The metaphor of knowledge in Arabic proverbs in walls of pesantren

Metafora ilmu dalam peribahasa Arab yang terpasang di tembok-tembok pesantren

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Abstract
This article examines the conceptual representation of knowledge in Arabic proverbs *mahfuzhat* displayed on the walls of two Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pesantren): Condong and Al-Bahjah. Employing Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory and a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach, the study analyzes 10 Arabic proverbs collected through field observation, documentation, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that knowledge is metaphorized as light, spiritual adornment, the path to paradise, fruitful trees, and a defining feature of humanity. These metaphors illustrate how *mahfuzhat* function not merely as decorative or rhetorical devices, but as pedagogical tools that foster character, discipline, and reverence for knowledge in pesantren education. The study highlights the educational and moral significance of Arabic proverbs as cultural texts and demonstrates their role in shaping the intellectual and spiritual formation of santri. This research contributes to the growing discourse on metaphor and education by foregrounding *mahfuzhat* as a distinct source of Islamic educational values, often overlooked in metaphor studies.

Abstrak
Artikel ini menganalisis representasi konseptual ilmu pengetahuan dalam peribahasa Arab *mahfuzhat* yang terpajang di dinding dua pesantren Indonesia: Condong dan Al-Bahjah. Dengan menggunakan teori metafora konseptual Lakoff & Johnson dan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi 10 peribahasa Arab yang mengandung metafora ilmu. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi visual, dokumentasi lapangan, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan ustaz dan santri. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa ilmu dimetaforakan sebagai cahaya, perhiasan batin, jalan ke surga, buah dari pohon, hingga pembeda esensial antara manusia dan hewan. Temuan ini menekankan bahwa *mahfuzhat* berfungsi bukan hanya sebagai ornamen retoris, melainkan sebagai alat pedagogis yang menanamkan nilai karakter, adab, dan kecintaan terhadap ilmu. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi baru dalam memahami peran *mahfuzhat* sebagai media pendidikan karakter dan spiritual di lingkungan pesantren, yang belum banyak dibahas dalam kajian sebelumnya.

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A. Introduction

Arabic is a main pillar in education at Indonesian pesantren. Besides serving as a medium for learning the yellow book (Jailani, 2022), Arabic is also regarded as having significant scientific and cultural weight (Hasan et al., 2020). One form of Arab intellectual and cultural expression that remains alive in the pesantren tradition is *mahfuzhat*, which are classical Arabic proverbs passed down through generations (Aminou, 2023), rich in literary values (Sukor et al., 2020), and remain relevant amidst changing times (Akila, 2023).

Mahfuzhat, or more popularly known as Arabic proverbs, are recognized not only as teaching materials but also as visual ornaments that adorn the walls and open spaces of pesantren. These expressions contain moral messages, spiritual values, and life philosophies (Fatimah et al., 2022), and also have a social influence on the character formation of students (Farah & Sanubar, 2021). As concise statements full of meaning (Yusuf, 2023), *mahfuzhat* often contain deep conceptual metaphors, such as knowledge as light, the ocean, or the path to heaven.

Pesantren, as an Islamic educational institution, also uses *mahfuzhat* as a medium for teaching values and character. The walls of the pesantren are often adorned with selectively chosen proverbs to shape the moral and intellectual outlook of the students (Muthoifin & Nuha, 2020). In this context, metaphor becomes important because it helps bridge abstract concepts like knowledge through familiar concrete experiences (Farghal & Saeed, 2022). The metaphor of science provides an illustration of how knowledge is interpreted religiously, philosophically, and culturally by the pesantren community.

Theoretically, this research is based on the conceptual metaphor theory developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2008), which explains that humans understand abstract concepts through cognitive mapping between source domains (such as light, trees, jewelry) and target domains (science) (Trisiana et al., 2024). This theory not only serves as a linguistic approach but also as a framework for understanding the cultural thought structures and social values (Shamsudin & Aladdin, 2024). In this study, the conceptual metaphor theory is used to explore how pesantren visualize scholarly values through language representation.

