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THE POWER OF LANGUAGE: HOW LANGUAGE IS USED TO CONSTRUCT STUDENTS' SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT (A CASE STUDY AT MAN 1 AND MAN 2 MEDAN)

PENELITI

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Puji dan syukur penulis panjatkan kehadirat Allah SWT karena berkat rahmat dan hidayah-Nya laporan penelitian yang berjudul *"THE POWER OF LANGUAGE: HOW LANGUAGE IS USED TO CONSTRUCT STUDENTS' SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT (A CASE STUDY AT MAN 1 & MAN 2 MEDAN) "* dapat diselesaikan tepat waktu. Penulis mengucapkan terima kasih kepada semua pihak yang terlibat, terkhusus kepada FITK UIN Sumatera Utara Medan serta pegawai, staf dan mahasiswa yang bersedia memberikan data yang dibutuhkan dalam penuyusunan laporan ini. Begitu juga kepada *Reviewer* dan Unit Penjamin Mutu FITK UIN Sumatera Utara Medan, penulis sampaikan ucapan terimakasih atas semua dukungan dan bantuan yang diberikan.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Problem

Language is an essential part of human life, functioning not only as a means of communication but also as an instrument for shaping social reality. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is understood as a means of constructing identity, social relations, and power structures within society (Fairclough, 2013). Language is not neutral, but rather contains ideological values that can reproduce or challenge existing social orders. Therefore, in the context of education, language plays a strategic role in shaping interactions between individuals, including students' social engagement in the school environment.

Social engagement refers to the extent to which individuals actively and constructively engage in social interactions, both in formal contexts such as the classroom and informal ones such as within peer groups. In the school environment, students' social engagement is a crucial factor in both academic and non-academic success. According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), student engagement consists of three main dimensions: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. One aspect that supports these three dimensions is students' language skills, which enable them to express themselves, interact, and build social relationships effectively.

In practice, students use language in various forms to build social engagement—whether through classroom discussions, conversations outside of class, or other collaborative activities. The language used is not always formal or academic, but also includes informal forms of communication such as slang, regional languages, and certain social codes. The function of language in this context is not limited to conveying information, but also includes creating emotional closeness, conveying attitudes, and forming social identities (Gee, 2012). Therefore, studying how language is used to shape social engagement is important for understanding social dynamics among students.

In Indonesia, particularly in Islamic-based educational institutions such as the State Islamic Senior High School (MAN), the context of language use is increasingly complex. Students in madrasas not only use Indonesian as the primary language of instruction, but are also exposed to the use of Arabic in religious contexts, English in foreign subjects, and regional languages in everyday interactions. This linguistic diversity creates a rich space for exploring how students construct and negotiate their identities and social engagement through linguistic practices. The role of teachers as transmitters of knowledge, and as social agents who have the power to shape the dynamics of interactions in the classroom, building students' social engagement through language is crucial, because the language used by teachers not only conveys material, but also conveys values, norms, and social identities. In this context, MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan are the right location to examine in depth how language is used by students to shape their social engagement.

To date, there has been very limited research in Indonesia that specifically explores the relationship between language skills and students' social engagement, particularly in madrasah settings. Previous studies have focused more on the influence of language skills on academic learning outcomes (Suryani, 2016; Fatimah & Widodo, 2021), while the social aspects of language use in schools have rarely been addressed. However, according to Vygotsky (1978), students' cognitive and social development is strongly influenced by their linguistic interactions with their environment. In other words, language is not only a means of thinking but also a social bridge that enables the formation of meaningful relationships between individuals within a learning community.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how students at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan use language to build their social engagement. The approach used is a qualitative case study, which allows researchers to capture the dynamics of language use contextually and in-depth. This research is expected to not only contribute to the study of applied linguistics and education but also offer practical insights for teachers, principals, and educational policymakers in creating learning environments that support students' social engagement through an inclusive, reflective, and effective language approach.

Thus, it is crucial for the world of education to begin viewing language not merely as a communication tool or teaching instrument, but as a force capable of shaping social interactions, building community cohesion, and creating inclusive spaces for students to thrive. The language used in schools, by both students and teachers,

has direct implications for how students feel valued, engaged, and connected to their learning environment (Cummins, 2000). Therefore, understanding the power of language in shaping students' social engagement is a strategic step towards realizing a more humanistic and transformative education.

Based on the background explained by the researcher, the researcher is interested in conducting research entitled: The power of language: How language is used to construct students' social engagement (A Case study at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan).

1.2 Research Novelty

In the context of linguistics and education studies, this study presents significant innovation by examining the role of language as a primary tool in shaping students' social engagement in the madrasah environment. The primary focus of this study is on the relationship between language use and students' natural social engagement at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan. This contrasts with previous research that tends to separate linguistics from social engagement. For example, Nugroho's (2020) study examined the influence of language skills on student participation in public schools, but did not specifically link it to the construction of social engagement in the context of religious education.

Fauziah & Pratama (2021) studied interpersonal communication between teachers and students in fostering collaborative learning environments, but did not address the use of language among students to foster social relationships. Sari (2019) focused on teachers' use of language to foster a positive classroom climate, but did not delve deeply into students' everyday language practices as active agents in fostering

social engagement. This study integrates linguistics and social engagement in depth within the context of Islamic education, which has its own cultural characteristics and values. Furthermore, the qualitative approach employed allows for narrative and contextual exploration of students' everyday language practices, particularly in fostering social relationships both inside and outside the classroom. This approach differs from the majority of previous studies, which emphasize quantifying student engagement without delving into the sociolinguistic dimensions inherent in real-life interactions.

This research also contributes to the understanding of language as a tool for social construction among adolescents in madrasahs. The language practices examined in this research are seen not only as a means of communication, but also as a medium for the formation of social identity, group solidarity, and cultural integration within the context of a faith-based school. MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan, as the research location, provides unique contextual richness due to its complex and multicultural educational environment.

1.3 Research Question

1. What types of language practices promote or hinder students' participation during learning process?
2. How is language used by teachers and students of MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan to construct social engagement,   social roles, group identities, and power relations among students   beyond the classroom context?
3. How do linguistic choices reflect and shape social relationships among students?

1.4 Objective of the Study

1. Revealing how language shapes social relations between students, teachers and students.
2. Explaining how language use can encourage or discourage student engagement in social interactions in the classroom.
3. Revealing how language shapes social identity, group solidarity, and relationships among students in the school environment.
4. Revealing how linguistic choices reflect and shape social relationships among students.
5. Providing teachers and school administrators with an understanding of the importance of a language approach in enhancing students' social engagement

1.5 Signification of the Study

This research holds significance in the field of language discussion, particularly in the context of school or institutions. By highlighting the power of language as a tool for constructing students' social engagement, this research makes theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the strategic role of language in students' social interactions in educational settings.

Theoretically, this study broadens insights in the field of sociolinguistics by positioning language not only as a means of communication but also as an instrument for the formation of social identity, strengthening group solidarity, and shaping power relations among students. This research also enriches the literature on student

social engagement by incorporating the linguistic dimension as a key factor.

Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for teachers, and policymakers at schools to design learning approaches that are more sensitive to students' language practices. Teachers can understand how the use of specific languages can increase participation, social inclusion, and prevent marginalization in the classroom. Furthermore, this research can also encourage the development of a more inclusive school culture that is responsive to students' linguistic and cultural diversity, particularly in madrasah environments like MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan.

CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 The Power of Languange

Language is not merely a neutral tool for communication; rather, it constitutes a powerful social practice through which meaning, identity, and power relations are constructed and maintained. Within social institutions, including education, language operates as a medium that both reflects and shapes social reality. From a post-structuralist perspective, language cannot be separated from power, as discourse functions as a mechanism through which authority, knowledge, and norms are produced and legitimized.

Michel Foucault's conceptualization of discourse provides a foundational understanding of the relationship between language and power. Foucault (1980) argues that power is not solely repressive or coercive, but fundamentally productive. Through discourse, power generates knowledge, constructs subjectivities, and establishes regimes of truth that define what is considered normal, acceptable, or legitimate within a particular social context. In this sense, language does not simply describe reality; it actively participates in the production of social meanings and the regulation of human behavior.

In educational settings, discourse plays a central role in shaping students' experiences, identities, and patterns of social engagement. Classrooms function not only as sites of knowledge transmission but also as social spaces where power relations are enacted and negotiated through language. Teachers' verbal practices—such as giving instructions, asking questions, providing feedback, and managing

classroom interaction—serve as discursive mechanisms that regulate participation and influence students' sense of agency. The language used by teachers and institutions implicitly conveys expectations regarding appropriate behavior, academic competence, and social participation.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that educational discourse is inherently ideological and never value-free. Linguistic choices, including vocabulary, grammatical structures, and interactional patterns, reflect and reproduce particular social ideologies and institutional interests. Through repeated exposure to such discourse, students may internalize certain representations of themselves and others. For instance, students who are repeatedly positioned as "passive," "low-achieving," or "inactive" may adopt these discursive identities, which can negatively affect their confidence, motivation, and willingness to engage socially in classroom activities.

Language also plays a crucial role in the reproduction of power relations within classroom interaction. Van Dijk (2006) argues that power in discourse is manifested through control over communicative events, including access to speaking turns, topic selection, and evaluative authority. In many classrooms, teachers exercise dominant control over discourse by determining who speaks, when they speak, and how their contributions are evaluated. While such control may be necessary for maintaining classroom order, excessive or unreflective use of discursive power can limit students' opportunities to express opinions, negotiate meanings, and participate as active members of the learning community.

Furthermore, language functions as a key mechanism in the construction of dominant narratives within educational institutions. Schools often promote particular values—such as discipline, obedience, politeness, and activeness—through institutional discourse embedded in classroom instruction, school regulations, and assessment practices. These narratives define what is considered an "ideal student" and shape students' perceptions of success and failure. Although such narratives aim to create order and efficiency, they may also generate social pressure and marginalization for students who do not conform to these normative expectations.

The power of language is also evident in its psychological impact on learners. Discursive practices influence not only how students are positioned socially but also how they perceive themselves as learners and social actors. Through continuous exposure to evaluative and regulatory language, students may internalize institutional norms and adjust their behavior accordingly. This process aligns with Foucault's notion of disciplinary power, whereby individuals come to regulate their own actions in accordance with internalized standards, often without overt coercion.

From this perspective, language in education operates in a dual capacity. On the one hand, it can function as a tool for empowerment, fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and active social engagement. On the other hand, it can serve as a means of control, reinforcing hierarchical relations and limiting students' participation. The extent to which language empowers or constrains students depends largely on how discourse is enacted in classroom interaction and institutional practices.

In conclusion, the concept of the power of language in education encompasses ideological, political, social, and psychological dimensions. Language not only reflects social reality but actively constructs and transforms it through discourse. By shaping identities, regulating participation, and reinforcing or challenging power relations, language plays a decisive role in influencing students' social engagement and learning experiences. Therefore, examining language use in educational contexts is essential for understanding how social interaction is structured and how more inclusive and participatory learning environments can be fostered.

