

Islamic Propagation and Terminological Challenges: A Sociocultural Analysis of New Muslim Converts

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Abstract: *This study examines dakwah as a professional career, the organized sequence of roles, tasks, and specialized training involved in Islamic propagation that focusing on its practice in conveying Islamic knowledge to new converts (muallaf). Dakwah is treated as both an art and a vocation that shapes the identity and effectiveness of propagators; its success depends on communicative skill, pedagogical competence, and the ability to translate knowledge into practice. In certain cases, contemporary dakwah practitioners face sociocultural challenges that hinder career development and the effectiveness of propagation. These challenges include social barriers, biases, discrimination, weak social integration, limited mentorship, and constrained professional mobility within and between Muslim and non Muslim communities. This study raised the issue to what extent should socio cultural factors be integrated into the planning and implementation of dakwah activities to strengthen practice and outcomes for muallaf? This research adopts a conceptual framework complemented by fieldwork observation. Primary data were collected through direct interviews with propagators and muallaf, and secondary data were gathered via document analysis of relevant literature and organizational records. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring sociocultural barriers and practical strategies used by practitioners. The study finds that muallaf receive and apply Islamic knowledge more readily when sociocultural burdens are minimized. Key barriers identified are insufficient social integration, lack of structured mentorship, and low levels of professionalization among propagators. These factors reduce trust, impede learning, and limit the long term retention and practice of religious teachings. Conversely, interventions that address cultural sensitivity, community inclusion, and mentorship significantly improve learning outcomes and the propagator's professional success. Addressing sociocultural aspects is essential for strengthening dakwah as a professional career and for improving outcomes among new converts. The study recommends that dakwah programs incorporate cultural competence training, formal mentorship schemes, and measures to enhance professional mobility and accountability. Doing so will increase the effectiveness of propagation, support propagators' career development, and foster more inclusive community engagement.*

Keywords: *Islamic Propagation; Professional Career; Sociocultural Challenges; Terminological Usage*

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the issue of dakwah (especially to Muallaf) as a professional career in carrying out tasks in an organized and effective manner. Tasks like this will not be successful without complete knowledge, in addition to systematic skills training, this is because it does not only function as an activity of transferring knowledge solely to the target group. In fact, it is considered a career art that functions to form a personality with integrity through communication skills that can translate the knowledge learned into the reality of everyday life (Asrul, 2025).

Professional skills in this field mean having effective self-ability in carrying out dakwah tasks. With this ability, a dakwah officer has the self-confidence to assess the situation, control actions, and lead the target group successfully. This self-confidence is also evident in his actions in facing the challenges of the task and how to achieve the goals that need to be achieved (DBP, 2022). The success of dakwah does not only depend on its objectives. The process and level of professionalism of a dakwah also play an important role in shaping the success of dakwah. In the context of preacher professionalism, more than just the courage to speak in public or understand religious texts is required. A professional preacher must have good communication skills, a deep understanding of religion and society, an understanding of the needs and expectations of the congregation, and the ability to convey religious messages clearly and convincingly (Bashori, 2022).

A professional preacher not only focuses on religious texts, but also strives to make religious messages understandable to various levels of society. A preacher must also create a bridge of

understanding between religious values and the realities of human daily life. Therefore, the message conveyed is not only theoretical, but also practical, relevant, and can inspire positive changes in human daily life (Bashori, 2022). Becoming a professional preacher who captivates the audience is a rare achievement that requires great perseverance and dedication. As a result, people flock to invite these preachers to give various lectures. Faced with high public demand for engaging religious messages, the challenge is to find preachers who meet these criteria (Harahap, 2019).

Preachers who can meet high standards of professionalism and attract the attention of the audience are not only magnets to the community, but also sources of inspiration and role models in understanding and practicing religious teachings correctly (Mubasyaroh, 2017). Therefore, the existence of qualified preachers is very important in meeting the spiritual needs of the community and maintaining the preservation and development of religious values in daily life. With the difficulty and high demand from the community to find preachers with suitable criteria, this has become an opportunity for some preachers to earn financial income and make preaching their profession. Making preaching a profession can also be listed in the field of employment on a person's identity card. This shows that becoming a preacher who is recognized as an official and respected career in the organizational structure and society is someone who has high professional values who can adapt to the diverse socio-cultural challenges in preaching tasks (Tanti at all, 2022). Choosing preaching as a profession is not a step that is chosen randomly without overall consideration and certain qualifications. Someone who chooses this career must be prepared to face great challenges and responsibilities. They must develop and the authorities.