Although many studies have been conducted on Arabic proverbs, ranging from aspects of cross-linguistic translation (Al Zuheiri & Al Tai, 2023), thematic objects such as animals (Salman & Amer, 2020), women (Ghafoori & Elyas, 2023; Muslat, 2023), to weapons and climate (Adnan et al., 2021; Leite et al., 2019), specific studies discussing the metaphor of knowledge in Arabic *mahfuzhat* used in the context of Indonesian pesantren have not been widely found. However, the context of pesantren has unique values, traditions, and moral frameworks that make the metaphorical meaning of knowledge a reflection of local Islamic culture.

Starting from that gap, this research explicitly aims to: (1) identify and analyze the patterns of conceptual metaphors of knowledge in ten Arabic *mahfuzhat* displayed on the walls of two Indonesian pesantren (Condong and Al-Bahjah); (2) explain the implications of these metaphorical meanings on the tradition of scholarship and character education of students in the pesantren environment.

B. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with text analysis methods to examine the conceptual representation of knowledge in Arabic proverbs displayed on the walls and in the environment of Islamic boarding schools. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to interpret the symbolic and metaphoric meanings embedded in the pesantren culture through language construction. The research was conducted at two pesantren in West Java: Pesantren Riyadlul Ulum Wadda'wah (Condong) in Tasikmalaya and Pesantren Al-Bahjah in Cirebon. Both were purposively selected because they actively use Arabic proverbs as part of the learning environment, whether through writings on walls, posters, or other open spaces within the pesantren. The research subjects include students, teachers, and administrators of the pesantren who interact with these proverb texts.

The data used consists of: Primary data, which is visual documentation (photos) of Arabic proverbs themed around knowledge displayed in the pesantren environment. Secondary data, which includes scientific literature related to conceptual metaphor theory, studies on Arabic proverbs, and Islamic education research. Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation to record the context of proverb placement and student interactions with them, semi-structured interviews

with *kyai*, *ustaz*, and students to explore their interpretations of the metaphor of knowledge and its role in character formation, and documentation of pesantren handbooks (*mahfuzhat* books) or archives related to the use of proverbs.

Data were analyzed using a conceptual metaphor analysis approach based on the theory of Lakoff and Johnson. The analysis procedure is carried out through the following stages: (a) identifying proverbs themed around science; (b) unraveling conceptual metaphors based on the relationship between the source domain and target domain; (c) grouping the patterns of scientific metaphors that emerge; (d) interpreting the symbolic meaning and cultural implications in the context of pesantren; and (e) concluding the pedagogical contributions of scientific metaphors to the character formation and learning ethos of students.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

Based on data collected from two pesantren, namely Pesantren Condong and Pesantren Al-Bahjah, ten dominant conceptual metaphor models representing the concept of knowledge in Arabic proverbs were found. Each model shows the mapping between the source domain (concrete realm) and the target domain (abstract realm of knowledge), as follows:

Data of proverbs 1

<div dir="rtl">

اُطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ وَلَوْ بِالصِّينِ

</div>

Utlub al-ilma walaw bis-sin
(Seek knowledge even if it reaches China)

This proverb conceptualizes the pursuit of knowledge as a long and challenging journey. China, as a metaphorical destination, symbolizes both distance and intellectual refinement. The source domain is geographical distance and travel, while the target domain is the pursuit of knowledge as a noble endeavor.

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Journey to China	→	The process of seeking knowledge
A journey to a place that is far, hard, difficult, and full of challenges	→	The search for knowledge as a noble endeavor that must be pursued even if it is far away
Arriving in China	→	Achieving the goal of seeking knowledge
China as a center of science and civilization	→	The importance of knowledge

Data of proverbs 2

<div dir="rtl">

لَيْسَ الجَمَالُ بِأَثْوَابٍ تُزَيِّنُنَا إِنَّ الجَمَالَ جَمَالُ العِلْمِ وَالأَدَبِ

</div>

Laysa al-jamaalu bi-athwaabin tuzayyinunaa inna al-jamaala jamaalu al-ilm wa al-adab
(Good looks are not only seen from clothes, but good looks are with knowledge and manners)

