The Islamic Worldview and Language Proclivity: The Case of Modern Brunei

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ABSTRACT

Brunei is undergoing a language transition, with younger generations favoring English over Malay, raising concerns about the potential impact on the Islamic worldview traditionally tied to Malay. This study examines the relationship between language preference and the Islamic worldview among 67 young female Bruneian Muslims, using an online survey to assess their language use, religious identity, and perspectives on Islamic and Western ideologies. Findings reveal strong alignment with Islamic beliefs on divine matters but ambivalence on contemporary social issues like gender and dating, particularly among English-preferring participants. While a weak association between English proclivity and a Western worldview was observed, it was not statistically significant. This study highlights the complexities of language and religious identity in a globalized context, emphasizing the need for further research and adaptive strategies in Islamic education to address linguistic and ideological shifts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the effect of language use on the Islamic worldview among young Bruneian Muslims. It builds on an earlier investigation (Salbrina & Zayani, 2021) involving 195 Bruneian Malays, which found a link between language preference and religious identity. Specifically, the study revealed that Bruneian Malays who favor English tend to have a weaker attachment to their Muslim identity. This paper delves further into this phenomenon by exploring the relationship between language use and religious practices. More precisely, it seeks to determine whether regular use of English correlates with lower religious tendencies or behaviors. While this is undoubtedly a contentious issue, as it implies a generalized association between the English language and looser attachments to Islamic practices, the study is set in a context where Islamic teachings are almost exclusively disseminated in Malay.

The word "almost" is used because Islam in Brunei is also associated with Arabic, as in the rest of the Muslim world. However, only a small number of Bruneians are proficient in Arabic, primarily those who have studied in one of the two Arabic-medium schools or the Tahfiz Al-Quran (Quran memorization) institute (Muhammad & Baihaqy, 2021). For the

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majority of the population, Arabic is regarded as a foreign language, and the teaching of Islam predominantly occurs in Malay, the state-sanctioned official language.

Malay has traditionally been the mother tongue of local Bruneians. However, recent research (Salbrina, 2020, 2021, 2023a; Salbrina & Hassan, 2021; Zayani & Salbrina, 2023) shows that English is increasingly becoming the preferred language for daily activities, particularly among the younger generation. Furthermore, studies reveal that the younger Bruneians' attachment to the Malay language is weakening, with many stating that they feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions in English than in Malay (Salbrina, 2021).

These trends have raised concerns about whether the exclusive use of Malay in Islamic contexts and the declining attachment to Malay among younger Bruneians have affected their connection to the Islamic faith. Evidence supporting this concern comes from Salbrina (2023b), who examined the relationship between language and religiosity among Bruneians.

The present paper extends the scope of the previous study by examining the relationship between language preference and the Islamic worldview, with a particular focus on how linguistic tendencies towards English or Malay influence beliefs and attitudes aligned with Islamic and Western ideologies. Specifically, this study aims to assess whether a preference for English is associated with weaker adherence to Islamic values, particularly in relation to contemporary social issues, and to determine the extent to which language inclinations shape perspectives on core Islamic tenets and social practices. In the next section, an overview of the scholarship on language and religion is provided, followed by a brief outline of the religio-linguistic situation in Brunei.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Language-Religion Interface

Early work investigating the interplay between language and religion primarily focused on the role of religion in accounting for the phenomena of language change, shift, and variation in a given speech community. Haugen (1953), for instance, noted that language shift among Norwegians in the United States could be explained in terms of religious attachment, with Kloss (1966) reporting a similar faith-driven force for language management efforts in the German-American community. The key takeaway from the two studies is that religious observances play a crucial role in maintaining languages post-immigration and that religion, as pointed out by Ferguson (1982), is one of the extenuating forces in the processes of language change and language spread.

Language-religion studies have also looked at other aspects, such as how language has been utilized and manipulated for religious purposes (Samarin, 1976); how religion has shaped people’s beliefs and attitudes towards a particular language (Schiffman, 1996), which then in turn influences language policy and planning (Cooper, 1989; Liddicoat, 2012) and how sociolinguistic choices can be attributed to religious affiliations and choices (Mukherjee, 2013; Omoniyi & Fishman, 2006; Yaeger-Dror, 2015). The latter is exemplified in Baker-Smemoe and Bowie’s (2015) study, which revealed linguistic behavioral differences not only between the Mormons and non-Mormons in Utah but also between the practicing Mormons and their non-practicing peers. Differing religious practices also accounted for the differences in the patterns of language use among two Hakka communities in Malaysia (Ding & Goh, 2020), where young believers, particularly those of

the Buddhist faith, are predisposed to the use of more English (and Mandarin) and less Hakka. David et al.'s (2003) investigation of the Sikhs in Malaysia revealed that many in their community had forgone the use of their ethnic language and shifted to English, even in the domain of religion. These studies have provided empirically-backed evidence of the influence of religion on language. The present paper aims to add to this collection of religio-linguistics studies by looking at the case in Brunei, where Islam is the declared official religion and Malay is the official language. Rather than investigate the effect of religion on language practices, this research seeks to explore if changing linguistic preferences have a bearing on individuals' religious worldviews. In the next section, a brief account is provided of what constitutes the Islamic worldview as used in this paper.

2.2 Islamic Worldview

The worldview can be defined as "visions of life" and "ways of life" (Valk et al., 2017: vi), which are thoughts and beliefs about the world and the reality therein. Oftentimes connotated as the philosophy of life, the Western or secularist stance contrasts sharply with the Islamic worldview, which pertains to the affirmation of "One Reality and Truth" (Al-Attas, 1993, p. 40) or the Oneness of God (that is, 'tawhid'). The Islamic worldview, therefore, is "living with an active reference to God" (Abdurrashid, 2017, para. 5) and is grounded on the theistic perspective. The two primary sources from which the Islamic philosophy of life is derived are the Quran and the Sunnah (Abdullah & Nadvi, 2011).

