



Kitab Kuning as a Medium of Javanese Language Heritage Maintenance in The Rural Community of Gedung Karyajitu

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Abstract

This study examines efforts to preserve Jawa Krama Inggil (JKI) Kitab Kuning (KK) and its instruction at the Gedung Karya Jitu Islamic Boarding School (a.k.a pesantren) in South Rawajitu District. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three teachers and were analyzed thematically. The results showed that KK plays an important role in preserving JKI as a linguistic and moral medium in the pesantren environment. Through the use of Javanese krama in religious teaching, teachers instill cultural values such as respect, politeness, and moral discipline. However, there are still several challenges, such as the students' limited understanding of refined vocabulary, the dominance of Indonesian in everyday communication, and the lack of modern and contextual teaching materials. This study concludes that the preservation of KI through the KK needs to be complemented by broader revitalization efforts by integrating its use in the fields of education, family, and digital media so that the sustainability of this language is maintained as an important part of the cultural identity of the Javanese people.

Keywords: Javanese Krama Inggil, Kitab Kuning, Language Preservation, Moral Values, Pesantren

Introduction

Language functions as a crucial embodiment of cultural identity, knowledge, and values transmitted between generations. In Javanese society, language serves as both a means of communication and a representation of morality, civility, and spirituality, embodying the community's unique identity. Nonetheless, the dynamics of modernization, urbanization, and globalization have induced a functional transformation in the utilization of the Javanese language, especially among the youth who are progressively proficient in Indonesian and foreign languages within social and educational spheres (Sih & Kurniati, 2020; Azizah & Satiti, 2021; Mustafidah & Rumondor, 2022). This trend indicates a tangible threat to the sustainability of the Javanese language, especially within rural communities that traditionally serve as the primary bastions of linguistic and cultural heritage.

In this context, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) serve as traditional educational institutions that consistently uphold the Javanese language in their teaching methodologies. A tangible example of local language retention in the pesantren setting is evident in the educational activities focused on the study of KK traditional Arabic Islamic books for religious knowledge. Kiai (religious leaders) and ustaz (teachers) utilize Javanese as the principal medium of instruction to elucidate the contents of these books to the santri (students) (Anggraeny & Manshur, 2024). Thus, the KK fulfills a dual function: both as a tool for religious teaching and concurrently as a conduit for the preservation of the Javanese language and its cultural values (Hakim & Novianty, 2020; Mustafidah & Rumondor, 2022).

The utilization of Javanese in KK learning transcends religious teaching, representing a process of linguistic preservation and the reinforcement of local identity. Jaeni (2019) asserts that the translation of Arabic literature into Javanese utilizing the Pegon script has engendered a distinctive hybrid register termed Javanese Kitabi, which amalgamates Arabic patterns with Javanese vocabulary and sporadic Indonesian components. Fauji (2022) clarifies that the Pegon script serves as a conduit between religious literature and the understanding of non-Arabic speakers, while also broadening the dissemination of Islam based on local knowledge. Through this activity, KK learning preserves both the textual language and reinforces the continuity of the Javanese language and culture within a spiritual context.

Mahfudh and El Tiganiy (2024) assert that employing Pegon and Javanese in KK studies enables santri to comprehend religious doctrines while enhancing their affinity for their own language. This corresponds with the findings of Sariasih et al. (2021, reported in Wahyuni & Ibrahim, 2017), which demonstrate that students' favorable opinions regarding local languages bolster their drive to preserve these languages in everyday communication. Moreover, research by Juansah et al. (2023) indicates that the use of regional languages in educational curricula enhances students' conceptual comprehension and emotional involvement.



In the rural hamlet of Gedung Karyajitu, the utilization of Javanese in KK education persists as a common practice endorsed by kiai, santri, and the local populace. Javanese is employed to elucidate textual readings, impart moral guidance, and reinforce the spiritual connection between educators and learners. This positions the pesantren in Gedung Karyajitu as not only a religious educational institution but also an essential repository for linguistic legacy and cultural memory across generations. Amrullah and Mutholingah (2025) elucidate that traditional pesantren are vital in preserving the Javanese–Islamic literacy culture via training utilizing the native language and Pegon script.

This practice not only serves a linguistic purpose but also demonstrates the cultural persistence of rural communities in the face of language homogenization influenced by the national education system and contemporary media (Pudjiastuti, 2015; Munip & Munip, 2016). The residents of Gedung Karyajitu sustain a robust connection to standard linguistic traditions by consistently employing Javanese for understanding the KK, while simultaneously keeping local values inherent in daily religious rites (Anggraeny & Manshur, 2024).

