



Negotiating Identity Through Language: A Linguistic Landscape Analysis of Islamic Boarding School Names in Malang, Indonesia

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: May, 17, 2026

Revised: June, 12, 2026

Accepted: July, 22, 2026

Keywords:

Islamic Boarding Schools;
Linguistic Landscape;
Multilingualism;
Naming Practices;
Social Identity.

Abstract

The linguistic landscape of Islamic boarding schools offers insight into the ways educational institutions express religious values and cultural affiliations through language. This study explores how pesantren in Malang, Indonesia, construct and negotiate their identities through institutional naming practices displayed in public spaces. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involved twenty-nine Islamic boarding schools selected purposively to represent different institutional backgrounds. Data were gathered through direct observation, photographic documentation, and semi-structured interviews and subsequently analyzed using Sudaryanto's correspondence method and thematic analysis. The findings identify four linguistic patterns in pesantren names: monolingual Javanese, bilingual Indonesian-Javanese, bilingual Javanese-Arabic, and multilingual Indonesian-Javanese-Arabic forms. The predominance of the Javanese-Arabic pattern indicates a close connection between local cultural traditions and the symbolic authority of Islam. While Arabic serves to reinforce religious legitimacy, Indonesian facilitates broader social communication, and Javanese preserves regional identity and historical continuity. These naming practices demonstrate that pesantren signboards function not only as markers of institutional presence but also as sites where cultural heritage, religious meanings, and social aspirations intersect and evolve.

To cite this article: Erawanto, V., Abidah, N, K, K., Hikmawati, R., Farih, M. (2026). Negotiating Identity Through Language: A Linguistic Landscape Analysis of Islamic Boarding School Names in Malang, Indonesia. *Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial dan Keagamaan*, 24(2), 909-925.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long been recognized as one of the most enduring educational institutions in Indonesia, shaping not only religious knowledge but also social values, cultural practices, and community identities. In recent decades, however, pesantren have experienced substantial transformations driven by urbanization, educational reform, and the growing influence of globalization. These changes are increasingly reflected in the linguistic forms that appear in public spaces, including institutional names displayed on gates, signboards, and other visual markers (Jenjekwa, 2022; Klöter, 2022; Reza Gholi Famian, 2026). Far from functioning merely as administrative labels, such names represent symbolic expressions through which educational institutions communicate authority, legitimacy, and collective aspirations. In multilingual societies, the language chosen for public signage often reveals the interaction between historical traditions and contemporary social demands (Albury, 2021; An & Zhang, 2024; Sheng, 2025). Within Islamic educational settings, the coexistence of Arabic, Indonesian, and local languages further illustrates the complex negotiation between religious commitment and cultural belonging. Consequently, the naming practices of pesantren provide an important lens through which broader sociolinguistic processes can be understood. Investigating these linguistic expressions is therefore essential for explaining how language contributes to the construction of identity in contemporary Islamic education.

The phenomenon becomes particularly visible in Malang, East Java, one of Indonesia's major centers of Islamic learning. The region accommodates hundreds of pesantren that vary considerably

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in terms of educational orientation, organizational structure, and historical background. Official statistics indicate that more than 780 Islamic boarding schools operate across Malang City and Malang Regency, ranging from traditional salaf institutions to modern and integrated models (Suwarno et al., 2023). Despite these differences, most pesantren publicly project their institutional identities through names that combine multiple linguistic resources (Rofiqi et al., 2026). Arabic expressions frequently coexist with Javanese vocabulary and Indonesian terminology, creating a multilingual landscape that reflects both local traditions and broader religious affiliations (Ilma et al., 2023; Pujiati et al., 2025). Such linguistic diversity raises important questions regarding the social meanings embedded in institutional naming practices. The selection of particular languages is rarely arbitrary; rather, it reflects specific ideological positions, cultural memories, and educational aspirations. For this reason, the linguistic landscape of pesantren in Malang offers a rich empirical setting for examining the relationship between language, religion, and society.

The growing visibility of multilingual signage has attracted considerable attention within sociolinguistic scholarship because public texts simultaneously perform informative and symbolic functions. Linguistic landscape studies conceptualize public signs as communicative artifacts that not only provide practical information but also embody social hierarchies, cultural values, and ideological orientations (Wijaya, 2021; Yao & Gruba, 2022). Through the strategic use of language, institutions construct identities and negotiate their position within wider social environments. This process is especially significant in Indonesia, where national, local, and transnational languages coexist within highly diverse cultural settings (Nugraheni & Hasan, 2026; Sakhiyya & Martin-Anatias, 2023; Syam et al., 2023). In pesantren communities, language choices carry additional significance because they are closely associated with religious authority and institutional legitimacy. Arabic, for instance, is widely perceived as a marker of sacred knowledge and theological authenticity, while Indonesian ensures accessibility and administrative recognition. At the same time, local languages preserve historical continuity and reinforce regional belonging (Massuannan et al., 2025). Examining how these linguistic resources interact in pesantren names is therefore crucial for understanding the sociocultural dynamics of Islamic education.

The urgency of investigating pesantren naming systems extends beyond purely linguistic concerns. Contemporary discussions on cultural sustainability increasingly emphasize the importance of protecting local identities in the face of global homogenization. Educational institutions occupy a strategic position in this process because they function as sites where cultural traditions are transmitted, adapted, and reinterpreted across generations. In many regions, public signage has become an arena in which competing identities negotiate visibility and legitimacy (Demaj, 2023; Jungherr & Schroeder, 2023; Reynolds et al., 2022). The linguistic choices displayed on pesantren signboards illustrate how local communities attempt to preserve ethnic heritage while simultaneously embracing national and religious affiliations (Bhatt et al., 2025). Understanding these practices is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where educational institutions are expected to balance cultural diversity with social cohesion (Amin & Ritonga, 2024; Mariyono, 2024). Moreover, institutional names shape public perceptions and contribute to the branding strategies adopted by contemporary educational organizations. Investigating the linguistic landscape of pesantren is therefore important not only for sociolinguistic inquiry but also for broader discussions concerning education, identity, and cultural preservation.

