

Integration of Arabic Language Learning in the Formation of Social-Religious Identity in *Madrasahs*: A Systematic Study of Policy, Local Practices, and Digital Transformation

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Abstract

Arabic has an important position in the Islamic education system in Indonesia, not only as a means of religious communication, but also as a medium for shaping the social and religious identity of students. However, learning practices in *madrasahs*, including in Banten Province, still face challenges in integrating spiritual, national, and linguistic values as mandated in KMA No. 183 of 2019. This study aims to systematically examine the role of Arabic language learning in shaping the social-religious identity of *madrasah* students in Banten using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The analysis was conducted on the policies of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, reputable national and international scientific articles, and local research results published in the 2015–2025 period. The results of the study show that curriculum implementation is still dominated by a structural approach, lacks innovation, and is not yet fully contextual. However, the integration of local values and digital literacy has been proven to increase learning motivation, strengthen the sense of belonging, and build an inclusive and adaptive Indonesian-Muslim identity in the face of globalization. The contribution of this research lies in strengthening the theoretical and practical perspectives on Arabic language learning as a means of fostering religious-national character through the development of contextual curricula, improving teacher competence, and utilizing digital technology in *madrasahs*.

Keywords: Arabic Language Learning, Social-Religious Identity, Madrasah, Banten, Systematic Literature Review (SLR).

INTRODUCTION

Language not only functions as a communication tool but also plays a crucial role in shaping social, cultural, and religious identities. In sociolinguistics and social psychology studies, language is understood as a collective symbol that allows individuals and groups to negotiate their social position and community affiliation.¹ In the realm of

¹ Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior," in *Political Psychology* (Psychology Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203505984-16>.

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applied linguistics, the identity and investment approaches affirm that language learning is always tied to social aspirations, access to resources, and identity construction. Thus, language proficiency is not merely a matter of structural-linguistics but also a social act laden with ideology and power relations.²

In the context of Indonesia, which has high religious and cultural plurality, the Arabic language occupies a highly strategic position: as the language of the Islamic holy book as well as a symbol of religious identity and Islamic scholarly tradition. This dual role makes Arabic language learning in *madrasah* (Islamic schools) oriented not only towards linguistic competence but also towards the formation of students' Islamic *habitus*. Joseph (2004) and Suleiman (2003) affirm that language can function as an instrument for the formation of collective identity in Muslim societies,³ while Yahya et al. (2021) found that in Indonesia, Arabic is studied not only for religious reasons but also for its symbolic value as a Muslim identity.⁴

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, through national regulation, also affirms the strategic position of Arabic in the *madrasah* education system. The Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs (KMA) No. 183 of 2019 concerning the Curriculum for Islamic Religious Education and Arabic Language in *Madrasah* directs the learning of PAI (Islamic Religious Education) and Arabic in three main domains: (1) strengthening spiritual and social attitudes, (2) improving communicative language skills, and (3) mastering the linguistic structure that supports religious literacy.⁵ The curriculum document emphasizes the importance of functional literacy, which is the ability of students to use Arabic contextually to understand Islamic texts while communicating in their social lives.

Although this policy promises a progressive vision, various empirical studies indicate that implementation in *madrasah* has not fully reflected the curriculum's spirit. A number of studies show the continued dominance of the structural-grammatical approach, the weak integration of students' social context, and the limited pedagogical

² Bonny Norton and Kelleen Toohey, "Identity, Language Learning, and Social Change," *Language Teaching* 44, no. 4 (2011): 412–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000309>; Bonny Norton, "Language, Identity, and the Ownership of English," *TESOL Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1997): 409, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587831>; Ron Darvin and Bonny Norton, "Identity and a Model of Investment in Applied Linguistics," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 35 (March 2015): 36–56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000191>; Qiuming Lin, "First-Year English Majors' Identity Transformations and English Learning," *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics* 04, no. 02 (2014): 367–74, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2014.42029>.

³ Kerry Taylor-Leech, "J. E. Joseph, Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious : (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan. 2004. Pp. Xii, 268)," *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 30 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.2104/aral0728>; Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology*, in *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.41-1102>.

⁴ Yuangga Kurnia Yahya et al., "Arabic Language as Representation of Muslim Identity in Indonesia," *Lakhomi Journal Scientific Journal of Culture* 2, no. 2 (2021): 82–88, <https://doi.org/10.33258/lakhomi.v2i2.473>.