Although there is an increasing amount of research focused on the preservation of local languages via cultural education and community activities, there is still a paucity of empirical investigation into how KK learning especially aids in the maintenance of Javanese in rural pesantren environments. Prior research has predominantly concentrated on religious or linguistic dimensions in isolation, resulting in a deficiency in comprehending the interplay of language preservation, cultural identity, and educational practices within rural Islamic communities. This study aims to address the gap by examining the role of the KK as both a religious and linguistic medium in preserving Javanese language and cultural values within the rural community of Gedung Karyajitu.

The study utilizes a descriptive phenomenological technique combined with a qualitative case study design to facilitate a comprehensive examination of the interplay of religious practice, linguistic function, and cultural identity in genuine circumstances (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2017). Data will be collected via comprehensive interviews with kiai, santri, and community leaders to elucidate how the utilization of Javanese in KK education aids in the preservation of local language and cultural values.

This research seeks to further the fields of sociolinguistics, educational ethnography, and religious linguistic studies by emphasizing the connection between religious texts and the preservation of local languages. The findings are anticipated to guide initiatives for enhancing regional language preservation policies via culture-based education and to reinforce the significance of pesantren as bastions of the nation’s linguistic and cultural heritage.

Research Question

1. What challenges do teachers face in using the KK to preserve the Javanese language?

2. What is the teacher's view on the role of the KK in maintaining the Javanese language in the Islamic boarding school in the Jitu Karya Building, South Rawajitu District?

Literature Review

Scholarly interest on the significance of KK, the Pegon script, and pesantren in the preservation of regional languages, particularly Javanese, has intensified within the past decade. Researchers have investigated the role of pesantren, traditional Islamic boarding schools, as both institutions of religious education and bastions for preserving local languages and traditions. These studies usually agree that KK learning is not solely a religious endeavor but also a sociolinguistic process through which local linguistic identities are conveyed, preserved, and modified in contemporary circumstances.

Studies by Ma'arif (2020) and Lestari (2021) highlight that pesantren serve as vital agents in the preservation of linguistic variation in Java. Teachers and kiai foster an environment conducive to natural language acquisition through the everyday usage of Javanese, namely at the Krama and Ngoko levels, during religious conversations. The sorogan and bandongan methods, characteristic of KK learning, serve as platforms for interaction wherein Arabic texts are elucidated through Javanese explanations, resulting in a form of linguistic and cultural translation. This discovery aligns with Fishman's (1991) concept of intergenerational transmission, wherein the preservation of language relies on its active utilization in educational and familial contexts.

Sulaiman (2022) and Rahman (2023) emphasize that the utilization of the Pegon script, a modified Arabic script for writing Javanese and Sundanese, has considerable ramifications for local literacy traditions. It serves as a conduit between Islamic and indigenous knowledge systems, enabling santri to engage with religious content while preserving their cultural and linguistic identity. Their research indicates that Pegon literacy exemplifies the hybridity of Islamic education in Java, being grounded in Arabic scholarship but maintaining a profound connection to Javanese linguistic conventions. From this viewpoint, Pegon transcends its role as a mere writing system; it emerges as a cultural artifact symbolizing resistance to linguistic uniformity in contemporary society.

A comparative study by Fauzi (2021) on pesantren in Central and East Java indicated that pesantren implementing KK learning in Javanese tend to cultivate santri with enhanced cultural awareness and linguistic adaptability. The interchange between Arabic and Javanese in classroom speech enables pupils to concurrently grasp both religious significance and local identity. This supports Holmes' (2013) assertion that the preservation of a minority language is significantly affected by institutional procedures and favorable speaker attitudes.

Nevertheless, the majority of these studies primarily concentrate on pesantren as macro-level institutions, neglecting the micro-level relationships that transpire throughout KK learning sessions. Insufficient emphasis has been devoted to the influence of language selection, explanatory methods, and Pegon literacy practices on the sustainability of Javanese in quotidian educational contexts. Likewise, although

Pegon script has frequently been examined as a cultural artifact, its educational role in enhancing understanding and safeguarding local language identity is still little explored.

