



THE DOMINANCE OF ARABIC AND ENGLISH IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF SOUTHWEST ACEH: IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS' INTEREST AND GOVERNMENT PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Background: The linguistic landscape reflects language visibility, identity, and social values within public space. In the West–South coastal region of Aceh, the presence of Arabic and English in public signage represents the interaction between religious identity and global influence. However, the representation of these languages raises questions about accuracy, policy support, and their influence on students' academic interests, particularly in Arabic language studies. Understanding this relationship is important for strengthening language education and public language policy in Islamic educational contexts. **Research Objectives:** This study aims to examine the dominance of Arabic and English in the linguistic landscape of the West–South coastal region of Aceh and to analyze its impact on students' interest in Arabic language study programs as well as on governmental perceptions of language use. **Methodology:** This research employed a qualitative sociolinguistic approach. Data were collected through photographic documentation of 75 public signage items in educational institutions, government offices, mosques, and commercial areas, along with in-depth interviews with government officials and 25 dayah students in West Aceh, Nagan Raya, and Southwest Aceh. Purposive sampling was applied. Data was analyzed through descriptive qualitative approach, and triangulation was used to ensure trustworthiness. **Results:** Arabic signage appears symbolically strong in religious and institutional contexts but often contains grammatical and orthographic inaccuracies. English dominates commercial signage and is associated with modernity and economic value. Limited Arabic usage is influenced by low public comprehension, weak regulation, and limited policy support. **Unique Contribution:** This study connects linguistic landscape analysis with student interest in Arabic language education within an Islamic regional context. **Conclusion:** The linguistic landscape influences language perception, motivation, and educational orientation. **Recommendations:** Some recommendations to support Arabic language learning include strengthening language policy, improving Arabic inscription quality, and integrating linguistic landscape awareness into education.

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Keywords:

Linguistic landscape; Arabic Language; English Language; Student Interest.

Introduction

Aceh Province, a region with special autonomy and the formal implementation of Islamic law, exhibits a unique and dynamic linguistic landscape.¹ Its symbolic status as the 'Veranda of Mecca' has elevated Arabic influence beyond its religious function, positioning it as a marker of cultural identity and a tool for economic development through halal tourism.² Ideally, this context indicates that the written language displayed in public spaces should reflect a strong presence of Arabic.

The use of the Jawi (Arabic) script in the naming of government institutions clearly demonstrates the influence of formal Arabic (fusha) in Aceh. This is evident in the names of institutions such as the Council of Aceh Custom (Majelis Adat Aceh; مجلس عادة أچيه) as well as educational institutions, such as public elementary schools (Sekolah Dasar Negeri [SDN] Alue Tampak; سکوله دسر نکري ألو تنباك) and various other public spaces. These practices reflect the local government's dedication to preserving and strengthening the Islamic identity of the Acehese people.³ In the realm of education, the Arabic language plays a pivotal role in the curricula of dayah (Islamic boarding schools) and madrasah, which serve as primary vehicles for instilling religious values in students.⁴ Consequently, Arabic holds significant symbolic value within Islam, serving as a fundamental cornerstone.⁵

Conversely, globalisation has facilitated the entry of English into the economic and popular culture sectors in Aceh.⁶ This can be observed in the high frequency with which English is used for naming business establishments, billboards, and commercial products.⁷ English expressions are often used in the daily lives of

¹ Faisal A. Rani et al., "Islam and National Law: A Formal Legal Review on Sharia Laws in Aceh," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 20, no. 1 (2020): 47–57, <https://doi.org/10.30631/alrisalah.v20i1.521>.

