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Negotiating Islamic and Cultural Identities in English-Mediated Academic Interaction: A Digital Ethnography of Power, Belonging, and Difference

Anugerah Febrian Syam*
Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

Andi Nurhikmah
Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba, Indonesia

**Corresponding author: anugerah.febrian@unm.ac.id*

Abstract:

Research on intercultural communication remains limited in its examination of how Islamic identity is negotiated in English-mediated academic interactions, particularly in digital academic spaces marked by power relations. This study aims to explore how Islamic and cultural identities are negotiated through discursive practices, strategic visibility, and the dynamics of belonging and difference. Using a Digital Ethnography approach, this study involved 12 English Language Education postgraduate students. Data were collected through online class interactions, discussion forums, chat logs, and in-depth interviews, and analyzed iteratively through coding, thematic analysis, and discourse-oriented interpretation. The results show that identity is produced through discursive performance, negotiated through strategic visibility and silence, and structured by power relations that influence the legitimacy of expression. Furthermore, identity is also experienced through the dynamics of belonging and difference in digital academic spaces. This study concludes that identity negotiation is a multi-layered process mediated by language, constrained by academic norms, and

experienced relationally. This study contributes to the development of identity negotiation in intercultural communication and offers implications for more reflective and inclusive digital academic practices.

Keywords: digital ethnography, Islamic identity, intercultural communication, English-mediated interaction, identity negotiation

A. Introduction

The development of digital academic environments in higher education has significantly changed the way individuals interact[1], participate[2], and construct identities within academic spaces[3]. In this context, English-mediated academic interaction serves not only as a means of global communication but also as a social arena where identities are negotiated through language practices, academic norms, and the dynamics of digital interactions. English as a lingua franca carries implications beyond its communicative function, as it shapes power relations, the legitimacy of knowledge, and the boundaries of identity expression within the global academic space.

In intercultural communication studies, identity is understood as dynamic[4] and contextual[5], continuously shaped through social interaction[6] . However, most research still focuses on cultural identity in a broad sense, with limited attention to how Islamic identity is negotiated within digital academic contexts mediated by English. Yet, for Muslim individuals, Islamic identity is not only personal but also discursive and normative, influencing how they participate, express themselves, and position themselves within academic interactions.

Research on academic discourse often views digital spaces as a neutral medium[7]. This perspective tends to overlook how power, academic norms, and institutional

[1] Elkington and Dickinson, "Reimagining Higher Education Learning Spaces: Assembling Theory, Methods, and Practice."

[2] Breitschwerdt, Hümmer, and Egetenmeyer, "Online and On-Site Participation in Synchronous Hybrid Settings: Reasons from the Perspective of Higher Education Students."

[3] Durgungoz and Durgungoz, "'Interactive Lessons Are Great, but Too Much Is Too Much': Hearing out Neurodivergent Students, Universal Design for Learning and the Case for Integrating More Anonymous Technology in Higher Education."

[4] Van Der Gaag, Gmelin, and De Ruiter, "Understanding Identity Development in Context: Comparing Reflective and Situated Approaches to Identity."

[5] Tovar-Correal and Pedraja-Rejas, "Gender, Ethnicity and Teaching Competencies: Do They Influence Intercultural Communicative Competence in Teacher Education?"

[6] Baruah, "The Impact of Computer-Mediated Communication on Relationships and Social Interactions."

[7] Kir, "Language Ideologies in New Media: Grassroots Resistance to a Multilingual Language Policy."

expectations subtly regulate who can speak[8], how they speak[9], and the extent to which identities can be displayed[10]. In the context of English-mediated academic interaction, this becomes even more complex as participants not only navigate cultural differences but also negotiate the visibility of their identities within the often-unexplicit framework of global academic norms.

Numerous studies have shown that identity can be expressed through discursive practices such as code-switching[11], the use of cultural symbols[12], and self-representation strategies[13]. However, there remains a gap in understanding how identity is also negotiated through less visible practices, such as strategic silence, self-censorship, and selective disclosure. This dimension is important because it demonstrates that identity negotiation occurs not only through what is said but also through what is unsaid. Furthermore, the relationship between identity, belonging, and difference in digital academic spaces remains underexplored, particularly in the context of Muslim students.