⁵ Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 183 Tahun 2019 Tentang Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam Dan Bahasa Arab Pada Madrasah, 466 (2019).

innovation and resources of Arabic language teachers.⁶ In the context of Banten Province—known for its strong tradition of Islamic education and *madrasah* as an integral part of its social ecosystem—local research shows interesting variations in Arabic language learning practices. Mahdi (2025),⁷ for example, in his research on the development of teaching materials based on the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) at MAN (State Islamic Senior High School) Pandeglang Regency, found that learning that integrates local values can increase student relevance and motivation. Nuraman (2020) researched the effectiveness of Arabic e-learning at MAN 2 Serang City and highlighted the importance of digital infrastructure readiness,⁸ while Subhan and Ghuftron (2023) through a case study at the non-formal institution El-Darosah showed how non-formal educational institutions play a role in shaping Arabic language competence for prospective students planning to continue their studies in the Middle East.⁹

These findings suggest that local factors such as the availability of trained teachers, local *madrasah* culture, and access to technology are the main determinants of successful Arabic language learning. In the Banten context, the literature also highlights a number of initiatives and challenges. Maksum and Jumaha (2024), for example, affirm the importance of developing Arabic language teaching materials rooted in local cultural values as an effort to strengthen students' identity.¹⁰ In line with this, various other studies highlight the need for integration between Arabic language mastery and the formation of religious character in Banten *madrasah*, indicating the increasing urgency for a contextual, adaptive, and relevant learning model with the social reality of the students.

Previously, a number of studies have reached different aspects of Arabic language learning and identity in Indonesia. Such as the research by Yahya et al. (2021) which found that Arabic language learning in Indonesia is not only due to religious orientation but also because of the symbolic significance of Muslim identity, with Arabic functioning as an instrument of collective identity and a symbol of ideology.¹¹ Furthermore, Fitria et al. (2023) highlighted how Arabic teachers and students negotiate identity and ideology

⁶ Nana Jumhana and Ali Maksum, “Kebijakan Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Di Indonesia,” *Jurnal Kajian Penelitian Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan (JKPPK)* 2, no. 4 (2024): 147–56.

⁷ TA Mahdi, “Pengembangan Bahan Ajar Bahasa Arab Berbasis Kurikulum Merdeka: Penelitian Di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Kabupaten Pandeglang Banten” (2025).

⁸ Nuraman, “Efektivitas Pengaplikasian Teknologi E-Learning Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab (Studi Kasus Di Kelas Bahasa MAN 2 Kota Serang)” (Undergraduate Thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, 2020).

⁹ Subhan et al., “Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Dalam Upaya Mempersiapkan Calon Mahasiswa Baru Ke Timur Tengah (Studi Kasus Pada El-Darosah Banten),” *Mantiqut Tayr: Journal of Arabic Language* 4, no. 1 (2023): 123–35, <https://doi.org/10.25217/mantiqutayr.v4i1.4027>; Zaki Ghuftron et al., “Arabic Teaching and Learning in Matriculation Program for Al-Azhar Student's Candidate,” *Arabiyat : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab Dan Kebahasaaraban* 10, no. 1 (2023): 106–20, <https://doi.org/10.15408/a.v10i1.31869>.

¹⁰ Ali Maksum and Nana Jumaha, “Kebijakan Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Di Indonesia Dalam Kurikulum Madrasah,” *Jurnal Kajian Penelitian Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan* 2, no. 4 (2024): 147–56, <https://doi.org/10.59031/jkppk.v2i4.598>.

¹¹ Yuangga Kurnia Yahya et al., “Arabic Language as Representation of Muslim Identity in Indonesia.”

through Arabic language learning in Indonesia.¹² While Fitrianto (2024) presented how the integration of technology and pedagogical innovation in Arabic language learning in Indonesia has potential, but faces infrastructure challenges and teacher readiness.¹³ On the other hand, the study by Sopian et al. (2025) shows that the multicultural context in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) in Indonesia influences motivation and Arabic learning strategies, and how Arabic can be a medium for inter-cultural dialogue and identity negotiation.¹⁴ Finally, a bibliometric study by Zikriah & Mauludiyah (2024) traced global research trends in Arabic language teaching using the Scopus database, which confirmed an increased focus on topics of learning technology and motivation, but also showed a lack of studies linking curriculum policy, local *madrasah* practices, and socio-digital dynamics in an integrated manner.¹⁵