² Buhori Muslim et al., "The Arabic Language Contribution to The Istinbāt in Islamic Law of Acehese Scholars," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 1 (2022): 224, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v6i1.11732>; Scarlett Mannish, "Tracking Identity in Minority Language Policy: A Reflexive Approach to Hybrid Concepts in the Language Sciences," *Language Sciences* 104 (July 2024): 101642, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2024.101642>; Muhammad Darda and Akmal Fajri, "The Role of Arabic in Increasing Local Tourism Attraction in Aceh," *Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Pusaka Cendekia* 1, no. 2 (2025): 72–76, <https://doi.org/10.65427/puscen.v1i2.8>.

³ Yusli Effendi et al., "Negotiating Sharia and Democracy: Institutional Pathways of Political Islam in Aceh," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 11, no. 2 (2025): 203–19, https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v11i2.9700; Firdaus et al., "Dominance of Arabic in Acehese."

⁴ Rijal Mahdi and Ahmad Asri Lubis, "Perspectives on the Arabic Language from University Student: Between Reality and Hope," *Izdihar: Journal of Arabic Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature* 3, no. 1 (2020): 45–58, <https://doi.org/10.22219/jiz.v3i1.11757>; Mirzon Daher, "Religious Moderation, Inclusive, and Global Citizenship as New Directions for Islamic Religious Education in Madrasah," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 1 (2022): 64–77, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v5i1.1853>.

⁵ Bilal Zakarneh and Diana Amin Mohammad Mahmoud, "Investigating the Role of Arabic Language in Sustaining Socio-Cultural Identity and Family Values in Emirati Society," *Frontiers in Sociology* 10 (August 2025): 1641732, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2025.1641732>.

⁶ Jie Zeng and Jianbu Yang, "English Language Hegemony: Retrospect and Prospect," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11, no. 1 (2024): 317, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02821-z>.

⁷ Jarjani Usman et al., "Behind the Trend of Englishing the Business Names in Aceh, Indonesia: A Postcolonial Analysis," *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2021): 16, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v8i2.8908>.

teenagers.⁸ Consequently, English carries both pragmatic and secular significance. The use of English in naming businesses such as cafes, retail shops, and service providers reflects society's perspective regarding the economic significance and modern appeal inherent in the language.⁹ English is no longer merely a school subject; rather, it has evolved into an integral element of the visual linguistic landscape, conveying a globalised lifestyle.¹⁰ This phenomenon indicates a linguistic shift within the community, wherein English is increasingly regarded as a crucial aspect of contemporary social interaction, business, employment, and economic contexts.¹¹

These dynamics are strongly suspected to contribute to the educational orientation of the younger generation, particularly graduates of general secondary schools. Although the learning of Arabic is regarded as a religious obligation, reports indicate a low level of interest among students in pursuing Arabic as an academic discipline at the tertiary level.¹² This paradox constitutes the central focus of the present study: how does the visual dominance of English in the urban linguistic landscape of Southwest Aceh influence students' interest in choosing Arabic Language study programs? How does this phenomenon influence government perception of language use?

This issue extends beyond individual student attitudes and has become a concern for government institutions as key policymakers in the fields of education and cultural preservation.¹³ Government perceptions of the dominance of English

⁸ Jatmiko Murdiono and Ainayah Safira Fadillah, "Analysis of Changes in Speaking Manners by Mixing Indonesian and English: A Case Study of Generation Z Teenagers," *International Journal of Applied Research and Sustainable Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2023): 215–24, <https://doi.org/10.59890/ijarss.v1i3.895>.

⁹ Zurriyati Zurriyati et al., "English Acculturation in Food and Coffee Shop Naming: Examining Its Impact on Local Languages," *Studies in English Language and Education* 12, no. 2 (2025): 1068–81, <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v12i2.36206>.

¹⁰ Yuling Jiao and Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh, "Linguistic Landscape in George Town, Malaysia: Language Visibility in a Postcolonial and Globalized Context," *Ampersand* 13 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2024.100202>.