2.2 Language as a Social Tool

Language is an essential social tool in human life, functioning not only as a system of symbols for communication but also as a medium through which social relations are constructed and maintained. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language use is always situated within specific social contexts and shaped by cultural norms, values, and expectations. Hymes (1974) emphasizes that language cannot be separated from its social environment, as communicative competence involves more than grammatical accuracy. Instead, it requires the ability to use language appropriately according to context, participants, purposes, and norms of interaction. Thus, effective communication is inherently social, reflecting an individual's understanding of how language operates within a particular community.

Within the framework of communicative competence, speakers are evaluated not only on their linguistic knowledge but also on their sociolinguistic and pragmatic abilities. This includes sensitivity to social roles, power relations, and situational contexts. In educational

environments, for example, students must learn how to adjust their language when interacting with teachers, peers, and institutional authorities. Such adjustments demonstrate an awareness of social norms and contribute to the maintenance of respectful and functional social relationships. The ability to navigate these linguistic choices reflects learners' broader social competence and their integration into the learning community.

In social interaction, language serves as a means of negotiating meaning and constructing shared understanding among participants. Communication is not merely the exchange of information but a collaborative process through which interlocutors interpret, clarify, and co-construct meaning. Holmes (2013) argues that language plays a significant role in signaling social status, solidarity, and social distance. Variations in language choice, such as register, tone, and politeness strategies, provide cues about the nature of social relationships. In school contexts, students typically employ more formal and respectful language when addressing teachers, while using informal and expressive language with peers. These linguistic variations illustrate how language functions as a marker of social sensitivity and relational awareness.

Language also functions as a mechanism for regulating and maintaining social order within a community. From an ethnography of communication perspective, linguistic behavior is governed by culturally embedded norms that determine what is appropriate to say, to whom, and in which circumstances. Duranti (1997) explains that linguistic practices both reflect and reinforce the social structure and value system of a community. Through everyday interactions,

individuals learn acceptable patterns of speech that align with communal expectations, thereby sustaining social cohesion and mutual understanding. In this way, language becomes a tool for social regulation, guiding behavior and reinforcing shared norms.

Moreover, language plays a central role in constructing social identity. Through repeated linguistic practices, individuals position themselves and others within social categories such as student, teacher, leader, or peer. These identities are not fixed but are dynamically negotiated through interaction. In educational settings, students' participation in classroom discourse contributes to the formation of their academic and social identities. Students who are encouraged to speak, express opinions, and collaborate with others are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and social confidence. Conversely, limited opportunities for interaction may restrict students' social engagement and identity development.

Language is also a key instrument in fostering social cohesion and creating intersubjective spaces within groups. In learning environments, language is used to establish a supportive classroom climate, promote cooperation, and build trust among participants. The use of inclusive, respectful, and dialogic language by educators can facilitate positive social interaction and encourage students to participate actively in learning activities. Such language practices help create a sense of shared purpose and mutual respect, which are essential for effective collaboration and meaningful social engagement.

In addition, language functions as a mediating tool in the learning process, connecting cognitive development with social interaction. Through dialogue, discussion, and collaborative tasks,

students not only acquire academic knowledge but also develop social skills such as turn-taking, negotiation, and perspective-taking. These interactions contribute to the development of interpersonal competence and strengthen the social fabric of the classroom community. Therefore, language use in education extends beyond instructional purposes and plays a vital role in shaping students' social experiences.

As a social tool, language is not static or fixed. It evolves continuously in response to social change, technological development, and shifting cultural practices. New forms of communication, such as digital and multimodal discourse, further expand the ways in which individuals interact and construct social relationships. Consequently, educators are required to develop critical awareness of their language use and its potential impact on students' social engagement. By adopting reflective and inclusive language practices, teachers can act as effective facilitators of social interaction and create learning environments that support both academic and social development.

In conclusion, language functions as a fundamental social tool that enables individuals to communicate, negotiate meaning, construct identity, and maintain social order. Its role in education is particularly significant, as classroom discourse shapes students' social relationships, participation patterns, and sense of belonging. Understanding language as a social tool therefore provides a crucial theoretical foundation for examining students' social engagement and the dynamics of interaction within educational contexts.

2.3 Language and the Social Construction of Reality

The concept of the social construction of reality, as articulated by Berger and Luckmann (1966), asserts that social reality is not inherently objective or given, but is continuously produced, negotiated, and sustained through social interaction. Central to this process is language, which functions as the primary symbolic system through which individuals interpret the world and communicate shared meanings. Language does not merely reflect reality; rather, it actively constructs, legitimizes, and stabilizes social reality by providing categories, labels, and narratives that shape human understanding and behavior.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) propose that the construction of social reality unfolds through three interrelated processes: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Externalization refers to the process by which individuals express their subjective meanings, intentions, values, and norms through social action and linguistic interaction. Through everyday communication, individuals project their interpretations of reality into the social world by naming experiences, defining situations, and categorizing behaviors. These linguistic expressions are inherently shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional contexts, making language a product of collective social activity.

The second stage, objectivation, occurs when these externally produced meanings become crystallized into social structures that appear objective and independent of human agency. Through repetition, institutionalization, and social validation, linguistic expressions and practices acquire a sense of permanence and factuality. Language plays

a critical role in this process by stabilizing meanings through shared terminologies, dominant discourses, and institutional narratives. Over time, these objectivated meanings are perceived as natural and self-evident, obscuring their socially constructed origins.

The final stage, internalization, involves the process by which individuals absorb these objectivated realities into their subjective consciousness. Through socialization, individuals learn the dominant linguistic and symbolic frameworks of their society and adopt them as legitimate representations of reality. As a result, socially constructed meanings are reproduced across generations, not primarily through coercion, but through internal acceptance and habitual use of shared language. Language thus becomes a powerful mechanism through which individuals come to understand their identities, social roles, and positions within the broader social order.

In educational contexts, the social construction of reality is particularly salient, as schools function as formal institutions of knowledge production and socialization. Educational reality is constructed and reinforced through multiple forms of discourse, including textbooks, classroom interaction, assessment practices, school regulations, and institutional policies. The language employed in these contexts shapes students' perceptions of themselves, their academic capabilities, and their social roles within the learning environment. Through sustained exposure to institutional discourse, students internalize particular definitions of success, failure, authority, and participation.

Labeling practices in educational discourse illustrate how language constructs social reality in concrete and consequential ways.

Terms such as "high-achieving student," "slow learner," or "problematic child" function not merely as descriptive categories but as performative labels that shape students' identities and social trajectories. When such labels are repeatedly reinforced through teacher feedback, peer interaction, and institutional practices, they may become internalized by students and influence their self-concept, motivation, and patterns of social engagement. In this way, language contributes to the formation of self-fulfilling prophecies within educational settings.

Moreover, the construction of social reality through language is closely connected to the production of symbolic boundaries and social inequality. Bourdieu (1991) conceptualizes language as a form of symbolic capital, arguing that mastery of socially valued linguistic forms—such as academic or institutional language—confers legitimacy and social advantage. Students who possess the linguistic capital recognized by educational institutions are more likely to be perceived as competent and intelligent, while those whose linguistic repertoires differ from dominant norms may be marginalized, regardless of their actual cognitive abilities. Thus, language functions not only as a communicative resource but also as a mechanism for reproducing power relations and social stratification.

These dynamics highlight the role of language as a site of symbolic power in the construction of social reality. Educational discourse often privileges particular ways of speaking, thinking, and expressing knowledge, thereby reinforcing existing social hierarchies. Through this process, language legitimizes certain identities while delegitimizing others, shaping unequal social realities for different groups of students. Consequently, the realities experienced by students

are not uniform but are mediated by differential access to valued linguistic resources.

Recognizing the role of language in the social construction of reality has significant implications for educational practice. Educators must be aware that every linguistic choice—whether in instruction, assessment, or classroom interaction—participates in shaping students' social worlds. Language can function either as a tool of domination that reinforces limiting identities or as a means of empowerment that promotes agency, inclusion, and social participation. A critical and reflective approach to language use is therefore essential for fostering educational environments that support equitable learning and positive social engagement. The theory of the social construction of reality underscores the central role of language in shaping human experience. Through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, language transforms subjective meanings into shared social realities that guide perception, interaction, and behavior. In educational settings, this process profoundly influences students' identities, opportunities, and social engagement. Consequently, a critical understanding of language use is indispensable for creating educational practices that empower learners rather than constrain them.

2.4 Students as Social Beings

Within the social constructivist paradigm, students are understood as inherently social beings who actively construct knowledge, identity, and meaning through interaction with others and their surrounding environment. Learning is not viewed as an individual or purely cognitive process, but as a socially situated activity that emerges through dialogue, collaboration, and shared experience. Freire

(1970) strongly emphasized that education should be a liberating practice, in which students are not treated as passive objects of instruction but as active subjects capable of questioning, reflecting, and transforming their social realities. In this emancipatory framework, language functions as the primary medium through which students negotiate meaning, articulate experiences, and participate in the construction of their social worlds.

Language plays a central role in shaping how students understand themselves and how they are understood by others. Student identities are not fixed or predetermined; rather, they are dynamically and discursively constructed through ongoing interaction. Gee (2011) argues that identity is formed through participation in specific discursive practices, which involve particular ways of speaking, acting, valuing, and interacting that are recognized within a community. In educational contexts, students' identities are continuously shaped by their engagement in classroom discourse, their responses to teacher feedback, and their interactions with peers. These discursive practices position students in certain ways, influencing whether they are seen— and see themselves—as competent, confident, and socially engaged learners.

The language used by teachers and institutions plays a particularly influential role in the formation of students' social positions. Classroom discourse, including patterns of questioning, feedback, and evaluation, communicates implicit messages about who is valued, whose voices matter, and what forms of participation are considered legitimate. Students who are frequently encouraged to express opinions, ask questions, and contribute to discussions are more

likely to develop an identity as active and capable learners. Positive verbal reinforcement and inclusive language practices can strengthen students' confidence and sense of belonging within the learning community. Conversely, students who are consistently marginalized in classroom interaction—through limited speaking opportunities, negative labeling, or dismissive responses—may internalize identities associated with incompetence, passivity, or social invisibility.

Moreover, identity construction in educational settings is not limited to teacher–student interaction. As social beings, students also form discursive communities through peer interaction. Classroom discussions, group work, and informal communication outside instructional settings provide important spaces for students to negotiate meaning, build solidarity, and develop shared norms and values. Through these interactions, students learn how to cooperate, resolve conflicts, and express empathy, all of which contribute to their social development. Language thus serves as a tool for constructing interpersonal relationships and fostering a sense of collective identity within the learning environment.