Nevertheless, a research gap remains apparent when we critically review the literature. First, most research focuses on *pesantren* or *madrasah* settings on the island of Java in general (or across provinces) without explicitly highlighting the context of a specific province like Banten, which has a distinctive *madrasah* tradition and Islamic culture. Second, many studies emphasize aspects of identity or technology separately but few have systematically and structurally connected curriculum policy (including national regulations such as the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 183 of 2019), Arabic language learning practices in *madrasah*, and the construction of socio-religious identity. Third, a number of studies do mention identity, but less emphasis is placed on how socio-digital dynamics (e.g., social media, transnational aspirations) broaden the meaning of Arabic as a symbol of modern identity—even though digital development and globalization increasingly influence the realm of *madrasah* education. Thus, this research is present to fill this gap by combining three domains: Arabic language curriculum policy, learning practices in Banten *madrasah*, and the socio-digital dynamics underlying the construction of student identity. With a systematic SLR approach in the Banten region and a thematic analysis linking policy-practice-identity, this research is expected to provide new contributions both theoretically (enriching the theory of language and identity and investment in the context of Islamic education) and practically (recommendations for more contextual and inclusive Arabic language learning policies and practices in Banten *madrasah*).

¹² Fitria et al., “Identitas Dan Ideologi Dalam Pembelajaran Dan Pengajaran Bahasa Arab: Pendekatan Collaborative-Autoethnography,” *Diwan: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab* 15, no. 2 (2023): 121–41, <https://doi.org/10.15548/diwan.v15i2.1076>.

¹³ Ibnu Fitrianto, “Innovation and Technology in Arabic Language Learning in Indonesia: Trends and Implications,” *International Journal of Post Axial: Futuristic Teaching and Learning*, August 27, 2024, 134–50, <https://doi.org/10.59944/postaxial.v2i3.375>.

¹⁴ Asep Sopian et al., “Arabic Language Learning in a Multicultural Context at Pesantren,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 1 (2025): 77–89, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v11i1.44104>.

¹⁵ Z. Zikriah and Lailatul Mauludiyah, “Research Trend of Arabic Language Teaching in the World: Systematic Literature Review Based on Scopus Database,” *Research and Development in Education (RaDeN)* 4, no. 1 (2024): 27–48, <https://doi.org/10.22219/raden.v4i1.31847>.

METHOD

The research method uses a qualitative approach based on a systematic literature review (SLR) to analyze the relationship between Arabic language curriculum policy and the formation of socio-religious identity in *madrasah* in Banten Province. The SLR approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to systematically and critically identify, evaluate, and synthesize the results of previous research in accordance with the conceptual and interpretative goals of the study. Data sources consist of national policy documents (including the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs Number 183 of 2019 and its supporting regulations from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia), published scholarly articles and theses focusing on Arabic language learning in Indonesia and Banten (drawn from academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and the official repository of UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten), as well as international theoretical studies relevant to the theory of language and identity and educational policy and curriculum studies.

Literature selection was carried out using inclusion criteria: publications were published between 2015–2025, originated from nationally accredited Sinta scientific journals or reputable international journals, focused on *madrasah* or Islamic educational institutions, and contained empirical or conceptual data regarding Arabic language learning and socio-religious identity. The literature search strategy involved the use of keywords: “Arabic language learning” AND “madrasah” AND “identity” AND “Indonesia”, “KMA 183/2019” AND “Arabic curriculum”, and “Banten” AND “pembelajaran bahasa Arab” (Arabic language learning). Out of a total of 84 articles found, filtering was carried out based on the SLR flow-chart guidelines as recommended by the PRISMA 2020 Statement—which provides a framework for systematic literature reporting.¹⁶ After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 32 main sources remained for analysis.