¹¹ M. Maksud Ali and M. Obaidul Hamid, "English Language and Employability in Locally Produced ELT Textbooks: Clashes between Neoliberal Ideals and Social Class Structures in the Pedagogical Space," *Applied Linguistics* 47, no. 1 (2026): 37–53, <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amae070>; Istika Suri and Frans Asisi Datang, "Language as Social Identity: A Study of Linguistic Landscape in Meulaboh, West Aceh," *JSPH (Jurnal Sosiologi Pendidikan Humanis)* 9, no. 2 (2024): 35–53, <https://doi.org/10.17977/um021v9i22024p35-53>.

¹² Zaki Ghufuron et al., "Integration of Arabic Language Learning in the Formation of Social-Religious Identity in Madrasahs: A Systematic Study of Policy, Local Practices, and Digital Transformation," *Al-Jadwa: Jurnal Studi Islam* 5, no. 1 (2025): 133–45, <https://doi.org/10.38073/aljadwa.3567>; Uril Bahrudin and Zulfi Mubaraq, "Obstacles to Learning Speaking Skills among Non-Arabic Speaking Learners in Indonesia," *IJ-ATL (International Journal of Arabic Teaching and Learning)* 7, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.33650/ijatl.v7i1.4570>; Achmad Fandi Bastian et al., "Tahlil Su'ubati Ta'allumul Lughatil 'Arabiyyah Lith-Thullabil Jami'lyyi Fi Kulliyatit Tarbiyyah Bi Jami'atil Islamiyyah 'Alawiyyah Bi Mojokerto," *Al-Fakkaar* 5, no. 2 (2024): 71–84, <https://doi.org/10.52166/alf.v5i2.7029>.

¹³ Dwi Lestianingsih et al., "Contesting Language Ideologies in the Linguistic Schoolscapes in an Indonesian Multilingual School: A Case Study," *VELES (Voices of English Language Education Society)* 7, no. 3 (2023): 431–44, <https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v7i3.23253>.

play a crucial role in shaping language and educational policies.¹⁴ Whether such dominance is perceived as a threat to cultural and Islamic identity constitutes a key analytical concern of this study.

Sociolinguistics serves as an appropriate approach for addressing this complex issue.¹⁵ Sociolinguistic research highlights the fact of language use within specific groups of speakers.¹⁶ Consequently, this methodology enables researchers to examine linguistic signs within their linguistic context while simultaneously linking these phenomena to the social perspectives of the relevant community.¹⁷ Through this study, the objective is to gain a profound understanding of the influence of Arabic and English dominance within the linguistic context of Aceh, particularly as it relates to student interests and the strategic perspectives of government institutions.

Method

This study employs a qualitative method, utilizing a structured approach to collect empirical data from the research area.¹⁸ Qualitative research refers to a research methodology that yields descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals, as well as observable behaviours. This approach highlights a deep understanding of individuals and the social environment in which they are situated.¹⁹ The data were analysed using thematic analysis, which involves coding, grouping, and interpreting patterns within linguistic aspects and participants' perspectives.²⁰

The study relies heavily on data obtained directly from the field, specifically from three regencies: West Aceh, Nagan Raya, and Southwest Aceh. The selection of

¹⁴ Dinara Imanova et al., "Language-in-Education Policy for English Language Teaching in Public Schools of Kazakhstan: Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Approaches," *Education Sciences* 15, no. 1 (2025): 66, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15010066>.

¹⁵ A. M. Oleh Sudirman and Dan M. Ihsan Dacholfany, "Multicultural and Multilingual Inside Education Perspective," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology* 9 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2020.09.163>.

¹⁶ Richmond Stroupe and Lilie M. Roosman, "Applied Linguistics in the Social Sciences and the Indonesian Context," in *Applied Linguistics in the Indonesian Context*, ed. Richmond Stroupe and Lilie Roosman, Engaging Indonesia (Springer Nature Singapore, 2025), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-2336-2_1.