The proverb redefines beauty from an external aesthetic (clothing) to internal excellence (knowledge and ethics). It contrasts *temporary, physical charm* with *lasting, intellectual and moral qualities.*

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Clothing	→	External physical good looks
Knowledge and manners	→	Inner good looks
Good looks	→	Something that attracts the heart

Data of proverbs 3

<div dir="rtl">

لَيْسَ الْيَتِيْمُ الَّذِي قَدْ مَاتَ وَالِدُهُ، بَلِ الْيَتِيْمُ يَتِيْمُ الْعِلْمِ وَالْأَدَبِ

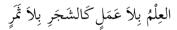</div>

Laysa al-yateemu alladhi qad maata waaliduhu bal al-yateemu yateemu al-ilm wa al-adab
(An orphan is not one who is deprived of his parents, but one who is deprived of knowledge and modesty)

This proverb redefines orphanhood metaphorically: from a state of physical loss to an intellectual and moral vacuum. Parents, as givers of love and guidance, are mapped onto *knowledge and adab* as sources of existential support.

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Orphans (loss of parents)	→	People who have lost knowledge and manners
Parents as life guidance	→	Knowledge as a guide for the mind
Parents as givers of love	→	Adab as a moral guide
Vulnerability and emptiness of life	→	Loss of direction and meaning of life

Data of proverbs 4

<div dir="rtl">

الْعِلْمُ بِلاَ عَمَلٍ كَالشَجَرِ بِلاَ ثَمَرٍ

</div>

Al-'ilmu bilaa 'amal kash-shajar bila thamar
(Knowledge without charity is like a tree without fruit)

This metaphor compares *unapplied knowledge* to a barren tree. The source domain is the natural image of a tree and its expected fruit-bearing function; the target domain is the expectation that knowledge must yield good deeds or practical benefits.

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Tree (growing life)	→	Knowledge (that which exists in a person)
Fruit (produce from the tree)	→	Charity (the result of knowledge)
No fruit	→	Knowledge is not useful

Data of proverbs 5

<div dir="rtl">

مَنْ كَانَ فِي طَلَبِ الْعِلْمِ كَانَتِ الْجَنَّةُ فِي طَلَبِهِ

</div>

Man kaana fi talab al-'ilm kaanat al-jannah fi talabihi
(Whoever seeks knowledge, Paradise will seek him)

This proverb portrays *Paradise* as an active agent in pursuit of the knowledge seeker an inversion of normative metaphors. It highlights the spiritual prestige of scholarly pursuit.

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Search	→	Pursuing knowledge
Final destination (heaven)	→	Spiritual success
Reward (paradise seeking)	→	God's grace

Data of proverbs 6

<div dir="rtl">

لَوْلاَ العِلْمُ لَكَانَ النَّاسُ كَالبَهَائِمِ

</div>

Lawla al-ilm lakaan al-naas kal-bahaaim
(If it were not for knowledge, man would be like an animal)

This metaphor equates ignorance with subhuman existence. The source domain draws from animal instincts and lack of moral governance; the target domain is human beings devoid of knowledge.

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Animals (who live by instinct)	→	Humans without knowledge
Do not have intellect	→	Can't think logically
Live only thinking about eating and drinking	→	Live without spiritual purpose
Purely biological impulses	→	Act according to human passions

Animals lack knowledge, while humans possess it. Knowledge sets humans apart from animals, allowing critical thinking, informed judgment, and a thorough understanding of the world. Education is crucial in shaping personalities and capacities, as it separates humans from instinctive animals.

Knowledge is highly prized in Arab and Islamic cultures and is seen as one of the most significant facets of human existence. It is the secret to becoming wise and comprehending life and the universe more deeply. These sayings metaphorically portray knowledge as the key factor that sets humans apart from other animals. Without information, people wouldn't be able to reason, comprehend, or act sensibly; instead, they would only follow their primal instincts. This metaphor highlights the value of knowledge in human existence.

Data of proverbs 7

<div dir="rtl">

مَنْ أَرَادَ الدُّنْيَا فَعَلَيْهِ بِالعِلْمِ

</div>

Man araada al-dunya fa'alayhi bil-'ilm
(Whoever desires the world, then let it be with knowledge)

Here, knowledge is framed as a necessary instrument for worldly achievement. The proverb blends pragmatic and spiritual domains, suggesting that *religious study* also brings social and material success.