The data analysis process was carried out using a thematic analysis approach, through the following steps: familiarization (reading all documents and articles to understand the context), coding (assigning codes to text units related to policy issues, learning practices, and social identity), theme development (grouping codes into main themes: curriculum policy and ideology; *madrasah* pedagogical practices; and construction of religious-national identity), reviewing themes (reviewing consistency between themes and the theory of identity and investment), defining and naming themes (providing conceptual names for each theme), and reporting (presenting the synthesis results in a narrative-argumentative form according to scientific publication standards). To guarantee the validity of the literature review results, a peer debriefing was conducted with two academics in the fields of Arabic Language Education and Islamic Sociolinguistics from UIN Banten and UIN Jakarta to ensure argumentative coherence and accuracy of literature interpretation. Because this research only utilizes secondary data and does not directly involve human subjects, formal ethical approval is not required;

¹⁶ Matthew J. Page et al., “The PRISMA 2020 Statement: An Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews,” *Systematic Reviews* 10, no. 1 (2021): 89, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-021-01626-4>.

however, academic ethical principles are still upheld through accurate citation, transparent reporting of sources, and application of scientific integrity in accordance with the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines.¹⁷

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Curriculum Policy and Identity Ideology

Arabic language learning policy in Indonesian *madrasah* affirms the integration between religiosity and nationalism. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) of the Republic of Indonesia through KMA No. 183 of 2019 positions Arabic as a primary instrument in shaping students' character to be faithful, moderate, and nationally-minded.¹⁸ This curriculum prioritizes three domains of learning—spiritual, social, and linguistic—designed to produce students with an Islamic identity and, at the same time, tolerant citizens.¹⁹ From the perspective of language and identity theory, this policy indicates that Arabic serves as symbolic capital²⁰ that connects students with their religious-national identity. The research by Widodo (2020) and Abduh & Rosmaladewi (2019) reinforces this view by showing that the teaching of Arabic in *madrasah* functions as a mechanism for the reproduction of Islamic values as well as social integration of the nation.²¹ In Banten, this policy has received broad acceptance because it aligns with the history and religious values of the community. This demonstrates that Arabic policy in *madrasah* is not only linguistically oriented but also ideological.

Pedagogical Practices and Implementation Challenges

Empirical studies show that the implementation of Arabic language policy still faces structural and pedagogical constraints. Wekke's (2015) study found that most *madrasah* in Indonesia still use the grammar-translation method (GTM), which emphasizes text translation rather than communicative ability.²² A similar observation was made by Dewi et al. (2024), who confirmed that limited teacher training, minimal contextual learning resources, and administrative pressure are factors hindering

¹⁷ Committee on Publication Ethics, "A COPE Study (2019): Exploring Publication Ethics Issues in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences," *Copyright, Fair Use, Scholarly Communication, Etc.*, January 1, 2019, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/scholcom/122>.

¹⁸ Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 183 Tahun 2019 Tentang Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam Dan Bahasa Arab Pada Madrasah.

¹⁹ Jumhana and Maksum, "Kebijakan Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Di Indonesia."

²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

²¹ Sembodo Ardi Widodo, "Development and Maintenance of Arabic through Education in Islamic Education Institutions in Indonesia/ Pengembangan Dan Pemertahanan Bahasa Arab Melalui Pendidikan Di Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia," *Al Mahāra: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 6, no. 2 (2020): 195–216, <https://doi.org/10.14421/almahara.2020.062.03>; Amirullah Abduh and Rosmaladewi Rosmaladewi, "Language Policy, Identity, and Bilingual Education in Indonesia: A Historical Overview," *XLinguae* 12, no. 1 (2019): 219–27, <https://doi.org/10.18355/XL.2019.12.01.17>.

²² Ismail Suardi Wekke, "Arabic Teaching and Learning: A Model from Indonesian Muslim Minority," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 191 (2015): 286–90, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.236>.

pedagogical innovation.²³ In Banten, Mahdi's (2025) research revealed that the implementation of the local value-based *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) in Arabic language learning at MAN Pandeglang increased students' participation and sense of ownership towards the language.²⁴ Mahdi noted that students were more motivated when the material was linked to their socio-religious life, such as *ngaji bareng* (joint recitation) practices, visiting scholars' graves (*ziarah ulama*), or *halaqah tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis circle) activities.²⁵ Fathoni's (2024) research also showed that the development of Arabic language teaching materials based on Bantenese culture can strengthen the *sense of belonging* to Islam and local wisdom.²⁶ However, other challenges emerge in the aspects of technology and digital literacy. Nuraman's (2020) study at MAN 2 Serang City found that the utilization of Arabic e-learning is still limited by internet infrastructure and teacher readiness.²⁷ Nevertheless, the research results showed that digital platforms such as Google Classroom and Kahoot! can increase interaction and learning motivation if used with a contextual approach. These findings affirm the gap between the curriculum ideal and pedagogical reality, as also noted by Jumhana and Maksum.²⁸ Thus, curriculum policy needs to be accompanied by strengthening teacher capacity and providing teaching materials appropriate to the social and cultural context of *madrasah* in regions like Banten.