The Islamic worldview encompasses both aspects of the 'dunya' (the world) and the 'akhirah' (the hereafter or the afterlife), and there exists a universal standard upon which actions may be categorized as moral or immoral ("Ethics and morality in Islam," 2017). As such, a Muslim's worldview also shapes his moral reasonings, ethical decision-making, and principles of conduct, all of which are not seen as one's personal choice but rather a realization of his connectedness to the belief in God and his awareness of the centrality of God. In other words, while Islam recognizes individual free will, there are limitations (Mohamed, 2019), such as the prohibition of intoxicants, same-sex relationships, pre-marital sex, and suicide. However, a detailed analysis of Islam's moral worldview is beyond this paper's scope; for a more extensive discussion, see Mohamed (2019).

As stated earlier, the Islamic worldview is said to be at odds with the Western worldview, so much so that some have outlined arguments against the former's applicability in the modern world (Connell, 2007). Westernisation, and by proxy, secularisation, advocates "the separation of the present world and the world to come" (Ashimi, 2022: 46) and of state and religion. Grounded on the ideology of societal governance based on scientific rationality (Falk, 2001), the prevalent belief among those possessing secular worldviews is that secularisation is essential to stay relevant in the era of globalization (Ali, 2002), and there is a need to dissociate religion from public life. Undoubtedly, the global-secular concordance has had an impact on the influence of Islam on some societies where Muslims, notably the youth, struggle in the reconciliation of religious values with those deemed to reflect modern thinking. For example, the Western perspective often highlights human rights and individual autonomy, such as the freedom to choose whom to love. On the other hand, the Islamic stance acknowledges human dignity and rights, but it situates these within the framework of divine rights and responsibilities towards God and the community. So, Muslim youths may struggle to reconcile the notion of same-sex relationships with their faith, as traditional Islamic teachings view the former as impermissible.

The challenges of globalization and secularisation on the Islamic worldview have been the topic of several scholarly works (Abdurrashid, 2017; Mohd. Saleh, 2016) and religious talks (e.g., Islam on Demand, 2012; TheProphetsPath, 2022; Yaqeen Institute, 2022) and the following quotes taken from Nouman Ali Khan's *khutbah* (Friday sermon) (TheProphetsPath, 2022) perfectly exemplify the predicaments afflicting the present-day Muslim communities:

> "… and if there is a girl in the university and she was wearing hijab, everybody's looking at her… because that is not the way someone educated and intelligent and modern is supposed to be… this is a backward thing, this belongs in the villages and third world ..." (5:08)

> "… being a Muslim is seen as something strange by non-Muslims, but it's also seen as something strange by Muslims themselves …" (6:30)

The situation in modern-day Brunei is no different from those of other Muslim nations, but with the exception of two recent studies (Salbrina & Zayani, 2021; Salbrina, 2023b), accounts of declining spiritual attachment in the Bruneian context have not been thoroughly investigated and have largely been anecdotal. This includes the author's personal observation of and experience with her university students, several of whom have expressed views more attuned to secularist thinking, such as their stance on the freedom to choose English pronouns in line with gender identity. Thus, this paper aims to fill the gap by carrying out an empirical investigation of this very issue. As briefly outlined in the introduction, looser attachments to Islamic values appear to be linked to language use and language preference, and that will be the focus of this current research. Some background information on the sociolinguistic situation in Brunei regarding Islam and Islamic education will be presented in the next section. This contextual knowledge is crucial for understanding the current issue under investigation.

2.3. Brunei and Islam

Brunei's history as an Islamic state can be traced back to the early 1400s when the first pagan ruler embraced Islam and took on the Muslim name Sultan Muhammad (Tengah, 2016). Since then, Islam has grown leaps and bounds, with Brunei acknowledged as "a formidable Muslim power" with "its missionaries being active in the Philippines, Sulu, and Champa, in what is now southern Vietnam" (Saunders, 2002: 48). Through the 1959 Constitution, Islam's status was propelled to that of the state's official religion (Haji Tamit, 2016) and was proclaimed as such when the country achieved its independence in 1984 (Abdullah, 2016). Although the country's national ideology, 'Melayu Islam Beraja' (lit. Malay Islamic Monarchy) or MIB as it is widely known, has long been imbued in the Bruneian thinking and customs and traditions, it was only in 1990 that the concept was "officially enunciated" (Saunders, 2002, p. 187).

The philosophy is seen as a blueprint for the Bruneian national identity, and in its simplest interpretation, the MIB outlines three core elements that are pivotal in the definition of Bruneianess: i) attachment to the Malay culture and, by proxy, language; ii) awareness of Islam and the Islamic way of life; and iii) allegiance to the ruling monarchy. While there is no restriction on the practice of other faiths in the country, Islam is the dominant religion and is "embedded into the fabric of daily life in Brunei" (Salbrina & Mabud, 2021: 56). For instance, calls to prayer are heard five times a day, not only from over 100 mosques

scattered throughout the country (Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama Brunei, 2016) but also broadcast live on the local radio and tv stations. Many of Brunei's buildings showcase elements of Islamic architecture of which arches and Arabesque art and detailing are common, and in workplaces, the recitation of *duas* (prayers) is customary to mark the start and end of meetings and events.

2.3.1 Islamic Education in Brunei

Education in Islam in Brunei in the 1930s came in the form of classes held in mosques, 'balais.'[1], and private houses with the aim of equipping children with some foundational elements of the Islamic faith and practices (Mansurnoor, 2011). While schools were in existence from as early as 1914 (Haji Mail et al., 2019), the teachings of Islam were conspicuously absent from the curriculum, and this largely stemmed from the belief of the ruling British administration that religious education was not pertinent to the growth of Brunei (Asim & Kumar, 2018). Records indicate that Islamic religious knowledge was incorporated as an additional subject taught in schools from 1931 onwards (Haji Mail et al., 2019). It was only in the 1950s that formal religious schools, locally called the 'Ugama' (lit. religion) schools, were opened, and the teaching force comprised mainly Malaysians from the state of Johore (Muhammad & Baihaqy, 2021). Back then, the 'Ugama' schools, under the purview of the Department of Religious Affairs (Presently known as the Ministry of Religious Affairs), ran in the afternoons as the mornings were meant for the mainstream schools, which were overseen by the Education Department (Presently known as the Ministry of Education). In 1965, Islamic Religious Knowledge (IRK) was introduced as a separate subject in the morning schools to accommodate Bruneian parents whose children could not attend the afternoon 'Ugama' schools (Muhammad & Petra, 2021). In order to cater to Bruneians who wished to pursue religious education at the tertiary level, an Islamic secondary school was set up in the 1960s (Haji Mail et al., 2019). Locally referred to as the Arabic schools, there are now seven of these Islamic secondary schools in the country ("Arabic and religious schools," 2022), and scholarships are offered to academically outstanding students to pursue their education at the university level in Egypt.

