

LANGUAGE USE IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: A LANGUAGE GAMES ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

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ABSTRACT

Language plays a crucial role in shaping the learning process, particularly within Islamic educational settings where linguistic practices are intertwined with religious and pedagogical values. This study aims to analyze language use in Islamic education through the lens of language games as proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through classroom observations, interaction analysis, and documentation of teacher–student communication. The findings reveal that language use in Islamic classrooms is inherently contextual and governed by implicit rules that align with specific instructional and religious practices. Various forms of language use were identified, including instructional language, explanatory discourse, interrogative exchanges, and religious expressions. Each of these reflects distinct language games in which meaning is constructed through use rather than fixed definitions. Furthermore, the study highlights that the integration of religious expressions into classroom discourse enriches the complexity of language practices and reinforces shared understanding among participants. The application of Wittgenstein’s perspective demonstrates that meaning emerges dynamically within the social context of learning activities. This study contributes to the understanding of language as a socially embedded practice in Islamic education and offers insights for educators to develop more context-sensitive and effective communication strategies in the classroom.

Keywords: *language use, Islamic education, language games, classroom interaction, Ludwig Wittgenstein*

A. Background

The use of language in the learning process functions not only as a communication tool, but also as a medium for contextual meaning-making. In the Islamic Education context, language use has distinctive characteristics influenced by religious and pedagogical values. The language game perspective proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein provides a relevant analytical framework for understanding how language meaning is formed through the practice of

application in classroom interactions. Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein is one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century. He worked largely in analytical philosophical thought on various topics such as logic and language, perception and intention, ethics and religion, aesthetics and culture.

Philosophers often create their own vocabulary by assigning special meanings to ordinary terms and phrases. Wittgenstein coined the terms "language games" and "private

language arguments." His argument about language is that the rules of everyday language use are neither right nor wrong; language is only useful for the specific applications in which it is applied. Language is defined not as a system of representation but as a system of tools for engaging in various kinds of social activity, hence 'the meaning of a word is its use in language.' Recent research has applied Wittgenstein's ideas to educational contexts, highlighting that classroom discourse consists of multiple overlapping language games that reflect different instructional purposes (Putra & Sari, 2023; Ahmed, 2020). These studies suggest that teachers and students engage in dynamic language practices where meaning is continuously constructed and interpreted. However, there remains limited research specifically examining how language games operate within Islamic educational settings, particularly in madrasah classrooms where religious and academic discourses intersect.

This gap indicates the need for further investigation into how language is used and understood in Islamic education through a philosophical lens. Understanding language use from the perspective of language games can provide deeper insights into how meaning is negotiated in classroom interaction and how teachers can optimize communication strategies to enhance learning outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to analyze language use in Islamic education through the

perspective of language games proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Specifically, it seeks to (1) identify the forms of language used in classroom interaction, (2) examine how these forms reflect different language games, and (3) explore the implications of such language use for teaching and learning in Islamic educational contexts.

B. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore language use in Islamic educational settings, particularly within madrasah classrooms. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate as the study focuses on understanding how meaning is constructed through language in naturally occurring classroom interactions. This approach aligns with the philosophical perspective of Ludwig Wittgenstein, especially his concept of *language games*, which emphasizes that meaning is derived from language use within specific social contexts. The research was conducted in Islamic education, involving teachers and students as participants. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on classrooms where active interaction between teachers and students could be observed. This setting was chosen due to its rich linguistic environment, where instructional, explanatory, and religious language are frequently used in the teaching and learning process.

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure depth and credibility. Classroom observations were carried out to capture natural interactions between teachers and students during the learning process. In addition, audio recordings were used to document verbal communication in detail, allowing for accurate transcription and analysis. Field notes were also taken to record contextual aspects of the classroom, such as participants' behavior, classroom atmosphere, and non-verbal cues. Furthermore, relevant documents, including lesson plans and teaching materials, were collected to provide additional contextual understanding of the instructional setting.

The data analysis followed several systematic steps. First, the recorded interactions were transcribed into written form to facilitate detailed examination. Second, the data were reduced by selecting relevant excerpts that reflected language use in classroom interaction. Third, the selected data were categorized into several types of language use, including instructional language, explanatory language, interrogative language, and religious expressions. These categories were then analyzed using the concept of *language games* proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, focusing on how meaning is constructed through context, function, and implicit rules governing language use. Finally, the findings were interpreted to identify patterns of language use and to understand how

different language games operate within the classroom. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation by combining multiple data sources, including observations, recordings, and field notes. In addition, detailed descriptions of classroom interactions were provided to enhance the credibility of the findings. Through these procedures, the study aims to produce a comprehensive and reliable analysis of language use in Islamic education.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses them through the lens of *language games* as proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The analysis reveals that language use in Islamic classroom settings is highly contextual and reflects various communicative functions shaped by instructional and religious practices. The findings are categorized into four main types of language use: instructional language, explanatory language, interrogative language, and religious expressions.

1. Instructional Language as Rule-Governed Language Games

Instructional language was predominantly used by the teacher to manage classroom activities and guide students' behavior.

Example 1:

Teacher: "Open your book on page ten."

Students: "Yes, Miss."

This interaction illustrates that understanding does not arise from the literal meaning of the words alone, but from the shared understanding of classroom rules. According to Wittgenstein, language functions within specific practices where participants know how to respond appropriately. The students' compliance demonstrates their familiarity with the "rules of the game," where a directive utterance requires an action.