Participation in discursive communities also enables students to develop social agency. When students are given opportunities to speak, listen, and respond to others, they engage in processes of mutual recognition that reinforce their roles as social actors. These experiences are crucial for developing communicative competence, which includes not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to interact appropriately and ethically in social contexts. Language skills that support dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration are therefore fundamental to meaningful learning and social engagement.

From this perspective, the role of the teacher extends beyond transmitting academic content to facilitating inclusive and dialogic spaces for interaction. Teachers play a critical role in shaping the discursive environment of the classroom and determining whose voices are heard and valued. By using language that encourages participation, openness, and empathy, teachers can create learning spaces in which all students feel recognized and included. Such practices contribute to the development of positive learner identities and strengthen students' positions as active members of the school's social community.

Language is not merely a tool for instruction but a central mechanism for identity formation, social interaction, and empowerment. Through discursive practices, students actively construct their identities and social roles within educational contexts. An educational environment that prioritizes inclusive and participatory language use can foster students' social engagement, agency, and sense of belonging, thereby supporting both academic and social development.

2.5 Social Engagement in the Educational Context

Students' social engagement refers to the extent to which students actively engage in constructive social interactions within the school environment. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) classify student engagement into three dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. These three dimensions are interrelated and influence the overall quality of students' learning experiences.

In this context, language serves as the primary link between these three dimensions. Through language, students express emotions, ask questions, provide responses, and collaborate with peers and

teachers. Therefore, the quality and form of language used in school interactions significantly determine students' level of social engagement.

The language used by teachers significantly determines whether students feel comfortable and motivated to participate. For example, the use of open-ended questions, verbal praise, or active invitations to discussion can increase student engagement. Conversely, authoritarian, condescending, or overly formal language can create psychological distance between students and teachers.

Furthermore, social engagement is also influenced by the extent to which students feel their identity and socio-cultural background are recognized through language. In multicultural education, the use of language that is sensitive to diversity will help students feel more accepted and encouraged to be active in the learning community.

Thus, student social engagement is not solely dependent on internal factors but is also greatly influenced by the language ecosystem established within the school. Language that facilitates inclusion, dialogue, and appreciation of differences is key to building healthy and productive social engagement in the educational environment.

2.6 Language as an Instrument of Power

Language is not merely a neutral or technical means of communication; rather, it functions as a powerful instrument through which power relations are constructed, maintained, and contested. Through language, individuals and institutions are able to influence thought, regulate behavior, and shape collective understandings of reality. Michel Foucault's theory of discourse (1972) provides a foundational framework for understanding how power operates through

language at all levels of society. Foucault argues that power is not centralized or possessed by a single authority, but is dispersed across social practices and exercised through discourse. In this sense, language does not simply transmit information; it actively produces power structures, legitimizes authority, and regulates how knowledge and truth are defined and circulated within society.

From a Foucauldian perspective, discourse determines what can be said, who is authorized to speak, and which forms of knowledge are considered valid. Language establishes dominant social norms by privileging certain ways of speaking while marginalizing others. As a result, discourse functions as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, allowing particular voices to be heard while silencing alternative perspectives that are deemed inappropriate or deviant. This regulatory function of language demonstrates its capacity to shape social reality by normalizing specific values, behaviors, and identities.

In educational settings, the operation of power through language is particularly visible and consequential. Schools function as institutional spaces where discourse is systematically organized and regulated. Teachers, as institutional representatives, exercise discursive authority through their use of language to instruct, evaluate, and discipline students. By employing formal, normative, or imperative language styles, teachers position themselves as legitimate authorities and reinforce hierarchical relationships within the classroom. Such linguistic practices not only structure classroom interaction but also communicate implicit expectations regarding obedience, participation, and acceptable forms of expression.

At the same time, educational institutions promote particular linguistic forms as more legitimate and valuable than others. Academic language, standardized varieties, and formal registers are often privileged within school discourse, while slang, regional languages, or non-standard forms of expression are frequently marginalized. This process creates a linguistic hierarchy in which students' social and academic value is often assessed based on their mastery of institutionally sanctioned language. Consequently, students who possess the linguistic resources aligned with dominant norms are more likely to be perceived as competent and intelligent, while others may be positioned as less capable or disengaged.

However, students are not merely passive recipients of dominant linguistic practices. They actively engage with language to construct their social identities and negotiate power relations within peer groups. Through everyday interaction, students use language strategically to express affiliation, assert status, and build solidarity. Peer discourse provides a space where alternative norms and meanings can emerge, allowing students to challenge or reinterpret institutional expectations. For instance, students who demonstrate fluency in socially valued communicative styles—such as persuasive speaking, humor, or code-switching—often gain recognition and social influence among their peers.

Language also enables students to exercise agency by navigating multiple discursive worlds. Students may adapt their language use depending on context, shifting between formal academic discourse in classroom settings and informal or vernacular language in peer interactions. This ability to move across discourses reflects

students' awareness of power dynamics and their capacity to manage social relationships strategically. Through such practices, students do not simply reproduce existing power structures but also reshape them in subtle ways through everyday linguistic interaction.

Furthermore, the constructive power of language is closely linked to students' social engagement within the school environment. When students feel that their voices are recognized and valued, they are more likely to participate actively in classroom discourse and social interaction. Conversely, when students' linguistic resources are consistently devalued or excluded, they may withdraw from participation, leading to reduced engagement and marginalization. Language thus plays a critical role in either enabling or constraining students' opportunities to engage socially and academically.

In this regard, the power of language in education operates on both structural and interpersonal levels. Structurally, institutional discourse shapes norms, hierarchies, and expectations. Interpersonally, everyday interactions among teachers and students continuously negotiate these structures. Language becomes the site where power is exercised, resisted, and transformed. Understanding this dynamic highlights the importance of critically examining language use in educational contexts. Language possesses a constructive power that extends beyond communication to the organization of social relations and the formation of student engagement. Through discourse, language establishes authority, reproduces inequality, and shapes identity, while also providing opportunities for agency and resistance. Recognizing the dual role of language as both a tool of power and a medium of social

construction is essential for creating educational environments that promote inclusion, participation, and meaningful social engagement.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This research applied a qualitative approach. According to Dornyei (2007, p. 24), qualitative research involves data collection methods that produce primarily open-ended, non-numerical data, which are then analyzed using non-statistical techniques. This approach allows researchers to explore complex phenomena in depth and to gain a more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

In line with Dornyei's definition, Creswell (2014, p. 4) further elaborates that qualitative research is an approach designed to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups attach to a social or human problem. By focusing on participants' subjective experiences, qualitative research seeks to uncover the deeper meanings, interpretations, and insights.

In this study, the researcher sought to understand not just the surface-level answers, but the underlying reasons and motivations behind participants' behaviors and viewpoints. This approach aligns with the broader goals of qualitative research, which emphasizes rich, detailed descriptions and the exploration of social contexts to understand complex issues in a meaningful way.

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how language is used by students to construct their social engagement

within the school environment. The case study design is appropriate because this research aims to explore the use of language intensively within a specific social context—namely, at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan—as a unique and complex learning environment.

According to Yin (2018), a case study is a research strategy used to understand contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident. In this study, language is not only viewed as a tool for communication, but also as a social instrument that shapes interaction and engagement among students.

This research is categorized as descriptive because it presents its findings using open-ended paragraphs and non-numerical data. Descriptive research, by definition, focuses on describing characteristics or phenomena in their natural settings rather than manipulating or controlling variables. In this case, the results are expressed through qualitative data, which is often in the form of words, descriptions, and narratives rather than numbers or statistical measures.

Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasize that qualitative data has been a fundamental part of several social sciences, such as anthropology, history, and political science. Unlike quantitative data, which relies on numbers and statistical analysis, qualitative data offers rich, detailed insights into human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena. This type of data allows researchers to explore meanings, contexts, and relationships in depth, providing a more nuanced understanding of the subject being studied. What makes the findings from qualitative studies particularly compelling is their ability to present information in a way that feels tangible. When qualitative data

is organized into stories, events, or incidents, it creates a concrete, engaging narrative. These narratives often have a sense of "undeniability" — they resonate with readers and viewers in a way that statistical data might not. The stories or incidents described in qualitative research are often far more relatable and convincing than a series of summarized numbers. This emotional and intellectual engagement makes qualitative findings especially powerful for audiences such as other researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and even the general public. The strength of qualitative data lies in its ability to offer a detailed, meaningful portrayal of a phenomenon, one that conveys a sense of lived reality, which can be more persuasive than abstract numbers alone.

3.2. Focus and Research Setting

The focus of this study is on how students use language to construct, maintain, and develop their social engagement in the school environment. The research was conducted at MAN 2 Medan**,** Jl. William Iskandar No.7A, Bantan Timur, Medan Tembung, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara 20222, Indonesia **and MAN 1 Medan,** Jl. William Iskandar No.7B, Bantan Timur, Medan Tembung, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara 20222, Indonesia Medan which was selected purposively due to its social diversity, the heterogeneous backgrounds of the students, and the various student activities that demonstrate the use of language in different social contexts.

3.3 Technique of Collecting Data

Research instruments are tools that you can use to collect, measure, and study data that is relevant to your research objectives. These instruments are typically used to engage patients, clients,

students, teachers, staff, ets; health sciences, social sciences and education are used. Research tools can be questionnaires, tests, surveys, or checklists (Hollin et al. 2020). The outhors of this study used interviews and observations. There are interviews, focus group discussions and observations. The interview itself is an evolving form of research that continues to cover a wide range of subjects and offers important insights into the identities, experiences, beliefs, attitudes and orientations towards various phenomena of research participants (Talmy 2010). After meeting the participants who were ready to be asked about their views and involvement in hybrid learning, I as the author collected their WhatsApp numbers and created a WhatsApp group where I asked them open the link I shared and fill in the five questions I creates earlier called semi-structured interviews. Creswell (Adhabi and Anozie 2017) explains that focus group discussions are the primary data collection technique used in focus groups. A group leader usually oversees these groups. A group leader typically oversees these groups. Focus groups data collection techniques might take different forms.

This research uses human as tools to establish research focus, select informants to obtain research data, assess data quality, analyze data, interpret data, and make conclusions about research findings.

1. Observation

Selecting, changing, recording and coding various behaviors and situations related to creatures according to empirical purposes is known as observation (Seltiz, 1976: 352). Focusing attention on an object with all the senses is known as observation or observation in psychological theory. As stated by Sutrisno Hadi (2013: 78), the

observation method is "a method of collecting data that is carried out directly regarding the object being 25 studied. This method is usually defined as systematically observing and recording the phenomena being studied." Based on the opinion above, it can be understood that observation techniques are techniques used systematically to collect data through observation. According to Sutrisno Hadi (2013:78), observation methods consist of three types, namely "non-participant research observation, non-systematic systematic observation, and non-experimental experimental observation." The type of non participant observation used by the author is defined as "if the participant element is not present in it at all." Therefore, researchers made direct observations of Students in English Education Deparment Islamic University of North Sumatra Medan.