¹⁷ Hartanti Woro Susianti et al., "Linguistic Landscape and Visitors' Perception of Written Information at Museums in Bali," *Englisia : Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities* 13, no. 1 (2025): 40–53, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v13i1.31210>; Guowen Shang, "Multilingualism in the Linguistic Landscape of Eastern China: City Residents' Perceptions and Attitudes," *Globe: A Journal of Language Culture and Communication* (January 2021): 99-116 Pages, 99-116 Pages, <https://doi.org/10.5278/OJS.GLOBE.V12I.6501>.

¹⁸ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2017).

¹⁹ Petronela Polixenia Nistor, "The Interview as a Research Technique in Social Work – Methodological and Practical Challenges," *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Social Sciences* 13, no. 2 (2024): 29–42, <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenss/13.2/105>.

²⁰ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

these locations aims to address the core research problems of this study, namely: identifying the linguistic landscape within educational spaces in the Southwest Coast of Aceh; examining the factors contributing to the limited use of Arabic and the dominance of English; and analyzing the influence of the linguistic landscape on students' decisions in choosing Arabic Language study programs.

Two techniques were used for data collection: photographic documentation, and in-depth interviews.²¹ Photographic documentation was conducted to capture visual evidence of the linguistic landscape. A total of 75 photographs of written information were collected using a smartphone camera. The data were then classified based on language use patterns, such as language choice (Arabic, English, Indonesian), script type (Jawi, fusha, transliteration), orthographic accuracy, and spatial placement and visibility. Participants perception data were collected through in-depth interviews to 34 respondents. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling. The interview questions focused on aspects such as deskriptive-sociolinguistic, causal-analytics, and implicative-educative. The interview data classified into Perception of Language, Motivation and Interest, Government Perspective, and Limiting Factors. interview data were analyzed through transcription to obtain both primary and secondary data.²²

The Photographic documentation displayed on signboards of educational institutions, government offices, commercial areas, and mosques, totaling 35 items. In addition, the interview participants were divided into two groups. The first group comprised key institutional representatives, including the heads of the Office of Islamic Sharia Affairs, the Chair of the Aceh Customary Council (*Majelis Adat Aceh*), and the Chair of the Ulama Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama*) in three regencies: West Aceh, Nagan Raya, and Southwest Aceh.

The second group consisted of 25 twelfth-grade students drawn from several Islamic boarding schools (dayah), namely DA and DM in West Aceh Regency; Bals and NJ in Southwest Aceh Regency; and NI in Nagan Raya Regency. Triangulation was conducted through data source triangulation (students and government officials), method triangulation (photographic documentation and interviews), and theoretical triangulation (Bourdieu and Spolsky frameworks).

Result and Discussion

Linguistic Landscape as a Site of Symbolic Power, Ideology, and Institutional Representation

This study confirms that the linguistic landscape in the West–South coastal region of Aceh functions not merely as a visual display of language, but as a socially constructed space in which meanings, identities, and power relations are continuously produced and reproduced. In this sense, public signage becomes a semiotic resource through which institutions and communities articulate their

²¹ Dongni Guo et al., "Qualitative Online Interviews: Voices of Applied Linguistics Researchers," *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* 3, no. 3 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmal.2024.100130>.

²² Susanne Wollin-Giering et al., "Automatic Transcription of English and German Qualitative Interviews," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 25, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-25.1.4129>.

ideological orientations. The dominance of particular languages in public spaces reflects the unequal distribution of symbolic capital, as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu, whereby language operates as a marker of legitimacy, prestige, and authority within a given social field.²³

Within the Acehese context, Arabic occupies a privileged symbolic position due to its intrinsic association with Islam, which forms the core of Aceh's socio-cultural and legal identity. This symbolic authority is materialized through its presence in key institutional domains, including Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), religious bodies such as MPU and LPTQ, and mosques as central nodes of religious life. In these spaces, Arabic functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a signifier of sacred knowledge, religious authenticity, and historical continuity. Its visibility in such contexts reinforces its role as an ideological anchor that legitimizes both institutional authority and collective identity.