Over the last two decades, linguistic landscape research has developed from simple inventories of public signs into a multidisciplinary field concerned with language, power, and social representation. Early scholarship established the theoretical foundations of linguistic landscape studies by emphasizing the dual informative and symbolic functions of public signage (Krompák et al., 2021). More recent studies have expanded this perspective by exploring how multilingual texts reflect social change, institutional ideologies, and language policies in educational settings (Bhatt et al., 2025; Sah, 2022; Uysal & Sah, 2024). In the Indonesian context, scholars have documented the ways in which public signs mediate the interaction between local traditions and national identities (Jailani et al., 2025; Purnawati et al., 2024). Research conducted in urban spaces has further demonstrated that linguistic landscapes function as repositories of collective memory and cultural values (Juzeleniene & Petroniene, 2025; Kaibuldayeva & Madiyeva, 2025; Simungala & Banda, 2026). These studies collectively suggest that language use in public spaces is never neutral but is deeply

embedded in historical and sociocultural processes. Nevertheless, the specific linguistic configurations employed by Islamic educational institutions remain insufficiently explored.

Recent investigations into Islamic educational environments have begun to reveal the complex relationship between multilingualism and institutional identity. Bukhori Muslim et al. (2024) found that Islamic schools in Jakarta strategically combine Arabic, Indonesian, and English to project images of professionalism and religious commitment. Similar patterns have been identified by Pradita & Arimi (2024), who argued that multilingual signage plays a significant role in shaping the public representation of private Islamic schools. Studies conducted in pesantren communities have also highlighted the importance of Arabic in maintaining religious authority and preserving cultural traditions (Arifianto et al., 2025; Suwendi et al., 2024a). Outside Java, Gu & Coluzzi (2025) and Renfeng et al. (2026) demonstrated that religious linguistic landscapes are strongly influenced by regional histories and local sociocultural contexts. More recently, Ayyub & Rohmah (2024) emphasized that pesantren signboards function simultaneously as informational media and symbolic expressions of institutional values. Although these studies provide valuable insights, most of them are limited to individual institutions or specific localities, making it difficult to identify broader patterns across diverse educational environments.

The existing body of literature reveals several important limitations that justify further investigation. First, previous studies have predominantly focused on schools, urban public spaces, and isolated religious institutions, leaving the collective naming practices of pesantren largely unexplored (Pelletier, 2021; Suwendi et al., 2024). Second, earlier research has tended to describe multilingual patterns without systematically examining how language choices negotiate ethnic identity, religious authority, and institutional legitimacy. Third, while scholars have acknowledged the symbolic importance of Arabic and local languages, little attention has been paid to the interaction among these linguistic resources within extensive pesantren networks. Finally, no comprehensive study has yet mapped the linguistic landscape of Islamic boarding school names across Malang, despite the region's prominent position in Indonesia's Islamic educational tradition. This gap is particularly significant because Malang represents a unique sociolinguistic environment in which Javanese cultural heritage and Islamic values are deeply intertwined. Addressing these shortcomings requires an analytical framework capable of connecting linguistic forms with broader social and cultural meanings (Boyd & Markowitz, 2025; Helm et al., 2024). Such an approach will enrich contemporary linguistic landscape scholarship while offering new perspectives on the role of language in religious education.

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the linguistic landscape of Islamic boarding school names in Malang by identifying the dominant patterns of language use and analyzing the social identities, values, and norms represented in institutional signboards. Specifically, this research investigates the linguistic configurations that characterize pesantren naming practices and explores the symbolic meanings embedded within them. By integrating Sudaryanto's correspondence method with Spradley's ethnographic approach, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the relationship between language, culture, and institutional identity in Islamic educational settings. Theoretically, the findings are expected to contribute to contemporary linguistic landscape studies by extending existing discussions beyond secular public spaces and highlighting the distinctive sociolinguistic dynamics of pesantren communities. Practically, the research offers insights for educational administrators and policymakers regarding the role of language in institutional branding and cultural preservation. More broadly, this study demonstrates how Islamic educational institutions negotiate local identity, religious commitment, and national integration through strategic linguistic choices. Ultimately, it contributes to a deeper understanding of multilingualism and identity construction within Indonesia's evolving educational landscape.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design within the framework of linguistic landscape (LL) research to examine the naming systems of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because the primary objective of

the study was not to test causal relationships or quantify linguistic phenomena, but rather to explore how language choices embedded in public signboards reflect social identity, religious values, and cultural meanings. Linguistic landscape research provides an appropriate analytical framework for investigating texts displayed in public spaces, as it enables researchers to uncover both the informational and symbolic functions of language. In the context of Islamic educational institutions, public signage constitutes more than a visual marker; it serves as a sociocultural artifact that communicates historical trajectories, institutional ideologies, and collective aspirations. Furthermore, the descriptive design facilitates an in-depth understanding of naturally occurring linguistic practices without intervention or experimental manipulation. By integrating linguistic analysis and ethnographic interpretation, this study seeks to reveal the complex interactions among language, religion, and local culture within pesantren naming practices. Accordingly, the chosen research design was considered the most suitable approach for addressing the objectives of the study.

