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THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF LANGUAGE AND ISLAMIC GLOBALITY: RECONSTRUCTING THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN *PESANTREN* TRADITION

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Abstract

This study examines how *pesantren* scholars in Indonesia interpret the role of English in Islamic education, da'wah, and engagement with global knowledge. Previous studies have largely focused on English language learning, pedagogical integration, and learners' experiences, while less attention has been given to how religious authorities construct the epistemic legitimacy and limits of English in relation to Arabic and Islamic knowledge. Using a qualitative interpretive approach, this study draws on semi-structured interviews with five scholars from selected *pesantren* in Java and Bali. Data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis, focusing on the meanings, justifications, and boundaries attached to English use. The findings reveal three main patterns. First, English is granted conditional legitimacy when it serves educational, da'wah, and knowledge-related purposes regarded as compatible with Islamic values. Second, scholars generally differentiate rather than substitute the functions of English and Arabic, with Arabic retaining a privileged position in religious knowledge while English serves broader communicative and global functions. Third, openness to global communication is accompanied by efforts to preserve *pesantren*'s religious and intellectual orientation. The study therefore identifies an epistemological negotiation rather than a comprehensive transformation of *pesantren* epistemology. It contributes to research on language and Islamic education by highlighting the role of religious authority in negotiating the meaning and boundaries of a global language within *pesantren* contexts.

INTRODUCTION

In the scholarly tradition, language does not merely serve as a means of conveying ideas. Language also shapes the way in which humans categorise their thoughts, acts as a mediator in the production of knowledge, and determines who has access to discourses deemed legitimate. In Islamic epistemology, the Arabic language occupies a special position as it is both the language of the Qur'an and the

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primary medium for the transmission of various Islamic scholarly disciplines. Nevertheless, the intellectual history of Islam has not unfolded in a monolingual manner. Studies on the conception of language in pre-modern Islam reveal the existence of multilingual practices that allowed other languages to play a role in the translation, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge (Açıkgenç, 2019; Salvaggio, 2024). Consequently, the issue is not merely whether other languages may be used, but rather how these languages are positioned within the structure of knowledge, values and authority within the Muslim community

This question becomes increasingly relevant as English dominates international communication, higher education, science, and the exchange of knowledge. The literature on *English as a Global Language* and *Global Englishes* explains that this status is shaped by history, institutions, economic-political networks, and the need for cross-national communication—not by any inherent linguistic superiority of the English language itself (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins & Panero, 2025). As a lingua franca, English does indeed provide communicative benefits, but these benefits go hand in hand with inequalities in access and prestige among languages (Blommaert, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2013). Therefore, the presence of English in Islamic education cannot be understood merely as the acquisition of an additional skill. It is also related to access to global knowledge, the distribution of its benefits, and the space available for local and religious languages.

These concerns are reflected in critiques of the dominance of English, which are discussed through the concept of linguistic imperialism. Phillipson (1992) demonstrates that the dominance of a language is maintained through structural and cultural inequalities, while Pennycook (2017) links the spread of English to the history of colonialism and cultural politics. In scientific communication, English can open up international circulation for a work, but at the same time acts as a barrier for researchers who do not use it as their primary language (Tardy, 2004). A cross-university study even found a correlation between a language's linguistic distance from English and scientific publication output (Cao et al., 2024). These findings are not a reason to reject English. On the contrary, they underscore the need for a critical discussion of the tension between global access and the

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sustainability of scholarly language traditions.

However, English does not always function as an unquestioned instrument of global domination. Canagarajah (1999) demonstrates that local users actively negotiate and adapt English language teaching practices to their own needs. On the other hand, Kubota (2016) points out that discourse on linguistic diversity often masks structural inequalities. In other words, the globalisation of language creates opportunities whilst simultaneously giving rise to inequality; the process is not one-directional and does not automatically homogenise the communities it passes through. Language policy studies reinforce this view. The status of a language is not determined solely by official regulations, but also by institutional practices, societal beliefs, and the small, everyday decisions people make (Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2004). It is from this perspective that language choices in *pesantren* can be understood, namely as a reflection of how *pesantren* interpret the aims of education, religious authority, and the types of knowledge considered valuable.