Dynamics of Socio-Religious Identity in the Digital Era

The third theme shows that Arabic language learning is now a new arena for the formation of social identity in the digital era. Based on the theory of identity and investment,²⁹ learners do not just "master" the language but also "invest" in the social and religious symbols that accompany it. This is evident in the research findings,³⁰ which indicate that *santri* (Islamic boarding school students) and *madrasah* students in Banten view mastery of Arabic as social capital to gain religious recognition and educational opportunities in the Middle East. Furthermore, social media also expands the arena for identity representation. Yahya et al.'s (2021)³¹ research found that Arabic in Indonesia functions as a symbol of public Islamic identity, especially among urban Muslim youth.

²³ Ni Putu Ellys Sucitha Dewi et al., "Eksplorasi Faktor-Faktor Penghambat Pembelajaran Ips Kontekstual Pada Siswa Sekolah Dasar: Perspektif Guru Dan Siswa," *SOCIAL : Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan IPS* 4, no. 4 (2024): 657–64, <https://doi.org/10.51878/social.v4i4.4464>.

²⁴ Mahdi, "Pengembangan Bahan Ajar Bahasa Arab Berbasis Kurikulum Merdeka: Penelitian Di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Kabupaten Pandeglang Banten."

²⁵ Mahdi, "Pengembangan Bahan Ajar Bahasa Arab Berbasis Kurikulum Merdeka: Penelitian Di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Kabupaten Pandeglang Banten."

²⁶ Fathoni Fathoni, "Pengembangan Materi Ajar Bahasa Arab Berbasis Budaya Lokal Untuk Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar," *MODELING: Jurnal Program Studi PGMI* 11, no. 1 (2024): 1152–65, <https://doi.org/10.69896/modeling.v11i1.2532>.

²⁷ Nuraman, "Efektivitas Pengaplikasian Teknologi E-Learning Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab (Studi Kasus Di Kelas Bahasa MAN 2 Kota Serang)."

²⁸ Jumhana and Maksum, "Kebijakan Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Di Indonesia."

²⁹ Darwin and Norton, "Identity and a Model of Investment in Applied Linguistics."

³⁰ Subhan et al., "Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Dalam Upaya Mempersiapkan Calon Mahasiswa Baru Ke Timur Tengah (Studi Kasus Pada El-Darosah Banten)"; Ghuftron et al., "Arabic Teaching and Learning in Matriculation Program for Al-Azhar Student's Candidate."

³¹ Yuangga Kurnia Yahya et al., "Arabic Language as Representation of Muslim Identity in Indonesia."

In Banten, this phenomenon is visible through digital *da'wah* (preaching) activities and online Arabic study groups that foster a sense of cross-institutional religious togetherness. In this context, Arabic is no longer just an instrument of religious communication but also a performative identity articulated through online practices. This reinforces the findings of Norton and Toohey (2011)³² that language learning is always related to broader social dynamics, including symbolic economics and identity representation. Overall, the results of the study indicate that Arabic language learning in *madrasah*—especially in Banten—functions as a space for the reproduction of socio-religious and national identity. This identity is formed through three main mechanisms: (1) internalization of curriculum ideology, (2) learning practices based on local values and locality, and (3) digital participation as a form of religious self-representation.

Table 1. Synthesis of Findings

Main Theme	Focus of Findings	Relevance for Social Identity
Curriculum Policy	Arabic as an instrument of religious and national integration (KMA 183/2019).	Confirms a moderate and contextual Indonesian-Islamic identity.
Pedagogical Practices	Gap between curriculum ideal and practice in the field; the role of Banten's local values.	Shows the importance of local-based and participatory pedagogy.
Digital and Social Era	Transformation of Arabic learning into online identity practice.	Forms new religious identities in the digital public space.

