

Beyond the Arabic-English Dichotomy: Language as a Catalyst for Islamic Civilizational Renewal in the Global Era

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between global languages and Islamic thought is considered to have two opposite roles. Where Arabic is prioritized because it is the purest and most valid language to study Islamic science. While English is considered a tool to spread western influence or dominance. This perspective causes differences in various educational contexts in Muslim regions, including Indonesia. So that it makes scientific ideas and innovations from within the country difficult to be recognized and disseminated to the world level. This research examines how Islamic principles such as *Shumuliyyah* (universality) and *Maqashid al-Shariah* change the perspective so that foreign languages are not considered a religious threat, but rather as a means by which academics function to transmit knowledge. This study uses a qualitative literature research design on 26 reference sources, including the Qur'an, literature studies, classical books, which are analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis. The results of the research synthesis show that Arabic remains the most legitimate main language for understanding revelation (Religion). However, English is very important as a tool for disseminating knowledge, building academic networks, and engaging in intercultural dialogue. Based on the purpose of Islamic law (*Maqashid Sharia*), mastering international languages actually helps to maintain reason (*hifz al-'aql*) and spread religion (*hifz al-din*) at the world level. In theory, this study provides a religious perspective to get out of the extreme choice of self-isolation or too westernization in language rules. Practically, this research helps Islamic campuses see mastery of foreign languages as an important skill, not just being forced to assimilate into Western culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the discussion space of modern Islamic education, the perception of Western influences, including foreign languages, is often deeply tied to historical traumas and defensive attitudes against secularization (Sahin, 2018; Abbasi & Tirmizi, 2020). In many traditional educational discourses, this condition often triggers a functional dichotomy. Arabic is believed to be a scientifically authentic language for Islamic studies, while English is often seen as just a practical tool that is considered to have neither spiritual nor civilizational value (Alsaied, 2024). This awareness is indeed based on good intentions to maintain the authenticity of religious teachings from the influence of colonialism. However, if applied excessively at this time, this step can actually separate Islamic educational institutions from the advancement of world science. This global problem is reflected clearly at the national level, especially in Indonesia, home to one of the world's largest Muslim populations with approximately 230 million adherents (Pew Research Center, 2025; Rohman & Isna, 2024). Reluctance and technical obstacles in mastering academic English are still major obstacles in Islamic religious colleges (Al Ghadi et al., 2022; Kurt, 2024; Munifah et al., 2025). The imbalance between the mastery of religious science and English literacy makes many quality scientific works from

Indonesian Muslim academic thought only stop at local consumption and fail to reach international discourse (Zainuri & Sukarno, 2022). This phenomenon triggered the occurrence of "international language stuttering", in which Indonesia's rich and original Islamic thought remained isolated from global recognition. In fact, overcoming this language barrier is not just a matter of linguistic ability, but an important prerequisite for exporting moderate Islamic thought to the world (Bsoul, 2024).

Previous studies have addressed this issue extensively, but the study still tends to be divided into two main focuses. The first focus is to test the theological position of Arabic as the language of revelation (Zargar, 2023; Zulkarnaini, 2022; Tolere, et al., 2020) while the second focus is on examining the sociolinguistic spread of English as a *lingua franca* of the world (Ullah & Akram, 2023; Chong, 2025; Das, 2026). Unfortunately, these two approaches rarely meet in a direct and integrated theological dialogue. This study presents a new perspective that interprets language not only as a tool of religious or practical communication, but as the main driver in repair the order of civilization. This research confirms that the mastery of international languages without domination the position of the Arabic language is a strategic means to revive Islamic civilization. Based on the principles of *syumuliyah* and *maqashid al-shariah*, this study seeks to reconcile the central role of Arabic in the Islamic scientific system with the urgency of English in the international arena. Thus, global language integration is no longer considered a risk to Islamic identity, but rather as a medium of renewal.

