

Pesantren and Mother Tongue: Madurese Language Maintenance Among Santri at Al-Hikam Bangkalan

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ABSTRACT

The Madurese language is slowly shifting because many young people prefer Indonesian, Arabic, or English in school and daily life. However, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) still play an important role in keeping the Madurese language alive. This study examines how *santri* (students) at *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, Bangkalan maintain the Madurese language by looking at their opinions, challenges, and solutions. The research used a qualitative method with questionnaires (75 students) and interviews with six *santri* and two *ustadzah* (female religious teachers). The analysis was supported by theories of language attitude (Holmes, 2013), domains of use and language maintenance (Fishman, 1991; 1997), diglossia (Berger, 1990), and social networks (Milroy, 1992). Results show that *santri* are proud to use Madurese and see it as part of their identity. They use it in family, friendship, and religious settings, but face problems with polite speech levels like *enggghi bhunten* (high speech level means yes-no), peer pressure, and the lower prestige of Madurese compared to other languages. To solve this, pesantren rules, peer support, and personal efforts help them keep using Madurese. The study shows that pesantren are not only for religion and education but also help protect local language and culture.

Keywords: Madurese language, language maintenance, pesantren, Fishman domains, *santri* perspectives.

BACKGROUND

Madurese is a local language that is slowly shifting in its use as it comes into contact with other languages (Herlianto, 2019). In many areas of Madura and East Java, young people often prefer to use Indonesian language at school, in the media, and in everyday conversations. According to Raditiyo Mirza Afiansyah (2023), Madurese has three main speech levels, namely *enjâ'-iyâ* (low), *enggghi-enten* (middle), and *enggghi-bhunten* (high). These levels mark different degrees of politeness and social respect. In the highest level, *enggghi* means “yes” and *bhunten* means “no,” which are considered refined forms compared to casual expressions used in the lower levels. Older generations still use Madurese actively at home and during traditional events, but in formal situations, the language is used less and less. Indonesian language as the national language, along with Arabic in religious activities and English in modern education, limits the use of Madurese. This shows that Madurese is experiencing a language shift, where its role as the main language in daily life is slowly being replaced. Language shift usually happens in bilingual or multilingual communities due to language contact, and although not every shift leads to language extinction, it is important to monitor language use in a region to prevent languages from disappearing (A'ini, 2023). While language shift often occurs in bilingual or multilingual communities, language maintenance becomes crucial to preserve endangered languages and sustain cultural identity.

Language maintenance means that a community keeps using and holding on to their original language, which is part of their identity and sets them apart from others, and they see it as a symbol of their nation (Iswanto et al., 2022). Language maintenance mostly happens when a language is spoken by a smaller group within a region, known as a minority language, which means it is used by fewer people compared to the majority population (Zuri et al., 2018). Fishman, as cited in Holmes (2008:21), identifies five key areas where language use strongly influences language maintenance: (1) the family domain, where the language is spoken at home, (2) the friendship or neighborhood domain, involving social interactions with friends and neighbors, (3) the religion domain, where the language is used in religious activities (4) the education domain, which includes the use of language in schools (5) and the employment or workplace domain, where language is used in professional settings. These domains together shape how a language is preserved or shifts within a community. One of the social and educational institutions that can play a significant role in language maintenance is the *pesantren*, especially because of its unique position in Indonesian society.

As an educational institution with its own unique characteristics, *pesantren* have a scholarly tradition that differs from the academic traditions of other institutions (Abdurrahman, 2018). *Pesantren* are Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia where students called *santri* live together under the guidance of religious teachers called *Kyai*. In addition to the *Kyai*, teaching and mentoring are also carried out by *ustadz* (male Islamic teachers) and *ustadzah* (female Islamic teachers), who usually assist in both religious subjects and character building. These schools are important places that help shape students' values, culture, and how they use language. In *pesantren*, *santri* usually speak their local language with friends in daily life, learn Arabic for religious studies, and use Bahasa Indonesia for formal classes (Bin-Tahir et al., 2017). This makes *pesantren* special places that not only teach Islam but also help keep local languages and cultures alive. *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, Bangkalan in Madura is a good

example of this, where most students are Madurese and continue to use their native language in everyday conversations while also learning Arabic and Indonesian, helping to pass down the Madurese language to younger people.

