

The Strategic Role of Indonesian Ulama in the Global Dissemination of Islamic Values through Islamic English

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Abstract

This study explores the strategic role of Indonesian ulama in disseminating Islamic values to global audiences through the use of Islamic English. In an era marked by increasing interreligious tensions and the need for cross-cultural dialogue, Islamic English has emerged as a vital medium for conveying the principles of peace, tolerance, and compassion to both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences worldwide. The research focuses on two main questions: (1) how Indonesian ulama utilize Islamic English to promote Islamic values, and (2) what strategies are employed to foster interfaith harmony and religious diplomacy. Employing a qualitative library research method with content analysis, the study examines a range of sources including speeches, sermons, publications, and interfaith programs. The findings indicate that Indonesian ulama use Islamic English not only to translate Islamic concepts, but to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps in interreligious communication. Digital platforms such as YouTube and social media have also expanded the ulama's reach and impact. Initiatives like the "English for Ulama" program exemplify Indonesia's soft-power approach in positioning moderate Islam globally. Through strategic use of language and engagement in interfaith dialogue, Indonesian ulama contribute to shaping a global discourse on Islam that emphasizes harmony over conflict. This research concludes that Islamic English is a powerful tool for religious diplomacy and plays a crucial role in promoting Indonesia's image as a peaceful and democratic Muslim-majority nation.

Keywords: Islamic English; Indonesian ulama; Interfaith harmony; Moderate Islam; Global communication

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INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, effective communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries is essential for religious leaders. Indonesian ulama, known for their moderate and inclusive approach to Islam, have increasingly adopted Islamic English to articulate Islamic values and foster interfaith harmony. Islamic English integrates Islamic terminologies and concepts within the English language, serving as a bridge between Islamic teachings and diverse global audiences.

Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, plays a significant role in promoting Islamic values globally. This role is underscored by the contributions of major Islamic organizations and the country's educational initiatives aimed at fostering tolerance and pluralism. Organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) leverage digital platforms to promote moderate Islam, emphasizing interfaith dialogue and combating misinformation (Rosidah & Faizah, 2024). With more than 30 million and 29 million

members, respectively, involved in social and humanitarian endeavors, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah play a crucial role in advancing moderate Islamic ideals (Susilawati & Kurnia, 2024). These groups' action tackles social, political, and economic issues while presenting an example of Islamic participation that is relevant throughout the world.

Indonesian ulama utilize Islamic English to convey the nation's unique Islamic characteristics rooted in moderation (wasatiyah), tolerance (tasamuh), and compassion to international audiences. The ulama's efforts are not restricted to local or national contexts; they seek to establish Indonesia as a global leader in the promotion of moderate Islam. By strengthening their English, students will be able to effectively promote Indonesia's message of tolerance and compassion on international forums. Programs aimed at improving English skills among Muslim students are essential for fostering critical thinking and global competencies, which are vital in the digital age (Rosidah & Faizah, 2024). This is consistent with Indonesia's diplomatic policy, which aims to leverage its soft power by portraying itself as a peaceful and democratic Muslim-majority country. The Indonesian government has actively promoted moderate Islam as part of its foreign policy, aiming to reshape perceptions of Islam in the West and counteract extremism (Naim & Mokodenseho, 2023). This approach allows them to reinterpret and contextualize Islamic teachings, addressing contemporary social, cultural, and ethical challenges.

Initiatives like the "English for Ulama" program in West Java exemplify efforts to train ulama in Islamic English, enhancing their ability to promote moderate Islam on global platforms. Such programs aim to improve interfaith harmony and understanding through collaboration between Indonesian and Western institutions (Ramadani, 2020). By using Islamic English, Muslim scholars and leaders, particularly in Indonesia, have been able to present Islam's core values such as peace, compassion, and tolerance in a way that resonates with both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. This approach not only bridges linguistic and cultural divides but also addresses misconceptions about Islam, paving the way for mutual respect and cooperation. In this context, Islamic English emerges as a powerful medium to communicate the universal messages of Islam and foster harmonious relationships in a multicultural and multi-religious world.