The proverb above has an underlying conceptual metaphor of knowledge as the key to achieving success in the world. In detail, the source domain of the proverb is knowledge, while the target domain is success or happiness in the world. Knowledge is interpreted as the knowledge, education and skills needed to achieve the goal, while worldly success is interpreted as success in worldly life, including material, social and professional aspects.

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Journey (endeavor)	→	An endeavor to reach the world
Tool or means	→	Knowledge is the main provision
End goal	→	Life without spiritual purpose
Purely biological impulse	→	Worldly success

Data of proverbs 8

الْعِلْمُ لَايَحْصُلُ إِلَّا بِالتَّقْوَى وَالْإِسْتِقَامَةِ

Al-'ilm laa yahsul illa bi-al-taqwa wa al-istiqaamah
(Knowledge will not be acquired except with piety and istikamah)

There are two underlying conceptual metaphors, namely knowledge as a result of piety and mysticism. The proverb's source domain is piety and mysticism, while its target domain is knowledge. Piety and consistency are the moral and spiritual qualities needed to achieve something valuable, while knowledge is the acquired knowledge that is the result of these moral and spiritual qualities.

This metaphor presents moral virtues as prerequisites for knowledge. The source domain is *religious discipline*; the target domain is *the attainability of meaningful knowledge*.

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Provision for the journey (piety)	→	Spiritual condition (moral awareness)
Straight and consistent path	→	Continuous effort (istikamah)

The proverb emphasizes the importance of piety and consistency in acquiring knowledge. It highlights that knowledge is not just intellectually derived but also rooted in high moral and spiritual qualities. In pesantren culture, *santri* are taught not only worship or knowledge but also morals and Islamic values like piety and steadfastness. Thus, knowledge is seen as valuable and can only be obtained through piety and mysticism.

Data of proverbs 9

الْعِلْمُ نُورٌ وَالْجَهْلُ ظُلْمَةٌ

Al-ilm noorun wa al-jahlu zhulmatun
(Knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness)

There are two conceptual metaphors underlying the proverb, namely knowledge as light and ignorance as darkness. In detail, the source domain of this proverb is light and darkness, while the target domain is science and ignorance.

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Light (illuminates' nature)	→	Knowledge (illuminating the heart and mind)
Helps to see clearly	→	Provides understanding and truth
Darkness blocks the view	→	Ignorance hinders understanding
Trapped in darkness	→	Not understanding something

The proverb الْعِلْمُ نُورٌ وَالْجَهْلُ ظُلْمَةٌ metaphorically represents science as light, providing enlightenment and understanding. It contrasts ignorance, which is likened to darkness blocking vision and understanding, causing confusion and misguidance. This metaphor highlights the importance of science in providing enlightenment and preventing us from ignorance, emphasizing the need for understanding and enlightenment in our lives.

Data of proverbs 10

اَلْمَعْرِفَةُ بِدُونِ عَمَلٍ هِيَ إِضَاعَةٌ, وَالْعَمَلُ بِدُونِ عِلْمٍ هِيَ حَمَاقَةٌ

Al-ma'rifah bidun amal hiya idhaa'ah, wa al-amal bidun ilm hiya hamaaqah
Knowledge without charity is waste, and charity without knowledge is ignorance.

When analyzed, the proverb has two conceptual metaphors, namely knowledge without charity as waste, and charity without knowledge as ignorance. In detail, the source domain of the proverb is waste and ignorance, while the target domain is knowledge without charity and charity without knowledge.

SOURCE DOMAIN		TARGET DOMAIN
Empty and futile	→	Knowledge without charity
Ignorance and misguidance	→	Charity without knowledge
No practical benefit	→	Knowledge that is not practiced
Actions that are misguided	→	Charity without true knowledge

The proverb "Waste without charity" emphasizes the importance of knowledge and charity in life. Waste is not used properly, while ignorance is actions taken without adequate knowledge, leading to undesirable results. Charity without knowledge is done without adequate knowledge, resulting in mistakes or ineffective results. The proverbs الْعَمَلُ بِدُونِ عِلْمٍ هِيَ حَمَاقَةٌ and اَلْمَعْرِفَةُ بِدُونِ عَمَلٍ هِيَ إِضَاعَةٌ metaphorize knowledge as an element that must be integrated with charity to achieve beneficial results. This emphasizes the need for a balance between knowledge and charity in life.

