

When the Teacher's Trust Wavers: A Metaphorical Analysis of Indonesia-Saudi Relations in Hajj Management

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ABSTRACT

This paper employs metaphorical analysis, particularly the "teacher-student" metaphor prevalent in Saudi Arabia's criticism of Indonesia's Hajj management policies in 2025, to examine the diplomatic tensions between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia regarding the handling of the pilgrimage. This study combines critical discourse analysis with Charteris-Black's (2004) Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) framework, which is based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Primary news stories from major Indonesian media outlets (Tempo, CNN Indonesia, Antara News), official government statements from BP Haji, social media comments on Facebook and Twitter, legislative transcripts, and Saudi government communications all form part of the data sources. Using four analytical phases—metaphorical identification, conceptual mapping analysis, contextual analysis, and effects analysis—the study spans the period January 2025 through June 2025 to investigate how educational metaphors shape diplomatic speech. The study exposes methodical metaphorical mappings between the diplomatic and educational sectors, thereby establishing Indonesia as the student subject under evaluation and Saudi Arabia as the authoritative instructor with evaluative power. The "red report card" metaphor manages public opinion, promotes institutional transformation, helps justify Saudi religious authority, and enables diplomatic responses that help save face. Particularly, the founding of BP Haji as a ministerial-level organization, this symbolic framing influenced policy outcomes, illustrating how metaphorical language shapes public opinion and institutional change in international religious diplomacy. While allowing for major institutional transformation, the teacher-student metaphor provided a structure for addressing the 2025 Indonesia-Saudi Hajj conflict. However, this metaphorical framework also supports hierarchical power systems that may compromise the idea of sovereign equality in international affairs. The study reveals that metaphors serve as cognitive tools for organizing policy responses; educational metaphors, in particular, help establish authority connections while supporting cooperation, albeit at the potential expense of sustaining uneven diplomatic dynamics.

Keywords: metaphor analysis, relations between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, Hajj organization, diplomatic dialogue, institutional change, religious diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

One of Islam's five basic pillars, the Hajj trip reflects a complicated junction of religious obligation, institutional responsibility, and international diplomacy influencing millions of Muslims worldwide. As the most populous Muslim country in the world, Indonesia's connection with Saudi Arabia in Hajj management has significant ramifications not only for bilateral diplomatic relations but also for broader patterns of religious authority and sovereignty in modern Islamic society (Noor, 2019). Beyond traditional diplomatic analysis, the

unparalleled diplomatic crisis of 2025—where Saudi officials allegedly issued a "raptor merah" (red report card) to Indonesia's Hajj management—along with threats to lower Indonesia's pilgrimage quota by up to 50%—represents a turning point in Indonesia-Saudi relations that requires scholarly study.

Examining this diplomatic crisis has much importance beyond its direct bilateral consequences. Representing the largest national contingent of Hajj attendees worldwide, Indonesia travels over 200,000–240,000 pilgrims annually to Saudi Arabia (Ichwan, 2020). Other Muslim-majority countries, which face comparable challenges in balancing national sovereignty with Saudi religious oversight, can draw on models established through Indonesia-Saudi interactions in Hajj management, including administrative frameworks, diplomatic protocols, and conflict resolution mechanisms. Furthermore, the metaphorical language used to explain and address this issue offers valuable insights into how symbolic representations influence international relations, policy responses, and institutional reforms in settings where political and religious power intersect.

Scholarly analysis of Indonesia-Saudi relations in Hajj management has evolved through multiple related lines. First, Azra (2018) thoroughly examined Indonesian Hajj management systems to find ongoing structural issues, including poor health screening policies, limited coordination among service providers, and transparency shortcomings in pilgrim care delivery. Azra's findings laid the groundwork for understanding systematic flaws in Indonesia's Hajj administration that would eventually come under scrutiny by Saudi Arabia. Emphasizing the conflict between efficiency needs and spiritual considerations, his study argued that problems in Indonesia's Hajj administration mirror broader difficulties in modernizing religious institutional structures while preserving spiritual authenticity.