Given Indonesia's unique position as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation with a long-standing tradition of religious moderation, the role of Indonesian ulama in engaging global audiences has become increasingly significant. As religious leaders embrace Islamic English to convey Islamic values such as tolerance, peace, and compassion, their voices contribute not only to religious discourse but also to global interfaith diplomacy. However, there remains a need to explore how Islamic English is employed in practice and what strategies are used to ensure its effectiveness in fostering interfaith harmony. Therefore, this study seeks to answer two key questions:

- (1) How Indonesian ulama utilize Islamic English to promote Islamic values to global audiences,
- (2) What strategies are employed by Indonesian ulama in using Islamic English to foster interfaith harmony and religious diplomacy.

These questions guide the research toward understanding the linguistic and communicative roles of ulama in advancing Indonesia's vision of moderate Islam on the global stage. So, this paper aims to explore how Islamic English serves as a bridge for interfaith dialogue, analyzing its role in promoting mutual understanding and highlighting the strategies employed by Indonesian ulama to foster harmony across religious and cultural boundaries.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a library research methodology, with a particular focus on document analysis, to explore how Indonesian ulama use Islamic English to promote Islamic values and foster interfaith harmony. The research design is both descriptive and exploratory, which means that the study will primarily aim to describe the phenomena surrounding the use of Islamic English by ulama in various settings and to explore the specific strategies they use to engage in interfaith dialogue. By integrating both descriptive and exploratory research designs, a thorough understanding of a phenomenon can be achieved. This approach allows for the documentation of its current condition while also investigating potential new perspectives or connections that may arise (Nwabuko et al., 2024) (Somasundaran, 2022).

The research design outlines the approach for collecting, organizing, and analyzing textual and documented sources related to the use of Islamic English. Since this study is focused on understanding how ulama communicate with international and interfaith audiences, library research is considered the most suitable method. It provides access to a rich variety of texts, including speeches, publications, and academic articles that document the use of Islamic English in religious and interfaith contexts.

Data Collection

In this study, data collection is centered around the systematic gathering of primary and secondary sources that provide insight into how Indonesian ulama use Islamic English to promote Islamic values and foster interfaith harmony. As this research is based on library research, the data collection process is focused on obtaining documents and texts produced by or related to the ulama who are active in international and interfaith contexts. The key types of documents that will be collected for this study include speeches, sermons, publications, and recorded dialogues. These sources are critical for understanding the linguistic strategies used by Indonesian ulama when promoting Islamic teachings and fostering interfaith dialogue through the use of English.

Primary sources are original documents produced by the Indonesian ulama or related figures in the realm of interfaith dialogue. These are essential for providing firsthand insight into the content and context of their discourse in Islamic English. The types of primary sources will be collected such as speeches and sermons, interfaith dialogue and documents and reports. Secondary sources provide critical background, context, and academic analysis of the primary data. These materials are essential for interpreting the findings and placing the research within the broader scholarly discourse on Islamic communication, language in interfaith dialogue, and the role of language in promoting religious values. Examples of secondary sources include articles and journals, books and book chapters and reports from Religious Organizations.

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, a method commonly used in library research to interpret textual materials in a systematic and replicable manner. This approach focuses on identifying recurring themes, patterns, and meanings related to how Indonesian ulama utilize Islamic English to disseminate Islamic values and engage in interfaith communication. The analysis process followed several stages:

Data Reduction

Data reduction involves techniques that condense extensive data into a more manageable form without losing significant information, utilizing methods such as dimensionality reduction and data compression (Sengupta & Sil, 2020). Relevant documents such as speeches, sermons, written publications, and official reports were

selected based on their relevance to the research questions. Materials that explicitly used English or engaged international/interfaith audiences were prioritized.

Thematic Coding

Thematic coding, on the other hand, systematically organizes data into smaller units called codes, which are then categorized into themes, facilitating the development of theoretical concepts from qualitative evidence (Khokhar et al., 2020). The selected texts were read closely and coded thematically. Codes included themes such as peace and tolerance, moderate Islam, use of English and Arabic terms, interfaith dialogue, and digital media usage. This process helped to organize the data into meaningful categories.

Interpretation and Cross-Referencing

Each theme was analyzed to understand its function within the broader context of global Islamic discourse. Speeches were compared with written publications to triangulate the consistency of the messages conveyed by ulama. Furthermore, references were made to existing literature to validate the findings and identify points of convergence or divergence

RESULTS

The results of this research reveal significant insights into how Indonesian ulama utilize Islamic English as a tool for promoting Islamic values and fostering interfaith harmony. Through a thorough analysis of speeches, sermons, interfaith dialogues, and other related documents, it becomes evident that ulama are actively engaging in international and interfaith spaces to communicate the universal message of Islam. One key observation is that Indonesian ulama employ a strategic use of Islamic English to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, making Islamic teachings accessible to a global audience.