By the time Brunei achieved its independence in 1984, Brunei had its own Religious Teachers Training College that was upgraded to the status of a university in 2007 and renamed the Seri Begawan Religious Teacher University College (henceforth, KUPU SB). The teaching force for the 'Ugama' schools is now almost exclusively provided by KUPU SB. In 2007, another Islamic higher institution, the second university in Brunei, was established. Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (henceforth UNISSA) had its beginning as the Faculty of Islamic Studies under Universiti Brunei Darussalam (henceforth UBD) and was formed with the aim of becoming a "centre for the spread of Islam" (Muhammad & Petra 2021: 38) in Southeast Asia.

Initially, enrolment at the 'Ugama' schools was voluntary, but under the 2012 Compulsory Religious Education Act, Bruneian parents of the Muslim faith are mandated to register their children in the religious schools for seven to eight years (Compulsory Religious Education Act 2012, c 215). Pupils wishing to pursue Islamic education at levels higher than the primary are required to take an entrance test for the Arabic school, which is normally

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[1] *Balais* are usually interpreted to mean massive halls intended for large cultural events but in the context of Islamic education, is taken to refer to religious centres similar to those of *pondok* in Malaysia and *pesantren* in Indonesia.

done in Year 2 of the ‘Ugama’ school. The progression pathway for those in the Islamic education curriculum is shown in Fig. 1.

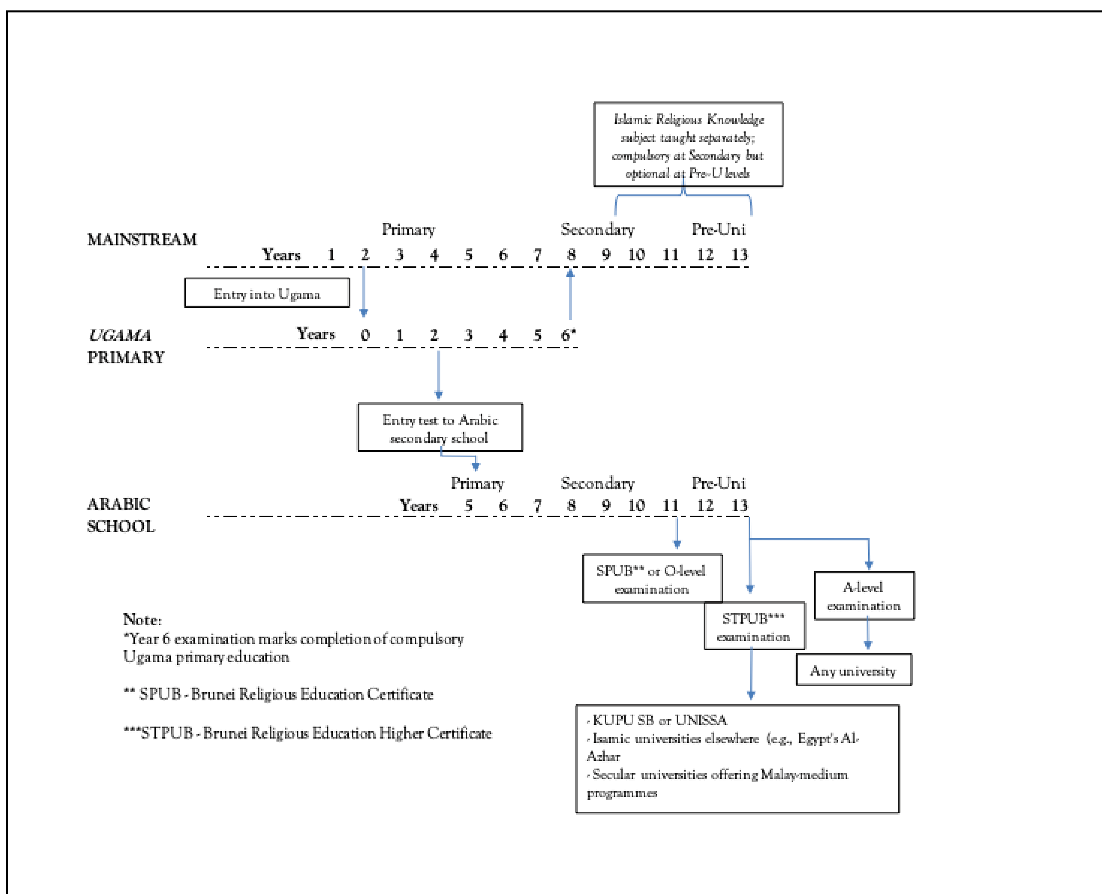

Fig. 1. Religious education pathways in Brunei

2.3.2 Language and Islam in Brunei

As mentioned in the introduction, Islam in Brunei collocates with Malay; that is, Islamic events and religious talks, particularly those organized by the state, are almost exclusively delivered in the country's official language. The 'Ugama’ schools utilize Malay as the main medium of instruction, and while most lessons in mainstream schools are conducted in English, the IRK subject is taught in the local language. So, although never formally articulated, it can be implicitly understood that only the use of Malay is acceptable for anything Islam-related. The Malay-Islam association is somewhat similar to the situation in Brunei's neighboring state of Malaysia, although, in the latter's case, the link has been made explicit through its constitution: "Malay is defined as a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to Malay customs" (Majid, 2018, p. 214).