Previous studies have highlighted various perspectives on local language maintenance in Indonesia. (Mulyani et al., 2024) examined teachers' perspectives on maintaining Acehnese in schools and found that positive attitudes are crucial but face challenges from globalization and shifting youth preferences. (A'ini, 2023) studied Madurese language in *Pesantren* Syekh Abdul Qadir Jailani, Situbondo, and identified strategies such as competitions, daily use, and maintaining *pesantren* traditions. Similarly, (Herlianto, 2019) emphasized the role of *pesantren* and *orèng kènèk* (lower social class) as strong agents in Madurese language maintenance through daily communication and prestige. Research on Javanese language has also shown the role of *pesantren* and cultural practices: (Hakim & Novianty, 2020) explored how Kitab Kuning supports Javanese maintenance in *Pesantren Al-Falah* Brebes. While (Saputri & Nurhayati, 2019) demonstrated how Ahmad Tohari's novel *Bekisar Merah* preserves Javanese through literary strategies.

Although many studies have examined strategies, the role of institutions, or literary depictions, few have centered on the perspectives of *santri* themselves, who are the younger generation directly navigating the balance between preserving local languages and adapting to national or global languages. Therefore, this study offers novelty by investigating Madurese language maintenance specifically among *santri* at *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, Bangkalan, highlighting their opinions, the challenges they face, and potential solutions from their perspective.

Review of literature

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics studies the relationship between language and society, focusing on how language reflects social identity, culture, and group dynamics (Chaer, A., & Agustina, 2004). It examines language variation, language attitudes, and language behavior within speech communities (Sukma, 2017). Research on *pesantren*, specifically in Madura, shows that *pesantren* act as vital sociolinguistic spaces where local language Madurese is actively maintained and performed, especially by *santri* and certain social classes (Effendy et al., 2022). Moreover, *pesantren* balance multilingualism by using Madurese for daily interaction, Arabic for religious purposes, and Bahasa Indonesia for formal education, which shapes *santri*'s multifaceted linguistic identities (Heriyanto Nurcahyo et al., 2023).

Language attitude reflects the mental and behavioral readiness of speakers, including language loyalty, pride, and norm consciousness, which are crucial factors in maintaining local languages such as Madurese in *pesantren* communities (A'ini, 2023). Studies confirm that positive attitudes among *santri* towards Madurese promote its continued use in the face of dominant languages (Effendy et al., 2022). Furthermore, *pesantren* reinforce group solidarity and cultural identity through language-based customs, rituals, and social norms, strengthening the sociolinguistic foundation for sustaining Madurese in younger generations (Juliriyanti et al., 2025). This sociolinguistic framework aids in analyzing how *santri* negotiate their place within local, national, and religious linguistic domains.

Language Maintenance

Language maintenance is defined as the community's efforts to preserve their native language despite external pressures toward language shift (Holmes, 2008). According to Holmes, language maintenance involves sociocultural, economic, demographic, political, and attitudinal factors that influence whether a community continues to use its language or shifts to another (Holmes, 2008). In *pesantren*, language maintenance is practiced through integrating Madurese into religious education, daily communication, and formal teaching processes, which serve both linguistic and cultural preservation functions (Effendy et al., 2022). The active use of Madurese in *pesantren* counters the loss of the language due to national language dominance and globalization (Juliriyanti et al., 2025).

Moreover, positive language attitudes are instrumental for language maintenance, as communities that value their native tongue are more likely to transmit and use it consistently (Sukma, 2017). Institutional support, such as local language curricula and community engagement in *pesantren*, boosts language vitality among *santri*, making *pesantren* key pillars in sustaining endangered languages (Effendy et al., 2022). Thus, language maintenance in *pesantren* is a complex phenomenon involving educational practice, community participation, and attitudinal reinforcement, essential for the survival of Madurese.

In analyzing the data, this study draws upon several sociolinguistic theories that provide the basis for categorizing the findings. The concept of language attitudes proposed by Holmes (2008) is used to explain elements such as pride, identity, and norm consciousness. Fishman (1997) domain of language use helps to account for language choice among *santri* in different contexts. Theories of diglossia (Berger, 1990) and prestige (Holmes, 2008) are applied to explain the challenges faced by the students, while Fishman's theory of Reversing Language (Fishman, 1991) and social network theory (Milroy & Milroy, 1992) guide the discussion of institutional support, peer encouragement, and personal efforts as solutions. These theoretical perspectives informed the categorization of data into sub-themes under opinions, challenges, and solutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing descriptive analysis to examine language maintenance practices. Qualitative descriptive research involves an inductive exploration of the data to identify recurring themes, patterns, or concepts and then describing and interpreting those categories (Nassaji, 2015). Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior, answering the *hows* and *whys* rather than *how many* or *how much* (Tenny et al., 2022).