Ichwan (2020) examined past trends of Indonesia-Saudi collaboration and conflict in the Hajj administration to reveal cyclical tensions between Saudi requests for standardization and Indonesian claims of administrative autonomy. Ichwan's longitudinal study revealed that conflicts over the Hajj administration reflect more fundamental concerns about religious authority, national sovereignty, and the balance between global Islamic unity and local administrative capabilities. His analysis revealed how Indonesia has consistently struggled to meet Saudi aspirations while maintaining domestic political legitimacy, thereby creating a recurring cycle of crisis and compromise that defines the bilateral relationship.

Through the prism of "religious diplomacy," Noor (2019) examined Indonesia-Saudi relations to demonstrate how a shared Islamic identity provides a basis for collaboration and a cause of hierarchical conflict. According to Noor's studies, religious diplomacy operates through complex negotiations between universal Islamic values and specific national objectives, with the Hajj administration serving as a vital test ground for these negotiations. Particularly in situations whereby one country controls access to holy places vital to another nation's religious responsibilities, his work developed the theoretical basis for understanding how religious authority translates into diplomatic leverage.

Recent studies by Simanjuntak (2025) have offered thorough documentation of the 2025 crisis, highlighting three main areas of Saudi criticism: inadequate health screening of pilgrims, a lack of transparency in health data reporting, and poor coordination among various service providers. Simanjuntak's documentation of the quick institutional reaction through the BP Haji establishment exposed the initial precipitating elements of the diplomatic crisis. However, his work concentrated mostly on factual records instead of an analytical assessment of the wider consequences of the crisis for institutional reform procedures and diplomatic relations.

Although considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to Indonesia-Saudi relations and Hajj administration, current research reveals some significant gaps that this study addresses. Although other studies have focused on the major policy questions driving the Indonesia-Saudi conflicts, none have examined how metaphorical language affects public reception, interpretation, or resolution of these diplomatic crises. Southeast Asian studies literature still underemphasizes the role of symbolic representation in international relations, particularly in religious diplomacy contexts.

The relationship between metaphorical framing and institutional reform initiatives in the Indonesian government has not been sufficiently investigated in the current literature. The rapid founding of BP Haji as a ministerial-level agency in direct response to Saudi criticism marks a noteworthy case study in crisis-driven

institutional restructuring, deserving of a methodical examination of how symbolic language shapes policy outcomes.

Third, there has been little scholarly research on the broader implications of educational metaphors in international relations, particularly in contexts involving religious authority and national sovereignty. Embedded in the "red report card" story, the teacher-student metaphor offers special insights into how hierarchical relationships are created, justified, and perhaps challenged through metaphorical language.

Fourth, the intersection of critical discourse analysis with metaphor Theory in Southeast Asian diplomatic studies marks a growing field of research with great promise for understanding how language influences international relations in culturally specific settings. Applying Critical Metaphor Analysis to Indonesia-Saudi relations advances broader theoretical debates on the function of symbolic representation in international diplomacy.

This paper fills these voids by offering a thorough investigation of how metaphorical language influenced the 2025 Indonesia-Saudi Hajj crisis, its resolution through institutional reform, and its broader consequences for understanding religious diplomacy in modern international relations. The study adds to several scholarly debates, including metaphor Theory in political discourse, Indonesia-Saudi bilateral relations, institutional reform processes, and the dynamics of religious authority in international diplomacy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theory of Metaphors in Political Discourse

Understanding political communication and policy development now depends much on metaphorical analysis. The groundbreaking 1980 book "Metaphors We Live By" by Lakoff and Johnson demonstrates that metaphors are conceptual systems that help us organize our understanding of abstract ideas through the lens of real-world events. Metaphors in political settings actively create reality rather than only define it, therefore impacting the interpretation and handling of policy issues (Schön, 1993).