Alongside Malay, Arabic is also used in Islamic settings in Brunei, as is the norm in countries that are predominantly Islam. Arabic and Malay are the main mediums of instruction in the Islamic institutes of higher education, UNISSA and KUPU SB. However, the use of English in the religious domain is almost unheard of. Exceptions are made for special lectures and talks delivered by invited speakers from the West, but even these are few and far between, and when there is such an event, it is most often organized by non-

governmental bodies. For instance, an Islamic motivational talk by an acclaimed speaker from the United States (Azahari, 2019), held not too long ago, had been organized by an Islamic international school in collaboration with a private company. Other Islamic talks delivered in English had been mainly scholarly and mostly saw participation from the academic community (Brunei: University Brunei Darussalam, 2012)

In recent years, however, it has been observed that the Ministry of Religious Affairs (henceforth MoRA) has begun incorporating the use of English in various settings. One example can be seen from the introduction of English for Islamic Education modules at KUPU SB, which all their religious teacher-trainees are required to undertake and pass (Muhammad & Baihaqy, 2021). As of 2021, MoRA has also started producing the Friday sermons in English and in the form of infographics, which are then uploaded to their social media accounts. The sermons in the mosques are still delivered verbally in Malay. However, the Ministry's efforts to translate them into English can be seen as a recognition of the increasing importance of English as the primary language of communication in today's modern world.

With recent reports of a shift in language use among young Bruneians (Salbrina, 2020, 2021, 2023a; Salbrina & Hassan, 2021; Zayani & Salbrina, 2023) where many from the rising generation claim to prefer the use of English to Malay, the efforts of MoRA are laudable indeed, but a question that begs to be answered is: are they enough? Specifically, should the initiatives be stepped up to include the educational setting, where all young Bruneians have their first formal exposure to Islamic knowledge? Or, would that be unnecessary, as the religiosity and Islamic practices of the Bruneians are in no way impeded by their changing linguistic preference? The latter is of particular interest to this present study and is the main research question driving the investigation; earlier insights into the link between language and religion, or rather, religious identity, in the Bruneian context reveal that the greater the informants' English-leaning tendency is, the lesser is their attachment to the Muslim identity.

In a survey conducted by Salbrina (2021), among 195 Bruneian Malay students at UBD, 95 were classified as English-dominant, while the remaining 99 leaned towards Malay. The survey included questions about their perception of religious identity, and it was found that the Malay-leaning group identified more strongly as Muslims compared to the English-dominant group. This difference was determined to be highly significant. Another study examining the association between language and Islamic religiosity in Bruneians of various ages also arrived at the same conclusion: Bruneians predisposed to using more English than Malay have fewer manifestations of practices aligned with Islamic teaching (Salbrina, 2023b). However, age was found to have a negative association with Islamic religiosity; religious inclinations increased in older subjects. The study concluded that Islam is playing a diminished role among modern-day young Bruneians in comparison to the older generation.

This paper takes the investigation to another level. It seeks to explore whether language inclinations have an impact on one's Islamic worldview, including beliefs about marriage and the concept of gender. As the struggle to balance Islam with contemporary values is more common among young Muslims, the investigation focuses on young Bruneians - the generation that has also been found to be inclined towards using more English than Malay. Similar to the approach undertaken in previous research, participants will be categorized into two groups, English-leaning and Malay-leaning, based on their language use and preference.

3. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore the relationship between language preference and the Islamic worldview among young Bruneian Muslim females. The research utilized a cross-sectional survey method, distributing an online questionnaire to collect data from the target demographic.

The survey was disseminated via short messaging services (e.g., WhatsApp) and social media platforms (e.g., Instagram), ensuring broad reach within the specified population. Participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: female, Bruneian Malay, Muslim, aged 18 or older, and currently enrolled in a local tertiary institution. Those studying overseas were excluded to maintain consistency in educational and linguistic exposure.

The survey comprised three sections: (1) demographic and educational background, including information on religious schooling; (2) language practices and preferences, measured through a Language Index Score (LIS) based on self-reported language use in various settings; and (3) worldview evaluation, featuring 16 Likert-scale statements assessing alignment with Islamic or Western ideologies.

Out of 94 responses received, 18 were excluded due to incomplete information or non-compliance with the criteria, leaving a final sample of 67 participants. The data was analyzed to investigate potential correlations between language preference and worldview, with participants grouped by their language-leaning tendencies (Malay-leaning vs. English-leaning) based on their LIS.

3.1 The Survey

The survey had three sections: the first sought information on the respondents' educational background, including details on their religious schooling; the second consisted of questions on their language use and practices; and the third constituted statements aimed at shedding light on the participants' worldviews.

Altogether, 94 survey forms were returned, of which 18 were discarded for failing to meet the stipulated criteria or having incomplete information. One informant openly identified as an atheist, though her details indicated a Muslim background (Malay ethnicity and attendance at 'Ugama' school). Nine of the remaining 76 forms showed signs of abandonment, with all nine completed until the third section, indicating a growing sensitivity to questions about Islamic beliefs. This phenomenon, as reported in The New York Times (Filice, 2018), seems more pronounced among younger generations. After removing incomplete and invalid questionnaires, 67 forms were left for analysis. The 67 respondents were all university students, with 16 (22.7%) from UNISSA and 51 (77.3%) from UBD. Their ages ranged from 20 to 26 ($M = 21.73$ years, $SD = 1.55$), and all had some form of 'Ugama' schooling, with only 13 (18.1%) not completing it, mainly because they continued to Arabic school. This sample, while small, provides valuable insights into the views of young, educated Muslims, though the representativeness may be limited to similar demographic profiles. The respondents' background details are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Background information on respondents (*N* = 67; all female)