Promotion of Islamic Values through Islamic English

The promotion of Islamic values through the use of Islamic English is a central aspect of the role Indonesian ulama play in global religious discourse. In the context of this research, it was found that ulama strategically employ Islamic English to convey key principles of Islam, such as peace, justice, mercy, and tolerance, to diverse audiences across the world. Promoting Islam can now be done through digital platforms such as YouTube and other social media channels. The use of digital platforms like YouTube has transformed ulama into communicators who can reach a global audience, further blurring the lines between local and international communication. This digital transformation supports the dissemination of Islamic teachings in English, making them accessible to a wider audience (Novriyanto et al., 2024).

The ulama have played a significant role in promoting Islamic values through both their written works and dialogues, many of which are conducted in English. Several written contributions by ulama and scholars on Islam include books, articles, and academic papers, written in English, that address key aspects of Islamic teachings such as the importance of peace, justice, and tolerance. Among these contributions are works such as:

Speeches and Lectures

On March 13, 2017, Dr. Kyai Haji Said Aqil Siradj, the Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), delivered a public lecture at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. In his lecture titled Promoting Moderation and Tolerance in Indonesia: The Nahdlatul Ulama's Story, he discussed NU's role in promoting religious moderation and tolerance in Indonesia.

Another speech by KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf who speech at the closing of the G20 Religion Forum (R20). KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), emphasized the critical role of religious leaders in addressing global challenges. He highlighted the necessity for religious communities to actively engage in promoting peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding. KH. Staquf called for a recontextualization of religious teachings to align with contemporary values, ensuring that religion serves as a source of solutions rather than conflicts in the modern world. He also underscored the importance of interfaith dialogue and collaboration in fostering a harmonious global society.

Another speech by Ulil Abshar Abdalla. In his speech at the G20 Religion Forum (R20), Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Institute for Study and Human Resource Development (Lakpesdam NU), introduced the concept of "Civilizational Fiqh" (fiqh al-hadara). This approach aims to reinterpret Islamic jurisprudence to address the challenges of modern global society, fostering harmony and peaceful coexistence among diverse communities. He emphasized the need for religious leaders to critically examine and recontextualize outdated doctrines within their traditions that may hinder dialogue and mutual understanding. By advocating for an inclusive and adaptive interpretation of religious teachings, Ulil stressed the role of religion as a source of solutions to contemporary problems rather than a contributor to conflicts. He highlighted Nahdlatul Ulama's efforts in convening study circles (halaqa) to explore the idea of "Islamic Jurisprudence for a Global Civilization," aligning Islamic principles with modern values while maintaining its core ethics. This vision reflects Indonesia's unique perspective on promoting religious harmony and moderation on a global stage.

Written Publication

There are several works written by Indonesian scholars that are written in English or have been translated into English. For example Several works by M. Quraish Shihab have been translated or analyzed in English, providing insights into his scholarship. *Sejarah & 'Ulûm al-Qur'an* explores the history and sciences of the Qur'an, offering a comprehensive view of its compilation and interpretation. This book is available in English version. Another notable work, *Al-Qur'an dan Maknanya*. This work by Quraish Shihab provides a translation and commentary of the Qur'an. While primarily in Indonesian, it includes English translations of the meanings, making it accessible to a broader audience. Additionally, sections of *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, his renowned Qur'anic exegesis, have been translated into English, focusing on themes like women's leadership and family in a modern context. These contributions highlight Quraish Shihab's influence in bridging Islamic teachings with contemporary issues.

International Islamic Organization and Program

The Muslim Council of Elders (Majelis Hukama Al-Muslimin) is an independent international organization established to promote peace, tolerance, and coexistence within Muslim communities and globally. It unites Muslim scholars, experts, and dignitaries known for their wisdom, sense of justice, independence, and moderation. The Muslim Council of Elders (Majelis Hukama Al-Muslimin) is an independent international organization established to promote peace, tolerance, and coexistence within Muslim communities and globally. It unites Muslim scholars, experts, and dignitaries known for their wisdom, sense of justice, independence, and moderation.