Extending this approach to political debate, Charteris-Black (2004) contends that metaphors serve three main purposes: cognitive (helping to grasp difficult problems), pragmatic (persuading audiences), and ideological (reinforcing specific worldviews). In international politics, metaphorical language sometimes reflects and supports power relations between countries (Chilton, 1996).

Recent studies have examined how educational analogies, in particular, influence political debate. Bacchi (2009) notes that "problem representations" sometimes employ educational language to establish authority relationships and support interventions. Particularly underlining hierarchical institutions, the teacher-student metaphor also suggests areas for development through discipline and direction.

Other Metaphorical Models

Beyond the teacher-student analogy, diplomatic language exposes numerous other frameworks that deserve study:

Referring to "joint ventures" (*mashru'at mushtarak*) and "shared investments" (*Istithmar mushtarak*) in the Hajj administration, Saudi official announcements frequently employ commercial partnership terminology. This framing implies, rather than hierarchical evaluation, equal stakeholders working towards shared aims.

A metaphor for the family

The concept of "Islamic brotherhood" (*ukhuwah islamiyyah*) establishes a sibling relationship structure where Saudi Arabia functions as an "elder brother" (also known as Akbar), guiding rather than instructing. This analogy preserves dignity and mutual respect while also keeping authority.

Contract Metaphor

Emphasizing mutual agreements rather than unilateral standards, legal and administrative papers sometimes describe Hajj management as contractual duties between sovereign governments. This structure guarantees responsibility while yet supporting sovereignty.

Institutional Reform and Metaphor

Scholarship on institutional transformation has come to recognize the importance of metaphorical language in propelling reform movements. According to Schmidt (2008), "discursive institutionalism" works through metaphors that provide fresh institutional configurations in a logical and essential sense. Particularly, crisis metaphors can open doors to the possibility of major organizational transformation (Kingdon, 2003).

Establishing BP Haji as a ministerial-level agency marks a major institutional reform in the Indonesian setting. Preliminary research suggests that the metaphorical framing of Saudi criticism as a "report card" requiring a swift response has a direct influence on this reform (CNN Indonesia, 2025).

Hajj Diplomacy and Indonesia-Saudi Relations

The relationship between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia has been characterized by what Noor (2019) defines as "religious diplomacy"—the utilization of shared Islamic identity to establish political and commercial connections. With Indonesia providing the largest national contingent of pilgrims yearly—approximately 200,000–240,000—the Hajj pilgrimage is a pillar of this partnership.

Still, their relationship has been marked by regular conflict. Ichwan (2020) illustrates how Indonesia has struggled to strike a balance between Saudi requirements for standardization and control and its own Hajj management needs. Previous research on Indonesian hajj organizations has highlighted persistent issues with transparency of health data, pilgrim readiness, and coordination among care providers (Azra, 2018).

The crisis of 2025 marks a significant escalation of long-standing tensions. Simanjuntak (2025) claims that Saudi criticism targeted three areas: inadequate health screening of pilgrims, lack of transparency in health data reporting, and poor coordination among many service providers (Syariah). These issues combined to create threats to lower Indonesia's hajj quota, a rare diplomatic pressure tactic.

Saudi Points of View on Hajj Administration

Recent Saudi research and official discourse reveal a sophisticated understanding of global Hajj administration that extends beyond simple regulatory control. Emphasizing the kingdom's need to ensure pilgrimage safety and spiritual authenticity while respecting the sovereignty of Muslim countries, Al-Rashid (2024) investigates Saudi Arabia's changing status as "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques." This viewpoint presents Saudi criticism as protective stewardship of holy responsibilities rather than as hierarchical dominance.

When discussing international Hajj management, Saudi media discourse—especially in Al-Riyadh and Okaz newspapers—often employs metaphors of "partnership" (*sharakah*) and "brotherhood" (*ukhuwah*), implying an alternative framing that emphasizes mutual responsibility rather than hierarchical assessment (Al-Riyadh, 2025). Indicating a preference for partnership-based rather than evaluative language, the communications of the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah regularly employ terminology such as "collaboration" (*ta'awun*) and "joint responsibility" (*mas'uliyah mushtarakah*).