2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative literature research design with a document analysis approach (Zed, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The choice of this approach is based on the main focus of the study, which is to analyze the sociolinguistic discourse and the functional role of English in the scope of Islamic thought and education today. Conceptually and descriptive-analytically oriented, this study prioritizes the search, critical review, and rearrangement of relevant literature over the collection of empirical data in the field (Krippendorff, 2018). Data collection is carried out systematically through purposive literature search by limiting the source to documents relevant to the research question. Inclusion criteria include: (1) peer-reviewed scientific journal articles and contemporary academic books (majority published in 2017–2026) that discuss English as a Global Language, the role of English in Islamic education, language hegemony, and internationalization of scientific works; (2) supporting texts include thematic Qur'anic verses that are relevant to the principles of universal communication and the search for knowledge; and (3) historical references of Islamic civilization related to translation and transmission of knowledge. On the other hand, there are some literary exclusions such as non-academic opinion articles, blog posts, daily news, and sociolinguistic analysis that purely discuss technical grammar without linking it to social functions or scientific developments. Based on the selection process, there are 26 main reference sources consisting of 18 journal articles, 4 citations of Qur'anic verses, and 4 historical and methodological references. The sources selected based on criteria include reputable (*peer-reviewed*), indexed, and the expertise of the authors in their respective fields so that the references are credible.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Arabic as the Theological Foundation of Islamic Civilization

Language has an important role in the development of human civilization. Where language is not only used as a communication tool, but also serves as the main means of conveying ideas, experiences, and knowledge across generations since ancient times (Rabiah, 2018; Susianti et al., 2024). Through language, humans began to build social order, thought patterns, and intellectual traditions that ultimately gave birth to civilization (Çinar, 2026). Without it, science, moral values, and beliefs will not be conveyed properly (Misechko, 2022). Within Islamic civilization, Arabic

occupies an irreplaceable theological position as the language of revelation, since the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانٍ قَوْمِهِ لِتُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ

"And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state clearly for them..." (QS. Ibrahim/14:4)

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

"Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an that you might understand." (QS. Yusuf/12:2)

Arabic is not only an ordinary language but the main language for Islamic science, law, and thought since ancient times. Because of its strong religious role, the position of Arabic cannot be replaced just like that. That is why language matters in the Islamic world are not just a matter of ordinary rules, but a matter of maintaining religion. In addition to the importance of Arabic from a religious perspective, globalization has changed the way the world uses languages. Today, English is the world's primary language for communication, education, technology, and science that connects various nations. For the Islamic world, this is not a threat, but a great opportunity. English became a new means of introducing Islamic values, thoughts, and works to the international level. Through English, translations of the Qur'an and Islamic scholarly works can be understood by non-Arabs, while helping to build interfaith dialogue to reduce prejudice against Islam.

3.2. English as a Vehicle for Knowledge Transmission and Islamic Identity

In addition to being the main language in spreading science and new ideas at the world level, English also has an important role for Islam (Setyaningrum & Rochanah, 2024). Although Arabic remains the main language used in the Qur'an as well as the classical books, English is present as a bridge. Through the translation of Islamic works such as tafsir, hadith, fiqh, and modern thought into English, Islamic teachings can now be learned by anyone around the world (AbuAlnaaj & Hani, 2019). The breadth of this knowledge is also in line with the first commandment in the Qur'an to continue learning and reading.

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ۝ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ۝ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

"Recite in the name of your Lord who created, created man from a clinging substance. Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not." (QS. Al-'Alaq/96:1-5)

In non-Arab contexts, English also functions as a primary medium through which Muslims discuss, write, and disseminate Islamic thought via books, academic journals, digital media, and international educational platforms, enabling the exchange of ideas among Muslim scholars from diverse cultural backgrounds. English thereby facilitates academic networking among scholars and offers a strategic pathway for Muslim researchers to participate actively in global scientific conversations. This process is reinforced institutionally by Islamic universities that adopt English as a medium of instruction to accommodate internationally diverse student bodies (Sahin, 2019), as well as through scholarly journals and academic books published in English.