Regarding Indonesian scholars (ulama) involved in the council, Muhammad Quraish Shihab, a prominent Indonesian Islamic scholar and former Minister of Religious Affairs, is a member of the Muslim Council of Elders. Additionally, Yahya Cholil Staquf the General Secretary of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), has engaged in discussions with the council, focusing on the role of religious leaders in addressing global challenges. These

engagements highlight the active participation of Indonesian ulama in international dialogues aimed at promoting peace and understanding within the Muslim world.

Strategies for Fostering Interfaith Harmony

Interfaith harmony is increasingly seen as a crucial element for maintaining peace and mutual understanding in our globalized, multicultural world. As societies become more religiously diverse, the role of communication, particularly through language, becomes ever more significant in bridging divides. Building trust and mutual respect among different faiths is crucial for maintaining social cohesion (Majid et al., 2024). Islamic English, the use of the English language to express Islamic values, has emerged as a vital tool for facilitating such interfaith dialogue, especially among Muslim scholars or ulama. By using English, ulama can promote Islamic principles of justice, peace, and tolerance to a wider audience, encouraging respect and cooperation between different religious groups.

English is increasingly seen as a means to bridge cultural and religious divides, allowing for clearer communication of Islamic values and reducing misconceptions (Rehman Kaloi et al., 2022). Religious leaders serve as mediators and facilitators of interfaith discussions, helping to resolve conflicts and promote harmony through inclusive approaches (Majid et al., 2024). For example speech by Ustadz Adi Hidayat at UMY Summer School 2022 program. Ustadz Adi Hidayat emphasizes the importance of sharing knowledge and spreading goodness in order to build a better world. He underscores the need for Muslims to be agents of positive change by promoting peace, tolerance, and understanding among people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Through the use of three languages English, Indonesian, and Arabic he demonstrates the value of bridging gaps between cultures and reaching a wider audience. Ustadz Adi Hidayat also highlights the role of Islam in fostering unity, highlighting how the religion promotes values that benefit not just Muslims but all of humanity. His message is about creating harmony and peace through mutual respect and learning from one another.

Islamic English as a Bridge for Interfaith Dialogue

In an era marked by globalization and the blending of diverse cultures, effective communication has become a cornerstone for fostering understanding among people of different faiths. One of the most significant tools in promoting interfaith dialogue is Islamic English, a nuanced use of the English language to convey Islamic teachings, values, and principles to a global audience. Islamic English maintains Arabic terminology, ensuring accurate representation of Islamic concepts (Othman & Ismail, 2018). As English serves as a lingua franca in many interfaith platforms, the ability to articulate Islamic concepts in this language allows for a more inclusive and impactful exchange of ideas.

By using Islamic English, Muslim scholars and leaders, particularly in Indonesia, have been able to present Islam's core values peace, compassion, and tolerance in a way that resonates with both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. This approach not only bridges linguistic and cultural divides but also addresses misconceptions about Islam, paving the way for mutual respect and cooperation. By using Islamic English, speakers can address misunderstandings about Islam, promoting a more informed dialogue (Othman & Ismail, 2018) In this context, Islamic English emerges as a powerful medium to communicate the universal messages of Islam and foster harmonious relationships in a multicultural and multi-religious world.

Programs like the English for Ulama initiative in West Java aim to enhance the English proficiency of ulama, enabling them to participate in international dialogues and proselytization activities (Ramadani, 2020). The "English for Ulama" program, initiated by the West Java Government in collaboration with the British Council, aims to train

Indonesian ulama in English to effectively communicate and promote the values of moderate Islam on a global stage.

This program equips ulama with language skills to deliver speeches, participate in international dialogues, and engage in interfaith discussions. As part of the program, the ulama visit the UK to interact with local Muslim communities, participate in seminars, and introduce the concept of Islam Nusantara a tolerant and culturally adaptive form of Islam. The discussions in these events often focus on promoting religious harmony, countering extremism, and fostering peaceful coexistence in diverse societies. Through this initiative, the program seeks to showcase Indonesia's unique approach to Islam and strengthen global interfaith understanding. But, challenges include limited resources, cultural sensitivities, and resistance to change, which can hinder the effectiveness of these programs (Umar et al., 2024) (Ramadani, 2020).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reveal the significant role of Islamic English in promoting Islamic values and fostering interfaith harmony. By analyzing speeches, written works, and programs like "English for Ulama," it becomes clear that Indonesian ulama strategically utilize Islamic English to bridge linguistic and cultural divides, engaging global audiences with Islam's universal principles of peace, tolerance, and justice. This discussion explores the broader implications of these findings, compares them with previous research, and examines their theoretical and practical relevance.