Respondents

The study involved 75 *santri* from *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, Bangkalan as primary participants. The majority were native Madurese speakers, with 8 participants originating from regions outside Madura. To provide additional perspectives and enrich the dataset, several *ustadzah* were also recruited as interview participants, following recommendations for comprehensive data collection in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2018).

Instruments

Data collection utilized two main instruments: a Likert-scale questionnaire and semi-structured interview protocols. The Likert scale questionnaire used a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree) to measure *santri*'s opinions, attitudes, and behaviors through a series of statements followed by response options that allow respondents to indicate how they feel about each statement (Abidin Dr. et al., 2012). Semi-structured interviews consisted of a dialogue between researcher and participant, guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented by follow-up questions, probes and comments, allowing researchers to collect open-ended data and explore participant thoughts, feelings and beliefs (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Procedures

The questionnaire was administered directly to *santri* within the pesantren environment. Following data collection, purposive sampling was used to select interview participants from both *santri* and *ustadzah* groups. The interview sessions were conducted as contextually and socially situated speech events, taking into consideration the spatial and temporal factors that shape language attitude research (Karatsareas, 2012).

Data analysis

A qualitative descriptive analytical approach was applied to examine the collected data. Qualitative description emphasizes direct, rich descriptions of experiences and events without extensive theorization or abstraction (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Questionnaire responses were systematically categorized to identify recurring patterns in attitudes and practices, while interview data underwent thematic coding analysis to extract primary themes concerning language maintenance challenges, and proposed solutions. This analytical framework enabled a comprehensive interpretation of findings within the pesantren's sociocultural context.

DISCUSSION

The following section presents the data that support the findings of this study, from both the questionnaire and interviews. Several categories were developed based on the statements in the questionnaire. They are shown in table 1.

Table 1. *Santri's* opinions toward Madurese language in pesantren

No	Statement	Responses (%)			
		SA	A	D	SD
1.	<i>Saya merasa bangga menggunakan bahasa Madura di lingkungan pesantren</i> (I feel proud to use Madurese language in the <i>pesantren</i> .)	63.5	34.7	0	0
2.	<i>Bahasa Madura penting untuk dipertahankan karena bagian dari identitas santri</i> (Madurese language is important to maintain because it is part of <i>santri</i> identity.)	52.1	43.8	1.4	2.7
3.	<i>Saya lebih mudah memahami Pelajaran atau diskusi jika menggunakan bahasa Madura</i> (I	20.0	53.3	26.7	0

	understand lessons or discussions more easily when using Madurese.)				
4.	<i>Bahasa Indonesia/Arab/Inggris lebih bergengsi daripada bahasa Madura di pesantren</i> (Indonesian/Arabic/English is considered more prestigious than Madurese in the <i>pesantren</i> .)	13.5	41.9	41.9	2.7
5.	<i>Saya lebih sering berbicara bahasa Indonesia dibanding bahasa Madura dalam percakapan sehari-hari</i> (I speak Indonesian more often than Madurese in the <i>pesantren</i> .)	5.3	30.7	57.3	6.7
6.	<i>Teman-teman saya sering menggunakan bahasa Madura dalam percakapan sehari-hari</i> (My friends often use Madurese in daily conversations.)	62.7	36.0	1.3	0
7.	<i>Saya merasa malu jika berbicara bahasa Madura didepan teman dari luar Madura</i> (I feel shy to speak Madurese in front of friends from outside Madura.)	4.0	14.7	49.3	32.0
8.	<i>Saya masih menggunakan bahasa Madura ketika berbicara dengan keluarga di rumah</i> (I still use Madurese when speaking with my family at home.)	36.0	52.0	10.7	1.3
9.	<i>Pesantren perlu mengadakan kegiatan khusus untuk melestarikan bahasa Madura (misalnya hari bahasa daerah, lomba pidato/puisi)</i> (Pesantren should hold special activities to preserve Madurese (for example, local language day, speech/poetry contest).)	42.7	49.3	8.0	0
10.	<i>Menurut saya, bahasa Madura masih akan terus digunakan oleh generasi santri berikutnya</i> (I think Madurese will still be used by the next generation of <i>santri</i> .)	60.0	38.7	0	1.3