Item		**Number (percentage)**	
Institution	UBD	51 (77.3)	
	UNISSA	16 (22.7)	
Age	19	17 (25.4)	Mean = 21.73
	20	17 (25.4)	SD = 1.55
	21	15 (22.4)	
	22	9 (13.4)	
	23	5 (7.5)	
	24	2 (3.0)	
	25	2 (3.0)	
Completed 'Ugama'	Yes	54 (80.5)	
	No	13[2](18.1)	

The survey also included two questions on identity as it relates to religion. The first asked the respondents to indicate the importance of Islam as their identity marker. A majority chose 'Very important' (47, or 70.1%), with 'Somewhat important' coming in a distant second (19, or 28.4%). Only one informant thought that Islam was 'Not very important' to her identity. The second question on religion and identity sought the respondents' personal assessment of their level of religiousness. Four options were given: 'Very religious,' 'Somewhat religious,' 'Not very religious,' and 'Not religious at all.' The most popular response here is 'Somewhat religious' (43, or 64.2%), with 'Not very religious' the second most chosen option (21, or 31.3%). Two informants claimed to be 'Not at all religious' (3%), while only one sees herself as 'Very religious' (1.5%).

In addition to asking the usual question on the respondents' mother tongue, the second section of the survey on language also included questions on their most used language for day-to-day activities as well as in a variety of settings such as at home with their parents and at school with their friends. They were also asked to provide their self-rated proficiency in Malay and English and to write down their choice in a hypothetical scenario of only being able to speak one language for the rest of their lives. All questions in this section are meant to assess the respondents' language-leaning tendencies, calculated by assigning a score of 1 to each Malay response and a 5 to the English ones. A language index score (LIS) was then generated, and a higher score translates to a greater preference for English usage and a lower score for Malay. Table 2 shows the summary of the LIS calculation for all 67 respondents and for when the informants were grouped by their universities.

[2] All 13 students cited their continuation of studies at the Arabic school as the reason for not completing the 'Ugama' school.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for language index scores (LIS) (*Higher score = greater preference for English use*)

	Mean	Standard deviation	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Overall (N= 67)	2.97	0.51	3.05	1.95	4.15
Institution					
UNISSA (n = 16)	2.68	0.53	2.6	2	3.85
UBD (n = 51)	3.07	0.48	3.1	1.95	4.15

The lower mean and median values for UNISSA show that students from this religious institution display greater proclivity to Malay use than their UBD counterparts. A t-test for independent samples reveals that the difference between the groups is statistically significant (t (66) = 2.60, $p < 0.05$). This is not an unexpected finding given that UNISSA, being an Islamic institution, utilizes Malay and Arabic as the two main mediums of instruction, while UBD is predominantly English medium.

In the third section of the survey, the respondents were asked to evaluate 16 statements (S1-S16; see appendix 1), some of which pertain to matters on the opposite ends of the worldview continuum vis-à-vis the Islamic versus Western worldviews. The subjects were asked to choose from a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly agree and 5 = Strongly disagree. Cronbach's alpha was performed to measure the internal reliability of the 16 items, using all 67 participants, and the value returned was α=0.7425, which shows that the questionnaire is of acceptable reliability (George & Mallery, 2003). While it is anticipated that there may not be many discrepancies in the statements concerning divinity and faith, the case may not be so for the four statements on current social issues, viz. statements 7, 10, 15, and 16.

The participants are grouped based on their language preferences rather than their institutions, following the approach used by [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process] (2021). This is done to investigate if language preferences have an impact on the respondents' worldviews. Using a median value of 3.05 as the dividing point, Bruneians with higher LIS are classified as English-leaning, while those with lower values are classified as Malay-leaning. Table 3 illustrates the grouping process. Four participants have LIS scores of 3.05, and these four are not included in any comparative analyses of worldviews based on language leanings.

Table 3
Grouping based on language leanings (Higher score = greater preference for English use)

	Malay-leaning	English-leaning	Ungrouped
	Number (percentage)		
Overall (N = 67)	32 (47.8)	31 (46.3)	4 (6.0)
Institution			
UNISSA (n = 16)	11 (68.8)	5 (31.3)	0
UBD (n =51)	21 (41.2)	26 (51.0)	4 (6.0)

4. RESULTS

4.1 Worldview

A general assessment of the overall responses indicates that the Bruneians' worldviews align more or less with the Islamic way of thinking. For instance, most informants agreed with the statements regarding divine beliefs, such as in the existence of the afterlife (76.2%) and the notions of 'qada' and 'qadar' (divine decree and destination: 87.3%). There are also high levels of agreement to statements pertaining to 'tawhid' (i.e., 'doing activities for the sake of Allah': 84.1%) and faith (prioritizing 'akhirah' over 'dunya': 92.1%). Interestingly, the responses to statements on social matters (i.e., statements 7, 10, 15, and 16) are not as straightforward, notably those mismatched in the Islamic-Western worldviews, which have garnered considerable attention in modern-day mass media. For instance, a majority of the informants are on the fence; that is, they chose 'neither agree nor disagree' when it comes to matters pertaining to freedom of gender choice (35.8%), dating (50.7%), and dog ownership (41.8%). Equally interesting is their position on songs with explicit lyrics, with only a few (13.4%) finding them 'unpalatable'. The rest see no issue with singing or listening to songs that contain lewd words (57.1%).

When analyzing the results based on language-leaning tendencies, we observe that more participants from the Malay-leaning group agree with the Islamic-oriented social issue statements compared to those from the English-leaning group.

Out of the four social issue statements, three show significant differences, with statement 7 regarding gender choice demonstrating a strong positive relationship with the language index scores ($r(65) = 1$, $p < .001$). In simpler terms, the more a respondent is oriented towards English, the more likely they are to believe that gender is a personal choice. The comparison of the respondents along the language-leaning line also reveals that none of those categorized as Malay-leaning agrees with the idea of dog ownership. At the same time, 10 (15.9%) from the English group see nothing wrong with Muslims keeping dogs as pets. The only statement that shows no differences between the two groups is in statement 15, regarding dating and relationships. The observation suggests that young Bruneian females, regardless of their language orientation, view dating as a normal part of life. This viewpoint sharply differs from the attitudes of women in the Middle East. For example, an exchange student from Oman shared that girls in her country usually do not have boyfriends. If they do, it often happens before marriage (S. Alfulaiti, personal communication, October 22, 2023).