2. Interview

The interview method can be defined as "a dialogue carried out by the interviewer (Interview) to obtain information from the interviewee". In other words, the interview method is a data collection technique used to ask questions verbally to the individual in question to obtain the information needed for research. The authors use free-guided interviews, which are defined as "the interviewer brings a framework of questions to be presented but the way these questions are presented and the rhythm of the interview are once left to the discretion of the interviewer." Therefore, a free guided interview is a data collection tool with questions and answers that has an element of freedom (not guided) but is also controlled and centered on the topic to be researched. In this case, the author asks what is needed as an informant to obtain the required research data. Data collection known as an interview occurs

when the interviewee asks questions directly to them and a recording device is used to record or record their responses. According to Suharsimi Arikunto, in general there are two types of interview guidelines, namely: 26 a. The interview guide is unstructured, meaning it only covers main questions. b. A structured interview guide, or a carefully written interview guide.

3. Documentation

To obtain information from written sources or documents, such as books, magazines, regulations, minutes, diaries, and so on, documentation is defined as "originally the word is a document which means written items, such as books, magazines, documentation, meeting minutes, notes daily basis, regulations and so on" (Suharsimi Arikunto, 2012:135). All kinds of information related to documents, both official and unofficial, are considered documentary sources of information. Documentation is used to study various sources of documentation, especially community activities that are supported by representative sources. Document analysis was carried out to collect data from archives and documents that were relevant to this research. This method is used to obtain information about the interview documentation, and other information needed to compile this research.

3.4 Technique of Data Analysis

To analyse the data of this research, the researcher use Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) data condensation, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions:

1. Data Condensation

Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the

full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials. By condensing, we're making data stronger.

(We stay away from data reduction as a term because that implies we're weakening or losing something in the process.) As we see it, data condensation occurs continuously throughout the life of any qualitatively oriented project. Even before the data are actually collected, anticipatory data condensation is occurring as the researcher decides (often without full awareness) which conceptual 27 framework, which cases, which research questions, and which data collection approaches to choose. As data collection proceeds, further episodes of data condensation occur: writing summaries, coding, developing themes, generating categories, and writing analytic memos. The data condensing/transforming process continues after the fieldwork is over, until a final report is completed. Data condensation is not something separate from analysis. It is a part of analysis. The researcher's decisions—which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which category labels best summarize a number of chunks, which evolving story to tell—are all analytic choices.

Data condensation is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that ―final‖ conclusions can be drawn and verified. By data condensation, we do not necessarily mean quantification. Qualitative data can be transformed in many ways: through selection, through summary or paraphrase, through being subsumed in a larger pattern, and so on. Occasionally, it may be helpful to convert the data into magnitudes

(e.g., the analyst decides that the program being looked at has a —high‖ or —low‖ degree of effectiveness), but this is not always necessary.

2. Data Display

A collection of data collected becomes a collection of information to enable action to be taken and conclusions to be drawn. By looking at the data presented, researchers can understand what is happening and have the opportunity to carry out analysis or other actions that depend on their understanding. Basically, data presentation is designed to show information systematically and is easy to see and understand.

3. Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

The third stream of analysis activity is conclusion drawing and verification. From the start of data collection, the qualitative analyst interprets what things mean by noting patterns, explanations, causal flows, and propositions. The competent researcher holds these conclusions lightly, maintaining openness and skepticism, but the conclusions are still there, vague at first, then increasingly explicit and grounded. —Final‖ conclusions may not appear until data collection is 28 over, depending on the size of the corpus of field notes; the coding, storage, and retrieval methods used; the sophistication of the researcher; and any necessary deadlines to be met. Conclusion drawing, in our view, is only half of a Gemini configuration. Conclusions are also verified as the analyst proceeds. Verification may be as brief as a fleeting second thought crossing the analyst's mind during writing, with a short excursion back to the field notes; or it may be thorough and elaborate, with lengthy argumentation and review among colleagues to develop —intersubjective consensus‖ or with extensive efforts to

replicate a finding in another data set. The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their confirmability—that is, their validity. Otherwise, we are left with interesting stories about what happened but of unknown truth and utility.
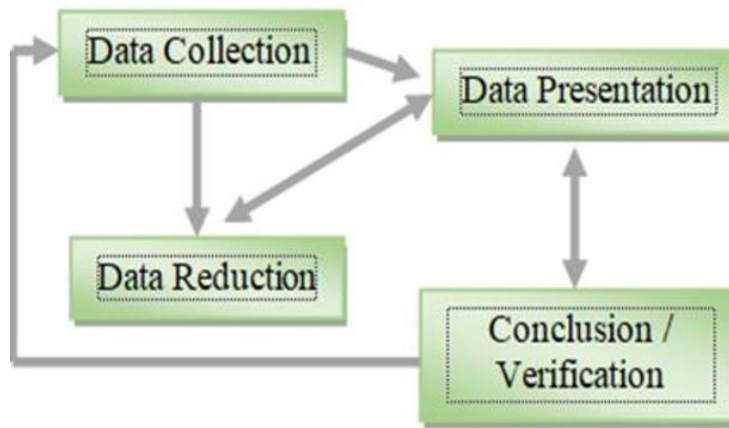

Figure 1. Components of Data Analysis

We have presented these three streams—data condensation, data display, and conclusiondrawing/verification—as interwoven before, during, and after data collection in parallel form, to make up the general domain called —analysis.‖ The three streams can also be represented as shown in Display 1.1—our first network display. In this view, the three types of analysis activity and the activity of data collection itself form an interactive, cyclical process.

The researcher steadily moves among these four nodes during data collection and then shuttles among condensing, displaying, and conclusion drawing/verifying for the remainder of the study. 29 The coding of data, for example (data condensation), leads to new ideas on what should go into a matrix (data display). Entering the data requires

further data condensation. As the matrix fills up, preliminary conclusions are drawn, but they lead to the decision, for example, to add another columnto the matrix to test the conclusion. The researcher gathered all the information required from the observation outcames to limit this study's data. To refine, classify, direct, eliminate, or brief descriptions were used to simplify and modify the data obtained, categorizing them according to a particular pattern. When analyzing observational data, researchers should pay special attention to anything regarded as strange, uncharted, or not yet have a pattern when doing their research.

The researcher than gathered all the information required from the interview's findings and grouped the data. The researcher would then summarize, pick the key elements, concentrate on what was crucial, and seek themes and patterns. In other words, the researcher selects and concentrates on the critical information by summarizing the data. The researcher would next classify and arrange the data to derive and confirm findings. As a result, some data for this reduction was chosen (living in), and other data was squandered (living out). A summary of the data was presented, and narrative prose was utilized to show how the categories related to one another in the data presented. The narrative text was written using the researcher's logical and methodical language to make it simple to grasp. It was based on the key results from the data reduction. This exhibit was organized methodically and followed the main topic so that it was simple to comprehend how the various competents worked together rather than when they were isolated. Researchers could examine the data, synthesize result from the study, and explain the study's conclusions by

comprehending how the facts were presented. The interpretation stage of the investigated data was carried out to form findings based on the phenomena discovered by disclosing on the data that had been gathered through interviews. It became a study whose data answers the existing problems. 30 In qualitative research, data is found through exploration rather than measurement. Thus, the researcher is the research tool. The Miles and Hubermen data analysis technique, namely descriptive qualitative, will be employed in this study.

CHAPTER IV
FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Finding

The results of this study were obtained from an analysis of interviews with eight teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan, consisting of English, Indonesian, and Arabic language teachers. In general, the interviews indicated that the teachers at both madrasas (Islamic schools) have a high awareness of the importance of using language that is polite, soft, and contextual, both in the learning process and outside the classroom. Language is not merely a tool for delivering material, but also a means to build social, moral, and spiritual relationships between teachers and students.

The language used by teachers functions to regulate the classroom atmosphere, build trust, instill character, and maintain social harmony both inside and outside the school environment. The majority of teachers use language that is inclusive and adaptive to the diverse backgrounds of students, whether in terms of culture, academic ability, or maturity level. Meanwhile, some teachers are also aware that using language that is too rigid, authoritative, or laden with academic terms can hinder active student engagement in interaction.

Thus, the linguistic practices of teachers at both madrasas (Islamic schools) reflect a balance between instructional aspects and socio-emotional aspects. Language becomes the primary tool for teachers to bring to life the values of politeness, empathy, religiosity, and social engagement that are the hallmarks of Islamic education.

A. Language Practices that Promote or Hinder Students' Participation

1. Politeness and Inclusive Commanding

The interview results indicate that all teachers from MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan possess a high level of linguistic awareness in using language for giving commands in the classroom. They emphasize the importance of politeness and inclusivity when providing instructions, whether in Indonesian, English, or Arabic. The language used is understood not merely as a tool for communication, but also as a means of establishing a learning atmosphere that is safe, comfortable, and respectful."

The teachers from both *madrasahs* agreed that polite and gentle forms of language are far more effective in encouraging student participation than language that is harsh, commanding, or dominating. Expressions like *'please' (tolong), 'we kindly ask for your assistance' (mohon bantuannya)*, or the address *'ananda'* are frequently used to replace the words *'you' (kamu or kau)*. The use of *ananda* is considered to foster a greater sense of closeness/familiarity with the students." One teacher from MAN 1 conveyed, "If I want to instruct a student, I say, 'Ananda, please open this page, okay?' (*'Ananda, tolong buka halaman ini ya)* rather than, ' open it now!' *'Kamu buka sekarang!'."* This statement reflects the values of politeness and courtesy embedded within the Islamic educational culture at the *madrasahs*, where the teacher-student relationship is not solely based on authority, but also on affection and mutual respect. The word "ananda" is considered to carry strong emotional and spiritual meaning—reflecting the affection, prayers, and hopes of an educator for their students.

One English teacher added that nonverbal aspects, such as tone of voice, also influence the students' courage to respond. They stated, "I use a gentle tone so the children aren't afraid." They also added, "Sometimes I repeat [the instruction] using Indonesian so that everyone understands."

This demonstrates the teachers' awareness of the importance of linguistic accommodation—the adjustment of language so that it can be received by all students with different levels of ability and backgrounds. By using a soft tone and inclusive word choice, the teachers create a safe linguistic environment that supports active participation and the students' confidence in answering questions or engaging in discussion.

In addition, teachers also try to balance between academic and non-academic language (everyday language) so as not to create a gap in understanding. For example, English teachers often combine English and Indonesian within a single instruction to ensure all students understand the command well.

For relatively complete sentences, such as *'Please open your book, page twenty,'* the teacher sometimes uses Indonesian so that students do not have difficulty understanding the given instructions."