A further gap exists in the geographical emphasis of the current literature. Current research predominantly focuses on prominent *pesantren* in East Java, such as *Tebuireng*, *Lirboyo*, and *Ploso*, which has extensive traditions of KK scholarship. Conversely, smaller *pesantren* in rural regions like Lampung have hardly been studied, despite their equally crucial role in preserving Javanese language and culture within migrant populations. Considering that Lampung possesses a substantial Javanese-speaking demographic, investigating *pesantren* in this area may yield important insights into the mechanisms of language preservation in heterogeneous environments.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the influence of KK learning and Pegon script utilization on the preservation of the Javanese language in the rural *pesantren* setting of Gedung Karyajitu. This study aims to enhance the comprehension of language preservation mechanisms in Islamic educational institutions by examining the interplay of linguistic practices, teaching methodologies, and literacy traditions within this specific setting. Moreover, it aims to enhance the broader dialogue regarding the interplay between Islamic education, local literacy frameworks, and the sustainability of regional languages within Indonesia's heterogeneous culture.

Method

This research employs a qualitative methodology utilizing a case study framework. This methodology was selected due to the study's emphasis on comprehensively studying the utilization of KK as a mechanism for conserving the Javanese language within Islamic boarding schools.

This research was conducted at a *pesantren* located in Gedung Karyajitu Village, South Rawajitu District, Tulang Bawang Regency, Lampung Province. This location was chosen because the boarding school still maintains the tradition of teaching KK using Javanese Krama. This *pesantren* is also part of a rural community that still preserves Javanese culture and language in daily activities, especially in religious activities. Therefore, this location is considered suitable for the study, which is to describe how the KK plays a role in preserving the Javanese language in the traditional religious education environment.

The participants in this study were 3 teachers of Qur'an or *ustaz* who taught the KK at the *pesantren*. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is the selection of samples based on certain considerations relevant to the research objectives. The criteria for selecting participants included teachers who actively taught the KK, used Javanese Krama in their teaching activities, and were willing to provide information openly. Three participants were considered sufficient because this study did not focus on quantity but rather on the depth of data and the meaning of their experiences. Thus, the data collected was expected to provide an in-depth description of

the teachers' views and experiences in using the KK as a medium for passing on the Javanese language and culture.

The data in this study were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allowed the researcher to prepare key questions while still giving participants room to explain their views freely. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with each teacher in the pesantren environment. The interview questions focused on their experiences in teaching the KK, their reasons for using Javanese Krama in teaching, and their views on the role of the language in preserving Javanese culture and identity. Each interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes, depending on the amount of information provided by the participant. The interviews were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere using a mixture of Javanese Krama and Indonesian so that the participants felt comfortable. All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission, and the researchers also took brief notes to record important points during the interview process.

After the interviews were completed, the researchers transcribed the interview results to maintain data accuracy. The transcription process was carried out by listening to the recordings repeatedly and writing down every word spoken by the participants in full. Statements in Javanese Krama were translated into Indonesian and English without changing their meaning. The transcribed data were then analyzed using thematic analysis based on the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step was to read the data repeatedly to understand its content, then mark important sections and code relevant ideas or statements. Next, the researchers looked for patterns in the codes and grouped them into main themes. These themes were then re-examined to ensure their suitability with the overall data, given clear names, and then compiled into a description of the research results supported by direct quotations from the participants' statements.

Findings and Discussion

The first research question investigates the challenges encountered by teachers in preserving the *Javanese KI* language through *KK* learning.

Thematic analysis revealed four major challenges: (1) limited comprehension among students, (2) generational language shift, (3) lack of exposure to polite Javanese outside the pesantren, and (4) the absence of modernized learning materials.

The coding results are summarized in Table 1.1.

Table 1. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Using Kitab Kuning

Code	Sample Excerpt (Javanese)	Sample Excerpt (English Translation)
Limited comprehension	<i>“Para santri asring angel mangertos makna tembung krama ingkang alus, dados</i>	<i>“Students frequently find it challenging to comprehend sophisticated Javanese vocabulary, necessitating my</i>

	<i>kula kedah sabar nerangaken kanthi conto.</i>	patient elucidation through instances.”
Generational language shift	<i>“Sakmenika kathah ingkang langkung remen migunakaken basa nasional tinimbang basa daerah.”</i>	“Currently, many individuals favor the usage of the national language over their regional dialects.”
Lack of exposure outside pesantren	<i>“Menawi wonten ing griya, kathah santri ingkang sampun boten ngginakaken basa krama malih.”</i>	“At home, many students no longer use the polite form of Javanese.”
Absence of modern teaching materials	<i>“Kadosipun bahan sinau ngaji punika dereng wonten ingkang nyocokaken kaliyan jaman samenika.”</i>	“The religious educational resources appear to be unmodified for the current generation.”