Another interesting observation is in the respondents' feedback on how they perceive Islam in relation to their individual selves; almost all (54 or 80.6%) view Islam as a personal matter instead of something to be displayed publicly. When the responses are scrutinized along the language-inclination divide, the English group shows the highest number of strong agreement with the statement (see Fig. 2). However, the overall percentage of participants' agreement (or disagreement) did not differ by language inclination (X^2 (2, N = 63) = 0.670, $p = .017$).

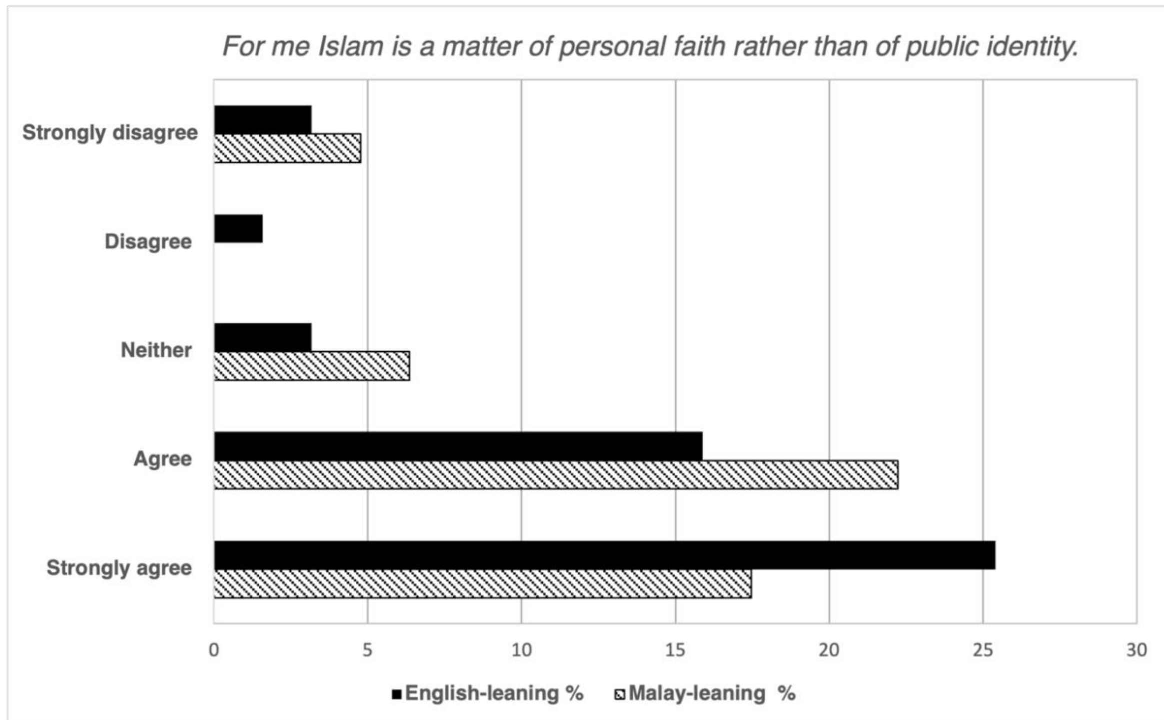

Fig. 2. Responses to the statement 'For me, Islam is a matter of personal faith rather than of public identity' according to language learning.

The responses of the Bruneian females regarding how they perceive Islam in relation to personal faith versus public identity seem to differ from their responses on the significance of Islam to their identity, with a majority claiming it to be 'very important.' The Discussion section provides possible reasons for the inconsistencies in their reporting.

Table 4 provides the descriptive statistics (mean, mode, and standard deviation) for responses to 16 worldview statements measured on a Likert scale. These statements assessed alignment with Islamic and Western ideologies, including beliefs on divinity, social issues, and personal identity. The results reveal general adherence to Islamic principles (e.g., high agreement on beliefs in the afterlife and divine decree) but ambivalence or divergence on social issues like gender choice, dating, and explicit content in music.

Table 4
The descriptive statistics of the responses to the worldview statements (Strongly agree (SA) = 1; Agree (A) = 2; Neither agree nor disagree (N) = 3; Disagree (D) = 4; Strongly disagree (SD) = 5). ** Items are reverse-coded.*

Statements		Mean	Mode	Standard deviation
1.	*For me, Islam is a matter of personal faith rather than of public identity.	4.07	5	1.13
2.	I believe Islam aligns with human rights, civil liberties, and democracy.	1.82	2	0.83
3.	*I am a cultural Muslim; that is, Islam is based on my family background rather than my practice.	2.82	2	1.11
4.	Women should be given the same rights and opportunities as men	1.64	1	0.83

5.	Marriage should be based on mutual respect rather than the subservience of one spouse to the other.	1.51	1	0.79
6.	Marriage should be between a man and a woman only.	1.87	1	1.13
7.	*People should be allowed to choose their gender according to their innate sense of being.	2.49	3	1.20
8.	*I think that religion is a principal cause of the backwardness of society.	2.40	2	1.09
9.	Everything that happens to us is being predetermined by fate (i.e., 'qada' and 'qadar').	1.66	1	0.77
10.	*It is ok for Muslims to have dogs as pets.	2.52	3	1.06
11.	I believe in the afterlife (e.g., immortality of the soul, resurrection).	1.76	1	1.05
12.	All human activities must be done for the sake of Allah SWT.	1.72	1	0.75
13.	*Islamic values are applicable only in certain situations, places and times.	2.20	2	0.98
14.	*Certain rules ordained by Allah SWT can be ignored / violated to achieve success in worldly life.	1.58	1	0.80
15.	*There is nothing wrong with a Muslim girl going out on a date with her boyfriend.	2.97	3	1.00
16.	*I have no problem listening to or singing songs that contain explicit words.	3.57	4	0.99