"Practices such as this not only increase cognitive understanding but also demonstrate pedagogical empathy—the teacher's ability to adjust language to the students' needs without diminishing their authority or the clarity of the message. The Arabic teachers at MAN 2 also show a similar approach by adding religious expressions to build emotional and spiritual warmth in the class. One of them said,..."

"Hayyaa banaa naftahul kitabu yaa banaatii." *"Come on, open your books, my children (or dear students)."*

The use of an address such as *Hayyaa banaatii* ("O my daughters") is not only a form of gentleness, but also an expression of affection and moral responsibility inherent to a teacher in the Islamic tradition. In this context, the Arabic language serves a dual function: to reinforce the students' Islamic identity while simultaneously instilling values of compassion and respect.

Conversely, some teachers also acknowledged that using language that is too direct or a high-pitched tone can reduce student participation. Teachers realize that although the intention may be to assert instructions, an authoritarian communication style often generates fear or awkwardness. Several teachers noted that students become quieter, reluctant to ask questions, and tend to follow lessons passively when they feel "pressured" by the teacher's speaking style. This aligns with the findings of Flanders (1970), which state that teacher verbal dominance and an authoritative linguistic style can create a passive and hierarchical learning atmosphere.

Consequently, the teachers in both *madrasahs* adjusted their communication strategies to avoid such outcomes. They tried using collaborative sentences such as "Let's try this together," "How about we discuss it first?" or "Who would like to help me answer this question?" (*Mari kita coba bersama-sama"*, *"Bagaimana kalau kita diskusikan dulu?"*, atau *"Siapa yang mau bantu ibu menjawab pertanyaan ini?")* This type of phrasing conveys a participatory impression and respects the students' role as active subjects in learning.

From the data presented above, it can be concluded that the practice of politeness and inclusivity in instructional language is not merely a matter of good manners; rather, it is part of a conscious

pedagogical strategy implemented by teachers to build classroom engagement.

This communication pattern demonstrates a shift in the teacher's role from an authoritative figure to a humanistic facilitator. Thus, linguistic courtesy in the *madrasah* is not just a reflection of moral values, but also a form of effective linguistic pedagogy in fostering courage, empathy, and mutual respect among students.

2. Teachers' Language Practices that promote students' Participation in the Classroom engagement.

In increasing the students' interaction in the classroom the teachers of MAN 1 and MAN 2, The teachers shifted the classroom from a one-way lecturing to a meaningful, two-way communication. Most of the teachers do the following ways :

a. The teachers minimize Teacher Talk Time (TTT) in teaching process. The teachers strove to reduce the amount of time they spend talking and maximize Student Talk Time (STT). Excessive TTT can lead to passive listening and reduced opportunity for students to process and practice language and ideas. The teachers said that in this way, the students have more responsibility to take part in the process of teaching-learning process in the classroom.

b. The teachers use Open-Ended Questions when they offer questions to students: These questions have multiple possible answers or require complex, elaborated responses (e.g., "Why do you think learning international language is important for students?)". The teachers said that this question will promote critical thinking, encourage students to connect ideas, and signal

that the teacher values diverse perspectives, leading to deeper cognitive engagement.

c. Providing Adequate Wait Time: This is the pause a teacher gives after asking a question and after a student finishes speaking. Extending the wait time (from the typical 1-2 minutes) allows students, particularly those who are hesitant or processing a second language, time to formulate a thoughtful response, significantly increasing the quantity and quality of students' responses. The other way to promote students' engagement in the classroom, some teachers do what we call Scaffolding and Recasting Language. This way can promote students' interaction, Theoretically, Scaffolding is simply about giving temporary help to a student so they can successfully do something they couldn't quite do alone yet. In this strategy the teachers do such as: Modeling and Sentence Stems**:** The teachers provide clear linguistic frameworks for responses like *"I believe... because..." or "My evidence for that is on page...".* The other way is Recasting and Expansion: When a student provides a response, the teacher gently restates or rephrases the student's idea using correct grammar or more precise academic vocabulary, without directly correcting as: *Student:* "They go to the school library and get the books." *Teacher*: "The *went* to the school library and *got* the books. That's an important detail!" The teachers stated that they provides direct, positive language input while validating the student's contribution, promoting language development without discouraging participation.

d. Seeking Clarification and Confirmation Checks (Negotiating Meaning): In teaching-learning process The teachers often find the students' response unclearly, when this happened the teachers ask the students to elaborate or confirms their own understanding of what said. Most teachers of MAN 1 and MAN 2 use sucah as this quesyion *"Could you say more about what you mean ?"*. This way encourages students to be active partners in communication and practice clarifying their own thoughts.

A. Positive Reinforcement and Atmosphere

In order for students to feel comfortable in class, the teachers stated that The tone and emotional content of teacher language are crucial for building a safe, trusting environment where students feel comfortable taking participating, Therefore, teachers in communicating do the following activities:

1. The teachers use specific and meaningful praise, rather than generic compliments as "I appreciate how you used three different pieces of evidence to support your claim," (this sentence focuses on the process/effort) instead of just "Good job." This sentence strengthens positive behaviors, motivates continued effort done by students.

2. Acknowledging every student's contribution, even an incorrect one, with a positive, supportive phrase. The teacher said "Thank you for your response," That's an interesting discussion; let's keep going to talk about our lesson. The teachers said that It can reduces the students' fearness of making mistakes, which is the single biggest barrier to participation.

3. Using inclusive language and making an effort to pronounce students' names correctly or learn a simple greeting in their home language.

   This shows respect for the student's identity and culture, helping them feel valued and connected to the classroom, thus enhancing emotional and behavioral engagement.

4. Inviting and Distributing Participation: The teachers use language that intentionally invites quiet students into the conversation.

   Examples

   Teacher: "Now I'd like to hear an idea from someone we haven't heard from yet," or She directly asks a student after they've had time to prepare: "[Student Name], what did you and your partner discuss in your 'Turn and Talk'?"

   The teachers said that By consciously employing these language practices, I (teacher) transform their talk into a powerful level for greater student participation, engagement, and ultimately, deeper learning.

3. Responding to Criticism as a Form of Dialogue

The interview results indicate that the majority of teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan view criticism from students as an important part of the educational communication process. Instead of seeing criticism as a form of resistance against authority, they regard it as a sign of students' openness, courage, and intellectual maturity. This reflects a paradigm shift in teacher-student communication from a one-way (teacher-centered) model toward a dialogic and participatory (learner-centered) model.

Teachers realize that in the context of modern education—especially in *madrasahs* that also teach moral and spiritual values—students' ability to express opinions politely is part of character building. One teacher at MAN 1 stated, "I don't blame the students if they offer criticism. I say 'thank you, you have your own perspective, but it still needs refinement." This statement demonstrates the teacher's awareness of the importance of acknowledgment language—language that validates the student's opinion without negating the teacher's authority. By saying "thank you" first, the teacher affirms that the student's voice is recognized and valued. Following this, they still provide guidance using gentle corrective language. This approach reinforces the position of language as a means of dialogue, not an instrument of control.

Another teacher at MAN 1 stated that criticism from students actually serves as a mirror for self-reflection. The teacher said that when students offer criticism, it signifies courage and honesty, two moral values highly upheld in the *madrasah* environment. The teacher conveyed:

"I am happy when students are honest. It means they dare to speak what they feel. That is also good for me; it becomes material for introspection."

This statement shows the emergence of metalinguistic awareness within the teacher—the understanding that verbal interaction does not merely convey a message, but also shapes social and moral relations. The teacher no longer positions themselves as a figure who "cannot be criticized," but rather as a lifelong learner who is also able to receive input.

These findings align with the perspective of Paulo Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which emphasizes the importance of dialogical communication in education. According to Freire, genuine communication between teacher and student must be reciprocal and liberating, rather than dominating. Language in this context becomes a tool for building equality and critical consciousness, not merely a medium for transmitting information.

In the context of this study, the teachers' practice of accepting criticism graciously (or open-heartedly) demonstrates that they have internalized the values of Islamic education that emphasize *syura* (consultation/deliberation) and *adab al-hiwar* (the ethics of dialogue). By responding to criticism gently and non-defensively, the teachers are actively instilling democratic and empathetic values in the learning process. This strengthens the emotional bond between the teacher and students, while simultaneously building a culture of open communication within the *madrasah* environment. Some teachers also asserted that not all criticism from students needs to be answered with a lengthy argument. Sometimes students simply want to be heard. One teacher said,

"I treat student criticism as normal. Sometimes they just want to be heard. *I respond with just a smile."* The smile in this context is not a passive response, but rather a nonverbal symbol of calming and affirming acceptance. The teacher's body language and facial expressions become part of affective language—a form of emotional communication that maintains the warmth of the interpersonal relationship in the classroom. In this way, the teacher shows that they

are not just hearing the student's words, but also understanding the feelings behind them.

Teachers at MAN 2 also hold a similar view, although some use a different strategy. One teacher said that when there is criticism or a question, they often turn it back to other students to foster collaborative discussion. The teacher explained:

"If someone gives criticism or asks a question, *"I throw it out to the other students so that they can discuss it among themselves."* This approach demonstrates that the teachers strive to create an equal discussion space and foster a sense of collective responsibility for ideas. The teacher does not act as the sole source of truth, but rather as a facilitator who cultivates a culture of critical and collaborative thinking. The language used in responding to criticism is generally soft-toned, rational, and conveyed with non-threatening word choices.

Teachers are aware that the manner in which they respond to criticism influences the classroom communication climate. A defensive or harsh attitude can shut down future student participation, whereas open and appreciative language actually cultivates the students' confidence to express ideas politely.

Thus, the results of this study affirm that teachers' language practices in responding to criticism are not merely spontaneous acts of communication, but reflect a dialogic learning paradigm that values the student's voice. The teacher acts as a dialogic partner who fosters moral sensitivity, intellectual courage, and reflective capacity in the learners. In the context of the *madrasah*, this form of communication reinforces Islamic values such as *tawadhu'* (humility), *musyawarah* (consultation/deliberation), and *husnuzhan* (positive assumption/good

faith), all of which form an essential foundation for building harmonious social relations in the educational environment.

4. Barriers to Participation

Although most teachers have endeavored to use polite, gentle, and supportive language in learning, some teachers admit that communication barriers still frequently occur in the classroom. One of the main barriers that emerges is related to language comprehensibility or linguistic accessibility. English teachers, for example, note that the use of academic terms without contextual explanation can make students feel confused and ultimately choose to remain silent. When teachers use words like "analyze," "evaluate," or "infer" without concrete examples, students often do not understand their meaning and feel hesitant to ask questions. In situations like this, the teacher's overly technical language actually restricts the space for student participation and renders the communication one-way. It can be stated that if the teacher dominance in speaking (teacher talk), it can decrease the level of student interaction and participation in the classroom.

