education literature, which highlight the role of a shared language in maintaining social cohesion in multicultural learning environments (Putriyani & Farhan, 2025).

When analyzed through Berry's acculturation theory, the adaptation strategies observed in this study predominantly correspond to an *integration* orientation. Non-Javanese students do not withdraw from the pesantren culture, nor do they abandon their original identities; instead, they actively engage with the host culture while

gradually incorporating its linguistic and behavioral norms (Berry, 2017). Peer interaction, mentorship from administrators, and pedagogical support from ustazd collectively create conditions that facilitate integrative acculturation rather than marginalization or separation.

Comparatively, these findings resonate with studies on adaptation among international students in residential universities, where peer networks, mentoring systems, and culturally responsive teaching play decisive roles in successful adjustment. However, the pesantren context introduces distinctive elements, particularly the centrality of religious authority, communal worship, and moral discipline. Unlike secular settings, adaptation in pesantren involves the simultaneous negotiation of cultural, spiritual, and educational dimensions, intensifying the role of social support systems.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the broader literature on student adaptation by highlighting adaptation as a relational ecosystem in Islamic boarding schools. Rather than conceptualizing adaptation as an individual psychological process, the findings emphasize the interaction between social actors and institutional culture. Peer relationships function as linguistic and cultural scaffolds, administrators operate as institutional translators, and ustazd enact pedagogical mediation. This triadic support structure represents a distinctive adaptation model within Islamic education contexts.

Moreover, the findings extend sociocultural and acculturation theories by situating them within a traditional Islamic boarding school environment. They demonstrate that adaptation strategies are not only reactive responses to difficulty but also proactive engagements shaped by institutional values of solidarity (*ukhuwah*), mentorship, and collective learning. This insight offers a nuanced contribution to global discussions on student adaptation, intercultural education, and Islamic education studies by foregrounding the role of faith-based communal structures in managing cultural diversity.

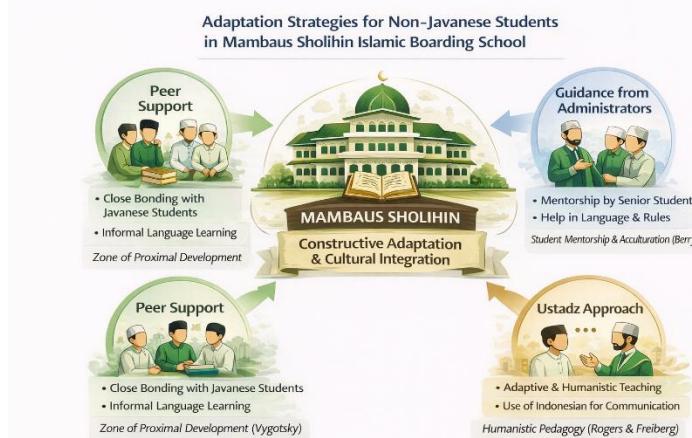


Figure 4. Adaptation Strategies for Non-Javanese Students in Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School

3.4 Observations of Students' Adaptation to Daily Islamic Boarding School Activities

Observational data reveal that the adaptation of non-Javanese students to daily life in Islamic boarding schools is best understood as a gradual, multi-dimensional process shaped by linguistic negotiation, social interaction, academic engagement, and institutional discipline. Rather than occurring instantaneously, adaptation unfolds through repeated participation in routine activities that progressively reduce cultural distance and communicative uncertainty. This finding underscores that adaptation in

pesantren contexts is not merely an individual adjustment but a socially mediated process embedded within daily practices.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language emerges as a primary gateway to adaptation. Observations indicate that non-Javanese students initially experience difficulties in understanding pesantren-specific terminology and oral instructions delivered by administrators and ustaz. These linguistic barriers are most visible in technical and procedural contexts, such as activity coordination and learning instructions. In response, students frequently rely on peers to interpret meanings, clarify instructions, and model appropriate linguistic usage. This pattern reflects Gudykunst's (2004) anxiety/uncertainty management theory, which posits that individuals in intercultural settings reduce communicative anxiety through interpersonal support and increased interaction. As students' exposure to daily communication intensifies, uncertainty diminishes, enabling more confident participation in pesantren life.

Beyond language, social interaction functions as a critical accelerator of adaptation. Observational findings demonstrate that students who actively establish relationships with Javanese peers integrate more quickly into the social rhythm of the pesantren. These students show faster comprehension of unwritten rules, social norms, and daily routines compared to peers who remain socially withdrawn. This evidence aligns with Berry's (2017) acculturation theory, particularly the integration strategy, wherein maintaining interpersonal engagement with members of the host culture facilitates psychological comfort and functional adjustment. Conversely, students who exhibit limited interaction tend to experience prolonged adaptation phases, marked by social isolation and slower internalization of pesantren norms.