Thus, the results of this research affirm that Arabic language learning in Indonesian *madrasah*—especially in the Banten region—plays a complex role in shaping the social, religious, and national identity of students. This finding reinforces the idea that language is not just a tool for communication, but also a symbolic arena where ideology, power, and social values are produced and negotiated.³³ In the context of Islamic education, Arabic functions as a religious symbol that connects students with the main sources of Islamic teachings, as well as a sign of social identity that confirms their position as part of the Indonesian Muslim community.

Arabic as Symbolic and Ideological Capital

Based on the theory of language as symbolic power, Arabic language learning operates as a form of high-value symbolic investment in Indonesian Muslim society. The language is not only associated with spiritual excellence but also with scholarly authority and religious legitimacy. This is consistent with the finding that language learning reflects social processes that involve power relations.³⁴ In Banten, the tradition of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and *madrasah* reinforces this symbolic dimension. Arabic is viewed as the "language of the scholars," the language of the scriptures, and the medium

³² Norton and Toohey, "Identity, Language Learning, and Social Change."

³³ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

³⁴ Norton and Toohey, "Identity, Language Learning, and Social Change."

for interpreting religious texts. Therefore, the *madrasah* curriculum, which places Arabic as a main pillar of education, reflects not only linguistic policy but also the ideology of moderate Islamic education that emphasizes harmony between religiosity and nationalism.³⁵ This finding is in line with the research of Abduh and Rosmaladewi (2019)³⁶ and Widodo (2020),³⁷ which show that language policy in Indonesia has a strong ideological dimension in constructing national-religious identity. Thus, Arabic language learning policy is not merely academic implementation, but also part of a *nation-building project* that simultaneously instills Islamic and Indonesian values.

Pedagogical Challenges and Local Transformation

Although the national policy is progressive, Arabic language learning practices in *madrasah* still face various pedagogical constraints. The gap between the ideal curriculum and field reality indicates that methodological innovation has not fully taken root.³⁸ This finding affirms the need for a *contextual pedagogy* approach—that is, teaching strategies that adjust to the culture, local values, and social needs of the students.³⁹ In Banten, efforts to link Arabic learning with local culture—such as visiting scholars' graves (*ziarah ulama*), Qur'anic exegesis circles (*halaqah tafsir*), and *marhabanan* (celebratory traditions)—have proven to increase learning motivation and strengthen the social meaning of the language.⁴⁰ This supports the theory of investment,⁴¹ which posits that learners invest in a language when they see a direct link between the language and the social identity they aspire to achieve. Therefore, Arabic language learning based on locality is not only linguistically relevant but also serves as a means of identity empowerment. Teachers play a strategic role as *cultural brokers* who link classic Arabic texts with modern social contexts. This approach affirms that the success of Arabic language learning in *madrasah* is measured not only by the cognitive aspect but also by the affective and social identity transformation of the students.

Arabic Language and the Digital Identity of Santri

In the digital era, Arabic has undergone functional repositioning as a religious symbol in the online public sphere. The study by Yahya et al. (2021)⁴² shows that Arabic is now present in *da'wah* (preaching) content, religious memes, and social media discourse as a marker of Islamic identity. This finding is also observed in Banten, where the *santri* community uses digital platforms to learn Arabic and express their religious

³⁵ Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 183 Tahun 2019 Tentang Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam Dan Bahasa Arab Pada Madrasah.

³⁶ Abduh and Rosmaladewi, "Language Policy, Identity, and Bilingual Education in Indonesia: A Historical Overview."

³⁷ Widodo, "Development and Maintenance of Arabic through Education in Islamic Education Institutions in Indonesia/ Pengembangan Dan Pemertahanan Bahasa Arab Melalui Pendidikan Di Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia."

³⁸ Wekke, "Arabic Teaching and Learning: A Model from Indonesian Muslim Minority."

³⁹ Mahdi, "Pengembangan Bahan Ajar Bahasa Arab Berbasis Kurikulum Merdeka: Penelitian Di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Kabupaten Pandeglang Banten."

⁴⁰ Mohamad Idhan et al., "Arabic Learning Strategy in a Pesantren: Local Cultural Integration Perspective," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 8, no. 4 (2024): 1274–87, <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v8i4.695>.

⁴¹ Darwin and Norton, "Identity and a Model of Investment in Applied Linguistics."