In the context of pesantren culture, especially modern pesantren, students are usually required to practice the knowledge they have gained after completing their studies. The form of practicing knowledge is usually often called devotion, which is generally one year. During this period of service, *santri* are usually assigned to teach or become assistant teachers at the institution where they serve.

Based on an interview with Ustadzah Khansa at Pesantren Condong, she stated that the installation of Arabic proverbs or *mahfuzhat* on walls and strategic places is aimed at strengthening the character of the students. The students always absorb the meaning contained in those proverbs. In every lecture or speech, the students also often insert proverbs. He also conveyed that the presence of proverbs greatly assists students in memorizing and internalizing scientific and moral values. Ustadzah Khansa said*, "The mahfuzhat are very closely related to life motivation, so these mahfuzhat are important and must always be remembered."* To be remembered for a long time, it needs to be placed in strategic locations so that it is always visible and readable by the students.

Based on interviews with male and female students at Pesantren Condong, they said that the presence of Arabic proverbs on the walls is very important for memorization and strengthening their retention. One of the students, Al-Hadad, in his interview told the researcher that Arabic proverbs greatly influence his enthusiasm for studying at the pesantren. If he did not know and memorize the inspirational and motivational Arabic proverbs, he might have gone home (no longer studying at the pesantren). Al-Hadad said, *"Those mahfuzhat are very important. The mahfuzhat are pearls of wisdom that motivate me."* There are many mahfuzhat in Condong, including those about knowledge, motivation, and so on. Often, these mahfuzhat help me to always stay enthusiastic and motivated in my pursuit of knowledge.

Similarly, at Al-Bahjah Islamic Boarding School, based on an interview with a teacher, it was mentioned that the placement of proverbs always considers strategic locations that are easy for students to see and read, such as in the garden, near the entrance gate of the boarding school, and near the canteen. In addition to Arabic proverbs, quotes from Buya Yahya are also put up on the walls so that they always remember Buya's messages. Ustadz Haris conveyed, *"These proverbs were installed by the administrators in strategic places as a means to strengthen their Arabic language skills and internalize the value of ta'zhim towards knowledge and teachers."*

2. Discussion

Among the ten Arabic proverbs related to knowledge, two originate from Al-Bahjah Islamic Boarding School, while eight are taken from Condong Islamic Boarding School. Viewed through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory, it becomes clear that knowledge is consistently metaphorized as something very valuable. Table 1 presents the results of the knowledge metaphor analysis.

Table 1. Knowledge Metaphor

Proverb Data Base	Source Domain	Target Domain (knowledge)	Metaphorical Meaning
1	A long journey to China	the process of seeking knowledge	knowledge as something that must be pursued without geographical boundaries
2	Clothing & outward	appearance Inner beauty through knowledge and manners	Knowledge as true beauty
3	Orphaned children	Loss of knowledge and manners	Knowledge as the foundation of a meaningful life
4	A tree without fruit	knowledge without action	knowledge must bear real actions
5	Heaven for seekers of knowledge	Spiritual rewards	Knowledge as the path to eternal happiness
6	Animals (without reason)	Humans without knowledge	Knowledge as the distinguishing factor of humans from other creatures
7	Means to the world	Knowledge as a tool for worldly success	Knowledge as capital for living in the world
8	Piety and steadfastness	Prerequisites for acquiring knowledge	Knowledge requires spiritual integrity
9	Light and darkness	Knowledge as light, ignorance as darkness	Knowledge illuminates and saves from misguidance
10	Wastefulness and ignorance	Knowledge without action, Action without knowledge	Knowledge must be balanced with deeds

