



Integrating Islamic Ethics and Binary Axiology in Javanese Unggah-Ungguh: Implications for Islamic Character Education

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ABSTRACT

The increasing influence of modernization and digital communication has transformed the implementation of Javanese speech levels, raising questions about how traditional values of respect and equality are maintained within contemporary social interaction. This study investigates the manifestation of binary axiology in Javanese social stratification in Temanggung Regency, Indonesia, with particular emphasis on the functions of unggah-ungguh and the ngoko–krama speech system from an ethnopragmatic perspective. A qualitative descriptive-analytical design was employed using participant observation and documentation studies conducted at the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic Institute (INISNU) Temanggung and within the surrounding community. The data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis integrated with ethnopragmatics, Scheler's value axiology, Heidegger's concepts of Dasein and Das Sollen, and an Islamic ethical perspective emphasizing adab, akhlaq, ta'zim, and iḥtirām. The findings reveal that Javanese communication operates through complementary binary values of equality (ngoko) and respect (krama), while speech-level selection is increasingly influenced by contextual factors, including institutional setting, relational proximity, and communicative purpose. Rather than indicating the erosion of cultural values, these adaptations represent the transformation of value implementation within changing social environments. The study is limited to observations conducted in one academic institution and its surrounding community; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all Javanese communities with different sociocultural characteristics. The study contributes a novel interdisciplinary framework integrating binary axiology, ethnopragmatics, existential philosophy, and Islamic ethics to explain Javanese social stratification as a dynamic value-oriented communication system, offering implications for character education, intercultural communication, and the preservation of local cultural values.

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1. Introduction

Axiology, as a branch of philosophy, examines the nature of values and the benefits of knowledge for human life ([Velázquez, 2023](#)). Etymologically, the term derives from the Greek words *axios* (valuable or beneficial) and *logos* (knowledge or science), emphasizing that knowledge acquires meaning when it contributes to human welfare ([Putra, Winarno, & Subagyo, 2026](#)). From an Islamic perspective, values are likewise understood as guiding principles that shape human conduct through *akhlaq* (moral character) and *adab* (ethical behaviour), where respect, humility, and harmonious social relations are regarded as religious as well as cultural obligations ([Ismail & Matthews, 2024](#)). Therefore, this study argues that the convergence between philosophical axiology and Islamic ethical values provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the value system embedded in Javanese social interaction. More specifically, the axiological perspective in this study is used to identify the values underlying interpersonal communication, while Islamic ethics provides a normative moral framework for interpreting whether those values and communicative practices promote respect, human dignity, and social harmony. Thus, the two perspectives are complementary rather than theoretically interchangeable: axiology explains the structure and orientation of values, whereas Islamic ethics provides a moral criterion for interpreting their ethical significance.

The concept of binary, originally understood as a numerical system consisting of the symbols 0 and 1, is reinterpreted in this study as a representation of two contrasting social values ([Zhao, Wu, Li, Yang, & Sheng, 2022](#)). Within this framework, binary signifies the distinction between respect (1) and equality or less formal relations (0), reflecting the dynamics of interpersonal communication in Javanese society ([Sumekto, Ghozali, Yuwono, Santoso, & Tukiyo, 2022](#)). Social stratification itself refers to the vertical differentiation of society based on socially valued attributes such as prestige, honour, and social recognition, while Islamic ethics emphasizes that differences in social status should never negate the principles of mutual respect (*iḥtirām*) and human dignity (*karāmah*) ([Tsolak & Bürmann, 2023](#)). Accordingly, this study proposes that Javanese social stratification can be interpreted as a binary axiological system in which cultural norms of respect are reinforced by universal ethical principles shared within Islamic teachings. The binary perspective is therefore not intended to reduce Javanese social relations to a rigid opposition between two mutually exclusive categories. Instead, it functions as an analytical device for identifying the complementary poles of equality and respect that are continuously negotiated according to relational context. This distinction is important because Javanese communication may simultaneously acknowledge social differences while maintaining the moral principle that every person possesses human dignity.

Unggah-ungguh (rules of politeness in speech and behaviour) together with the *ngoko krama* language system constitute the principal mechanisms through which social hierarchy is expressed in Javanese society ([Dewi & Goebel, 2023](#)). Recent studies explain that unggah-ungguh encompasses linguistic forms, body language, seating arrangements, and communicative manners, whereas the *ngoko* and *krama* speech levels distinguish interpersonal interactions according to familiarity, age, social status, and respect ([Aisha & Wiranti, 2025](#)). From Heidegger's existential philosophy, these practices reflect *Dasein* as the lived reality of everyday communication, whereas *Das Sollen* represents the normative ideal that communication should preserve social harmony despite the pressures of modernization; this normative ideal is also consistent with the Islamic

concepts of adab and akhlaq, which encourage ethical communication and mutual respect in all social relationships ([Sutrisno, 2025](#)). Therefore, this study argues that the interaction between Dasein, Das Sollen, and Islamic ethical values explains how the binary principles of respect and equality continue to be negotiated within contemporary Javanese communication practices. In this integrated framework, each theoretical perspective performs a distinct analytical function. Ethnopragmatics explains how speech choices acquire culturally specific meanings in particular interactional contexts; binary axiology identifies the underlying value polarity of equality and respect; Heidegger's concepts distinguish between communicative practices as they are lived and the normative expectations governing how they ought to be performed; and Islamic ethics evaluates these practices in relation to adab, akhlaq, human dignity, and respectful conduct. The integration therefore follows a sequential analytical logic from communicative practice, to cultural meaning, to value structure, to normative and ethical interpretation rather than combining unrelated philosophical concepts.