⁴² Yuangga Kurnia Yahya et al., "Arabic Language as Representation of Muslim Identity in Indonesia."

identity.⁴³ This phenomenon illustrates the transformation of the concept of language learning into *identity performance*. Arabic becomes a medium for religious self-expression while also being a tool for building cross-community social networks. As explained by Darvin and Norton (2015),⁴⁴ language is a social investment that negotiates the relationship between ideology, identity, and access to symbolic resources. Therefore, the mastery of Arabic in the digital era is no longer solely related to linguistic ability, but also to representational and symbolic capacity to demonstrate identity as a modern global Muslim.

The implication is that *madrasah* need to integrate digital literacy into Arabic language learning, both through the development of social media-based content and teacher training in the use of educational technology. This aligns with global trends in language education that emphasize the integration of digital literacy and critical pedagogy.⁴⁵ Theoretically, this research extends the application of the identity and investment theory in the context of Islamic education in Southeast Asia. This theory has been largely applied in the context of the English language, but these findings show that the same principle can be used to understand the dynamics of Arabic language learning as a language of religion and identity. Arabic in *madrasah* is not just an academic means but also a spiritual and social vehicle that mediates the formation of students' religious identity.

Practically, this research has three main implications: (1) Development of a contextual curriculum. The Arabic curriculum needs to be structured based on the principle of *context-responsive education*, which considers local values, such as the Islamic culture of Banten, without abandoning national standards. (2) Improvement of teacher competence. Arabic teachers must be trained as identity facilitators, not just instructors of language structure. Training based on *reflective pedagogy* can help teachers understand the socio-cultural role of learning. (3) Integration of digital literacy. *Madrasah* need to adopt learning technology that facilitates interaction and the representation of students' identity in the digital space, for example through creative content in Arabic or online collaboration between *madrasah*. These implications are relevant not only for Banten but also for the national context, given that Indonesia is facing the challenges of globalization that affect how the young Muslim generation understands its identity.

From the overall findings and analysis, it can be concluded that Arabic language learning in *madrasah* functions as an ideological, social, and cultural instrument that affirms the Muslim-Indonesian identity. In the context of Banten, the integration between traditional Islamic values and modern education creates a learning model that not only teaches the language but also instills the values of religiosity, nationalism, and openness to globalization. Thus, Arabic in *madrasah* is not just an intellectual heritage of Islam but

⁴³ Subhan et al., "Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Dalam Upaya Mempersiapkan Calon Mahasiswa Baru Ke Timur Tengah (Studi Kasus Pada El-Darosah Banten)"; Ghufron et al., "Arabic Teaching and Learning in Matriculation Program for Al-Azhar Student's Candidate."

⁴⁴ Darvin and Norton, "Identity and a Model of Investment in Applied Linguistics."

⁴⁵ Colin and Michele Knobel Lankshear, *Digital Literacies* (Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2008).

also a dynamic and transformative medium for the formation of socio-religious identity amidst changing times.

CONCLUSION

Arabic language learning in Indonesian *madrasah*, particularly in the Banten region, functions not only as an academic linguistic process but also as a socio-cultural arena that shapes the religious, national, and digital identities of students. Literature analysis shows that Arabic operates as symbolic capital that connects individuals with the Islamic scholarly tradition while simultaneously strengthening the sense of Indonesian nationhood through national curriculum policy. From the perspective of identity and investment, the process of learning Arabic is understood as a social investment involving ideology, community membership, and identity aspirations. *Madrasah* students do not just learn the language as a system of signs, but as a means of constructing self-meaning and social relationships within a contextual Islamic framework. In Banten, learning practices show a synergy between *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) tradition and educational modernization. Arabic becomes a symbol of connection between local values (scholarly tradition, religious culture) and global values (digital literacy, transnational interaction). Thus, Arabic language learning functions as a dual process—the inheritance of Islamic values and the formation of an Indonesian Muslim identity that is adaptive to changing times. Conceptually, this research expands the application of the theory of language and identity in the context of Islamic education in Southeast Asia, showing that a religious language like Arabic has a multidimensional identity function: spiritual, social, national, and digital. Practically, these results affirm the importance of a contextual curriculum, reflective pedagogy, and the integration of technology as part of a learning strategy oriented towards character and identity formation.

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