This requires great determination and dedication to continue to improve oneself and provide the best service to the congregation and the wider community. A deep understanding of religious knowledge, effective communication skills, and sensitivity to social conditions and community needs are the main foundations for carrying out dakwah as a profession. Therefore, a dakwah is not only a bearer of religious teachings, but also a leader, friend, and source of inspiration for an individual and his community in facing various life problems. Although training dakwah as a profession offers the potential for recognition and appreciation from society, a dakwah must also be able to maintain integrity and ethics in carrying out their duties (Amin, 2017). The behavior of a dakwah that provides practical role models in daily life is an important asset for a preacher in gaining trust, confidence, and inspiring the dakwah community. Therefore, the effort of managing dakwah as a profession is not just about sharing religious information and knowledge, but also a skill of calling towards something good and positive in the development of the personality of an individual and his community. Dakwah professionalism can also be assessed from the aspect of using religious terms accurately and effectively. This is because it is based on socio-cultural values that can disrupt the understanding and acceptance of dakwah participants. Terms such as "Allah (swt)", "Rasul", "Nabi", "Qada & Qadar" and others represent words found in the Al-Quran and Al-Hadith which will continue to be preserved in the socio-cultural context of the Islamic community. Meanwhile, the general opinion regarding the importance of a term – (especially those representing religious concepts) – is mixed between positive and negative. This is because it is built to represent certain theories to fulfill certain purposes and functions. As emphasized by Aini and Maheram (2020:15) that the difficulty of finding corresponding words in the target language is a major constraint among users of terms in religious texts. The same findings are shown by various studies, either qualitatively or quantitatively. Although the study of terms in general has been established, studies related to the use of terms in religious texts require more study and observation.

Clearly, the position of the term "Allah" as a "religious term" in the daily lives of converts is very fundamental. In fact, there are various privileges and roles that have certainly been the impetus for the proliferation of studies related to the issue of clarity of term usage. In this context, some people may consider it to be simply a matter of borrowing words and terms from one language to another. More than that, it represents the value of declaring the user's self-identity in the use of the term. This is because it clarifies the conceptual aspects of the user's actual understanding in each use. In other words, some consider the question of term usage to be just another example of academic superficiality. For them, all religions and their terminology are no different and are just culturally created. However, as we know that a term should be understood as a specific conceptual meaning in a specific scientific field that must be adhered to in human communication practices to process exclusive information that functions to carry

and transfer information. Such scientific specialization can be identified in the use of a term itself (COTSOES, 2002:8).

Therefore, clarity and accuracy in the use of terms are necessary in every aspect of human life. This situation reinforces the idea that quality information, including the correct semantic and pragmatic representation of any term usage, is not an alternative approach. Rather, it acts as a mutual complement to the rules of scientific language as a practice of language communication and in supporting excellence in scientific discovery and development (Hodges, 2008: 373).

Problem Statement

Contemporary preaching practitioners face sociocultural challenges that hinder the development of a career as an effective preacher in spreading Islam. Among the main challenges is the ability to understand the religious terms used in every preaching activity. For example, the use of terms borrowed from Arabic in Islamic preaching activities will certainly form a sociocultural clash in the participants' mind who do not understand this language. This is because each language represents its own sociocultural basis and foundation.

In other words, the problems discussed in this study can trigger various questions such as:

1. Is doing a propagational service is a professional career?
2. Why does doing a propagational service need to be based on professional skills?
3. How can a professional skill of preaching service can be improved?

Objectives

The reality of every living being is facing various factors that hinder its smooth running. For example, socio-cultural factors exist in the reality of every da'wah activity. Therefore, they certainly affect its smooth running and effectiveness. Therefore, these factors need to be clearly identified to enable each party involved to take wise steps in carrying out their duties successfully and effectively.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive theoretical approach in analyzing sociocultural aspects that influence the use of religious terms such as linguistic structure, literal meaning, semantic and pragmatic meaning used in preaching activities. Its conceptual framework was designed based on previous research documents and related organizational records and followed up with fieldwork observations through randomly direct interviews with a group of ten new Muslim converts, after identifying their personal background, asking their personal experiences, especially in term of special attention need and Islamic knowledge acquiring ability, as a method of reflecting the strong relationship between the semantics meaning of an Islamic terms and its pragmatics conceptual understanding as observed within Muslim converts understanding and applications. Five of them above 50 years old, while three person above 30 years old and two person below 30 years.