Comparative Analysis Framework

The research now examines how identical diplomatic events are framed differently in the Indonesian versus Saudi language, utilizing a cross-cultural metaphor analysis technique. This comparative perspective highlights cultural differences in metaphorical choices and their diplomatic connotations.

Alternative Frameworks and Saudi Perspectives

Saudi Metaphorical Taste

Examining Saudi official speech suggests a taste for stewardship and cooperation metaphors over hierarchical educational frameworks. Rather than "evaluator" or "assessor," the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah regularly characterize its function as "facilitator" (monastic) and "supporter." Saudi officials routinely use the metaphor of "guardianship" (wilayah) and "stewardship" (ri'ayah), therefore presenting Saudi Arabia as a protector and facilitator rather than as a judge. This framing stresses caring and duty above evaluation and hierarchy.

Cross-Cultural Metaphorical Study

The contrasts between the Indonesian adoption of the teacher-student metaphor and Saudi inclination for partnership language reveal important cultural variations in diplomatic communication:

Indonesian cultural context

Indonesian educational culture emphasizes respect for teachers (gurus) and the acceptance of constructive criticism, thereby rendering the teacher-student metaphor culturally relevant and face-saving for Indonesian viewers.

Saudi Cultural Context

Saudi diplomatic culture stresses Islamic brotherhood, sovereignty, and mutual respect. Hence, metaphors of collaboration and stewardship are more suited and diplomatically powerful.

Research Design

Although current studies on Indonesian-Saudi relations and metaphor Theory focus independently on different aspects, few studies examine how metaphorical language affects specific diplomatic crises and policy reactions. By offering a thorough investigation of how the teacher-student metaphor influenced institutional reform in the 2025 Hajj management issue, as well as public debate, this paper closes this gap.

Theoretical Structured Approach

This paper integrates conceptual metaphor Theory with critical discourse analysis, utilizing Charteris-Black's (2004) developed Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA). At three levels—cognitive (conceptual mapping), semantic (linguistic expression), and pragmatic (contextual effects)—CMA examines how metaphors function.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) guides the study, as it posits that metaphors shape knowledge through systematic mappings between target domains (abstract, complex concepts) and source domains (concrete, familiar notions). Here, the objective domain is international diplomatic relations, whereas the source domain is education or schooling.

Data Collection

Included among the data sources are:

- Main news stories from significant Indonesian media sources (Tempo, CNN Indonesia, Antara News)
- Government official comments from BP Haji
- Conversational social media on Facebook and Twitter

Transcripts of Parliament and committee reports

- Saudi government communications (where they exist)

Capturing the emergence, escalation, and resolution of the crisis, the main data collection period runs from January 2025 through June 2025.

Method of Analysis

Four phases of the research follow:

1. Metaphor Identification Systematic identification of educational metaphors in texts employing language indicators like "rapor" (report card), "nilai" (grades), "guru" (teacher), "murid" (student), "ujian" (test), and "pembelajaran" (learning).
2. Conceptual mapping analysis of systematic mappings between diplomatic ties and educational ideas, thereby determining which facets of education are projected onto the Indonesia-Saudi connection.
3. Contextual Analysis: Examining how metaphorical language performs in certain political and cultural settings, with an eye on Indonesian educational culture and Saudi religious authority.
4. Effects Analysis of how metaphorical framing affected public dialogue, media coverage, and policy actions, including the development of BP Haji.

Conventions

This study primarily relies on Indonesian-language materials, which may result in a limited understanding of Saudi perspectives. Furthermore, the study spans a relatively limited period; longer-term consequences of the metaphorical framing warrant future studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Alternative Framings and Saudi Metaphorical Choices

Examining Saudi official speech suggests a taste for stewardship and cooperation metaphors over hierarchical educational frameworks. Rather than "evaluator" or "assessor," the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah regularly characterise its function as "facilitator" (monastic) and "supporter."