Based on this philosophical, religious, and sociocultural background, this study addresses three research questions concerning the manifestation of binary axiology in Javanese social appreciation, the function of unggah-ungguh and ngoko krama as a binary system, and their ethnopragmatic implications for understanding social stratification ([Dewi & Goebel, 2023](#)). To answer these questions, the study aims to analyze the manifestation of binary axiology in the social practices of Javanese society in Temanggung Regency ([Sahfutra & Maharani, 2022](#)). It also seeks to explain the function of unggah-ungguh and ngoko-krama from an ethnopragmatic perspective and to explore their conceptual and practical implications for understanding Javanese social stratification ([Pramudibyanto, 2023](#)). Thus, this research is designed to construct a comprehensive explanation of Javanese social stratification by integrating philosophical axiology, Islamic ethics, and ethnopragmatic perspectives within a single analytical framework. Importantly, the study does not treat Islamic ethics as an external interpretation imposed upon Javanese culture. Rather, it examines the points of convergence and negotiation between locally embedded communicative norms and Islamic moral principles within a community in which Javanese cultural practices and Islamic values coexist. This approach enables the study to identify not only continuity between cultural and religious values but also possible tensions and transformations produced by changing social contexts.

The significance of this study can be explained from both academic and practical perspectives ([Lim & Bowman, 2023](#)). Academically, previous studies have largely discussed unggah-ungguh, social stratification, or ethnopragmatics separately, while few have explicitly integrated binary axiology, Heidegger's concepts of Dasein and Das Sollen, Islamic ethical values, and Javanese communication practices into a unified conceptual framework ([Chintawidy & Sartini, 2022](#)). This constitutes the principal research gap addressed by the present study. Existing scholarship has provided valuable explanations of Javanese politeness, speech-level variation, social hierarchy, and ethnopragmatic meaning, but these strands have generally remained analytically separated. In particular, limited attention has been given to how the binary relationship between equality and respect is constructed through ngoko krama, how this relationship is negotiated between actual communicative behaviour and normative expectations, and how Islamic ethics can provide a complementary moral interpretation of such practices. Consequently, the present study addresses not merely a contextual gap concerning Temanggung Regency, but also a theoretical integration gap by connecting cultural-

linguistic practices, axiological structures, existential interpretation, and Islamic morality within one analytical framework.

Practically, the rapid expansion of modernization and digital culture has contributed to the gradual decline of unggah-ungguh and the ngoko krama system among younger generations, threatening the preservation of cultural values that also resonate with Islamic teachings on adab, respectful communication, and social harmony ([Sartika & Nurbaiti, 2022](#)). Therefore, this study argues that preserving Javanese communication ethics requires understanding social stratification not merely as a hierarchical structure but as an axiological system grounded in philosophical reasoning, Islamic morality, and harmonious social relationships. From an educational perspective, this finding is particularly relevant because cultural communication values can be transformed into contextual character-education resources. Islamic educators can use culturally familiar practices such as appropriate speech levels, respect for elders, humility, and interpersonal courtesy as contextual examples for teaching adab, akhlaq, mutual respect, and social responsibility. In this sense, the preservation of unggah-ungguh is not positioned merely as cultural conservation but also as an educational process through which local wisdom can support the development of Islamic character.

Binary axiology explains that social values often operate through two complementary poles that distinguish equality from respect in interpersonal relationships ([Floris, 2019](#)). In Javanese society, this binary pattern is reflected in the distinction between ngoko and krama, where ngoko symbolizes intimacy and equality, whereas krama represents respect and social hierarchy ([Hidayatullah, 2024](#)). A comparable pattern is found in Gayo customary philosophy, where Joni (2019) demonstrates that social interaction is governed by the dual principles of equality and respect ([Syukri & Sabariah, 2023](#)). Therefore, this study argues that binary axiology constitutes a universal value framework whose manifestation in Javanese unggah-ungguh reflects the convergence of cultural philosophy and social ethics in regulating interaction. Nevertheless, the present study does not assume that the binary structure identified in Gayo customary philosophy can be transferred directly to Javanese society. Joni's (2019) framework serves as a conceptual point of departure for identifying the analytical relationship between equality and respect, while the present study examines whether and how this relationship is manifested differently within Javanese unggah-ungguh. This distinction strengthens the theoretical justification for borrowing the binary concept while preserving the sociocultural specificity of the Javanese context.

Islamic ethics strengthens this binary logic through the principles of adab, akhlaq, and ta'zim, which require believers to balance equality in human dignity with respect in conduct ([Hefni, Ahmadi, & Mustofa, 2022](#)). The Qur'anic emphasis on honouring others and speaking with kindness shows that respectful language is not merely a cultural preference but also a moral obligation ([Burhanudin & Rojali, 2022](#)). In this sense, krama resonates with Islamic ideals of humility and courtesy, while ngoko may be understood as appropriate only within relationships that preserve dignity and propriety ([Suryani et al., 2023](#)). Therefore, this study argues that the Islamic ethical sub-point deepens the interpretation of binary axiology by showing that Javanese linguistic hierarchy is compatible with a broader moral framework of respectful human relations. At the same time, this study avoids equating krama automatically with Islamic morality or ngoko with a lower moral status. The ethical meaning of either speech level depends on communicative intention, relational context, and whether the interaction preserves dignity and respectful conduct. Islamic ethics therefore functions as an interpretive and

normative lens rather than as a simplistic classification of particular Javanese speech forms as inherently moral or immoral.