Pesantren in Indonesia serve as a relevant locus for examining these negotiations because tradition and modernity within them do not necessarily cancel each other out. Lukens-Bull (2005; 2001)(2001, 2005) demonstrates that *pesantren* communities can negotiate modernization and globalization while reinterpreting Islamic traditions and identity. Studies on Islamic education in various Muslim societies also highlight its diversity and institutional changes (Hefner & Zaman, 2010). In this context, ulama serve not only as guardians of static tradition but also as interpreters who determine how traditional principles are applied to new issues. Zaman (2010) positions the authority of ulama at the intersection of scholarly heritage and contemporary debates. Therefore, to understand the status of English in *pesantren*, it is necessary to examine the reasons, legitimacy, and boundaries established by ulama regarding its use.

A number of studies have examined English in *pesantren* from various perspectives. Farid and Lamb (2020) link the motivation to learn English to students' aspirations for *da'wah* and their spiritual orientation. Eliawati, Ngadiso, and Putra (2024) discuss the linguistic landscape and language ideology in *pesantren*, while Madkur and As'ad (2024) highlight teachers' negotiations

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between learning objectives and religious-cultural values. Al Fajar (2025) describes the development of Arabic and English language cultures in modern Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, Mustofa and Romadhon (2025) found that some teachers and students prioritize religious knowledge over English proficiency, and some students initially felt that English had the potential to conflict with religious studies. Alfisuma, Pujiati, and Rifa'i (2025) mapped English teaching methods in both traditional and modern *pesantren* that are oriented toward *da'wah* and global engagement. A rapid review of 39 publications by Sofi and Jenks (2026) concluded that the EFL literature in *pesantren* primarily addresses factors of integration, strategies for linking language learning to faith and globalization, and pedagogical challenges. In general, these studies situate the integration of English within the contexts of motivation, pedagogy, the linguistic landscape, identity, and social adaptation.

While important, programs, teachers and students have not been sufficiently addressed in terms of how religious authorities judge epistemic status of English. Specifically, why are religious scholars interpreting English as global language of communication differently from Arabic as the language of revelation and primary medium for Islamic literacy? Positive or negative attitude toward learning does not tell us normative reasons to accept a language (nor legitimate goals), limits preventing it from replacing Arabic. This article fills this gap without assuming that English leads necessarily to Westernization nor that use of English automatically signifies epistemological progress. English may open access to sources of knowledge, cross-cultural communication and da'wah more broadly but these functions are interpreted through values and knowledge hierarchy of *pesantren*. On the other hand, special status of Arabic does not imply rejection of other languages; what needs to be investigated is how informants distinguish function and authority of each language. With that focus the research moves beyond simple opposition between tradition and modernity and examines negotiations that are truly data supported.

Based on this discussion, this study examines the views of *pesantren* scholars in Java and Bali regarding English in *pesantren* education and religious life. This

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study is guided by three questions: (1) how do ulama interpret the position and function of English in Islamic education and *da'wah*; (2) what religious and epistemological principles do they use to accept, limit, or integrate it; and (3) how do these interpretations relate to the status of Arabic, the transmission of Islamic knowledge, and the *pesantren*'s engagement in the global arena. The aim is to analyze the epistemological constructions of *pesantren* ulama regarding the English language, as well as the negotiations between Islamic scholarly traditions, the authority of the Arabic language, the needs of *da'wah*, and global communication. The contribution of this article lies in shifting the focus from pedagogical integration to epistemological legitimation—that is, how religious authorities assign meaning, function, and boundaries to a global language within the *pesantren* context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language, Knowledge, and Islamic Epistemology

In the Islamic tradition, language is closely linked to the ways in which knowledge is produced and transmitted. Arabic does indeed occupy a special position as the language of the Qur'an and the primary medium of the Islamic scholarly tradition. However, this status does not mean that all Islamic knowledge originated and developed in a single language. Indeed, the intellectual history of Islam records a long-standing practice of multilingualism, including the use of non-Arabic languages in the compilation, translation and dissemination of knowledge (Açıkgenç, 2019; Salvaggio, 2024). Therefore, the issue of language in Islamic education cannot be viewed solely as a matter of communicative ability. This issue also concerns how a language is situated within the structure of knowledge, values and religious authority.

The thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Fazlur Rahman offers complementary, though not identical, perspectives. Al-Attas situates knowledge within the framework of the Islamic *worldview* and *adab*, such that the acceptance of specific knowledge or tools must be viewed in light of the accompanying goals and value systems (al-Attas, 2020; Al-Attas, 2023a, 2023b).

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Nasr emphasizes the unity of the intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions within knowledge, so that modernity is not understood in isolation from Islam's transcendental orientation (Nasr, 2006). Fazlur Rahman, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on the Islamic tradition's ability to respond to changing contexts without losing its normative principles (Rahman, 1982). In this study, these differences are translated into three analytical questions: how does English gain legitimacy within the Islamic value system, how is its use situated in relation to knowledge and spirituality, and how is the language negotiated with the demands of the global context.

This framework is relevant to the development of English in *pesantren*. Previous research indicates that English language learning in *pesantren* is linked to *da'wah* orientations and students' global aspirations (Farid & Lamb, 2020), while studies on the linguistic landscape of *pesantren* show that the presence of Arabic and English is also tied to educational identity and ideology (Eliawati et al., 2024). More recent research indicates that the integration of English continues to be negotiated in relation to religious values, *pesantren* culture, and educational goals (Fajar, 2025; Madkur & As'ad, 2024). A review by Sofi and Jenks (2026) further clarifies that studies on English in *pesantren* have primarily focused on EFL integration, the relationship between language learning and faith and globalization, as well as pedagogical challenges. Thus, previous research has provided considerable insight into how English is taught and integrated in *pesantren*, but has not fully explained how religious authorities confer epistemological legitimacy upon the language.

Language, Power, and Global Negotiations

The epistemological dimension of language is also linked to power. Foucault demonstrates that language and discourse are connected to the formation of authority and the legitimization of knowledge, while Arkoun directs attention to the historical and intellectual structures that shape what is accepted as legitimate knowledge within Islamic rationality (Arkoun, 1994, 2002; Foucault, 2012). In this study, these two perspectives are not employed as standalone theories but as tools for analyzing how linguistic hierarchies and legitimacy are negotiated within the *pesantren* context.

A decolonial lens also adds to this framework. English as a global language is

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hard to disentangle from colonial history and inequalities in the production of knowledge but using English does not mean submitting to that hegemony. Local communities can reclaim this global language and turn it into an instrument for expanding their space to be heard and control over their own lives. On this basis, this study sees English as ambivalent space: It opens the door to global communication and world knowledge but at the same time asks who has authority, who is represented and how interlinguistic hierarchies are formed.

In this study, this critical perspective is applied to analyse the different views of the informants on Arabic and English positions. Two interrelated trends are found in the research data: some informants emphasise English as a means to enlarge *da'wah* and access to global knowledge spaces; others say that English must not displace Arabic as the source of religious literacy. The perspectives of Foucault and Arkoun help interpret these differences as issues of legitimacy and the authority of knowledge, while the decolonial perspective is used to examine how English is negotiated as a global language without assuming that its use is synonymous with Westernization. Thus, theory is used to explain the patterns emerging from the data, not to supplant the informants' experiences and views.

Research Analytical Framework

Based on this synthesis, this study employs a two-tiered perspective. First, Islamic epistemology, particularly through the works of al-Attas, Nasr, and Fazlur Rahman, is used to understand the relationship between language, knowledge, religious values, and contextual change. Second, a critical perspective on language and power, through Arkoun, Foucault, and decolonial approaches, is used to analyze how the legitimacy and hierarchy of language are negotiated in *pesantren* life.

These two perspectives are applied to three empirical dimensions: (1) legitimacy, namely the religious and epistemic reasons used by ulama to accept or restrict the use of English; (2) language relations, namely how English is positioned in relation to Arabic and the *pesantren*'s scholarly tradition; and (3) orientation of use, namely how English is interpreted in education, *da'wah*, and engagement with the global sphere. This framework enables the study to distinguish between the use of English as a practical tool and its interpretation as part of how *pesantren*

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understand knowledge and religious authority.