3.3. English in the Global Dissemination of Islamic Thought

Historically, translation into foreign languages, especially English, has been the main way to introduce the great works of Islamic thinkers to the world (Zinhom, 2024). Since the 19th century, the regular translation of Islamic classics has allowed non-Arabic-speaking people to participate in learning the tradition of Islamic thought (Saeed, 2006). If in the Middle Ages the works of great figures such as Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun were studied in Europe through Latin, in this modern era it is the English translation that brings these important texts into the world's academic discussion space (Bsoul, 2016; Roji & El Husarri, 2021). For example, the English translation of Ibn

Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* and Ibn Sina's philosophical writings made it easier for international historians and philosophers to examine the contributions of Islam in the fields of social sciences and medicine (Gutas, 1998). In addition, although the English translation of the Qur'an is admittedly unable to fully match the beauty and virtue of the original language (Arabic), it remains a very useful entry point for the reader the world for the first time understood the Islamic values of ethics, justice, and humanity. As the unifying language of the world, English has an important role in connecting people from different cultures in the modern era (Wierzbicka, 2007). Through English, people from different cultural, religious, and national backgrounds can communicate with each other and exchange ideas. This role of English is very much in line with the principle in the Qur'an that encourages people to know each other (*li'ta'arafu*).

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." (QS. Al-Hujurat/49:13)

In international academic conferences, seminars, and scientific journals, English acts as the primary medium for contemporary Muslim academics to present Islamic scientific values and traditions to the international academic community, while providing a common forum for non-Muslim academics to engage in constructive dialogue (Abdullah, 2017). From a sociolinguistic perspective, this mutual exchange supports the reduction of cross-cultural misunderstandings, thereby enabling diverse societies to build a more objective and knowledge-based common understanding

3.4. Toward a Maqashid-Based Framework for Language Adoption

The relationship between Arabic and English in Islamic civilization should not be seen as two things that negate or contradict each other (Ou et al, 2020). The position of Arabic as the language of revelation remains absolute and irreplaceable, while English has only a technical function as a tool (Fadel, 2008). What determines whether the adoption of English constitutes capitulation to secular hegemony or a legitimate instrument of *da'wah* and knowledge dissemination is not the language itself, but the intention and framework guiding its use. This is precisely where the Islamic principles of *syumuliyyah* and *maqashid al-shariah* provide interpretive value (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023; Murshidi et al., 2024). *Maqashid al-Shariah* directs Muslims to evaluate any instrument, including language, based on its contribution to preserving religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property known as *hifz al-din*, *al-nafs*, *al-'aql*, *al-nasl*, and *al-mal* (Auda, 2008). Understood through this lens, the English language functions as a *wasilah* or means, rather than a *maqasid* or an end in itself. Its adoption is legitimate precisely to the extent that it serves *hifz al-'aql* through the expansion of global intellect and *hifz al-din* through the propagation and defense of faith, without displacing the irreplaceable role of Arabic in accessing primary Islamic sources. This framework offers Muslim educational institutions a theologically grounded alternative to the binary of isolation versus assimilation, reframing multilingual competence not as a threat to Islamic identity, but as a contemporary expression of the Quranic mandate for *Iqra'* and Islam's historical adaptability across civilizations. Theoretically, this study contributes to sociolinguistic and Islamic education scholarship by proposing a *maqashid*-based conceptual bridge between the theological centrality of Arabic and the functional necessity of global languages an alternative to frameworks that treat language choice in Muslim societies as a binary between religious authenticity and secular assimilation. Practically, the findings suggest that Islamic higher education institutions can design curricula that position English proficiency as a *da'wah* and knowledge dissemination competency rather than a concession to Western hegemony, potentially informing language policy debates in Muslim majority educational contexts such as Indonesia. As a conceptual, library based study, this

research does not incorporate empirical data on how students, educators, or institutions actually experience or negotiate this Arabic-English relationship in practice. Future research employing qualitative or mixed-methods designs for instance, examining language attitudes and practices among students and lecturers in Islamic higher education would help validate and extend the *maqashid*-based framework proposed here.

4. CONCLUSION

This study discusses how to respond to Arabic and English in the Islamic academic world without having to contradict them. Arabic continues to play a major role as the language of the holy book and the source of Islamic teachings, while English plays an important role in disseminating knowledge, building academic networks, and engaging in dialogue at the global level. Based on Islamic principles such as Shumuliyyah and Maqashid al-Shariah, the mastery of international languages is seen as a means (*wasilah*) for the advancement of science, not a form of submission to secular influences. This frame of mind can be a reference for Islamic universities in formulating language policies so that academics are able to compete globally without sacrificing their religious commitments. However, because these studies are still conceptual and theoretical, follow-up research directly in the field such as interviews or surveys with lecturers and students—is needed to see how these ideas are applied and the real challenges on campus.

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