Figure 1. Standard Arabic (fusha) script on Gate of Baitul Makmur Mosque



Figure 2. Standard Arabic (fusha) script on Office of MPU Signboards



Figure 3. Standard Arabic (fusha) script on Office of LTPQ Signboards

However, the empirical data reveal a significant contradiction: the strong symbolic presence of the Arabic language is not supported by either linguistic accuracy or functional robustness. Various errors, spanning morphology, syntax, and orthography, are evident across diverse domains, including educational signage, dayah grounds, government institutions, and mosque environments. These inaccuracies are not merely technical flaws; rather, they point to a deeper structural problem regarding the disconnect between symbolic endorsement and practical proficiency. In numerous instances, Arabic appears to function as a decorative or symbolic element, rather than as a linguistic system meticulously applied in accordance with formal grammatical rules.

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1991).



Figure 4. Syntax Error (fusha) script pesantren spaces



Figure 5. Morphology Error (fusha) script pesantren signboards



Figure 6. Syntax Error (fusha) script on MPU Signboards

From the perspective of Bernard Spolsky, this condition reflects a misalignment among the three core components of language policy: language ideology, language practice, and language management. While Arabic enjoys strong ideological support as a sacred and identity-bearing language, this support is not effectively translated into accurate usage (practice) or sustained through systematic regulation and standardization (management). The presence of errors even within official and religious institutions underscores the limited capacity of existing governance structures to ensure linguistic correctness and consistency.



Figure 7. Arabic Jawi Script on Elementary School Signboards



Figure 8. Standard Arabic (fusha) script on Madrasah Aliyah Signboards



Figure 9. Arabizi Script on Pesantren Signboards



Figure 10. Shop name writing in Arabizi script

Moreover, the coexistence of multiple writing systems—Standard Arabic (fusha), Jawi script, and Latin-based transliteration (Arabizi)—further complicates the linguistic landscape. Rather than reflecting a dynamic form of multilingual creativity, this plurality often indicates the absence of clear standardization and

authoritative norms. As a result, the linguistic landscape becomes fragmented, with competing forms that may confuse readers and weaken the pedagogical and communicative potential of public signage.²⁴

Photographic documentation data confirm that Arabic is highly visible in religious and institutional domains but frequently used inaccurately. Student interviews reveal that Arabic is primarily perceived as a symbolic marker of identity rather than as a practical communicative tool, reinforcing its ideological rather than functional role. Meanwhile, government informants acknowledge the lack of effective regulation, monitoring, and quality control mechanisms, which contributes to the persistence of linguistic inaccuracies in public spaces.

“Limited understanding and inadequate use of the Arabic language across government institutions are attributable to the absence of clear regulations and the lack of explicit implementation of guidelines regarding the use of the linguistic landscape.” (DSI West Aceh)

These findings suggest that the linguistic landscape in Aceh operates predominantly at the level of symbolic representation. Arabic successfully projects ideological authority and cultural identity; however, in the absence of effective language management, it fails to develop into a fully functional and authoritative social practice. This leads to a condition in which symbolic power is maintained, but linguistic competence and practical utility remain underdeveloped. Consequently, the linguistic landscape reproduces not only identity and ideology but also the structural limitations that constrain the functional vitality of Arabic in contemporary Acehnese society.

Unequal Distribution of Linguistic Capital and Market-Driven Language Hierarchy

This analysis reveals a distinct imbalance in the distribution of linguistic capital within the linguistic landscape of the West–South coastal region of Aceh. This disparity is not merely descriptive in nature; rather, it reflects deeper structural dynamics in which various languages occupy distinct positions within a hierarchy shaped by economic, social, and ideological forces. Arabic, despite possessing substantial symbolic capital by virtue of its association with Islam, nonetheless faces limitations in its functional scope. Conversely, English wields significant economic power, enabling it to dominate practical domains of communication and public interaction.