The proverb 1 reflects what Lakoff & Johnson (2008) describe as an *orientational metaphor*, linking physical distance to cognitive and moral effort. In pesantren culture, this proverb reinforces the ethic of scholarly endurance (*rihlah 'ilmiyyah*), where distance implies the depth of commitment. Farghal & Saeed (2022) emphasize that metaphorical journeys in Arabic texts often encapsulate the human pursuit of enlightenment, mirroring pesantren values on lifelong learning. The proverb 2 operates through an *ontological metaphor*, locating abstract attributes such as *beauty* in internalized virtues. Kövecses (2016) notes that such metaphors shift societal values from materialism to moral aesthetics. In pesantren, this metaphor aligns with the Islamic principle of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), affirming that true distinction stems from inner excellence. This expands upon Ghafoori & Elyas (2023), who analyzed gendered representations in Arabic proverbs but did not engage metaphors of intellectual virtue.

The proverb 3 applies a *deep reversal of metaphor*, presenting epistemic and ethical emptiness as more severe than physical orphanhood. This reflects what Kövecses calls *moral metaphorization*, where social roles are extended to conceptual domains. In pesantren, such expressions instill the idea that *teachers*

and knowledge provide spiritual guardianship, reinforcing moral dependency on education. Unlike studies focused on family metaphors (Farah & Sanubar, 2021), this reading exposes the pedagogical transformation of familial roles in pesantren discourse. This metaphor (proverb 4) exemplifies what Kövecses (2016) terms a *structural metaphor*, where a physical object structures an abstract moral expectation. It reinforces the pesantren ethic of *'amal shalih* virtuous action born from knowledge. In Islam, knowledge without practice is deemed not only incomplete but spiritually dangerous (Wahab et al., 2020). The proverb critiques superficial scholarship and upholds integrative learning.

This is (proverb 5) an *agency reversing metaphor*, where the consequence (Paradise) takes initiative. It deepens the Islamic view of *'ilm* not just as a duty but as a divine merit. Such metaphors intensify the emotional and moral stakes of study. Lakoff and Johnson (2008) describe these as *experiential metaphors*, shaped by culturally resonant spiritual aspirations. This aligns well with pesantren narratives of *barakah* (blessing) via disciplined learning. A stark *ontological metaphor*, this expression (proverb 6) positions *knowledge* as the dividing line between human rationality and animalistic impulse. It affirms the idea of humans as *'ashraf al-makhluqat* (noblest creation) by virtue of intellect. This complements the Islamic educational tradition that prioritizes knowledge as the essential marker of humanity (Fatimah et al., 2022). The metaphor also critiques ignorance as a fall from existential potential.

The proverb 7 مَنْ أَرَادَ الدُّنْيَا فَعَلَيْهِ بِالْعِلْمِ emphasizes the importance of knowledge and education as the foundation for achieving worldly success. In the pesantren culture, a kyai or *ustaz* is viewed as someone with substantial knowledge, making them a respected and revered figure. Students compete to kiss the kyai's hand, hoping to receive the blessings of their knowledge. This metaphor (proverb 8) aligns with *moral-source metaphors* (Kövecses), where character quality is a condition for epistemic success. In pesantren pedagogy, this elevates *'ilm* beyond mere information, it becomes a fruit of inner discipline. The metaphor reiterates that knowledge is spiritually "earned," resonating with the pesantren principle that purity precedes enlightenment.

The proverb 9 an *orientational and experiential metaphor*, deeply rooted in both Arabic linguistic tradition and Islamic cosmology. It mirrors the Qur'anic contrast between *nūr* (light) and *zulumāt* (darkness) (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 257). The metaphor underlines the fundamental Islamic belief that knowledge dispels existential ignorance and moral peril. The proverb 10 expression uses *mutually reinforcing metaphors* to portray a balanced epistemology: both intellectualism and activism are flawed if isolated. It reflects the pesantren ideal of *'alim 'amil*, a scholar who embodies his knowledge. This proverb serves as a curricular compass, cautioning against both performative learning and reckless practice.