Research Setting and Period

The study was conducted in Malang City and Malang Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia, one of the country's most prominent centers of Islamic education. The research setting encompasses urban and rural areas characterized by strong Islamic traditions and diverse linguistic environments. Administratively, Malang Regency consists of thirty-three subdistricts, whereas Malang City comprises five districts that host numerous Islamic educational institutions. According to official regional statistics, more than 780 Islamic boarding schools operate across the greater Malang area, representing various educational orientations, including traditional (salaf), modern (khalaf), and integrated models (Malangkab.go.id, 2022). This sociocultural diversity makes Malang a particularly relevant context for examining the interaction among local, national, and religious languages in institutional naming systems. Data collection was conducted over a six-month period, from January to June 2026, allowing sufficient time for field observations, interviews, documentation, and data verification.

Population and Participants

The population of this study consisted of all active Islamic boarding schools registered in Malang City and Malang Regency, totaling more than 780 institutions. To ensure adequate representation of institutional diversity, a stratified purposive sampling strategy was employed. In the initial stage, the population was classified into three institutional typologies: traditional (salaf), modern (khalaf), and integrated or semi-modern pesantren. Subsequently, twenty-nine institutions were purposively selected based on several inclusion criteria: (1) the institution possessed permanent outdoor signboards displaying its official name; (2) the institution had operated continuously for at least five years; and (3) administrators or school leaders were willing to participate in interviews. The study involved two categories of participants. The first category consisted of physical participants, namely institutional signboards, entrance gates, and publicly displayed texts. The second category comprised key informants, including administrators and senior staff members responsible for institutional management and decision-making processes. To enhance the credibility of the findings, administrative participants were required to have served in leadership positions for a minimum of three years and possess adequate knowledge of the historical background and philosophical meanings underlying the names of their institutions.

Research Instruments

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher functions as the primary instrument responsible for observing, documenting, interpreting, and analyzing the data. To support the data collection process and minimize subjective bias, several auxiliary instruments were employed. First, a high-resolution digital camera was used to capture photographs of institutional signboards and preserve their visual characteristics. Second, a structured observation sheet was developed to record contextual information, including the geographical location of the pesantren, the physical features of the signboards, the hierarchy of languages, and the visual prominence of specific scripts. Third, semi-structured interview guidelines were designed to explore the historical, philosophical, and sociocultural considerations underlying the naming systems. The interview protocol included questions concerning the origins of institutional names, the reasons for selecting particular

languages, and participants' perceptions of how linguistic choices represent institutional identity. Finally, field notes were utilized to document contextual observations, researcher reflections, and non-verbal interactions encountered during fieldwork.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Given the qualitative nature of the study, conventional statistical measures of reliability, such as Cronbach's alpha, were not applicable. Instead, the trustworthiness of the research was established through the principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability proposed. Content validity of the observation sheets and interview protocols was assessed through expert judgment involving two senior scholars specializing in sociolinguistics and Islamic education. These experts evaluated the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the instruments using a structured validation rubric, and subsequent revisions were made based on their recommendations. Credibility was further strengthened through methodological triangulation by comparing data obtained from photographic documentation, field observations, and interviews. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting each stage of sampling, data collection, coding, and interpretation. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming selected findings and interpretations with several participants to reduce researcher bias and improve analytical accuracy.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was organized into a sequence of interconnected stages designed to ensure methodological rigor and facilitate the replication of the study. The process began with the identification and classification of Islamic boarding schools in Malang based on their educational typologies. Following the sampling stage, the research instruments underwent validation and refinement through expert review. Fieldwork was subsequently conducted through direct visits to the selected institutions, during which photographs of the signboards were taken under optimal conditions and semi-structured interviews were carried out with school administrators. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The resulting data were systematically organized, cataloged, and archived to facilitate subsequent analysis. Finally, linguistic and ethnographic analyses were conducted to interpret the relationships among language choice, institutional identity, and sociocultural values. To ensure methodological transparency and facilitate the replication of the study, the overall research procedure was organized into a series of interconnected stages, beginning with the identification and classification of Islamic boarding schools and ending with data interpretation and reporting. Each stage was designed systematically to guarantee the rigor, consistency, and credibility of the research process. The sequence of activities undertaken throughout the study is illustrated in Figure 1.

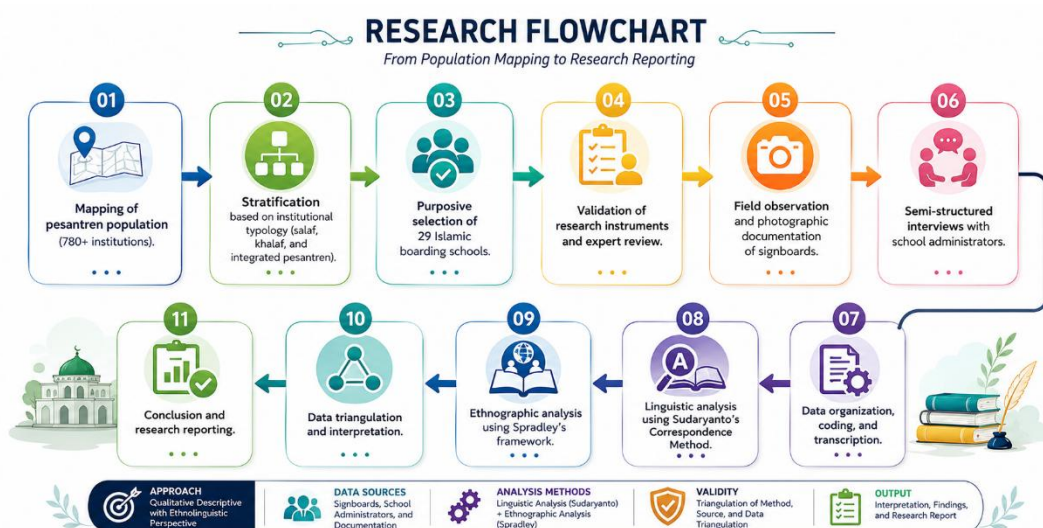


Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

As illustrated in Figure 1, the research process followed a sequential and iterative procedure that integrated data collection, organization, and interpretation. The combination of linguistic documentation and ethnographic inquiry enabled the researchers to examine both the structural