The dominance of the English language is highly evident in the commercial sector, where it is widely employed for naming shops, hotels, and consumer goods. Beyond aspects of brand image, English also appears on everyday functional signs, such as pull, push, and open, illustrating its role as a practical tool for facilitating interaction in public spaces. Furthermore, English possesses strong associations with modernity, professionalism, and global connectivity, making it a strategic choice for various companies seeking to cultivate a modern and competitive

²⁴ Frenz Djaxxas Daleon Clorion et al., “Exploring Linguistic Signage in Higher Education: An Empirical Study of a Linguistically Diverse Context,” *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.59400/fls.v6i1.2049>.

image.²⁵ In this sense, English serves not merely as a means of communication but also as a semiotic resource that signifies socio-economic aspirations as well as a sense of connectedness with the globalized world.



Figure 11. Product names of English in Coffee Shops



Figure 12. Hotel names



Figure 13. Mosque Door Handle



Figure 14. Signage in Some Mosque Restrooms

Conversely, the use of Arabic is generally confined to the realms of religion and education, specifically within pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) and other Islamic institutions. Even within these spaces, its usage is frequently characterised by linguistic inaccuracies, including errors in morphology, syntax, and orthography. Such inconsistency can undermine its functional reliability and also limit its capacity to serve as an effective means of communication. Moreover, the gradual replacement of Arabic-derived terms with Indonesian equivalents, such as the shift from 'da'i' to 'penceramah', points to a broader trend of linguistic shift, wherein Arabic is losing its foothold even in contexts that are conventionally and habitually associated with Islamic discourse.

From the perspective of Rössel and Schroedter, this condition reflects an ongoing contestation between symbolic capital and economic capital. While Arabic retains high prestige within the symbolic and ideological domain, it lacks the convertibility necessary to function effectively within the economic field. English, on the other hand, derives its dominance from its capacity to generate tangible returns, including access to employment, education, and global networks. This suggests that linguistic hierarchy is ultimately determined by the extent to which a language can be mobilized as economic capital, rather than by its symbolic value alone.²⁶

²⁵ Shahid Abrar-ul-Hassan, "Linguistic Capital in the University and the Hegemony of English: Medieval Origins and Future Directions," *Sage Open* 11, no. 2 (2021): 21582440211021842, <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211021842>.

²⁶ Jörg Rössel and Julia H. Schroedter, "The Unequal Distribution of Linguistic Capital in a Transnational Economic Order," *Frontiers in Sociology* 6 (April 2021): 568962, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2021.568962>.

Within the framework of Spolsky's model, this persistent imbalance can be attributed to a lack of language management.²⁷ Although there exists ideological support for the Arabic language as well as regulatory frameworks such as qanun, numerous deficiencies persist regarding standardisation, rule enforcement, and structured institutional oversight. The absence of strict guidelines governing the use of Arabic on public signage, coupled with a weak monitoring system, leads to recurring errors and degrades the overall quality of the linguistic landscape. Furthermore, shifts in regulatory authority have also contributed to a decline in the implementation of language policies, which, in turn, further exacerbates the marginalisation of Arabic in practical domains.

Photographic documentation findings clearly show the dominance of English in economic spaces, while Arabic appears sporadically and often in inaccurate forms. Student interviews reveal that English is perceived as essential for social mobility, career advancement, and participation in globalized contexts.²⁸ This perception aligns with rational decision-making processes, in which individuals prioritize languages that offer greater returns on investment. Meanwhile, government interviews indicate that although policy initiatives to promote Arabic do exist, they remain fragmented and have not been implemented in a systematic or sustainable manner.

These findings point to a broader transformation in the linguistic landscape, driven primarily by market forces. Arabic undergoes a process of over-symbolization, in which its value is preserved at the ideological level but diminished in practical application. Conversely, English is subject to economic instrumentalization, functioning as a key resource for navigating contemporary socio-economic realities. As a result, the linguistic landscape is governed less by ideological commitments and more by market-oriented logic, in which languages compete based on their perceived utility and exchange value.