Table 5
Frequency of responses to the worldview statements (Strongly agree = 1; Agree = 2; Neither agree nor disagree = 3; Disagree = 4; Strongly disagree = 5). * *Items are reverse-coded.*

Statements		**5 (SD)**	**4 (D)**	**3 (N)**	**2 (A)**	**1 (SA)**
2.	I believe Islam aligns with human rights, civil liberties and democracy.	1 (1.5%)	1 (1.5%)	9 (13.4%)	30 (44.8%)	26 (38.8%)
4.	Women should be given the same rights and opportunities as men.	0	2 (3.0%)	9 (13.4%)	19 (28.4%)	37 (55.2%)
5.	Marriage should be based on mutual respect rather than the subservience of one spouse to the other.	1 (1.5%)	1 (1.5%)	3 (4.5%)	21 (31.3%)	41 (61.2%)
6.	Marriage should be between a man and a woman only.	2 (3.0%)	3 (4.5%)	17 (25.4%)	7 (10.4%)	38 (56.7%)
9.	Everything that happens to us is being predetermined by fate (i.e., 'qada' and 'qadar').	0	2 (3.0%)	6 (9.0%)	26 (38.8%)	33 (49.3%
11.	I believe in the afterlife (e.g., immortality of the soul, resurrection).	1 (1.5%)	5 (7.5%)	9 (13.4%)	14 (20.9%)	38 (56.7%)
12.	All human activities must be done for the sake of Allah SWT.	0	1 (1.5%)	9 (13.4%)	27 (40.3%)	30 (44.8%)

*Reverse-coded statements		5 (SA)	4 (A)	3 (N)	2 (D)	1 (SD)
1.	*For me Islam is a matter of personal faith rather than of public identity.	29 (43.3%)	25 (37.3%)	7 (10.4%)	1 (1.5%)	5 (7.5%)
3.	*I am a cultural Muslim, that is, Islam is based on my family background rather than my practice.	7 (10.4%)	9 (13.4%)	22 (32.8%)	23 (34.3%)	6 (9.0%)
7.	*People should be allowed to choose their gender according to their innate sense of being.	4 (6.0%)	8 (11.9%)	24 (35.8%)	12 (17.9%)	19 (28.4%)
8.	*I think that religion is a principal cause of the backwardness of society.	3 (4.5%)	7 (10.4%)	19 (28.4%	23 (34.3%)	15 (22.4%)
10.	*It is ok for Muslims to have dogs as pets.	1 (1.5%)	10 (14.9%)	28 (41.8%)	12 (17.9%)	16 (23.9%)
13.	*Islamic values are applicable only in certain situations, places and times.	1 (1.5%)	6 (9.0%)	15 (22.4%)	28 (41.8%)	17 (25.4%)
14.	*Certain rules ordained by Allah SWT can be ignored / violated to achieve success in worldly life.	1 (1.5%)	0	7 (10.4%)	21 (31.3%)	38 (56.7%)
15.	*There is nothing wrong with a Muslim girl going out on a date with her boyfriend.	5 (7.5%)	11 (16.4%)	34 (50.7%)	11 (16.4%)	6 (9.0%)
16.	*I have no problem listening to or singing songs that contain explicit words.	10 (15.2%)	27 (40.9%)	20 (30.3%)	7 (10.6%)	2 (3.0%)

Table 5 presents the frequency distribution of responses to the same statements (in number and percentage). It highlights a mix of agreement and neutrality on social issues, with most respondents showing strong agreement with traditional Islamic beliefs but neutrality or openness on modern social matters, such as gender identity and dating practices. These tables collectively illustrate the tension between traditional Islamic worldviews and modern, secular ideologies among the surveyed group.

4.2 Language and Worldview

The main purpose of this research is to assess whether there is any link between language proclivity and the Islamic worldview. As shown in the previous section, there is a correlation indicating that the Malay-leaning group is more inclined towards a conservative (i.e., Islamic) perspective.

This relationship is further investigated using a linear regression test on the index scores for language and worldview. The regression model showed that the variable Language Index Score explained 5.74% of the variance from the variable Worldview Index Score (see Fig. 3). An ANOVA was used to test whether this value was significantly different from zero. Using the present sample, the findings reveal a weak direct relationship between language and worldview, although the effect was not significantly different from zero, $F = 3.96$, $p = .050$, $R^2 = 0.06$.

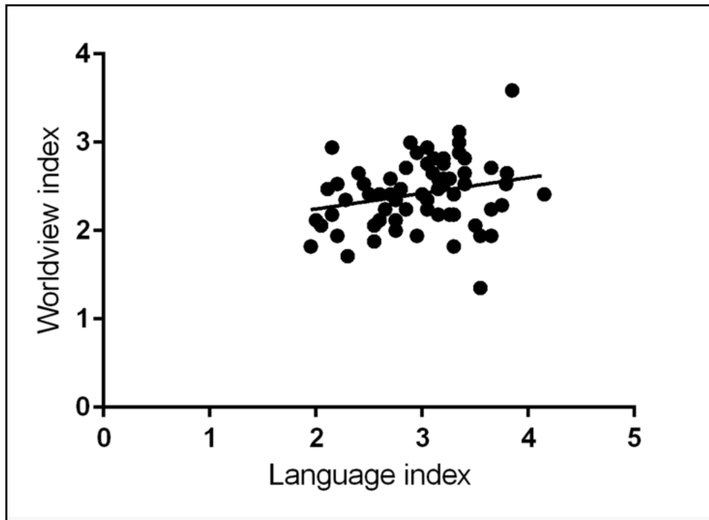

Fig. 3. A scatterplot of Language Index versus Worldview Index

Four statements related to contemporary social issues in which the popular responses appear misaligned with Islamic teachings are further scrutinized. The findings on statements 7, 10, 15, and 16 indicate that a majority of the respondents were undecided, with many choosing the neutral 'neither agree nor disagree' stance.