The data was analyzed based on themes to identify recurring sociocultural barriers and practical strategies used in the preaching process. The summary of the interview questions is as follows:

Table 1. Summary of Interview Questions on Sociocultural Challenges

No.	Focus
1	Does the linguistic structure of each term used help you understand Islam?
2	Do you understand the literal meaning of each term used by the preacher?
3	Do you understand the literal meaning (semantic) of each term used?
4	Do you understand the implicit meaning (pragmatic) in the use of preaching terms?
5	Are you able to determine the field of specialization for each term used?
6	Are the terms used in accordance with your cultural values?
7	Is the terms been used figuratively?
8	Are the terms used appropriate to the participants?

The table above represent the focus aspects of the interviews with the new Muslim. Further explanations regarding these aspects are as follows:

Table 2. Sociocultural Aspects in The Use of Terminology (Adapted: Giora, 2002)

No.	Aspect	Remark
1.	Linguistic Structure	This aspect refers to the structure of the language that forms a term, such as the structure of a noun or noun phrase that indicates a specific meaning such as the word "people", as opposed to "forest people". The same is true of the term "Islam" as a name for a religion, as opposed to "Islamophobia" which refers to the implicit nature of a person's fear of this religion.
2.	Literal Meaning	An aspect of the original meaning of a word that is used without being influenced by aspects of context and societal values in its use. Example: Islam is a name that means submission and surrender.
3.	Semantics Meaning	The semantic meaning aspect refers to the meaning of a word that has clear, precise, and true demonstrative elements. Example: Islam is a name that means, safe, prosperous and peace.
4.	Pragmatics Meaning	The pragmatic meaning aspect refers to the values contained in the use of a word or term whose nature cannot be described by physical comparison because it is beyond the logical understanding of the language user. Example: Islam is a universal religion. This use is pragmatic in nature, because it cannot be understood by laying down the logical foundations of ordinary human understanding (especially those who do not have extensive knowledge foundations).
5.	Fields of Utilization	This aspect refers to the values that provide certain limitations in its use as rules for its use. Example: Islam is a straight religion.
6.	Social Values	This aspect describes the social principles in the use of a word or term. Example: Islam is a holy religion.
7.	Figurative Style	The figurative language aspect provides a certain description of an abstract meaning by using material comparative demonstratives. Example: White is the colour been chosen by the Prophet.
8.	Environmental Communication	The environmental aspect in the use of words and terms in a text (or expression) is to refer to specific values that influence the selection of words or terms in the text. An example of specific values is as in the expression: Islam is the best religion in this world and the hereafter. This expression is certainly influenced by the presence of its use, namely Muslims. This is because it is accurate with their beliefs.

The table above explains important aspects that affect the clarity in the use of words and terms. For example, differences in cultural background in the use of terms can affect how a person interprets the implied meaning in the use of the term. It is also explaining some important aspects that affect the clarity of use of words and terms. For example, the differences in cultural background in the use of terms can affect how a person interprets the implied meaning in the use of the term. For example, semantics is the study of the meaning of an expression or the structure of the meaning of a speech. This understanding is in accordance with the opinion of Saeed, (2004:3) who states that semantic is the study of meaning communicated through language usage as its presented in word forms and sentence structure. This is further explained in a relationship draw in Figure 1.