This situation underscores a significant structural implication: in the absence of deliberate efforts to enhance the functional and economic relevance of the Arabic language, its role will remain limited solely to the symbolic realm, while English continues to strengthen its influence across various public and practical spheres.

Linguistic Landscape as an Implicit Curriculum and Its Impact on Language Preference

The findings of this study suggest that the linguistic landscape operates not merely as a passive visual environment but as an implicit curriculum that shapes students' linguistic cognition, affective engagement, and educational orientation. Unlike formal instruction, which is structured and intentional, the linguistic landscape functions through continuous and incidental exposure, enabling learners to internalize linguistic elements in a more natural and less cognitively demanding manner. In this sense, public signage becomes an informal pedagogical resource that contributes to language acquisition beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

²⁷ Bernard Spolsky, *Language Policy*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511615245>.

²⁸ Rössel and Schroedter, "The Unequal Distribution of Linguistic Capital in a Transnational Economic Order."

Within the pesantren environment, the density and frequency of exposure to Arabic vocabulary create what may be termed a "micro-ecology of language immersion", a setting in which Arabic exists as an integral part of daily life, rather than merely as an abstract academic subject.²⁹ This immersive environment supports indirect vocabulary acquisition, enabling learners to absorb lexical elements without the need for deliberate memorisation, while simultaneously fostering contextualised learning through repeated interactions with the language in meaningful and functional situations.³⁰ Furthermore, this type of exposure plays a role in emotional normalization by reducing the psychological distance and anxiety often associated with mastering Arabic as a foreign language.³¹ Consequently, students cultivate a sense of ownership and growing confidence when communicating in the language.

"It has a significant influence, particularly for me as a student who regularly interacts with Arabic in everyday activities. The presence of such language displays contributes to the expansion of my Arabic vocabulary."
(Nd, (Santri Dayah Darul Muta'allimin) West Aceh).

Empirical evidence gathered from interviews with students supports this interpretation. Students reported that the presence of Arabic-language signage displayed throughout the environment facilitated vocabulary memorisation, supported comprehension, and fostered motivation to learn. These findings align with input-focused theories of language acquisition, which emphasise the critical role of repeated exposure to comprehensible input in strengthening long-term memory storage. Furthermore, this linguistic landscape fosters the development of positive attitudes toward the language, a crucial factor in sustaining continued engagement and perseverance throughout the language learning process.

However, this educational potential is not distributed evenly across various social spaces. Outside the context of pesantren, existing linguistic conditions do not provide an equal level of support for the acquisition of Arabic. The presence of Arabic-language signage in public areas is limited, often linguistically inaccurate, and in many cases, is in a state of disrepair or poor maintenance. Consequently, the broader public sphere is unable to either reinforce or extend the learning outcomes achieved within educational institutions. Conversely, students face a contradictory linguistic reality, wherein English dominates both the public and economic sectors. This creates a disconnect between educational experiences and social realities,

²⁹ Rong Li and Youming Yang, "A Cross-Sectional Study of How Linguistic Landscape Shapes Students' Foreign Language Outcomes: The Mediating Role of Language Learning Efficacy and the Moderating Role of Language Policy Clarity," *BMC Psychology* 14, no. 1 (2026): 289, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-026-03982-z>.

³⁰ Marie-Josée Bisson et al., "Incidental Acquisition of Foreign Language Vocabulary through Brief Multi-Modal Exposure," *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 4 (2013): e60912, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0060912>.

³¹ Yan Xu and Zhilong Xie, "Exploring the Predictors of Foreign Language Anxiety: The Roles of Language Proficiency, Language Exposure, and Cognitive Control," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 15 (November 2024): 1492701, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2024.1492701>.

ultimately undermining the continuity of Arabic language acquisition beyond the institutional environment.