Building on this gap, this study positions English-mediated academic interaction as a power-laden space where Islamic and cultural identities are produced, negotiated, and positioned through digital interaction practices. This research argues that identity negotiation occurs through multi-layered mechanisms, encompassing discursive performance, strategic visibility, power positioning, and experiences of belonging and difference. Identity is not simply an attribute but a process continuously shaped by social and discursive relations.

This study aims to: (1) explore how Islamic and cultural identities are performed through English-mediated discourse; (2) analyze how identity visibility is negotiated between expression and strategic silence; (3) examine how power

[8] Essanhaji and Bourabain, "Un/Muting Muslim Difference: Anti-Muslim Racism and Secular Whiteness in Dutch and Belgian Academia."

[9] Torres-Zaragoza, "Moroccan Muslim Students' Cultural and Religious Diversity Recognition in Spanish Schools. A Critical Multiculturalism Analysis from Their Mothers' Perspectives."

[10] El Jebary Amisnaou, Sánchez-Martí, and Bertran Tarrés, "Do I Not Belong Here? Navigating Social Work as a Racialized Professional within the Moroccan Diaspora in Catalonia."

[11] Boonsuk et al., "When Marginalized Secondary Students See Themselves in Their ELT Textbooks: Cultural Engagement, Learning Motivation, Identity Formation, and Intercultural Awareness in Culturally Responsive Classrooms Amid an Ongoing Insurgency in Southern Thailand."

[12] Gu and Coluzzi, "Presence of 'ARABIC' in Kuala Lumpur's Multilingual Linguistic Landscape: Heritage, Religion, Identity, Business and Mobility."

[13] Istanbulli, "Cultural Translation and the Neoliberal Landscape of Glocalized Media."

relations shape the legitimacy of identity expression; and (4) understand how belonging and difference are constructed in digital academic spaces. This focus allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of identity negotiation in an increasingly digitalized academic context.

To achieve these goals, this study uses a Digital Ethnography approach, which enables an in-depth exploration of interaction practices in digital contexts within everyday academic life. This approach captures not only the text but also the dynamics of interaction, participants' experiences, and the social context that shapes communication practices. Through this approach, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of studies on intercultural communication and identity negotiation, as well as empirical contributions to understanding how identity is negotiated in digital academic spaces mediated by English.

B. Literature Review

Studies on identity in intercultural communication have long positioned identity as a dynamic construct shaped by social interactions and discursive practices. The identity negotiation perspective emphasizes that identity is not fixed, but rather is continually negotiated in relationships with others[14] and specific social contexts[15]. In a global academic context, the use of English as a lingua franca furthers this complexity, as individuals negotiate not only cultural differences but also linguistic and epistemological norms that often reflect Western standards.

Numerous studies demonstrate that language plays a central role in identity construction. Practices such as code-switching, the use of cultural symbols, and self-representation strategies allow individuals to express their identities across various contexts flexibly[16]. In the digital space, these practices become even more complex because interactions occur through multimodal, mediated communication. Studies on digital discourse emphasize that digital platforms are not only communication media but also spaces where identities are produced, negotiated, and publicly performed.

However, most research still focuses on visible identity expressions, with limited attention to practices of strategic silence and selective disclosure. Yet, in many academic contexts, individuals often adjust or even suppress their identity

[14] Cristina Contrino, "Narrative Negotiation of Personal Identity."

[15] Hassan, "Female Arab International Students Negotiate Their Identities."

[16] Almashour et al., "Translanguaging in Jordanian EFL Assessment: Cognitive Scaffolding, Identity Expression, and Institutional Friction."

expressions to meet certain normative expectations[17]. This perspective demonstrates that identity negotiation occurs not only through what is said but also through what is unsaid, thus broadening the understanding of identity work in social interactions.