The findings above indicate that the Arabic proverbs displayed on the walls of the pesantren not only contain linguistic expressions but also conceptual constructions regarding the meaning of knowledge. Referring to the conceptual metaphor theory framework (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008), metaphorical mappings such as knowledge metaphorized as light, knowledge metaphorized as a fruit-bearing tree, or knowledge metaphorized as a path to heaven, reflect that knowledge is not merely cognitive knowledge, but holds existential and spiritual value. This finding corrects the assumption that metaphors only exist in the realm of literature or oral texts. As emphasized by Ghufron et al. (2023), metaphors in Arabic proverbs displayed visually in public spaces such as pesantren walls have the power to shape social understanding and sustainable collective norms. This also supports the argument of Thomas & Ibrahim (2022) that the contemplative process of metaphors can enhance spiritual awareness and character transformation.

One of the important findings is the emergence of the metaphor "knowledge as the path to heaven," which reveals the spiritual dimension in the process of seeking knowledge. This is reinforced by Fouda (2024), who shows that many hadiths and the Prophet's advice contain such spiritual metaphors, which serve as a binding meaning between religion, knowledge, and moral actions.

The tendency to use religiosity-based metaphors such as "knowledge is only obtained through piety and diligence" reflects the deep connection between the cultivation of knowledge and moral formation in Islamic pesantren education. This is in line with the views of Ulum et al. (2023), who assert that in Islam, knowledge comes from God and is obtained through reason, experience, and piety. Other proverbs such as "knowledge without action is like a tree that bears no fruit" and "action without knowledge is ignorance" demonstrate the close relationship between epistemology and axiology in Islamic culture, rejecting the notion that knowledge is merely theoretical. This reinforces Hermawan's

(2018) finding that the teaching of mahfuzhat or Arabic proverbs contributes to strengthening students' character, particularly in terms of moral and spiritual values.

Pesantren Condong or Pesantren Riyadlul Ulum Wadda'wah is the largest and oldest modern Islamic boarding school in the "City of Santri" area of Tasikmalaya (Hasib & Usman, 2016). This pesantren consistently implements three curricula at once by adhering to the principle of *al-Muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-salih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadid al-ashlah*. The three curricula are: traditional, modern Pesantren of Darussalam, Gontor, and general education (Ningrum & Sa'adah, 2020).

Pesantren Condong as a modern pesantren always prioritizes the language aspect (Ningrum & Sa'adah, 2020), especially in the aspect of oral communication, so it is not surprising that there are many elements supporting language skills in this pesantren. One of the supports for students' language skills is Arabic proverbs. In this pesantren, Arabic proverbs have become decorations on every wall of the pesantren. Arabic proverbs lessons in Pesantren Condong are not only taught in class, but also written, posted, and pasted in strategic places with a relatively large number.

Pesantren Condong is known for its extensive collection of Arabic proverbs. The proverbs are written by *ustaz*, proficient in *khat/*calligraphy, while installed or pasted by the Organization of Santri Pesantren Condong (OSPC), which handles linguistic issues and the Year-End Assessment Committee (PPAT) each year. The proverbs are a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Pesantren Condong. The presence of OSPC is a forum for instilling and building the character of santri (Wardatushobariah & Syibromalisi, 2023). Arabic proverbs in Pesantren Condong are a source of motivation for students, often derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, *atsar* of companions, *tabi'in*, prayers, sayings of ulama, and anonymous Arabic proverbs.

Al-Bahjah is an Islamic boarding school founded by Buya Yahya, with around 21 branches across Indonesia and abroad. The center is in Sumber, Cirebon Regency, West Java, with a mission to produce preachers and scholars focusing on memorizing the Qur'an and studying religious sciences. The school offers a special program in *tahfizh* Qur'an and *tafaqquh*. Although Arabic proverb lessons are not formally taught, the school is focusing on linguistic aspects, with Arabic proverbs posters installed in the corners. The school is creating an Arabic and English language zone called "Arabic and English Area" and requires santris to use Arabic or English when passing by.

The Arabic proverbs of Al-Bahjah Islamic Boarding School often contain motivations to the students, which are sourced from the Qur'an, Hadith, the words of scholars, and Buya Yahya himself. These proverbs are written in Latin, Indonesian, Arabic, and English. The pesantren does not allow Arabic writing on the stairs, as Arabic is associated with the language of the Qur'an. The pesantren documents each of Buya Yahya's sayings so that they are posted in strategic places or pasted on the walls or on the stairs that the students pass through. These proverbs are often displayed in vivid posters, but many of them have been torn due to the lack of protective materials such as frames or statues.