Heidegger distinguishes Dasein as human existence in lived reality from Das Sollen as the normative condition describing how individuals ought to behave ([Onwuatuegwu, 2022](#)). Within Javanese communication, the factual use of ngoko in formal situations represents Dasein, whereas the expectation to employ krama according to unggah-ungguh embodies Das Sollen, illustrating the dialectic between empirical practice and cultural ideals, as also emphasized ([Purnomo, 2025](#)). This tension reveals that language use is not only descriptive but also prescriptive, because speakers constantly negotiate between what is done and what should be done ([Chen & Brown, 2025](#)). Therefore, this study argues that the Dasein Das Sollen relation provides a useful lens for understanding the gap between actual Javanese speech behaviour and the normative expectations of politeness. In the present study, this philosophical distinction is operationalized conceptually rather than treated as a claim that Heidegger originally developed his philosophy specifically to explain Javanese speech levels. Dasein is used to illuminate the situated and lived character of communicative practice, whereas Das Sollen is used to represent the normative expectations attached to culturally appropriate communication. Their analytical value lies in explaining the dynamic relationship between actual practice and normative expectation, particularly when modernization and digital communication alter established patterns of interaction.

Javanese social stratification is maintained not only through economic or political distinctions but also through language, behaviour, and communication ethics that express social recognition ([Yana & Sudrajat, 2025](#)). Family interaction constitutes the earliest foundation of Javanese social stratification through linguistic practices, whereas modernization has increased the dominance of the Indonesian language without entirely eliminating the cultural values of unggah-ungguh ([Suparno, Indah, & Hasanah, 2024](#)). In this context, stratification is reproduced through everyday interaction, where speakers adjust language choice according to age, status, and relational distance ([Ntou, 2024](#)). Therefore, this study argues that Javanese social stratification should be understood as an axiological system in which language functions as a marker of social order and moral recognition. This perspective also shifts the interpretation of stratification from a purely vertical model toward a relational model. Social differences are expressed through communicative choices, but these differences are continually negotiated through expectations of dignity, respect, familiarity, and social harmony. Consequently, unggah-ungguh becomes an important site where social hierarchy and moral equality interact rather than mutually exclude one another.

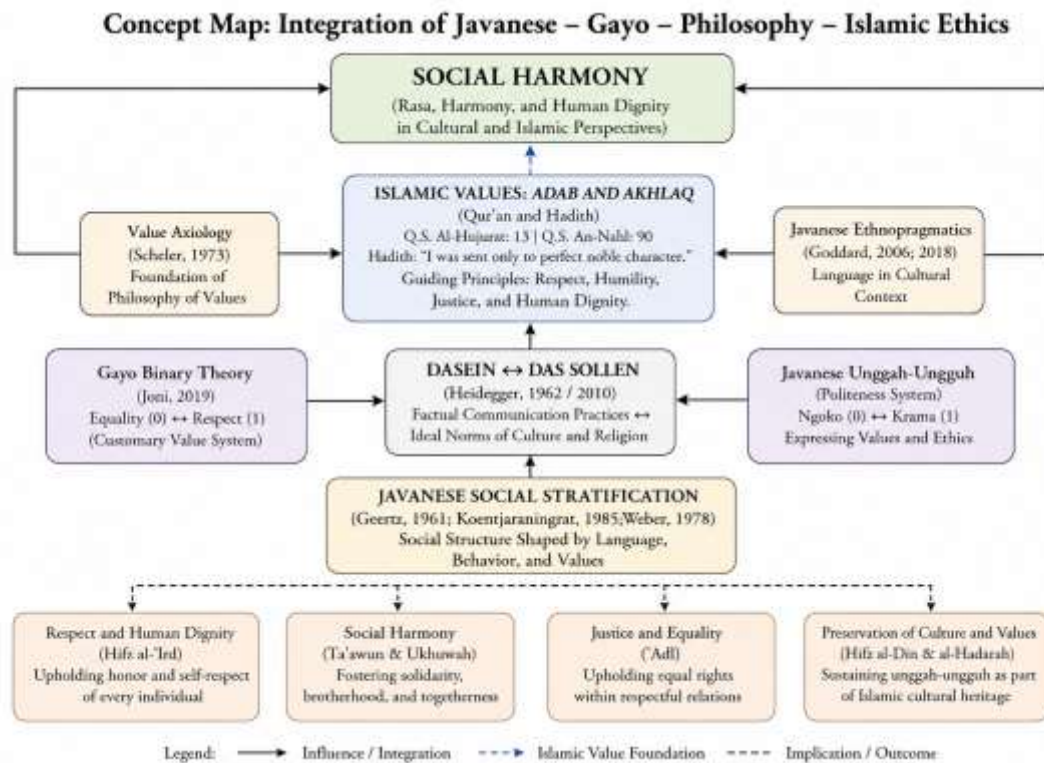


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Integrating Javanese Culture, Gayo Philosophy, Axiology, and Islamic Ethics

The conceptual framework of this study integrates value axiology, Gayo binary theory, Javanese ethnopragmatics, Heidegger's concepts of Dasein and Das Sollen, Islamic ethics, and Javanese social stratification into a unified analytical model. Scheler's value axiology provides the philosophical foundation, while Joni's (2019) binary theory explains that equality (0) and respect (1) constitute complementary social values reflected in Javanese ngoko and krama. Islamic ethics reinforces this binary structure through the principles of adab, akhlaq, and ta'zim, which emphasize respectful communication, humility, justice, and the preservation of human dignity. Therefore, this study argues that Javanese communication should be understood as a multidimensional value system in which philosophical reasoning, cultural wisdom, and Islamic morality mutually reinforce one another. The theoretical integration is structured hierarchically: Schelerian axiology establishes the general question of value; the binary framework specifies the principal value polarity of equality and respect; ethnopragmatics explains how these values are encoded and interpreted in culturally situated communication; Heidegger's concepts illuminate the relationship between lived communicative practice and normative expectation; and Islamic ethics provides a moral framework for interpreting the ethical quality and educational significance of those practices. This division of analytical functions is the basis for treating the theories as complementary rather than theoretically redundant.