In the context of Islamic identity, previous research has tended to focus on issues of representation, diaspora[18], and identity politics in the public sphere[19]. Meanwhile, studies on how Islamic identity is negotiated in academic spaces, especially in digital contexts, remain relatively limited. Yet, for Muslim individuals, Islamic identity is not only personal but also normative and discursive, influencing how they participate in academic interactions. This becomes even more complex when this identity is negotiated in an environment dominated by English and global academic norms.

The concept of power in intercultural communication demonstrates that interactions are never entirely equal[20]. Linguistic authority, academic norms, and symbolic legitimacy shape who can speak and how they are understood. In English-mediated academic interactions, this can result in inequalities in identity visibility, with certain expressions deemed more "academic" than others. As a result, individuals often have to negotiate their identities within boundaries that are not always explicit.

On the other hand, affective dimensions such as belonging and difference are beginning to receive attention in identity studies. Belonging is not only about participation but also about a sense of acceptance[21] and connectedness within a community[22]. Conversely, difference is not always inherent but is often produced through interactional practices such as boundary-making and othering. In digital academic spaces, these two dimensions are crucial for understanding how identity is represented and experienced.

[17] Ross and Wang, "Modelling Conditionally Respected Social Norms: A Critique from the Intentional Stance."

[18] Kianpour et al., "Social Media Narratives, Diasporic Identity and Collective Memory: A Critical Synthesis of the Literature."

[19] Zafar and Blackmer, "Digital Religion in the Public Sphere: Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and Alternative for Germany (AfD)."

[20] Pöllmann, "Exploring Intersectional Interculturality in Contexts of Cultural Pluriformity."

[21] Phirangee and Hewitt, "Enhancing Learners' Sense of Belonging in Online Threaded Discussions."

[22] Ajjawi et al., "Coming to Belong in the University through Small Acts of Connection."

Although various studies have made important contributions, there remains a gap in integrating the discursive, structural, and affective dimensions within a single analytical framework. In particular, research examining the negotiation of Islamic and cultural identities in English-mediated academic interactions that simultaneously considers power, belonging, and difference remains limited. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by using a Digital Ethnography approach to deeply understand how identity is negotiated in complex and layered digital academic interaction practices.

C. Research Methods

This study uses a Digital Ethnography approach to examine how Islamic and cultural identities are negotiated in English-mediated academic interactions. This approach was chosen because it allows for the exploration of naturally occurring, contextually relevant digital communication practices in academic life. Different from approaches that focus solely on text, Digital Ethnography views digital space as a socially embedded environment where identity, language, and power relations interact. Conceptually, this study positions digital academic space as a power-laden space that shapes the legitimacy of expression and participation. This design integrates the principles of prolonged engagement, contextual immersion, and interpretive analysis, enabling the researcher to understand the dynamics of interaction in depth, at both the discursive level and within participants' experiences. The researcher acts as an embedded observer with limited involvement, maintaining a balance between contextual closeness and analytical distance. With this design, the study not only describes the phenomenon but also uncovers the social mechanisms underlying identity negotiation in the digital academic context.

1. Participants / Subject / Population and Sample

Participants in this study consisted of 12 postgraduate students (S2) in English Language Education from a state university in Indonesia. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with attention to active involvement in English-mediated academic interaction and the diversity of Islamic and cultural identities. The main criteria included: (1) active students who regularly participate in English-based academic discussions, both synchronously and asynchronously; (2) having a Muslim background with varied expressions of Islamic identity; and (3) coming from diverse cultural backgrounds. The limited number of participants was deliberately selected to allow for prolonged engagement and in-depth exploration in accordance with the principles of Digital Ethnography. In this study, participants were positioned as social actors who actively shape and negotiate their identities.

All participants' identities were disguised using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality, and their involvement was conducted with informed consent.