With this framework, the study does not assume from the outset that the use of English results in epistemological transformation. Rather, the study empirically examines whether ulama interpret English as a change in the structure of *pesantren* knowledge or primarily as a new instrument situated within an existing epistemological framework. This distinction is important because the use of a new language does not in and of itself indicate an epistemological change; the object of analysis is how religious actors ascribe meaning, legitimacy, and boundaries to that language.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach to understand how *pesantren* ulama interpret the role of English in Islamic education, *da'wah*, and its relationship with Arabic. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on the construction of meaning, religious considerations, and the institutional experiences of the informants, rather than on measuring language proficiency or the effectiveness of learning programs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Schwandt, 1994). Data analysis employed reflexive thematic analysis (*reflexive thematic analysis*) as developed by Braun and Clarke (2021). Consequently, phenomenology, religious discourse analysis, hermeneutic-theological analysis, and critical discourse analysis were not used as separate methods. The perspectives of al-Attas, Nasr, Fazlur Rahman, Arkoun, Foucault, and decolonial approaches were employed as interpretive lenses to examine the patterns of meaning identified in the data.

The research was conducted at five Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) located in Central Java, West Java, East Java, and Bali. The selection of locations was done purposively, taking into account variations in educational orientation, levels of openness to modern education, and the use of foreign languages. Informants consisted of five religious scholars or educational figures who held key positions in teaching, administration, or religious guidance at each *pesantren*. To illustrate institutional variations, the study employed the operational categories Traditional Salafiyah, Modern Khalafiyah, Semi-Modern Salafiyah, International

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Modern, and Cultural Salafiyah. These categories are descriptive for the purposes of this study and are not intended as a general typology of Indonesian *pesantren*. The informants' identities were anonymized using the codes U1–U5.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews focusing on four aspects: the role of English in *pesantren* education, its relationship with Arabic, its use in *da'wah* and access to global knowledge, and religious considerations that restrict or legitimize its use. Each informant was interviewed over two sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, conducted in person and/or online in Indonesian. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Observations and institutional documents, such as curricula or language programs, were used as contextual data to aid in the triangulation of the interview findings.

The analysis was conducted in several stages: repeated reading of the transcripts, coding of relevant data segments, grouping codes into categories, reviewing and refining themes, and formulating final interpretations. For example, U2's statement regarding the need for English among international preachers was coded as global *da'wah* orientation, then grouped into the category language use orientation, and developed into the theme English as a means of expanding *da'wah*. Conversely, U5's statement regarding the status of Arabic as a source of religious knowledge was coded as epistemic authority of Arabic, grouped into the category of language relations, and contributed to the theme of limited acceptance of English. This process ensures that research themes are constructed from patterns in the data before being interpreted through a theoretical framework.

The validity of the data was checked by comparing findings from interviews, observations and documents; coding and themes were documented, including how the researcher interpreted informants' statements. The researcher also adopted a reflective approach, recognising that his position as a Muslim researcher might influence the way he interpreted the informants' statements. Since only five informants were studied from selected *pesantren* in Java and Bali the results are not intended to represent all *pesantren* in Indonesia. This study therefore gives a contextual overview of how some *pesantren* scholars interpret, legitimize, limit and

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negotiate use of English with regard to Arabic, Islamic knowledge and global *da'wah.*

Table 1. List of Research Informants

Code	Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren*) Category	Location (Province)	Scientific Orientation	The Social Position of Religious Scholars	Focus on English
U1	Traditional Salafism	Jawa Tengah	Classical yellow books, *fiqh*, and Sufism	Third-generation boarding school caretaker	Viewing English as a tool that can be used for global da'wah without displacing Arabic.
U2	Modern *Khalafiyah*	West Java	Integration of general and religious curricula	Chairman of the modern Islamic education foundation	Considering English as a global da'wah competency and a symbol of Islam's openness to knowledge.
U3	Semi-Modern Salafism	East Java	Interpretation studies and character education	Islamic boarding school teacher and local UIN lecturer	Viewing English as a means of ijtihad to bridge Islam and modern knowledge.
U4	Modern Internasional	Bali	Religious studies and educational technology	Director of the Islamic boarding school language institute	Viewing English as a strategic tool for building the image of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* in the global world.
U5	Cultural Salafism	Central Java	The traditions of *sanad* and *tasawuf*	Elderly cleric and Sufi guide	Assessing English needs to be done with caution so as not to undermine the sanctity of Arabic and classical scholarly authority.