The framework further explains that binary values are manifested in everyday communication practices through Heidegger's concept of Dasein, whereas Das Sollen represents the cultural and moral ideals embodied in unggah-ungguh and the ngoko–krama language system. Javanese ethnopragmatics provides the analytical perspective for interpreting how these linguistic choices express social meanings within their cultural context, while Islamic ethics guides communication toward adab and ethical responsibility. The interaction between empirical communication practices and

normative expectations shapes the way individuals negotiate respect, equality, and social identity in contemporary Javanese society. Therefore, this study argues that the dialectic between Dasein, Das Sollen, ethnopragmatics, and Islamic ethics explains the continuity and transformation of Javanese communication values amid social change. This relationship is particularly important in contemporary settings because changes in communication media do not necessarily eliminate cultural values; instead, they may alter the contexts, forms, and intensity through which those values are expressed. The framework therefore allows the study to distinguish between the disappearance of a value and the transformation of its communicative realization.

The integration of these theoretical components ultimately explains the formation of Javanese social stratification as a value based social system rather than merely a hierarchical structure. Social harmony emerges when binary values, cultural norms, and Islamic ethical principles operate in balance, producing respect, justice, solidarity, and the preservation of cultural identity. This conceptual framework therefore positions unggah-ungguh as both a cultural practice and a moral instrument for sustaining harmonious social relationships across generations. Accordingly, the proposed framework demonstrates that social harmony is achieved through the integration of binary axiology, Javanese cultural traditions, and Islamic ethical values, providing a comprehensive foundation for understanding Javanese social stratification. The novelty of the framework consequently lies not in claiming that each individual theory is new, but in proposing a theoretically justified pathway through which these perspectives explain the same empirical phenomenon at different analytical levels. The contribution is therefore an integrated explanatory model in which cultural communication practices are connected to value structures, lived–normative tensions, Islamic ethical principles, and ultimately the formation and transformation of social relations.

This study aims to develop an integrated understanding of Javanese social stratification by examining the dynamics of unggah-ungguh through the perspectives of binary axiology, ethnopragmatics, Heidegger's concepts of Dasein and Das Sollen, and Islamic ethics. It investigates how the binary values of equality and respect are constructed, negotiated, and maintained in everyday communication practices within Javanese society, particularly in Temanggung Regency. Furthermore, the study seeks to formulate a comprehensive conceptual framework that connects philosophical values, cultural traditions, linguistic practices, and Islamic moral principles in explaining the continuity and transformation of Javanese social interaction. In addition to its theoretical contribution, the study seeks to translate these findings into implications for Islamic character education by identifying how culturally embedded communication practices can become contextual learning resources for teaching respect, humility, ethical communication, social responsibility, and appreciation of local wisdom. Therefore, this study argues that integrating philosophical axiology, Javanese cultural wisdom, and Islamic ethical values provides a novel and holistic perspective for understanding the formation of social stratification and the preservation of social harmony in contemporary Javanese society. The study thus contributes an interdisciplinary framework that is relevant not only to sociolinguistic and philosophical discussions but also to Islamic education, particularly in designing culturally responsive character education practices that connect local cultural values with Islamic ethical principles.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research design to investigate the manifestation of binary axiology in Javanese social stratification through communication practices. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on exploring meanings, values, and linguistic practices situated within specific cultural contexts rather than on quantitative measurement. The descriptive-analytical design enabled the researcher to describe communication phenomena while simultaneously interpreting them through the framework of binary axiology, the dialectic between Dasein and Das Sollen, and the Islamic ethical principles of adab and akhlaq as complementary analytical perspectives ([Karamercan, 2023](#)). Accordingly, this research design provides an appropriate methodological foundation for examining Javanese communication as a culturally embedded system of social values.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument responsible for observing, recording, selecting, and interpreting the data throughout the research process. During fieldwork, the researcher assumed the role of a participant observer by engaging directly in everyday communication within both academic and community settings. Reflective awareness was continuously maintained by distinguishing empirical communication practices (Dasein) from their normative ideals (Das Sollen), thereby minimizing subjective interpretation. The researcher maintained systematic field notes throughout the observation period, documenting the linguistic forms used, the relationship between interlocutors, the interactional setting, the communicative purpose, and the apparent social meaning of each relevant interaction.

The research was conducted at the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic Institute (INISNU) Temanggung and within the wider Temanggung community, Central Java, Indonesia. These locations were selected because they represent formal and informal social environments where unggah-ungguh and the ngoko–krama speech system continue to shape everyday communication. The coexistence of academic and community interactions provided opportunities to observe linguistic behavior across different social contexts while preserving the authenticity of naturally occurring communication ([Wang, Jin, & Li, 2023](#)). Fieldwork was conducted in April 2025, covering both academic and community interactions. At INISNU Temanggung, observations focused on naturally occurring interactions involving 20 students, 5 lecturers, 3 administrative staff members, and 2 university officials. In the surrounding community, the researcher observed interactions involving 10 community members representing different age groups and relational positions.

The participant pool was determined purposively because the study required participants who regularly engage in Javanese communication and whose interactions could provide evidence of unggah-ungguh, ngoko krama usage, social recognition, and respect equality relations. The total number of participants was 40, consisting of 20 students, 5 lecturers, 3 administrative staff members, 2 university officials, and 10 community members. Participants were included when they were involved in naturally occurring communication in the selected research settings and were able to provide contextual information concerning the use and meaning of Javanese speech levels.