Table 1. Participants' demography

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Cultural Background	Islamic Identity Expression
P1	Female	24-26	Javanese	Moderate
P2	Male	27-29	Sundanese	Strong
P3	Female	23-25	Minangkabau	Moderate
P4	Male	26-28	Bugis	Strong
P5	Female	25-27	Betawi	Flexible
P6	Male	28-30	Madurese	Strong
P7	Female	24-26	Javanese	Moderate
P8	Male	27-29	Sundanese	Flexible
P9	Female	23-25	Minangkabau	Strong
P10	Male	26-28	Bugis	Moderate
P11	Female	25-27	Javanese	Flexible
P12	Male	28-30	Madurese	Strong

The Islamic Identity Expression category serves as an analytical framework for understanding variations in how participants express their Islamic identity in English-mediated academic interactions. This category is interpretive and developed based on observed discursive practices, such as language choices, religious references, and the level of identity visibility in the interaction. Strong indicates explicit and consistent expression, Moderate reflects contextual and selective expression, and Flexible describes expression that adapts to academic norms. This category is not normative, but rather aims to capture the dynamics of identity positioning within relations of power, belonging, and difference.

2. Instruments

This research uses various digital materials that represent real-life English-mediated academic interaction. The primary data includes synchronous interactions such as online class sessions, as well as asynchronous interactions in the form of discussion forum posts, chat logs, and written academic exchanges within Learning Management Systems (LMS). Furthermore, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture participants' perspectives on their experiences and negotiations of Islamic and cultural identities. Data collection was conducted over a semester using a Digital Ethnography approach that emphasizes prolonged engagement and contextual immersion. The researchers conducted non-intrusive observations and documented field notes to capture the dynamics of interactions and their social context. This process includes data selection

based on relevance to the research focus. All procedures were conducted with ethical considerations in mind, including informed consent, the use of pseudonyms, and the protection of confidentiality in digital data management.

3. Procedures of Research

Data analysis was conducted iteratively and interpretively in line with the principles of Digital Ethnography. The process began with data familiarization through thorough reading of digital materials and the compilation of analytic memos to identify initial patterns. Next, data-driven open coding was conducted to capture units of meaning related to discursive performance, strategic visibility, and identity positioning. Initial codes were then developed into themes through thematic analysis using the constant comparative method. At this stage, the analysis was deepened through discourse-oriented interpretation to understand how language, choices of expression, and interactions reflect power relations and shape experiences of belonging and difference. To maintain trustworthiness, this study employed data triangulation between observations, digital interactions, and interviews, as well as reflexive engagement through fieldnotes. This approach enabled contextual and in-depth interpretation of the negotiation of Islamic and cultural identities in the digital academic space.

D. Findings

1. Performing Islamic and Cultural Identities through English-Mediated Discourse

The findings show that Islamic and cultural identities are not merely personal attributes but are actively performed through English-mediated discourse practices. Participants use English not only to convey academic ideas but also as a medium for religious and cultural self-positioning. Practices such as code-switching, the insertion of religious terms, and self-framing strategies demonstrate that identities are dynamically negotiated in interactions. In this context, the use of English does not erase local or Islamic identities but rather becomes a space where these identities are rearticulated in academically acceptable formats.

For example, participants often combine English with religious expressions to maintain a balance between academic norms and Islamic identities.

> "I think this concept is quite relevant to our discussion, and inshaAllah we can apply it in our future teaching practice." (P3)

Another example demonstrates how code-switching is used to strengthen cultural positions while maintaining engagement in academic discourse:

> "From my perspective, this theory aligns with our context, especially in budaya kita, where respect and hierarchy are very important." (P7)

Furthermore, participants also strategically framed themselves in interactions, combining academic voice and religious positioning:

> "As a Muslim student, I believe critical thinking is important, but it should still be guided by our values." (P2)

The data demonstrate that identity is not simply expressed but produced through discursive choices that reflect negotiations between academic expectations and Islamic-cultural values. English-mediated academic interaction becomes a space where identity is not dissolved but actively negotiated through complex, layered language practices.

2. Negotiating Visibility: Between Expression and Strategic Silence

The findings show that the negotiation of Islamic and cultural identities does not always occur through explicit expression. Still, also through practices of strategic visibility, that is, conscious decisions to display, withhold, or adjust identities in English-mediated academic interactions. Participants actively considered the context, audience, and academic norms before expressing their identities. In many cases, Islamic identity was not always directly displayed but negotiated through selective disclosure and even discursive silence. This suggests that "what is not said" is also an important form of identity work.