Table 1 shows the *santri*'s opinions toward Madurese language maintenance in pesantren. The responses are presented as percentages for statements regarding pride in using Madurese, language choice in daily communication, peers' use of Madurese, feelings of shame when speaking Madurese in front of outsiders, the importance of Madurese as part of *santri* identity, understanding lessons through Madurese, the prestige of other languages compared to Madurese, the need for pesantren programs to preserve Madurese, the use of Madurese with family, and students' views on the future of Madurese. These answers are further elaborated in the next subsections with additional data from interview results.

A. *Santri*'s Opinions on Mother Tongue Language Maintenance

Pride in using the mother tongue

The questionnaire results reveal that almost all *santri* expressed pride in using Madurese in the *pesantren* setting, with 63.5% strongly agreeing and 34.7% agreeing (Table 1). This indicates that pride in the mother tongue is widely shared among the

students, suggesting that Madurese still holds a significant place in their daily lives and identity construction. One participant (P1) remarked,

- (1) “...*Saya bangga menggunakan bahasa Madura karena sudah kebiasaan sehari-hari dan lebih mudah dipahami*” (“I am proud of using Madurese because it has become a daily habit and it is easier to understand”).

Other participants resonated this sentiment by explaining that Madurese feels more natural and comfortable to use, while some emphasized that speaking their mother tongue is part of what makes them different from outsiders. These perspectives demonstrate that pride is grounded not only in the practicality of communication but also in a sense of cultural distinctiveness. Teacher participants reinforced this view by underlining the role of polite speech levels such as *enggghi bhunten*. As one teacher (P7) explained,

- (2) “...*Santri itu identiknya dengan bahasa enggghi bhunten. Orang tua mondokkan anaknya biar bisa lebih sopan dalam sikap dan bahasa*” (“*Santri* are identified with the *enggghi bhunten* form of Madurese. Parents send their children to pesantren so that they can become more polite in both behavior and language”).

Other teachers agreed that using Madurese, especially the refined form, is considered a marker of identity and respectability, shaping the expectations parents have when sending their children to *pesantren*. These findings align with Holmes (2008), who argues that pride is a key attitudinal factor in language maintenance, as well as with Effendy et al. (2022), who note the importance of *pesantren* in sustaining cultural identity through local languages. In the case of *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, pride in speaking Madurese represents not only an individual attitude but also a communal value supported by *pesantren* traditions and family expectations, which together strengthen the prospects of language maintenance among the younger generation.

Language choice in pesantren

The questionnaire results show that Madurese is still the main language used in *pesantren*. Almost all *santri* (98.7%) agreed that their friends often use Madurese in daily conversations. On the other hand, only 36% admitted that they personally speak Indonesian more often than Madurese, while most (57.3%) disagreed with this statement. This means that Indonesian is used sometimes, but Madurese is still the preferred language in everyday life at the *pesantren*. Interview data also confirm this. One participant (P1) explained,

- (3) “...*Kalau dengan teman biasanya pakai bahasa Madura, tapi kalau bicara dengan ustadz atau kyai harus pakai bahasa enggghi bhunten*” (“With friends I usually use Madurese, but when speaking with *ustadz* or *kyai*, I must use the *enggghi bhunten* form”).

Other participants expressed similar views, adding that Indonesian is sometimes used in formal situations or when talking with friends from outside Madura. However, they agreed that Madurese, especially the polite form is the usual choice when

communicating inside the *pesantren*. Teachers also supported this point. One teacher (P7) said,

- (4) “...*Santri itu diwajibkan memakai bahasa engghi bhunten untuk percakapan sehari-hari, apalagi kalau bicara dengan kyai atau ustadz*” (“*Santri* are required to use *engghi bhunten* in daily conversation, especially when speaking with the *kyai* or *ustadz*”).

Another teacher (P8) confirmed that while some students still mix Indonesian and Madurese, teachers keep reminding them to use the proper speech level as part of *pesantren* discipline. These findings show that language choice in the *pesantren* depends on context and social hierarchy. This supports Bin-Tahir et al. (2017), who explain that *pesantren* are multilingual places: local languages are used for daily interaction, Arabic for religious study, and Indonesian for formal education. At *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, Madurese is still strong in informal settings, while *engghi bhunten* is promoted in respectful interactions, helping to maintain the language as both a communication tool and a cultural identity.