The object of this study comprised verbal and non-verbal communication practices that reflect binary axiology within Javanese social stratification. Particular attention was given to the use of ngoko and krama, as well as the implementation of unggah-ungguh in everyday interpersonal interaction. These communicative practices were examined as expressions of respect, equality, hierarchy, and social recognition within Javanese culture

while also considering their correspondence with the Islamic ethical principles of *adab*, *akhlaq*, *ta'zim*, and *ihtirām*. Consequently, the research object allowed the study to explore the interaction between linguistic choices, cultural values, and social hierarchy.

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data consisted of naturally occurring conversations observed within the academic environment of INISNU Temanggung, including interactions among students, lecturers, administrative staff, and university officials, as well as communication practices within the Temanggung community. Secondary data included scientific articles, books, conceptual manuscripts, and other scholarly publications concerning axiology, Javanese social stratification, unggah-ungguh, ngoko krama, and ethnopragmatics ([Pranowo & Susanti, 2020](#)). The primary empirical data comprised 60 observed interaction episodes collected during 12 observation sessions, representing approximately 36 total hours of field observation. The observation episodes were selected when they contained identifiable linguistic or behavioural indicators of speech-level selection, respect, equality, social distance, hierarchy, or interpersonal recognition.

Data were collected through documentation studies and participant observation. Documentation studies were conducted to examine conceptual literature related to binary axiology, philosophy of values, ethnopragmatics, and Javanese communication, whereas participant observation enabled the researcher to observe naturally occurring communication practices within academic and community environments ([Zahle, 2023](#)). The collected information was subsequently selected, organized, and categorized into major themes, including unggah-ungguh, ngoko krama, respect, equality, and social stratification. This combination of data collection techniques strengthened both the depth and contextual richness of the empirical evidence.

Participant observation was conducted through 12 observation sessions with an approximate total duration of 36 hours. Each observation session lasted approximately three hours and was conducted in classrooms, administrative offices, campus common areas, and community gathering places in Temanggung. During each session, the researcher recorded the context of interaction, participants' social relationships, speech-level choices, communicative purposes, relevant non verbal behaviour, and contextual factors influencing language selection. Relevant conversations were documented through field notes, and no audio recordings were made in order to preserve the naturalness of the interactions and protect participants' privacy.

No formal interviews were conducted in this study. The empirical analysis relied on participant observation, field notes, and documentary materials in order to prioritize naturally occurring communication practices rather than retrospective accounts of language use.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis integrated with an ethnopragmatic approach. The analytical procedure began with data reduction, followed by the identification of binary concepts by classifying communication practices into two complementary categories: equality or intimacy (0) and respect or social distance (1). The categorized data were subsequently interpreted through ethnopragmatic analysis to explain their cultural meanings and synthesized using the dialectical concepts of Dasein and Das Sollen to evaluate the relationship between actual communication practices and normative ideals ([Duranti, 2023](#)). This analytical framework enabled the study to explain not only how Javanese communication is practiced but also why particular linguistic forms are considered socially appropriate.

To maintain consistency with the theoretical framework, the ethnopragmatic analysis was further complemented by an Islamic ethical perspective. Communication practices identified during the analysis were interpreted in relation to the principles of *adab*, *akhlaq*, *ta'zim*, and *ihtirām* to examine whether Javanese communication values corresponded with Islamic moral teachings on respectful and harmonious social interaction. Rather than functioning as a normative theological evaluation, this perspective served as an analytical lens for understanding the convergence between local cultural wisdom and Islamic ethical values. Accordingly, the analytical framework integrated philosophical axiology, ethnopragmatics, Heidegger's existential philosophy, and Islamic ethics into a coherent interpretative model.

The credibility of the findings was enhanced through methodological triangulation, source triangulation, and expert review. Methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating documentation studies with participant observation, whereas source triangulation involved comparing data obtained from academic settings, community interactions, and scholarly literature ([Vivek, Nanthagopan, & Priyatharshan, 2023](#)). In addition, preliminary interpretations were reviewed by two experts in Javanese language and culture to ensure that the findings accurately reflected indigenous perspectives and cultural meanings. The reviewers examined the preliminary coding and interpretation, particularly the classification of *ngoko krama* practices, the interpretation of social relationships, and the correspondence between local cultural values and Islamic ethical principles. Feedback from the reviewers was incorporated into the final interpretation.

The interpretations were also examined for their consistency with the Islamic ethical principles incorporated into the conceptual framework, thereby strengthening the coherence of the overall analytical interpretation. Collectively, these validation procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the research findings while ensuring that the interpretations remained culturally grounded.

Ethical considerations were also addressed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of the collected data. Personal identifiers were removed from the research records and reporting to protect participant confidentiality. Naturally occurring observations were reported in a manner that avoided disclosure of unnecessary personal information.

3. Finding and Discussion

Finding

a. Empirical Findings on Javanese Communication Practices

Field observations conducted at the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic Institute (INISNU) Temanggung and within the surrounding Temanggung community revealed diverse communication patterns shaped by institutional settings, interpersonal relationships, and cultural expectations. Students generally employed *ngoko* when communicating with peers to express familiarity and equality, whereas interactions with lecturers predominantly involved *krama*, although instances of *ngoko* and mixed Indonesian–Javanese expressions were also observed, particularly in informal academic contexts. Similar patterns appeared among lecturers and administrative staff, who adjusted their linguistic choices according to situational formality, age, institutional hierarchy, and relational closeness. These findings indicate that contemporary Javanese communication is characterized by a dynamic negotiation between traditional norms of respect and the practical demands of modern academic interaction.

The empirical observations were further illustrated through naturally occurring interactions involving students, lecturers, and community members. The following excerpts demonstrate how speech-level selection was related to interpersonal relationships and communicative contexts.