Some participants chose to express their religious identity explicitly when they felt the context supported it:

> "Before starting my presentation, I usually say Bismillah, but only if I feel the class is comfortable with that." (P5)

However, in other situations, participants consciously withheld identity expression to conform to global academic norms:

> "Sometimes I want to mention something related to Islamic perspective, but I'm not sure if it's relevant, so I just keep it general." (P8)

The practice of self-censorship also emerged as an adaptive strategy for maintaining academic standing:

> "I avoid bringing too much religious context because I don't want to be seen as less academic or too subjective." (P1)

These findings suggest that identity visibility is not a fixed concept, but rather the result of a continuous negotiation between the desire to express oneself and the need to conform to academic expectations, strategic silence and withholding become integral to how identity is negotiated in digital academic spaces.

3. Power as Structuring Force in Identity Negotiation

The findings indicate that negotiations over Islamic and cultural identities do not take place on equal terms. Still, they are instead shaped by power relations that determine who can speak, how they speak, and the extent to which identities can be displayed. In English-mediated academic interactions, linguistic authority is a primary source of power, with participants with higher English proficiency tending to be more dominant and confident in expressing their ideas and identities. Conversely, other participants show hesitation or choose to limit their participation. Furthermore, academic hierarchy, both formal (lecturer-student) and informal (students perceived as more competent), also influences the distribution of voices in interactions.

As an illustration, speaking dominance is often associated with the ability to articulate ideas fluently in English:

> "I feel more confident to speak because I can explain my ideas clearly in English, so I don't hesitate to add my perspective." (P4)

Conversely, another participant expressed hesitation related to linguistic insecurity:

> "Sometimes I have something to say, but I'm afraid my English is not good enough, so I prefer to stay silent." (P9)

Furthermore, academic norms, which are not always explicit, also shape the boundaries of identity expression, particularly regarding religiosity:

> "In this class, we are expected to be objective and academic, so I try not to bring too much personal or religious perspective." (P6)

This finding suggests that power operates subtly through implicit norms and symbolic legitimacy, where certain forms of expression are deemed more "academic" than others. As a result, identity negotiation depends not only on individual preferences but also on the power structures that govern the legitimacy of language, knowledge, and speech in digital academic spaces.

4. Constructing Belonging in Digital Academic Spaces

The findings indicate that belonging in English-mediated academic interactions is not automatically formed but rather constructed through an interactional process involving alignment, shared identity markers, and emotional positioning. Participants actively seek common ground among themselves through shared language, experiences, and values. In some cases, the use of religious expressions or cultural references serves to build closeness and a sense of acceptance. However, not all participants experience full belonging; some are in a state of partial belonging, feeling academically engaged but not fully connected socially or culturally.

For example, the practice of alignment is evident when participants respond in ways that demonstrate shared values or experiences:

> "I agree with your point, especially in our context as Muslim students, we have similar responsibilities in how we apply this knowledge." (P3)

In other interactions, shared identity markers are used to create a sense of closeness:

> "Maybe because we come from similar backgrounds, I feel more comfortable discussing these topics with you." (P7)

However, some participants also expressed experiences of partial belonging that were emotional in nature:

> "I can follow the discussion, but sometimes I feel like I don't fully belong because I cannot express myself the way I want in English." (P10)

This finding suggests that belonging is not solely determined by academic participation, but also by the ability to express oneself authentically and be accepted in interactions. Digital academic spaces become arenas where identity, emotion, and experience interact to form a sense of connectedness that is not always complete.

5. Producing Difference: Boundaries, Tensions, and Identity Work

The findings show that the difference is not simply present as a pre-existing condition, but is actively produced through interactional practices in English-mediated academic spaces. Difference emerges through subtle boundary-making, where participants (consciously or unconsciously) differentiate between what is considered "appropriate" and "less appropriate" in academic contexts. In many cases, Islamic and cultural identities become points of negotiation vulnerable to subtle exclusion and othering, especially when they do not fully align with dominant academic norms. This creates cultural and religious tension that is not always explicit but is felt in the dynamics of interactions.