patterns of language use and the sociocultural meanings embedded within the naming systems of Islamic boarding schools in Malang. The data obtained from these stages were subsequently analyzed using complementary linguistic and ethnographic techniques, as described in the following section.

Data Analysis

The study employed two complementary analytical frameworks: Sudaryanto's Correspondence Method and Spradley's ethnographic analysis. The first stage involved linguistic analysis using the determinant element sorting technique (Pilah Unsur Penentu—PUP) to classify the linguistic configurations appearing on pesantren signboards into monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual categories. After classification, the comparative technique (Hubung Banding Membedakan—HBB) was employed to identify similarities and differences across institutional typologies. The second stage involved ethnographic analysis adapted from Spradley's framework. The analysis began with domain analysis to identify major categories of linguistic representation, followed by taxonomic analysis to examine the structural organization of language choices. Componential analysis was subsequently conducted to uncover contrasts and relationships among linguistic patterns, institutional identities, and sociocultural values. Finally, thematic analysis was performed to synthesize the broader meanings embedded within the naming systems and to construct an integrated interpretation of the linguistic landscape. Throughout the analytical process, data triangulation was continuously applied to combine visual evidence with participants' narratives, thereby enhancing the rigor, credibility, and depth of interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Malang is administratively split into two distinct units: Malang Regency and Malang City. The regency covers a vast geographical area comprising 33 subdistricts. In contrast, Malang City is smaller on paper made up of 5 subdistricts, 57 urban villages, and 544 villages across 252 square kilometers yet it hosts 57 registered Islamic boarding schools. This number, while substantial for an urban center, looks modest next to the 727 pesantren scattered across the expansive territory of the regency. Looking closely at how these institutions are named in public spaces, three recurring thematic patterns consistently emerge: the founder's name, a philosophical or spiritual value, or a geographical reference. These naming elements are almost always expressed through a linguistic mix of Arabic and Indonesian, with Javanese integrated into the structural identity. These naming patterns are categorized into monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual configurations. Interestingly, the bilingual pattern in Malang adheres to a strict structural constraint: it always pairs Javanese with either Indonesian or Arabic, never with other language combinations. The complete classification and distribution of these linguistic configurations across the 29 sampled institutions are presented in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1. Classification of Linguistic Data on Naming Patterns for Islamic Boarding Schools in Malang

Linguistic Category	Sub-Pattern	Count	Percentage
Monolingual	Javanese (BJ)	1	3.45%
Bilingual	Indonesian + Javanese (BI+BJ)	1	3.45%
	Javanese + Arabic (BJ+BA)	16	55.17%
	Indonesian + Arabic (BI+BA)	0	0.00%
Multilingual	Indonesian + Javanese + Arabic (BI+BJ+BA)	11	37.93%
	English + Javanese + Arabic (BE+BJ+BA)	0	0.00%
Total		29	100.00%
Linguistic Category	Sub-Pattern	Count	Percentage

To illustrate these patterns in the local linguistic landscape, the specific configurations found during the fieldwork are documented through the following cases:



Picture 1. Signboard of Pondok Pesantren Kedunglo

The data displayed in Picture 1 represents the monolingual naming pattern utilizing the Javanese language. The Kedunglo Islamic Boarding School, located in Kaliurang Village, Klojen Subdistrict, represents this category. This naming pattern is characterized by the use of the Javanese geographical name "Kedunglo". Within the broader dataset, this monolingual form accounts for only 3.45% of the total sample, representing a single boarding school. Conversely, the multilingual category is characterized by two distinct structural configurations: Indonesian + Javanese + Arabic, and English + Arabic + Javanese. This category accounts for 37.93% of the dataset, representing eleven boarding schools. The combination of Indonesian + Javanese + Arabic is exemplified by three specific institutions: the Darul Ulum Al-Fadholi Islamic Boarding School (Male), the Darul Ulum Al-Fadholi 1 Islamic Boarding School (Male), and the Himmatul Muriidin Islamic Boarding School (Co-educational).



Picture 2. Signboards of Darul Ulum Al-Fadholi Male and Darul Ulum Al-Fadholi 1 Male Islamic Boarding Schools

Both the Darul Ulum Al-Fadholi Islamic Boarding School for boys and the Darul Ulum Al-Fadholi 1 Islamic Boarding School for boys incorporate the Arabic phrase "Darul Ulum" into their public signage, which translates literally to "house of knowledge." Within this structure, the lexical choice of "Fadholi" carries a distinct semantic function. It is derived from the Arabic root associated with virtue, grace, and moral excellence. In traditional Muslim naming conventions, particularly for boys, it denotes an individual who is wise, exceptional, and sharp-minded. Because these institutions enroll male students exclusively, the choice of this word is highly deliberate.