The statistics indicate that the foremost concern is the deterioration of students' understanding of KI. Numerous younger learners possess a restricted vocabulary and favor use Bahasa Indonesia in everyday communications. This scenario validates Fishman's (1991) thesis of language shift, which posits that minority or traditional languages diminish in vitality when newer generations discontinue their everyday usage.

Educators' observations indicate that KI has predominantly been limited to formal or religious settings, hence constraining its functional scope. Fishman (2001) underscores that successful language preservation necessitates the sustained use of language throughout several living domains, including family, education, and religion.

The absence of updated instructional resources presents pedagogical difficulties. The classical framework and linguistic intricacy of the KK provide challenges for contemporary pupils, who tend to excel through multimodal and visual learning approaches. This discovery aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, indicating that language acquisition is most effectively facilitated by scaffolding, interaction, and contextual support.

Teachers' adaptive tactics, like the simplification of explanations, provision of examples, and patient repetition, demonstrate their dedication to preserving knowledge integration within the learning process.

The second research question explores how teachers perceive the role of KK in maintaining the *Javanese KI* language.

Findings reveal that teachers see KK as both a linguistic and moral instrument that unites religious faith with Javanese cultural identity.

The relevant codes are presented in Table 1.2 below.

Table 2. Teacher Perception of the Role of Kitab Kuning in Maintaining the Javanese Language

Code	Sample Excerpt (Javanese)	Sample Excerpt (English Translation)
Kitab Kuning as cultural heritage	<i>“Kitab kuning punika saged dados piranti nguri-uri basa Jawa krama amargi kathah pitutur lan tembung luhur wonten ing mriku.”</i>	“The <i>Kitab Kuning</i> can serve as a tool to preserve the Javanese polite language because it contains many noble words and moral teachings.”
Language as moral education	<i>“Kula nganggep basa krama punika ngajari andhap asor lan tatakrama ing pasinaon.”</i>	“I believe that polite language teaches humility and courtesy in learning.”
Integration of faith and culture	<i>“Nalika nerangaken kitab, kula tansah nyerat maknaipun mawi basa krama supados saged ngiket iman lan budaya Jawa.”</i>	“When explaining the book, I always interpret it using polite Javanese so that faith and culture are connected.”
Pedagogical value of Krama Inggil	<i>“Basa krama punika penting amargi maringi piwulang bab unggah-ungguh lan tata krama.”</i>	“The polite Javanese language is important because it teaches manners and proper behavior.”
Intergenerational transmission	<i>“Kadang santri sepuh paring tulada, dados santri enom saged sinau saking caranipun matur.”</i>	“Sometimes the older students set an example, so the younger ones can learn how to speak properly.”

Educators' viewpoints highlight the symbolic and ethical significance of the *Kitab Kuning* in safeguarding the language and cultural identity of the community. They perceive the book not solely as a religious manuscript but as a conduit of *pitutur luhur* (noble teachings).

From a sociolinguistic standpoint, this corresponds with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, wherein proficiency in a culturally esteemed language variation, such as KI, confers social recognition and moral authority. Employing courteous language in religious circumstances reflects respect, piety, and the social refinement norms integral to Javanese ethics.

The amalgamation of faith and culture exemplifies Geertz's (1960) notion of the moral community, wherein religious institutions such as *pesantren* function as hubs for the dissemination of both spiritual and cultural standards. Through the instruction of KK in KI, educators integrate sacred Islamic knowledge with indigenous Javanese traditions, fostering a synthesis of faith and cultural legacy.

Furthermore, intergenerational learning plays a crucial role. The involvement of older students and alumni in guiding younger ones exemplifies Wenger's (1998) *community of practice*, where knowledge, including language, is sustained through participation, shared meaning, and repetition. Such a structure ensures that the *Javanese KI* language remains a living practice rather than an artifact of the past.

Conclusion

This study concludes that KK plays an important role in preserving the Javanese KI language through its dual function as a means of religious learning and a medium for passing on cultural values. The use of the krama language in the teaching process not only strengthens the linguistic abilities of santri but also instills values of politeness, morality, and Javanese cultural identity. However, the younger generation's limited understanding of refined vocabulary, the lack of use of krama language outside of Islamic boarding schools, and the unavailability of modern teaching materials are major challenges in efforts to preserve this language. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the study to Islamic boarding schools in other regions and to examine innovative learning strategies, including the use of digital media and intergenerational approaches, so that the preservation of Javanese KI can be more effective, contextual, and sustainable.

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