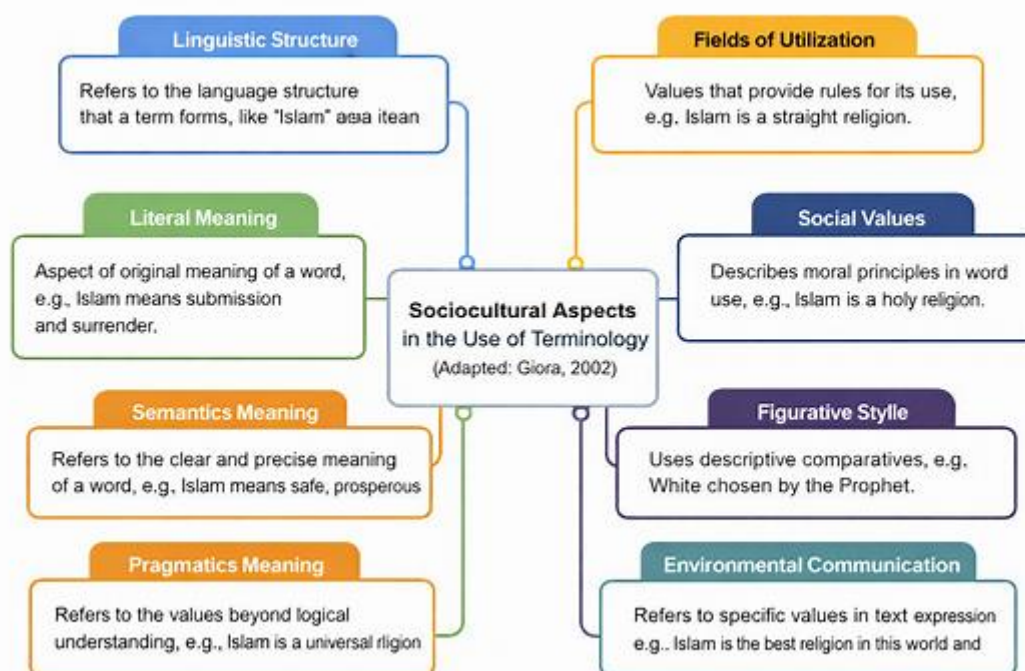


Figure 1. Sociocultural Aspects in the Terminology Usage (Adapted from Giora, 2002)

The diagram centers on Sociocultural Aspects in the Use of Terminology (Adapted: Giora, 2002), represented by a prominent central box from which eight labeled nodes radiate. Each node is visually distinct with its own color and short label of Linguistic Structure, Literal Meaning, Semantics Meaning, Pragmatics Meaning, Fields of Utilization, Social Values, Figurative Style, and Environmental Communication and contains a concise explanatory phrase. The layout makes the relationships clear: the central concept ties all eight perspectives together, while the individual nodes show how different analytical lenses focus on form, meaning, use, social force, or context. The color-coding and one-line descriptions help a reader quickly map each sociocultural dimension to concrete examples and contrasts.

Functionally, the figure shows how a single term can be read and used in multiple, sometimes overlapping ways: structural form and literal origin anchor a word's basic identity, semantic and pragmatic readings add graded or context-dependent senses, and fields of utilization and social values impose normative or domain-specific constraints. Figurative Style and Environmental Communication highlight how metaphor, cultural preference, and speaker community shape evaluative or promotional uses of terminology. Together the nodes suggest a practical analytic workflow for linguists or communicators: identify the term's form, separate literal from semantic senses, test pragmatic claims against user knowledge, and then situate usage within social, disciplinary, and environmental contexts to understand how meaning is produced, contested, and mobilized. Thus, in general, semantics can be defined as a linguistic science that studies the meaning of language use (see Chaer, Abdul, 2009 in Nasution, 2022); George, 2011; Slametmuljana & Muljana, 1964). Therefore, a semantics meaning should be analyzed closely through other fields of science such as sociology, philosophy, and psychology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following table is part of the findings from the interview with muallaf regarding the sociocultural challenges in understanding the use of religious terms used by preachers when teaching Muslim new converts to understand and appreciate Islam.

Table 3. Analysis of Sociocultural Aspects in Religious Terminological Usage

No	Terms usage	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	Grading
1.	Allah	0	0	0	0	10	10	0	10	30/80
2.	Rasul	0	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	70/80
3.	Islam	0	3	0	10	10	10	10	10	53/80
4.	Iman	0	5	0	10	10	10	10	10	55/80
5.	Solat	0	0	0	10	10	10	10	10	50/80
6.	Akidah	0	0	0	8	10	8	8	8	42/80
7.	Amar Makruf	0	0	0	5	3	3	3	3	17/80
8.	Nahil Munkar	0	0	0	5	3	3	3	3	17/80
9.	Syaitān	0	0	0	7	5	4	3	4	23/80
10.	Hijrah	0	7	0	9	8	7	8	10	42/80

Table 3 quantifies how eight sociocultural aspects (A1–A8) shape the use of ten religious terms, showing clear differences in emphasis across terms; this pattern supports a Giora-style pragmatic/semantic reading where salience, context, and social embedding determine which aspects dominate.