This supports the idea that meaning is not attached to words independently, but is constituted through participation in structured social activities. Without this shared framework, the utterance would lose its functional meaning.

2. Explanatory Language and the Construction of Meaning through Use

Explanatory language illustrates Wittgenstein's notion that meaning is constructed through use rather than definition.

Example:

Teacher: "The simple present tense is used to describe daily activities."

From a traditional perspective, this may appear as a transfer of knowledge. However, from the perspective of Ludwig Wittgenstein,

this utterance becomes meaningful only when students are able to use it within appropriate contexts. The explanation itself is part of a *language game* aimed at guiding students toward correct usage. Wittgenstein rejects the idea that meaning resides in abstract definitions; instead, meaning emerges when learners engage with language in practice. Therefore, explanatory language serves not as an endpoint, but as a bridge to meaningful use.

3. Interrogative Language as Interactive Meaning Negotiation

Interrogative language reflects the interactive dimension of *language games*, where meaning is negotiated through participation.

Example:

Teacher: "What is the meaning of this word?"

Student: "It means 'makan', Miss."

This exchange demonstrates what Ludwig Wittgenstein refers to as the social nature of language. The question-and-answer format constitutes a structured activity in which both teacher and student understand their roles. In this *language game*, meaning is not pre-given but co-constructed through interaction. The student's response is not merely a linguistic output but a demonstration of understanding within a shared communicative framework. This aligns with Wittgenstein's view

that language is inherently dialogical and embedded in social practices.

4. Religious Expressions as Forms of Life

Religious expressions represent a unique dimension of *language games* that are deeply rooted in what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls *forms of life*.

Example:

Teacher: "Let's begin with Bismillah."

Students: "Bismillahirrahmanirrahim."

This interaction cannot be fully understood through linguistic analysis alone. Its meaning is grounded in shared religious and cultural practices. According to Wittgenstein, language is inseparable from the life-world in which it is used. Thus, the utterance "Bismillah" functions as a meaningful act because it is embedded within the Islamic *form of life*. This finding highlights that language in Islamic education operates within a broader cultural and spiritual framework, where meaning is shaped by collective beliefs and practices.

5. Language Games as a Driver of Classroom Interaction

The data reveal that when language is used as part of meaningful interaction (i.e., as a *language game*), students are more actively engaged in the learning process.

Example:

Teacher: "What do you say when you meet your teacher in the morning?"

Student: "Good morning, Miss."

Teacher: "Good. Now practice with your friend."

In this example, language is not taught as an abstract structure but as a contextual practice. Students are invited to participate in a real-life communicative situation. This form of interaction reflects a *language game* where meaning is tied to social use.

In contrast, when language is taught in isolation:

Teacher: "Repeat: Good morning."

Students: "Good morning."

The interaction becomes mechanical and less meaningful. Students may memorize the expression but lack understanding of when and how to use it appropriately. This comparison clearly shows that *language games* foster deeper engagement and more meaningful interaction.

6. Contextual Meaning Enhances Student Participation

The findings indicate that students respond more actively when language is embedded in context. This supports Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea that meaning emerges through use rather than through isolated definitions. When teachers use contextualized language:

- Students are more willing to respond
- Interaction becomes more natural
- Communication flows more smoothly

On the other hand, decontextualized language tends to:

- limit student responses
- reduce interaction
- create passive learning environments

7. Language Games vs. Structural Approach

One of the key findings of this study is the contrast between:

- Language as structure (traditional approach) vs.
- Language as use (language games approach)

Tabel 1 Comparison between the structural approach and the language approach

Aspect	Structural Approach	Language Games Approach
Focus	Grammar & form	Context & use
Interaction	Limited	Active
Student role	Passive	active participant
Meaning	Fixed	Contextual

The analysis shows that the *language games* approach leads to:

- more interactive classrooms
- higher student engagement

- better understanding of meaning

The findings strongly reinforce Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical claim that language is a form of life and that meaning arises from use within specific contexts. In the classroom, different types of language—instructional, explanatory, interrogative, and religious—function as distinct *language games* governed by implicit rules.

More importantly, this study provides empirical support that the use of contextualized language significantly enhances classroom interaction. When language is embedded in meaningful activities, students become active participants in the learning process. Conversely, when language is taught in isolation, interaction becomes limited and mechanical.

Thus, this study confirms that adopting a *language games* perspective not only enriches theoretical understanding but also offers practical implications for improving language teaching practices, particularly in Islamic educational contexts.

D. Conclusion

This study has examined language use in Islamic educational settings through the perspective of *language games* proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The findings reveal that language in madrasah classrooms is

not merely a tool for communication, but a dynamic social practice in which meaning is constructed through use, context, and shared understanding.

The analysis demonstrates that different forms of language—namely instructional, explanatory, interrogative, and religious expressions—function as distinct *language games* governed by implicit rules. These rules are understood and followed by participants within the classroom, enabling effective communication and interaction. In line with Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical view, the study confirms that meaning does not reside in words themselves, but emerges through their use within specific *forms of life*.

Furthermore, the study highlights that contextualized language use significantly enhances classroom interaction. When language is embedded in meaningful activities, students actively participate and engage in the learning process. In contrast, decontextualized language instruction tends to produce passive learning and limited interaction. Therefore, the application of *language games* provides a more effective framework for understanding and improving language use in educational contexts.

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