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FINDINGS

The five interviews show different views on English in pesantren, ranging from itsacceptance as a medium of education, da'wah and global engagement; concerns about Arabic authority in Islamic knowledge; etc. These differences are not simply one or the other: they reflect negotiation over what purposes English has (and where it belongs) within pesantren tradition rather than acceptance or rejection dichotomy

English as a Means of Education, Da'wah, and Knowledge Exchange

The informants generally viewed English as legitimate when used for purposes consistent with Islamic values. U1 explained, "The English language is part of wisdom. When used to convey the truth and preach Islam, its value becomes an act of worship." This perspective locates the value of English in its purpose rather than in the language itself. Similarly, U2 emphasized that English enables students to communicate Islamic messages across national and cultural boundaries.

Religious considerations also influenced how informants understood language learning. U3 said "if the reason for learning a language is to understand God's creation and spread goodness then it is worship". U4 also linked linguistic diversity with signs of Allah's power (signs of his greatness) and possibility of interaction with different communities. These accounts show that English is acceptable when associated with knowledge acquisition, goodness promotion and communication beyond pesantren context.

The informants also saw English as a way of participating in wider intellectual discussions. U3 called writing about Islam in English "ijtihad of the times" and U4 said that Islamic writings and discussions available in English should be read. These statements are aspirational not proof that *pesantren* have institutionalized knowledge production.

English was also associated with cross-cultural communication. U1 linked understanding other languages to *ta'āruf* in Q.S. al-Ḥujurāt [49]:13 emphasizing that communication does not mean abandoning one's cultural identity. Europe, America and Africa referred to aspirations for wider da'wah rather than activity or measurable international impact.

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Arabic's Authority and the Boundaries of English Use

Despite the perceived benefits of English, the interviews revealed boundaries concerning its position relative to Arabic. U5 stated, "English may be taught, but students must not forget that the source of knowledge and religion remains Arabic." This perspective reflects the continuing authority of Arabic as the language associated with Islamic sources and scholarly traditions.

U3 offered a complementary formulation: "Arabic is the source of meaning; English is the bridge of meaning." This distinction suggests that the two languages are not necessarily understood as competitors. Arabic retains its authoritative position in religious learning, while English provides a medium for communicating Islamic knowledge to broader audiences.

The findings therefore reveal three related patterns. First, English gains legitimacy through its perceived contributions to education, da'wah, cross-cultural communication, and scholarly engagement. Second, its acceptance remains conditional on its consistency with *pesantren* values. Third, the use of English coexists with the preservation of Arabic's authority. Given the limited number of informants, these patterns should be understood as variations in how religious authorities negotiate language and knowledge, not as evidence of a comprehensive transformation in *pesantren* epistemology.

DISCUSSION

English as Conditional Religious Legitimacy

The finding is that English is accepted in *pesantren* not because it is valuable but because of what it does— education, *da'wah*, access to knowledge and cross-cultural communication, as long as these functions are Islamic. This extends Farid and Lamb's (2020) study on how students understand English as a means of *da'wah*. Their study focuses on why students use English whereas the present study shows how religious authorities explain normative conditions under which English is appropriate.

This distinction also complements Madkur and As'ad (2024)'s account of how English teachers negotiate language education in the cultural and religious

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context of Islamic boarding schools. In this study, then, the negotiation is not just about teaching practices but also legitimacy and boundaries of English use. The informants' positions suggest that acceptance of language entails judgments about its purposes as well as its relationship to established religious values.

English can thus be read as conditionally legitimized: it is accepted when it serves a purpose that is deemed beneficial but does not displace the *pesantren*'s religious and scholarly commitments. This interpretation turns the question around (from whether English is accepted or rejected) to what criteria its use becomes legitimate.

Arabic and English: Functional Differentiation

Arabic and English are better understood functionally than competitively. Arabic is still associated with religious sources and scholarly traditions; whereas English is valued for communication, access to international literature and dissemination of Islamic knowledge. The benefits of English do not challenge Arabic's authority.

This interpretation builds on Eliawati, Ngadiso and Putra (2024) which studies the relationship between language practices, identity, ideology and linguistic control in Islamic boarding schools. Here we add epistemic dimension by showing how functions of language are justified through distinctions between religious authority and communicative reach: Arabic is legitimated because it is associated with Islamic knowledge while English is legitimated because of its intellectual and communicative benefits.