The importance of language maintenance

The questionnaire results indicate that most *santri* recognize the importance of maintaining the Madurese language. More than 95% agreed or strongly agreed that Madurese is important to preserve because it is part of their identity (Table 1). This suggests that *santri* are aware of the cultural value of their mother tongue, even while living in a multilingual environment. One participant (P2) explained,

- (5) “...*Bahasa Madura itu penting karena menjadi identitas kita sebagai orang Madura*” (“Madurese is important because it represents our identity as Madurese people”).

Other participants also emphasized that maintaining the language is necessary to ensure that the next generation can still use it, especially the polite forms. They argued that Madurese should not be lost because it carries local wisdom and cultural respect. Teachers shared the same view. One teacher (P7) noted,

- (6) “...*Orang tua mondokkan anaknya biar bisa lebih sopan dalam sikap dan bahasa*” (“Parents send their children to *pesantren* so that they can be more polite in both manners and language”).

Another teacher (P8) added that teaching Madurese at the *pesantren* is not only about communication, but also about building character through respectful language. These findings confirm that both *santri* and teachers see language maintenance as part of preserving cultural identity and values. This is consistent with Holmes (2008), who explains that positive attitudes toward a language are essential for its survival, and with Iswanto et al. (2022), who show that local language maintenance strengthens community identity. In the context of *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, the importance of maintaining Madurese goes beyond practical communication; it is also about transmitting politeness, respect, and cultural pride to the younger generation.

Attitudes toward outsiders

The questionnaire results show more variation in *santri*'s attitudes when using Madurese in front of outsiders. Only 18.7% of respondents admitted feeling shy (strongly agree or agree), while the majority (81.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 1). This indicates that most *santri* are confident in using their mother tongue even in front of people who are not from Madura, although a small group still feels some hesitation. Interview findings reflect this diversity. One participant (P3) stated,

- (7) “...*Saya tetap pakai bahasa Madura walaupun ada orang luar, karena itu bahasa saya sendiri*” (“I still use Madurese even when there are outsiders, because it is my own language”).

Other participants expressed similar views, saying that they did not feel embarrassed and were even willing to explain or teach Madurese words to outsiders. However, one participant (P5) admitted sometimes feeling uncomfortable when others did not understand what was being said, which could make them switch to Indonesian. Teachers also discussed this issue. One teacher (P8) explained that some students from outside Madura initially struggled, but were trained to use at least the polite form *enggih bhunten*. This shows that outsiders are not excluded from Madurese use in *pesantren*, but instead encouraged to participate in it.

These findings suggest that while there are minor differences in attitudes, the overall tendency is positive and supportive of Madurese use, even in mixed-language settings. This aligns with A'ini (2023), who found that positive attitudes among *santri* are crucial for language maintenance in *pesantren*. It also reflects Holmes' (2008) idea that language pride and loyalty reduce the sense of shame when speaking a minority language. In *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, most *santri* show confidence in using Madurese with outsiders, which helps strengthen the role of the language beyond their immediate community.

B. Challenges in Maintaining Mother Tongue Language in Pesantren Al-Hikam

Difficulties in using Madurese

The questionnaire results suggest that while most *santri* are comfortable using Madurese, difficulties arise particularly with the polite forms. From the interviews, it became clear that the main challenge was not in speaking Madurese in general, but in mastering *enggih bhunten*, the refined speech level expected in *pesantren* interactions. One participant (P4) explained,

- (8) “...*Saya kadang kesulitan kalau harus pakai bahasa enggih bhunten, takut salah ucap*” (“I sometimes find it difficult to use *enggih bhunten*, because I am afraid of making mistakes”).

Other participants (P1, P2, and P6) shared similar experiences, noting that they were more confident using casual Madurese but felt less sure when switching to the polite level. Teachers confirmed this challenge. One teacher (P7) said,

- (9) “...*Anak-anak di sini sudah terbiasa dari rumah pakai bahasa Indonesia, jadi ketika harus diarahkan ke bahasa Madura, terutama enggih bhunten,*

banyak tegurannya” (“The students here are already used to speaking Indonesian at home, so when they are directed to use Madurese, especially *engghi bhunten*, it requires a lot of reminders”).