Saudi Arabian Stewardship Metaphor:

Saudi officials regularly use the metaphor of "guardianship" (wilayah) and "stewardship" (rayah), therefore presenting Saudi Arabia as a protector and facilitator rather than a judge. This framing stresses caring and duty above evaluation and hierarchy.

Cross-Cultural Metaphorical Study

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Mapping the Partnership Framework:

Saudi Arabia as Senior Partner

Knowledge, tools, supervising power

Indonesia as Junior Partner: Passion, significant constituency, dedicated learning process

Hajj Management as a Joint Venture Mutual gain, shared investment, group success

Framework mapping for stewardship:

- Saudi Arabia as Guardian: Guidance, protective responsibility, resource sharing, shared accountability.
- Indonesia as Benefactor

Autonomous implementation, respectful cooperation, improvement dedicationHajj Management as Sacred Trust: Mutual accountability, spiritual obligation, quality assurance.

Consequences of Different Frames of View

Every symbolic framework generates different diplomatic dynamics:

Effects of teacher-student metaphor:

- ✓ Facilitates institutional reform that helps to save faces.
- ✓ Preserves hierarchy yet offers a means of improvement.
- ✓ Risks strengthening dependencies on one another

Effects of a partnership metaphor:

- ✓ Maintains mutual respect and sovereignty.
- ✓ Promotes group efforts at solving problems.
- ✓ May hide disparities in power.

Effects of stewardship metaphor:

- ✓ Combining duty with power
- ✓ stresses compassion and protection.
- ✓ Preserves religious credibility.

Effectiveness of BP Haji Analysis

Six months after its founding, BP Haji has shown conflicting performance in resolving the initial Saudi issues:

Positive Results:

- Coordination centralized minimising interagency ambiguity
- Enhanced health screening methods satisfying Saudi criteria
- Improved openness in pilgrim statistics collecting
- strengthened routes of bilateral correspondence

Still Difficult Remains:

- Redundancy of bureaucracy between BP Haji and current agencies
- Conflicts in resource distribution between national and local administrations

- Long-term institutional viability sustainability issues
- Literary Development
- The way Indonesia-Saudi ties are framed metaphorically has changed once the issue is resolved:

From Evaluation to Cooperative Approach:

Recent diplomatic correspondence suggests a successful navigation of the hierarchical consequences of the teacher-student paradigm, as evidenced by a shift from educational language to partnership metaphors.

Institutional learning: BP. Consciously using partnership language, Haji's communication approach references "collaboration" (kerjasama) and "mutual improvement" (perbaikan bersama) instead of "grades" or "assessments."

Connotations of Metaphorical Hierarchies

Power Relations in Diplomatic Metaphors

Although it helps to resolve crises, the teacher-student paradigm begs serious ethical issues concerning power dynamics in international diplomacy.

Hierarchical analogies suggest that some countries are inherently better than others in terms of their potential for self-governance, thereby undermining the notion of sovereign equality.

Educational analogies run the risk of fostering psychological reliance, whereby the "student" country always looks to the "teacher" nation, thereby perhaps undermining autonomous decision-making.

The imposition of symbolic frameworks could indicate cultural imperialism, in which the language and conceptual preferences of powerful countries dominate global communication.

Ethical substitutes cooperative metaphors:

Contextual Sensitivity

Not only should diplomatic metaphors represent the dominating power in the partnership, but also the cultural values and preferences of all the participants. Rotational leadership is based on metaphors that facilitate situational leadership and knowledge exchange rather than rigid hierarchical structures.

Analogous Mappings within the Teacher-Student Frame

Examining reveals methodical metaphorical mappings between diplomatic and educational spheres:

Saudi Arabia as Instructor:

- Authorized to assess performance
- Establishes expectations and criteria.
- Offer direction and corrections.
- Possesses the ability to either reward or penalize

Indonesia as a Student:

- Under assessment and graded
- Had to show development.

- may grow from errors.
- Looks for instructor permission.