“It is possible to choose the Arabic Language Education program, particularly if it is supported by several other contributing factors and not solely by the linguistic landscape.” (ZF, Santri Dayah Babul Istiqamah Abdy).

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, this phenomenon can be understood through the interplay between habitus and the distribution of capital. While pesantren environments cultivate a habitus that is receptive to Arabic, this disposition is challenged by the broader social field in which English possesses greater exchange value. As a result, students develop a dual orientation: an affective and ideological attachment to Arabic, alongside a pragmatic and instrumental preference for English. This duality demonstrates that language preference is not determined solely by exposure or competence, but is deeply embedded in perceptions of future opportunities, social mobility, and economic return.

Within the framework of Bernard Spolsky, the findings further highlight the dominance of language practice over language ideology. Although Arabic is strongly supported at the ideological level, particularly within religious and educational discourse, this support is not accompanied by its functional integration into economic and public domains. The absence of strategic linkages between Arabic and socio-economic sectors—such as employment pathways, professional domains, or public services—limits its perceived utility among students and reduces its attractiveness as a field of academic specialization.

Photographic documentation findings indicate that the effectiveness of Arabic linguistic landscapes is highly context-dependent, functioning well within pesantren but remaining weak in broader public spaces. Student interviews reveal that, although linguistic landscapes contribute positively to learning, academic choices are ultimately shaped by economic considerations. Meanwhile, government interviews highlight the absence of integrated policy frameworks linking Arabic to socio-economic development, pointing to a structural gap in language management.

This finding demonstrates that, although the linguistic environment can serve as an efficient vehicle for informal learning, its influence is structurally constrained by broader socio-economic circumstances. The primary limitation lies in the incongruity between micro-level exposure within educational contexts and the macro-level framework governing language use within society. This leads to a crucial realisation: while the linguistic landscape can shape language proficiency and attitudes, it cannot, on its own, alter language choices without a commensurate shift in the distribution of linguistic capital. In essence, pedagogical effectiveness within a linguistic landscape is essential, yet insufficient. If Arabic is to become a relevant alternative for students in academic and professional spheres, its symbolism and educational provision must be accompanied by increased practical usage in the public sphere, institutional support, improved standardisation, and substantial integration into the economic and professional sectors. In the absence of such structural support, the influence of the linguistic landscape will remain limited

to motivational aspects and symbolic engagement, while actual language choices will continue to be driven by market considerations.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the linguistic landscape of the Southwest Coast of Aceh reflects the coexistence of Arabic, serving as a symbol of Islamic identity, and English, acting as a marker of modernity and economic value. While Arabic remains clearly visible within religious contexts and institutions, English dominates commercial public spaces and everyday life. These findings affirm that exposure to the linguistic landscape influences students' perceptions, motivations, and interest in majoring in Arabic.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in linking linguistic landscape studies with student academic interest and governmental perception within an Islamic educational context. Contextually, this study provides evidence from Aceh that sustaining Arabic in public spaces requires not only symbolic use but also orthographic accuracy, educational integration, and policy support.

In the future, public linguistic landscapes can function as informal learning spaces that strengthen Arabic language education, cultural identity, and language policy implementation in Aceh.

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Author Contribution Statement

AM and RJ conceptualized the study, data instruments, refinement of manuscript in its final form, and supervised the overall project implementation. MH contributed to data collection, organized landscap linguistic observations, and carried out qualitative data coding. SAR assisted in analyzed students interview, and government data interview from three districts of West-South Aceh. BM focused on design the research framework and proofreading. AAS conducted literature review, theoretical validation. All authors contributed equally to the interpretation of data, discussion of findings, and the preparation of the final version of this article.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors state that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that may have affected the research reported in this paper.

AI Writing Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used chatGPT and Perflexity to assist with language editing and grammar checking. The authors carefully reviewed and edited the content generated with the assistance of AI and take full responsibility for the final content of this manuscript.

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