Santri not only learn Arabic proverbs from the classroom, but the presence of Arabic proverbs on the wall is an effort to remember and strengthen their memorization until it takes root and forms character. This is in line with the opinion that quotes, or proverbs have the power to change the reader (Tumasang, 2022). This is where pesantren create a positive environment with inspirational writings. the hope is that the presence of a positive environment can support the growth of mature and moral santri characters (Merisa & Maulana, 2023). As one of the Islamic educational institutions, pesantren realize that they have a big responsibility in shaping the character of santri (Rohdiana et al., 2023) who are the next generation of the nation in the future.

Based on the results of the observation, the students look disciplined. During congregational prayers, students fill the mosque to pray. Only a small number are late. At the time of meal distribution, students look neatly lined up to receive food rations. Likewise, when taking a card to go home on vacation after finishing the semester exam, students are seen lining up in line.

Similarly, in Pesantren Al-Bahjah, based on interviews with santri and *ustaz*, they said that the proverbs posted on the walls of the pesantren, especially about knowledge, are very important. based on observations, santri were seen to have practiced noble moral characters such as respect for guests or strangers visiting the pesantren. The santri readily bowed to guests who passed by or asked to shake hands by kissing the guest's hand.

Research on the metaphor of knowledge in Arabic proverbs, primarily found in pesantren walls and open spaces, is limited. However, it focuses on teaching these proverbs in classrooms and other educational institutions. Learning Arabic proverbs can instill character education values like religious

values, honesty, and discipline (Kamilah, 2022). Additionally, it serves as a bridge to introduce students to good morals (ethics), which can be instilled through methods like compulsion, coercion, and habituation (Shalehah, 2020).

According to Zain (2016) that effective learning of Arabic proverbs is by connecting the material with real life. Arabic proverbs are pearls of wisdom that are always relevant and valuable, no matter when and where. In research Hermawan (2018), it is stated that there is a non-negative effect of learning Arabic proverbs on the morals of students. This means that learning Arabic proverbs contributes to strengthening positive character in students.

In Arab-Islamic culture, these proverbs reflect an ethos of learning that integrates knowledge and spirituality. The source of knowledge in Islam is God, some of which is found in the Qur'an, while reason, experience, and the five senses are only tools (Ulum et al., 2023). In the Qur'an, the word knowledge and its derivations are mentioned 744 times. This indicates how high Islam's appreciation of knowledge is (Sappe, 2020). When examined, the proverb above appeared during the time of the Prophet (Hadith) which was the best time in history. The Prophet as a head of state as well as a religious head ordered his companions to always learn. Many hadiths of the Prophet uphold science and the virtues of the knowledgeable, such as "Seeking knowledge is obligatory for Muslims and Muslim women" (Muslim, 2000), "A person who is studying knowledge is equivalent to jihad fighting in the way of Allah (Ulum et al., 2023).

D. Conclusion

This study has identified ten dominant conceptual metaphor models related to knowledge, as represented in Arabic proverbs displayed within pesantren environments. The metaphors position knowledge as *light*, *true inner beauty*, *a fruitful tree*, *a path to paradise*, *a moral and intellectual compass*, and *a divine reward*, among others. These representations do not merely function as rhetorical flourishes but serve as cognitive tools shaping students' understanding of the significance, purpose, and pursuit of knowledge. The findings demonstrate that conceptual metaphors in Arabic proverbs are integral to pesantren education. They act as embedded pedagogical instruments that instill spiritual values, encourage intellectual commitment, and cultivate moral character. The study affirms the relevance of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in analyzing culturally-situated knowledge transmission within Islamic education contexts. This research contributes a novel synthesis by bridging metaphor theory with pesantren studies, highlighting how physical texts in educational environments can shape learners' cognitive and affective engagement with knowledge. It enriches the discourse of Islamic education, metaphor studies, and Arabic pedagogy in Indonesia.

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