5. DISCUSSION

This research addresses the complicated relationship between language and religion. The complex linguistic reality of contemporary Brunei arising from overlaps in national interests (i.e., the sole use of Malay in religious domains) with global challenges (i.e., the precipitated growth of English as the world's lingua franca) has given rise to a uniquely complex linguistic situation in Brunei where there appears to be a shift in language use and proclivity along the age spectrum. While it is indisputable that the Bruneian population is largely Malay-English bilingual, recent studies have shown that the older generation is more inclined to use more Malay than English. In contrast, the rising generation shows a diametrically opposite pattern. This phenomenon has led to some new questions being raised, notably those that concern the religion of Islam and aspects of the Muslim faith. This is of interest because in Brunei, Islam is inextricably tied to Malay, and as explained earlier, anything Islam-related utilizes the language of the dominant group.

Previous investigations on the situation in Brunei have looked at the associations between English-centricity and Muslim identity (Salbrina & Zayani, 2021) as well as Islamic religiosity (Salbrina, 2023b), and they revealed that a greater predisposition towards the use of English is linked with lesser identification as a Muslim and fewer religious impulse. The present paper sought to examine another faith-linked variable– that of the Islamic worldview. The overall findings reveal that, for the most part, the young female Bruneians in this study display worldviews that align with Islamic ideology, particularly in aspects relating to *tawhid* and divine beliefs.

This alignment, however, falls into disarray when it comes to contemporary social issues that are at the center of public scrutiny and have received much coverage in the media, which are statements 7, 15, and 16 (see Table 4). Most informants opted out of giving their opinion on three statements, instead choosing to 'neither agree nor disagree.'

The three abstention-dominant statements pertain to the ensuing debate on biological gender versus gender identity, the contentious issue of dogs in Islam that was brought to light following the "I want to touch a dog" event held in neighboring Malaysia ("Malaysia's 'I want to touch a dog'," 2014) and dating practices, once considered taboo in Islamic Brunei but is now the norm as evidenced in various online discussions (Matali, 2021). Also worth highlighting is the nonchalance most respondents have shown concerning using explicit words.

In order to have a better understanding of the above observations, an after-thought activity was included where the [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process] read out the statement on gender to a group of UBD students. The minute the statement was read, the students gasped, with one chiming in that 'gender' is a controversial issue and that they would rather not say their thoughts on the matter out loud. This is indeed a surprising response, given that Islam's position on the issue of biological gender and gender identity is definite and clear. When asked to explain further, the students added that their stance is to "respect people's choice," whatever shape or form. From that response, it is apparent that the young Bruneians' viewpoints are shaped by the Western conception of freedom and equality. This may also explain why the responses to the statements on dog ownership and dating are mostly noncommittal; both involve the freedom of choice of the individual to "be a free agent in his interhuman relationships, to make his own decisions, to be free from the arbitrary authority of others, and to be able to choose how he wishes to use his services or property rather than to be subject to coercion by others" (Kemp, 1960, para. 3), a doctrine which has seen active propagation in recent years and is now the mainstay of contemporary and 'modern' thinking. Unsurprisingly, young Muslims, not excluding those in predominantly Muslim nations such as Brunei, are easily the ones to embrace such a line of thinking, particularly given that they are already struggling to negotiate their identity in a world that is increasingly antipathetic to faith and religion.

A peek into the identity struggle afflicting present-day young Muslims is evident in this study following the contradictory responses they offered on the two questions related to this very concept; while a majority of the informants indicate that Islam is an important marker of their identity, an equally large number sees Islam occupying a personal space as opposed to being an identity that can and is to be declared publicly. This also explains why there is a high degree of agreement on statements regarding *tawhid* and personal beliefs, while those that impinge on the public sphere showcase ambivalence. To put it differently, young Muslims stand behind the 'individual freedom' movements as a matter of public advocacy, and their changing attitudes on social issues, which were unseen or unheard of before in conservative Brunei, mirror the shifting attitudes observed in non-Muslim nations.

As to the question of the relationship between language and religion, this study reveals that while the association between Islam and Malay is proven based on the Language Index Scores of the UBD and UNISSA groups, any perceived bearing of language proclivity on the participants' worldviews is somewhat inconclusive. Although there appears to be a direct association between English proclivity and a Western worldview, the association is weak and fails to yield a statistically significant output. This does not, however, outrightly diminish the plausible link between the two because the participants in this study comprise only a small segment of Bruneian society.

The findings also raise crucial questions about the effectiveness of Brunei's Islamic education system in addressing the challenges posed by globalization and secularisation.

While religious education in Brunei is deeply rooted in Malay and Arabic, the growing preference for English among the youth necessitates a more inclusive approach. Incorporating English as a medium in Islamic discourse, as initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, could bridge the gap between modern linguistic realities and traditional religious values, ensuring that Islamic teachings remain accessible and relevant.

6. CONCLUSION

The study underscores the complex relationship between language use and religious worldview in Brunei, revealing adherence to Islamic beliefs and a growing openness to secular ideologies among English-leaning participants. While the findings highlight the challenges of maintaining a cohesive Islamic identity in a globalized world, they also point to opportunities for adaptive religious education that respects linguistic diversity. By addressing these issues, Brunei can better navigate the delicate balance between tradition and modernity, ensuring its Islamic heritage remains vibrant and relevant for future generations.

This study's scope was limited to a small, homogeneous sample of young female university students. It will be interesting to see what the findings will reveal should the investigation be replicated with a larger population sample and by including other social variables such as age, socio-economic status, and gender. Another area of improvement will be to utilize a survey that comprehensively looks at the notion of the Islamic worldview by expanding the selection of evaluative statements and employing a qualitative thematic approach to provide additional insight into the value and utility of the survey results. Additionally, employing qualitative methodologies, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide deeper insights into the nuanced ways individuals negotiate their religious and linguistic identities.

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Availability of Data and Materials
The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author. However, the data are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements and because they contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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Authors' Contribution
The sole author of this work was responsible for all aspects of the research and manuscript preparation, including conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, visualization, supervision, project administration, and funding acquisition.

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