Another teacher (P8) added that while students generally understood casual Madurese, they often mixed it with Indonesian when they did not know the polite terms. These findings highlight that the main difficulty in maintaining Madurese is not the ability to speak the language itself, but the challenge of sustaining its polite and context appropriate forms. This reflects Heriyanto Nurcahyo et al. (2023), who observed that young Madurese often struggle with the refined levels of the language. It also aligns with Fishman’s framework (in Holmes, 2008), which emphasizes that successful language maintenance depends not only on continued use but also on maintaining the appropriate domains and registers of the language.

Negative perceptions and pressure

Although many *santri* show pride in speaking Madurese, some also reported negative experiences, such as being teased or corrected when making mistakes. This indicates that social pressure can sometimes discourage the use of the language, especially among younger speakers. One participant (P1) shared,

- (10) “...*Pernah diejek teman kalau salah ngomong bahasa Madura, jadi kadang ragu untuk bicara*” (“I was once teased by friends for making mistakes in Madurese, so sometimes I hesitate to speak”).

Other participants (P2 and P5) also mentioned similar experiences, explaining that ridicule from peers could make them feel less confident, even though they continued to use the language. Teachers observed the same issue. One teacher (P8) explained,

- (11) “...*Ada yang tidak tahu bahasa Madura halusnya, akhirnya campur bahasa Indonesia. Mereka tidak mau pakai bahasa kasar karena dianggap tidak sopan*” (“Some students do not know the polite Madurese words, so they mix with Indonesian. They also avoid using the rough forms because they are considered impolite”).

This shows that students are under pressure not only from peers but also from social norms, which sometimes leads to code switching instead of full use of Madurese. These findings reveal that negative perceptions, such as teasing, and the fear of being judged affect how freely *santri* use Madurese, particularly in its refined form. This resonates with Mulyani et al. (2024), who found that similar social pressures in Aceh created obstacles for maintaining the local language among young people. It also aligns with Holmes (2008), who notes that attitudes of ridicule or shame can undermine efforts to preserve minority languages. In the context of *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, such challenges show that language maintenance is not only a matter of ability but also of social acceptance and confidence.

Prestige gap among languages

The questionnaire results show mixed views about the prestige of languages in the *pesantren*. Around 55% of *santri* agreed that Indonesian, Arabic, or English are

considered more prestigious than Madurese, while 44.6% disagreed (Table 1). This suggests that although many *santri* value their mother tongue, some still see other languages as having higher social status. One participant (P6) admitted,

- (12) “...*Bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa asing dianggap lebih tinggi, karena dipakai di sekolah dan di luar pesantren*” (“Indonesian and foreign languages are seen as higher in status because they are used in schools and outside the *pesantren*”).

Other participants (P1–P4) did not share this view and stated that all languages are equal since each has its own function. Teachers also noticed this prestige difference. One teacher (P7) explained,

- (13) “...*Karena di kota banyak pakai bahasa Indonesia, akhirnya bahasa Madura kelihatan kurang bergengsi*” (“Because in the city people mostly use Indonesian, Madurese ends up looking less prestigious”).

Another teacher (P8) agreed, but emphasized that *engghi bhunten* still holds special value in the *pesantren* as “the heart of Bangkalan culture,” especially in interactions that require respect. These findings suggest that Madurese is sometimes overshadowed by Indonesian, Arabic, and English, which are associated with education, religion, and global communication. This reflects Herlianto (2019), who observed that social class and language domains influence how Madurese is valued compared to other languages. It also echoes Fishman’s theory (in Holmes, 2008), which explains that minority languages are more likely to be maintained in intimate and religious domains, while dominant languages hold prestige in public and formal domains. In *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, the prestige gap remains a challenge, but the *pesantren*’s emphasis on *engghi bhunten* helps strengthen Madurese in its cultural and religious role.

C. Solusion for Mother Tongue Language Maintenance in *Pesantren Al-Hikam*

Institutional support for maintenance

The findings show that *pesantren* play an important role in supporting the maintenance of Madurese. Institutional rules and teacher supervision ensure that *santri* continue to practice their mother tongue, especially the polite form *engghi bhunten*. One teacher (P7) explained,

- (14) “...*Santri itu diwajibkan memakai bahasa engghi bhunten untuk percakapan sehari-hari*” (“*Santri* are required to use *engghi bhunten* in daily conversations”).