Table 3 exhibits: -

- i. **Structure of the data:** The matrix lists 10 terms (e.g., *Allah*, *Rasul*, *Islam*, *Iman*) scored 0–10 across eight aspects (A1–A8) and summed into a grading out of 80. The grading column is a compact indicator of overall sociocultural salience for each term: higher fractions (e.g., *Rasul* 70/80) mark terms that are broadly salient across many aspects, while low scores (e.g., *Amar Makruf* 17/80) indicate narrow or specialized salience.
- ii. **Patterns and contrasts:** Terms tied to core identity and authority (*Rasul*, *Iman*, *Islam*) receive consistently high marks across multiple aspects, suggesting broad semantic and pragmatic resonance. Ritual or doctrinal terms (*Solat*, *Akidah*) score strongly in some respects (fields of utilization, social values) but weakly in others (literal or linguistic-structure columns), indicating domain-specific salience. Terms tied to normative action (*Amar Makruf*, *Nahil Munkar*) show low overall grading, consistent with specialized prescriptive usage rather than broad cultural salience.

How This Links to Theory

Salience and graded meanings. The pattern in the table aligns with Giora's Graded Salience view: words differ in which meanings or uses are most cognitively salient, and context determines which sense is accessed first. High overall grades reflect multiple salient senses or broad contextual triggers; low grades reflect narrow, context-bound salience (Giora, 2003).

Pragmatics and intercultural framing. The differences between semantic (stable, dictionary-like) and pragmatic (contextual, value-laden) aspects in the table mirror contemporary work in intercultural pragmatics: social values and environmental communication columns capture community-specific evaluative uses that go beyond literal semantics (Yu, 2005; Kecskes, 2006).

Table 3 shows a clear pattern: terms tied to authority and identity (e.g., *Rasul*, *Iman*, *Islam*) score high across multiple sociocultural axes, while prescriptive or action-oriented terms (e.g., *Amar Makruf*, *Nahil Munkar*) score low and narrowly; this implies broad cultural salience for identity terms and context-bound salience for normative terms.

Key findings of Sociocultural Aspects in Religious Terminological Usage

- i. High-scoring, broad-resonance terms: *Rasul* (70/80), *Iman* (55/80), and *Islam* (53/80) receive consistent nonzero values across many A-columns, indicating multi-axis salience (lexical, semantic, pragmatic, social).

- ii. Domain-specific or ritual terms: *Solat* (50/80) and *Akidah* (42/80) show concentrated strength in a subset of aspects (notably social values and fields of utilization), which suggests strong functional salience within religious practice but weaker lexical or pragmatic spread.
- iii. Low-scoring, prescriptive terms: *Amar Makruf* and *Nahil Munkar* (both 17/80) have sparse scores, indicating specialized, context-dependent usage they are activated mainly in normative or prescriptive discourse rather than everyday talk.
- iv. Mixed cases: *Hijrah* (42/80) and *Syaitan* (23/80) show intermediate patterns, implying variable salience depending on discourse context (historical/migratory vs. moral/evil framing).

Theoretical interpretation (link to graded salience)

- i. The pattern aligns with Giora's Graded Salience Hypothesis: some meanings/usages are more cognitively salient and accessed rapidly regardless of context, while less salient senses require stronger contextual support. Identity/authority terms behave like highly salient lexical items; prescriptive terms behave like low-salience, context-triggered items (Giora, 2003)
- ii. Practically, semantic stability (dictionary-like senses) explains some high scores, while pragmatic and social embedding explains why other terms score only in social or environmental columns (Giora, 2023; Kecskes, 2006).

As emphasized by Newmark, (1981) and Nida, (1964) that the use of a term can be influenced using its own external context. This understanding can be observed from the examples presented by the analytical data. For example, in the use of the term {Allah}, where it has been transferred using a borrowing strategy and then defined as {Yang Maha Agung} where the representation of its semantic meaning means "directing in one direction". In this context, although its pragmatic value is not lost, the semantic match is not the same. As a result, its conceptual meaning understood by a Muallaf will differ from person to person. In other words, their conceptual understanding is not the same. This happens because the individual's understanding of a term will always be influenced by his own external factors. This is because the term {Allah} is derived from the root word {Ilh}. Its plural form is {Ilaah}. This name has been chosen by the Creator of the Universe as His absolute name where it is used as the most important name that all humans must know. This name also provides a clear and definite representation of the meaning based on language facts. The conceptual meaning of this term is very clear in every context of its use throughout the Quran and in the Hadith of the Prophet (al-Maany, 2010).