The empirical observations were further illustrated through naturally occurring interactions involving students, lecturers, and community members. The following excerpts demonstrate how speech-level selection was related to interpersonal relationships and communicative contexts.

Transcript 1. Student Lecturer Interaction

Context: A student approached a lecturer after an academic session to ask about an assignment.

Student: "Pak, nyuwun sewu, menawi tugasipun dipun-kempalaken dinten menapa nggih?"

Lecturer: "Dikumpulke minggu ngarep wae, ora apa-apa."

English translation:

Student: "Excuse me, Sir, may I ask when the assignment should be submitted?"

Lecturer: "Just submit it next week; that is fine."

The student's use of *krama* forms such as "nyuwun sewu," "menawi," "tugasipun," and "dinten menapa" demonstrates linguistic politeness toward the lecturer. The speech choice indexes institutional respect and social distance. The lecturer's response, however, shifts toward a more informal register, demonstrating that speech-level selection does not necessarily operate symmetrically between interlocutors. A contrasting pattern was found in peer interaction:

Transcript 2. Student–Student Interaction

Context: Two students who regularly interacted with each other discussed an assignment before class.

Student A: "Kowe wis ngrampungke tugas sing wingi durung?"

Student B: "Durung, aku malah durung paham nomer telu. Kowe wis?"

Student A: "Wis. Mengko tak jelaske nek wis mlebu kelas."

English translation:

Student A: "Have you finished yesterday's assignment?"

Student B: "Not yet. I still don't understand number three. Have you?"

Student A: "Yes. I'll explain it to you once we are in class."

The repeated use of *ngoko*, particularly "kowe," "aku," and "tak jelaske," indicates familiarity and relational equality. Unlike the student lecturer interaction, the participants share a relatively equal institutional position and therefore do not need to linguistically mark social distance. The interaction demonstrates that *ngoko* can function as a positive marker of intimacy and solidarity rather than as an inherently impolite form.

The observations also revealed that contemporary academic interaction frequently involved linguistic mixing:

Transcript 3. Informal Student Lecturer Interaction

Context: A student met a lecturer informally outside the classroom and asked about an upcoming presentation.

Student: "Pak, nyuwun sewu, presentasinipun menika besok nggih?"

Lecturer: "Iya, besok. Materinya sudah disiapkan?"

Student: "Sampun, Pak. Tapi bagian terakhir niki dereng yakin."

Lecturer: "Ora apa-apa, nanti kita bahas sebelum presentasi."

English translation:

Student: "Excuse me, Sir, is the presentation tomorrow?"

Lecturer: "Yes, tomorrow. Have you prepared the material?"

Student: "Yes, Sir. But I am still unsure about the last part."

Lecturer: "That's fine; we'll discuss it before the presentation."

This interaction demonstrates the flexibility of contemporary *unggah-ungguh*. The student retains several *krama* expressions while incorporating Indonesian, whereas the lecturer uses a mixture of Indonesian and *ngoko*. The interaction therefore suggests that respect can be maintained even when traditional speech-level patterns are not applied consistently. Linguistic adaptation in this context reflects the influence of contemporary academic communication rather than the complete abandonment of Javanese ethical values.

b. Binary Axiology and the Dialectic of Dasein and Das Sollen

The empirical findings demonstrate that the binary distinction between equality (0) and respect (1) continues to structure communication practices in Javanese society, although its realization has become increasingly flexible. The transcripts show that *ngoko* tends to operate at the pole of familiarity and equality, whereas *krama* tends to operate at the pole of respect and social distance. However, the binary framework is not used to classify speakers or speech forms into permanently fixed categories. Rather, it functions as an analytical device for identifying two complementary values that speakers continuously negotiate according to relational and situational conditions.

From Heidegger's existential perspective, the concept of *Dasein* is used in this study to illuminate communication as lived and situated practice. The actual use of *ngoko*, *krama*, and mixed Indonesian Javanese expressions represents the communicative reality experienced by participants in particular social situations. By contrast, *Das Sollen* is used to represent the normative expectation associated with culturally appropriate *unggah-ungguh*. The distinction is therefore methodologically relevant because it enables the analysis to differentiate between what speakers actually do and what they are socially expected to do.

For example, Transcript 3 demonstrates a divergence between traditional expectations and contemporary practice. The student continues to employ respectful *krama* expressions, but the lecturer's response incorporates Indonesian and *ngoko*. This does not necessarily indicate that the normative value of respect has disappeared. Rather, it demonstrates that the realization of the value has changed in response to the communicative context.

The Dasein–Das Sollen distinction is therefore not employed as an additional philosophical label but as an analytical mechanism for interpreting the relationship between empirical communication and normative expectations. Without this distinction, linguistic changes could be interpreted simply as cultural decline. Through this framework, however, the findings can be interpreted as evidence of an ongoing negotiation between lived communicative practice and culturally expected conduct.

Rather than indicating the disappearance of Javanese etiquette, these linguistic adjustments illustrate an ongoing negotiation between empirical communication practices and culturally prescribed values within changing social environments. Accordingly, this study argues that binary axiology provides a framework for understanding how Javanese speakers continuously balance intimacy and respect,

while the Dasein *Das Sollen* distinction explains how this balance changes between actual practice and normative expectation.

c. Ethnopragmatic Interpretation and Islamic Ethical Perspective

From an ethnopragmatic perspective, the selection of *ngoko* or *krama* cannot be interpreted solely as a linguistic choice because each speech level conveys culturally shared meanings concerning age, authority, relational distance, familiarity, and social recognition. The four empirical interactions demonstrate that the meaning of a particular speech form emerges from the relationship between linguistic form and its interactional context.