As an illustration, a form of subtle exclusion emerges through responses that implicitly shift certain perspectives:

> "That's interesting, but maybe we should focus on more general perspectives so everyone can relate." (P6)

In another context, boundary-making is evident when participants mark the line between academic discourse and personal identity:

> "I think it's better to keep our discussion neutral and not bring too many cultural or religious aspect." (P2)

Othering practices also emerge subtly through the construction of difference:

> "In some cultures, including Islamic contexts, the approach might be different, but in global academia we usually follow this model." (P8)

This finding suggests that difference is not only negotiated but can also be reinforced through discursive practices that prioritize certain norms as standards. Identity work is not only concerned with how individuals present themselves, but also how they navigate and respond to the boundaries established in interactions. This confirms that the difference results from complex social processes, not simply a static inherent category.

E. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic and cultural identities do not exist as fixed entities, but are instead continually negotiated through English-mediated academic interactions. Identities are produced through discursive performance, regulated through strategic visibility, and structured by power relations that determine the legitimacy of expression. At the same time, identities are not merely discursive but also experienced affectively through the dynamics of belonging and difference. The digital academic space emerges not as a neutral

medium but as a complex arena where language[23], identity[24], and power[25] are intertwined.

These findings reinforce the identity negotiation perspective, which views identity as a dynamic, context-dependent process. This study goes further by demonstrating that these negotiations occur not only through open expression but also through practices of strategic silence and selective disclosure. This broadens the understanding that identity work lies not only in what is said but also in what is withheld[26]. In this context, English-mediated discourse is not merely a medium of communication but also a mechanism that mediates how identities are positioned[27], negotiated[28], and assessed[29].

The findings of this study not only confirm the dynamic nature of Islamic and cultural identities but also lead to the development of a more integrative conceptual framework. Based on consistently emerging patterns in discursive practices, strategic choices, and the dynamics of power, belonging, and difference, this study proposes a Multi-Layered Model of Identity Negotiation in English-Mediated Academic Interaction. This model emphasizes that identity negotiation unfolds across five intertwined layers that simultaneously shape participants' experiences. The first layer, discursive performance, demonstrates that identity is produced through language choices, code-switching, and the use of religious references. The second layer, strategic visibility, highlights how identity is negotiated not only through expression but also through silence and selective disclosure. The third layer, power structuring, reveals that academic norms and linguistic authority implicitly regulate the legitimacy of identity expression. Next, belonging construction positions identity as an affective experience related to a sense of acceptance or connection. Finally, boundary production demonstrates that difference is actively produced through practices of othering and subtle exclusion. This model expands the study of identity

[23] Jiang and Hyland, "EAP in a Changing World: Towards a New Research Agenda."
[24] Boumaza and Baker, "Negotiating Cultural Identity in the Trans-Digital Space: A Multi-Scalar Analysis of Translingual ELF Users' Intercultural Communication."
[25] Rashid and Ding, "Online Discursive Contestations over Educational Reform in Malaysia's Multiethnic Society."
[26] White et al., "Research Learning Experiences for First-Year Undergraduate Students: Belonging, Research Identity, and Retention."
[27] McGahern, "Higher Education Under Siege: Attacking Spaces of Hope in Palestine."
[28] Marginson, "Space, Power, and Globalization: On the Geopolitics of Higher Education."
[29] Abdulmuhsin et al., "Impact of the Organizational Dimension of Workplace Friendship on Knowledge Management Processes: An Islamic Higher Education Perspective."

negotiation by integrating discursive, structural, and affective dimensions into a more comprehensive framework.

Table 2. Multi-Layered Model of Identity Negotiation

Layer	Key Concept	Main Focus	Analytical Function
1	Discursive Performance	Language use, code-switching, and religious expressions	Producing identity through discourse
2	Strategic Visibility	Expression, silence, selective disclosure	Negotiating identity visibility
3	Power Structuring	Academic norms, linguistic authority, legitimacy	Regulating identity expression
4	Belonging Construction	Alignment, emotional connection, inclusion	Experiencing identity relationally
5	Boundary Production	Othering, exclusion, cultural tension	Producing and reinforcing difference

This model demonstrates that identity is not only negotiated through language but also through a complex interplay of visibility, power, affective experiences, and constructions of difference. English-mediated academic interaction can be understood as a dynamic space where identity is not simply represented, but is continuously constructed, negotiated, and contested.

