


AN ETHNOGRAPHIC AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SCIENCE EDUCATION IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN THREE JAVANESE REGENCIES: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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According to the TIMSS survey in 2011, Indonesia is one of the countries with the lowest level of scientific literacy in the world. Even though Indonesia’s economic growth continues to be robust (between 5-7% per year) and reading skills for both boys and girls are nearly 100%, in mathematics and science, Indonesia ranks near the bottom. Among the poorest performers are students in traditional, and underresourced, Islamic boarding schools or pesantren.

Islamic education in Indonesia has a long and complex relationship to science. While some of the earliest scientific discoveries were made by Muslims, many Indonesian Muslims adhere to a variety of Islam that does not regard scientific learning as obligatory. In the last 15 years, however, in an effort to better serve their students, increasing numbers of Islamic schools in Indonesia have adopted some or all of the national curriculum, a move that requires the teaching of science to all students.

This paper reports on preliminary results of a 3 year, National Academy of Science-funded experimental study of an innovative, Islamic themed curriculum unit implemented in 18 Islamic schools in three regions in Java (Yogyakarta, Malang and Lamongan). Ethnographic video, interview and achievement data were compared with Islamic schools receiving the “standard fare” science curriculum units. The results provide not only valuable quantitative information, but also an interesting and rare glimpse of student experience in a world that remains poorly understood. By examining transcriptions of video and audio data of actual student interactions in classrooms, we compare these with recordings of more traditional modes of Islamic pedagogy and evaluate their implications for an understanding of Indonesian Islamic education.