The findings further demonstrate that the principles embedded in *unggah-ungguh* correspond with Islamic ethical concepts such as *adab*, *akhlak*, *ta'zim*, and *iḥtirām*, which emphasize respectful communication, humility, moral responsibility, and preservation of human dignity. For example, the use of *krama* by the student toward the lecturer in Transcript 1 can be interpreted as a culturally specific realization of respect. Within the Islamic educational context, this practice can also be understood in relation to *adab* and *ta'zim* toward educators.

Nevertheless, the findings do not support an assumption that *krama* is inherently Islamic or that *ngoko* represents a lower moral status. Transcript 2 demonstrates that *ngoko* can support solidarity and positive interpersonal relationships among peers, while Transcript 4 demonstrates that different speech levels can coexist within an interaction without undermining mutual dignity. Therefore, Islamic ethics functions as an interpretive and normative lens rather than as a simplistic classification system for Javanese speech forms.

This distinction is particularly important within Islamic education because ethical communication cannot be reduced to the mechanical selection of a particular linguistic register. Rather, learners need to understand the relationship between language, intention, context, respect, responsibility, and human dignity. Consequently, *unggah-ungguh* provides a culturally familiar context through which Islamic ethical principles can be taught and practiced.

The findings therefore indicate that Javanese communication represents a convergence between local cultural wisdom and Islamic ethical values. Linguistic behavior functions simultaneously as a social practice, an expression of cultural identity, and a potential medium for developing ethical character.

d. Cross Cultural Binary Axiology: Integrating Gayo and Javanese Perspectives

The comparison between Gayo customary philosophy and Javanese communication demonstrates that both societies organize interpersonal interaction through complementary values of equality and respect despite differences in their linguistic expressions. Joni's (2019) binary customary theory identifies these values within Gayo society, while the present findings reveal a comparable structure through the *ngoko*–*krama* system and *unggah-ungguh* in Javanese culture. This cross-cultural similarity suggests that binary axiology constitutes a broader philosophical principle for regulating social interaction rather than a phenomenon limited to a single ethnic tradition. Therefore, this study extends previous ethnopragmatic research by demonstrating that binary axiology provides a universal explanatory model whose local manifestations are shaped by distinct cultural and religious contexts.

e. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The findings contribute theoretically by integrating Scheler's value axiology, Heidegger's concepts of Dasein and Das Sollen, ethnopragmatics, Javanese social

stratification, and Islamic ethical principles into a unified analytical framework. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined unggah-ungguh, social stratification, or language politeness independently, this study explains how these dimensions interact through the binary values of equality and respect in everyday communication. Practically, the findings provide implications for character education, intercultural communication, and the preservation of Javanese linguistic heritage within educational institutions and wider society, particularly in strengthening communication ethics among younger generations. Accordingly, this study demonstrates that preserving Javanese communication is not merely an effort to maintain linguistic traditions but also a means of sustaining philosophical values, cultural identity, and Islamic moral principles that collectively promote harmonious social relationships.

Table 1. Major Findings, Novelty, and Contributions of the Study

Focus	Major Findings	Novelty	Contribution
Binary Axiology	Javanese communication is organized through complementary values of equality (<i>ngoko</i>) and respect (<i>krama</i>).	Reinterprets binary logic as a sociocultural value system rather than a numerical concept.	Extends philosophical discussions of axiology into communication studies.
Dasein–Das Sollen	Communication practices reveal continuous negotiation between empirical reality and cultural ideals.	Applies Heidegger's existential concepts to everyday linguistic behaviour.	Provides a philosophical explanation for communication change in contemporary Javanese society.
Ethnopragmatics	Speech levels encode culturally shared meanings concerning hierarchy and interpersonal relations.	Integrates ethnopragmatics with binary axiology.	Enriches intercultural pragmatics through a value-oriented approach.
Islamic Ethics	<i>Adab</i> , <i>akhlaq</i> , <i>ta'zim</i> , and <i>ihtirām</i> reinforce the cultural values embodied in <i>unggah-ungguh</i> .	Connects Islamic ethical principles with Javanese communication practices.	Demonstrates the compatibility between local wisdom and Islamic moral teachings.
Social Stratification	Social hierarchy is reproduced through everyday language choices rather than solely through socioeconomic status.	Reconceptualizes Javanese stratification as an axiological communication system.	Offers implications for cultural preservation, education, and communication ethics.

Discussion

The empirical findings of this study reveal that communication practices within the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic Institute (INISNU) Temanggung represent a dynamic negotiation between traditional Javanese linguistic norms and the communicative demands of contemporary academic life. Interactions among students predominantly employ *ngoko* to express equality and interpersonal closeness, whereas communication directed toward lecturers and senior academic staff generally involves *krama* as a linguistic marker of respect and institutional hierarchy. These findings support Geertz's classical interpretation that Javanese speech levels function as symbolic representations of social stratification, while also extending more recent ethnopragmatic studies which argue that speech-level selection is increasingly influenced by contextual factors such as institutional setting, communicative purpose, and relational proximity rather than by social status alone ([Purnomo, 2025](#)). Accordingly, the present findings suggest that contemporary Javanese communication should be understood not as a rigid hierarchical system but as a flexible sociocultural mechanism through which speakers continuously negotiate equality, respect, and interpersonal solidarity within changing social environments.