Picture 3. Signboard of Pondok Pesantren Himmatul Muriidin

Pondok Pesantren Putra-Putri Himmatul Muriidin is one of the older boarding schools in the dataset, founded in the 1960s by KH Baidlowi Muhyiddin in Purwantoro Village, Blimbing Subdistrict. The name utilizes a multilingual structure that layers Indonesian, Javanese, and Arabic. The signboard explicitly includes the phrase "Putra-putri" (boys and girls). Philosophically, "Himmatul" carries strong Arabic semantic weight, pointing to lofty aspirations and intellectual ambition. This is paired with "Muriidin", meaning those who search or seek. Traced to its etymological root, the term originates from "murid", denoting a dedicated seeker committed to walking a righteous path under the spiritual guidance of a teacher.



Picture 4. Signboard of Pondok Pesantren Modern Assidiqqi As-syuhadaa

The Assidiqqi As-syuhadaa Modern Islamic Boarding School, located in Pandanwangi Village, Blimbing Subdistrict, is the only institution in the dataset that incorporates the English word "modern" into its signage name. The name itself carries substantial semantic weight in both of its Arabic components: "Assidiqqi" is derived from the Arabic root for "honest," "truthful," or "trustworthy," while "As-syuhadaa" (derived from the root for "witness") translates to those who have died in the struggle for the path of Allah SWT. Bilingual naming patterns constitute the largest proportion of the collected dataset at 55.17%, covering 16 institutions that combine Javanese and Arabic elements, and one institution that pairs Indonesian with Javanese. Among the schools utilizing the Javanese-Arabic pattern are the Sabilur Royyan Islamic Boarding School and the Tahfidzul Quran Asy-Syifa' TPQ and Madrasah Diniyah.



Picture 5. Signboard of Pondok Pesantren Sabilur Royyan

The Sabilur Royyan Islamic Boarding School is situated in Pandanwangi Village, Blimbing Subdistrict. The institution's name draws directly on classical Arabic roots. The first component, "Sabilur", means "the path" or "the way of goodness." The second component, "Royyan", encompasses two interrelated Arabic meanings: "ar-rayyan", which connotes spiritual satisfaction, refreshment, and the quenching of thirst, and "royhan", which signifies joy, fragrance, or success.



Picture 6. Signboard of Pondok Pesantren Tahfidzul Quran Asy-Syifa' TPQ & Madrasah Diniyah

The Tahfidzul Quran Asy-Syifa' Islamic Boarding School, TPQ & Madrasah Diniyah, is located in Kebonsari Village, Sukun Subdistrict. Unlike most institutions in the dataset, its public name directly advertises its core programmatic and educational specialization. The term "Tahfiz" means to memorize, preserve, or maintain; when paired with the noun "Quran", the compound "Tahfidzul Quran" translates directly to "memorizer of the Quran." The second component, "Asy-syifa'", is derived from the Arabic word for "remedy," "healing," or "medicine."



Picture 7. Signboard of Pondok Pesantren Lembaga Tinggi P. Luhur (Pesantren Luhur)

The P. Luhur Higher Islamic Boarding School, situated in Summersari Village, Lowokwaru Subdistrict, stands out within the dataset for the complete absence of Arabic script or lexical items in its primary name. Despite its modern higher academic orientation (indicated by "lembaga tinggi"), the institution firmly retains the traditional study of classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning)

characteristic of Salafiyah boarding schools, maintaining a specialized focus on ancient Salafiyah manuscripts.

In linguistic landscape research, a physical sign on a building performs two functions simultaneously: it performs an informative function, telling a passerby what the place is, and a symbolic function, signaling collective identity, prestige, and institutional authority through the specific choice of script and language. Arabic on a pesantren gate serves both roles. It names the school as a center of Islamic learning (informative) while borrowing the historical and theological weight of scriptural tradition in a way that Indonesian or Javanese cannot fully replicate (symbolic). Indonesian, meanwhile, carries a different functional load. Indonesian works as a national *lingua franca* that nearly the entire population can read, giving it high informative value and wide accessibility. Consequently, Arabic projects religious gravity and institutional legitimacy, while Indonesian ensures the school remains legible to outsiders, government administrators, or parents who may not read Arabic script. This multi-layered linguistic choice aligns with the broader dynamics of language policy, where signage often functions as *de facto* policy that reflects the institutional "hidden agendas" regarding prestige and identity. Furthermore, the structural classification of these signs into monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual patterns reflects established methodological frameworks in Indonesian urban landscape studies, which view public writing as a mirror of societal transition.

Javanese, on the other hand, sits quietly underneath both languages, built directly into the compound terminology of the institutions rather than being explicitly highlighted on the signboards. The word *pondok* traces back to the Arabic *funduq*, which refers to a lodging house or dormitory for travelers and students. Meanwhile, the term *pesantren* is derived from the Javanese root *santri* or *cantrik*, referring to a student or disciple under the tutelage of a religious teacher. When these two halves are combined, the term *pondok pesantren* itself functions as an Arabic-Javanese hybrid before a specific institution even affixes its individual name. This integration demonstrates that the regional Javanese language is not overshadowed or erased by religious globalization; rather, Javanese communities actively preserve their ethnic identity by harmonizing local heritage with classical Islamic scholarship. By pairing Javanese with Arabic, the dominant 55.17% bilingual pattern reveals a highly localized cultural negotiation where traditional religious authority is seamlessly projected alongside ethnic pride. In the case of Darul Ulum Al-Fadhli, the naming projects an identity and values rather than merely locating a physical building. This phrase positions the school as an intellectual sanctuary organized around the holistic pursuit of learning. The choice of "Fadhli" represents an ideal young man that aligns naturally with an educational institution established solely for boys. Thus, the names convey a profound philosophical claim, projecting an aspirational model of the ideal graduate a young man who is knowledgeable, virtuous, and intellectually discerning establishing this institutional identity before a student ever enters the gates.