Indonesian Language teachers also admit that the teacher-centered discourse pattern is still quite frequent. Many teachers unconsciously dominate the conversation by giving lengthy explanations, asking rhetorical questions, or rarely giving students the opportunity to respond. Consequently, students become passive listeners and feel that their voices are not very important. This condition reflects what Freire (1970) called the banking model of education, which is a learning model that places the teacher as the main source of knowledge and the students merely as recipients of information. This linguistic imbalance ultimately creates a social and psychological

distance between teachers and students, thus hindering the creation of a participatory and dialogical learning atmosphere.

In addition to linguistic style, barriers also arise from the emotional tone used by the teacher. Although some teachers use a soft and friendly tone of voice, some admit that under certain conditions—for example, when the class is noisy or student discipline declines—they sometimes speak with a high or firm tone. A teacher at MAN 2 revealed that that after being scolded in front of the class, some students became reluctant to speak or answer questions for several weeks. This indicates that language not only functions as a communication tool but also contains emotional content that can affect students' sense of security and courage to participate. Thus, the way teachers speak plays an important role in creating an inclusive and conducive classroom atmosphere.

`Communication barriers are also often related to the students' socio-linguistic background. In pluralistic madrasah environments such as MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan, students come from various regions with different dialects, such as Melayu Deli, Batak, or Javanese. Some teachers note that students with strong regional accents or limited English language ability tend to be more passive in class discussions because they are afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at by friends. Thus, linguistic diversity, which should be a richness, can actually become a barrier to participation if it is not inclusively accommodated by the teacher. Teachers need to foster the awareness that every language variety has equal value, so students feel respected without having to lose their linguistic identity.

In addition to the verbal aspect, some teachers also mention non-verbal barriers in communication, such as body language, standing position in the class, and eye contact. A teacher who always teaches from the front without moving closer to the students can create an impression of distance and rigid authority. Conversely, a teacher who often walks among the students, uses open body gestures, and gives smiles or nods, is able to create a warmer and more participatory atmosphere. This finding indicates that effective communication in the classroom is not only determined by word choice but also by the accompanying non-verbal language.

Overall, barriers to student participation are not solely caused by a lack of student motivation or ability, but rather are the result of a complex interaction between linguistic, emotional, and social aspects. Reflective teachers need to realize that the language they use can either strengthen or weaken the students' courage to speak. Therefore, effective teaching demands a balance between authority and empathy, between firmness and warmth, and between clarity of language and openness to dialogue. Only in this way can the classroom become a truly democratic space, where every student feels heard, valued, and has a voice in the learning process.

B. Language and the Construction of Social Engagement, Roles, Identities, and Power Relations

1. Language as a Tool for Social Inclusion

The interview results show that teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan have a high linguistic awareness regarding the importance of using inclusive language in the classroom. Inclusive language is understood not just as a choice of polite words, but also as a

communicative strategy to ensure that all students—regardless of academic ability, social background, or language proficiency level—can actively participate in the learning process.

A teacher at MAN 2 asserted, "I always watch my words so that all students feel valued, even if their abilities vary." This statement illustrates a social sensitivity towards individual differences. The teacher does not want language to be a barrier, but rather a bridge connecting students with various levels of ability. Another teacher added that they often use "common and simple language" so that it can be understood by all students. This awareness demonstrates the application of the principle of sociolinguistic awareness, which is the ability to adjust language style according to the social context and the audience's level of comprehension (Holmes, 2013).

Some teachers also apply the translanguaging approach, which involves combining Indonesian with English or Arabic to strengthen students' understanding. For example, when teaching vocabulary in English, the teacher will add an explanation in Indonesian, and sometimes even use relevant Arabic terms to enrich the religious or moral meaning. This strategy is not merely a linguistic effort but also a form of recognition of the students' multilingual identity in the madrasah. Thus, the use of dual language becomes a means of empowerment, not a differentiator of ability classes.

Furthermore, the practice of inclusive language is also reflected in the use of egalitarian greetings such as "*ananda*" (a term of endearment for students), "*kita*" (we), or "*teman-teman*" (friends). These words not only show emotional warmth but also reflect the idea that all students are part of the same learning community. In this

context, language functions as a social instrument that fosters a sense of belonging, removes stigma against low-achieving students, and strengthens solidarity among class members.

2. Negotiating Power through Language

Another finding indicates that teachers consciously use language to negotiate the power relationship between teachers and students. In the context of madrasah education, which generally emphasizes discipline and respect for teachers, the effort to balance authority with empathy becomes a particular challenge. However, teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 try to avoid forms of communication that are overly authoritative or hierarchical. They prefer collaborative and participatory language, such as *"let's try," "let's learn together," or "what do you all think?"*

An English teacher stated that he never directly blames a student. He said, "I tell them, 'Good try, but let's take another look, okay?' so that they won't be embarrassed." This expression reflects a form of constructive feedback, which emphasizes appreciation for the student's effort while encouraging improvement without causing shame. From the perspective of Brown & Gilman's (1960) power and solidarity theory, such a strategy shows the teacher's effort to shift the power relationship from a vertical (authoritative) to a horizontal (collaborative) one.

This approach is also in line with the concept of dialogic teaching put forward by Alexander (2008), where the teacher not only transfers knowledge but also opens up space for students to think critically and express opinions. With language that invites collaboration, students feel they have an active role in the learning

process. Moreover, when teachers respond to mistakes with supportive language, they not only maintain student motivation but also foster psychological safety—a feeling of security to participate without fear of being humiliated.

Some teachers admit that an authoritative attitude still occasionally emerges in certain situations, such as when students violate class rules. However, they try to balance firmness with empathy, using sentences like, "I understand you're tired, but we still have to be disciplined." This form of communication shows that power is not eliminated, but negotiated so that it continues to function as a moral guide without suppressing students' freedom. Thus, language becomes an arena where power and solidarity meet, resulting in a social relationship of mutual respect.

3. Language as a Carrier of Moral and Religious Values

The language of teachers in the madrasah not only functions as a means of academic communication but also as a medium for the internalization of moral and religious values. In the interviews, almost all teachers emphasized that every interaction in the classroom must contain an element of character building. A teacher at MAN 1, for example, said: "I start the lesson with a prayer and motivation. I say, my dearest *ananda* (students), *inshaAllah* (God willing) you are future leaders." (*Saya mulai pelajaran dengan doa dan motivasi. Saya bilang, ananda yang saya sayangi, inshaAllah kalian calon pemimpin masa depan.)"*This statement illustrates how language is used to instill spiritual values while simultaneously strengthening the emotional relationship between the teacher and the students.

Religious phrases like "*Ash-shidqu najah*" (honesty brings salvation) or "May *ananda* (students) become heirs of virtue" serve a dual function: first, as a form of moral teaching; second, as a tool for forming a collective identity in line with the madrasah's vision as an Islam-based educational institution. Arabic Language teachers often utilize Quranic expressions or *hadith* as part of their material explanation, thus language plays a role in uniting the students' intellectual and spiritual dimensions.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995), this practice shows that the educational discourse in the madrasah is not neutral but is laden with moral and religious ideology. Language becomes an ideological medium that affirms the teacher's role as a spiritual guide, not just an academic educator. However, what is interesting is how teachers are able to convey these values without being dogmatic. They use a gentle, loving, and dialogical speech style, so that religious values are conveyed through communicative example, rather than rigid moral commands.

Thus, the language of teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan plays a multidimensional role: as a teaching tool, as a means of character building, and as a reinforcer of students' moral identity. In this context, the teachers' linguistic practices not only reflect their linguistic competence but also the moral and cultural competence that is characteristic of madrasah education.

C. Linguistic Choices and the Shaping of Social Relationships

1. Empathy and Closeness through Informal Language

Research findings indicate that teacher-student interaction does not stop in the classroom but continues in informal contexts which become an important space for building emotional closeness. Teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan realize that building personal relationships with students can be done not only through academic instruction but also through the use of warm, light, and empathetic everyday language.

The teacher from MAN 1 stated, "Outside of class, I like to greet them first, 'Hey, have you got lunch?' Just a small thing like that makes them feel closer."

This statement illustrates a simple yet meaningful form of interpersonal communication. Informal greetings such as this become a symbol of care and warmth that makes students feel valued as individuals, not just as learners. From the perspective of social interaction theory (Vygotsky, 1978), this kind of social interaction plays an important role in shaping a positive psychological climate that supports the learning process.

Other teachers also use a mix of Arabic and Indonesian, such as "Kaifa halukum?" (How are you all?) or *"Semangat terus ya, nak,"* (Keep up the spirit, child), to maintain a balance between familiarity and politeness.

This code-mixing not only reinforces the madrasa's (Islamic school's) religious nuances but also demonstrates an emotional closeness that remains within the bounds of Islamic morality. The teachers intentionally adjust their speaking style to reflect their position as friendly yet respected role models.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this practice demonstrates linguistic accommodation (Giles, 1973), which is the speaker's ability to adjust language according to the social context and the relationship between individuals. By using informal and empathetic language, the teachers are able to reduce the social distance without losing their authority. This approach fosters trust and openness in students towards the teachers, which in turn strengthens student engagement both academically and emotionally.

2. Empathetic and Context-Sensitive Communication

In facing conflicts in the school environment, teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 show a strong preference for using language that is soft, reflective, and spiritually nuanced. They tend to avoid confrontational language and choose to calm the situation by fostering student empathy.

A teacher from MAN 2 explained that when dealing with troubled students, he/she prefers to remind them using language that appeals to their emotions: "I remind them about their parents to evoke a sense of responsibility and empathy." This approach shows that the teacher is not just resolving the conflict on the surface, but is instead striving to build moral awareness within the student. By linking behavioral issues with family values and spiritual responsibility, the teacher positions language as a medium for reflection, not just a tool for reprimand.

Another teacher added, "I have them say *istighfar* (seek God's forgiveness) first, then I give advice." This statement illustrates a linguistic practice that integrates religious and psychological dimensions. In the madrasa context, the use of religious terms like *istighfar* holds a deep symbolic meaning—it functions not only as a

verbal ritual but also as a pedagogical strategy to calm emotions, open hearts, and guide students toward self-introspection.

From the perspective of emotional intelligence in education theory (Goleman, 1995), this empathetic language strategy demonstrates the teachers' ability to manage their own and their students' emotions constructively. Soft language creates a dialogical, not repressive, climate, where students feel safe to admit mistakes without feeling judged. Furthermore, the communicational approach, which is spiritually nuanced, reinforces the madrasa's identity as an institution for moral and religious education.

Thus, it can be concluded that the teachers in both madrasas have practiced a form of restorative communication, which is communication focused on restoring social and moral relationships after a transgression has occurred. Language is not used to punish, but to heal.

3. Language and Emotional Connection with Parents and Community

The interaction between teachers and parents and the community shows a communication pattern laden with empathy and social awareness. Teachers in both madrasas (Islamic schools) are not only educators for the students but also communicators who bridge the relationship between the educational institution and the family. In this context, language functions as a tool for social diplomacy that maintains harmony, trust, and cooperation between the madrasa and the surrounding environment.