Another teacher (P8) added that the use of Madurese is part of *pesantren* discipline:

- (15) “...*Kalau ada santri yang salah atau campur dengan bahasa Indonesia, biasanya langsung ditegur*” (“If students make mistakes or mix with Indonesian, they are usually corrected immediately”).

Santri also recognized this institutional role. One participant (P2) stated,

- (16) “...Kalau di *pesantren*, bahasa Madura itu harus dipakai, apalagi dengan *ustadz* atau *kyai*” (“In the *pesantren*, Madurese must be used, especially when speaking with *ustadz* or *kyai*”).

Other participants (P1, P3, and P6) confirmed that the *pesantren* environment pushes them to use Madurese more consistently than at home or outside. These results show that the *pesantren* is not just a place of religious learning but also a space where local culture and language are actively preserved. This supports Effendy et al. (2022), who argue that *pesantren* act as cultural guardians by institutionalizing the use of local languages. In *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, institutional support through rules, corrections, and teacher modeling helps maintain Madurese as both a cultural marker and a tool of discipline.

Student participation in preservation

Besides institutional rules, the *santri* themselves also take part in preserving Madurese. Many of them mentioned that they intentionally use Madurese with friends to keep the habit alive. One participant (P5) shared,

- (17) “...Kalau dengan teman, saya lebih memilih pakai bahasa Madura supaya tidak hilang kebiasaan” (“With my friends, I prefer to use Madurese so the habit will not disappear”).

Other participants (P1, P3, and P6) agreed, adding that speaking Madurese among peers helps them feel closer and strengthens group identity inside the *pesantren*. Students also encourage each other to practice the polite form. For example, one *santri* (P2) explained that they remind their friends if someone accidentally uses casual Madurese when speaking to *ustadzah* or *kyai*. This peer correction shows that students are not only users but also agents of language preservation.

These findings suggest that language maintenance is strengthened when students actively participate, not only by following *pesantren* rules but also by motivating each other. This reflects Holmes (2008), who states that strong peer support is crucial for the survival of minority languages. In the case of *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, *santri* participation ensures that Madurese is more than a rule, it becomes part of their social bond and daily practice.

Personal efforts in language maintenance

In addition to institutional support and peer encouragement, *santri* also make personal efforts to maintain Madurese. Some admitted that they consciously choose to speak Madurese at home or outside *pesantren*, even when Indonesian might be easier to use. One participant (P6) explained,

- (18) “...Saya tetap pakai bahasa Madura di rumah supaya adik-adik juga terbiasa” (“I keep using Madurese at home so that my younger siblings will also get used to it”).

Other participants (P1, P4, and P5) expressed similar ideas, saying that they try to mix less Indonesian in their speech and prefer Madurese to show pride in their identity. Teachers also highlighted these personal efforts. One teacher (P8) remarked,

- (19) “...Kalau ada santri yang berusaha membiasakan bahasa Madura, itu biasanya berlanjut sampai di rumah dan masyarakat” (“If students try to get used to using Madurese, it usually continues at home and in the community”).

This shows that the personal commitment of each student plays a role in strengthening language use beyond the *pesantren* setting. These findings underline that language maintenance does not depend only on rules and group influence, but also on individual choices. As Holmes (2008) notes, positive attitudes at the personal level are key for keeping minority languages alive. In *Pesantren Al-Hikam*, personal efforts from choosing Madurese in daily life to teaching siblings help ensure that the language remains part of both family and community interaction.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Madurese language is still strong in *Pesantren Al-Hikam*. Santri feel proud of their language, use it every day, and see it as part of their identity. The findings also confirm Fishman’s five domains of language maintenance: Madurese is spoken in the family, in friendship (daily talk with friends), in religion (with *kyai* and *ustadz* using *enggghi bhunten*), and in education (through *pesantren* rules and teacher correction). The employment domain did not appear directly since the participants are still students, but the high value given to Indonesian, Arabic, and English shows its indirect influence. This study also adds new points. First, the *pesantren* is not only a place for religion and education, but also a cultural space that supports local language. Second, language maintenance here is not just about speaking Madurese, but also about keeping the polite form *enggghi bhunten*, which carries respect and identity.

These findings imply that *pesantren* and schools can play a key role in protecting local languages, while families should continue using Madurese at home so that children grow up with the habit of speaking it. Policy makers also need to give more support to local languages, not only in formal education but also in cultural and religious institutions. Finally, future research can compare different *pesantren* or regions to give a broader picture of how mother tongue languages are maintained in Indonesia.

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