- These empirical patterns can be interpreted more comprehensively through Heidegger's existential dialectic of *Dasein* and *Das Sollen*. The factual tendency of participants to alternate between *ngoko*, *krama*, and mixed Indonesian Javanese expressions represents *Dasein* as lived communicative reality, whereas the cultural expectation that respect should be expressed through *unggah-ungguh* embodies *Das Sollen* as the normative ideal. Rather than indicating cultural decline, this divergence demonstrates that speakers actively reinterpret traditional norms in response to educational modernization, institutional interaction, and evolving social relationships. From the perspective of Scheler's value axiology, values are realized through concrete human action rather than existing as static normative principles; therefore, the adaptation of speech levels reflects the transformation of value implementation rather than the disappearance of cultural values themselves ([Neumann, 2023](#)). This finding extends Heidegger's existential philosophy by demonstrating that the dialectic between empirical reality and normative ideals is observable in everyday linguistic practices, where communication becomes the primary arena through which cultural values are continuously reconstructed.

From an ethnopragmatic perspective, the selection of *ngoko* or *krama* represents considerably more than grammatical variation because each speech level embodies culturally shared understandings concerning authority, age, relational distance, and social recognition ([Setyowati, 2023](#)). The findings further indicate that these communicative practices closely correspond with Islamic ethical principles, particularly *adab*, *akhlaq*, *ta'zim*, and *ihtirām*, which collectively emphasize respectful communication, humility, moral responsibility, and the preservation of human dignity. Within the social context of INISNU Temanggung as an Islamic higher education institution, participants consistently associated polite language not only with Javanese cultural identity but also with religious obligations rooted in Islamic moral teachings. This convergence confirms that *unggah-ungguh* functions simultaneously as an ethnopragmatic system and as an ethical framework through which local cultural wisdom and Islamic values mutually

reinforce one another in shaping harmonious social interaction. Consequently, this study proposes that Javanese communication should be interpreted as an integrated cultural–religious discourse in which linguistic choices simultaneously express social identity, philosophical values, and Islamic moral commitments.

The present findings also provide broader theoretical implications through the integration of binary axiology into the study of Javanese communication. Binary values of equality (0), represented primarily through *ngoko*, and respect (1), represented through *krama*, consistently emerged as complementary principles regulating interpersonal interaction across different communicative situations. When compared with Joni's (2019) binary customary theory developed within Gayo society, a comparable philosophical structure becomes apparent despite substantial linguistic and cultural differences between the two ethnic communities. This cross-cultural convergence suggests that binary axiology should not be interpreted as an isolated indigenous concept but rather as a universal philosophical logic through which societies organize interpersonal relationships while expressing local cultural identities through distinct linguistic systems. Accordingly, this study extends previous ethnopragmatic scholarship by proposing binary axiology as a cross-cultural explanatory framework capable of integrating philosophical values, indigenous communication practices, and social stratification within a single conceptual model.

The principal contribution of this research lies in its interdisciplinary integration of value axiology, Heidegger's existential philosophy, ethnopragmatics, Javanese social stratification, and Islamic ethics into a coherent analytical framework for understanding communication practices. Previous studies have generally examined *unggah-ungguh*, linguistic politeness, social hierarchy, or Islamic ethics independently, whereas the present study demonstrates that these dimensions interact dynamically through complementary values of equality and respect embedded in everyday communication. The findings therefore enrich theoretical discussions concerning Javanese communication by repositioning social stratification as an axiological and moral system rather than merely a hierarchical social structure reproduced through language. Practically, this framework provides important implications for character education, intercultural communication, and the preservation of Javanese linguistic heritage within Islamic educational institutions, where strengthening *unggah-ungguh* simultaneously contributes to preserving cultural identity, fostering ethical communication, and reinforcing Islamic values of *adab*, *akhlak*, *ta'zim*, and *ihtirām* among younger generations.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the manifestation of binary axiology in the social practices of Javanese society in Temanggung Regency is reflected in the complementary values of equality and respect that are continuously negotiated through everyday communication. The findings demonstrate that *unggah-ungguh* and the *ngoko–krama* speech system function not merely as linguistic forms but as ethnopragmatic mechanisms through which speakers express authority, age, relational proximity, social recognition, and cultural identity within diverse communicative contexts. Interpreted through Heidegger's concepts of *Dasein* and *Das Sollen*, the flexibility observed in contemporary language use represents an ongoing negotiation between empirical communication practices and normative cultural expectations, indicating that the adaptation of speech levels signifies the transformation of value implementation rather

than the disappearance of Javanese cultural values. From the perspective of Scheler's value axiology, these communicative practices illustrate that values become meaningful through lived human action, while the integration of Islamic ethical principles including *adab*, *akhlaq*, *ta'zim*, and *ihtirām* demonstrates that respectful communication constitutes both a cultural obligation and a moral responsibility. Consequently, this study proposes an interdisciplinary framework that integrates binary axiology, ethnopragmatics, Heidegger's existential philosophy, and Islamic ethics to explain Javanese social stratification as a dynamic value-oriented communication system. The study therefore contributes theoretically by extending discussions on language, culture, and social stratification through a philosophical and ethnopragmatic perspective, while practically providing insights for character education, intercultural communication, and the preservation of Javanese cultural values within educational institutions and contemporary society.

Consequently, this study proposes an interdisciplinary framework that integrates binary axiology, ethnopragmatics, Heidegger's existential philosophy, and Islamic ethics to explain Javanese social stratification as a dynamic value-oriented communication system. The study therefore contributes theoretically by extending discussions on language, culture, and social stratification through a philosophical and ethnopragmatic perspective, while practically providing insights for character education, intercultural communication, and the preservation of Javanese cultural values within educational institutions and contemporary society. For Islamic educational policymakers, school principals, and curriculum developers, the findings recommend integrating *unggah-ungguh* and *ngoko krama* into contextual Islamic character education through culturally relevant dialogues, role-playing, teacher modelling, and daily communication practices that reinforce *adab*, *akhlaq*, respect, humility, and social responsibility. Such integration should remain context-sensitive, recognizing that ethical communication depends not only on speech level but also on communicative intention, human dignity, and relational context.

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