A teacher from MAN 1 explained: "I start with a respectful greeting, 'Dear respected parent/guardian of the student,' then I convey

the matter concerning their child using polite language." The use of formal salutations like "Dear respected parent/guardian" demonstrates a pragmatic awareness of politeness norms (Brown & Levinson, 1987). By starting the conversation using a positive politeness strategy, the teacher seeks to create a communicative atmosphere that respects the dignity of the parents as equal partners in educating the child.

Meanwhile, a teacher at MAN 2 added that the level of language formality needs to be adjusted according to the parents' social and educational background. The teacher stated that not all student guardians are comfortable with formal language, so in certain situations, he/she uses a more relaxed and communicative speaking style. This flexibility reflects the teacher's ability to implement context-sensitive communication, which is the language skill that considers the situation, the interlocutor, and the communication goal.

This empathetic approach has broad implications for the community's trust in the madrasa (Islamic school). Language that is polite, open, and easy to understand becomes the key to successful communication between the educational institution and the family. Furthermore, the way teachers convey student problems with empathy—without blaming or judging—reflects an educative communication paradigm that is oriented toward solutions and collaboration, rather than focusing on faults or unilateral control.

From the perspective of the theory of interpersonal communication in education (Hargreaves, 2000), this practice demonstrates that the emotional relationship between teachers, students, and parents is built through empathetic and balanced communication skills. Teachers are not just transmitters of messages,

but also intermediaries of human values that maintain the integrity of the madrasah educational ecosystem.

Overall, the three dimensions above—familiarity through informal language, empathetic communication in conflict resolution, and emotional connection with the community—indicate that linguistic practices in the madrasa are not merely functional, but also affective and moral in value. Language functions as a social glue that binds the relationships between individuals within the educational ecosystem. Through the use of polite, flexible, and spiritually nuanced language, teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan succeed in building a communication culture based on compassion, equality, and respect for diversity.

4.2. Discussion

A. Linguistic Practices and the Construction of social Engagement in Classroom Interaction.

1. Politeness and Inclusive Commanding

The findings of this study demonstrate that teachers from both MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan exhibit a high level of **linguistic awareness** in their classroom language practices, especially in how they give instructions and manage interactions. Their use of **politeness and inclusive commanding** reveals a conscious pedagogical strategy aimed at fostering student engagement through respect, empathy, and shared responsibility. The teachers' linguistic behavior aligns with the sociolinguistic principle that language does not merely transmit information, but also performs **interpersonal and affective functions** that shape the emotional climate of learning (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Gumperz, 1982).

Expressions such as *"tolong,"* *"mohon bantuannya,"* or *"ananda"* were intentionally used to replace more direct or impersonal forms like *"kamu"* or *"kau."* In the Indonesian cultural context, this shift represents a **linguistic mitigation strategy**—softening directives to maintain social harmony and reduce perceived imposition. Such practices embody the values of Islamic pedagogy, where communication is rooted in *adab* (ethical manners) and *rahmah* (compassion). The use of affectionate address terms such as *"ananda"* or the Arabic *"ya banati"* reflects the teachers' desire to maintain both authority and warmth, creating what can be described as a **pedagogical balance between power and care** (Cummins, 2001).

Furthermore, teachers' tone of voice played a crucial role in establishing a safe and comfortable linguistic environment. Teachers consciously avoided harsh or loud tones, opting instead for **soft, inviting prosody** that signals openness and emotional safety. This linguistic choice resonates with the concept of *linguistic accommodation* (Giles & Coupland, 1991), in which speakers adjust their communicative style to the listener's level of understanding and comfort. In doing so, teachers lower affective barriers and create opportunities for increased participation, especially among less confident students.

The findings also show that teachers engaged in code-switching between Indonesian, English, and Arabic to ensure clarity and inclusivity. Statements such as "Please open your book, page twenty. Buka halaman dua puluh, ya," illustrate a form of translanguaging (Garcia & Wei, 2014) that bridges linguistic gaps and accommodates diverse student competencies. This hybrid communication not only supports comprehension but also fosters a culturally responsive classroom discourse.

Conversely, when teachers used overly direct or authoritarian language, students tended to become passive or hesitant to participate. This echoes Flanders' (1970) observation that excessive teacher talk and directive control may suppress interaction. Hence, teachers' use of collaborative expressions—such as *"Let's try together"* or *"Who would like to help me answer this?"*—can be interpreted as a conscious shift toward a dialogic pedagogy that values students as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients.

In conclusion, the use of politeness and inclusivity in teacher directives functions not merely as a matter of etiquette, but as a linguistic pedagogy that enhances engagement, nurtures trust, and humanizes the learning process. The teachers' communicative choices embody the integration of Islamic moral values and contemporary learner-centered approaches, resulting in classrooms that are both respectful and participatory.

2. Responding to Criticism as a Form of Dialogue

A key finding in this research is that teachers in both institutions demonstrate dialogic openness when responding to students' criticism or differing opinions. Instead of perceiving criticism as defiance, they interpret it as an opportunity for mutual reflection and intellectual growth. This represents a shift from a monologic, teacher-centered discourse toward a dialogical and participatory model of communication (Freire, 1970).

Teachers' responses often began with acknowledgment phrases such as *"Thank you, that's a good point,"* before offering constructive feedback. This linguistic pattern constitutes a form of acknowledgment language**,** where the teacher validates the student's contribution prior to correction. Such practices align with Vygotsky's (1978) notion of *scaffolding*, in which teachers guide learners through supportive, non-threatening interaction. By affirming the student's voice, teachers establish a sense of psychological safety that encourages future participation.

Furthermore, teachers viewed criticism as a mirror for self-reflection, seeing it as a sign of students' honesty and critical awareness—qualities consistent with Islamic values of *shura*

(consultation) and *adab al-hiwar* (ethics of dialogue). The teachers' readiness to accept feedback reflects an understanding that authority in education is dialogically constructed, not imposed. This disposition exemplifies Freire's (1970) "problem-posing education," wherein both teacher and student learn together through dialogue and critical inquiry.

Nonverbal communication also played an essential role. Teachers reported that simple gestures—like smiling, nodding, or maintaining gentle eye contact—were effective in diffusing tension and showing receptivity. These forms of affective language create emotional warmth and reinforce relational trust (Kramsch, 1998). In some cases, teachers even redirected criticism to peer discussion, encouraging students to evaluate ideas collaboratively. This approach decentralizes authority and cultivates a community of inquiry, in which learning emerges from collective dialogue rather than hierarchical instruction.

Ultimately, teachers' responses to criticism reveal a deeply rooted belief that communication is both a cognitive and moral act. By integrating Islamic ethics of humility (*tawadhu'*) and respect with dialogic pedagogy, teachers transform moments of disagreement into opportunities for empathy, moral growth, and critical consciousness. Thus, responding to criticism functions as a form of linguistic empowerment, nurturing students' ability to think independently while maintaining respect for others.

3. Barriers to Participation

Despite these positive practices, several linguistic and socio-emotional barriers to participation were identified. The first and most salient obstacle concerned linguistic accessibility. When teachers used

academic or technical vocabulary—such as *"analyze," "evaluate,"* or *"infer"*—without contextual explanation, students often hesitated to respond. This suggests that specialized language can act as a gatekeeper of participation**,** reinforcing asymmetrical power relations between teacher and student (Bernstein, 1990).

Another recurring theme was the persistence of teacher-dominated discourse pattern**s.** Some teachers admitted that extended monologues and rhetorical questioning limited students' opportunities to express themselves. This reflects what Freire (1970) termed the *banking model of education*, where knowledge is "deposited" by the teacher rather than co-created through interaction. In such contexts, the classroom becomes linguistically hierarchical, and students' voices are marginalized.

Emotional tone also emerged as a determinant of participation. Teachers who occasionally raised their voices—especially during disciplinary moments—observed that students became silent or withdrawn for days afterward. This underscores the affective dimension of language: the same words can carry vastly different meanings depending on emotional delivery. The findings support the idea that emotional safety is a prerequisite for linguistic participation (Dörnyei, 2005).

Sociolinguistic diversity presented another challenge. Both schools accommodate students from multiple ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, including Malay, Batak, and Javanese speakers. Teachers noted that students with strong regional accents or limited proficiency in English often felt insecure about speaking, fearing ridicule from peers. This phenomenon reveals the subtle presence of linguistic

insecurity (Labov, 1966), which can suppress active participation unless teachers consciously validate all language varieties as equally legitimate.

Nonverbal dynamics further influenced classroom engagement. Teachers who maintained rigid spatial positioning—standing exclusively at the front—were perceived as distant and authoritarian. In contrast, those who moved around the classroom, made eye contact, or used open gestures created a more approachable atmosphere. This observation aligns with Goffman's (1981) concept of "footing," which emphasizes the relational meanings embedded in physical stance and body language.

Overall, the barriers identified in this study illustrate that limited participation is rarely a matter of student passivity alone; rather, it is co-constructed through linguistic, emotional, and sociocultural interactions. Effective teaching, therefore, requires a balance between clarity and empathy, authority and openness, formality and warmth. When teachers are reflexively aware of how their linguistic choices shape participation, classrooms can transform into democratic discourse spaces—where every learner feels heard, respected, and empowered to speak.

B. Language and the Construction of Social Engagement, Roles, Identities, and Power Relations

1. Language as a Tool for Social Inclusion

The use of inclusive language by teachers reflects a high degree of linguistic awareness and social sensitivity toward students' diversity. This finding supports Holmes' (2013) view that communicative competence involves not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability

to adjust linguistic style to the social context and audience's needs. Teachers at both madrasahs consciously employ polite, simple, and accessible language to ensure that all students—regardless of their academic ability or linguistic background—feel valued and capable of participating actively in classroom interactions.

The practice of translanguaging, in which teachers blend Indonesian, English, and Arabic, also reflects recognition of students' multilingual identities. Within the madrasah context, this strategy carries deep cultural meaning, bridging academic and religious dimensions of communication. This aligns with García and Wei's (2014) concept of *linguistic empowerment*, where translanguaging allows learners and teachers to draw from their full linguistic repertoire to create understanding and solidarity.

Furthermore, the use of egalitarian terms of address such as *ananda* ("my dear student"), *kita* ("we"), or *teman-teman* ("friends") illustrates the affective dimension of inclusive language. Such expressions foster emotional warmth and solidarity while reducing hierarchical distance between teachers and students. From a *sociolinguistic pragmatics* perspective, these linguistic choices reinforce classroom cohesion and affirm the collective identity of the class as a supportive learning community. Therefore, inclusive language functions not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a social mechanism that fosters belonging, respect, and engagement among students.