In the case of Pondok Pesantren Putra-putri Himmatul Muriidin, the explicit inclusion of "Putra-putri" (male and female) on the signboard signals that both male and female students are granted equal access to the school's physical facilities, academic curricula, and spiritual programs. Among the boarding schools analyzed, this institution stands out as the only case where gender inclusivity is explicitly spelled out in this manner. Furthermore, beneath this semantic layer lies a deeper personal connection: "Muriidin" phonetically and semantically echoes the name of the founder, "Muhyiddin", which translates to the "reviver of faith" (from "muhyi" meaning one who revives, and "ad-din" meaning religion). Thus, the founder's personal legacy and the institution's public name are structurally intertwined, reflecting the long-standing pesantren tradition of preserving and honoring ancestral spiritual lineages across generations.

For Pondok Pesantren Modern Assidiqqi As-syuhadaa, incorporating the English word "modern" into its signage name directly reflects its alignment with contemporary educational and administrative practices. This modern positioning is further evidenced by the school's active use of Instagram as a primary communication and public relations channel. Such linguistic and digital strategies highlight how modern Islamic institutions utilize global (English), national (Indonesian), and sacred (Arabic) languages to project an elite academic yet pious branding, a phenomenon increasingly observed in urban Islamic private schools across Indonesia. Through this multilingual display, the school establishes itself not only as a repository of traditional values but also as a progressive space aligned with contemporary societal trends.

Conversely, Lembaga Tinggi P. Luhur signals its university-level academic function through its Javanese-derived designation ("Luhur" meaning noble or high), aligning modern higher education with traditional values without relying on Arabic scripts. This practice of highlighting indigenous vocabulary and noble titles to assert cultural prestige and sovereign identity in public spaces resembles the visual and linguistic strategies observed in other prominent Indonesian regions, such as Bali. The overwhelming prevalence of Arabic in the naming of Islamic boarding schools in Malang reflects its broad communicative reach and deep integration into local Muslim religious practices. Within this community, Arabic is not treated or perceived as an inaccessible foreign language; rather, its linguistic and conceptual content is intrinsic to the daily religious, spiritual, and educational needs of Muslims. This cultural familiarity allows Arabic to function as a shared linguistic register across diverse socioeconomic segments of the population, reinforcing the shared educational and spiritual mission that these schools are established to serve. Under these conditions, Arabic functions not merely as an alien tongue but as an essential spiritual register deeply woven into the superdiverse fabric of Indonesian society.

Historical factors further explain this linguistic dominance. Arabic in Indonesia has developed primarily within localized communities oriented toward intensive Islamic religious study, rather than as a general medium for broader secular communication. In the Malang region, the historical trajectory of Islamization shaped both the demographic composition of the population and the institutional character of its educational establishments. This localized sociolinguistic reality is consistent with other religious landscapes in Malang, where public markers serve as mirrors of the community's collective memory and theological alignment. These historical and sociocultural conditions have determined the ways in which languages enter the communicative practices of local communities, directly shaping the linguistic conventions that govern how modern educational institutions are named. This unique Javanese-Islamic synthesis presents a distinct communicative model, differing noticeably from the religious linguistic landscapes of other non-Javanese territories in Indonesia, such as South Sulawesi, where alternative local languages and distinct socio-historical conditions shape different naming practices.

The naming patterns documented across Malang's Islamic boarding schools directly index the social identities, values, and norms that these institutions uphold. Social identity acts as a cognitive and cultural anchor, linking individuals to the social groups they inhabit and fostering shared norms, aspirations, and communal objectives. Among the most consequential dimensions of this social identity are ethnic and religious affiliations, both of which are highly legible in the linguistic choices made on institutional signboards. As argues, language functions as a cultural subsystem that externalizes the internal mental frameworks and worldviews of its speakers. The languages and specific vocabulary selected for pesantren names are therefore neither incidental nor purely administrative; they give public, physical form to a synthesized ethnic and religious identity.

This study carries significant theoretical, practical, and socio-cultural implications that extend beyond the immediate geographical context of Malang. On a theoretical level, the findings enrich linguistic landscape (LL) studies within religious and educational domains by demonstrating how sacred spaces actively negotiate global (English), sacred (Arabic), national (Indonesian), and local (Javanese) languages to construct multi-layered institutional identities. This complex sociolinguistic negotiation proposes a unique, localized model of linguistic hybridity in non-Western educational landscapes, challenging conventional Western-centric LL frameworks. Practically, for language policymakers and educational administrators, this research reveals that the physical signage of pesantren serves as a highly effective medium for public communication, visual identity construction, and institutional branding. It demonstrates how a strategic, layered choice of language allows these traditional institutions to maintain their historical and spiritual authority while simultaneously remaining highly accessible, legible, and welcoming to the modern, secular public. Socio-culturally, the results show that the regional Javanese language remains deeply and permanently rooted in the institutional identity of the pesantren, as fundamentally evidenced by the enduring etymological synthesis of pondok and pesantren. This implies that local wisdom and indigenous ethnic identities are not erased or overshadowed by religious globalism and Arabicization; rather, they are harmoniously integrated with them, showing how local community values and broader religious traditions can mutually reinforce each other in public spaces.