These findings align with previous studies that emphasize the role of language as a marker of identity[30], while also expanding on them by demonstrating that English in academic contexts functions as a site of negotiation fraught with power relations[31]. While previous research has largely highlighted code-switching and identity representation as expressive practices[32], this study demonstrates that implicit academic norms also influence these practices. These findings not only align with existing literature but also extend our understanding of how linguistic authority and symbolic legitimacy shape the boundaries of identity expression in digital academic spaces.

Moreover, this study reveals that power operates subtly through implicit norms that determine what forms of expression are considered "academic" and "appropriate." This creates conditions in which participants strategically adapt, even self-censor, to maintain their academic legitimacy. These findings make an

[30] Firdaus, "Indonesian and World Folklore from a Critical Literacy Perspective: A Comparative Analysis of Cultural Values and Social Identity."

[31] Jaeka, Kurnia, and Rusdiarti, "*Heritage* , Memory Politics, and the Production of Postcolonial Identity in Ampenan Old Town, Indonesia."

[32] Mehio, "Upholding and Resisting English Language Ideologies: Identity Negotiation of Five Sunni Muslims in Lebanon."

important contribution to the study of intercultural communication by demonstrating that identity negotiation cannot be separated from the power structures that govern interaction. English-mediated academic interaction should be understood as a space that not only connects individuals from different backgrounds but also shapes how these differences are displayed or concealed.

The findings on belonging and difference suggest that participants' experiences in digital academic spaces are ambivalent. On the one hand, alignment practices and the use of shared identity markers enable a sense of connectedness. On the other hand, limitations on authentic self-expression, whether due to language barriers or academic norms, create a sense of partial belonging. This suggests that inclusion in academic spaces is not only about access but also about the ability to express identity meaningfully. This research highlights the importance of understanding the affective dimension of identity negotiation, which has often been overlooked in studies of academic discourse.

These findings imply the need to rethink communication practices in higher education, particularly in a global context dominated by English. Academic institutions need to recognize that the use of English as a lingua franca is not neutral but carries consequences for how certain identities become more or less visible. Therefore, a more sensitive approach to identity diversity, including Islamic identity, is needed when designing more inclusive digital academic learning and interaction practices.

In some cases, this study has several limitations. First, the relatively small number of participants from a single institutional context limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, focusing on a single group of students with an English-language background may influence the observed interaction patterns, particularly regarding language competence. Third, although Digital Ethnography allows for in-depth exploration, this approach remains dependent on the researcher's interpretation, which particular positions and perspectives can influence.

It is recommended that future research expand its context to include different disciplines and institutions to capture a wider range of identity negotiation practices. Furthermore, future research could integrate a more in-depth multimodal approach to analyze not only textual but also visual and performative aspects of digital interactions. Longitudinal studies are also important for understanding how identity negotiations evolve within the academic experience. This study opens up space for further exploration of how identity, language, and power continue to interact in the increasingly digitalized landscape of higher education.

F. Conclusion

This study confirms that negotiating Islamic and cultural identities in English-mediated academic interactions is not merely a matter of expression but a complex social practice in which language, norms, and power relations mutually shape the possibilities and limits of identity. Identities do not exist in their entirety but emerge from a series of discursive decisions (what is said, adjusted, or even concealed) in response to academic demands and the dynamics of digital interactions. This research demonstrates that digital academic spaces function as ambivalent arenas: they open up opportunities for identity articulation, while simultaneously limiting their visibility through standards that are not always explicit. In this context, experiences of belonging and difference are key to understanding how identity is negotiated not only cognitively but also emotionally and relationally. This study contributes to its aim of providing a more layered understanding of identity negotiation, not merely as a discursive phenomenon but as a practice situated at the intersection of language, power, and experience. This perspective opens up space for a more critical reconsideration of global academic practices, particularly in efforts to create environments that are not only structurally inclusive but also enable the meaningful presence of diverse identities.

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