The Role of Islamic English in Bridging Cultural Divides

The findings align with previous studies, such as those by Othman & Ismail (2018), which emphasize the importance of maintaining Arabic terminology within English discourse to preserve the authenticity of Islamic concepts. Indonesian ulama adopt a similar approach, ensuring that while Islamic teachings are made accessible to global audiences, their core meanings are not diluted. This strategy allows them to engage in meaningful interfaith dialogues while combating misconceptions about Islam. For instance, speeches by leaders like KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf at the G20 Religion Forum demonstrate how Islamic English is used to address global challenges and advocate for peace.

Digital Platforms as Catalysts for Islamic Communication

The research highlights the transformative role of digital platforms, such as YouTube and social media, in amplifying the reach of Islamic English. These platforms have redefined traditional communication methods, enabling ulama to engage with younger, tech-savvy audiences worldwide. This finding supports Novriyanto et al.(2024), who argue that digital tools are crucial for modern religious communication. The ability to present Islamic teachings in English on these platforms not only enhances accessibility but also strengthens the perception of Islam as a religion that embraces dialogue and coexistence.

Interfaith Dialogue and Global Diplomacy

Interfaith dialogue plays a crucial role in global diplomacy by fostering mutual understanding, reducing religious tensions, and promoting peace among diverse cultures. This dialogue serves as a diplomatic tool that transcends theological differences, emphasizing shared values such as compassion and tolerance. Programs like "English for Ulama" illustrate Indonesia's diplomatic efforts to promote moderate Islam as a cornerstone of its soft power strategy. This aligns with theories of religious diplomacy, which position interfaith dialogue as a mechanism for building global alliances and fostering mutual respect (Ramadani, 2020).

The Qur'an encourages dialogue, highlighting the importance of understanding and respecting other faiths. Verses advocate for justice and equal rights, promoting a culture of

coexistence (Rehman Kaloi et al., 2022). And also The use of English in interfaith dialogue allows for broader participation and inclusivity, making it easier to address global issues collaboratively (Siahaya et al., 2023). By equipping ulama with English proficiency, these initiatives enable them to effectively participate in international forums, presenting Islam Nusantara as a model for peaceful coexistence and cultural adaptability.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the findings highlight the success of Islamic English in fostering interfaith harmony, challenges remain. Limited resources, cultural sensitivities, and resistance to change are significant barriers to the widespread adoption of such initiatives (Umar et al., 2024). Overcoming these challenges requires continued investment in language education, the development of culturally sensitive communication strategies, and sustained collaboration with international partners.

The use of Islamic English by Indonesian ulama has profound implications for global religious discourse. It positions Indonesia as a leader in promoting moderate Islam and provides a template for other Muslim-majority countries seeking to engage in interfaith dialogue. The findings also underscore the importance of language as a tool for diplomacy and peacebuilding, offering valuable insights for policymakers and educators aiming to foster mutual understanding in a pluralistic world.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore two main questions: (1) how Indonesian ulama utilize Islamic English to promote Islamic values to global audiences, and (2) what strategies are employed by Indonesian ulama in using Islamic English to foster interfaith harmony and religious diplomacy. Based on the findings, it is evident that Indonesian ulama have adopted Islamic English not merely as a linguistic tool, but as a strategic medium to convey the core principles of Islam such as peace, compassion, tolerance, and justice to diverse international audiences.

The analysis reveals that ulama employ Islamic English in various forms, including speeches, lectures, publications, and digital media. By maintaining key Islamic terminologies while contextualizing messages in English, they succeed in bridging cultural and religious divides. This linguistic choice allows them to address global audiences while preserving the authenticity of Islamic teachings. Moreover, the study identifies several key strategies used by the ulama to enhance their global reach: participation in international interfaith forums, involvement in government-supported initiatives like the “English for Ulama” program, and the use of digital platforms such as YouTube and social media. These strategies not only strengthen the image of moderate Islam (Islam Nusantara) but also position Indonesia as a significant actor in global religious diplomacy.

The role of Indonesian ulama in disseminating Islamic values through Islamic English demonstrates a dynamic integration of language, faith, and diplomacy. This research highlights the importance of equipping religious leaders with linguistic and intercultural communication skills to foster mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected and pluralistic world.

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