Although this study offers structured and comprehensive insights into the linguistic landscape of Islamic boarding schools in Malang, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. First, the empirical research sample is restricted to twenty-nine selected pesantren within Malang City and Malang Regency. While this sample was carefully selected to represent the primary institutional and structural typologies of the region, it does not exhaustively encompass the entirety of the more than 780 registered Islamic boarding schools operating across the greater Malang area. Second, the investigative scope of this inquiry is primarily bounded to external, physical outdoor signboards and the institutional perspectives of school administrators. Consequently, the research does not evaluate the cognitive reception, subjective perception, or interpretative frameworks of the surrounding community members, visitors, or the students themselves who interact with these linguistic displays on a daily basis. Finally, the study is geographically and culturally confined to the Malang region of East Java, an area characterized by a highly specific Javanese-Islamic sociolinguistic dynamic. This regional context may differ significantly from other territories across the Indonesian archipelago that possess distinct ethnic traditions, local languages, and historical trajectories of Islamization, meaning the findings may not be fully generalizable to other cultural landscapes.

Based on the empirical results, analytical discussion, and established limitations of this inquiry, several productive pathways are proposed for future academic research. First, subsequent researchers are encouraged to expand the geographical and cultural scope of this inquiry by conducting comparative linguistic landscape studies in other distinct sub-regions of Indonesia, such as the Sundanese-dominant areas of West Java, the island of Madura, or the Minangkabau highlands of West Sumatra. Such comparative work would clarify how diverse local ethnic dynamics and indigenous naming systems interact with classical Arabic and national Indonesian registers. Second, future investigations would benefit from incorporating mixed-methods or robust quantitative designs, such as distributing structured survey questionnaires to students, teachers, and the local public. This empirical expansion would allow researchers to measure and analyze the actual cognitive, psychological, and sociological impacts of these public signboards on community perception and institutional prestige. Lastly, it is highly recommended that future studies explore the rapidly evolving digital realm by examining the "digital linguistic landscape" of these educational institutions. Investigating how pesantren construct and project their social, cultural, and religious identities through official websites and active social media platforms such as Instagram and systematically comparing these digital spaces with the physical outdoor signage analyzed in this study, would provide a more holistic, multi-dimensional, and contemporary understanding of religious institutional branding in the modern era.

Discussion

The predominance of bilingual Javanese–Arabic naming patterns among Islamic boarding schools in Malang demonstrates that pesantren identity is constructed through a dynamic negotiation between local cultural heritage and religious authority. The finding that more than half of the institutions employ this linguistic configuration indicates that language choice extends beyond practical communication and functions as a symbolic strategy for expressing institutional values and affiliations. Contemporary linguistic landscape scholarship argues that public signs represent ideological spaces where identities are continuously constructed, contested, and legitimized within specific sociocultural contexts (Sakhiyya & Martin-Anatias, 2023). In the case of pesantren, the coexistence of Arabic and Javanese reflects an effort to reconcile universal Islamic traditions with regional cultural roots. Rather than signaling linguistic competition, the combination reveals a process of cultural accommodation in which local and religious identities reinforce one another. This finding supports recent studies showing that multilingual signage in Indonesian educational institutions serves as an important mechanism for negotiating social belonging and institutional legitimacy.

The strong presence of Arabic in pesantren names further highlights the enduring symbolic authority of sacred language in shaping institutional prestige and religious authenticity. Names such as Darul Ulum, Himmatul Muriidin, and Asy-Syifa' do not merely function as labels but encode theological values, educational aspirations, and moral ideals that define the identity of Islamic educational institutions. Recent studies have consistently shown that Arabic occupies a privileged position within Islamic educational landscapes because it represents both spiritual legitimacy and

continuity with classical Islamic scholarship. The findings also corroborate, who argue that Arabic signage contributes significantly to the public image of Islamic schools by projecting piety and institutional credibility. However, this study expands previous research by demonstrating that Arabic rarely appears in isolation. Instead, its symbolic power emerges through interaction with local linguistic resources, suggesting that religious authority in Indonesian pesantren is constructed through linguistic integration rather than exclusivity. Such evidence enriches contemporary discussions on religious multilingualism by emphasizing the contextual and relational nature of sacred language.

At the same time, the persistence of Javanese elements within pesantren names challenges assumptions that globalization and religious transnationalism inevitably marginalize local languages. The incorporation of Javanese vocabulary into institutional nomenclature demonstrates that local identity remains deeply embedded in the educational landscape of Malang. This finding aligns with those who emphasize that regional languages continue to play a crucial role in preserving cultural memory within Islamic communities. Found that religious linguistic landscapes in Indonesia are strongly shaped by regional histories and sociocultural traditions. Unlike previous studies focusing primarily on urban commercial spaces, the present research reveals that pesantren actively institutionalize ethnic identity through naming practices. Consequently, multilingualism within Islamic educational contexts should not be interpreted as evidence of cultural homogenization but rather as an adaptive strategy that enables communities to preserve historical continuity while engaging with broader religious discourses. This perspective contributes to current debates on cultural sustainability in multilingual societies.

Another important finding concerns the role of Indonesian as a mediating language that connects pesantren to wider social, administrative, and educational networks. Although Arabic dominates the symbolic dimension and Javanese reinforces local belonging, Indonesian provides accessibility and communicative efficiency for diverse audiences, including parents, government officials, and surrounding communities. Recent linguistic landscape studies have demonstrated that national languages often function as instruments of inclusion and institutional visibility in multilingual environments (Kusuma, 2021; Sakhiyya & Martin-Anatias, 2023). The multilingual structures identified in this study therefore reflect deliberate linguistic strategies aimed at balancing religious identity with social integration. This finding also suggests that pesantren participate actively in national educational frameworks without sacrificing their distinctive religious character. More broadly, the coexistence of Indonesian, Arabic, and Javanese illustrates how language policy may operate informally through public signage, shaping perceptions of institutional legitimacy and accessibility. The results thus extend existing scholarship by highlighting the role of educational institutions as agents of sociolinguistic negotiation.