2. Negotiating Power through Language

The data also indicate that teachers consciously use language to negotiate power relations within the classroom. In the traditional culture

of Islamic education, teachers are often viewed as authoritative figures who must be respected. However, teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 strive to balance authority with empathy by avoiding rigid or hierarchical modes of communication.

They employ collaborative expressions such as *"let's try together," "how do you think we can solve this?"* or *"let's discuss this first"* to promote participation and shared responsibility. This linguistic strategy reflects a shift from power-based communication toward solidarity-based communication, a concept articulated by Brown and Gilman (1960). By choosing cooperative rather than commanding language, teachers transform the classroom into a dialogic space where power is redefined through respect and shared inquiry.

This finding also resonates with Alexander's (2008) concept of dialogic teaching, in which language serves as a means to stimulate critical and reflective thinking rather than simply transmit information. When teachers respond to mistakes with expressions such as *"Good try, but let's check again,"* they provide constructive feedback that maintains students' motivation and self-esteem. Such practices cultivate psychological safety, enabling students to participate actively without fear of embarrassment or punishment.

Moreover, power negotiation through language illustrates a balance between firmness and empathy. Teachers do not relinquish their authority but redefine it as moral guidance rather than control. In Freire's (1970) framework of **critical pedagogy**, this approach reflects a form of *humanizing education*, where authority serves the purpose of empowerment rather than domination. Hence, teacher language becomes an ethical space—where pedagogical intent and moral

responsibility intersect to foster democratic and compassionate classroom relations.

3. Language as a Carrier of Moral and Religious Values

Language in the madrasah context operates beyond its communicative and instructional functions; it serves as a vehicle for transmitting moral and spiritual values. Nearly all teachers emphasized that every classroom interaction must carry an element of *character education*. As one MAN 1 teacher stated, *"I start the lesson with prayer and motivation. I tell my students, inshaAllah, you are future leaders."* Such expressions highlight how teachers use language to instill faith, hope, and moral consciousness while strengthening emotional bonds with students.

Religious expressions such as *"Ash-shidqu najah"* ("Honesty brings success") or *"May you be among the heirs of virtue"* serve dual purposes: as moral instruction and as reinforcement of a collective Islamic identity. Arabic teachers often incorporate Qur'anic or prophetic sayings into lessons, thus merging intellectual and spiritual dimensions of learning. From a critical discourse analysis perspective (Fairclough, 1995), such practices demonstrate that educational discourse is never neutral; it embeds and reproduces moral and ideological values. Teacher language, therefore, becomes a site of moral production—one that positions teachers as spiritual mentors as well as academic educators.

Importantly, the teachers in this study deliver these values through gentle, dialogic, and compassionate communication rather than dogmatic preaching. This reveals an integration of spiritual discourse

and emotional pedagogy, where both verbal and nonverbal communication serve to model ethical conduct. Thus, the teachers' linguistic behavior embodies *moral agency*—using everyday communication to cultivate faith, empathy, and integrity among students.

In sum, language practices at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan are multidimensional. They promote inclusion, mediate power, and transmit moral values, illustrating how linguistic choices shape not only academic interaction but also the social and spiritual fabric of the classroom. Language in this context functions as a form of ideological pedagogy**,** constructing an environment where respect, collaboration, and moral awareness are intertwined—reflecting the essence of Islamic educational philosophy.

C. Linguistic Choices and the Shaping of Social Relationships

1. Empathy and Closeness through Informal Language

The findings indicate that teacher–student interaction at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan extends beyond formal classroom discourse, continuing into informal spaces that play a crucial role in building emotional closeness. Teachers recognize that personal connections with students can be cultivated not only through academic instruction but also through everyday, empathetic, and relaxed language.

As one teacher at MAN 1 stated, *"Outside the classroom, I like to greet them first—'Hey, have you eaten?' Small things like that make them feel closer."* This seemingly simple interaction demonstrates an interpersonal communication strategy that fosters warmth and respect. Informal greetings such as these act as symbolic gestures of care, allowing students to feel acknowledged as individuals rather than

merely as learners. In the light of social interaction theory (Vygotsky, 1978), such exchanges contribute to a positive socio-emotional climate that enhances learning motivation and engagement.

Teachers also frequently use code-mixing, blending Arabic and Indonesian expressions such as *"Kaifa halukum?"* or *"Semangat terus, ya, nak."* This linguistic blending reflects not only the religious-cultural identity of the madrasah but also a balance between friendliness and moral respect. By adopting a hybrid communicative style, teachers are able to position themselves as both approachable mentors and respected moral guides.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this practice exemplifies the concept of linguistic accommodation (Giles, 1973)—the ability of speakers to adjust their language to align with social context and interpersonal relationships. Through the use of informal and empathetic language, teachers reduce social distance without diminishing their authority. This linguistic sensitivity helps establish a trusting environment in which students feel psychologically safe to express themselves, thereby reinforcing both emotional and academic engagement.

2. Empathetic and Context-Sensitive Communication

When dealing with conflicts, teachers in both madrasahs exhibit a strong preference for using gentle, reflective, and spiritually grounded language rather than confrontational tones. This linguistic empathy reflects an effort to promote emotional regulation and moral reflection among students.

A teacher from MAN 2 explained, *"When students misbehave, I remind them about their parents so they feel a sense of empathy and*

responsibility." This statement reflects a moralized communication strategy in which teachers frame behavioral correction within emotional and familial values. Instead of punitive reprimands, teachers employ discourse that invites self-awareness and reflection. Another teacher added, *"I ask them to perform istighfar first, and then I advise them."* The inclusion of spiritual expressions such as *istighfar* (seeking forgiveness) carries both symbolic and pedagogical significance. It serves as a linguistic bridge between emotional calmness and moral consciousness, fostering an atmosphere of humility and self-restraint.

Drawing on Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence, such empathetic communication reveals teachers' ability to manage emotions—both their own and their students'—in a constructive way. Gentle language facilitates a dialogic rather than repressive classroom environment, where students feel safe to admit mistakes without fear of humiliation. Moreover, this approach reflects the Islamic educational ethos, where language serves not merely to instruct but to nurture the soul.

In this sense, teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 demonstrate a form of restorative communication—a discourse strategy aimed at healing social and moral relationships rather than enforcing punishment. Language becomes a medium of reconciliation and guidance, aligning pedagogical practices with the broader moral vision of Islamic education.

3. **Language and Emotional Connection with Parents and Community**

Teacher communication with parents and the broader community demonstrates an empathetic and socially attuned approach.

Teachers at both madrasahs act as communicators who bridge the institutional world of education with familial and community spheres. In this context, language functions as a tool of social diplomacy, fostering trust, cooperation, and mutual respect between the madrasah and its stakeholders.

A teacher from MAN 1 noted, *"I always begin with respectful greetings—'Dear respected parents,'—and then explain the issue about their child using polite language."* Such discourse exemplifies positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), reflecting pragmatic awareness of social norms and cultural expectations. By acknowledging parents' dignity through respectful address, teachers position them as partners rather than subordinates in the educational process.

Meanwhile, a teacher from MAN 2 emphasized the need for linguistic flexibility, explaining that not all parents are comfortable with highly formal language. Thus, she adjusts her tone and register according to the listener's social and educational background. This demonstrates context-sensitive communication, where linguistic choices are adapted to audience expectations and communicative goals.

This empathetic approach enhances public trust in the madrasah and strengthens home–school collaboration. When teachers communicate with kindness, openness, and cultural awareness, they not only prevent miscommunication but also reinforce the moral credibility of the institution. From the perspective of interpersonal communication theory in education (Hargreaves, 2000), these practices highlight how emotional bonds between teachers, students, and parents are maintained through balanced and respectful language use.

Overall, these three dimensions—informal empathy, restorative communication, and community connection—demonstrate that language use in the madrasah context transcends functional boundaries. It is affective, moral, and relational, serving as the social glue that binds individuals within the educational ecosystem. Through polite, flexible, and spiritually infused linguistic choices, teachers at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Medan successfully cultivate a communicative culture grounded in compassion, equality, and mutual respect.

CHAPTER V
CONSLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Conclusion

1. Teachers at both madrasahs demonstrated a high degree of linguistic awareness in using polite, inclusive, and empathetic forms of language. Through expressions of respect such as *tolong*, *ananda*, and *mohon bantuannya*, teachers created an emotionally safe environment that encouraged active participation. Inclusive commanding and collaborative phrases like *"let's try together"* promoted a sense of shared responsibility and reduced hierarchical distance between teacher and student. This highlights that language choice directly influences classroom participation, serving as a powerful pedagogical instrument for empowerment and engagement.

2. The teachers' responses to student criticism revealed a strong commitment to dialogic interaction. Rather than perceiving criticism as defiance, they embraced it as an opportunity for reflection and growth. This approach reflects Freire's (1970) model of *problem-posing education* and embodies Islamic principles of *adab al-hiwar* (ethics of dialogue). Teachers used acknowledgment language and empathetic tones to build trust and critical awareness, transforming moments of disagreement into opportunities for mutual learning and respect.

3. Despite many positive practices, barriers to student participation persist. These include the use of overly academic language,

teacher-dominated discourse, and emotional tones that discourage interaction. Additionally, sociolinguistic diversity—differences in regional dialects and linguistic competence—can generate insecurity among students. Such barriers underscore the need for reflective language use that prioritizes clarity, empathy, and inclusivity. Teachers must continuously calibrate their linguistic practices to ensure equitable participation for all learners.

4. Language in the madrasah context operates at multiple levels: as a mechanism for inclusion, a tool for negotiating authority, and a carrier of moral and religious values. Teachers' use of egalitarian address terms such as *kita* ("we") and *teman-teman* ("friends") fosters belonging and reduces hierarchical distance. Their language of moral guidance—through prayers, Qur'anic references, and ethical expressions—illustrates that classroom discourse is both pedagogical and spiritual. Through dialogic and compassionate communication, teachers position themselves as facilitators and moral mentors rather than authoritarian figures.

5. Teachers extend their linguistic sensitivity beyond the classroom, using informal and empathetic communication to strengthen relationships with students, parents, and the community. Informal greetings and code-mixing (Arabic–Indonesian–English) help sustain emotional closeness and reinforce cultural identity. In communication with parents, teachers employ context-sensitive and polite language that fosters trust and collaboration. These linguistic choices reflect a broader moral vision of education—one grounded in compassion, mutual respect, and community harmony.

B. Recommendation

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed:

1. For Teachers: Teachers should continuously develop their linguistic sensitivity and emotional awareness, ensuring that communication promotes inclusivity, empathy, and respect. Reflection on tone, vocabulary, and feedback practices can help enhance student engagement.

2. For School Leadership: Madrasah administrators should provide professional development programs focusing on dialogic teaching, restorative communication, and intercultural language awareness to support a more participatory classroom environment.

3. For Future Research: Further studies could explore how students' own language practices contribute to classroom dynamics or examine similar themes in different Islamic school contexts, incorporating comparative or longitudinal approaches.

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