Hajj Management as Subject Matter:

- One can evaluate and classify performance.
- Calls for research and ready-made plans.
- Success results from using correct techniques.
- Development achievable with committed work

The "Red Report Card" as Performance Assessment:

- Objective analysis of present performance
- Alert warning indication needing attention
- Chance for development
- Foundation for upcoming ties

Discursive Uses of the Teacher-Student Metaphor

There are numerous discourse purposes for the teacher-student metaphor:

Legitimizing Saudi Authority:

By placing Saudi Arabia in the teaching role, the metaphor naturalizes Saudi power over hajj rules and positions criticism as instructional rather than punitive. This framing helps Saudi control appear favorable rather than endangering Indonesian sovereignty.

Facilitating a face-saving response:

The student role allows Indonesia to acknowledge issues without perpetuating basic ignorance. Through work and guidance, students can grow, implying that present challenges are temporary and solvable.

Encouraging Change:

While offering a clear road ahead, the report card metaphor generates urgency for institutional transformation. Indonesia can raise its "hajj grade" through improved management systems, as students can improve their marks by adopting better study habits.

Oversaw public opinion:

By implying that problems arise from procedural rather than basic shortcomings of government or religious conviction, the educational framework helps control internal criticism.

Policy Impact: BP Haji's Establishment

The formation of BP Haji as a ministerial-level agency directly affected Indonesia's policy response through metaphorical framing. Key authorities linked this reform to the need for improved "grades" in Saudi assessments.

"Presiden telah membentuk manajemen baru dalam bentuk badan penyelenggara haji. Ini menunjukkan Indonesia dalam memperbaiki tata kelola haji," Wakil Kepala BP Haji Dahnil Simanjuntak said (The President has formed new management in the form of a hajj organising body. This shows Indonesia's commitment to improving hajj governance). (CNN Indonesia, 2025).

This institutional reaction precisely reflects educational logic: poor performance necessitates new organizational systems and study strategies. The revision is meant to "improve Indonesia's grades" in the next Saudi assessments.

More General Consequences for Religious Diplomacy

The instance exposes multiple more general trends in global religious relations:

The teacher-student metaphor captures actual conflicts between religious authority (Saudi Arabia as custodian of holy places) and national sovereignty (Indonesia's right to oversee its populace). Metaphorical language offers a means of negotiating these conflicts without directly confronting either value.

Legitimacy Through Performance: According to the educational framework, rather than natural rights, legitimacy in religious matters results from shown competency. This performance-based legitimacy fuels a constant push for institutional development.

Collective Learning: The metaphor suggests that Indonesia's experience might teach other countries' hajj management systems, therefore framing diplomatic problems as learning chances for the larger Muslim community.

Although the teacher-student paradigm helped to resolve crises, it also supports perhaps dangerous hierarchies. The frame implies that instead of building mutual respect between sovereign countries, Indonesia must constantly prove its ability to be competent to Saudi Arabia.

The educational metaphor could also hide fundamental problems in favour of technical fixes. The metaphor might limit the scope of significant reform by emphasizing "better management" instead of analyzing power dynamics or resource limitations.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that although the teacher-student paradigm has helped resolve institutional transformation and crises, its hierarchical consequences create long-term difficulties in fostering fair diplomatic ties. In diplomacy, the success of metaphorical framing relies on the preservation of sovereignty, dignity, and mutual respect as much as it does on swift crisis resolution. The management of the Indonesia-Saudi Hajj dispute illustrates both the power and the dangers of symbolic language in foreign policy. Although educational analogies can offer diplomatic crisis face-saving routes, they might also support troubling power hierarchies that compromise the values of sovereign equality and mutual respect that ought to shape world affairs.

Future diplomatic policies should establish symbolic frameworks that balance the requirement for efficient cooperation with the protection of national dignity and sovereignty as top priorities. From teacher-student to partnership models in Indonesian-Saudi relations, the shift indicates that diplomatic language can evolve to support more equitable relationships while preserving good cooperation.

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