This concept is also clear in the use of the term "God" in English to mean "A being or spirit who is most revered because of his extraordinary power in controlling the universe". It is almost like the meaning of Idol which is understood as "a person or object who is loved, admired or respected and worshipped". If we take the word "Idol" as an example, according to the Cambridge English Dictionary (2021), it is a noun that usually refers to someone who is loved, admired, or respected. Idol is also understood as an object or image that is worshipped as a god. In other words, terminologically, the word "Idol" as understood by contemporary English-educated people refers to "a person or object who is loved, admired or respected and worshipped". Similarly, the word "God" in common English usage is used to refer to a spirit or being believed to control some part of the universe or life and is often worshipped for doing so, or something that represents this spirit or being. This word is also defined as someone who is very important to you, whom you greatly admire, and who greatly influences you. In this regard, we can conclude that terminologically the word "God" among contemporary English-educated people refers to the concept of "a person or object (whether seen or unseen) who is loved, admired or respected and worshipped as the creator or ruler of the universe and believed to have more than human power".

The analysis shows a clear split between broadly salient identity/authority terms and context-bound prescriptive or ritual terms. Terms like Rasul, Iman, and Islam score high across multiple sociocultural axes, indicating they carry stable lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and social weight in the corpus. Ritual and doctrinal items such as Solat and Akidah concentrate their strength in specific axes (fields of utilization, social values), signaling strong functional importance within religious practice but narrower everyday spread. By contrast, prescriptive pairs like Amar Makruf and Nahil Munkar register low overall

grades, reflecting specialized, normative usage that is activated mainly in targeted, context-rich discourse. Practically, these patterns imply that communicators and researchers should treat grading as a proxy for breadth of sociocultural resonance and use the A-columns as diagnostic axes to locate where a term's influence lies (lexical form, literal/semantic sense, pragmatic value, social embedding, or environmental framing).

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that new Muslim converts accept and apply Islamic knowledge more easily when sociocultural burdens are minimized. The main barriers identified were inadequate social integration, lack of structured guidance, and low levels of professionalization among preachers. These factors reduce trust, hinder learning, and limit the retention and practice of religious teachings in the long term. In contrast, interventions that address cultural sensitivity, community inclusivity, and guidance significantly improve the learning outcomes and professional success of preachers. To establish a religious terminology (within the context of muallaf usage), academic research needs to be carried out comprehensively. This is due to the complexities of religious system and its practices. Without doubt, an advantage lies, in the clarification of the commonly synonymous used terms within religious discipline and profession. On the other hand, a description of potential relationships between variable of a terminological term needs to be established. Conceptually, however, the terminology extends beyond pure linguistics description insofar as the differentiation of religiosity and spirituality refers to the respectively required structures within religious practices. There is some distortion through conceptual definition of a term on one side and another distortion through interpretation and exaggeration of religious terms to other languages such as English and Malay. The problems of adapting international terminologies for use in the religious language context (of research and practice) have been presented. This challenge is on one hand, the result of different language conventions, and on the other hand, the result of the heterogeneity of contemporary religious systems. These differences and specific characteristics of the religious system should be considered when compiling a religious terminology of spiritual terms. At the same time, international comparability plays an important role within the context of academic debates, and evaluation of religious education and collaboration which is need be considered.

Addressing sociocultural aspects is essential to strengthen dakwah as a professional career and to improve outcomes among converts. The study recommends that dakwah programs incorporate cultural competency training, formal mentoring schemes, and measures to increase professional mobility and accountability. Doing so will increase the effectiveness of dissemination, support the career development of the disseminators, and foster more inclusive community engagement. A term used should meet the sociocultural characteristics of its use. For example, the use of the correct linguistic structure in the use of terms is very important. This is because each form in the structure of the language represents the internal system of its use and the smoothness of its function in the real world of language communication. Each term used has its own semantic component. The existence of this component allows its users to distinguish the literal understanding referred to by the term.

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