The multilingual naming practices observed in institutions such as Himmatul Muriidin and Darul Ulum Al-Fadholi additionally reveal that pesantren names function as repositories of philosophical values and collective aspirations. The lexical choices embedded in these names communicate ideals related to knowledge, moral excellence, spiritual devotion, and intellectual achievement. Recent studies have demonstrated that linguistic signs within educational institutions influence public perceptions by projecting specific ideological orientations and institutional missions. The present findings deepen this understanding by showing that pesantren names not only symbolize religious commitments but also preserve founder legacies and establish normative expectations regarding the ideal characteristics of students. Such symbolic functions are particularly evident in names derived from personal histories and theological concepts, which transform institutional signboards into cultural narratives. Consequently, linguistic landscapes should be understood not merely as visual artifacts but as mechanisms through which educational institutions reproduce social values and shape collective identities across generations.

The incorporation of the English word *modern* into the name of one pesantren introduces an additional dimension to the discussion by illustrating how global educational discourses intersect with local and religious traditions. Although English appears only marginally within the dataset, its presence signifies aspirations toward modernization, innovation, and global competitiveness. Previous research has noted that English frequently serves as a symbolic marker of prestige and international orientation within educational settings. Nevertheless, the limited use of English in the present study indicates that modernization within pesantren does not necessarily entail abandoning

traditional linguistic repertoires. Instead, global linguistic symbols are selectively integrated into an identity framework still dominated by Arabic and Javanese values. This finding offers an important conceptual contribution by challenging perspectives that portray globalization as a force that uniformly erodes local cultures. In the context of Malang's pesantren, modernization appears to involve adaptation and synthesis rather than linguistic replacement.

The sociocultural context of Malang provides an important explanation for the dominance of bilingual and multilingual naming practices identified in this study. Historically, the region has served as one of Indonesia's major centers of Islamic learning, where Javanese cultural traditions and Islamic scholarship have evolved in close interaction. Recent research has emphasized that linguistic landscapes cannot be separated from the historical and demographic conditions in which they emerge (Sakhiyya & Martin-Anatias, 2023). The linguistic patterns found in Malang therefore reflect broader historical processes of Islamization and cultural transmission rather than isolated institutional decisions. At the same time, the findings differ from studies conducted in other Indonesian regions, where distinct ethnic compositions and sociolinguistic environments produce alternative naming conventions. These differences suggest that religious linguistic landscapes remain highly context-dependent and should be interpreted within their specific cultural settings. Consequently, future comparative research is needed to examine how local histories shape the relationship between language and religious identity across Indonesia.

Taken together, this study contributes to contemporary linguistic landscape scholarship by extending analysis beyond secular urban environments into the domain of Islamic education. Previous studies have largely concentrated on commercial spaces, public administration, and general educational institutions, leaving pesantren relatively underexplored. By demonstrating how Arabic, Indonesian, Javanese, and, to a lesser extent, English interact within institutional naming practices, the present research proposes a localized model of multilingual identity construction rooted in Indonesian sociocultural realities. Theoretically, the findings enrich current understandings of linguistic hybridity by showing that sacred, national, and local languages can coexist in mutually reinforcing ways. Practically, they provide valuable insights for educational leaders and policymakers concerning institutional branding, cultural preservation, and language planning. More broadly, this study fills an important gap in the international literature by revealing that pesantren signboards are not merely physical markers of institutional presence but dynamic spaces in which cultural heritage, religious values, and social aspirations are continuously negotiated and redefined.

CONCLUSION

The linguistic landscape of Islamic boarding schools in Malang demonstrates that institutional naming extends far beyond a simple means of identification, functioning instead as a symbolic arena where religious values, cultural traditions, and social identities are negotiated and expressed. The analysis of twenty-nine pesantren signboards revealed four linguistic patterns monolingual Javanese, bilingual Indonesian Javanese, bilingual Javanese Arabic, and multilingual Indonesian Javanese Arabic with the Javanese Arabic combination emerging as the dominant configuration. This pattern reflects the complementary roles of Arabic as a source of spiritual legitimacy, Indonesian as a medium of public accessibility, and Javanese as a marker of local identity and historical continuity. The findings highlight how pesantren strategically integrate these linguistic resources to balance religious authority, ethnic belonging, and national integration. By extending linguistic landscape studies into the context of Islamic education, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and institutional identity while also providing practical insights for educational leaders and policymakers concerned with cultural preservation and institutional branding. Nevertheless, because the study focuses primarily on physical signboards in selected pesantren, future research should explore other regions and incorporate digital spaces and community perspectives to provide a broader picture of linguistic practices in contemporary Islamic education.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Very Erawanto conceived the study, formulated the research design, and supervised the overall research process. Nudya Kuntum Khoirel Abidah and Muhammad Farih conducted the fieldwork, including the documentation of pesantren signboards and the collection of interview data. Rosyidatul Hikmawati contributed to the development of the analytical framework and performed the linguistic and ethnographic analyses. Very Erawanto and Rosyidatul Hikmawati interpreted the findings and drafted the manuscript. All authors participated in reviewing and revising the manuscript, approved the final version for publication, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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