The learning environment further illustrates the socio-cultural nature of adaptation. Although non-Javanese students continue to face challenges in comprehending classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning), particularly those written in Arabic with Javanese pegon annotations, observations show active academic engagement. Students frequently ask questions and seek clarification from ustaz, signaling a transition from passive adjustment to active learning. This phenomenon resonates with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, especially the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning occurs through guidance from more knowledgeable others. In this context, ustaz and senior students function as mediators who scaffold students' understanding of both linguistic structures and textual traditions.

Importantly, adaptation in pesantren is inseparable from disciplinary habituation. Observational data indicate that while some non-Javanese students quickly adjust to the dense schedule of worship, study, and routine duties, others require sustained supervision. This variation highlights that discipline operates not merely as institutional control but as a mechanism of behavioral internalization. Through repeated exposure and practice, students gradually align their behavior with pesantren expectations. This supports Kim's (2000) behavioral adaptation framework, which emphasizes that adaptation develops through continuous interaction and habituation rather than cognitive acceptance alone.

Comparatively, these findings parallel studies conducted in other Islamic educational settings. Research on pesantren modernization in Central Java and multicultural madrasahs in Malaysia similarly emphasizes the role of peer mediation and routine participation in facilitating student adjustment (Hafidhuddin et al., 2023; Putriyani & Farhan, 2025). However, this study extends prior literature by highlighting the simultaneous adaptation demands faced by non-Javanese students: linguistic

adaptation to Javanese pesantren culture, academic adaptation to *kitab kuning* pedagogy, and structural adaptation to a highly regulated daily system. Unlike international student adaptation in universities, where institutional support structures are often formalized, pesantren adaptation relies heavily on informal social networks and relational learning.

Thematically, observational findings can be synthesized into three interrelated dimensions: linguistic mediation, social scaffolding, and institutional habituation. Linguistic mediation occurs through peer-assisted communication and exposure to pesantren terminology. Social scaffolding is evident in peer support systems that accelerate cultural understanding and emotional adjustment. Institutional habituation manifests through gradual alignment with pesantren discipline and routines. These dimensions interact dynamically, forming an integrative adaptation process rather than isolated stages.



Figure 5. Stages of Non-Javanese Students' Adaptation to Daily Activities in an Islamic Boarding School

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on Islamic education and intercultural adaptation by demonstrating that pesantren function as social learning ecosystems, where adaptation is produced through continuous interaction rather than formal orientation alone. By operationalizing Berry's acculturation theory, Vygotsky's ZPD, and Gudykunst's uncertainty management framework within a pesantren context, this research expands the application of these theories beyond secular or university-based settings. It also challenges the assumption that traditional religious institutions are resistant to multicultural integration, showing instead that pesantren possess adaptive social mechanisms capable of managing cultural diversity constructively.

Practically, these findings suggest that Islamic boarding schools can enhance adaptation outcomes by institutionalizing peer mentoring systems, providing early exposure to pesantren language and terminology, and supporting *ustadz* in adopting linguistically inclusive teaching strategies. Such measures can reduce early-stage anxiety and accelerate integration without compromising pesantren traditions.

In sum, observational evidence confirms that non-Javanese students' adaptation to daily Islamic boarding school life is a progressive, socially constructed process shaped by language, interaction, learning, and discipline. This study offers both theoretical enrichment and practical insight, positioning pesantren as dynamic educational spaces that actively negotiate cultural diversity rather than merely accommodate it.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the adaptation process of nonJavanese students at the Mambaus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School occurs gradually and is influenced by social interactions, language skills, the rhythm of the school's activities, and peer support. Key findings reveal that the most prominent initial obstacles arise in communication, understanding rules, and adjusting to the learning patterns of the yellow books typical of Javanese Islamic boarding schools. Nevertheless, the students' active involvement in daily activities, peer support, and mentoring from ustadz (Islamic teachers) and administrators play a significant role in accelerating the adjustment process. Scientifically, this study contributes to strengthening the study of socio-cultural adaptation in the context of Islamic boarding school education by emphasizing that the adaptation of new students is not instantaneous, but rather a process of acculturation influenced by the social dynamics and structure of Islamic boarding school life. Practically, these findings provide implications for Islamic boarding school administrators to design initial mentoring strategies that are more sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of students from outside the region.

However, this study has limitations, particularly the focus on a single Islamic boarding school and the relatively limited number of informants. Therefore, generalizations of the findings require caution. Furthermore, this study has not yet thoroughly examined the role of Islamic boarding school institutional policies in facilitating the adaptation of new students. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the scope of research locations, involve more Islamic boarding schools with diverse cultural characteristics, and combine qualitative and quantitative approaches. Future research can also focus on developing an adaptation model for students from outside the region based on systematic mentoring and inclusive Islamic boarding school policies, so that the adaptation process can be more effective and sustainable.

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