The findings also qualify interpretations of language modernization as a linear transition from traditional to modern practices. Although Al Fajar (2025) describes adaptation in the linguistic environment of modern Islamic boarding schools, the present study suggests that adaptation need not entail the displacement of existing authority structures. Similarly, Mustofa and Romadhon (2025) report that some teachers and students continue to prioritize religious knowledge over English proficiency. The current findings extend this concern by illustrating how such priorities inform the boundaries assigned to English by *pesantren* authorities.

Global Engagement as an Orientation

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The informants associated English with the potential to communicate with culturally and geographically diverse audiences and participate in international scholarly discussions. However, these accounts indicate an orientation toward global engagement rather than evidence of successful international da'wah or institutional transformation. Accordingly, the term *cross-cultural orientation* more accurately describes the findings than treating cosmopolitan awareness as an established condition.

This interpretation is consistent with Farid and Lamb (2020), who identify English as a potential medium for communicating with Muslims across different regions. Sofi and Jenks (2026) similarly discuss the relationship between English-language learning, global engagement, and the preservation of *pesantren* identity. The present study adds that this orientation is expressed in religious values: engagement with the wider world is acceptable only if it fits existing commitments.

Global engagement is therefore not simply accepted or rejected. The informants selectively value opportunities associated with English but still have concerns about Arabic's position and religious traditions' continuity. This pattern shows that global communication and local religious identity are not necessarily opposed goals; they are negotiated through the purposes and limits to which language use is given.

Epistemological Negotiation and Theoretical Implications

The findings can be interpreted as a negotiation over the functions and authority of knowledge rather than a comprehensive transformation of *pesantren* epistemology. Al-Attas's emphasis on situating knowledge within an Islamic worldview helps explain why the informants evaluate English according to its perceived alignment with religious values (al-Attas, 2020; Al-Attas, 2023a, 2023b). Rahman's attention to changing contexts also provides a perspective for understanding how a global language can be adopted without necessarily being regarded as a departure from Islamic principles (Rahman, 1982).

Another implication is that language and epistemic authority are not the same thing. The informants do not give Arabic and English equal status: Arabic still has religious sources as its referent; English allows communication and participation in

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wider intellectual discussion. From this point of view, the incorporation of English is about negotiating existing knowledge structures rather than replacing them wholesale. Critical or decolonial reading also points out that globally dominant language can be used to communicate locally grounded religious knowledge and values.

The study's main contribution is to show this negotiated relationship between language function, religious authority and global engagement. Whereas previous studies have focused on *da'wah* motivation, language practices and teachers/students experiences (and vice versa), these findings show how religious authorities define the conditions under which English becomes legitimate. The relation between *pesantren* and global languages is therefore better understood through selective adaptation than as opposition between tradition and modernity: English is adopted for specific purposes but Arabic authority and *pesantren* religious commitments are central.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that English in *pesantren* is understood by religious scholars not merely as a communication skill, but as a tool that can be used for education, *da'wah*, access to knowledge, and cross-cultural interaction. On the other hand, the adoption of English is conditional. Informants assess the usage of English in terms of why and what it is used for and then place it in the context of the religious principles they believe in. Additionally, Arabic will remain an important language for communicating Islamic teachings. Therefore, the way the informants see the relationship between Arabic and English represents a difference in function rather than replacing one language with another.

The results of the research also show that the ulama's views on their openness towards global languages differ. On one hand, some informants see the value of using English as a tool for increasing the reach of da'wah and engaging with the global community of scholars. On the other hand, other informants believe it is most important to maintain the authority of Arabic and the traditional methods of scholarship practiced in *pesantren*s. These differing views demonstrate that the

decision whether or not to accept English as a legitimate language is made through a process of negotiation over its legitimacy, role, and extent of usage. In this sense, the study more accurately highlights a space for epistemological negotiation rather than concluding that a comprehensive epistemological transformation of *pesantren* has occurred.

Given that this study involved only five ulama from selected *pesantren* in Java and Bali, the findings are not intended to represent all *pesantren* in Indonesia. The study's contribution lies in its contextual explanation of how religious authorities assign meaning and set boundaries for the English language in relation to Arabic, Islamic knowledge, and the needs of *da'wah* amid globalization. Further research with a more diverse sample size and broader geographic scope is needed to determine whether the patterns of negotiation identified here also emerge in other *pesantren* contexts.

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